Introduction

What form will your 'theology' take? What will be its organizing principle? I have often been asked these questions in recent years when colleagues have learned that I was planning to write a Theology of the Old Testament. My usual answer has been that I was not sure, and that every time I thought about the subject I came up with a different answer! Of one thing I was always sure, however, and that was that my 'theology' would attempt to address today's world, and would not be an exercise in trying to reconstruct what people may or may not once have believed in ancient Israel.[1]

Ever since I came upon the Epilegomena to Rudolf Bultmann's *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* I felt that it issued a challenge that I wanted to take on. In my translation it reads as follows:

> Because the New Testament is a document of history, and in particular, of the history of religion, its interpretation requires the work of historical investigation, whose methods were developed from the time of the Enlightenment, and which bore fruit in the investigation of early Christianity and the interpretation of the New Testament. Such work can only be carried out from two standpoints, either from that of reconstruction or that of interpretation. Reconstruction is concerned with past history, interpretation with the writings of the New Testament; and clearly, one cannot be done without the other. They always work mutually together. But the important question is which of the two is the servant of the other. Either the writings of the New Testament can be treated as 'sources' which the historian uses in order to reconstruct early Christianity as a phenomenon of the historical past, or the reconstruction serves the need of the interpretation of the New

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[1] In this respect the enterprise resembles the view of writers such as Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch, that philosophy and history should assist our understanding of today's world. See H.-E. Schiller, *Bloch-Konstellationen: Utopien der Philosophie*, Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 1991, the essays 'Philosophie als Optativ: Ernst Blochs *Leipziger Vorlesungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie*', pp. 11–24, and 'Jetztzeit und Entwicklung: Geschichte bei Ernst Bloch und Walter Benjamin', pp. 25–50. See especially p. 22, 'Walter Benjamin hat in seinem Passagenwerk "die wahre Methode der Dinge sich gegenwärtig zu machen" durch die Aufgabe bestimmt, "sie in unserm Raum (nicht uns in ihrem) vorzustellen"': The reference is to Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* V, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982, p. 1014; ET *The Arcades Project* (trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 846: 'The true method of making things present is: to represent them into our space (not to represent ourselves in their space.')

Testament writings, on the assumption that these writings have something to say to the present. The historical investigation involved in the picture that is presented here is put at the service of the latter view.[2]

What caught my attention was the statement that the historical reconstruction would serve the needs of the interpretation of the New Testament, on the assumption that its writings had something to say to the present. It is my hope that what follows in this work will enable the writings of the Old Testament to say something to the present, however one understands 'the present'.

Before I proceed I want to reflect further on Bultmann's statement, because doing so will enable me to clarify exactly what I hope the present 'theology' will achieve. Bultmann presents two alternatives: either the biblical texts are used as 'sources' for the reconstruction of beliefs (early Christianity) as a phenomenon of the historical past, or the reconstruction serves the need of the interpretation of the biblical texts on the assumption that they have something to say to the present. The reality is probably more complex than this, but the alternatives are a useful starting-point for reflection upon the genre of Old Testament theologies and their purposes.

Old Testament theology in its modern form is an invention of Protestant, mainly Lutheran, German scholarship of the nineteenth century. It owed its rise to the emancipation of biblical studies from subservience to dogmatic and systematic theology, an emancipation that happened gradually from the time of the Reformation and which accelerated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Basically, this involved a recognition that the thought-worlds of the Old Testament writers differed so fundamentally from those of Enlightenment Europe that it was no longer possible for the Old Testament to support uncritically the use that had traditionally been made of it in dogmatic and systematic theology.

In some cases, the recognition of the distance between Old Testament and modern thought-worlds could be easily accommodated to traditional Christian belief. For example, as it became clear, from voyages of exploration around the world, that the Table of the Nations in Genesis 10 did not include places such as North and South America, the conclusion, that Genesis 10 portrayed the world as it was known to the biblical writers, not the world as it was in its entirety, was a conclusion that did not in any way threaten traditional Christian belief. In other cases, the ancient principle of accommodation could be invoked in order to deal with problems

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[2] R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 9th edn, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1984, p. 600.

arising from the difference between the biblical and modern thought-worlds.[3]

Accommodation had its origins in attempts to explain biblical statements about God that seemed to contradict traditional beliefs about the nature and being of God. A good example was found at Genesis 6.6, which states that God was sorry that he had created humankind. The older translations had, 'it repented the Lᴏʀᴅ' and earlier exegetes were agreed that 'repentance' was something of which God was not capable, since he knew all things in advance.[4] Genesis 6.6 was therefore a statement that was accommodated to human understanding. God did not, in fact, repent or feel grieved about having created humankind. The verse had a rhetorical function, which was to underline the seriousness of the wickedness of the human race prior to the Flood.

The principle of accommodation could be adapted and extended to cover the ways in which God had made himself and his will known to people whose scientific understanding of the world was, to put it mildly, rudimentary in comparison with the scientific knowledge of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

An obvious strategy was to say that for ancient Israelites, phenomena of nature that we can explain in terms of scientific causality were seen by them in terms of divine speaking and acting. Thus, it was a thunderstorm that caused Adam and Eve to flee from the Garden of Eden, and the lightning of that storm that was understood by them to be a flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life. The thunder was for them the voice of God expressing his anger, because they had disobeyed him. This kind of strategy made it possible for interpreters, especially in the eighteenth century, to 'de-supernaturalize' the Old Testament; to rid it of its world-view of angels, miracles and divine interventions. All these had been the interpretations of natural occurrences by a people with little knowledge of scientific explanations. Modern interpreters could make use of the biblical text by 'de-supernaturalizing' it.[5]

This approach could deal not only with the scientific difficulties that the text contained for modern European readers; it could also deal with moral difficulties. These had long been recognized by Christian interpreters,

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[3] K. Scholder, *Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik im 17. Jahrhundert* (FGLP 10/33), Munich: Kaiser, 1966.

[4] See J. Calvin, *Genesis* (trans. J. King), Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965, pp. 248–9, 'The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him . . . the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity.'

[5] See further J. W. Rogerson, *Myth in Old Testament Interpretation* (BZAW 134), Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974, ch. 1.

and a variety of methods had been developed in order to deal with them. Augustine, in the *City of God* (*c.* 412 CE), had recognized that Abraham violated the rule of monogamy by having a child, Ishmael, by his wife's servant Hagar (Genesis 16).[6] Augustine excused Abraham on the ground that what he did was without lust or sexual gratification, and designed to do what his wife, Sarah, was unable to do at the time, to provide him with offspring. Joshua's slaughter of the Canaanites during the occupation of Canaan was excused on the ground that the Canaanites were excessively wicked and that Joshua was carrying out God's sentence of judgement on this wickedness. David's adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent elimination of her husband, Uriah, by placing him in the front line of battle (2 Samuel 11) was dealt with by distinguishing between David in his office as king, and David as a private individual. In his office as king, David was truly the man after God's own heart (cf. 1 Samuel 13.14); as a private individual his behaviour was wicked and justly punished by God (2 Samuel 12).[7]

These explanations became increasingly unacceptable from the seventeenth century onwards, although some survived well into the nineteenth century in some orthodox circles. Where they were rejected, they were replaced by another type of accommodation. This assumed that the moral understanding of ancient Israelites was much inferior to that of modern Europeans, and that actions that we would regard as immoral were not regarded in this way in ancient Israel. A test case was God's command to Abraham to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice (Genesis 22). How could someone believe that God was commanding him to do something as immoral as sacrificing another human being? The answer was that this was only possible in a situation in which people did not value highly the life of individuals, a situation where morality operated at a lower level compared with modern European societies. This led in turn to the view that the Old Testament was, among other things, the record of the process by which God had led the Israelites from crude religious and moral ideas to higher and more sophisticated notions.[8] All this was the background to the rise, in the nineteenth century, of theologies of the Old Testament, and it is not

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[6] Augustine, *The City of God against Pagans* (Loeb Classical Library, trans. E. M. Sanford and W. M. Green), London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965, Book 16, XXV (pp. 120–3).

[7] See generally the section entitled 'Seeming Contradictions to Morality' in T. H. Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, 5th edn, London, 1825, vol. 1, pp. 562–78.

[8] See J. W. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany*, London: SPCK, 1984, pp. 246–7.

A classical statement of the position that was to determine the writing of Old Testament theologies well into the twentieth century was made by Heinrich Ewald in 1843 at the beginning of his *History of Israel*:

> The history of this ancient people is in reality the history of the growth of true religion, rising through all stages to perfection . . . finally revealing itself in full glory and power, in order to spread irresistibly from this centre, never again to be lost, but to become the eternal possession and blessing of all nations.[12]

At this point it is necessary to make an observation which is of critical importance not only for Old Testament theologies in general, but for what will follow in the present work. The historical reconstruction of which Bultmann spoke; the historical survey of beliefs to be found in the Old Testament as envisaged by Baumgarten-Crusius, Steudel and others, and the history of Israel as written by Ewald was not a simple retelling of the story of Israelite religion as found in the Old Testament. It was a scholarly reconstruction of history using, as Bultmann observed, methods of historical investigation developed from the time of the Enlightenment.

As I have sought to demonstrate elsewhere, it was W. M. L. de Wette who pioneered a breakthrough in the critical reconstruction of ancient Israelite history that set an agenda with which all subsequent scholarship has had to come to terms.[13] In his doctoral dissertation on Deuteronomy (1805) and his *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1806–7) de Wette argued that the Old Testament's own account of its history of religion and sacrifice did not agree with what could be established by historical research. According to the Old Testament, Moses established a fully fledged system of priesthood and sacrifice at Mount Sinai following the Israelite exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 19—24 and the material in Leviticus and Numbers). According to de Wette this fully fledged system was not given once-for-all at an early point in Israel's history. It developed gradually over many centuries, and did not reach the form in which it is now presented in the Old Testament until many centuries after the time of Moses.

There is no point in rehearsing here the reasons adduced by de Wette for this radical position.[14] What is important for present purposes is a consideration of the implications of his work. De Wette himself did not

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[12] H. Ewald, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Göttingen: Dietrichs Buchhandlung, 1843, vol. 1, p. 9; ET *History of Israel*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1876, vol. 1, p. 5.

[13] See J. W. Rogerson, *W. M. L. de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography* (JSOTSS 126), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.

[14] See my *Old Testament Criticism*, pp. 20–36, and *W. M. L. de Wette*, pp. 39–61.

see scholarly reconstructed history as something in which the divine will could be discerned. He wrote a *Biblical Dogmatics* that drew upon the post-Kantian philosophy of his friend Jakob Friedrich Fries. Old Testament texts were valuable to the extent that they resonated with insights about the nature of truth and reality that were discerned by means of Fries's philosophy. But if de Wette did not view history in this way, others did; and we have seen above how Ewald understood and expressed the matter. However, de Wette's work posed the following dilemma: either one had to accept the Old Testament's own view of the history of Israelite religion or one had to reject it and replace it with a version reconstructed by biblical scholarship. There was no other possibility.

In conservative and traditional circles in Germany, elsewhere in Europe, and in North America, de Wette's rejection of the Old Testament's view of the history of its religion was seen as a rationalist attack on the inspiration of the Bible and a potential denial of fundamental Christian doctrines. A vigorous defence of the Old Testament picture was mounted by scholars such as E. W. Hengstenberg and J. C. K. von Hofmann in Germany, to name only two, while in Britain attempts to stem what was seen as the German rationalist tide were largely successful until the 1860s.[15]

Mention has already been made of Heinrich Ewald, and it is to him that attention must now be given. Ewald is important because he was the first scholar to publish a full-scale scholarly History of Israel. While he was immensely critical of de Wette's position (he also disagreed with almost every other contemporary scholar working in the field!), he accepted the basic premise of the de Wette position, which was that the Old Testament's own view of its religious history did not agree with that of modern critical scholarship. In the event, Ewald's reconstruction was much less radical than that of de Wette and had the effect of enabling some scholars to accept the results of critical scholarship, while adhering to a view of the history of Israelite religion that was closer to the biblical account than de Wette's version. However, the fundamental point became, and continued to be this: if de Wette's basic premise was correct, then the history of Israelite religion as reconstructed by critical scholarship would always necessarily be provisional. It would be affected by new discoveries, for example in the field of archaeology, new methods, for example in sociology and anthropology, and the theological or anti-theological agendas held by scholars from time to time.

From the perspective of the twenty-first century it seems strange that eminent and thoughtful scholars could accept the basic premise of de

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[15] See my *Old Testament Criticism*, pp. 79–90, 104–11.

Wette's position without realizing that it was certainly incompatible with the idea that 'history' was a process guided by God in which he revealed his will. De Wette himself did not claim this for history. Von Hofmann squared the circle by exempting biblical history from critical reconstruction while subjecting all other history to its rigours. Even such a brilliant and perceptive scholar as William Robertson Smith towards the end of the nineteenth century could believe that the history of Israel, as reconstructed by critical investigation, was a history of divine grace.[16]

It is now necessary to return to Bultmann's formulation to see how it is affected by the immediately preceding discussion. His statement, that historical reconstruction must assist the interpretation of the New Testament, implies an acceptance of the de Wette either/or in terms of the indispensability of critical historical investigation as it was developed from the time of the Enlightenment in Europe (roughly, from the seventeenth century). This means that the background or context for biblical interpretation (the reconstruction) must be ever changing, for the reasons given above. Even in the present writer's short time of encounter with biblical scholarship, the scholarly understanding of the history of Israel's religion has changed out of all recognition. In my student days in the late 1950s, the text book recommended as 'modern scholarship at its best' was G. E. Wright's *Biblical Archaeology*, a book which began with pre-biblical times and proceeded serenely through the biblical periods as contained in the Old Testament: the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the Conquest of Canaan, the Period of the Judges, and so on. Although Wright's account was critical, it was also thoroughly traditional. The general outline of Israel's history as given in the Old Testament was reliable and could be backed up by archaeology.[17] Wright's position was repeated in much greater detail by J. Bright's *A History of Israel*, which was published in 1960.[18] It was therefore something of a shock as a student to have to come to terms with the English translation of Martin Noth's *The History of Israel*, which appeared in 1958.[19]

Noth's history began not with the Patriarchs, the Exodus and the Conquest of Canaan, but with the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan and the formation of a tribal league called the 'amphictyony'. The Old Testament narratives of the Patriarchs and the Exodus were treated as the

[16] W. R. Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1881, pp. 15–16.

[17] G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, revised and expanded edition, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.

[18] J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (OTL), London: SCM Press, 1960.

[19] M. Noth, *The History of Israel*, London: A. & C. Black, 1958, translated from *Geschichte Israels*, 2nd edn, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955.

surprising that the earliest practitioners saw their task in descriptive and historical terms. L. F. O. Baumgarten-Crusius, writing in 1828, saw the task of Old Testament theology as that of giving an account of the historical development of the ideas of the biblical writers, as opposed to how the texts had been used in the Church and in dogmatics. It was an exercise 'without prior views to which it must conform, and without regarding it [i.e. the Old Testament] as a supernatural unity, or containing a double (spiritual) sense through divine inspiration'.[9] According to J. C. F. Steudel Old Testament theology was 'the systematic overview of the religious ideas which are to be found in the books of the Old Testament, including the Apocrypha'.[10] However, scholars such as Steudel did not see their task as purely descriptive. There was a theological purpose, which was to bring to expression the divine process that was at work behind and within the development of human religious ideas.

If we look back to the alternatives stated by Bultmann, those of using the Bible as a source to reconstruct past religious beliefs, or using historical reconstruction to assist the interpretation of the Bible for the present day, we have to say that these Old Testament theologies were firmly on the side of the first alternative. The Old Testament was a source for reconstructing the beliefs that had been held at differing times in ancient Israel. This was not surprising. The recognition that there was a significant gap between the world-views of the biblical writers and modern Europeans had brought a reluctance to cite biblical texts as though they conveyed direct information from God. On the other hand, there was a growing interest in history as a process through which God worked and revealed his will. In 1811–12, B. G. Niebuhr had published a *History of Rome* in which he argued that the hand of God could be seen to be at work in particular times of crisis in that nation's history.[11] The idea that history was a process guided by God seemed also to be a view found in the Old Testament. In the climax of the story of Joseph, when Joseph finally discloses his identity to his brothers, he says,

> do not be distressed, or reproach yourselves for having sold me here; it was in order to preserve life that God sent me before you . . . it was not you who sent me here, but God. (Genesis 45.5, 8)

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[9] L. F. O. Baumgarten-Crusius, *Grundzüge der biblischen Theologie*, Jena: F. Fromann, 1828, p. 7, my translation.

[10] J. C. F. Steudel, *Vorlesungen über die Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Berlin: G. Reimer, 1840, p. 1, my translation.

[11] B. G. Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte*, 1–2, Berlin: G. Reimer, 1811–12; ET by J. C. Hare and C. Thirlwall, *The History of Rome*, London: Taylor & Walton, 1847.

traditions of the tribal league, not as historical events that could be backed up by archaeology. This was all very disturbing for students, and they could hardly be expected to know that Noth's history was simply drawing together positions that had been advocated and worked out by German scholarship in the 1930s. In the period since the publication of Noth's history, the scholarly view of ancient Israel's history has moved in such a radical direction that Noth's work looks distinctly conservative! Scholars labelled 'minimalists' doubt whether very much can be known about ancient Israel in the pre-exilic period (i.e. before 587 BCE), while even 'maximalists' such as W. G. Dever have abandoned any attempt to begin their reconstructions with the Patriarchs and the Exodus.[20]

The effect of this on the writing of Old Testament theologies has been a strong affirmation of the first alternative of Bultmann's either/or: that the biblical texts should be used as sources for the reconstruction of religious beliefs in the past. Good examples of this are R. Albertz's *History of Israelite Religion* or E. Gerstenberger's *Theologies in the Old Testament*. Yet these works are just as subject to the ever-changing reconstructions of ancient Israelite history as any other study, although this is not to say that such work should not be undertaken.[21]

In the present book the nettle will be grasped by affirming Bultmann's second alternative, albeit in a modified form – that the reconstruction should serve the interpretation of the biblical texts in today's world. How is this to be done? The ugly ditch that supposedly separates the world of the Bible from our world(s)[22] will be bridged by concentration upon the necessary part played by modern interpreters and interpretations in bringing biblical texts to expression. This modern activity leaves no part of the interpretative process untouched. The forms and versions of the biblical texts that are interpreted are determined by modern scholarship. In the case of the Old Testament, although scholars work from the traditional, mediaeval Hebrew text, they do not hesitate to alter and correct it where it is considered to be corrupt, either on the basis of evidence from the Ancient Versions or, where that is lacking, by way of informed scholarly

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[20] See P. R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (JSOTSS 148), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992; W. G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

[21] R. Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, 2 vols (ATD Ergänzungsreihe 8), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992; E. Gerstenberger, *Theologien im Alten Testament; Pluralität und Synkretismus alttestamentlichen Glaubens*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001.

[22] It is well described by Mark Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 86–100.

guesswork.[23] The study of the New Testament exhibits this problem even more sharply. The 'New Testament' that is studied by scholars and which is the basis for translations into modern European languages is entirely a modern, eclectic scholarly construct. This is in contrast to what happened for most of the history of Christianity where, prior to the invention of printing, churches had their own local texts. Even after the invention of printing, what emerged as the 'received text' was one based upon reception and use in churches, and not scholarly reconstruction.[24] Returning to the Old Testament, modern translations are affected by the modern study of comparative Semitic philology, as well as archaeological discoveries that shed light on obscure technical terms in biblical Hebrew.[25] Another factor that influences translation today is the rediscovery of the nature of Hebrew poetry, beginning in the eighteenth century. Any modern translation of the Old Testament will be made in the image of its translators, to a greater or lesser extent.

The same is true of theologies of the Old Testament. However hard scholars may strive for objectivity, however hard they may try not to read their own interests and assumptions into the way they organize their work, they will not be able to avoid the fact that they are situated in times and circumstances that inescapably affect and shape what they do. In the 1950s there was a debate between Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad about how a theology of the Old Testament should be organized.[26] Eichrodt had taken the theme of Covenant as his organizing principle. Von Rad objected that this was not as central to the Old Testament as Eichrodt

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[23] An early, and influential, pioneer of this method in the eighteenth century was C. F. Houbigant. See my essay 'Charles-François Houbigant: His Background, Work and Importance for Lowth' in J. Jarick (ed.), *Sacred Conjectures: The Context and Legacy of Robert Lowth and Jean Astruc*, London: T. & T. Clark International, 2007, pp. 83–92.

[24] See the essay by D. Parker, 'The New Testament' in J. W. Rogerson (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 110–33, who notes (on p. 133) that a radical edition of the Greek text of the New Testament prepared by G. D. Kilpatrick was abandoned by the British and Foreign Bible Society in favour of a more traditional edition produced by the United Bible Societies.

[25] J. Emerton, 'The Hebrew Language' in A. D. H. Mayes (ed.), *Text in Context: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 171–99, reviews recent developments in the study of biblical Hebrew. For the effect of archaeological discoveries, the Hebrew word *pim* or *payim* in 1 Samuel 13.21 was unknown until a weight inscribed with this word was discovered in Jerusalem. See Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 91–2.

[26] For Eichrodt's account of this see W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, London: SCM Press, 1961, pp. 512–20. See the summary by F. F. Bruce, 'The Theology and Interpretation of the Old Testament' in G. W. Anderson (ed.), *Tradition and Interpretation: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 390–3.

claimed, and that in any case, it did not do justice to the way in which Israel confessed its faith through its historical traditions. Yet von Rad's magisterial and inspiring theology was fundamentally shaped by the dominating concerns of German Protestant Old Testament scholarship of the 1930s and 1940s, and it is also worth asking whether von Rad's stress on Israel's confession of its faith was in any way influenced by his opposition to National Socialism and his involvement with the Confessing Church.[27]

The same point needs to be made in connection with the various rigorous literary methods of Old Testament interpretation that have become a feature, particularly of German scholarship, since the pioneering work of Wolfgang Richter.[28] Any attempt to introduce rigour and objectivity into the exegesis of biblical texts must be welcomed. But again, it must be acknowledged that even this agenda is shaped by modern concerns, in these cases, ones grounded in the modern study of linguistics and reception criticism.

Taking these points into consideration, the present work will openly acknowledge that its agenda is set by the author's own concerns and interests. The writer is an active Anglican priest whose faith in its present form owes much to modern Lutheran German theology. He is also a humanist and a socialist, which is why writers such as Bloch, Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas are referred to in the course of the work. The agenda will be set subjectively, not by themes drawn directly from the Old Testament, but from the author's intellectual predilections and his reflections on the plight of humanity living in today's world(s). The work will also assume, with Bultmann, that the Old Testament has something to say to today's world(s) when interrogated about problems that face these worlds. This does not mean that the Old Testament will be interpreted as though there were no such thing as biblical scholarship. On the contrary, this will be a scholarly exercise, with Old Testament texts being interrogated and expounded with the help of critical scholarship, but in accordance with an agenda set by one person's perception of the human condition in today's world(s). The work will not meet with the approval of

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[27] See the essay by R. Smend, 'Gerhard von Rad' in R. Smend, *From Astruc to Zimmerli: Old Testament Scholarship in Three Centuries*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, pp. 170–97.

[28] W. Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft: Entwurf einer alttestamentlichen Literaturtheorie und Methodologie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971; C. Hardmeier, *Erzähldiskurs und Redepragmatik im Alten Testament* (FAT 46), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; H. Utzschneider, *Gottes Vorstellung: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Ästhetik und ästhetischen Theologie des Alten Testaments* (BWANT 9.15), Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007. For an overview see J. P. Floss, 'Form, Source and Redaction Criticism' in J. W. Rogerson and J. M. Lieu (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 591–614.

those committed to Radical Orthodoxy, or neo-Barthian Reformed theology,[29] or even adherents of canonical criticism. It if has models, they come from the nineteenth century in the shape of Wilhelm Vatke and W. M. L. de Wette, both of whom were courageous enough to approach the Old Testament from the standpoint, respectively, of Hegelian and post-Kantian philosophy.[30]

An observation that can be made, with some justice, is that a theology that does not deal explicitly with the nature of God and the world does not deserve the name 'theology'. I would reply by alluding to Friedrich Schiller's play *Wallensteins Lager*, the first of three plays about the tragic general on the Catholic side in the Thirty Years War in Europe.[31] The setting is Wallenstein's camp in Bohemia (his power base) at a time when this discredited general is seen by the Catholic rulers as a last resort in the face of the seemingly unstoppable military success of the Protestant Swedish ruler, Gustav Adolf. In *Wallensteins Lager* Wallenstein never appears at all. Yet he is the absent presence whose personality, and differing estimations of it by his followers, affects and penetrates every part of the play. The present work will deal with dilemmas that are integral to modern human existence, and will seek a dialogue in different ways with Old Testament texts from those standpoints. This does not mean that God will be any more absent from the work than Wallenstein is absent from *Wallensteins Lager*.

To conclude: *A Theology of the Old Testament* is a work which, to paraphrase Bultmann, will use the resources of historical criticism in the service of the interpretation of Old Testament texts, on the assumption that they have something to say to the present. It will be up to readers to decide whether the outcome is successful or not; whether the exercise enables them to understand themselves and today's world(s) in new ways.

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[29] As represented by B. Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

[30] On Vatke, see my essay 'What is Religion? The Challenge of Wilhelm Vatke's *Biblische Theologie*' in C. Bultmann, W. Dietrich and C. Levin (eds), *Vergegenwärtigung des Alten Testaments: Beiträge zur biblischen Hermeneutik: Festschrift für Rudolf Smend zum 70. Geburtstag*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, pp. 272–84. On de Wette, see my *W. M. L. de Wette*, pp. 96–120.

[31] F. Schiller, *Wallensteins Lager* in *Sämtliche Werke*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981, vol. 2, pp. 275–311. See also Schiller's account of the Thirty Years War: *Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Kriegs* in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 4, pp. 363–745.