

BREVARD S. CHILDS

# Canon as Rule and Guide

Edited by  
DANIEL R. DRIVER

*Forschungen  
zum Alten Testament  
174*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Forschungen zum Alten Testament

Edited by

Corinna Körting (Hamburg) · Konrad Schmid (Zürich)  
Mark S. Smith (Princeton) · Andrew Teeter (Harvard)

174





Brevard S. Childs

# Canon as Rule and Guide

Collected Essays

Edited by  
Daniel R. Driver

Mohr Siebeck

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## Abbreviations

AAOT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AASF	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
AB	The Anchor Bible
AcOr	Acta Orientalia
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AoF	Altorientalische Forschungen
ASAW	Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
ASNU	Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ASTI	Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BFCT	Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bib	Biblica
BibLeb	Bibel und Leben
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester
BKAT	Biblicher Kommentar, Altes Testament
BLE	Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique
BRA	Beiträge zur Religionsgeschichte des Altertums
BSNA	Biblical Scholarship in North America
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BTS	Biblich-theologische Studien
BTZ	Berliner theologische Zeitschrift
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Edited by A. Leo Oppenheim et al. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum: Series Graeca. Turnhout: Brepols, 1977–
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–

Colloq	Colloquium
CPJ	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> . Edited by Victor A. Tcherikover. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957–64
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
CuW	Christentum und Wissenschaft
DBSup	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément</i> . Edited by Louis Pirot and André Robert. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928–
DBW	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works
DJDJ	Discoveries in the Judean Desert of Jordan
Dtr	Deuteronomistic; Deuteronomist
EdF	Erträge der Forschung
EH	Europäische Hochschulschriften
EKZ	Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung
ES	Evangelischer Schriftendienst
ET	English translation
EvK	Evangelische Kommentare
EvT	Evangelische Theologie
Exp	The Expositor
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FP	Florilegium patristicum tam veteris quam medii aevi auctores complectens
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GAT	Grundrisse zum Alten Testament
GNT	Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBC	<i>Harper's Bible Commentary</i> . Edited by James L. Mays et al. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HBT	Horizons in Biblical Theology
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IB	<i>The Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by George A. Buttrick et al. 12 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1951–57
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by George A. Buttrick. 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962
IDBSup	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume</i> . Edited by Keith Crim. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
IKaZ	Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio
Int	Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBR	Journal of Bible and Religion
JBTh	Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JE	<i>The Jewish Encyclopedia</i> . Edited by Isidore Singer. 12 vols. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1925

JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JPH	Journal of Presbyterian History
JPOS	Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTC	Journal for Theology and the Church
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
Judaica	Judaica: Beiträge zum Verstehen des Judentums
JudChr	Judaica et Christiana
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KBL	Köhler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner. <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros</i> . Leiden: Brill, 1953
KD	Kerygma und Dogma
KEHAT	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KSB	Kohlhammer-Studienbücher Theologie
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LXX	Septuagint
MoTh	Modern Theology
MSL	<i>Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon</i> . 17 vols. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1937–2004
MT	Masoretic Text
MUSJ	Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph
NCB	New Century Bible
Neot	Neotestamentica
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	New Testament Studies
OBL	Orientalia et Biblica Lovaniensia
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
OTWSA	Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika
PG	Patrologia Graeca. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–86
PL	Patrologia Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–64
PMS	Publications in Medieval Studies
POuT	De Prediking van het Oude Testament
PR	Presbyterian Review
ProEccl	Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology
Proof	Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History
PTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
PW	<i>Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> . New edition by Georg Wissowa and Wilhelm Kroll. 50 vols. in 84 parts. Stuttgart: Metzler and Druckenmüller, 1894–1980
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae



RA	Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> . Edited by Theodor Klauser et al. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–
RB	Revue biblique
RD	Religions and Discourse
ReS	Religious Studies
RevScRel	Revue des sciences religieuses
RG	Reihe Gottesdienst
RGG	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Edited by Hans Dieter Betz. 3rd ed. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1957–65
RHPR	Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–
RSR	Recherches de science religieuse
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
ST	Studia Theologica
StPB	Studia Post-biblica
TB	Theologische Bücherei
TBl	Theologische Blätter
TGUOS	Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society
THAT	<i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. 2 vols. Munich: Kaiser, 1971–76
ThTo	Theology Today
ThViat	Theologia Viatorum
ThWAT	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970–
TLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
TQ	Theologische Quartalschrift
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . Edited by Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–
TRev	Theologische Revue
TRu	Theologische Rundschau
TTZ	Trierer theologische Zeitschrift
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
TWNT	<i>Theologische Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> . 10 vols. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932–79
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
TZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
UH	<i>Ugaritic Handbook</i> . Cyrus H. Gordon. AnOr 25. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1947
VF	Verkündigung und Forschung
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WdF	Wege der Forschung
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	Die Welt des Orients
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
ZTK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche



## Editor's Introduction

Born one hundred years ago this September, Brevard Springs Childs wrote numerous works of biblical and theological scholarship, including thirteen books and over seventy articles and essays. A high proportion of his major works became landmarks in their respective fields. The arrival of his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* in 1979, for example, was an event heralded by review issues in two different journals in 1980.<sup>1</sup> The work garnered nearly sixty reviews in total and has been cited in thousands of publications. His two commentaries, on Exodus (1974) and Isaiah (2001), have also established themselves as standard works, the former having been cited more than a thousand times, the latter nearly so.<sup>2</sup> Especially in comparison to the Old Testament Introduction, the companion volume introducing the New Testament in 1984 made very little impact.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it helped lay the foundation for the hefty *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (1992), the impact of which is perhaps best registered by the fact that it was shortly translated into a two-volume German edition.<sup>4</sup> Two technical commentaries, two Introductions in the German tradition, a full theology of the Christian Bible, not one of them under five hundred pages and most well over six: these are the obvious monuments of a productive and consequential career.

Yet to tally reviews, citations, and pages of major works is to take a partial and incidental measure of a scholar's contribution. Before describing the present volume of collected essays, it will help to contextualize the larger body of work.

### 1 *The Major Works*

If one thinks of Childs as authoring five core tomes, then that core is flanked by eight shorter books that can be inventoried relative to it. Three early studies appear in hindsight to be preparatory. Fully at home in the German-pioneered form- and tradition-critical methods in which Childs was trained, these monographs

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<sup>1</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). See *HBT* 2.1 (1980) and *JSOT* 5.16 (1980), and see below.

<sup>2</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974); Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). Citation statistics are drawn from Google Scholar.

<sup>3</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). It was reviewed nearly twenty times and has been cited in over 440 publications.

<sup>4</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); German edition: *Die Theologie der einen Bibel*, trans. Christiane and Manfred Oeming, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1994–96).

also resonate with interests and themes that the author will develop over time. Right from the start, in the published form of the thesis completed under Walter Baumgartner and Walther Eichrodt in 1954, one sees a concern to understand problems of the Old Testament in connection with “many of the basic problems of Biblical theology,” although such expansive questions are disciplined by exegetical studies of texts related to myth and “reality.”<sup>5</sup> A second title, the manuscript of which was reviewed by G. Ernest Wright and “Professor Gerhard von Rad” himself, argues that work on the role of memory in Old Testament tradition needs “a return to the detailed work of biblical scholarship. There is here no less concern for the broad theological issues, but a conviction that our grasp of biblical theology grows only as we get past the stage of the general survey.”<sup>6</sup> A third title seeks to understand the prophet Isaiah in relation to the Assyrian crisis of 701 such that “a new perspective is opened into the historical and theological message of the prophet which is sensitive to the tension, interaction, and resolution of elements which together constitute the full biblical witness.”<sup>7</sup> Thus even at the earliest stage of Childs’s work, in the books most narrowly conceived, there is a clear purpose to integrate rigorous biblical study with a more comprehensive vision – he would later speak of the church searching out a “holistic” understanding – of Christian Scripture. It is not by chance that all three of these monographs appear in a series for Studies in Biblical Theology.

A fourth early work is transitional in at least two ways. First, by its own account, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1970) understands itself to be responding to the recent dissolution of a movement:

It is evident to most people who are engaged professionally in the teaching of theology that the discipline has recently passed through one phase and entered into another. Many lay people are also conscious of a shift in the winds. However, the exact nature of this change is not fully clear, and most of the reflections on the nature of the change remain impressionistic and often visceral. The layman senses the new emphasis on the secular side of Christian responsibility, and the focus of attention on contemporary social issues. The professional theologian speaks of the end of the theological consensus, often identified with “neo-orthodoxy,” and the opening up of new theological fronts. He is also aware that the interest seems to have shifted away from Biblical studies to social action. But, above all, he is keenly aware of the fluid state of theological studies.<sup>8</sup>

Childs starts with a cogent review of the rise and fall of a distinctively American “Biblical Theology Movement,” aided in his formulations as much by his distance from the movement, thanks to his time studying in Europe in the early 1950s, as by his understated participation in it, most actively from around 1958 to 1967. Tracking with other critics of the period, such as Langdon Gilkey and James Barr, he helps to mark a transition by characterizing the end of an era. Second, he begins to

<sup>5</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, SBT 27 (London: SCM, 1960; 2nd ed., 1962), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, SBT 37 (London: SCM, 1962), 6–7.

<sup>7</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, SBT 2/3 (London: SCM, 1967), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 9.

effect a transition by outlining a proposal to reorient the field to a hermeneutical and theological framework grounded in the Christian canon. "As a fresh alternative, we would like to defend the thesis that the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology."<sup>9</sup> The theological climate was changing, and a change in approach was required.

In the first part of *Crisis* one finds scant hints that canon had been the missing ingredient.<sup>10</sup> The same is true of Childs's other work up to this point. An illustrative essay on the canonical context of Psalm 8, first published in 1969, is incorporated in the book's showcase of exegetical examples. There are also pregnant comments in 1967, about the complex "diversity of witness" to the Assyrian crisis and the danger of "trying to understand these texts exclusively from an historical point of view," and about the appropriateness of "a confessional stance" for an exegete "who takes seriously the Christian canon as his theological context."<sup>11</sup> One could also point to the contours of the Exodus commentary of 1974, which involved a decade of active work on an objective that was "unabashedly theological."<sup>12</sup> Near the beginning of that span of work, in a 1964 article about Old Testament commentaries that was framed, in part, as a response to Krister Stendahl's famously split definition of biblical theology in 1962, Childs speaks of the need to establish a "framework of faith" in order to approach the true task of theological exegesis.<sup>13</sup> The word "canon" does not yet appear, but looking back it is clear enough what parameters are in play.<sup>14</sup> In sum, in the run-up to his fourth book in 1970, Childs undertakes a critical recalibration of form- and tradition-critical methodologies that he then redeploys in service of a novel pursuit of the canonical context of scripture. Elsewhere I have described this shift as a turn from form to final form.<sup>15</sup> Insofar as *Crisis* launched a broad, long-running debate about the significance of canon and final form, the book is properly remembered as seminal.

A fifth shorter work is an annotated book list for a church audience.<sup>16</sup> The title is easily overlooked because it is semipopular, overshadowed by the stupendous

<sup>9</sup> Childs, *Crisis*, 99.

<sup>10</sup> The most notable comment is a passing one on the unity of the Bible: "there were always those who found the fundamental unity in history.... Surprisingly enough, the role of the canon in creating and maintaining the unity of the Bible was seldom discussed. Often one got the impression that the concept of canon was part of the static, dogmatic unity that was being rejected for a new dynamic interpretation" (Childs, *Crisis*, 39).

<sup>11</sup> Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 121, 127.

<sup>12</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, ix. "During that [ten-year] period I have gone through many different stages in my own thinking" (x).

<sup>13</sup> Brevard S. Childs, "Interpretation in Faith: The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary," *Int* 18.4 (1964): 432–49; repr. below, 47–61.

<sup>14</sup> Childs, "Interpretation in Faith," 433, 436–37; repr. below, 48, 50–51.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel R. Driver, *Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian: For the Church's One Bible*, FAT 2.46 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 105–36; cf. 13–18 on the development, starting with a graduate paper from 1952, of the six-part rubric used throughout the Exodus commentary.

<sup>16</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Books for Pastor and Teacher* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

bibliographical reckoning of the Introduction of 1979, and now quite dated. Still, it serves well as an index of the author's aim and outlook in 1977. It opens with a statement of the predicament that Childs wants to address. The crisis identified at the start of the decade has not abated. To the contrary:

The task of using the Bible faithfully and effectively in the ministry of the Christian church has always been a challenge for each new generation, but particularly within recent years the problem has increased in intensity. A widespread confusion has fallen upon large segments of the church regarding the nature of the Bible. This malaise has spread from clergy to laity, from old to young. How should the Bible be preached and taught? What should its role be in shaping the life of modern Christians? How does Scripture exert its authority on a congregation?

These problems are closely related to the larger theological crisis of our age in which older traditional positions have been abandoned and new ones have not yet been found. It is my conviction that the present struggle for a fresh theological formulation of the Christian faith will fail unless it is accompanied by a new understanding of the central place of the Bible within the church....

I believe that it is of the highest priority for the church to seek to recover an understanding of its Scripture. This task cannot be accomplished by assigning it to a dispassionate battery of experts (although I do not doubt that God can work even in committees) but must arise from within the confessing church itself. This goal will not be reached without much prayer, struggle, and study of Scripture on the local parish level. Only seldom has rebirth begun in the academy. Of course, there is an important role for trained scholars, but their contribution must remain in the context of the worshiping community if it would address the pressing theological needs of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Readers familiar with Childs's diction may note the variations on phrases with characteristic words like "generation" and "struggle." Observations such as these are still being consolidated, and the form of them here is relatively fresh. In a sense the preface to *Old Testament Books* looks both backwards and forwards. It recapitulates some of the assumptions underlying the constructive proposal in *Crisis*, further developed in programmatic statements and case studies such as those of his Sprunt Lectures, given in early 1972 and published in various places.<sup>18</sup> It also

<sup>17</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Books*, 7–8.

<sup>18</sup> Childs gave a series of five lectures for the 1972 James Sprunt Lectures, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA, 1–4 February 1972. A typescript draft of the lectures, dated January 1972 and entitled "Canon and Criticism: The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church," is held in the Brevard S. Childs Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library. A lecture on the crossing of the reed sea was incorporated in the Exodus commentary of 1974. Lectures on Second Isaiah, the Psalms, and Daniel became chapters in the *Old Testament Introduction* of 1979. In the draft, copies of which were to be circulated in advance, the first lecture consists only of a title ("The Canon as a Historical and Theological Problem"), a two-sentence summary, and a two-page bibliography, half of it handwritten. Based on the subtitle of the full series, the date of the draft, and the contents of the bibliography for the first talk, it would appear that the introductory Sprunt lecture was composed last, presented at Union Seminary in early February, presented again at the end of the month at Concordia Seminary, perhaps with revisions, and published later that year as Brevard S. Childs, "The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church," *CTM* 43.11 (1972): 709–22; repr. below, 127–40.

anticipates some later claims about the relationship of church and academy.<sup>19</sup> An academic today might read it as a declaration of the author's positionality. It is that only obliquely. At heart it is a confessional statement of purpose that subordinates his own biblical scholarship to a scripturally rooted renewal of the modern church. In that sense at least, Childs is a teacher of the church. His judgment of scholarly success or failure is bound to an ecclesial "malaise" and the difficult conditions of its remedy. He recognizes the legitimacy of other interpretive contexts and approaches but, in applying theological criteria to theological scholarship, defends "the integrity of this confessional stance."<sup>20</sup>

It is indeed a stance, not a technique. Patterns of reaction to the rise of the historical-critical method have developed into a "sterile impasse" between theological left and right, and his review of the literature turns up no ready solution:

I do not believe that this complex theological problem will be solved by a new and cleverer theological proposal. The level of understanding that is being sought requires a profounder wrestling with Scripture by a broad segment of the church as part of its life of praise and service. This book list is offered as a modest aid in this search for a renewed understanding of the Bible by the Christian community.<sup>21</sup>

For all that, the criteria for evaluation are no less rigorous. He critiques "books that appear ignorant of the data, are slovenly in execution, and are lacking in thoroughness, regardless of how pious."<sup>22</sup> The better one understands how Childs defines the problem of theological exegesis in his generation, the easier it is to appreciate why he speaks of understanding Christian Scripture in general, and the Old Testament in particular, as a struggle.

*Introduction to the Old Testament* became a turning point in the reception of the canonical approach, and in some ways it marks a turn in the discipline, too. In writing it, remarked Walther Zimmerli, "hat B. S. Childs einen Stein in den Teich geworfen."<sup>23</sup> The aptness of this is proved by the volume of response generated.<sup>24</sup> The basic nature of the provocation is evident right from the start:

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Brevard S. Childs, "Some Reflections on the Search for a Biblical Theology," *HBT* 4.1 (1982): 1–12; repr. below, 224–31.

<sup>20</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Books*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Books*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Books*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Walther Zimmerli, review of *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, by Brevard S. Childs, *VT* 31.2 (1981): 235–44, here 235.

<sup>24</sup> Reviews appeared in Danish, English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and were authored by a range of scholars including: Ronald J. Allen, Bernhard W. Anderson, Lloyd R. Bailey (twice), James Barr, Paul Beauchamp, Bruce C. Birch, Cesare Bissoli, Joseph Blenkinsopp, Walter Brueggemann, Robert P. Carroll, Henri Cazelles, James E. Eisenbraun, Notker Füglistler, Ralph David Gehrke, Jerry A. Gladson, Walter J. Harrelson, Fred L. Horton Jr., Horace D. Hummel, Harry B. Hunt Jr., J. Gerald Janzen, Knud Jeppesen, Bonnie Pedrotti Kittel, Ralph W. Klein (twice), Douglas A. Knight, André LaCocque, George M. Landes, Fredrik Lindström, James L. Mays, Thomas Edward McComiskey, Sean E. McEvenue, Donn F. Morgan, Roland E. Murphy, Robert Murray, Kevin G. O'Connell, Graham S. Ogden, Leo G. Perdue, David P. Polk, Fredrik Poulsen, Gian Luigi Prato, John F. Priest, Thomas J. Ryan, James A. Sanders, Horst Seebass,



Twenty-five years ago, when I returned home from four years of graduate study in Europe, the area within the field of Old Testament which held the least attraction for me was Introduction. I supposed that most of the major problems had already been resolved by the giants of the past. Even allowing for the inevitable process of refinement and modification, could one really expect anything new in this area? I was content to leave the drudgery of writing an Introduction to someone else with more *Sitzfleisch*.

Two decades of teaching have brought many changes in my perspective. Having experienced the demise of the Biblical Theology movement in America, the dissolution of the broad European consensus in which I was trained, and a widespread confusion regarding theological reflection in general, I began to realize that there was something fundamentally wrong with the foundations of the biblical discipline. It was not a question of improving on a source analysis, of discovering some unrecognized new genre, or of bringing a redactional layer into sharper focus. Rather, the crucial issue turned on one's whole concept of the study of the Bible itself. I am now convinced that the relation between the historical critical study of the Bible and its theological use as religious literature within a community of faith and practice needs to be completely rethought. Minor adjustments are not only inadequate, but also conceal the extent of the dry rot.<sup>25</sup>

Childs then undertakes to rebuild the foundations of the discipline. The task, as in 1970, is twofold. On the one hand, criticism is deployed in the work of demolition. The old superstructures have to be removed. On the other hand, canon is commended as the most suitable theological framework for the alternative "attempt to hear the biblical text in the terms compatible with the collection and transmission of the literature as scripture."<sup>26</sup> It should hardly be surprising that most scholars were not prepared to accept the result. It simply asked too much. Then again, it is hard to say that Childs misjudged the moment. One thinks, for example, of the welcome enjoyed by Robert Alter's 1981 *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, in spite of Alter's initial sense that his ideas would "ruffle a lot of feathers" in the biblical guild.<sup>27</sup> The unwinding of historical-critical hegemony was not as apparent in 1979 as it would be within a few years, but the context of biblical scholarship itself was changing rapidly. If Childs's position seemed at first too radical, before long it began to appear almost conservative in its reapplication of historical-critical insights to deeply traditional, explicitly confessional ends.

It is interesting to observe how, just as some Anglo-American scholars are deciding that canon is not the way forward, Childs seems to earn a closer hearing among some other German-speaking scholars. It is hard to imagine that a secondary wave of engagement would have developed in Europe if he had rejected critical methods outright, as was sometimes alleged. But this is not the place to rehearse that history, which is of course just a tiny part of what is happening in the

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John F. X. Sheehan, Horacio Simian-Yofre, Rudolf Smend, Gary Stansell, Jean-Michel de Tarragon, Roger N. Whybray, Arthur E. Zannoni, and Walther Zimmerli. Childs's responses to five reviewers in *HBT* 2.1 (1980): 199–211, and seven in *JSOT* 5.16 (1980): 52–60, are noteworthy but too contextual to include in the present collection of essays.

<sup>25</sup> Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), xii.

field in general. The period is a complex one, marked by change and reassessment on many fronts. One should not exaggerate the importance of a single scholar in it. Yet the singular combination of the scope and timing of *Introduction to the Old Testament* makes it a useful marker of the changing situation. Childs may have been the last biblical scholar to control the entire field through a demonstrated mastery of the literature. Certainly he was among the last for whom such a thing was possible. Seen in retrospect, however, what his work's reception shows as much as anything else is the end of the idea of a unified discipline. If the project's success is judged by its ability "to reverse the direction of biblical scholarship," as Childs says was attempted, unsuccessfully, in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>28</sup> then neither can the 1979 Introduction be judged successful. It comes at an inflection point. Around that time, it was becoming impossible to think of biblical scholarship as moving in just one direction. Its direction was therefore not reversible.

No subsequent work of his commanded the same degree of attention. Nevertheless, he pressed ahead with the ambitious research agenda that culminated in *Biblical Theology*, first by devoting five years to the academic study of the New Testament. This decision in itself is extraordinary. One part of the rationale for *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* is, he says, to clarify and extend some of the concerns that were raised in 1979. Another part calls back to 1970.

Some fifteen years ago, when I had just completed a book on biblical theology, I was shaken by a conversation with a New Testament colleague. He remarked that he did not so much disagree with my presentation, but felt that the perspective was dominated by Old Testament concerns. I had touched on few issues which were of real interest to a New Testament scholar. Upon reflection I realized the force of his argument.<sup>29</sup>

The 1984 Introduction therefore represents the author's best attempt "to hold in check Old Testament questions, and to saturate [himself] fully in strictly New Testament issues."<sup>30</sup> The book's relatively cool reception is, in a sense, perfectly understandable given its transgression of disciplinary boundaries. It also seems to reflect a waning of general interest in Childs's development of a canonical approach. Either way, while not a flop, it cannot be called a triumph. It is the thing, however, that most distinguishes him as a modern practitioner of *gesamtbiblische Theologie*. He is not building towards a biblical theology of either the Old Testament or the New, but rather of both.

A year later, the effort was followed up by a return to his primary area of specialization. *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* is another shorter title that, looking ahead to 1992, one could call preparatory.<sup>31</sup> Yet it stands out for sev-

<sup>28</sup> Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 16. He revisits this era in later essays. Above all, see Childs, "Old Testament in Germany, 1920–1940: The Search for a New Paradigm," in *Altes Testament, Forschung und Wirkung: Festschrift für Henning Graf Reventlow*, ed. Peter Mommer and Winfried Thiel (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), 233–46; repr. below, 345–56.

<sup>29</sup> Childs, *New Testament*, xvi.

<sup>30</sup> Childs, *New Testament*, xvi.

<sup>31</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

eral reasons. First, it is Childs at his most accessible. Compared to his more voluminous works, it is less apt to try the patience of readers. Second, the 1985 book constitutes the clearest statement, amply illustrated, of how Childs distinguishes between Old Testament theology and biblical theology as separate disciplines. As such it provides a counterpoint to the larger works that immediately precede and follow it. Third, it is a key place where he distinguishes himself from his teachers and predecessors, most notably Eichrodt and von Rad. This is a topic that could be explored at great length. Briefly put, the differentiation is marked by an open ownership of theological categories, a move that is manifested in the book's outline. "Both Eichrodt and von Rad introduced normative categories without adequate acknowledgment or methodological clarity," he notes.<sup>32</sup> Because of this, the debate about how to organize an Old Testament theology tends to be a detour.

In respect to the disagreement between Eichrodt and von Rad, among others, as to whether an Old Testament theology should be organized "systematically" or "traditio-historically," I suggest that both of these alternatives arise from a view of a closed body of material which is to be analysed descriptively. Both writers have worked hard to discover inner-biblical categories, which is an effort not to be disparaged. Nevertheless, when Old Testament theology is viewed in its canonical context as a continuing interpretative activity by that community of faith which treasures its scriptures as authoritative, the issue of organization is sharply relativized.<sup>33</sup>

The way that Childs selects, arranges, and explores topics in 1985 shows an exercise of freedom and creativity that was, in the charged and often polemical environment of that day, seldom appreciated.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the book helps locate Childs in a field that was slowly becoming more diverse. One theme here with a strong connection to earlier and later work is the relationship of Jewish and Christian interpretation. Indeed, the book pairs well with the essays in Jon Levenson's *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism*. The title essay, first given as a lecture in 1984, memorably comments that, "in the elite academic world, those for whom the term 'Old Testament' is more than vestigial have been put into the unenviable position of an ex-emperor who now must learn how to be a good neighbor."<sup>35</sup> While Levenson's critique of legacy biblical theology is more pointed

<sup>32</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> To the scattershot taxonomy of Old Testament theologies in James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 27–51, compare the more penetrating analysis in Mark W. Elliott, *The Reality of Biblical Theology*, RD 39 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 41–67. Evaluating Barr and Childs, Elliott sees a mismatch between an orientation to a linear sequence of ideas and a stance receptive to the biblical mediation of divine realities. Like Calvin rather than Aquinas, for Childs "the Bible leads not to doctrine but directly to the living God" (*Reality*, 67).

<sup>35</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 32. Childs: "In my opinion, much of the confusion in the history of Old Testament theology derives from the reluctance to recognize that it is a Christian enterprise" (*Old Testament Theology*, 8).

than Childs's, their lines of attack share some remarkable parallels. *Old Testament Theology* remains a resource for thinking about the possibilities for Jewish and Christian dialogue based on the highest common denominator – based, that is, on rich acknowledgments of religious identity and difference.

The prefaces and introductions to Childs's books yield some insight about their intended aims, and about the personal circumstances surrounding their composition. Frequently they acknowledge what the author owes to teachers and colleagues – a somewhat fluid distinction, one realizes, given the way Childs pursued the study of Akkadian with Albrecht Goetze, for example, or of midrash with Judah Goldin, after coming to teach at Yale in 1958. Over time these acknowledgments disclose a bit more about what he feels he may have missed in those remembered opportunities. ("It now seems ironical to recall that I spent more time in Heidelberg learning Arabic than listening to von Rad and Bornkamm."<sup>36</sup>) Almost invariably they credit his wife, Ann. In early 1992, at the completion of *Biblical Theology*, he begins to express gratitude "for both the time and the energy afforded me to pursue this project."<sup>37</sup> Although he would not officially retire from Yale until 1999, he was, at the time this magnum opus was completed, already sixty-eight years of age. This fact helps account for the retrospective tone of its preface. "I have been interested in Biblical Theology throughout my entire academic career. Yet the path toward writing this volume has been long and circuitous":

In 1970 I made my first effort at sketching some of the problems of Biblical Theology at a time in which the older consensus had begun to fall apart. Almost immediately I realized that I had not thrown the net wide enough. The hermeneutical issues of Biblical Theology involved far more than simply joining together the critical study of the Old Testament with that of the New, as if one could spend the first semester with Eichrodt and von Rad and the second with Bultmann and Jeremias! It slowly began to dawn on me that everything turned on how one understood the material which was being described. I set out to rethink the role of the Old Testament as scripture which took almost a decade of work before turning to the similar task for the New Testament. At the same time I sought to develop seminars on the history of interpretation, and even taught a course on the book of Romans through the eyes of Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Barth.

In spite of the challenge of trying to gain competence in both testaments, this task paled into insignificance before the difficulty of gaining entrance into the field of dogmatic/systematic theology. Anyone who has ever studied under Karl Barth is left with the lasting sense of inadequacy just from remembering the standards of thoroughness which he required of his students. Soon I became painfully aware that an iron curtain separated Bible from theology, not just at Yale, but throughout most of the English-speaking world. I am sure that the fault lay with both disciplines, but deep suspicion and disinterest prevented any serious interaction. I did read the books of my colleagues, attended their lectures when permitted, and listened from my side of the wall.... I am aware that the results are far from adequate.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, xv.

<sup>37</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, xvi.

<sup>38</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, xv–xvi.

This is not the first time he expresses a sense of inadequacy before the task at hand. In many cases it appears to be what drives him to the next big project. In 1992, however, he urges “the next generation . . . to build strong links between the disciplines of Bible and theology.”<sup>39</sup> He seems to be passing the baton, maintaining hope *sub specie Dei* but admitting that the “sterile impasse” he began to confront in the 1970s looks to be more deadlocked than ever.

Personal struggle with illness notwithstanding – he suffered from an early case of Lyme disease – time and energy would be afforded for three more books. First, the date on which he closes out his Isaiah commentary in New Haven in 2001 is that of his seventy-eighth birthday. “During the last decade I have been afflicted with serious health problems at three different intervals.”<sup>40</sup> Health challenges aside, a contrast is made with the situation in the field in the decade leading up to his first commentary.

When I was preparing a study on the book of Exodus during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the reasons for writing a commentary were entirely obvious. There had been no technical commentary on the book in English for over fifty years. In Germany, largely from fortuitous circumstances, a similar lacuna existed. In addition, the new insights of critical research, especially in terms of form criticism, history of interpretation, and theology, had not been adequately applied to this book. However, during the last thirty years the academic situation has dramatically changed. There is a plethora of biblical commentaries, both on Old and New Testaments, written from every possible perspective and on every level of popular and technical interpretation. For many within the biblical field, the publication of yet another commentary seems about the last thing needed.<sup>41</sup>

The new commentary is justified despite a crowded field because “tremendous confusion still reigns regarding virtually every serious problem of interpretation.”<sup>42</sup> *Biblical Theology* is referenced as mere prolegomena to exegesis. He is returning to “the real task.”<sup>43</sup> Canon is invoked, but with a request not to prejudge the work by it, “since the label has only engendered major confusion.”<sup>44</sup> The aim of the commentary, one might say, is to offer a post-critical reading of the book of Isaiah. It engages with the critical literature on Isaiah since Bernhard Duhm – to such an extent, frankly, that it detracts from exegetical coherence – but with the stated goal of pressing beyond critical mastery to uncover “the coercion of the text itself in faithfully shaping the life of the church,” and to find there “a family resemblance” in the patterns of Christian interpretation.<sup>45</sup> Second, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* was completed in 2004, the year he turned eighty-one.<sup>46</sup> Dedicated to Ann, “who alone understands the full extent

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<sup>39</sup> Childs, *Biblical Theology*, xvi.

<sup>40</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, xii.

<sup>41</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, xi.

<sup>42</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, xi.

<sup>43</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, xii.

<sup>44</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, xii.

<sup>45</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

of the physical struggle involved in writing this book," it is a robust extension of the quest to find "coercion" and "family resemblance" in the concrete history of Isaiah's interpretation. Finally, *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul* was published posthumously, the manuscript having been submitted to the publisher shortly before Childs died in June 2007.<sup>47</sup> *Struggle* is one of his finest works. Arguably, it is something that only he could have written. While straying further from his area of expertise, *The Church's Guide*, too, is subtle and impressive. It is something that only he would have written.

## 2 *The Minor Works*

The present volume constitutes the author's *Kleine Schriften*. It is a comprehensive selection of Childs's essays. With one exception, book reviews have been excluded. So also responses to reviewers, dictionary articles, in-house publications, recorded talks, tributes, and a handful of other obscure pieces. Of these, one which I found important in my own research on Childs and which I know others have delighted in discovering, is superseded by "Karl Barth, the Preacher's Exegete," a lecture delivered at the Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching in 1991 and published here for the first time. It is a substantial revision of a talk given at a memorial colloquium on Karl Barth in 1969. Also, readers looking for "Die Beziehung von Altem und Neuem Testament aus kanonischer Sicht" should refer instead to "On Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology," of which the former is a partial translation.<sup>48</sup> In making the selections of an editor, it is not my intent to consign such things to further obscurity. Researchers and others with interest can still track them down. For the purposes of most readers, however, I believe nothing has been excluded that would make this collection of essays less than comprehensive.

Articles have been ordered chronologically, with first delivery sometimes taking precedence over first publication. They are grouped in four parts that roughly correspond to phases in Childs's career. First, "Early Studies (1958–1967)" includes seven essays that are worth revisiting largely because of what will follow. For example, the 1958 study of prophecy and fulfillment interacts with Campegius Vitranga, the eighteenth-century interpreter who will be the subject of an entire essay in 1999. The study cites several others whom Childs will revisit over the decades, too. As a statement on prophecy and hermeneutics, it is overshadowed by more mature works like "Retrospective Reading of the Old Testament Prophets" (1996). Still, at this early stage it is worth noting where his thinking begins on issues like

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<sup>47</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Alternatively, for a German translation of 364–67, below, see Brevard S. Childs, "Die Beziehung von Altem und Neuem Testament aus kanonischer Sicht," in *Eine Bibel – zwei Testamente: Positionen biblischer Theologie*, ed. Christoph Dohmen and Thomas Söding, trans. Ursula Dohmen (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 29–34.

the nature and genre of commentary, and on the tradition-critical observations that will culminate in both a proposal about canon and an Exodus commentary.

Second, "Canonical Reformulations (1969–1980)" begins with the essay on Psalm 8 that becomes part of *Crisis* a year later. It is followed by another dozen essays from a fruitful period in which the author's canonical approach takes shape. One sees a willingness to correct or modify positions in response to the work of others (George Coats in 1970, for example, as with Barr a little earlier). At the same time, there is a push to extend and sharpen the insights of an older generation. Hans-Joachim Kraus's recommendations for biblical theology are judged too timid in "A Tale of Two Testaments" (1972), and steps are taken toward a deeper critique of the prevailing critical methods. Childs also begins to reckon more seriously with Jewish interpretation, especially through a study of midrash as anticipated (perhaps) in inner-biblical exegesis, as an ancient genre, and as a modern hermeneutical style. Psalm titles are discussed in this connection, in a 1971 article that would become a minor classic. Strikingly, this work coincides with statements defending the place of "The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church" (preeminently but not only in the 1972 essay by that title). Studies of Jewish and Christian interpretation in this period culminate in "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem" in 1977, a quintessential article. To a significant extent, such studies lay the groundwork for the theological terms, concepts, and judgments that permeate Childs's major works. This is not to suggest that they can be regarded as fixed conclusions, however. Midrash is an important example of a topic where Childs's thinking will be subject to further development.

Third, "Canon and Biblical Theology (1981–1992)" contains fourteen essays that follow in the wake of *Introduction to the Old Testament*. One distinctive of this period is a new interface with German-language scholarship. Five essays here appear only in German translation. Some of these read like field reports about biblical theology in America, or about Childs's own understanding of biblical theology in a canonical framework. There is a sense in which Childs is on the circuit, sharing his work with a new audience. One of the five, "Die Bedeutung des jüdischen Kanons in der alttestamentlichen Theologie" (1987), originally from a 1985 symposium in Bern for Jewish-Christian dialogue, contains some of Childs's most important comments about how he comes to understand Judaism in relation to canon and Old Testament theology. (Introductory remarks at the start of this essay have been left as they appear in the volume of proceedings, even though they are contextual to that occasion.) Other essays from this part describe how, in their own times, Wellhausen and von Rad were mediated in the English-speaking world. Criticism of modern biblical scholarship, and of the theological use of it made by von Rad and others, solidifies. Broader hermeneutical and theological concerns predominate to a degree that distinguishes this period from earlier ones. A more detailed textual study, "Analysis of a Canonical Formula: 'It Shall be Recorded for a Future Generation'" (1990), is a sort of throwback to the early form-critical studies, but conducted in service of the novel paradigm.

Fourth, "Recovering Theological Exegesis (1994–2005)" contains eighteen essays from a late season that does not seem to have involved much retirement. They are occasional, reflective, and highly iterative. "Old Testament in Germany, 1920–1940" (1994), one of a number of contributions to *Festschriften* for colleagues, revisits a lively debate about "theological exegesis" and Old Testament scholarship. In a postscript the author reflects:

Only after I had completed this essay did it occur to me how much my own attempt to resolve the hermeneutical problems of Old Testament interpretation according to a new canonical approach has been unconsciously influenced by the German struggle of the 1930s. Along with many confessing Christians, I, too, felt the full force of the powerful challenge of Barth, Vischer, and Hellbardt for the Old Testament to be heard as a theological witness to Christian faith. Yet I was also forced to agree with von Rad, Eichrodt, and Zimmerli that Vischer's solution was seriously flawed and that there must be another alternative between the sharp polarity which he set up between modern historical-critical exegesis and a reprimatination of sixteenth-century Reformation theology.<sup>49</sup>

The thought is picked up some months later and carried forward in "On Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology," first delivered at a conference on that topic held in Minnesota in June 1994. It recapitulates the previous essay, sometimes verbatim, and then extends it in terms that will be familiar to anyone who knows Childs's work. It closes with remarks on the theological role of the history of interpretation. These in turn are carried forward in different places in the run-up to *Struggle* (see especially "Allegory and Typology within Biblical Interpretation," a paper presented in Scotland in April 2000). A different cluster of essays revisit the subject of biblical commentary, with implications for his own of 2001. One lists criteria for the evaluation of a commentary (see "The Genre of the Biblical Commentary as Problem and Challenge," from 1997). Two other standouts here, both from 1999, are the studies of Vittinga on Isaiah and Benno Jacob on Genesis. In both one gets a glimpse of Childs the bibliophile, on the hunt for rare books to read and restore to the conversation.<sup>50</sup> Some essays revisit the hotly debated question of whether the Old Testament has a *Christuszeugnis*. Yet another set ventures into

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<sup>49</sup> See below, 355.

<sup>50</sup> This avocation is also on display in "Biblical Scholarship in the Seventeenth Century: A Study in Ecumenics," in the *Festschrift* for Barr, which has been newly footnoted below with reference to a few of the rare books that Childs collected and often personally rebound. On the topic of Childs, books, and library development, see the comments of Robert Wilson, "The Life and Work of Brevard S. Childs" (paper presented at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, 10 October 2011), <https://youtu.be/1QXiWTK6SRI>, made on the occasion of the dedication of a book display case in Childs's name at the Divinity School Library. Wilson, first a student and later a colleague of Childs at Yale, recounts being on book-buying expeditions with Childs, and he describes Childs's massive personal library. "He was a genuine bibliophile, with a collection numbering more than forty thousand volumes.... The thing that was remarkable about Childs's library was the fact that he had actually read all of those books." Wilson is being laudatory, but if his personal history is accurate, then Childs's acquisitions progressed from the German classics of critical biblical scholarship, most of which he had already acquired in the 1950s and 1960s, back to rarer titles of the preceding centuries. There is ample evidence to say that Childs long



New Testament studies again. New vocabulary emerges for the relation of Bible and theology, some of it drawn from David Yeago.<sup>51</sup> The title of the fourth part is drawn from "Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis" (1997), the essay in which Yeago's language is adopted, as it shows a new edge in Childs's work after *Biblical Theology*.<sup>52</sup> Finally, "The Canon in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era" (2005) is a high-level, bibliographically thorough review of an era of scholarship that Childs did much to shape. It is a fitting conclusion to the present volume.

The fifty-two essays collected here span nearly half a century of biblical scholarship. Together they provide a view into the history of a discipline from the vantage of a scholar who worked to integrate his command of it with several cognate disciplines. The volume's title, *Canon as Rule and Guide*, underscores a concern that is all but ubiquitous. For Childs, scripture has been shaped with frameworks for interpretation, guidelines built into it through a complex editorial process that resulted in a multifaceted canon with two Testaments. To read the Bible "canonically" is, he says, to read it "kerygmatically."<sup>53</sup> Scripture is a canon and rule of faith that in turn shapes the church's confession and life of faith. This entails a holistic view that touches the Bible's composition and reception histories as well as its enduring claim on living communities of faith. Yet this broad coherence has been obscured, in part, by the fragmentation of scripture that was introduced in the Enlightenment and its high-critical aftermath.

The overall situation is extremely complex and requires critical assessment on several fronts. On one front, Childs is sharply critical of solutions that seem to him to erase the depth dimension (in addition to sporadic comments on conservative interpretation, see his late discussions of intertextuality, midrash, and speech-act theory). The canon is structured, not flat. The findings of historical research are not to be evaded through a text-immanent theory of biblical interpretation. As he says of speech-act theory as propounded by Nicholas Wolterstorff:

the fixing of the scope of the canon was not derived from a divine decree, nor was it ever so claimed within the sacred literature itself. Rather, canon designated a series of decisions made first by the Jewish synagogue respecting the Hebrew Bible, and later by the Christian church respecting the range of the apostolic tradition. In the earliest period of the church, the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) offered an authorized oral formulation of the faith which was not identical with the scriptures, but increasingly apostolic tradition and scripture were joined by the formation of a New Testament.<sup>54</sup>

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sought to make his own judgments about the hermeneutical territory covered in Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>51</sup> Note the related uses of "pressure" and "coercion" after David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *ProEccl* 3.2 (1994): 152–64.

<sup>52</sup> The fully handwritten manuscript of the essay submitted to *Pro Ecclesia*, dated 13 May 1995, is held in the Brevard S. Childs Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

<sup>53</sup> See below, 363.

<sup>54</sup> See below, 504.

Resisting the imperatives of academic specialization, Childs would have agenda-setting interpreters of Christian Scripture account for all of this historical, theological, and hermeneutical complexity.

On another front, Childs spent much of a career combatting the view, most prevalent in the operations of Continental European biblical scholarship, that the final form of scripture is unimportant, or else of secondary importance. At one point he addresses the charge that no final form ever existed.

In the past the use of the term “final form” has evoked much controversy. Does the biblical text ever have a final form? Does it not vary within different textual traditions? Certainly such questions are fully legitimate within a discussion of textual transmission, variants, and stabilization. However, in reference to the hermeneutical issue of final form, the above questions are peripheral to the subject. Nor is the real issue at stake a debate between a diachronic or synchronic handling of the Old Testament.<sup>55</sup>

In the short discussion that follows, Childs interchanges “final form” with “received form,” a variation that some now prefer because it seems less prone to misapprehension,<sup>56</sup> and one that Childs himself uses at least as early as 1978.<sup>57</sup> It may be preferable in some respects, although it is unlikely to move those whose sympathies are informed by radically different understandings of the situation. The real question, for Childs, is profoundly basic. What is the nature of the Old Testament as scripture? As shown by the history of its interpretation, this is contested territory. The question is also profoundly theological, and Childs is adamant that it should remain so. Reconstructed forms of scripture should not be given normative theological status. He is critical, too, of materialist accounts of scripture that would reduce theology to a branch of anthropology. There is more than one way in which unspoken assumptions about the nature of the biblical text can carry too much theological freight.

Yet another front is the history of biblical scholarship. This is a major aspect of his critique of historical criticism, though critics of the canonical approach have

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<sup>55</sup> See below, 390.

<sup>56</sup> For example, R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40 n. 35. Robert G. Brown, *Childs' Canonical Approach: A Critical Assessment* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023), decides that the term “final form” is so inaccurate that it “should be dropped from future descriptions of Childs' approach” (59) – a prescription as implausible as it is unhelpful. Childs's concern with matters of textual criticism is indeed peripheral to his critique of theology pursued on the basis of reconstructed forms, a point often discounted by those with less investment in source and tradition criticism. When, in the expanded form of his own Sprunt Lectures of 1982, James Barr admits that he never “detected a gloss, identified a source, proposed an emendation or assigned a date” (*Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1983], 130), he is making a telling point about his indifference to historical-critical scholarship. Readings of Childs are liable to become misreadings if historical criticism in the Continental tradition is held to be “not very important” (so Barr, *Holy Scripture*, 131). It is a mistake, unfortunately repeated by Brown, to handle Childs as if he really ought to have prioritized text criticism over of a reform of tradition criticism.

<sup>57</sup> See below, 189 and 196; cf. 46.

tended to overlook how far it runs into hermeneutical hinterlands. Is biblical criticism really in crisis? Mark Brett suggested not in 1991, presenting methodological pluralism less as a fact or a virtue and more as a mandate.<sup>58</sup> Inexplicably, his thesis isolates itself from the historical analysis that is integral to Childs's actual approach.<sup>59</sup> Absent from this reconstruction of Childs's program, and from too many others like it, is any clear sense of why one would search the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for insight about contemporary interpretation. What is offered to us by someone like Vitranga (1659–1722)? Extending the work of his colleague Hans Frei, Childs revisits Vitranga as he explores old issues of historical reference and predictive prophecy, taking up a theme he first addressed in 1958. He extrapolates to the situation he sees in 1999, when his commentary on the book of the prophet Isaiah was nearing completion:

I think one can mount a convincing case that the present study of biblical prophecy from a hermeneutical perspective still falls roughly within these same options, namely, the rationalistic orthodoxy of Vitranga, the rationalistic agnosticism of Collins, the allegorical/typological *Heilsgeschichte* of Cocceius, and the romantic/idealistic approach of Schleiermacher. That the latter two categories have often been combined is equally clear. When in a recent monograph John Sailhamer argues that modern evangelicals share virtually the same "precritical" view of scripture as did the Reformers, he has failed to understand one of Frei's major points. The Reformers in the "precritical" era were still able to *assume* the coherence of text and historical reference. Following the challenge of the Enlightenment, this *assumption* was no longer possible. Thereafter, the biblical interpreter was forced either to be critical, anti-critical, or post-critical, but the precritical option has been forever lost.<sup>60</sup>

On this understanding, post-critical interpretation is not a solution to the problem of historical criticism but a call to enter the hermeneutical predicament. It is different from conservative calls to hail the superiority of precritical exegesis, though it works hard to give precritical exegesis its due. It is different from the postmodernism of someone like Brett, too, not least because it sees criticism as a tradition with enough integrity to be entered and engaged, not as one to be subdivided into a menu of options. Only in part does study of all kinds of past scholarship serve a goal not to repeat mistakes of the past, although diligence in the pursuit of it does seem to function like a keel for Childs. It is a centerline running across all his work. To what end? There are several, but ultimately engagement with an expansive history of scholarship both follows and opens up questions about scripture as such. As he writes in 2000, "I had long since rejected the modern historical-critical consensus that nothing of any real exegetical significance had occurred prior to the

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<sup>58</sup> Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> "My argument requires," he stipulates, "that the canonical approach be distinguished from attempts to write the history of biblical exegesis" (Brett, *Crisis?*, 7).

<sup>60</sup> See below, 474.

nineteenth century, but then what kind of light was earlier present? How did and does scripture actually function for a community of faith and practice?"<sup>61</sup>

This volume of essays is offered not as a program to be rejected, adopted, or tweaked. Its contents stem from their own times and places, and scholarship has not stood still. Neither has the church, which is, Childs insists, part of the equation. Childs is clear about the changing nature of biblical interpretation and the demands that scripture places on each successive generation of those beholden to it. He opposes "restitution." Moreover, in spite of the prospects that he opened up for himself and others, Childs neither solved the critical problem nor resolved the theological crisis. The obstacles to theological exegesis remain, to all appearances, fixed. Childs seems to see this more and more in later work. As he says in the conclusion to his final essay, reflecting on the legacy of the canon debate, "the initial promise afforded to theology from its scriptures has become increasingly blurred and rendered helpless before the onslaughts of modernity."<sup>62</sup> However one measures his impact on biblical scholarship in the twentieth century – it is, by any reckoning, considerable – and whatever one makes of modernity's "onslaughts" against the hope to see scripture and theology reintegrated in the twenty-first – Levenson had wondered whether "liberty or anarchy" would follow "the dethronement of Christian theology, indeed *any* theology, as the organizing paradigm for the study of the Hebrew Bible"<sup>63</sup> – one can, I think, fairly credit Childs with putting the problem and the possibility of understanding the Old Testament as scripture, within the total context of Christian Scripture, in sharpest relief. More modestly, then, this volume is offered in hopes that it will be a resource for the ongoing discussion of the role of canonical scripture in the late-modern world.

Thanks are due to many who supported its production. I am happy to remember David Lincicum for suggesting, in a conversation back in 2018, that it might be valuable. I am also grateful to the editors of *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* for understanding the proposal so readily, and for giving the project a suitable home. Special thanks are due to Andrew Teeter for guidance, informed by the other series editors, at a difficult juncture. At Mohr Siebeck, Betina Burkhart, Katharina Gutekunst, Ilse König, Elena Müller, and Tobias Stähler have all been models of professionalism and courtesy. Christopher Seitz was instrumental in the project at a formative stage, giving advice about contents and style and helping to connect with the author's estate. I remain indebted to him for supplying copies of some unpublished papers when I was a student in St Andrews. Stephen Chapman also gave good advice when the work was further along, helping to ensure nothing vital was excluded. Ephraim Radner kindly discussed his recollection of decisions involved in editing three essays that are reprinted in a different order below. Oliver Dyma very generously read over the German essays to help check for

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<sup>61</sup> See below, 476–77.

<sup>62</sup> See below, 533.

<sup>63</sup> Levenson, *HB, OT, and Historical Criticism*, 32.

errors in transcription. In the formidable task of digitizing all the essays, checking them for accuracy, applying a consistent style, and updating citations, I enjoyed the support of three keen-eyed research assistants. Thanks to all of you for your diligence, to Kate Crane and Nathan Wall for coping with my decision to use  $\text{\LaTeX}$ , and to Andrew Dyck for going the distance. Thanks also to Pine Hill Divinity Hall and Atlantic School of Theology for funding their work and mine. It is hard to express how much is owed to Adriel Driver, my wife, who cannot have expected Childs to return to our home for another extended visit, this time posing questions about comma placement. She was always willing to entertain them. Finally, I am deeply grateful to Ann Childs-Keck, Catherine Applewhite, and John Childs, without whose support this project would not have been possible.

Style has been governed by *The Chicago Manual* (17th ed.) as augmented by *The SBL Handbook* (2nd ed.), under which the exercise of editorial discretion has been narrow. The author's use of pronouns, personal and relative, has not been updated; they continue to reflect different standards (and one sees some movement in the former as those standards evolve). Similarly, German spelling remains as it was in the German essays as first published, all of which predate the orthography reform of 1996. However, because the book has some relevance to Jewish-Christian dialogue, the Tetragrammaton has not been vocalized throughout, including in the citation of other works.

Daniel R. Driver  
Eastertide, April 2023  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Part I

Early Studies (1958–1967)



## Prophecy and Fulfillment: A Study of Contemporary Hermeneutics

### A. A History of the Problem

Modern biblical scholarship has done much to reemphasize the importance of the formula “prophecy and fulfillment” for the New Testament church.<sup>1</sup> However, the understanding of this formula has not met with any real success. The genuine difficulty of the problem is evidenced by its constant reinterpretation throughout the history of the Christian church.

It is a well-known fact that, in the ancient church, an appeal to fulfilled prophecy proved a main apologetic weapon against the Jews. In such works as Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* and Cyprian’s *Testimonies against the Jews*, the argument rested upon the identity of the New Testament fulfillment with the Old Testament prediction, the purpose being to demonstrate logically the messianic claim of Jesus. The use of prophecy was not limited merely to apologetic writings but was common property among all the fathers. From the beginning difficulty was caused by the attempt to match prophecies directly with New Testament fulfillment.<sup>2</sup> Under Jewish pressure literal fulfillment gave way to “spiritual” fulfillment, with the allegorical method of interpretation becoming increasingly useful in reconciling difficulties. The growing tendency to interpret the Old Testament as a mysterious collection of isolated oracles all pointing to Christ can be seen in the typical statement of Chrysostom, a comparatively sober expositor. He remarked that the prophets scattered historical references throughout their writings merely for the purpose of concealing their real meaning.<sup>3</sup> With the hegemony of the Alexandrian school of scriptural interpretation, the difficulty of understanding the problem was bypassed, but the problem remained unsolved.

The Reformers, by rejecting the allegorical method as a hermeneutical principle, raised again the problem of prophecy and fulfillment. Martin Luther’s exegesis in one respect did not offer any deepened understanding over the fathers since he

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Harold Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936).

<sup>2</sup> Maurice F. Wiles, “The Old Testament in Controversy with the Jews,” *SJT* 8.2 (1955): 113–26.

<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, *De prophetiarum obscuritate*, Opp. VI, 168–98, cited by Ludwig Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche* (Jena: Mauke, 1869), 136.



also conceived of the Old Testament prophecies as directly related to Christ.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, a new approach was introduced when he interpreted the entire Old Testament christologically rather than remaining satisfied with any mechanical relationship. Far more basic to the problem was the direction offered by John Calvin. Only occasionally did he seem to fall back into the older scheme (cf. *Institutes* I.viii). He conceived of Christ's work as a fulfillment of the historical institutions of Israel, which foreshadowed his kingdom. Working with types, he developed an organic relationship between the Testaments and conceived of history as moving toward a goal.<sup>5</sup> When one compares the Reformers' approach to the problem with a typical definition developing out of the succeeding period of Protestant scholasticism, it becomes immediately evident that the insights of the Reformation had soon been lost. Campegius Vitringa defined prophecy as the "prediction of any occurrence or contingent event in the future revealed through divine revelation."<sup>6</sup> Prophecy had become equated with arbitrary prediction, divorced from the purpose of God in history.

That a reaction would set in against this extreme position was obvious. It expressed itself in different and often radically opposing ways. On the one hand, the developing critical school, nourished by rationalism, was not reluctant in pointing out the inconsistencies between the prophecies and the alleged fulfillment. Begun by Johann Salomo Semler and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, the criticism of the orthodox position found its full expression in the work of Abraham Kuenen, who devoted three long chapters to relentlessly tracking down "unfulfilled prophecies."<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, a more positive attempt to offer a solution which was basically different from the orthodox position was presented by Friedrich Schleiermacher.<sup>8</sup> He differentiated between "special prediction, directed to an individual event," and "messianic prophecy." The first kind was strictly foretelling and achieved only varying degrees of accuracy. Messianic prophecy, however, was not concerned with particulars but with universals, and therefore obtained its absolute value. The accidental elements accompanying messianic prophecy were an "external vesture" not touching the essential idea. The influence of Schleiermacher's solution has been widespread. Ironically enough, Ernst Hengstenberg, the vigorous champion of Lutheran orthodoxy, adopted a similar solution by distin-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther und das Alte Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1948), 86ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), 42ff.; Diestel, *Geschichte*, 267ff.

<sup>6</sup> Campegius Vitringa, *Hypotyposis historiae et chronologiae sacrae, à M.C. usque ad finem saec. I ae. v.: accedit typus doctrinae propheticae* (Franeker: Halma, 1708), 2; cited by Diestel, *Geschichte*.

<sup>7</sup> Abraham Kuenen, *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel: An Historical and Critical Enquiry* (London: Longmans, Green, 1877), 98ff.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), §103.3.

guishing between the “general truths” which were the prophets’ chief concern, and incidental particulars used “in order that the glory of the idea itself” would be accentuated.<sup>9</sup> Traces of this same scheme show also in the works of August Tholuck, Eduard Riehm, Hermann Schultz, and to some degree A. B. Davidson.<sup>10</sup>

An entirely different direction to the problem was undertaken in the profound book of Johann von Hofmann.<sup>11</sup> He consciously attempted to avoid the pitfalls both of literalism and idealism. Following the direction given earlier by Johannes Cocceius and Johann A. Bengel, Hofmann stressed the fact that the actual Old Testament prophecy lay not in isolated predictions, but that the entire history of Israel was prophetic in nature. God had revealed himself in a historical development which only gradually unfolded through different stages, as an organic whole moving toward a goal. This historical process he called *Heilsgeschichte*. He stressed, as had Calvin, the importance of the three institutions of prophecy, priesthood, and kingdom as a foreshadowing (*Vorausdarstellung*) of Christ. However, for Hofmann, typological foreshadowing had replaced actual prophecy.

Within recent years biblical scholarship has again returned to wrestle with this problem. Wilhelm Vischer’s book was epoch making in the vigorous manner in which the question of the relation of the Old Testament to the New was raised.<sup>12</sup> According to him it is not doing full justice to the New Testament’s understanding of the Old when the latter is conceived of merely as a history pointing to Christ as its goal. In this case fulfillment would mean the dissolution of the period of expectation in the light of the event itself. The unity of the scriptures can only be maintained by seeing also in the Old Testament a direct witness to Christ since there is no break in the solidarity of faith between Testaments. Fulfillment cannot be seen on the level of time sequence, as the occurrence of an event previously promised. Rather, that which was known in the Old Testament is made perfect in the New. The New Testament’s interpretation is made normative for the understanding of the Old. At times Vischer conceives of the Old Testament witness in terms of types, but essentially he sees Jesus Christ actually at work in the Old Testament community.

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<sup>9</sup> Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament, and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*, trans. James Martin, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871–75), 4:425; previously developed in an inaccessible article: Hengstenberg, “Über die Auslegung der Propheten,” *EKZ* 23 (1833).

<sup>10</sup> August Tholuck, *Die Propheten und ihre Weissagungen: Eine apologetisch-hermeneutische Studie* (Gotha: Berthes, 1861), 146ff.; Eduard Riehm, *Messianic Prophecy: Its Origin, Historical Character, and Relation to New Testament Fulfilment* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1891), 224; Hermann Schultz, *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1889), 4:254ff.; Andrew Bruce Davidson, *Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. J. A. Paterson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1904), 312ff.

<sup>11</sup> Johann von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung im Alten und im Neuen Testamente: Ein theologischer Versuch*, 2 vols. (Nördlingen: Beck, 1841–44). See Christian A. Preus, “The Contemporary Relevance of von Hofmann’s Hermeneutical Principles,” *Int* 4.3 (1950): 311–21.

<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Vischer, *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*, trans. A. B. Crabtree, vol. 1 (London: Lutterworth, 1949).

Vischer's method has been severely criticized at many points. One of the most trenchant has been that of Walther Eichrodt, whose own positive contributions to this problem cannot be minimized.<sup>13</sup> Eichrodt points out Vischer's failure to take seriously the history of revelation which entered into and participated in all the ambiguities of the empirical world. He stresses prophecy and fulfillment as an organic relationship which only gradually unfolded in a history. This history moved toward the goal of all fulfillment, which is the kingship of God. Another severe critic of Vischer is Gerhard von Rad, who emphasizes the function of the prophetic word as a history-creating force.<sup>14</sup> Israel's entire history, from the creation to the coming of the Son of Man, is bracketed within a framework of prophecy and fulfillment. In the concrete minutia of Israel's history, the Word of God is striving for its goal. Von Rad sees in this history of the Word the event of Christ "prefigured." Walther Zimmerli's position is similar to von Rad's, but with less emphasis on the typological connection with the New Testament.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of the various modifications introduced by Eichrodt and von Rad by way of correcting Hofmann, the *heilsgeschichtliche* approach to prophecy continues to meet a vigorous antagonist in Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>16</sup> He contends that it is impossible to speak of fulfillment on the plane of empirical history since Christ brought an end to history in an eschatological sense which is not related in a positive way to Israel's history. One can speak of "fulfilled prophecy" only negatively inasmuch as the Old Testament demonstrates the total failure (*Scheitern*) of man's religious efforts to relate himself to God. The phrase "fulfilled prophecy" can only have theological meaning in showing the impossibility of a progression from the religious self-consciousness of man to the new creation in Christ.

Finally, the most ambitious attempt in recent years to solve the problem of prophecy and fulfillment is the work of Friedrich Baumgärtel.<sup>17</sup> He submits the above solutions to a thoroughgoing analysis and finds them deficient in important points. According to Baumgärtel, it is absolutely essential that the concept of promise (*Verheissung*) be distinguished from that of prophecy (*Weissagung*). Promise is the unchanging message central to both Testaments: "I am the Lord thy God." This promise is true only in Jesus Christ. Prophecy, however, is the humanly conditioned attempt of the Old Testament prophets to understand when and how the divine promise would be fulfilled. Promise is unchangeable and ab-

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<sup>13</sup> Walther Eichrodt, "Zur Frage der theologischen Exegese des Alten Testaments," *TBl* 17 (1938): 73–87; Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1948), 1:257ff.; Eichrodt, *Israel in der Weissagung des Alten Testaments: Ein Vortrag* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1951); Eichrodt, "Ist die typologische Exegese sachgemäße Exegese?," *TLZ* 81 (1956): 641–54.

<sup>14</sup> Gerhard von Rad, "Typologische Auslegung des Alten Testaments," *EvT* 12 (1952–53): 17–33.

<sup>15</sup> Walther Zimmerli, "Verheissung und Erfüllung," *EvT* 12 (1952–53): 34–59.

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Weissagung und Erfüllung," *ZTK* 47 (1950): 360–83.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Baumgärtel, *Verheissung: Zur Frage des evangelischen Verständnisses des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1952).

solute in truth, whereas prophecy is relative. Since the fulfillment of the promise is known only in Christ, the New Testament's witness to him becomes the yardstick for judging what in the Old Testament is a testimony to this promise. The Old Testament is theologically relevant only when it relates itself existentially to the promise fulfilled in Christ. Baumgärtel contends that the formula "prophecy and fulfillment" must be abandoned as a means of relating the Testaments since it is an attempt to demonstrate logically, from the standpoint of the Old Testament, the promise of Christ. The method is theologically false in trying to pass from the Old Testament to the New on the basis of empirical data and is, moreover, historically unconvincing and outmoded.

Following our discussion of this complex problem, we shall have occasion to return to some of these proposed solutions.

## B. A Reexamination of the Problem

The problem of prophecy and fulfillment is raised here again in the conviction that a successful solution rests by and large on the measure in which the uniquely biblical categories are rediscovered. The four Gospels share in common the practice of witnessing to various events in the life of Christ as occurring in order to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Especially in the Gospel according to Matthew does this method become decisive in forming the particular framework into which the evangelist has cast his material. Modern biblical scholarship has repeatedly emphasized the fact that the actual formula of Old Testament citations used to evidence New Testament fulfillment forms only a small portion of what was considered by the New Testament writers as fulfilled in Christ.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the entire life and teaching of Christ were molded and fashioned according to the tradition of the Old Testament. The rest of the New Testament canon is clear in the continuance of this understanding of the relation between the two covenants. The recent study of C. H. Dodd has increased our understanding regarding the use of Old Testament citations as pointers to a whole scriptural context rather than merely as individual prooftexts.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, he has suggested that the assumption underlying this use of the Old Testament by the New is a "certain understanding of history, which is substantially that of the prophets themselves."<sup>20</sup> It is in order to penetrate into this biblical understanding of history that we turn to a study of the word "fulfill."

The verb used most frequently in the New Testament to express the act of fulfilling is *πληροῦν*, which appears in reference to prophecy chiefly in the aorist

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<sup>18</sup> Julius Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950); Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: Die typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen*, BFCT 2.43 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1939), 7ff.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Harold Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952).

<sup>20</sup> Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 128.

passive or perfect middle forms.<sup>21</sup> In Matthew the typical formula of introduction is usually: “in order that [ἵνα, ὅπως] that which was spoken [τὸ ῥηθὲν] by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled [πληρωθῆ]” (1:22; 2:15, etc.). The Gospel of John substitutes λόγος (12:38, etc.) in a similar formula. All the four Gospels at times refer to the fulfilling of the scriptures (ἡ γραφή, αἱ γραφαί). Although similar expressions occur occasionally in Jewish rabbinical writings,<sup>22</sup> the closest parallelism is found in the Septuagint (cf. 1 Kgs 2:27; 2 Chr 36:21). Since in the great majority of cases πληροῦν is the translation of the Hebrew root  $\text{אָלַמ}$ , we shall turn our attention to its usage within the Old Testament.<sup>23</sup>

The Hebrew verb  $\text{אָלַמ}$ , sharing a common Semitic root, can mean in its *qal* form either “to fill” or “to be full.” Locusts fill the houses (Exod 10:6); the train of  $\text{יְהוָה}$  fills the temple (Isa 6:1); following Elisha’s command, the woman takes empty vessels and pours oil in them until they are full (2 Kgs 4:6). In both the *qal* and *niphāl*, this essentially spatial connotation has been expanded into a temporal expression. Days and years are commonly spoken of as being full or filled. Rebekah’s days were full that she could give birth (Gen 25:24); following a certain period of separation, the Nazirite’s days are said to be full that he may return to a normal life (Num 6:13); forty days are full before the process of embalming Joseph is completed (Gen 50:3).

The use of  $\text{אָלַמ}$  as a temporal expression is of importance as it evidences a peculiarity of Hebrew thought which is often overlooked in our modern use of this same idiom. The Hebrew concept of time is primarily concerned with the quality of time rather than in its temporal succession.<sup>24</sup> The characteristic words for time such as  $\text{תַּיִם}$  (= LXX καιρός) and  $\text{דְּמִיּוֹת}$  are clearly of this nature. The writer of Ecclesiastes elaborates on the various kinds of time which present themselves (ch. 3). It is the search for the “right time” that interests the Hebrew (cf. Hag 1:2; Esth 1:13). The fact that the Hebrew verbal system indicates qualities of action rather than tenses goes to confirm this analysis.

Although the Hebrew emphasis is on opportune time (καιρός), it should not be thought that the Old Testament is indifferent to chronological time (χρόνος). The succession of time is marked by days, months, and years. Days are said to come (Isa 13:6) and pass (Deut 4:32). The shortness of man’s life is contrasted to the eternity of God (Pss 90:9f.; 103:15ff.). Although many Hebrew verbs are used to describe the passing of time succession, the use of  $\text{אָלַמ}$  retains its unique emphasis,

<sup>21</sup> TWNT 4:283ff.; Henrik Ljungman, *Das Gesetz erfüllen: Matth. 5,17ff. und 3,15 untersucht* (Lund: Gleerup, 1954).

<sup>22</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, “The Formulas Introducing Quotations of Scripture in the NT and the Mishnah,” *JBL* 70.4 (1951): 297–307, here 306.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ljungman, *Das Gesetz erfüllen*, 26ff., for a criticism of Dalman’s attempt to relate πληροῦν to the Hebrew  $\text{מָלַא}$  (Aramaic  $\text{מָלַא}$ ).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 1:487ff.; John Marsh, *The Fulness of Time* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 19ff.; Thorleif Boman, *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954), 2:109ff.

which differs from the meaning given by verbs such as “come” (בוא) and “pass” (עבר).

In the great majority of cases, מלא appears in reference to days or years in order to designate the filling or completing of chronological time. מלא is never used with יום or מועד to express the filling of an appointed time. Occasionally, however, the chronological element is replaced by a usage of “day” bordering on יום (Jer 25:34). The uniqueness of the term מלא used in expressing chronological time rests in the fact that this time is viewed as a totality. Hebrew thinking, even when attempting to express time succession, could not abstract it from its content. Time as a mere concept was unknown. Chronological time as well as opportune time were known by the content. When passing time with its content formed a totality, it was said to be filled in the same way a receptacle with its content together formed a whole. The spatial terminology could be used to express temporality because both shared in the decisive fact of totality. The truth of this analysis is supported when we recall the well-known fact that the Hebrew expressed the past in terms of that which was ahead of him (קדם), and the future in terms of that which followed him (אחר).<sup>25</sup> This usage is exactly opposed to the modern abstract concept. Only when we speak of our forefathers and posterity do we use this inverted Hebrew frame of reference. Time is here also viewed in terms of its content, and forms an organic totality within chronological time. To summarize: מלא in reference to time can often bear the meaning of complete, but only when seen in terms of forming a whole.<sup>26</sup>

The real focus of our word study is found in the *piel* usage of מלא. While the verb continues to possess its essential meaning of fill, it has expanded its usage to include the filling of words. The Jews in Egypt have not only said that they would practice idolatry, but they have filled their words by doing so (Jer 44:25). The word which had been spoken concerning the house of Eli was filled when Solomon expelled Abiathar from office (1 Kgs 2:27). The exile in Babylon filled the words of יהוה spoken through Jeremiah (2 Chr 36:21). It appears most probable that the earliest passage in which this usage occurs is in Jeremiah. When we consider the deepening which the doctrine of the word received through this prophet, it is not surprising to find a development at this point.<sup>27</sup> However, the full use of this formula came about through the Deuteronomistic school, where it formed the actual framework into which the writer cast his material.<sup>28</sup> Although this formulation of a word filling itself is relatively a late development, the concept behind the for-

<sup>25</sup> Conrad von Orelli, *Die hebräischen Synonyma der Zeit und Ewigkeit genetisch und sprachvergleichend dargestellt* (Leipzig: Lorentz, 1871), 14.

<sup>26</sup> The comment of J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1876), 257, that the New Testament's usage of the word “complete” has lost its connection with its basic meaning of fill, must be seriously questioned in light of the Old Testament usage. Cf. also Ljungman, *Das Gesetz erfüllen*, 56ff.

<sup>27</sup> *TWNT* 4:96f.

<sup>28</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomium-Studien*, FRLANT 58 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1947), 52ff.

mula is early. It is rooted deeply in the Hebrew mentality and touches on the Old Testament understanding of truth and reality.

Only that which maintains itself is true (למנוח). It maintains itself by joining to a totality. A false thing is an empty thing having no reality (Ps 4:3). Egypt's help possesses no reality because it is empty (קִרְיָה), unable to be realized. A man with an empty soul has no reality but is merely a worthless caricature (Judg 9:4). He is a fragment which falsely appears to be something. Naomi went away full but returned empty because she could not maintain herself (Ruth 1:13). The family wholeness had been destroyed, making her life empty and unreal. Also, labor is empty if it does not fill its purpose (Isa 51:58). The bearing of children is empty if it does not produce wholeness in a family (65:23).

A word which is empty is a lie (Ps 4:3). It is the product of flattering lips which cannot endure (12:3). A true word is one which is filled. It does not return empty but accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent (Isa 55:11). God is faithful because he fills with his hand the word which he spoke with his mouth (2 Chr 6:4). The word maintains itself by reaching the wholeness of God's purpose for it. The true word possesses an independent existence since it is a part of the totality towards which it moves. If it is a filled word, it already shares in the reality. It hastens toward its end and cannot be stopped (cf. Hab 2:3). An empty word returns void because it never possessed reality. The true word continues until it forms a totality with that reality of which it is already a part. Word and sign have much in common since they both point toward a totality while already possessing a portion of the anticipated reality. A word is fulfilled when it is filled full to form a whole.

We see, therefore, that within the biblical categories, fulfillment is not in terms of identical correspondence, if this is understood as the matching up of two independent entities. It is non-Hebraic thinking which tries to relate prophecy and fulfillment in terms of exactness of correspondence based on a Greek theory of truth. The Hebrew view of fulfillment does not consider them as two independent entities whose relation is determined by an external criterion. This method, which is characteristic of scholastic Protestantism, loses the uniquely biblical idea of history. The time (or history) between the prophecy and the fulfillment in this scheme has no significance since the fulfillment is accomplished through arbitrary divine intervention.

The actual biblical relation between prophecy and fulfillment is not easy to understand chiefly because of its strangeness to our modern thought patterns. The prophetic word and its fulfillment are not held independently of one another but belong to the same event. The word is a quasi-independent activity which produces the event. It is not just descriptive but causative. This concept of the word, which is known to many primitive cultures, has become in the Old Testament a most compatible vehicle for the uniquely biblical understanding of fulfillment. The word shares in a reality – the same reality as the fulfilled event; however, the two are not merely to be identified. Word and fulfillment are part of the selfsame reality; however, they do not have the same wholeness. This is made clear from our word study. The word sets an event into motion which is then filled up. A filled

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