

Preface

As this book goes to press in Great Britain with SPCK and in North America with Fortress Press, I would like to recount how the book came to be. More than twenty years have passed since Judith Longman, then of SPCK, suggested that I should write an Old Testament Theology, and gave me a contract to do this, with a deadline considerably shorter than twenty years later! There are various reasons why it has taken the project so long to be completed, and completed in a way quite different from how I originally envisaged it. My first priority was to complete the biography of W. M. L. de Wette on which I had begun serious work in 1985. This took me until early 1991, although the task of dealing with proofs, indexes and lists of de Wette's publications and letters, prior to the publication of the book in 1992, was also very time-consuming. I then had invitations to deliver special series of lectures – the F. D. Maurice Lectures in London in 1992, six Gifford Lectures in Aberdeen in 1994, and the Prideaux Lectures in the University of Essex in 1998. I suppose that I could have declined these invitations on the grounds that completing my Theology was more important, but apart from not being very good at saying 'no', there was the fact that I had no clear idea in my mind of how I was going to tackle the task of writing an Old Testament Theology. This was in spite of (or perhaps, because of) the fact that I had spent three months at the end of 1994 in Göttingen reading all the Old Testament theologies or their equivalents that I could find that had been published in German in the nineteenth century.

To cut short what could be a long story, I felt that the time to stop prevaricating had come when, in 2004, I received an invitation to deliver the 2006 Thomas Burns Lectures at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. There were six lectures to be delivered over the course of two weeks in the August of that year, and I decided that they must become the basis for the Theology. It would also be an opportunity to get the reactions of colleagues to what I was trying to do. The lectures were delivered under the title 'A Communicative Theology of the Old Testament' and I should like to record my thanks to Professor Paul Trebilco and his colleagues for the invitation and for making the time in Dunedin so enjoyable and profitable.

The present work is a complete rewriting and enlargement of the lectures, although following their basic scheme. Something should be said, first, about the term 'communicative'. This term was key to the lectures and remains key throughout this book. It has, as reviewers may wish to

point out, been used in the present work in a somewhat elastic way. It is a slippery term in any case, as Luhmann has pointed out.¹ My use of it is eclectic, owing something to Habermas's idea of communicative action,² as well as to my reading of Luhmann, and his use of systems theory. But its main thrust in the present work is twofold. First, it helps to emphasize that the purpose of the book is not to try to reconstruct the religious ideas that may have been held in ancient Israel and which were expressed in the Old Testament. Although an Old Testament Theology cannot avoid dealing with the past as the matrix from which the Old Testament emerged, the present work is concerned above all with today's world. It is an attempt to let parts of the Old Testament speak to the concerns of present-day readers. The term 'communicative' is meant to try to convey this. Second, 'communicative' serves as a theme around which certain topics can be organized, most notably in the chapters about disrupted communication in social relationships and divine-human relationships.

One of the most helpful observations made (by Dr M. E. Andrew) on the lectures in Dunedin was that they dealt extensively with actual passages from the Old Testament as opposed to relegating it to numerous references to the subjects being discussed. It was always my intention to try to let the texts 'speak', so to say, and I was thus glad of the encouragement given to me by Dr Andrew on this score. In the present work the space devoted to the exegesis of passages from the Old Testament has been considerably expanded. The translations are my own, and readers will notice that I have accepted many scholarly suggestions about emending the traditional Hebrew text. I hope that experts in Hebrew will be able to understand my transliterations. When I see transliterated Hebrew it often takes me some time to work out what the underlying Hebrew in fact is! I am also aware that extremely sophisticated transcriptions of the Hebrew have been undertaken by members of the 'Richter' school, based upon modern linguistics.³ What I have tried to do is to give an 'oral' version of the Hebrew as it would be pronounced, roughly, in modern Israeli Hebrew pronunciation, and given that modern word-processors do not have all the diacritical marks that one would like. I hope that Hebraists will be able to see what I have done, whether or not they agree with my conclusions.

The various dynamics that have come together in the genesis of this book – the Burns Lectures, the stress on communication (in its various

¹ N. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987, pp. 193–200.

² J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 2 vols, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981.

³ W. Richter (ed.), *Biblia Hebraica transcripta* (ATSAT 33.1–33.13), St Ottilien: Eos, 1991–3.

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senses), the importance of exegesis – have resulted in a very different, and considerably shorter, work than I previously envisaged. At one stage, I thought of reviewing all the theologies that had been written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has also occurred to me that I have devoted no space to my work on Old Testament ethics, especially discourse ethics, which would fit well into the communicative scheme. All this is because my thinking tends to move on all the time, and I do not like to repeat myself more than is absolutely necessary. Another point that may well strike readers and reviewers is the lack of reference to other writers in the field, including Brueggemann, Barr, Childs, Rendtorff, Kaiser and Janowski, to mention only some of the most recent. It goes without saying that I have learned much from these, and many other, writers. If they are not, or hardly, mentioned, it is because I am trying to do things in a particular way that leads me along different paths. Also, I did not want to overload the book with footnotes for the sake of it. The book represents what I want to say now, not what I might have written twenty years ago, or even at some time in the future.

My friend and colleague Philip Davies has read and commented upon the drafts of the chapters as they have emerged, and as always, I have greatly appreciated the discussions that have ensued. My wife Rosalind has, as ever, typed from my longhand – first the lectures, then their revised version with, I fear, too many footnotes in German. I do not need to say how much I have appreciated her help and support.

J. W. Rogerson