

PREFACE

This book is addressed primarily to the church: the believing and worshipping community. It is an introduction to biblical theology of the Old Testament, intended mainly for theological students, ministers, religious educators, missionaries, and laypersons who seek a better understanding of the biblical foundations of Christian faith.

The approach proposed here reflects my teaching experience over a period of years at the Theological School of Drew University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the Boston University School of Theology. This period, the second half of the twentieth century, witnessed the aftermath of World War II, the turbulent sixties with the “death of God” and crisis in biblical theology, the theological crosscurrents of the seventies, and the beginning of the so-called postmodern period in the eighties and nineties. The outline of this Old Testament theology, tested in these cascading experiences, had taken shape penultimately at the climax of my teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary, as indicated by the course summary of 1982 found in Appendix 1.

The reader will not be surprised to hear in these pages echoes of what I have written in *Understanding the Old Testament* (4th ed., 1987; paperback revision, 1997), which also considers theological matters, though in a story/history context. While such a general introduction would be helpful, it is not prerequisite for this theological study.

The biblical quotations in this work are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. My own translations are marked BWA.

It is evident from these pages that I am a debtor to many theologians, especially the two theological giants of the century, Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. Also I have been profoundly influenced by Jewish philosophers and theologians: Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emil Fackenheim, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and especially my good friend and former colleague, Will Herberg, with whom portions of this book have been discussed in vigorous table conversations. Above all I am indebted to my inspiring teacher, James Muilenburg, who was able to interweave creatively the elements of historical study, archaeological research, stylistic (rhetorical) criticism, and biblical theology.

Further, I am very grateful to my students and colleagues in theological schools who have joined me in wrestling with the issues of biblical theology, and to many people in the churches who have helped me to understand the Bible better: the Harvard-Epworth Methodist Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the United Church of Christ, Middlebury, Vermont; the United Methodist Church of Merced, California; the Presbyterian Church of Sunnyvale, California; St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Aptos, California; a conference of ministers gathered at Yanzei University, Seoul, South Korea—to mention a few.

Especially I want to express thanks to my assistant, Steven Bishop, who did

graduate work with me at the Boston University School of Theology. His perceptive advice and editorial skill have been immeasurably helpful in bringing this work to fruition. In addition, my thanks go to the staff of Fortress Press, particularly to Beth Wright, whose editorial skill has enhanced the quality of this work.

This book is dedicated to my colleague in biblical archaeology and biblical theology, the late G. Ernest Wright (see Appendix 2: "The Relevance of Biblical Archaeology to Biblical Theology"). Before his untimely death he encouraged me to keep at the task of biblical theology. I have continued the work, though taking a different path from the one he would have blazed.

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