

Excerpts

Excerpt from the Preface to the Second Edition

I am delighted that Fortress Press has decided to publish a new, slightly revised edition of *The Land*. I am, moreover, profoundly grateful to K. C. Hanson who has given immense effort to the new edition, most especially in preparing a current bibliography on the topic.

The initial publication of *The Land* came at an important point in my own reflection on the Old Testament, my own reflection in a rather characteristic way alongside more general changes and developments in Old Testament studies at the time. As I have indicated elsewhere, the 1970s in Old Testament studies was a time when the major shape of Old Testament study, largely accomplished by Gerhard von Rad and G. Ernest Wright in the wake of Karl Barth, began to unravel. While the upheavals in the discipline were complex and a result of complex contextual factors, in general it is fair to say that it meant, in a most important way, the diminishment of the accent on "God's Mighty Deeds in History." This diminishment entailed as well the end of the old dichotomies that had been so prominent in the field between "history and nature," "time and space."

It was in that context that I begin to see that the Old Testament, in its theological articulation, was not all about "deeds," but was concerned with place, specific real estate that was invested with powerful promises and with strategic arrangements for presence in the place as well. Once I had seen that much, then it was a ready development to see the dialectic in Israel's fortunes between landlessness (wilderness, exile) and landedness, the latter either as possession of the land, as anticipation of the land, or as grief about loss of the land; it was on that basis that my argument in the book took shape, all aspects of land being referred to the God of covenant Torah.

The categories and methodologies that now dominate Old Testament studies were then scarcely on the horizon, as Norman K. Gottwald's decisive study, *The Tribes of YHWH*, was published only in 1979. My own approach, reflected in the book, was not yet well informed or self-conscious about such emerging methodologies. As a result I offered what was still rather a study of a "biblical theme" after the manner of the older, more innocent so-called biblical theology movement. It is fair to say, I believe, that that perspective has been continued in the more recent book by Norman Habel, *The Land is Mine*:

Six Biblical Land Theologies. His book is an important advance upon my own but is I believe in general congruent with it. I estimate that my book merits reissuance because, for all its innocence, the book represents a responsible harbinger of what was to come in the field, largely through the impetus of Gottwald and the scholars who have been informed by his work. ...

I should add a word about method. When I wrote this book, it was clear to me that historical critical approaches to the subject of land were, by themselves, not adequate. For the intent of the book was to move beyond historical critical issues to the contemporary crisis of land, contemporary in terms of the many land disputes including that of Israel and the Palestinians, the environmental agenda, and the farm crisis at the time of my writing. It was at the time not at all clear how to move beyond historical critical perspectives, not clear for me and not generally clear in the discipline. By that time Walter Wink had uttered his famous verdict about the "bankruptcy" of historical criticism, and Brevard S. Childs had made a first run at what turned out to be "canon criticism," an attempt to remove the Bible from the control of historical judgments. The moves to come later beyond historical criticism, however, at that time were less than clear, and my book is rightly critiqued as lacking theological rigor and clarity.

Since that time, of course, methodological matters have become much clearer with rhetorical criticism and social scientific approaches now prominent alongside historical criticism, the latter newer method including ideological critique as a component of social scientific method. And, of course, a book could now be written on the land that is much more rigorous and clear about method than is my own is reflective of the state of the discipline at the time of writing. The lack of clarity about method, of course, was reflective of a general deficit in our understanding of how to move beyond historical matters, even though a theological reading of the Bible "as scripture" assured the legitimacy of such a move.

Now, unlike then, it would be proper to consider the ideological force of land texts and to see how such articulations served either the ideological legitimacy of land owners or to see how the same text might serve the hopes of those who anticipate receiving land but in the present moment control no land. ...

In any case, my book is an attempt to make clear that biblical faith—and the God of the Bible—cannot be left disconnected from real public life in the world with its sociopolitical, economic dimensions. While a great deal has been done interpretively and methodologically since my book, the book nonetheless

stands as a marker in the movement of scholarship, albeit a marker now in the somewhat removed past, as interpretation has taken up more systemic issues of faith and lived reality. By "systemic" I mean that Israel's embrace of land and Israel's practice of land in conformity with the will of the creator (or in defiance to the will of the creator) is quite in contrast to the notion of the more-or-less ad hoc singular intrusions of God into history. Such a "systemic" approach to land as an arena of sustained and sustainable blessing is an opportunity for further reflection about the land as nourisher and sustainer in contrast to discontinuous events that have the force of masculine intrusiveness. Wendell Berry has written that any society is likely to treat its land in the same way that it treats its women. While the twinning of these concerns may be a bit enigmatic and perhaps smacks of a masculine definition of interpretive questions, the point is worth reflection. A systems approach to the theology of the land takes land as blessed creation that evokes a particular kind of wisdom about how to live well and responsibly in the land. Such a judgment now sounds rather commonplace in interpretation, but it was not so at the time of the writing of the book. ...

The large witness of the Bible concerning land testifies that such uncurbed land management as legitimated in current "globalization" finally cannot succeed, even if it imagines the extension of its power "to the uttermost parts of the earth." It seems unlikely on the face of it, but entirely credible upon thoughtful reflection, that the Bible in its odd, insistent way stands as an abiding warning to and testimony against uncurbed technological exploitation in the interest of self-enhancement and self-aggrandizement, and as an abiding invitation to alternative inchoately offered in the tradition. The Bible is relentless in such testimony but, of course, that testimony requires an endless procession of interpreters who can make the connection between old texts and contemporary temptations and opportunities. This book is one voice that I am glad will continue to sound in making that connection.