

OVERTURES TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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*Reconstructing
Old Testament
Theology*

THE COLLAPSE OF HISTORY

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temple and knew post eventum of the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C.E. In the poetry (source A), Jeremiah stands in strong opposition to kings and monarchy and finds no place for the institution in any new Israel, while in the prose sermons he criticizes rulers but looks to the reestablishment of the royal institution in the future. In the confessions, he is the petulant complainer who demands the destruction of his personal enemies, following the lament tradition. In the poetry he announces destruction by the "foe from the north," yet in intense agony he intercedes for the salvation of nation and opponents. In sources A, B, and C, the prophet is the leader of the peace party who counsels submission to the foreign powers, especially Babylon, while in the speeches against the nations in Jeremiah 46–51 he sounds very much like the prophets of nationalism who used the magical power of prophetic oracles to bring destruction to foreign enemies.

These differences could be multiplied, but perhaps they are sufficient to demonstrate that there are several portraits of Jeremiah in the book along with a variety of theologies that emerge from the different traditions. Efforts to authenticate the so-called historical Jeremiah's theology, precisely differentiated from later redactional activity, are increasingly perilous.

BRIGHT'S HERMENEUTIC

It is just as challenging to attempt to recover the life and thought of a historical Jeremiah placed within the specificity of space and time as it is to attempt to recover the historical dimensions of acts of God in the Late Bronze and early Iron ages. Thus, what happens to a theology, both biblical and contemporary, that is predicated on the accurate recovery of history? And what of the multiple attestations to the God of Israel, often in significant tension even within one biblical book? What role should be given to pluralism, that is, the different tellings of the story of the chosen, or more specifically the life and thought of Jeremiah? Are the so-called later layers of tradition, assuming they may be separated out, stripped of any theological value? Or does one celebrate the pluralism and discard attempts to do any constructive work? These are important questions that face any theology that seeks some authentication in the recovery of historical events.

CHAPTER 3

History as Tradition: The German School

TRADITION HISTORY AND OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

Appearing as an important exegetical method as early as the 1930s, tradition history received its formative shape in the work of the German scholars Albrecht Alt, Martin Noth, and Gerhard von Rad.¹ A different form of the method was fashioned in Scandinavia by Harris Birkeland, Ivan Engnell, Sigmund Mowinckel, and Eduard Nielsen, to name several of its most influential practitioners.² Developing as a corrective to the limitations of literary and form criticism, tradition history began to reshape significantly biblical theology, especially in the seminal work of Gerhard von Rad.

It was von Rad who placed in sharp relief the major problems Old Testament scholarship encountered as a result of the limitations of literary and form criticisms.³ Literary criticism generally followed a

1. Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966); Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972); idem, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (3d ed.; Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967); and Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 1965); idem, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966).

2. Harris Birkeland, *Zum hebräischen Traditionswesen* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1958); Ivan Engnell, *Gamla Testamentet: En traditionshistorisk inledning 1* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1945); idem, *Critical Essays on the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1970); Sigmund Mowinckel, *Prophecy and Tradition* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1946); and Eduard Nielsen, *Oral Tradition* (SBT 11; London: SCM, 1954). For a detailed analysis of both the German and the Scandinavian developments of the method, see Douglas A. Knight, *The Traditions of Israel* (SBLDS 9; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1973). For a brief overview of the method, see Walter Rast, *Tradition History and the Old Testament* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

3. See Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," *The Form Critical Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver &

"book" model for analyzing the composition of literary sources. Thus scholars thought that individuals (e.g., the Yahwist) composed their sources during a specific period of time, in one location, and for a particular audience. While these authors were thought to have used older materials and indeed may have produced compositions that were later changed by others, the model for understanding the composition of sources and books was predominantly static and one-dimensional. Form criticism focused on common literary types: their structure, oral development, and social setting. But this method was unable to work with larger complexes. Generally regarding literary types as rigid and inflexible, form critics also did not easily allow literary creativity to transform and alter genres. Furthermore, the method illustrated well the proverbial case of the inability to see the forest for the trees. Carefully and imaginatively applied, however, tradition history was a more dynamic method that both traced the development of large literary complexes and isolated their themes and social features. The method is multidimensional, allowing scholars to see the stages in the growth of a tradition over many years and in some cases even several centuries.

As a method for biblical study, tradition history undertakes four major objectives.⁴ First, it seeks to determine the social group or groups responsible for the formulation and transmission of a tradition. Thus, communities of priests, sages, scribes, and prophets, to name the most common categories, are thought to be responsible for shaping traditions that reflected their own peculiar beliefs, vocabulary, and social functions. Second, tradition history is concerned with localization, that is, the role that geographical and cultural contexts play in the development and transmission of a tradition. The method also allows for the recognition that traditions were carried by their social groups during their migrations, even while leaving behind a deposit in the earlier locales. A third concern of this method, related to the first, is the discovery of the specific social, political, and religious dynamics present in the tradition. These were subject to change over the course of a tradition's growth. Fourth, the method delineates the major themes of the tradition. Theological themes, when placed within the method of tradition history, received their shape within the dynamics of Israel's evolving society and culture. This meant that the abstract categories

Boyd, 1958; repr., London: SCM, 1984) 1-78.

4. For a clear summary, see Rast, *Tradition History*.

stamped by the rational idealism of Walther Eichrodt's theology were replaced by a sociology of realism in which the ideas of ancient Israel were associated empirically with their concrete social matrices.

HISTORY AS TRADITION: GERHARD VON RAD

While sharing some important features with the biblical theology movement, Gerhard von Rad fashioned his own distinctive theology of history in two volumes, first published in German in 1957 (volume 1) and 1960 (volume 2). Indeed, von Rad's compelling work eventually supplanted that of Eichrodt whose exposition of covenant theology had held first rank in Old Testament theology since 1933.⁵

As a biblical scholar, von Rad was deeply concerned with recovering the history of Israel. Indeed, he enthusiastically proclaimed that "the Old Testament is a history book."⁶ However, in addition to Wright's understanding that history should be based on recoverable concrete events in space and time, von Rad also contended that history was a recounting of saving history (*Heilsgeschichte*) that witnessed to God's continuing redemptive actions for Israel and the world. Further, von Rad was concerned to trace the social and historical development of Israel's theological traditions, for it was in these that Israel's faith was embodied. Thus the opening section of von Rad's initial volume outlined the development of Israelite religion and its major religious and social institutions from their origins in pre-Mosaic times to the beginnings of scribal religion in the postexilic period.⁷ It was within this diachronic context that von Rad traced Israel's developing faith.⁸

The most significant difference from Wright and the biblical theology movement in America lay in the primary objective of historical research that led into biblical theology. For Wright, the primary object was to obtain the nucleus of actual events, residing behind the confessional interpretations expressing Israel's ancient faith. But, for von Rad, the primary objective was to discover the

5. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

6. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2:357.

7. *Ibid.*, 1:3-102.

8. For a detailed assessment of von Rad as an Old Testament theologian, see James L. Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad* (Makers of the Modern Theological Mind; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1978).

content of this confession, trace its traditiohistorical development, and articulate its diverse understandings. By the use of tradition history, von Rad outlined the social and literary development of ongoing trajectories through the centuries of biblical Israel's historical existence. To put the contrast in succinct terms, the primary opposition between Wright and von Rad resides in what is considered to be the defining feature of biblical theology: "event" (Wright) or "word" (von Rad). For von Rad, "history becomes word, and word becomes history."⁹ This did not mean that Wright ignored theological interpretations of events or that von Rad was not interested in determining the actuality or character of the historical event that may have resided behind the interpretation. However, for Wright, events had to have happened in order for them to have theological legitimacy in proclamation and response. For von Rad, it is the primacy of the word, confessed by the community and lodged within its traditions, that gives faith its authentication. While events may have resided behind confessions, the recovery of "what happened" is not necessary for faith to be true.

Von Rad was opposed to theologizing that approached its work by the articulation of bloodless, abstract concepts such as covenant, faith, and righteousness. This approach, based on the use of word studies, was part of the strategy used by the biblical theology movement that assumed that meaning was located in and derived from individual words.¹⁰ These ideas tended to be articulated by means of generalization and abstraction. However, von Rad understood the historical task of the biblical theologian to be that of uncovering the witness of social communities to divine action within the context of tradition history. Ideas were an intrinsic part of the growth and expansion of tradition complexes, not so much in a progressive, evolutionary fashion, but rather like a river moving sometimes backward but more often forward while forming new channels and tributaries. Subsequently, each generation of Israel was responsible for determining what it meant to be the people of God in their own time by encountering tradition and reshaping it in view of their particular context and experience.

THE LITTLE CREED

The linchpin of von Rad's theology was the isolation of what he considered to be confessions of faith that were embedded within

9. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2:357.

10. See James Barr's devastating critique of this assumption in his important book, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

larger literary texts. He argued that Israel's earliest faith was expressed in what he determined was an ancient, historical creed found in Deut 26:5b-9, going back, so he proposed, to a liturgy of thanksgiving uttered during a festival of first fruits at a local sanctuary (cf. Deut 6:20-24; Josh 24:2b-13). Von Rad argued that this creed, either a confession by or a hortatory address to the congregation within a liturgical setting, is a succinct expression of the redemptive acts of God and contains the earliest faith of Israel.¹¹ These redemptive acts include the promise to the fathers, the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness, and the gift of the promised land. Von Rad attached great significance to the absence of any mention of the revelation at Sinai in this so-called early creed. He concluded from this "absence" that covenant and Torah were later developments and thus were not an early part of the primal faith centering on the redemptive acts of God. Indeed, for von Rad, it was not until the post-exile that the reference to Sinai is included within the creedal faith (Neh 9:6f.). This means that the Sinai tradition, which embodies laws detailing the character of divine justice, had a separate and later origin and was not originally related to the earliest tradition of the redemptive acts of God.

The Hexateuch (Genesis through Joshua) contains, for von Rad, two large tradition complexes that developed over several centuries. The exodus-settlement tradition, very early in its history, incorporated the promises to the ancestors and celebrated God's guidance and redemptive activity, while the Sinai tradition portrayed theophanic vision, the coming of God to his people, and the entrance into a covenant relationship. It is not difficult to see that von Rad is differentiating between what he considers to be "law" (Sinai) and "gospel" (exodus-settlement). Originally, the cultic setting for the exodus-settlement tradition was the offering of first fruits during the Feast of Weeks. Thus the creed was the earliest part of the religious narrative of this important pilgrimage festival at a time when ownership of the land was a live issue. This would have been shortly after the entrance into the land but before the emergence of the monarchy of David some two centuries later. Von Rad concluded that the sanctuary where this religious narrative originated was Gilgal, near Jericho. Here the territorial boundaries of the tribes were ritually recognized.

In terms of origin, the Sinai tradition, in von Rad's view, is perhaps the latest stage in the development of the Hexateuch. It

11. This creed found expression in cult lyrics (Psalms 78; 105; 106; 135; 136), again demonstrating its liturgical setting.

developed as the religious narrative of the sanctuary of Shechem, the chief northern Israelite temple from the time of the tribal federation during the formative period of the judges. The two dominant features, the coming of God and the entering into covenant, presuppose some grand festival, most probably the Feast of Booths, celebrated during Israel's autumnal New Year. Even the structure of the Book of Deuteronomy, which presents the reformulation of historic faith and covenant, reflects the major features of a cultic ceremony: historical presentation of the events at Sinai, the reading of the law, the sealing of the covenant, and blessings and curses. Deuteronomy derives from the formal pattern of this liturgy. And its characteristic mentioning of "today" emphasizes that the saving events, which provided the basis for covenant and law, were the objects of response by the assembled community. In saying yes to God's redemption, formalized within the renewal of the covenant, salvation is reactualized liturgically in the community's present experience. In the ceremony of covenant renewal, the Lordship of God over Israel is reaffirmed.

Von Rad then proceeded to trace the development of these two major hexateuchal traditions, indicating how they were eventually included in the major literary sources of J, E, D, and P. The treatment of J by von Rad is illustrative of this development. For von Rad, central for J was the exodus-settlement tradition, although this writer did include an early form of the Sinai complex. But it was a considerable period of time before the combination of these two traditions was generally accepted. J was responsible for the first blending of the "two fundamental propositions of the whole message of the Bible: Law and Gospel."¹² In addition, the Yahwist was responsible for the inclusion of the creation tradition, also late in being accepted by the community of faith as a redemptive activity of God. With this inclusion of creation, however, the Yahwist indicated that the purpose of Israel's redemption was to reconcile all humanity to God. This secularization of redemptive history and covenant by the Yahwist led to the development of a spiritualized faith in which the cultus was tolerated but not seen as fundamentally important. Indeed, the theological problem of the Yahwist was that the sacral sphere no longer guaranteed the truth of the creeds. Now it is the theological emphasis on the providential direction of history that is developed. This understanding enabled new traditions to appear, grounded in Israel's continuing history.

12. Von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," 54.

New traditions came to include the promise of an eternal dynasty to David (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89) and the selection of Zion (Jerusalem) as the dwelling place of God (Psalms 46; 48; 76). God is not limited either to the past or to the sacred sphere but even now is active in history to effectuate redemption through new agents and events. This included creation, although this affirmation of divine action never achieved a commanding and normative status as an independent tradition, except in wisdom literature. Rather, for von Rad, creation was but the prolegomenon to salvation history. Seen as ancillary to redemption, creation theology was held in suspicion because of its possible association with fertility religion and natural revelation. While creation was certainly known by Israelites who witnessed its central place in the religions of the ancient Near East, it was not appropriated by their faith until very late. According to von Rad, decisive for this appropriation was the prophet of the exile, Second Isaiah, who spoke of creative redemption. However, this prophet, he contended, still gave primacy to revelation and redemption in history.

It is important to remember that, for von Rad, the two major traditions in the Hexateuch, exodus-settlement and Sinai, originated and developed over the years within liturgical celebrations. These two traditions represented, not the attempt to write history in the modern sense, but the efforts of successive generations to articulate and celebrate their faith within worship. Nevertheless, the ancient faith could be taken by the shapers of theological tradition, such as the Yahwist and the prophets, and given a spiritual character that validated the authenticity of belief outside worship. The sacred and the secular continued to be the two spheres, at times in direct tension, that expressed the vital faith of the chosen people.

THE TRADITIONING PROCESS

The major thematic traditions isolated by von Rad were quite similar to those of Wright: the promise to the fathers, the exodus, the Red Sea victory, the wilderness wandering, the land of Canaan, and the later additions of Sinai covenant and law, the David-Zion complex, and creation. Unlike Wright, however, the emphasis was not placed on the nucleus of demonstrable events but on their interpretations that continued to develop and change over the years. Wright saw his task to be the reconstruction of Israelite history, out of which one could then begin to do Old Testament theology. This scholarly reconstruction of history differed at times rather dramatically from Israel's own accounting. The tension be-

tween Israel's own accounting of its story and the history of Israel reconstructed by scholars was, for von Rad, a great problem, one that he never fully resolved. Even so, he took much more seriously Israel's own rendering of its history than did Wright. Indeed, what Israel says about God's action is primary for Old Testament theology.¹³ Thus the proper mode of engaging and actualizing the faith of Israel, for von Rad, is "retelling." And what Israel says is not dependent for its legitimacy on the actual occurrence of events or the ability of the historian to "prove" that these events took place. While von Rad does not appear to doubt that some sort of historical experience lay behind the redemptive acts, the real significance of the traditions resided within the development of the content of the faith expressed in words. In von Rad's formulation of the task of biblical theology, one is by necessity forced to take seriously what Israel says about its own salvation history. For von Rad, Israel's faith is not grounded in history but in a *theology* of history.¹⁴ This is the fundamental difference from Wright. Indeed, for von Rad, Israel's theology, and therefore our own, is the critical engagement and response of each generation to the proclamation of the ancestors. Each generation of necessity had to determine what it meant for them to be Israel in their own time and place. The role of the believer was not passive but active in creating and reformulating tradition. In the context of worship, Israelites represented and reactualized, that is, made living and new, the faith for their own contemporary existence. In and through ritual, the community made the past present and thereby participated in the sacred stream of redemptive history. The same process, suggested von Rad, is at work today in believing communities, especially in liturgical settings.

Perhaps more clearly than Wright, von Rad recognized the tension between competing presentations of the faith. For von Rad, historical-critical method demonstrates the development of Israelite religion in all of its multiplicity. Therefore it is not only impossible to argue for a unifying center that is indigenous to the text but it is also wrongheaded to engage in a systematic rendering of faith in abstract categories. Israel's faith is presented in flowing streams of various traditions and cannot be authentically rendered by a system. Further, the pluralism of Israel's faith, in part due to the very

13. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 1:105.

14. *Ibid.*, 1:106.

nature of the canon as a collection of texts, also derives from the moving and changing streams of tradition that pass through many generations of witnessing communities.

OLD TESTAMENT HERMENEUTICS

In addressing the issue of hermeneutics, von Rad argued that Old Testament traditions continued into the New Testament, where they received new formulations. Thus the relationship between the Testaments was not one of radical discontinuity.¹⁵ However, what of von Rad's understanding of the meaning of the Old Testament for modern Christianity?

For von Rad, tradition history contains three hermeneutical features: typology, promise-fulfillment, and reactualization. Redemptive acts as historical events were unrepeatable, once-for-all occurrences. However, in a new understanding of typology, von Rad argued that the events of Old Testament salvation history became the prototypes for the New Testament's corresponding antitypes.¹⁶ This means that salvific events in the Old Testament pointed beyond themselves to acts in the future, especially and most important the Christ-event. In von Rad's words, "The primeval event is a type of the final event."

Von Rad took the promise-fulfillment scheme and argued that each event points beyond itself to ever greater and more significant fulfillment, until the Christ-event provided the ultimate culmination of history.¹⁷ This allows the Christian to read the Old Testament as a "book of ever increasing anticipation."¹⁸ Inherent within the formulation of each redemptive tradition was the feature of divine promise pointing toward new and even greater fulfillment in the future. Each development in the tradition allowed for God to enter into it once again, leading to both different interpretations and similar, though new events. Especially for the prophets (and this is the point of origin for von Rad's understanding of promise-

15. Unlike Rudolf Bultmann who contrasts Old Testament law with New Testament grace and points to the failure of Old Testament promises as a serious hermeneutical dilemma ("The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," *The Old Testament and Christian Faith* [ed. Bernhard W. Anderson; New York: Harper & Row, 1963] 8-35).

16. See von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2:364-87.

17. *Ibid.*, 2:319-35, 357-87.

18. *Ibid.*, 2:319.

fulfillment), there was to be a new exodus, a new covenant, a new Jerusalem, and a new David. Indeed, even creation, which von Rad saw as a redemptive "act," was to become new.

Von Rad saw this hermeneutic as intrinsic to the Old Testament itself, for it understood that there were ever new fulfillments and that the community always lived between the now and the not yet, in anticipation of additional and at times greater fulfillments that resided still in the future. God was not held captive by the past but was ever active, willing and able to effectuate new acts of salvation in the present and the future.

For von Rad, this faith in a God of history, the present, and the not yet is expressed most clearly in the psalms (especially the laments), the prophets, and Deuteronomy. Here there are always breaks within the continuity of historical development, where God intrudes to inaugurate periods of new beginnings. There is the fulfillment of the Old in the New, yet this too opens itself to new possibilities. While von Rad attributed a "once-for-all" character to God's ultimate and final act in Jesus Christ, the tradition opened itself ever again to new possibilities, revitalized understandings, fresh hope, and an anticipated final climax in the eschaton. Von Rad contended that his version of typology was rooted in history, whereas allegory was invalid because of its ahistorical nature.

NEOORTHODOXY AND CONFSSIONAL CHRISTIANITY

Like Wright and Bright, von Rad approached his theological work from within the confessing church. Von Rad's Lutheran heritage, construed by neoorthodoxy, is represented in several of his theological affirmations: revelation in history, the sovereignty and providence of God, the Lordship of Christ, human nature, justification by faith, law and gospel, Word and confession, and the normative character of Scripture.

For von Rad, history reigned supreme as the primary mode of revelation. While the pagan nations searched for religious meaning and guidance in the sacral orders of nature, Israel looked to salvific events in history as the medium for understanding the activity and nature of God. It was especially in history that God had been active to deliver Israel from destruction and to bring it into existence as the chosen nation. Through the reactualization of past redemptive acts of God in confession and liturgy, the present community re-experienced the salvation of old. Thus one finds a sacramental view of the events of salvation history and the means by which they were

liturgically reactualized or enacted in the life of the worshipping community. And the anticipation arose from these liturgical experiences that new acts of God in the immediate and distant future yet waited to greet the faithful community.

Von Rad also affirmed that divine sovereignty extended over all creation. Creation was not viewed as a Greek cosmos but as a unity that originates in the divine will and continues only by God's sustaining effort that moves creation and history toward their divinely appointed goal.¹⁹ For von Rad, creation was viewed not so much as a doctrine as it was a salvific act, indeed the first as well as the prolegomenon for many others. Israel did not see creation as nature in some scientific sense or as a sacral sphere infused by divine forces, or gods, vying for control. Israel's creation faith did not allow for either the divinization of sex or the use of idols that were made from natural materials. Nor did this faith find expression in the timeless or recurring seasonal myths that were dramatically performed in fertility religions in order to renew the vitality of the earth. Rather, Israel viewed creation, contended von Rad, as the first of God's salvific acts that preceded all others.

As the Lord of history, God was, for von Rad, the one whose acts of redemption brought Israel into existence as the covenant people. The redemptive acts of God, recited in the ancient creed, were the formative events that shaped Israel's life as the community of God and continued to sustain Israel throughout its history.

As a Christian Old Testament scholar, von Rad's religious confession came to shape his views of Scripture and Israelite faith. In maintaining continuity between the Testaments, and between Israel and the church, he held that Christ claimed the traditions of Israel for himself. The early church saw in him the ultimate fulfillment of Israel's redemptive faith. He held that in Christ there is continuity with the old, and yet also the dawn of a new beginning. The kingdom of God had come in the newness of the Christ event.

Further, the New Testament writers read the Old Testament and its redemptive acts as the precursors of the Christ-event. Giving this tendency a prophetic cast, von Rad placed this development within the scheme of promise and fulfillment.²⁰ Each new act of redemption pointed beyond itself to greater and more lasting fulfillment, until the climax of God's eschatological act of redemption in Jesus Christ. Thus the unity of Scripture was found in redemptive history,

19. *Ibid.*, 2:338-39.

20. *Ibid.*, 2:328-29.

culminating in the Christ-event. While elements of the interpretation of the Old Testament by the New are not valid for today, the thrust of tradition, the increasing expectation, and the fulfillment in Christ are of lasting value for Christians.

In articulating his view of human nature, von Rad believed that God had given humans the freedom to choose their way of life before or apart from God. Yet the basic tendency of humans was to digress from God's commandments. The general thrust of the Old Testament is to speak of a fallen humanity ever in opposition to God and always needing forgiveness and divine guidance.²¹ Even the chosen are incapable of obeying God in a consistent fashion. Humans needed what Jeremiah and Ezekiel called a transformation of the heart, an act of divine creation that shapes human nature to have the very capacity for responsive obedience. Sinful humanity also required mediation with the Holy. The mediators could be and often were priestly officials who guarded the sacred sphere, but the more significant ones were prophetic intercessors who suffered vicariously for a sinful nation. These were Moses in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and the Servant in Second Isaiah. Only in Jesus Christ, asserted von Rad, was the law perfectly fulfilled and the sins of a fallen humanity borne by a sinless victim. For von Rad, Christ was the ultimate mediator, for in his life and death humanity was reconciled to God.

Justification by faith was also central to von Rad's Old Testament theology. Faith was the one and only possible authentic response to God by Israel.²² There was not just a glance backward to the redemptive acts of old but also a forward look by which one may move into the salvific action of God's future. The Old Testament, especially Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic theology, renders judgment on the sinfulness of people. Yet radical faith demanded the abandonment of self and the acceptance of the grace of God. The hidden God continued to address Israel with the new Word. In this way Israel was able to live by faith. What is new in the gospel is that the proclamation of the redemptive acts of God becomes incarnate in the Word that confronts humanity with an either/or decision. With "yes" to the divine encounter, humanity stands justified before God. Israel's "yes" to the redemptive events of the past and its open affirmation of new acts yet to come allowed Israel to par-

21. *Ibid.*, 2:348.

22. *Ibid.*, 2:378.

ticipate in the final justification rendered by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

In struggling with Luther's dichotomy between law and gospel, von Rad emphasized that the Old Testament was not only a statement of judgment but also a repository of grace.²³ Significant for von Rad was the fact that Israel was elected prior to the giving of the commandments. God's judgmental and demanding will was incorporated into law which, nonetheless, was related to the preceding acts of grace. Law was recited liturgically as evidenced in its formation in a series. Even so, the law was never firmly fixed; rather, it remained flexible and open to the mystery of God. The saving event that brought Israel into existence was intrinsically related to the moral responsibility demanded by the imperatives of divine law. Law, including the so-called sacramental orders, was to regulate an existing, redeemed community.

Even so, Israel understood that it was saved, not by legalistic obedience, but by God's acts of merciful redemption, given primal expression in the exodus event. Israel never legitimately understood its relationship to God to be defined exclusively or even primarily in legal terms. Rites, sacrifices, and moral deeds could never lay claim, in and of themselves, to divine favor. Israel was saved by grace, not by human works of imperfect moral obedience and ritual performance.

For von Rad, the prophets were the first to preach the wrath of God and to require their community to submit to law. This preaching of the law was new in Israel. The prophets based their indictments in oracles of judgment on specific legal statutes. However, Israel's primary sin was that of failing to respond to God's gracious action of salvation, not that Israel violated this or that commandment. At the ground of Israel's sin was the rejection of freely offered salvation and God's continued will to save. Human obedience to law was not, on the whole, a prerequisite for salvation. It was only with Ezekiel that Israel is condemned for failing to fulfill the law.

This understanding of law and gospel finds expression in von Rad's treatment of the two major traditions of the Hexateuch: law (Sinai) and gospel (exodus-settlement). For von Rad, the exodus-settlement tradition, which speaks of the gifts of redemption, preservation, and land, was earlier, primary, and normative, while the

23. *Ibid.*, 2:388-409.

later tradition of law was less significant. As faith required guidance by law for Paul and Luther, so for von Rad faith in the redemptive acts of God, involving both a backward and a forward look, necessarily led to the desire for moral obedience made possible by the Torah.

Finally, von Rad discusses the importance of the confessional response to the divine Word that embodied the redemptive acts of God. For the Old Testament, von Rad stressed that the Word of God creates the world and directs human history.²⁴ Priestly and prophetic oracles partook of this creative power that, on the one hand, transformed, directed, and redeemed human life and, on the other, counteracted sin and evil. Symbolic acts, both ritual and prophetic, shared the same sacred power. Through dramatic performance and spoken confession in liturgy, both the mystery and the redemptive power of God were experienced.

TRADITION HISTORY AND THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Von Rad's traditionhistorical approach to Old Testament theology shapes his presentation of the prophets. He begins by placing these spokespersons for God solidly within the developing life and faith of Israel. The prophets, like other social groups, are both carriers and transformers of tradition.

Reacting against classical liberalism, von Rad opposed earlier portrayals of the prophets as original thinkers and highly individualistic loners whose intimate relationship with God gave shape to a radically new theology.²⁵ For von Rad, the prophets were more properly understood within the larger religious and historical context of the ancient Near East and earlier generations of Israel. However, the prophets' use of myth and ritual from the ancient Near East and their appropriation of traditional ideas and images from both pagan and Israelite sources in no way reduced the power and significance of their message. Von Rad also went much further than Bright and Wright in arguing against the false dichotomy drawn between the spirituality of the prophets and the cultic religion of the priests. In fact, von Rad entertained the idea that the early prophets were official spokespersons of the cult, perhaps even functionaries of the sanctuaries. This view was even more pronounced in the

24. *Ibid.*, 2:80-98, 352-56.

25. See *ibid.*, vol. 2, for von Rad's assessment of the broad contours of classical prophecy.

Scandinavian school.²⁶ Von Rad noted that the early prophets were intercessors on behalf of Israel, speaking for the corporate body, often, it seemed, within the context of official worship ceremonies. On occasion they even uttered curses against the nation's enemies. Thus, as late as the ninth century B.C.E., the prophets were a part of the cultus.

For von Rad, however, the classical prophets marked a new development in Israelite prophecy. While there was not a radical break with the past, the prophets of the eighth century reformulated the prophetic tradition. On the one hand, even the classical prophets were closely bound to the traditions of Israel's historic faith. The exodus, guidance through the Sinai, the gift of the land, law and covenant, creation, the promise to David, and Zion as the city of God were theological traditions on which the classical prophets based their preaching. In these they find their legitimation, Israel's continuing identity, and the theological images and symbols available for reinterpretation. The ancient traditions of faith were encountered and made new.

Yet, always open to the freedom of God, the message of the classical prophets also represented something radically new. The old was passing away, and new acts of God were imminent. A new exodus, a new covenant, a new creation, to name several examples, were to be wrought by the Lord of history. For von Rad, these new acts, in one sense, were continuous with those of the past, and yet, in another, they embodied fresh and even greater experiences of divine redemption. There was both continuity and discontinuity with the past.

In breaking with the past, the classical prophets attacked the cult and announced divine judgment, not only against the enemies of Israel, but even against the chosen people themselves. The classical prophets found their authority, not in an office in the cult, but in the experience of their individual call. In this divine-human encounter, they were commissioned to challenge the past orders of religious piety and in unprecedented fashion to announce the radical judgment of God. Unlike their Canaanite and some of their early Israelite counterparts, the classical prophets were not driven into ecstasy by the spirit, for by the eighth century this phenomenon had essentially ceased.²⁷ Rather, for von Rad, it was their encounter

26. See, e.g., Alfred Haldar, *Associations of Cult Prophets among the Ancient Semites* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1945).

27. Ezekiel represents a problem for von Rad, since ecstatic experiences induced by the spirit or "hand" of God appear to be evidenced in this prophet.

with the Word of God, first experienced in the call and personally directed to them, that gave them their authority and shaped their understanding of the divine will. Von Rad emphasized, however, that the freedom of the prophet was never lost in this encounter. Indeed, there were experiences in which the call seemed so overwhelming that the prophets were unable to resist. Yet, for von Rad, prophets were free to accept or to reject the divine commission and did not completely surrender their freedom to God.²⁸

Their call signaled a radical break with their individual past and thrust them into a role that endured throughout the remainder of their lives. The old was passing away; now the new is about to dawn. This individual break with the past was paralleled by God's own dealings with Israel. Divine judgment of Israel's past was accompanied by the promise of new acts of redemption that would break into history. Prophetic life and message became entwined, and the prophets found themselves compelled by a will much stronger than their own. In the primal experience of the call and later encounters with the Holy, prophets were detached from their own feelings and thoughts and filled with the emotions of God. And in the experience of the emotions of God, the prophet came to understand both God's governance of history and view of the human situation.

Important is von Rad's contention that it is the Word which is the bearer of revelation and possesses authority, not an event behind the interpretation. Prophets were bearers of the divine word that they announced and proclaimed. Using the messenger formula to introduce their speeches ("thus saith the Lord"), the prophets understood themselves as messengers who spoke the oracles delivered to them by God. These speeches, which were couched in a variety of forms, were arranged into small complexes either by the prophets themselves or by their disciples who transmitted the prophetic traditions. These collections were designed to demonstrate that the prophetic word was power-laden language that directed the course of history by bringing destruction and dispensing salvation. These powerful words could never become void or empty of creative force; rather, they continued to find fulfillment in new and significant ways. The disciples believed that fresh meaning could always be extracted from prophetic collections, even when their original historical context and meaning long since had been forgotten.²⁹

These adaptations of prophetic words were not spurious distortions; rather, they represented the renewal and re-creation of tra-

dition that continued to have power and meaning. Thus, unlike the Albright school, von Rad did not give primacy to the earliest layer of prophetic tradition, presumably closest to if not actually deriving from the prophet himself. Rather, the many layers of tradition possessed an authentic character. This traditioning process was "a perfectly normal and theologically legitimate procedure."³⁰ Since the prophet's words continued to accompany Israel on its historical journey, later generations who encountered these oracles were not only summoned to faith by the generative power of prophetic discourse but also felt free to reinterpret them within new and different settings. This trajectory of tradition was indeed the authentic hermeneutic that was articulated by Israel's own theologizing. Radical openness to the future allowed continuous reinterpretation, a process that did not do violence to the past but gave it new life.

THE THEOLOGY OF JEREMIAH

Von Rad's explication of the theology of Jeremiah begins with his customary description of the historical context in which the prophet lived.³¹ The collapse of the Assyrian empire, the contest between Egypt and Babylonia for control of Syro-Palestine, and the ultimate establishment of Babylonian hegemony are rehearsed along with the heroic although ultimately futile struggles of Judah to achieve political independence. Indeed, Jeremiah's message and life achieved significance in interaction with these most critical events. Perhaps the most significant historical factor in shaping the prophet's message, suggested von Rad, was the "foe from the north," an enemy from Mesopotamia, eventually identified as Babylonia, who would carry out divine judgment against Judah (see Jeremiah 4-10). This theme of a northern enemy appears in the preaching of Jeremiah from its inception in 627 B.C.E. to its conclusion sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.

Von Rad points to the significance of Jeremiah's identity as a northern Israelite prophet from the village of Anathoth in the tribe of Benjamin. Like Hosea, upon whom Jeremiah was dependent, the prophet grounded his preaching in the theological traditions derived from the older, Israelite complex of exodus, covenant at Sinai, and conquest and not from the southern traditions of Judah centered in the promise to David and Zion as the city of God. These northern traditions were cultivated by Jeremiah's priestly family, Levites whose famous ancestor, Abiathar, had been exiled to Ana-

28. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2:70-79.

29. *Ibid.*, 2:45.

30. *Ibid.*, 2:47.

31. *Ibid.*, 2:188-219.

thoth by Solomon. Abiathar had been one of David's two chief priests, but he was exiled as a result of the power struggle between Solomon and Adonijah, two of David's sons who vied for the throne. Abiathar suffered from the misfortune of supporting Adonijah. When Solomon succeeded to the kingship, he selected Zadok, the founder of the Zadokite priesthood, as his chief priest, and exiled Abiathar. While the Zadokites nurtured the David-Zion tradition, the Levites in the north, including the family and descendants of Abiathar, maintained the older traditions of the exodus, the Sinai covenant, and the conquest of Canaan. After the Assyrian conquest in the late eighth century B.C.E., many northern Levites went south to preach in Judah.

Von Rad argued that the sacred traditions of Israel are the basis for the three major elements of Jeremiah's preaching: proclamation of divine judgment, individual laments, and announcement of future salvation. Common to all is von Rad's emphasis on the power of the divine word that goes forth to direct human history and to create the possibility of faithful response. In Jeremiah's early preaching, he speaks of the threat of a "foe from the north" who would carry out Yahweh's will in bringing not salvation to the chosen people but destruction. Israel and Judah both had been faithless to the election and covenant traditions and subsequently were placed under the threat of divine punishment. Prior to Josiah's death in 609 B.C.E., Jeremiah held out the possibility of repentance and the averting of destruction. However, after the battle of Megiddo and the death of the king, Jeremiah points to God's final rejection of his people.³²

Von Rad emphasized the importance of the redemptive acts of Yahweh in the laments of Jeremiah that speak of suffering, accusation, and the silence of God. The Psalter, of course, contains the response of the community to the acts of divine redemption in hymns (Psalms 78; 105; 106; 135; 136), thanksgivings (Psalms 18; 21; 65; 66; 75; 92; 118), and laments (Psalms 7; 22; 44; 52; 58; 60; 74; 80; 83; 85; 89; 90). Laments typically mention the gracious acts of God in saving the people in the past, complain about the silence and inactivity of God in the present, and sometimes conclude with expressions of confidence in coming redemption. Unique in prophetic literature, however, is the presence of laments in the Book of Jeremiah (11:18—12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13; 20:14-18). These "confessions" speak of the prophet's struggle with

32. See, e.g., the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7.

both his call and the justice of God. Persecution by his enemies and the failure, at least for a time, of the judgment from the north to materialize resulted in a darkness of the soul that threatened the prophet's faith. Jeremiah questioned the justice and faithfulness of God in much the same way that Israel responded to the threat of judgment. Where was the God whose acts of redemption in the past had rescued the faithful from an existence under threat?

According to von Rad, Jeremiah's prophetic life, in a sense, became a *via dolorosa* (see Jeremiah 37-45). Through his own suffering (confessions and passion story), Jeremiah came to experience the terrifying darkness of "godforsakenness," even as Judah was to experience that terror in its own dark night of the soul. For von Rad, this personal struggle of the prophet reflected the near-collapse of God's relationship with the chosen. Yet in the intensity of their struggles, Jeremiah and eventually Judah discovered an essential feature of faithful life: the concealment of God is the only means that enables people to have the possibility of true human-divine dialogue.

After the judgment of God rendered by the "foe from the north," Jeremiah used the same ancient traditions as the basis for hope in new and gracious acts of God in the future. These new acts, grounded in the redemption of old, included the reuniting of Israel and Judah, the return from exile, and the establishment of a new covenant that would command the obedience of a faithful people whose hearts were transformed (see especially Jeremiah 30-31). While the David-Zion tradition had no significance in the prophet's proclamation of judgment, his eschatological preaching did make a place for a future Messiah (see Jer 23:5-6 and 30:21). However, the new emphasis of the prophet is placed upon one who, in representing divine rule on earth, risks his life and thereby provides access to God in a personal way. Distinctive to Jeremiah is the view that the royal mediator opens up the possibility of salvation to those who give their lives and hearts to God.

A THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF VON RAD'S HISTORY AS TRADITION

Von Rad's articulation of Old Testament theology has been and continues to be a commanding presentation. Its distinguishing features include a descriptive, historical articulation of Israelite religious traditions; an important place for the hermeneutical process at work in the Bible by which each generation engaged its tra-

ditional faith and reformulated it for their own present; a serious effort to forge a unity between the Testaments not only by means of the traditioning process but also by pointing to Christ as the culmination of history; the use of promise and fulfillment as a hermeneutical structure intrinsic to the traditioning process; and the interpretation of Scripture within the setting of the modern church. Von Rad did not write a systematic Old Testament theology shaped by a single center. But he did point to several tradition complexes that provided thematic coherence for the presentation of the faith of Israel. Von Rad's constructive work tended to be done in writings that represented a stage beyond the descriptive work of his two-volume theology. Yet he did not leave entirely the constructive task to others.

While continuing to serve as a formidable rendering of Old Testament faith, von Rad's theology still has several limitations.³³ He has tended to use characteristic features of Deuteronomistic theology to shape the various Old Testament traditions. The so-called ancient credo may be only a Deuteronomistic summary, not a primitive core of faith developing into long-standing trajectories, while the organizing principle of "proclamation and response" is also Deuteronomistic.³⁴ Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with using certain elements of Deuteronomistic theology, but why privilege these over others in the Bible?

One may also criticize von Rad for tracing the development of each tradition of faith without attributing any significant theological value to the principles of discontinuity and plurality. To point out the discontinuous and plural nature of Old Testament faith without some incorporation of these observations into theological method is not very satisfying.

Von Rad's theology also faces the same challenge that confronted Wright and the biblical theology movement in America: how to integrate successfully certain parts of the canon, especially wisdom and law, into a comprehensive Old Testament theology. Not only did wisdom literature find its theological grounding in creation, it expressed very little interest in sacred history or even national his-

33. See especially James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (London: SCM, 1966); idem, "Trends and Prospects in Biblical Theology," *JTS* 25 (1974) 265-82; and Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology*, 110-24.

34. J. Philip Hyatt, "Were There an Ancient Historical Credo in Israel and an Independent Sinai Tradition?" *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament* (ed. Harry Thomas Frank and William L. Reed; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) 152-70.

tory before Ben Sira in the second century B.C.E. The theology of law is based on the primal event of revelation at Sinai. Yet neither of these themes was a part of the early creed, at least according to von Rad. For him, the full development of the theological traditions of creation and the revelation at Sinai as themes of a confessing faith occurred only in the exilic and postexilic periods.

The theological struggle to find an important place for creation is illustrated, according to von Rad, by the Yahwist. The J narrative regards creation as a preface to salvation history that begins with Abraham in order to extend the blessing of Israel to all nations. Yet for creation to be regarded as a saving event, von Rad had to make creation into a work in time, much the same as the exodus. Given the primacy of redemption in his Old Testament theology, von Rad searched for this view of creation as a soteriological act and found it very late, in Deutero-Isaiah's redemptive theology. Von Rad attempted, not very convincingly, to include wisdom under the rubric of the "response to salvation history," even though these themes are absent in the corpus until the second century B.C.E.³⁵

Von Rad's presentation of the theological significance of Torah is also open to serious debate. He regarded the Sinai tradition as secondarily placed into the tradition of the wilderness wandering. And of course, the ancient creed, as he determined it, did not mention this event.³⁶ He argued that it is only in the postexilic period that the law assumed primacy in Jewish religion and received its full theological development. For von Rad, of course, this was not entirely a welcome development. He saw this as something of a digression from a theology of redemption grounded in both the gracious acts of Yahweh and Israel's justification by faith (see Abraham's response to God's call) and as a movement toward a theology of works-righteousness. According to von Rad, the law, not election rooted in gracious acts of saving history, now defined who belonged to the people of God.³⁷ The law became absolute, timeless, and unconditional, regardless of the situation. True, the law was

35. Von Rad addressed this deficiency in his *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) when he indicated that wisdom reflected theologically on the nature and activity of God revealed in everyday experiences of the world. For von Rad, the sages, except Qoheleth, affirmed that creation was good and came to express their trust in the graciousness of the creator. Even Job finally places his destiny and that of creation back into the hands of God. For a detailed treatment, see Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

36. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 1:187.

37. *Ibid.*, 1:90.

strongly linked to salvation, but redemption now was merited by obedience to divine commandments. Prior to the post-exile, he argues, the purpose of the law was to serve the people by guiding them through their history as the chosen of God. After the exile, the purpose of the people was to serve the law. Von Rad saw the door to casuistry open, and saving history as a movement through time and space came to an abrupt halt.³⁸ Israel was no longer linked to the nations but now was separate and apart. The theological richness of Torah is not explored and set forth by von Rad, and this is perhaps the greatest weakness of his presentation.

Von Rad's work in the area of hermeneutics also is open to question. Certainly, the principle of promise and fulfillment and the practice of "retelling" are important in understanding the nature of traditioning and the re-presentation and reactualization of Old Testament faith. Each generation encounters the "word" and re-experiences its saving power through faith and confession. However, typology is not very useful as a hermeneutical principle. Typology derives from precritical thinking unencumbered by the shock of the Enlightenment and presupposes one continuous story of faith, not the multiplicity of traditions, interruptions, and fragmentation that von Rad so adroitly reveals in his descriptive work.³⁹ Events become extracted from their space and time to point to "like" events in the future. The scholar most responsible for describing Old Testament theology as redemptive history moves away from the language and conceptualities of history to another mode of discourse and understanding when he approaches hermeneutics.⁴⁰

38. *Ibid.*, 1:91.

39. For an overview of the critical responses to von Rad and the difficulties posed by history in general, see Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology*, 59-124.

40. In Germany, especially among the scholars who continue the von Rad-Alt-Noth *Schule*, the program for doing theology remains essentially that of von Rad. What is needed is greater clarity and more refined results. See especially Rolf Rendtorff, "Alttestamentliche Theologie und israelitisch-jüdische Religionsgeschichte," *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Theologische Bücherei 57; Munich: Kaiser, 1975) 137-51. Rendtorff (the major Old Testament participant in the Pannenberg *Schule*) is one of von Rad's students who has developed his teacher's views by attempting to bring together the history of actual events uncovered by historical criticism and the history of Israel's own self-attested faith. For Rendtorff, it is impossible to believe simply that God acted in certain, uninterpreted ways that are discernible to the historian. Indeed, these acts are interpreted and constantly reinterpreted. No event occurs without the interpretation which is its meaning. But more important, Rendtorff contends that the traditions of the thematic acts are themselves history, i.e., they are constructed

Von Rad certainly worked as a Christian interpreter of the Old Testament, standing within his own confessing community. Would his presentation of Old Testament theology have been improved by the inclusion of a more constructive, integrative, and systematic approach? This is a major question, but it would have enabled contemporary theologians and those who stand within confessing Christian communities of faith to access better von Rad's theology, or, better stated, theologies.

To push further the issue of doing a constructive Old Testament theology, what of questions emerging from the contemporary community of faith that von Rad's treatment does not answer, at least directly? Sexism, racism, environment, war, the Holocaust, and social justice, to name a few pressing issues, are not addressed by von Rad's theology, presumably because he thought these belong to contemporary theology and ethics.

One may question an approach that does not posit a center that allows for a systematic presentation. As a historian, von Rad has made a strong case for denying that any one theme or tradition resides at the center of Israelite faith. For a descriptive stage of Old Testament theology, this is most probably true. Is it not possible, however, for a theologian, even a historical theologian, to move to another stage or level in theological discourse and set forth a center that unites various elements into a more systematic treatment?

Von Rad's treatment of Jeremiah is admirable. He places the prophet within his historical and cultural setting, the long stream of prophets in Israel, and the theological traditions of Israelite faith. At the same time, he addresses in cogent terms the specific features of the life and thought of the prophet, bringing to light, for example, the unique presence and importance of the confessions.

Yet several problems confront von Rad's theological presentation of Jeremiah. What is one to do, for example, with Jeremiah's appropriation of the theology of creation, particularly the chaos tradition, in describing the "foe from the north"? Or, what of the

within time and space by historical communities and open to historical understanding. These traditions include actual events, but they cannot be separated into two parts: facts and interpretation. Israel's history occurs both within the "outward" events that are the subject of the historian and the "internal" events that exist in the multilayers of tradition. There is the unity of word and event through which the knowledge of God comes. For Rendtorff, revelation comes in "the event which is announced in the Word in its context in the history of the tradition." For a purely descriptive approach, following the historical development of Israelite theology, see Werner H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament: A History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

wisdom texts that made their way into the prophetic traditions (e.g., Jer 17:5-11)? Von Rad could have examined these specific examples of two traditions in Jeremiah, but he does not do so.

Then there is the substantial problem posed by the continuities and discontinuities resulting from the Deuteronomic editing of the Book of Jeremiah. In this redaction, Jeremiah becomes the "new Moses" who is both the preacher and the interpreter of the (Deuteronomic) law. Would this representation of Jeremiah as the "new Moses" be a digression and perhaps even misrepresentation, given von Rad's treatment of Torah?

Von Rad's formulation of Old Testament theology, illustrated by his assessment of the Book of Jeremiah, remains a formidable presentation even today. However, the weaknesses mentioned above have demonstrated how an Old Testament theology, grounded in history, even a history of traditions traced out within a reconstructed narrative history of Israel, faces serious challenges and carries with it inherent limitations.

CHAPTER 4

History as Liberation: Social Science and Radical Theology

The paradigm of history remains a significant model for biblical study and Old Testament theology, in part because it has adapted well to new methodological developments. Since the 1970s, however, a renewed emphasis on the social sciences has led, not only to the reshaping of the study of the Bible, but also to the reformulation of the tasks of both biblical theology and contemporary hermeneutics. Perhaps the most provocative example of the combination of the historical paradigm with social-scientific study that leads into biblical theology and eventually contemporary hermeneutics is the work of Norman Gottwald. The two primary and related features of Gottwald's formidable work are his social-scientific analysis of ancient Israel and his theological work that is largely informed by liberation theology.

SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

While the concerns and application of the social sciences have shaped modern biblical scholarship for the past century, the significant use of social-scientific methods to reconstruct Israelite history and religion has developed at a rapid pace since the 1970s.¹

1. See Walter Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 98 (1979) 161-85; Norman K. Gottwald, "Sociological Method in the Study of Ancient Israel," *The Bible and Liberation* (ed. Norman K. Gottwald; rev. ed.; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983) 26-37; Bruce J. Malina, "The Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation," Gottwald, *The Bible and Liberation*, 11-25; J. W. Rogerson, "The Use of Sociology in Old Testament Studies," *SVT* 36 (1985) 245-56; Gerd Theissen, "The Sociological Interpretation of Religious Traditions: Its Methodological Problems as Exemplified in Early Christianity," Gottwald, *The Bible and Liberation*; and Robert K. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).