

# A Survey of Biblical Theology

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Anyone who undertakes seriously to interpret the scriptures must be constantly aware that behind the words confronting him on the Bible page lie three distinct, though closely inter-connected realities: first, the historical objects and events about which the biblical authors are speaking, second the biblical authors themselves, and the communities which they may be supposed to have been addressing in all the complexities of their historical environment, third the actual concepts and words in which the biblical authors formulate the divine meaning which they have perceived. Corresponding to this threefold division in the reality 'on the other side of the Bible page', three broad schools of thought may be distinguished among modern theologians of the Bible. The first may be termed the 'orthodox' school. Its adherents tend to concentrate their attention on the objects and events recorded, the substantial historicity of which they accept. They regard the biblical authors as pointing them on to realities beyond the authors themselves, or their immediate environment. For such theologians the primary question is: 'What really happened and what did it mean?' What was the meaning of the exodus, the fall of Jerusalem, the death and resurrection of Christ considered as historical events? These events are seen as acts of God which reveal his attitude and, more rarely, his nature. The second school tends to focus its attention not on the objects and events recorded, but on the community itself from which the words of the Bible emerged, and to which they were initially addressed. It is not the object of the community's belief that is important so much as the expression of that belief, and the phenomenon of a community believing at all; striving to live out its beliefs and progressively explicating them in response to the challenges of a world always alien and usually hostile. In the New Testament, for instance, what Jesus was and what happened to him is both less ascertainable and less important than what the believing community made of him, and the continuing impact which this had upon their own lives and the lives of their descendants. Thus the biblical theologian's first task is to reconstruct the living context, the *Sitz-im-Leben*, of the community in which the biblical message was first articulated, and to interpret it in terms of this living context in

its manifold aspects. The community at worship or at war, sustaining itself in times of hardship and persecution, purging out sin and error from within its midst, striving to respond to what it believes to be God's saving act and purpose, articulates, even as it strives, an eternal message of salvation from God to all men.

The third school concentrates upon the actual notions and terms which the biblical authors themselves use to convey the inner significance of what they record. A specific number of concepts and words which occur in the Bible itself, and which are considered to be especially rich in theological content, are isolated and analysed *semantically*. The origin, etymological meaning, customary usage and evolution of such words as 'faith', 'grace', 'love', 'church', etc., are explored. Even notions which, of their nature, stand for concrete historical realities, such as 'passion' or 'resurrection' tend to be accorded an abstract and 'conceptualized' treatment by adherents of this school. Thus theological word-books are built up consisting usually of a series of these theologically significant concepts arranged in alphabetical order. By examining these words and concepts the mind penetrates through to the deeper mysteries of biblical thought, and so, beyond this, touches the mind of God himself, and apprehends the message intended by him. The classic and monumental prototype of all such 'word-books' of biblical theology is undoubtedly the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* commenced in 1933, first edited by G. Kittel, and still in process of completion under the general editorship of G. Friedrich. The seven massive volumes which have so far appeared have dominated New Testament theology as a whole and considerably influenced Old Testament theology too. Kittel's stated aim was to trace the 'inner lexicography' or 'concept history' of the key words of the New Testament. The etymology, origin, extra-biblical usage, Old Testament usage, etc., of each key word, and of the concepts associated with it, are minutely and comprehensively examined.

Several of these articles have been translated into English and have appeared as separate books in the *Bible Key Words* series. Two of the most recent have been *Faith*,<sup>1</sup> and *Spirit*.<sup>2</sup> It is important to notice that in this series the Old Testament and extra-biblical material of the original articles has often been greatly abbreviated. It is also necessary to observe that in the case of Dr Schweizer's book he has publicly

<sup>1</sup>FAITH, by A. Weiser and R. Bultmann; A. & C. Black, 12s. 6d.

<sup>2</sup>SPIRIT, by E. Schweizer *et al.*; A. & C. Black, 15s. Titles in capitals are of books under review in this article.

stated that the translation was made without his knowledge, and that he regards it as in some respects unsatisfactory.<sup>3</sup> The abbreviations in both books are surely regrettable. If this theological method has any real value it must be comprehensive and complete. It is precisely in its surveys of extra-biblical material not otherwise easily accessible that the *T.W.N.T.* is often most helpful. Now in these English translations it is this material that is most often curtailed or omitted. However the series is of proved worth and popularity, and the non-specialists for whom it is intended are unlikely to be discouraged by these lacunae.

The treatment of 'Faith' by Weiser and Bultmann is fairly representative of the series as a whole. The chapter on the Old Testament concept consists of a semantic survey of six Hebrew roots expressive of various aspects of faith, and is completed by a general summary. Those familiar with Bultmann's general position will not be surprised to find that in his explanation of faith in the New Testament he is quite openly influenced by his own existentialist presuppositions. In this respect his treatment hardly conforms to the strict standards of objectivity which the semantic approach demands. However Bultmann has elsewhere explained why he regards it as impossible to eliminate all presuppositions, and why he regards those of Heidegger's philosophy as particularly suitable. Dr Schweizer's treatment of 'Spirit' is somewhat complex and difficult to follow. But the study is an important one and contains many penetrating insights. Both volumes require to be read critically.

What has shaken one's confidence in this sort of treatment, however, is the slashing and powerful onslaught upon the whole semantic approach recently launched by J. Barr.<sup>4</sup> He attacks both the basic principles and the practice of a biblical theology based on semantics and word analysis, and exposes, with a cogency which appears to me to be quite irresistible, the radical unsoundness of many of the most influential and authoritative sources, and notably that of the *T.W.N.T.* itself. The exponents of biblical semantics allege that they have found a distinctive unity of biblical thought underlying key theological terms throughout the scriptures. But, as Barr is able to demonstrate repeatedly, their expositions betray a radical failure to work out the relationship which exists between language and ideas. Their basic assumptions on this point are often astonishingly naïve and erroneous. For example it is often taken for granted that the etymological history of a particular term accurately reflects the theological development of the concept for

<sup>3</sup>In a letter published in *Interpretation*, xvii/1, January, 1963, pp. 122-123.

<sup>4</sup>THE SEMANTICS OF BIBLICAL LANGUAGE, by J. Barr; O.U.P., 37s. 6d.

which it stands. The most basic principles of linguistics are misconceived or ignored. Indeed, what has really been happening in so-called semantic treatments of biblical theology is that the investigator's own *a priori* theological notions have been read into the language of the Bible. Without any real basis in etymology, single words have been loaded with intricate theological significances which they are quite incapable of sustaining, and which often do violence to the basic principles of lexicography. Consciously or unconsciously the linguistic evidence has been manipulated in such a way as to provide a spurious support for the investigator's own theological theories. A false mystique has grown up of the unique and impenetrable depths of biblical language and thought, so that individual words are held to be almost untranslatable. Convulsive efforts are demanded of the reader to bridge the gulf which allegedly exists between his own thought-world and that of the ancient Semitic or Hellenistic milieu in which the Bible was written. A failure to comprehend the esoteric burlblings of the exponents of semantics is held to be a failure to 'think as a Semite'. Professor Barr is particularly scathing, and also particularly convincing, in his onslaught on this false mystique. In this connection he singles out for special attack the current descriptions of a contrast alleged to exist between Hebrew and Greek thought. This has recently been the subject of a widely acclaimed and influential work by T. Boman.<sup>5</sup> As Professor Barr contends, 'Boman . . . has tried harder than other writers to give a systematic correlation of that contrast with linguistic characteristics. Whether his account of the thought-contrast is an accurate one or not, it is clear that his linguistic discussion is full of impossible constructions of phenomena, often claims as a Hebrew peculiarity something that is not at all unique, but appears to fit into the peculiarities of Hebrew thought, and often fails to make any examination of Greek or any other language and compares Hebrew language direct with what is supposed to be Greek thought or European thought. This failure is fundamentally because his programme does not arise from linguistic description at all, but is extended or extrapolated from the thought-contrast, and the same failure appears in work of the same kind done from the more explicit biblical theology side.'

The attack continues in a second and rather shorter work entitled *Biblical Words for Time*.<sup>7</sup> Barr succeeds, I think, in demonstrating the unsoundness of a procedure which consists of ' . . . the building of a

<sup>5</sup>*Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* Engl. translation London 1960.

<sup>6</sup>Barr *op. cit.* p. 279.

<sup>7</sup>BIBLICAL WORDS FOR TIME, by J. Barr; S.C.M., 13s. 6d.

structure from the lexical stock of the biblical languages, and the assumption that the shape of the structure reflects or sets forth the outlines of biblical thinking<sup>8</sup> about time. Works of such authority as Cullmann's *Christ and Time* are attacked, just as in the earlier work the sort of source-books which every biblical scholar has at his elbow (e.g. Arndt and Gingrich's *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*) had been subjected to some radical criticisms.

In holding that the tendencies which he attacks in these two books are both widespread and dangerous, Professor Barr seems to me to prove his case up to the hilt. But he has few positive alternatives to suggest for the systems which he has so decisively discredited. He does insist that ' . . . the linguistic bearer of the theological statement is usually the sentence and the still larger literary complex, and not the word or the morphological and syntactical mechanisms . . . as a whole the distinctiveness of biblical thought and language has to be settled at sentence level, that is, by the things the writers say, and not by the words they say them with'.<sup>9</sup> And he does suggest as a possible procedure that the words of the Bible might be arranged 'in groups, each representing a related semantic field, e.g. the "holy" group with its chief representatives in *hagios*, *hagnos*, and *hieros*. Within a general field thus loosely defined an attempt would be made to mark off the semantic oppositions between one word and another as precisely as possible; and from this to proceed to special contexts and word-combinations in which each word occurred—bringing in, of course, the words from outside the loosely defined field freely'.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to notice that in a study of Amos which appears to have escaped Professor Barr's notice, this exact procedure appears to have been carried out most successfully.<sup>11</sup> It would be interesting to hear Professor Barr's estimate of this work and also of another, on the use of the root *shubh* in the Old Testament,<sup>12</sup> in which the analysis of usages appears to be sounder than in the New Testament works with which he is primarily concerned.

It is, in fact, strikingly apparent that Old Testament theology, with its far greater emphasis on the event, the reality and the unit of tradition as distinct from the individual 'key word', has remained relatively immune to the exaggerations and distortions which Professor Barr so

<sup>8</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>*The Semantics* . . . p. 269.

<sup>10</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>11</sup>cf. V. Maag: *Text, Wortschatz und Begriffswelt des Buches Amos*, Leiden 1951.

<sup>12</sup>cf. W. L. Holladay: *The Root Subh in the Old Testament*, Leiden 1958.

trenchantly attacks. This is particularly evident in the case of W. Eichrodt's *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, the first volume of which has recently appeared in English.<sup>13</sup> To appreciate the significance of this classic work, widely regarded as the greatest of the Old Testament theologies, we must notice in brief outline the earlier history of biblical study. Up to the late nineteenth century biblical theology as it is now understood did not really exist. The subject-matter of the scriptures was systematized and interpreted according to the categories and preconceptions of traditional scholastic theology. The Old Testament was significant only in so far as it foreshadowed and led up to the New. Then came the 'higher critics'. With their resolutely scientific approach they were determined to exclude all preconceived theological categories, dogmatic or otherwise, and to analyse the Bible by objective literary and historical methods. They eliminated the idea of the supernatural. They refused to find any underlying unity between the Testaments in terms of which the one could be regarded as the fulfilment of the other. As a result, theological interest gave way to source-criticism, form-criticism and history of religion. There was a tendency to reduce the scriptures to the *disjecta membra* of disparate sources. At the same time a wealth of newly discovered extra-biblical writings became available for comparison, so that the 'comparative religion' school was able to assess the sacred writings of Israel along with those of other Semitic peoples to an extent which had hitherto been impossible. All this enabled scholars to reconstruct the sort of living situations or 'settings in life' in which particular types of religious writings were characteristically produced, and the literary *genres* characteristic of the Semitic world. At the same time it was realised that the Old Testament writings did reflect, however fragmentarily, the continuous religious thought of a single people, and attempts were made to trace the history of Israelite religion as a whole. The concept of the divinity was held to have moved from a crude and barbarous polytheism in the origins, through stages of progressive refinement, to the highly developed ethical monotheism apparent in the prophetic writings. But from the exile onwards Israelite religion tended to lose its pristine spontaneity and to degenerate into a rigid legalism. This process is particularly apparent in the Priestly writings of the Pentateuch.

Such, in brief outline, was the evolutionary course of Israelite religion traced by the exponents of the new critical approach. The greatest of

<sup>13</sup>THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, by W. Eichrodt, translated by J. Baker, S.C.M., 50s.

them, however, recognized that, whatever its validity as a description of the development of religious thought in Israel, this account left certain vital and basic questions unanswered. What made the religion of this particular people, so much weaker and less civilized than other Semitic peoples whose religious writings have come down to us, survive unique and unparalleled, astonishingly achieving ever greater heights in the midst of poverty, disaster and defeat? What unique factor imparted to this particular religious faith a self-consistency and a vitality which made it, when compared with other Near Eastern religions, so radically anomalous?

Such questions as these the greatest representatives of the 'history of religion' school recognized but failed to answer. Though the new critics, for all their rationalist prejudices, left a residue of assured conclusions of permanent value, it was increasingly realised that the methods which they had evolved were incapable of providing answers to the questions which prompted Christian men to read the Bible at all. These remained convinced that, so far from being a source-book for historians and comparative religionists, it contained a message that was eternal and divine, and addressed to men of all ages for their salvation. A demand arose for a new *theology* of the Bible, one which, while recognizing and using the conclusions of the scientists, would yet bring out the unique religious meaning which the Bible bore for all Christians: the eternal meaning, divinely revealed, of God, man and the world, and of the relationship between them.

One attempt to solve this problem was proposed by O. Eissfeldt.<sup>14</sup> He suggested that it was possible for scientific criticism and biblical theology to exist side by side as two distinct disciplines. As a scientist, the biblical scholar could, so to say, close his mind to his own religious commitments, and pursue his investigations according to the strictly scientific methods which alone would assure him the objective truth he sought. As a man of faith he could interpret the biblical material according to the tenets of the particular confessional group to which he belonged. The unsatisfactory nature of this 'double think' was at once apparent. Faith, no less than science, ought to be concerned with objective reality. If the conclusions of the scientists concerning the history of the Israelites and their sacred book really were assured, then it should be possible to regard the historical facts they had discovered as part of God's plan. God himself must have proposed that the history of his people developed

<sup>14</sup> 'Israelitische—jüdische Religionsgeschichte und alttestamentliche Theologie', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, xlv, 1926, pp. 1-12.

in that particular way, that the crystallization in writing of their religious traditions should have progressively acquired that particular form. In educating the *theological* meaning of the Bible, it should be possible to use these *historical* conclusions positively and boldly; to allow them to determine the categories in which the divine meaning of the Bible is systematically presented.

This basic position seems to me to be definitive for modern biblical theology. Certainly it is the position adopted by Eichrodt. For him faith seeks understanding scientifically. The systematic presentation of the Old Testament data in response to the questions raised by faith is complemented and aided by a full awareness of the scientific conclusions of the historians of religion. ' . . . In so far as the spiritual history of Israel has brought about a drastic remodelling of many religious ideas, the right way to make allowance for this is *to have the historical principle operating side by side with the systematic in a complementary role*'.<sup>15</sup> It is a cardinal principle for Eichrodt that the categories of dogmatic theology must not be superimposed on the Bible. The Old Testament offers us categories of its own, and these must be allowed to determine the division of the material. The Old Testament dialectic ' . . . speaks of a revelation of the God of the People, who in his rule proves himself to be also the God of the World and the God of the Individual. We are therefore presented with the three principal categories within which to study the special nature of the Israelite faith in God: *God and the People, God and the World, and God and Man*'.<sup>16</sup>

But what is it which, from the aspect of religious history, accounts for the uniqueness and self-consistency of Israel's religious traditions throughout well over a thousand years of sin and disaster? What is it which, from the point of view of theology, draws all the disparate manifestations of her religious belief into one and directs them irresistibly and dynamically on towards their New Testament fulfilment? The answer to both questions is the covenant. It is the covenant, as historical event, as abiding social institution and as overriding theological conception, which lies at the very heart and centre of Israel's religion, and pervades her whole life at every stage. It is here that the fundamental relationship between God and his people is achieved and defined. By the covenant Yahweh chooses irrevocably to unite himself to a particular people and to manifest in and through that people his rule over the whole world and over every individual within it. Moreover the covenant

<sup>15</sup>Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 33.



is of its nature purposive and dynamic, leading relentlessly on to a final consummation in the future, when the universal kingship of God will impose itself openly and invincibly upon the whole world. It is here that the essential continuity between the two Testaments is to be found. 'That which binds together indivisibly the two realms of the Old and New Testaments—different in externals though they may be—is the irruption of the Kingdom of God into this world and its establishment here. This is the unitive fact because it rests on the action of one and the same God in each case; that God who in promise and performance, in Gospel and Law, pursues one and the self-same great purpose, the building of his Kingdom. This is why the central message of the New Testament leads us back to the testimony of God in the old covenant'.<sup>17</sup>

In explaining how the covenant exercises a pervasive influence on the whole of Israelite thought, Eichrodt shows himself constantly aware that the Old Testament traditions are closely linked to the prolific variety of pagan religions, their manifestations of worship, and their institutions. As elements from these are absorbed within the framework of Israel's native traditions, they are transformed by the covenant idea and made to serve the interests of the unique covenant-God. Thus Old Testament theology constantly 'faces on to the comparative study of religions'.<sup>18</sup> Incidentally Eichrodt is able to make a far truer and more balanced comparison of Israelite religious institutions with those of other peoples than had the earlier comparative religionists. At the same time, by the teleological and purposive character which Israelite religion receives from the covenant, it constantly points forward to and demands its fulfilment in the New Testament. 'Anyone who studies the historical development of the Old Testament finds that throughout there is a powerful and purposive movement which forces itself on his attention. It is true that there are also times when the religion seems to become static, to harden into a rigid system; but every time this occurs, the forward drive breaks through once more, reaching out to a higher form of life, and making everything that has gone before seem inadequate and incomplete. This movement does not come to rest until the manifestation of Christ, in whom the noblest powers of the Old Testament find their fulfilment'.<sup>19</sup>

By the covenant Yahweh renders himself present to his people and reveals his will to them in laws applicable to all generations in every

<sup>17</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 26.

moment of time. The word of God is effective in creation and history, and demands a continuous response from the chosen people. The whole of sacred history is the relentless working out of the single overriding plan of the covenant-God. The cultic institutions and prescriptions render the formative and creative past of the people present; the prophets render the future fulfilment present. Both represent the claims of the covenant-God, whose intervention in history spans past, present and future. But while the *claims* of the covenant-God, and the expression of his will in law are present in every moment of time, the *exaction* of those claims, the *execution* of that will in judgment are intermittent. It is here that we encounter the idea of the decisive moment. Mysteriously and unpredictably Yahweh chooses certain such moments of judgment within the total sweep of time in order to exact his claims, to impose his will anew, to carry the covenant plan and purpose a stage further towards its predestined consummation. Thus for the Israelite people, confronted with the constant summons to obedience of the ever-present covenant-God, every moment is a moment of response, decision and preparation. They stand in constant danger lest the mysterious moment of judgment finds them unprepared to meet their covenant-God. If that happens, they will find themselves rejected and condemned. The moment of their salvation will have passed them irrevocably by.

This is, I hope, a fair presentation of Eichrodt's overall view of Old Testament theology. The first volume of his work (translated, so far as I can judge, almost faultlessly despite the translator's modest apology for being 'leaden-footed') is confined to the first of his three main divisions, 'God and the People'. He deals here first with the nature of the covenant itself and the social and cultic laws attached to it. From this he passes on to the actual revelation of the covenant-God, his names, and affirmations concerning his nature and activities. The upholders and instruments of the covenant are then examined, the *charismatic* leaders, who are the prophets, and the *official* leaders, the priests, and the king. The last two chapters are respectively entitled 'Covenant-Breaking and Judgment', and 'Fulfilling the Covenant: The Consummation of God's Dominion'. Those already familiar with the general lines of Eichrodt's theology will of course welcome this excellent translation of the sixth edition as one of the most significant contributions to English Old Testament study for many years. But for them perhaps the most interesting section, and one which does not appear in the German sixth edition, will be the final excursus, 'The Problem of Old Testament

Theology',<sup>20</sup> Here Eichrodt offers some extremely sharp and radical criticisms of the new approach to Old Testament theology evolved by G. von Rad. However, before considering Eichrodt's criticisms, some brief description must be given of von Rad's own *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, the first volume of which has also been translated into English.<sup>21</sup>

Von Rad is supremely the theologian of the 'History of Tradition' school. This school regards the Old Testament as a sort of snowball of tradition, the central nucleus of which is constituted by the 'pan-Israelite' traditions recording the events of the exodus, Sinai and the entry into the promised land. Under the impact of history, this nucleus rolls down the years accumulating fresh layers of tradition about itself as it goes. Many of these fresh layers are considerably older than the central nucleus of tradition itself, having existed independently as local or tribal traditions long before the 'pan-Israelite' nucleus was formulated. Again, seen from the point of view of the exegete, the Old Testament is like an archaeological *tell*, in which the expert's initial task is to establish the successive layers or strata of tradition. The historical import of these tradition-strata deepens as they become broader and more all-embracing, the later strata absorbing and bringing into significant correlation the earlier ones in the light of a more profound and more unified theological perspective. The task for the theologian of this school is to assess the theological message of each 'tradition-stratum' at each stage in the snowballing. He must show the essential continuity of the process, how the later strata absorb and deepen the theological message of the earlier, and how the total theological message constituted by Israel's deepening awareness of her covenant-God grows under the impact of history. Thus the theologian starts with the central and definitive traditions which determine, so to say, the basic shape of the snowball, and shows how and why this shape was modified and adapted down the years. This is, I believe, a fair description of the task which von Rad has defined for himself. As he himself puts it, '... with every single unit of tradition the first questions which should occupy us are these: Who is reporting it? What is the standpoint of the report, and what is the reporter's probable historical and theological position? What led him to report as he did? With what viewpoint and tradition is he aligning himself? In a word, we are encountering sacred traditions of the most varied kinds,

<sup>20</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 512 ff.

<sup>21</sup> OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY, VOLUME I, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, by G. von Rad, translated by D. M. G. Stalker, Oliver & Boyd, 45s.

each of which demands its own special form of examination, if we are to arrive at the historical facts reported'.<sup>22</sup>

The historical interventions of Yahweh were remembered and 're-actualized' by successive generations at the shrines and in the cult. In this process of 're-actualization' each succeeding generation strove to re-discover for itself, and in its own particular living context, what it was to be Israel. Both the form of the individual units of tradition and the order in which they have been arranged have been deeply conditioned by this fact. The Old Testament traditions as they now exist have been re-arranged and re-interpreted over and over again in the cultic re-living of the original events by successive generations. Layer upon layer of interpretative accretion has thus been superimposed on the primitive communal memories. But within the total history of the development of these traditions we can discern a specific number of absolutely vital points at which, in response to some special and profound change in the life of the community, the whole accumulated stock of traditions was radically re-thought and re-assessed in terms of some new perspective, achieving thereby a fresh unity and depth and a new vitality so as to apply to a new phase in Israel's life. It is these cardinal points in the history of Israel's traditions which von Rad describes in the first hundred pages of his book. Briefly they are first the conquest and settlement in the land of Canaan, secondly the institution of the monarchical state with its centre at Zion, thirdly the great Deuteronomist reform of the late seventh century, and finally the attempt to renew Israel's life after the exile, to recapture its ancient religious heritage and to revivify it in the worship of the second temple. Before the conquest and settlement in Canaan there were no 'pan-Israelite' traditions—only communal memories preserved by particular tribal groups and associated with particular places, above all the Red Sea, Sinai and Kadesh. These particular tribal traditions were taken up by the confederation or amphictyony of *all* the tribes only after the settlement in Canaan. They now become attached to the seasonal festivals of the year celebrated by all the tribes at a central shrine. The worship of nature and fertility as practised by the Canaanites at these festivals is partly suppressed, and the cult becomes 'historicized'—that is, it becomes a means not primarily of renewing fertility in nature, but of 're-actualizing' what *all* Israel now considers to be her communal past experience of Yahweh's interventions in her history. In these sacred moments of the year successive generations of Israelites strive to become the recipients

<sup>22</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 4.

of the original favours which Yahweh bestowed on their ancestors. This re-living of the creative moments of the past is intended to shape the course of the future too, to enable Israel to overcome all that is hostile and harmful to her and to enjoy the state of prosperity and peace promised in the covenant blessings. Thus the past traditions are not merely re-lived but creatively adapted so as to answer the special needs of the present. They are profoundly conditioned by the living context and the special interests of those who strive to re-live them year after year in an unstable and menacing world. All this is reflected in the history of the traditions originally attached to these Festivals. The 'Sinai-covenant' traditions form one block which is attached to the Festival of Tabernacles as celebrated in the Autumn at Shechem. The 'Exodus-Promised Land' traditions constitutes another distinct block, attached to the Feast of Weeks as celebrated at Gilgal.

It is in this context that a tradition-unit originates which is of crucial importance for the development of Old Testament tradition, namely the 'cultic credo' which was prescribed for the individual Israelite pilgrim to recite standing before the shrine with the first fruits of his land in his hands: 'A wandering Aramaean was my father; he went down with a few people into Egypt and there he became a nation, great, mighty and populous. But the Egyptians treated us harshly, they afflicted us and laid harsh toil upon us. Then we cried to Jahweh, the God of our father, and Jahweh heard us and saw our affliction, our toil and oppression. And Jahweh brought us up out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders, and brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey' (Deut. 26. 5-9). This represents an ancient 'confessional' summary of the 'Exodus-Promised Land' traditions. It also provides the nucleus and essential framework for the total amalgam of traditions represented by the first six books of the Bible, the Hexateuch. And it is the theology of the Hexateuch which occupies the greater part of this first volume, traced from the primitive 'credal' formula to its final unfolding in the last of the great tradition-cycles, the Priestly document. The next main section of the book, on the distinctive theology which grew up round the institution of the monarchy, is entitled 'Israel's Anointed'. Here von Rad takes as his starting-point the institution of the Davidic monarchy and the covenant with David's house, and traces the development of traditions around this central institution right through to the two great theological re-assessments which emerged respectively from the exilic and post-exilic communities, the Deuter-

onomist theology of history and the historical work of the Chronicler. Thus, as he says, 'Jahweh twice intervened in Israel's history in a special way, to lay a basis of salvation for his people. The first was in the complex of acts which are gathered together in the avowal made by the canonical saving history (that is, from Abraham to Joshua), the other was in the confirmation of David and his throne for all time. Round the first datum—Israel became the people of Jahweh and received the promised land—lies the Hexateuch, with its wealth of traditions, to unfold this work of Jahweh adequately and to interpret it. The other, the choice of David and his throne, became the point of crystallization and the axis for the historical works of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler . . . On these two saving data rested the whole of Israel's existence before Jahweh'.<sup>23</sup> In the final section of this book von Rad evaluates Israel's own response to, and reflexions upon Yahweh's saving interventions in her life in the Psalms and the Wisdom literature.

In this brief outline of the purpose and plan of von Rad's *Theology I* find it impossible to convey the astonishing and brilliant insights which it offers on almost every page. I can only confess that since the German original appeared in 1954, no other work on Old Testament theology has helped me so much. The intense controversy which the work has provoked should not be allowed to blind one to the essential rightness of von Rad's approach. This book sets the seal on a lifetime of original research and gathers up the best of his earlier works on the Hexateuch, Deuteronomy and Chronicles, and also on the history-writing of the Old Testament. Already the author has been accused of excessive scepticism with regard to the objective historicity of the Bible, of arbitrariness in grouping the book of Joshua with the first five books of the Old Testament so as to form a 'Hexateuch', of artificiality in separating the early 'exodus-promised land' traditions from the 'Sinai-covenant' cycle, and in assigning each block to a separate shrine and a distinct feast day. His book is held by many to lack balance and proportion in that the chapters of the Deuteronomist and Chronicler's history writing are so brief in comparison with the section on the Hexateuch. In particular von Rad has been criticized for the brevity and inadequacy of the final section on the Wisdom literature and Psalms. Some degree of justification can be found, I suppose, for most of these criticisms. The fact remains that this is pioneer work of epoch-making importance. As such it is great enough and flexible enough to allow for considerable modifications and expansions. This Old Testament Theo-

<sup>23</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 355.

logy makes all others known to me appear in some degree over-rigid, over-systematized and over-abstract. This one alone seems to allow for the immediacy of the traditions now preserved in the Old Testament to a troubled and usually anguished history, the mysterious *untidiness* of which is reflected on every page of the Old Testament. This approach alone seems to allow fully and completely successfully for the way traditions grow directly and continuously out of salvific history, and are themselves an organic and creative part of that history, exercising a decisive influence on its course. Even if von Rad adopts far more controversial positions than Eichrodt, who criticizes him so sharply, even if his treatment lacks the balance and precision of the earlier work, it still seems to me, with due respect for Eichrodt himself and his many admirers, far to surpass it in flexibility and perceptiveness. Eichrodt's attempt to relate every area of Old Testament thought to the institution of the covenant does seem to have resulted in a certain rigidity and artificiality in certain areas of his theology. Von Rad's approach, with its refusal to over-systematize and its concentration on certain key-points in the history of tradition has superbly overcome this.

If von Rad is the leading theologian of the 'History of Tradition' school, M. Noth is its outstanding historian and, in this respect, the disciple and heir of the late Albrecht Alt. His characteristic interests and emphases are seen to advantage in the recent translation of his commentary on Exodus,<sup>24</sup> almost the only full-scale and up-to-date commentary on this particular book at present available in English. The original appeared in the series entitled *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, which is intended to be primarily theological in interest. Those already familiar with the translation of von Rad's *Genesis* will be aware how magnificently the general aim of the series has been fulfilled by him. Noth's commentary is quite different. It is clear that this author is not interested in theology except in the most secondary sense. All the emphasis here is on the philological, historical and archaeological problems of the book. Above all Noth is concerned to disentangle the particular units or strands of tradition running through this book, and to trace their provenance. In other words his approach is precisely that of an 'historian of traditions'. For this reason the commentary reads rather like a popularizing summary of his earlier *Überlieferungsgeschichte*. But the arguments by which, in that earlier work, Noth justified his analysis of the traditions are often given here in very summary form, and sometimes omitted altogether. As presented in this commentary they often seem somewhat

<sup>24</sup>EXODUS, by M. Noth, translated by J. S. Bowden; S.C.M., 40s.

arbitrary. However, the source-analysis of Exodus does present special problems, and Noth is a leading authority on the subject. It is immensely valuable to have his conclusions made available in clear and summary form, and at last to have a first-class commentary on this particular book.

From the same series, *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, comes a highly stimulating commentary on *Psalms* by A. Weiser.<sup>25</sup> This is chiefly remarkable for the author's important but controversial hypothesis that a 'feast of covenant renewal' was celebrated by the Israelites during the time of Joshua and Judges. As Weiser reconstructs it, the cultic ceremonies of this feast fall into two complementary phases, the *actio Dei* and the *reactio hominis*. In the first phase the central and supreme element is the symbolic 'reactualization' of the theophanic advent of Yahweh at Sinai to make covenant with his people. The fire, smoke and cloud of the original theophany are artificially and symbolically reproduced in the holy fire upon the altar, and still more in the smoking censers carried by the priests. In the liturgy of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) the High Priest penetrates behind the veil of the Holy of Holies, with a censer of blazing coals and a 'double handful' of incense, and there makes a cloud of smoke over the *kapporet*, the ark-throne on which Yahweh is conceived to descend as once he had descended on Sinai enveloped in fire, cloud and smoke (cf. Lev. 16. 2-3; I Kgs. 8. 10 ff.; Is. 6. 4 ff., etc.). The lightning is now represented by the flaming coals in the censer. The terrible trumpet of Sinai is brought to life again in the solemn 'blowing of trumpets' (Lev. 23. 24; cf. Exod. 19. 16, 19; 20. 18; Pss. 47. 6, etc.). The thunder becomes the voice of the people themselves uttering the *teru'ah*, the terrible growling roar of Israel, which is said to cause the earth to shudder. (I Sam. 4. 5; cf. Ps. 47. 6; Is. 6. 3 ff.; Ps. 66. 1; 89. 16; 98. 6; 50. 2 ff.; 68. 12, etc.). The next stage in the cultic reconstruction of the encounter at Sinai is the solemn promulgation of the sacred covenant name, 'Yahweh'. Then Yahweh himself from the midst of the theophanic fire proclaims his mighty deeds of protection and deliverance in the past, and his claims on his people's gratitude and loyalty. This is a preliminary to the renewed promulgation of the divine will in the covenant laws, and the pronouncement of Yahweh's judgment importing salvation for the loyal and destruction for apostates and enemies. This first phase in the covenant renewal feast represents the *actio dei*. Each of its elements finds its counterpart in the *reactio hominis*, which is the cultic and liturgical response of Israel to the self-revelation of her

<sup>25</sup>*The Psalms, a Commentary*, translated by H. Hartwell, London, 1962.



covenant-God. This cultic 'reactualization' is constantly reflected in the Psalms. The numerous descriptions of the theophany (Pss. 18. 8-16; 50. 2 ff.; 68. 2 ff.; 77. 17 ff.; 97. 3 ff.; 104. 3), and cultic cries such as 'Arise, Yahweh!' (Pss. 3. 8; 7. 7; 9. 20; 10. 12; 17. 13, etc.), 'Shine forth!' (Pss. 80. 2; 94. 1; 50. 2, etc.), and, more specifically, the preoccupation with the light of Yahweh's countenance (Pss. 95. 2; 69. 18 ff., etc.), reflect and presuppose the cultic re-actualization of Yahweh's theophany. Similarly, many of the references to the divine name in the psalms reflect the cultic proclamation of that name, the second element in the *actio dei*, as this was re-enacted in the ritual of the feast. Yahweh's self-proclamation finds its counterpart in the solemn rehearsal of his mighty deeds in the historical psalms, especially those relating to the events of the Exodus. Reflections and adaptations of the promulgation of Yahweh's will in law are to be found in the form of 'negative confessions' or adaptations of the decalogue such as that reflected in the series of accusations of Ps. 50. 16-20. The remaining elements in the cultic ceremonies find their echo in the psalms, above all that of judgment, in which the covenant-community reasserts its loyal obedience to the divine law, purifies itself and 'puts away strange gods', and thereby receives the covenant-blessings anew, while traitors and enemies of the community are ritually cursed.

It must be admitted that in ascribing so central an influence to the cult of this feast Weiser is on decidedly precarious ground. Nevertheless his commentary represents an important and stimulating contribution, and his hypothesis seriously rivals Mowinckel's classic 'Enthronement festival' theory.

A second work of Weiser's has also been translated recently, namely the fourth edition of his *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*.<sup>26</sup> Here, as one would expect, the author usually adopts more central and less controversial positions than in his commentary on Psalms. In scope this Introduction is particularly generous, providing special introductions not only to each book of the Old Testament itself, but also to the apocrypha (deutero-canonicals) and pseudepigrapha, as well as a long survey of the discoveries at Qumran. In the opening chapters the author explains the historical and cultural background of the Old Testament, and deals with the pre-literary and oral forms of tradition in a particularly valuable way. In many ways this first part of the book is the most striking of all. It compares most favourably in this respect with the

<sup>26</sup>INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, by A. Weiser, translated by D. M. Barton; Darton, Longman and Todd, 50s.

*Introduction* of R. H. Pfeiffer,<sup>27</sup> which concentrates, to an extent which is now rather outmoded, on a purely literary analysis of sources. The formation of the canon and the texts and versions of the Old Testament are lucidly described. The whole work is a model of clarity and concision, though less ample in scope and, I think, rather less excellent in quality than that miracle of book-production the first volume of *Introduction à la Bible* edited by Robert and Feuillet.<sup>28</sup> Weiser's *Introduction* is less diffuse than the earlier one of A. Bentzen,<sup>29</sup> in many ways the best *Introduction* in English hitherto. It makes far less reference to particular authors and schools of thought. It is also easier to read, since Bentzen's English style is irritatingly awkward and unidiomatic. It is less detailed either than S. R. Driver's classic *Introduction*<sup>30</sup> or Eissfeldt's *Einleitung*,<sup>31</sup> which still remains, in my opinion, far the greatest of all Old Testament *Introductions*. The positions which Weiser adopts are usually sound and central, though he is capable of taking sharp issue with his contemporaries. He criticizes severely von Rad's theory of the development of tradition in the Hexateuch. If I were able to buy only one reasonably priced *Introduction* it would still be the Robert-Feuillet *Introduction à la Bible*. But this one would certainly be my second choice among the shorter and more concise *Introductions*.

<sup>27</sup>*Introduction to the Old Testament*, London, 1961.

<sup>28</sup>A. Robert and A. Feuillet ed. *Introduction à la Bible*, 2e éd., Tournai, 1959.

<sup>29</sup>A. Bentzen: *Introduction to the Old Testament I-II*, 5th ed. 1959, Copenhagen.

<sup>30</sup>S. R. Driver: *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 8th ed., 1909, Edinburgh.

<sup>31</sup>O. Eissfeldt: *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* 2e Aufl. 1956. This classic work is at present out of print, but a new edition is promised.