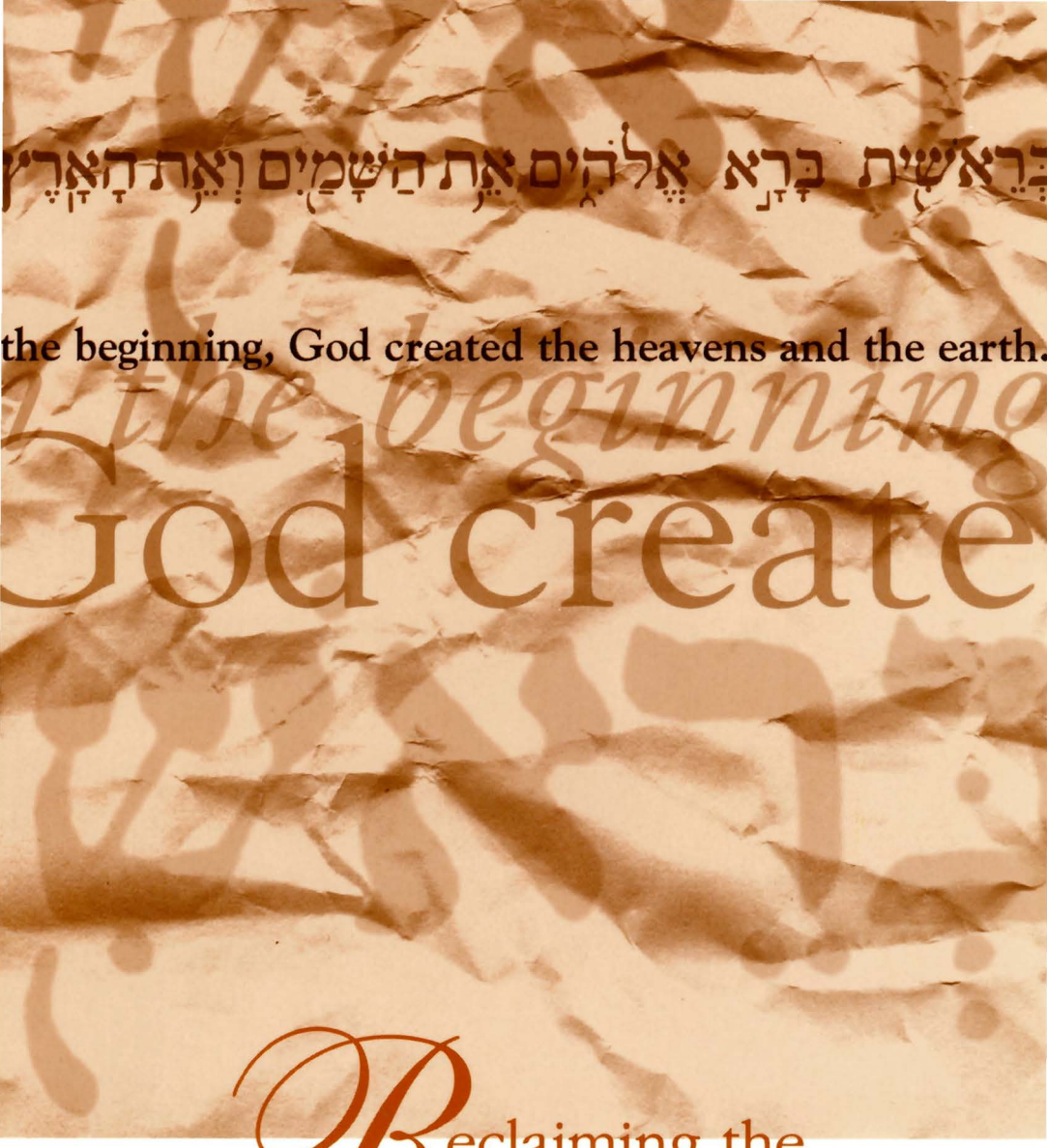

Reclaiming the Old Testament:

Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen

Edited by Gordon Zerbe

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CMBC Publications
Winnipeg, Manitoba
2001

CMBC Publications
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg Manitoba
R3P 0M4

Cover: Roberta Fast

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data
Main entry under title:
Reclaiming the Old Testament

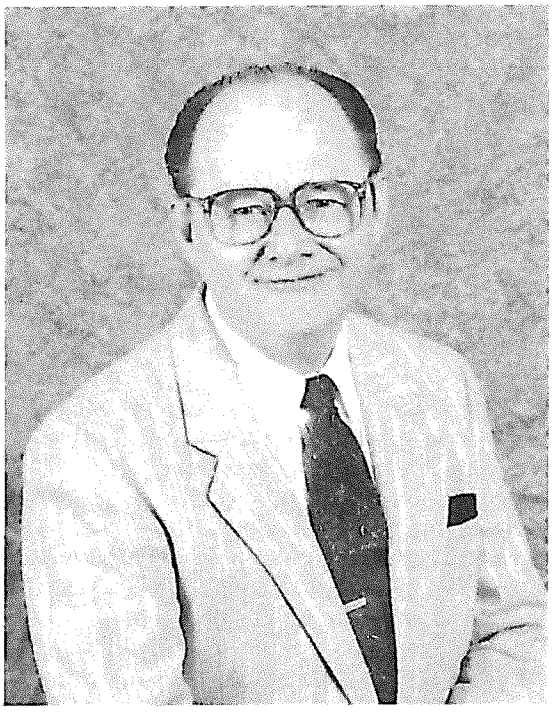
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN: 0-920718-70-1

1. Janzen, Waldemar. 2. Bible (O.T.)—Criticism, interpretation, etc.
I. Janzen, Waldemar. II. Zerbe, Gordon M.

BS1171.2.R42 2001 221.6 C2001-910404-9

Printed in Canada
by
Christian Press
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2L 1L4

Waldemar Janzen



Formative Professor
Mentor to Students
Direction-Setting Dean
Biblical Scholar

Acknowledgements

In early 1996, Wes Bergen and Gary Daught sent to CMBC Publications a proposal for a volume that would highlight the reading of the Old Testament for today. At the same time, an ad hoc committee of Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) faculty, charged with envisioning appropriate retirement celebrations for Waldemar Janzen, was also thinking of a publication in his honour that would give special attention to the Old Testament. From that dual impetus has emerged the present volume.

In the fall of 1996, Gerald Gerbrandt as editor and Sheila Klassen-Wiebe and Wes Bergen as further editorial consultants, envisioned the shape and target of this volume, and began to invite contributions. Meanwhile, Gerald's energies were increasingly absorbed by the task, as President, of bringing CMBC into Mennonite College Federation, now Canadian Mennonite University. In June 1999 I was invited to take over primary editing responsibilities. My initial enthusiasm for the project could not be tapped, however, as a result of a mid-summer injury that sent me to emergency and required a slow recuperation. Needless to say, it is a pleasure to see this volume finally come to completion.

Appreciation must be expressed to the contributors to this volume, for taking the time and energy to write substantive and engaging essays, and for being patient in waiting for its appearance. I've been grateful to colleagues Gerald Gerbrandt and Daniel Epp-Tiessen for advice at many points along the way.

The CMBC Publications Committee, chaired by Adolf Ens, must be thanked for its constant support for the project. Margaret Franz, staff member for CMBC Publications, worked tirelessly as copy-editor, and Glenn Bergen put in many extra evening hours doing page formatting and design.

Generous publication subsidies were provided by First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, and by the Gerhard Lohrenz Publication Fund.

Finally, on behalf of CMBC, we thank Waldemar for his paradigmatic modelling of professorial virtues, and for his relentless commitment to keep the Old Testament, alongside the New Testament, in the centre of the church.

Gordon Zerbe
August 2000

Contents

A Tribute to Waldemar Janzen

Gerald Gerbrandt

The certificate of recognition presented to Waldemar Janzen at his official retirement dinner in the summer of 1997 characterized him as Formative Professor, Distinguished Biblical Scholar, Direction-Setting Dean and Mentor to Students. These accolades were not chosen quickly or lightly by his colleagues. Years of working with him at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) and observing him in action led to these words. Although far from complete, they do provide helpful windows onto someone who has played a pivotal role at CMBC for so long.

Formative Professor. In 1956 Rev. J. J. Thiessen, then chairman of the CMBC board, interviewed a young student at Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago about a possible teaching position at the College. The conversation went well, and Waldemar was pleased to receive an invitation to come to Winnipeg to become part of the CMBC faculty. Much to his surprise, however, when the announcement of his appointment appeared in Der Bote, he discovered he had been appointed to teach German rather than Bible, the direction his studies at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and Mennonite Biblical Seminary had taken him.

This minor misunderstanding did not deter him, and for the 45 years since, Winnipeg and CMBC have been his home. During his early teaching years faculty members were expected to be flexible, and so he taught courses throughout the curriculum, from German to Greek, from Psychology to Spiritual Life. But Old Testament was his first love and, as CMBC matured and his preparation in the field increased, he became the CMBC Old Testament professor.

In this role he has inspired more than two generations of students. Waldemar was the consummate professor who worked with greatest diligence at the art of teaching. His careful preparation considered both content and method. He worked hard at remaining abreast of recent research even though he retained a healthy skepticism of the changing fads of academia. Perhaps influenced by his studies in German literature, he was especially sensitive to the literary nature and elements of the Biblical text. Although he recognized the importance of good exegesis, his attention always moved beyond the individual text to larger themes which could be traced and studied throughout scripture-covenant, law, salvation, anthropology were only some of the topics he introduced to students. In his teaching he explained the intricate nuances of a text and Biblical interpretation,

and yet he did it simply and clearly, frequently with the help of well chosen and developed analogies. Sometimes the significance of what he said and taught was not caught immediately, but years later students would remember and treasure what he had taught them.

Mentor to Students. Waldemar Janzen taught Old Testament. But more than that, he taught students—he taught them about the Old Testament and he taught them how to live. His office door was always open, a sign to students that they were welcome to come in, just to visit, to discuss an assignment, or for advice. Over the years hundreds of students made use of this opportunity, some for a one-time chat, and some for extended counselling. For many this began a relationship which has continued for years after attending CMBC.

Not only did Waldemar mentor individual students; he also modelled what it meant to live a humble and faithful Christian life. Appropriately, in the 1999-2000 school year Waldemar taught a course on the Biblical theology of hospitality. This was the first time he had taught this as a formal course, but throughout his teaching years this theme was part of who he was. For years a regular event at CMBC was the invitation to the home of Waldemar and Mary Janzen for an evening of advent goodies, sharing and singing. Regularly, CMBC alumni who return to Winnipeg for a visit make sure they stop by at the Janzen's house to see how they are doing, and to once again experience the hospitality and friendship they learned about through earlier visits. His words, his life and his actions have been samples of life under God's rule, and as such are signs of the Kingdom of God.

Direction-Setting Dean. CMBC was founded in 1947 by a people with a lofty dream—building an academically excellent college with university connections and recognition—but with limited experience in higher education. When Waldemar joined the CMBC faculty the school was still in its infancy, less than ten years old. The dream was there, but the school had a long way to go in fulfilling its aspirations.

Waldemar quickly established himself as the academic leader of the faculty. This was recognized by his appointment as the first registrar of the College in 1958, only two years after arriving. A major agenda for the next few years was negotiating a relationship with the University of Manitoba. In those years universities tended to view all teaching of religion with some suspicion. This was true even of religion courses taught within the university—how much more so when done in a Bible college run by Mennonites. The challenge of persuading the University of Manitoba to recognize work done at CMBC was thus substantial. Waldemar, together with his colleagues, were convinced it could be done and systematically worked at it. Through countless discussions and building personal relationships, these efforts were rewarded. In 1964 CMBC became An Approved Teaching Centre of the University of Manitoba, an arrangement largely crafted by Waldemar and one which served CMBC and the university well.

These discussions no doubt played a role in pushing Waldemar to work more systematically through a philosophy of education for CMBC. This resulted in his writing a booklet in 1966 with the title A Basic Educational Philosophy for Canadian Mennonite Bible College. This publication placed CMBC within the larger field of higher education, and gave CMBC a clearly formulated mission which remained its guide for many years to come: "CMBC aims to offer non-professional theological education on a post high-school level, together with sufficient instruction in the liberal arts to form a rich background and setting for such education" (italics in the original). Two years later, in 1968, Waldemar became CMBC's first Academic Dean. In this role he helped the school make major strides forward as a strong college. Clear and systematic policies were developed. A strong faculty was hired. Faculty research and writing were encouraged. As registrar and dean, Waldemar Janzen helped set the direction for what CMBC became.

Biblical Scholar. Although actively involved in academic and institutional administration at CMBC, Waldemar was trained as a Biblical scholar, and he took this role seriously. He possessed the natural intellectual curiosity that all good scholarship requires. He was convinced it was important for CMBC that its faculty remain in on-going dialogue with the scholarly guild. But perhaps most importantly, he believed that scholarship was a tool which, when used carefully, could help the Christian church deal with the difficult issues of the day. His Biblical scholarship thus was always one which kept an eye on the contemporary context and on the needs of the church.

A special concern of his in this context was the Old Testament. Anabaptism tends to have a radical New Testament orientation. The Old Testament is then de-emphasized, or even considered superceded. Waldemar considered this a deficiency and a major loss. In order for us to be a truly Biblical people, he argued, the Old Testament must be allowed to speak. As he says in the article included in this volume, "Is it not high time, then, that we reinstate the Old Testament as a full-fledged conversation partner in our ongoing theological discourse?" Much of his scholarly activity was devoted to studying the Old Testament in a way which allowed it to be God's word to the church, whether this was in individual essays (Still in the Image), in a systematic treatment of ethics (Old Testament Ethics), or in a detailed study of the text (Exodus in the Believers Church Bible Commentary series). This present volume, with its title (Reclaiming the Old Testament), is an effort to recognize this commitment, as well as make a contribution to it.

Completing the picture. The four phrases included in the certificate of recognition are apropos, but they do not paint a complete picture. At least two elements are missing. Integral to Waldemar's

life and work is the church. Waldemar spent his early years in Russia at a time when the church could only exist underground. But even there his family taught him that they were not alone, but were part of the larger people of God. Although special events had to take place behind drawn blinds, Bible reading and ceremony bound them to the larger church.

Throughout his years in Winnipeg he has been a faithful member, contributor and, since 1978, an ordained lay minister at First Mennonite Church. He spent a sabbatical doing pastoral work at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church in Ontario. Much of his writing has been in the service of the church. The number of publications in his bibliography devoted to lay education reflect this: Sunday school curricula, Bible study guides, radio addresses, etc. Not included in the bibliography are some 300 popular articles he wrote for church publications. When he first experienced eye difficulties some years ago he wondered whether he should move into pastoral work. Perhaps most indicative of his commitment to the church was his remaining at CMBC for the time he did. I know he also enjoyed the work, but when invitations came to him to teach at larger and more prestigious schools, he turned them down because of his commitment to serve the church and college he loved.

A further theme missing from the list is family. Waldemar came to CMBC single, but soon he became a husband and a father. In both roles he demonstrated commitment and dedication. His wife Mary became an active participant in the college community, and an invaluable support to him. It is not coincidental that the primary paradigm in his Old Testament Ethics is the familial one. Whether he recognized the prominence of this in the Old Testament because of his own commitment to family, or whether he consciously patterned his own commitment to his family on the basis of the Biblical model can be debated. But the importance of Mary, and their three children, Martin, Hildi and Edwin, in his life is sure.

In closing, a more personal note. I personally have experienced each of the characteristics identified in the certificate of recognition presented to Waldemar. During my first year at CMBC as a student, he was at Harvard working on his Old Testament doctorate. I was introduced to Waldemar in my second year through a course on Biblical Theology which he taught together with Peter Fast. Through that course I became excited about the Old Testament—he was my formative professor. When I continued my studies in Old Testament, and eventually returned to CMBC to teach in the area, his Old Testament scholarship was a model for me. When I became Academic Dean at CMBC his way of approaching the task guided me. Most importantly, however, his mentoring became a friendship which has influenced me more than I can tell. On behalf of the many, many others who have benefitted from Waldemar's contributions, I thank him.

Freeing the Old Testament to Speak

A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation[1]

Waldemar Janzen

The preference of authority given by sixteenth-century Anabaptism to the New Testament over the Old will be assumed rather than argued in this paper. It has been documented in several scholarly studies[2] and is frequently acclaimed by its modern heirs as "one of our Mennonite distinctives." Nuances on this point among early Anabaptists are less important for our purposes than the general Anabaptist belief that "where the Old Testament is superseded by the New it is no longer authoritative for Christians,"[3] together with the assumption that the Old has indeed been replaced by the New in most matters of greatest importance.

It has often been pointed out, and must be acknowledged here, that the early Anabaptists did not reject the Old Testament in an overtly Marcionite fashion.[4] They accepted it as true divine revelation for its own time and believed that it retained "a certain author-

[1] This essay was first published as a chapter in *The Church as Theological Community: Essays in Honour of David Schroeder,* ed. Harry Huebner (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1990), 90–112.

[2] Key essays on this subject have been helpfully collected in Willard Swartley, ed. *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), hereafter cited as *Essays*.

[3] Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: Presuppositions, Principles and Practice," in *Essays*, 8.

[4] William Klassen, "The Relation of the Old and the New Covenants in Pilgram Marpeck's Theology," in *Essays*, 26.

ity 'outside the perfection of Christ'."[5] This understanding, however, does not outweigh the fact that the early Anabaptists drew a clear line of separation between the Testaments and subjected the Old Testament to the overriding authority of the New in all important matters that dominated theological discussion during the Reformation era.

The practice of drawing a distinction between the Testaments is such a hallmark of early Anabaptism that John H. Yoder lists it, along with the hermeneutical community, as one of the two distinctives of Anabaptist hermeneutics when compared to the hermeneutics of the mainline reformers.[6] He attributes to this distinction a highly positive valuation, a "fundamental exegetical importance, as one of their century's few ways of focusing the historical character of revelation."[7] He sees in the Anabaptist position an incipient understanding of salvation history, "a meaningful movement from the Old Testament to the New," as compared to a Greek understanding of timeless truth underlying the synoptic view of the Testaments that marked Zwingli and the mainline Reformation.[8] More than that, Yoder makes the claim that these two distinctives of Anabaptist hermeneutics, that is, the hermeneutical community and the historical relationship of the Testaments, "have been confirmed by further theological research and by experience."[9] These assessments will require our further attention.

In his "Afterword" to *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, entitled "Continuity and Change in Anabaptist-Mennonite Interpretation," Willard Swartley comments extensively and approvingly on the extent to which the Mennonite interpretation of the Bible has preserved the first of Yoder's distinctives of Anabaptist hermeneutics, the hermeneutical community.[10] One looks in vain, however, for a

[5] Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics," in *Essays*, 8. See also John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," in *Essays*, 26.

[6] John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," 28. I gratefully acknowledge the following observations of my respondent, Walter Klaassen: 1) The relationship between the Testaments broke open anew for all Reformation parties after the medieval four-level interpretation of scripture was abandoned. 2) All reformers tended to give precedence to the New Testament in some fashion. 3) The diverging positions between the mainline reformers and the Anabaptists were generated by controversy. This underscores the fact that the problems addressed in the present paper, though focused on the Anabaptist-Mennonite situation, are wider Christian problems.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 27. See also William Klassen, "The Relation of the Old and the New Covenants in Pilgram Marpeck's Theology," in *Essays*, 100 and 103.

[9] John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," in *Essays*, 27. See also Ben C. Ollenburger, "The Hermeneutics of Obedience," in *Essays*, 49, where he characterizes the "sharp distinction between the Old and the New Testaments " as a "preunderstanding, because it stands as a principle of interpretation, not as a result of it."

[10] Willard Swartley, "Afterword: Continuity and Change in Anabaptist-Mennonite Interpretation, " in *Essays*, 328–330.

comment on Yoder's second distinctive, the relationship between the Testaments.

My impression, gathered over 30 years of Bible teaching in the context of Mennonite schools and churches, is that the formal continuity between early Anabaptists and present-day Mennonites in this area by far exceeds that of an emphasis on the hermeneutical community.[11] The belief that the Old Testament has been superseded by the New flows easily from Mennonite lips, learned and unlearned alike. Coupled with this understanding is a disdain for the mainline churches which are seen to have somehow stayed back in the lesser fullness of the Old Testament in the areas of laws, politics and war.

However, the continuity between early Anabaptists and present-day Mennonites in this respect is merely formal and superficial. Both the motivation and its function are vastly different then and now. In 1966, Yoder could say that "the origins of Anabaptist originality on this point [the relationship between the Testaments], already visible in September of 1524, have not yet been traced."[12] Meanwhile, James A. Sanders[13] and other proponents of canonical criticism have taught us much about the mutual interaction of canon and community. A religious community expresses its identity in the story it adopts as canonical, and is shaped, in turn, by that canon. It appears that the early Anabaptists were people who, in that eschatologically sensitive century, were especially imbued with the reality of the rule of Christ over his Messianic flock.[14] Obedience to the Lord at all cost, and regardless of consequences for self or the structures of society, was paramount. They were repeatedly distracted from this quest for obedience by apparently compromising positions that found scriptural support in the Old Testament: support for infant baptism and people's church, for the oath and for the use of violence and war. Theologically inexperienced and unsophisticated as they were, they confronted these challenges to obedience with a hermeneutical *tour d'force*, namely, the neutralization of the Old Testament as authoritative canon.[15] Whether right or

[11] It is instructive in this connection to consult "Scripture in Individual Confessions," in Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America: An Introduction* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 333–369. Even a quick glance will reveal the vastly greater use of the New Testament in these confessions. In the Ris Confession, for example, the ratio of Old to New Testament references is approximately 1:4.

[12] John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," in *Essays*, 28.

[13] See the section below on "The Promise of Canonical Criticism."

[14] The events at Münster have attracted attention in this respect, due to their violent and excessive nature, but the Münsterites should not be isolated or set in opposition to the remaining Anabaptists as far as an eschatological orientation is concerned.

[15] Ben Ollenburger says, "Their separation of Old Testament from New Testament grew out of this commitment [of prior obedience to Christ] and as a result of difficulties

wrong, it was a bold and, to them, costly move in the interest of obedience.[16]

For most Mennonites in the Western world, on the other hand, an eschatological urgency towards costly obedience in the context of the Messianic community has hardly been the stamp shaping our existence. We have become largely acculturated rather than separated. And we have come to accept as legitimate Christian goals such concerns for this world as the liberation of the politically and economically oppressed and the preservation of our biological environment from exploitation and pollution. Hardly ever—unless occasionally in matters of military service—is our Christian obedience impeded by others through their recourse to the Old Testament. In fact, we have indulged at times in sympathetic attitudes towards certain Old Testament-based concerns and movements, like liberation theology or Jubilee-year economics.[17]

Why, then, should most Mennonites still be so ready to claim that the New Testament has superseded the Old? I would suggest the following factors: At bottom, one senses an aversion to the Old Testament that has much in common with true Marcionism. Again and again, doubts are expressed about the identification of the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New. This is prompted, above all, by the realism of the Old Testament in which God's activity cannot be disentangled from history, war and judgement. It is perceived that the loving Father of Jesus Christ "would not do such things." Marcion himself was more consistent here, realizing that a rejection of the "lower, evil" God of the Old Testament would require the excision of large parts of the New Testament as well.

None of these objections to the Old Testament would have disturbed the early Anabaptists. They certainly believed in a God who sovereignly ruled the world with power, was involved in all aspects of it and was to be feared as a judge. At the roots of the modern rejection of the Old Testament we must posit at least three developments.

First, individualism was spawned by the Enlightenment and reached its climax in the emphasis of our time on self-realization

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which arose when they were not separated." "The Hermeneutics of Obedience," in *Essays*, 49.

[16] While this zeal for obedience is humanly attractive and explains the early Anabaptists' stance towards the Old Testament, I agree with my respondent, Ben Ollenburger, that our positive valuation of their obedience does not justify them. Similarly, my call to embrace the whole canon again is based on our identity as Christians rather than a preference rooted in contemporary trends.

[17] This is true even if not all may follow John H. Yoder in interpreting Jesus' call to kingdom ethics as constituting the inauguration of the Jubilee year. See *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 26–77.

and individual rights. A New Testament divorced from the Old can, albeit only with violence, be made to serve this individualism, while the Old Testament is totally impervious to it. Second, religion has gradually adapted itself to the private sphere, often seen as the inner haven of the soul in a turbulent outer world. Once again, it is possible, if not legitimate, to privatize the New Testament, but never the Old. Third, this individualizing and privatizing trend merges with the contemporary psychological and New Age tendencies to seek salvation as the ultimate human goal, not in a transcendent reality embracing history and the world (the Kingdom of God), but in an inner tranquillity of the individual self. Once again, the New Testament can be forced to serve this end, but the Old is perceived as so incompatible with this view that it has to be rejected, or at least neutralized.

All such motivations for demoting the Old Testament from an authoritative role in Christian life are, of course, not specifically Mennonite phenomena, but are to be found widely in Western Christianity. The only difference is that Mennonites can establish a formal and superficial continuity between this neo-Marcionite mood and the Anabaptist New Testament orientation.

Not only are the motivations for the modern rejection of the Old Testament totally different from the Anabaptist motivations, as has just been shown; the function of the modern attitude is also very different. While the early Anabaptists de-emphasized the Old Testament so as not to be detained by it from radical Messianic obedience, modern Mennonites (and others) avoid it so as not to allow it to disturb their inner tranquillity. For the Anabaptists, a radical New Testament orientation meant costly obedience and persecution; for moderns it means a more undisturbed, soothing religion of psychological well-being.

Assessing the Losses

Whether one posits that the Old Testament has been superseded salvation-historically by the New, as Yoder claims for the early Anabaptists, or that the two are incompatible from a Neo-Marcionite perspective, one is left with a reduction of the canon.[18]

For the early Anabaptists, this removed an arsenal of theological arguments used by their opponents to blunt radical obedience of the Messianic community (Menno's "church without spot or wrinkle") to

[18] The body of writings accepted as offering direct authoritative guidance for faith and life, and to which both individuals and the church feel accountable, has been reduced in sheer volume by 77 percent or, in my edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, from 1270 to 293 printed pages. Possibly this quantitative reduction of material for which one is responsible in the first instance is in itself a major factor enticing many to be New Testament (plus Psalms) Christians.

its risen Lord. For the post-Enlightenment Neo-Marcionite, Mennonite or other, it removes a constant challenge to the modern search for an individualistic religion of inner tranquillity.

It is only lately and gradually, I believe, that we are beginning to feel the losses also. In the wider church, the possibility of perverting a New Testament detached from the Old has nowhere been demonstrated more clearly and shockingly than in the "German Christians" movement of the Hitler era. It was no accident, then, that the interest in biblical theology in the earlier twentieth century took hold first in the Old Testament field.[19]

No such awakening to the losses and dangers inherent in a truncated New Testament canon has, to my knowledge, occurred in the Mennonite church. It is true that individual Mennonite Old Testament scholars receive a respectful if limited hearing in schools, at study conferences and in church-oriented publications. This is especially true if they use the beloved word "covenant" freely; if they "help" us with "problems" like war in the Old Testament or creation versus evolution; and if they isolate certain "Mennonite-compatible" themes like shalom or justice.

Much of the attention given to the study of the Old Testament takes place in the context and mood of "providing background" and "coping with problems." Only a small minority studies the Old Testament with a sense of expectancy, waiting to hear a word from God. All the while, the majority keeps on confidently repeating the Anabaptist dictum that the Old Testament has been superseded by the New.

But, as others have recognized before us, there are losses on the theological battlefield. It is not the subject of this paper to trace the neglect of the Old Testament in the church generally, but to focus on the Anabaptist New Testament orientation and its formal continuation in the Mennonite church of our time. That orientation, as I argued earlier, had its main root in the Anabaptists' desire for a more unimpeded, radical obedience (discipleship) which, in turn, was the prerequisite for the eternal salvation of individuals. Even though the content of this obedience was discerned from the scriptures communally (hermeneutical community) and lived out communally (the emphasis on church discipline), the end (*telos*) of the Christian endeavour was the eternal salvation of the individual.

In this, the Anabaptists were at one with Luther in his quest for a merciful God ("Wie finde ich einen gnädigen Gott?"). For both, the

[19] Although the initial impetus came from Karl Barth's commentary on Romans (1918, 1921), it was taken up most forcefully by Old Testament theologians like Walther Eichrodt, Ludwig Koehler, Wilhelm Vischer and many others. James D. Smart surveys this development in *The Past, Present and Future of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 70–74.

way to salvation was Jesus Christ. The difference lay not in the *telos*, but in the different understanding of Jesus Christ as the way. While both stressed God's grace and human response, or justification and sanctification, Luther accented the former, Anabaptists the latter. As to the end (*telos*), again they were in substantial agreement, not only with each other but also with the Catholic church of the Middle Ages and of their time, albeit, the Anabaptists pursued this end more radically, with greater eschatological zeal and with less concern both for their own fate in this world and for the fate of this world as such. As a result, Anabaptism could dispense with an explicit theology of the world outside the church, even though it acknowledged in a general way that a measure of God's rule over that world was maintained by divinely ordained magistrates.

This deficiency of a theology with respect to large and significant areas of life can be exemplified in two areas, each of great prominence throughout centuries of Mennonite existence: family and land. Mennonites had large families. Due to their many migrations, family ties became more important than for the more sedentary population that established its identity more through place than through genealogy. There was an explicit Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of the spiritual family, the church. One entered it by baptism upon personal decision, symbolized one's bond to it through communion and submitted to its authority and discipline. But what about the children of Mennonite parents who were either too young to enter the spiritual family or, more problematically, who decided against joining it? Should they be abandoned as strangers or apostates? Or did the biological bond have a theological significance all its own? By way of practice, certain trends developed, such as the tendency to have large families. Was this due to the pragmatism of a farming people that needed workers? Or of a persecuted minority that needed potential converts from within the clan? Or were children a blessing from God, independent of their potential church membership? Only recently has some serious theological thought been given to the children of the second generation,[20] but I know of no theological work on adult children remaining outside the church.

Land is as important as are family bonds in Mennonite history and life. From earliest times on Mennonites have sought new land, have developed great land-tending skills and have been sought after as a desirable agricultural population, from the Jura mountains in Switzerland and the Weichsel delta in Prussia, to the Ukrainian steppes, the Paraguayan Chaco and the North American prairies.

[20] Marlin Jeschke, *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1983).

Nevertheless, a theology of land seems lacking.[21] Migrations appear pragmatic in character; they were motivated by a search for freedom from oppression and for greater prosperity. High quality farming resulted from a struggle for existence and from a belief in the virtue of frugality; it hardly issued from a theological sense of stewardship of the earth. Homeland literature, where it was written at all, bears the stamp of nostalgic reminiscence or of blood and soil ideology, but rarely of a theology of places in the economy of God. While occasionally the Exodus appears as symbol of salvation, the rich land theology of the Old Testament has scarcely been addressed by our ancestors other than in a spiritualized form: we are pilgrims and exiles in this world on the road to a heavenly Canaan.

Why have we not developed a biblical theology of family and of land? Because the New Testament does not give much overt attention to them,[22] while the Old Testament, where these themes are prominent, has been superseded, as we all know. The fact of the matter is that the New Testament builds on the theology of the Old in such areas, setting certain accents differently here and there, but seeing no need to reaffirm what Jesus and the early church could assume. Thus, while the family structure of society is taken for granted in the New Testament,[23] God's rich and unlimited grace is joyfully affirmed: God can give mothers and brothers and sisters in the faith to those rejected by their natural families (Matt 12:46–50), just as God can give a future, that is, an ongoing spiritual family, to those unmarried for the sake of God's calling (Matt 19:10–12; 1 Cor 7:1–7). With respect to land (or wealth), inherent responsibilities are assumed[24] but extended beyond the confines of the "Promised Land" (Acts 1:8).

Family and land are but two illustrations. A fuller listing of areas of life that exist in a theological vacuum for Mennonites would include at least four major groupings: 1) Creation: including land,

[21] Waldemar Janzen, "The Great Trek: Episode or Paradigm?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 51 (April 1977): 127–139 offers a brief sketch of an implicit and minimal (Russian) Mennonite theology of land, especially 135–139.

[22] See Waldemar Janzen, "Geography of Faith: A Christian Perspective on the Meaning of Places," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 3 (1973): 166–182, reprinted in Waldemar Janzen, *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Newton: Faith and Life Press; Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982), 137–157; and Waldemar Janzen, "Land," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 143–154.

[23] Note Jesus' affirmation of the duty to parents (Mark 7:9–13), his provision for his mother (John 19:26–27), the conversion and baptism of a whole household (Acts 10:2, 44–48; 11:14; 16:31; 18:8), and the concern for the family structure in the *Haustafeln*, for example, Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–22.

[24] Note Jesus' concern for the poor, the early church's experiment with community of goods (Acts 4:34–37) and Paul's concern and collection for the impoverished Jerusalem church (1 Cor 16:1–4).

place, nature, body, medicine; 2) Society, political: including government, law/justice, human "rights," liberation; 3) Society, economic: including business, work, play; 4) Family: including children before baptism, children outside the church.

In contrast to our Anabaptist-Mennonite ancestors, however, who were ready to exclude many of these areas of life from an active Christian mandate, we include them in *de facto* fashion, only without an adequate theology. In other words, we have widely accepted the general Christian view of our time that this world is not only means, but also end (*telos*) of God's redemptive work.

Having abandoned the Old Testament as superseded, however, we have gathered up our various concerns for this world either from other Christians or from the secular world around us. We pursue justice largely on the basis of philosophical assumptions of human rights and self- fulfilment. We express concern for politically and economically oppressed groups or peoples under the banner of liberation. We chime in with ecological concerns under the threat to survival. We deny military conquest as legitimizing land claims, but are susceptible to the unbiblical argument of aboriginal possession. We proclaim the spiritual family but feel instinctively that it cannot and should not displace the bonds of blood altogether. Meanwhile, the Old Testament, lying fallow among us, contains rich theological resources for a theology of stewardship of earth and land, of justice, of liberation, and others.

Is it not high time, then, that we reinstate the Old Testament as a full-fledged conversation partner in our ongoing theological discourse?![25] A projection of the manner in which this could happen will be made in the next section of this paper.

The Promise of Canonical Criticism

The model for the theological re-enfranchisement of the Old Testament to be proposed here will draw upon the rediscovery of the methodological and theological significance of the biblical canon, namely, from "canonical criticism." Its most prominent proponents in North America have been Brevard S. Childs and James A. Sanders.[26] Many others, however, have joined the ranks of those searching for ways to overcome the fragmentation of the Bible under the impact of historical-critical scholarship by giving serious attention

[25] This invitation is based on our claim to be Christians, that is, people created and shaped by the canon, not on any attempt to adjust the canon to our current self-perception.

[26] Of the numerous publications of Childs and Sanders, the following seem most central to their thinking: Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970); *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979); *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia:

to the fact that the Bible in its totality emerged and functioned first of all as the authoritative canon of a believing community.[27] It is therefore seen as a body of authoritative writings inseparably linked to a believing community within which it emerged and the identity of which it, in turn, defines.

James A. Sanders, taking an anthropological approach (although with a theological interest at heart), sees believing communities of all persuasions engaged in an ongoing process of expressing their changing identity by a commensurate shaping and reshaping of their canon. Sanders certainly does not understand canon as something totally relative and changeable, merely reflecting the self-perception of a community at any given time. Two principles are at work in the canonical functions of texts: the principle of adaptability and the principle of stability.[28]

Sanders looks at the canonical process from a detached vantage point as an analytical observer of a social dynamic found in all groups, even though he himself has a personal interest in the methodological and theological consequences of the academic discipline (as he understands it) of canonical criticism for the Christian church and its canon, the Bible. In principle, the process of canon formation and adaptation could be observed equally well in other religions.

As a matter of fact, I adopted the methodology of Sanders' version of canonical criticism in the earlier sections of this paper when

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Fortress Press, 1984); *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972); "Hermeneutics," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 402–407; *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). A fuller listing of works by Childs and Sanders, together with an incisive comparison, can be found in Timothy A. P. Reimer, "Canon as Product or Process?: A Comparative Analysis of the Canonical Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs and James A. Sanders" (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1987).

[27] Walter Brueggemann, Joseph Blenkinsopp, Ronald Clements, Hartmut Gese, Peter Stuhlmacher and Rolf Rendtorff, among many others, use a new understanding of canon, in some form or other, to relate the Testaments to each other. See also such summaries of contemporary trends in this area as John H. Hayes and Frederick C. Prussner, "The Canon and Old Testament Theology," in *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 268–273; George W. Coats, "Old Testament Theology in the Context of the Canon," in Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker, eds., *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 251–254; and Henning Graf Reventlow, "Das Problem des Kanons," in *Hauptprobleme der biblischen Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 125–137 and "Neuansätze einer biblischen Theologie," ibid., 138–172, with extensive bibliography.

[28] James Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 43f., 48ff.

I suggested that the Anabaptists' rejection of the Old Testament was a consequence of their self-understanding as a totally obedient Messianic community. Further, I implied, again in keeping with Sanders, that a different self-understanding of the Mennonite church today calls for a commensurate expansion of the canon to include a theologically re-enfranchised Old Testament. In other words, the Mennonite church has *de facto* become a community which understands itself as one called to responsibility for creation, and having a concern for the political-economic liberation of oppressed groups, and is therefore in need of a canon embodying this identity.

Such an adaptation of canon to perceived group identity would, however, be facile and self-serving if left without a counter-dynamic maintaining the permanence and stability of canon, and thereby its capacity not only to reflect identity, but also to critique it on the basis of a truth claim transcending the church's self-perceptions and needs. While this fact is acknowledged by Sanders, as was mentioned already, greater help towards this end can be gained, in my opinion, from Brevard S. Childs.[29]

In a somewhat circular fashion, the church has determined the canon, and that canon in turn defines the church. In spite of the lack of unity in the church's delimitation of the canon, especially with respect to the inclusion or exclusion of the Apocrypha, there is a *minimal* agreement among all Christians that at least the books of the Hebrew Bible plus the books of the New Testament are canon for *all* Christians. Furthermore, the church has recognized these texts in their *final* form as canon. Historical-critical analysis may legitimately and helpfully discern earlier stages of the text and earlier forms of canon, but these are of interest to the Christian exegete and theologian, according to Childs, only insofar as they help in elucidating the final form which alone is authoritative, that is, canon. It is this final form, then, which must be the object of exegesis and the basis of theology. Furthermore, as a believer speaking from within the community of faith, Childs does not treat the emergence of the canon anthropologically, as the community's formulation of its identity, but theologically, as the community's apperception of God's revealed truth.

Such understanding of the canon seems to me to be completely compatible with the formal and oft-repeated Anabaptist-Mennonite view of the Bible as embracing both Testaments as true Word of God. That the Anabaptists, in actual faith and practice, reduced the

[29] In spite of considerable divergences between Sanders' and Childs' understanding of canonical criticism, and a lively debate between them as well as their adherents and critics, I am convinced that their perspectives to a large extent support, supplement and correct each other. See Timothy A. P. Reimer's thesis "Canon as Product or Process?" in which he compares the canonical hermeneutics of Childs and Sanders.

canon to the New Testament in order not to be detracted from true Messianic obedience by the Old Testament, seems to me to be the result of a hermeneutical deficiency. They lacked a method of interpretation that would allow them to hear the whole biblical canon as authoritative Word of God for their own time without having a blunting effect on the radical call of Jesus.[30] In this respect, Childs and others have drawn methodological consequences for exegesis and biblical theology from their understanding of canon that can help us hear the Old Testament as God's Word for us without fear that the call of Jesus might be blunted or muted.

The hermeneutic to be outlined in the next section is my own version of contemporary canonical criticism/hermeneutics. It leans heavily on other authors, especially Brevard S. Childs and cautiously, George A. Lindbeck, but does not wish to be seen as a consistent application of any one extant contemporary hermeneutical or methodological school.[31]

Before we proceed to this task, however, it should be said that my invitation to Mennonites to adopt a methodology that can be called in some sense "canonical" is not new. Such invitations have been extended in recent times by at least three Mennonite scholars: John H. Yoder,[32] Jacob J. Enz[33] and A. James Reimer.[34] References to their proposals will be made in the further course of this paper.

Proposing a Hermeneutical Model

Before I present a hermeneutical model that again unites the Testaments as theological partners within the canon, I wish to make

[30] The mainline reformers were no more successful in this respect. Luther's internal yardstick of "whatever promotes Christ" ("was Christum dringet") in both Testaments, and the Reformed tendency to read both Testaments on the same level, had their own unsatisfactory consequences. However, they preserved the theological relevance of the Old Testament.

[31] For examples of Brevard Childs' own exegetical application of his method, see his *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 147–219, and his commentary, *The Book of Exodus*. See also Timothy Reimer, "Canon as Product or Process?" 83–117. For further application of canonical exegesis, see Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982). See especially his programmatic statement, 2–4. The already classic monograph of George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), seems to me to provide a broad and compatible theological framework for canonical criticism as I envision it. Its profound and multi-faceted implications need further testing, however, both in my own thinking and in the broader theological world. See especially chapter 6, "Toward a Postliberal Theology."

[32] John H. Yoder, "The Authority of the Canon," in *Essays*, 265–290.

[33] Jacob J. Enz, "Canon: Creative Biblicism as a Hermeneutical Principle," in *Essays*, 165–176.

[34] A. James Reimer, "Theological Framework for the Authority of the Scriptures," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 4 (Spring 1986): 125–140. See also Glenn Brubacher's response in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 4 (Fall 1986): 241–244.

perfectly clear what my hearers or readers should not expect.

The model to be proposed will not seek to smooth out the historical, literary and theological diversity within the scriptures into a seamless robe on the doctrinal-confessional level. I agree most heartily with A. James Reimer (and George Lindbeck) that "a direct theological reading of the Bible as a whole in the context of the Christian community of faith"[35] will yield the sense of a narrative with an intended unity, a story directly comprehensible to the "naive" Christian reader, and that this "literal" (not "literalistic") sense of the "canon as a whole is the locus of authority for the Christian."[36]

I part company with Reimer (who follows Vander Goot), however, when he imposes an inherent dogmatic structure on this narrative, namely that of "creation-fall-redemption-consummation." I demur even more when Reimer asks us to take especially seriously the interpretive guidance of "summaries, confessional statements, and creeds." [37] It is precisely at this point, I believe, where the history of biblical interpretation was led into one of its major aberrant tendencies. The early church employed two main instruments to define what was Christian both for its own instruction and for apologetic purposes: the canon and the confessions of faith or creeds. While the canon defined comprehensively the texts genuinely expressive of Christian identity, creeds (like the Apostles' Creed) functioned to summarize canonical teachings or to highlight certain ones as it struggled with heresies.

As long as creeds, and eventually dogmatic systems, remain functional tools for instructional, apologetic, liturgical or other purposes, they are necessary and useful. However, as soon as they become hermeneutically authoritative, that is, control what the canon is allowed to say, they have a reductionist effect on biblical interpretation and a divisive impact on the church.[38] The high point of such a creedal-dogmatic straight-jacketing of scripture was reached in the "High Protestant Scholastic" view of the seventeenth century,

[35] A. James Reimer, "Theological Framework for the Authority of the Scriptures," 136.

[36] Ibid., 137. A similar perspective seems to pervade the work of George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, for example, 120.

[37] A. James Reimer, "Theological Framework for the Authority of the Scriptures," 138.

[38] On the last point, see Waldemar Janzen, "Maintaining a Spirit of Unity in the Face of Current Diversities," presented at the Consultation of the Council of Mennonite/Brethren in Christ Moderators, Calgary, January 19, 1989; published in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 7 (Fall 1989): 211–225. In contrast to the widely held opinion that strong creedal affirmations unify the church, I argue that the opposite is true, that a canonical approach could achieve the end of Christian unity much more effectively. It should also be clear that creeds, where they become "hermeneutically authoritative," do so *de facto*, generally in spite of the protestations of those who promulgate or hold them.

well characterized by Yoder as holding the assumption "that the propositional content of all the canonical writings is in such a way timelessly true and coherent that it is fitting to lift all the significant statements out of their specific setting, whether in narrative, poetry, or epistle, and to reorganize them according to modern [creedal-dogmatic] principles of coherence . . . and that the coherence of all of the texts recognized as canonical is the coherence of one logical set of propositions in no way contradictory to another."[39]

Perry Yoder has drawn attention to a transformation in the Mennonite confessions of faith through the centuries, from, in my terminology, a canonical to a creedal character.[40] I see a canonical approach to scripture not as helpfully guided by, but as freeing us from, the misguidance of a hermeneutically authoritative use of creeds and, equally important, of creedal thinking.[41]

It is precisely in the turn from creedal to canonical hermeneutics that I see the greatest hope of overcoming the Anabaptist-Mennonite rejection of the Old Testament without jeopardizing the ideal of faithful discipleship which led to that rejection. But before developing that hope further, I must mention another road not taken. In those biblical theologies of our century that have been most sensitive to the theological needs of the church, the belonging together of the two Testaments has often been sought in the tracing of overarching themes. The most prominent of these have been the themes of covenant and of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). It is inevitable that such approaches will "leave the Old Testament behind" in the no longer relevant past in some way or other. It becomes either the type preparing the ground for the higher New Testament antitype, or the promise fulfilled in the New Testament, or the Old Covenant superseded by the New. The articles of both Yoder and Enz are good illustrations of this phenomenon.[42]

[39] John H. Yoder, "The Authority of the Canon," in *Essays*, 268f.

[40] Perry Yoder, "The Role of the Bible in Mennonite Self-Understanding," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Calvin Wall Redekop and Samuel J. Steiner (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 69–82; especially 78f. "I propose that the earlier creeds express a hermeneutical community reflecting on its identity—thus they are longer, narrative, and seem to systematize a common way of reading the Bible; while the later creeds grow out of a community reflecting on its theological identity. Put bluntly, these statements are becoming a witness to beliefs about the Bible or doctrine, which church members ought to hold," 79.

[41] By creedal thinking I mean the approach to the Bible that expects it to speak univocally, yielding a seamless robe of propositional truths. George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* constitutes a critique of "creedal thinking," that is, of the "cognitive-propositional theory of religion" (together with the "experiential-expressive" theory) from the vantage point of his "cultural-linguistic" theory. The latter subordinates creedal formulations to the "grammar" of the community's story (based on the canon), which alone is the locus of authority for the believing community. See, for example, 64, 112ff.

[42] See notes 31 and 32, above.

This is not to deny that such treatment may be in order with respect to certain biblical themes; it is merely claimed here that it is not an adequate hermeneutic for relating the Testaments as such to each other.[43] In fact, the canonical approach to be presented will not attempt to relate *the* Old Testament to *the* New Testament which, as parts of the Christian canon, recede as theologically independent entities divided by a clearly defined boundary line affecting all their themes.[44] Instead, it will be argued that a canonical approach should consider all themes within the boundaries of the whole canon and discern with respect to each theme where the most important biblical treatments affecting it can be found.

With this last statement I have introduced the central feature of my proposed hermeneutical model. In this model, the canon marks out the field within which theological dialogue must move if it is to be, or remain, Christian. It could be compared to a basketball court within which the ball must be bounced; if the ball leaves the court, it is "out of bounds." To pursue our analogy, within this court there are rules and realities governing the ball's movement, but there is no spot within the court where the ball could not at some time legitimately bounce. To say it more plainly, there is no section, book or text in the canon (both Testaments) that should, in principle, be excluded from conveying God's Word to the community for which it is canon, or that should, in principle, be defined as lesser truth, or less God's Word, than another. To return to our analogy, even the weakest player on the court, as long as he/she is tolerated on the team (that is, constitutes a part of the canon) can at some time properly be in control of the ball and can, occasionally, even score a point. That does not mean that he/she ought not at most times play supportively and yield the shots at the basket to the more skilled players. In decoded language, there is room in this canonical approach for ranking one biblical text as a "stronger player," that is, as having a more weighty theological voice than another in most matters. The life and words of Jesus will generally qualify as "strong players."[45] But it does not allow for declaring one part of the canon or an internal norm as having priority, whether this be the New

[43] See note 50, below, and my attempt to sketch such an approach with respect to Exodus and salvation.

[44] Hartmut Gese has gone so far as to deny the separate existence of an "Old Testament" prior to a "New Testament," seeing the canonization of the Christian Bible as one continuous canonical process. See Hartmut Gese's essay, "The Biblical View of Scripture," in *Essays on Biblical Theology*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1981), 9–33. But already for Luther the boundary line between the Testaments was less significant than the witness to Christ holding them together.

[45] See note 50, below, and my attempt to sketch such weighting with respect to Exodus and salvation.

Testament as such, or the story of Jesus, or the Sermon on the Mount, or the gospel versus the law.[46]

Such a view assumes, then, that a contemporary exegete/biblical theologian in search of the biblical message on any given topic—such as Christology, liberation, sin and forgiveness, stewardship of creation, sexuality and marriage, war and peace—will first take stock of the biblical texts (shorter or longer) within both Testaments that seem relevant to that topic. He/she will then proceed to "interface" (Childs' term) these texts, allowing them to deliver their own distinctive message on that topic. The assumption is that, in a general way, these contributions will support and supplement each other as they all function within the parameters of the canon. For example, they will all speak within the framework of assuming one sovereign God, creator of the world and shaper of its history and destiny. Within such broad common assumptions, however, the intertextual dialogue will be polyphonic rather than homophonic. Texts will support, challenge, modify or supplement each other. At points they will appear to be contradictory. Such diversity will be evident just as much *within* each Testament as *between* the Testaments. Thus an Old Testament text apparently advocating war will find itself in just as much tension with other Old Testament texts advocating peace as with New Testament texts. On some topics, like family, land or work, the sheer bulk of material will be found in the Old Testament. Furthermore, we may well discover that, on many a topic, the combined chorus of Old Testament texts defines the biblical position, a position to which the New Testament's contribution consists of little more than marginal notes, at best adding minor modifications. I believe this to be the case with respect to a biblical theology of work, for example.[47] On other topics, the New Testament's volume of contribution to a topic will be more prominent.

Furthermore, in this process of the interfacing of texts an interpreter will find that the texts isolated originally as immediately pertinent will soon lead him/her to yet other texts that initially seemed to lie outside of the subject in question. Ultimately, the pursuit of a single topic would draw in ever wider circles of texts, resulting eventually in a biblical theology snowballed around an initial topi-

[46] With Childs, "There is no hermeneutical key for unlocking the biblical message, but the canon provides the arena in which the struggle for understanding takes place." Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 15. Childs may overstate the case a little here. There are certain guidelines according to which the "struggle for understanding" must be carried on, as he himself has demonstrated often and well. See note 30, above, and our discussion below.

[47] For a detailed substantiation of this claim, see Waldemar Janzen, "The Theology of Work from an Old Testament Perspective," a paper first read at the MCC-sponsored Colloquium on the Theology of Work, Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 15–17, 1988; published in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10 (Spring 1992): 121–138.

cal kernel. In this view, it appears of little importance with which text our quest begins. A New Testament starting text would draw other texts into the discussion, possibly first from within its own New Testament book or section (gospels, Pauline letters), then from the rest of the New Testament and eventually from the Old Testament. A beginning point in the Old Testament would expand in analogous fashion to the New Testament.[48]

The chief function of the biblical interpreter is to adjudicate the relative weight of the texts interfaced in discussion of a given topic.[49] Once again, in this model no superior authority is granted *a priori* to any canon within the canon or to any other internal norm. This adjudicating in the dialogue between texts belongs to a second level of dialogue, namely that between interpreters.[50] Rather than positing a set of absolute principles, this model calls for a genuine hermeneutical community consisting of all—past and present—who claim the Bible as their canon.[51] As a result, many theological questions will be debated for a long time.[52]

[48] For a legitimation of a separate Old Testament theology and, by implication, a New Testament theology as preliminary to a biblical theology, see Brevard Childs, "A Canonical Approach to Old Testament Theology," in *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 1–19.

[49] In response to several questions raised in the discussion period following the original presentation of this paper, I must plead with my readers to remember that no attempt is made here to present a full exegetical-theological methodology, much less a digest of biblical theology. My task consists of a call for admitting the Old Testament to partnership with the New in the biblical-theological arena, but not to spell out what happens in that arena. It is in the latter process (referred to here, in shorthand, as "interfacing") that aspects of content, of history and of eschatology would come to bear on the relative weight accorded to specific texts. For example, the abrogation of Old Testament food laws would be recognized, not because it happens in the New Testament—Jesus and the apostles probably observed them—but because the era of the admission of the gentiles had begun at Pentecost.

[50] I acknowledge gratefully the warning of my respondent, Ben Ollenburger, that the call for interfacing texts from both Testaments may suggest a simplistic biblicism, ready to speak directly to modern issues to the disregard of the tasks of systematic theology. Such a reading is not at all intended here; again, I must draw attention to the limited task of this paper. My concern here, however, remains: that the systematic-theological task include both Testaments.

[51] It should be understood clearly that it is not the object of this discussion to determine which of the texts are more fully the authoritative word of God. All of them were word of God in certain past contexts. The conversation has as its goal to ascertain in what sense, and in what order of priority, these texts should be heard as word of God in *our* context. An example: A mother tells her child in context A: "Be careful!" In context B: "Don't linger so long; get going!" Finding itself in context C, the child needs to ask: "How do I hear mother's words now?"

[52] At the Mennonite scholars' meeting in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature sessions in Chicago, November 19, 1988, John H. Yoder encouraged those present to carry on their theologizing on the model of rabbinic discussion, in which there is room for a patient playing out of contradictory opinions. There is much in this invitation that attracts me, but I think the recent models

On the other hand, such an approach, though "long-suffering," can lead to closure. The question of slavery is an example. It took centuries of debate, but at this time in the church's history a consensus has been reached. No Christian interpreter can advocate slaveholding as a Christian option today. And let us remind ourselves that this consensus was not achieved on the basis of a New Testament rejecting slavery, as compared to an Old Testament accepting it. Both Testaments accepted this social institution of their time, but both also contained seeds that, in the course of interpretation, could grow into an understanding which rejected slavery.

This illustration also makes clear that the hermeneutical community, often understood by the Anabaptists in synchronic fashion as the presently gathered groups of believers, is here understood to be diachronic, embracing the church of all ages.[53] Decisions reached in more limited communal and temporal contexts, though necessary, must retain a preliminary status.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us return to the claim made earlier that we are in need of the theological voice of the Old Testament, not only to round out our understanding of all theological areas, but also to provide us with a biblical-theological basis in areas only marginally treated in the New Testament. Often such a deficiency is the result of two contrary assumptions: While the New Testament assumes the ongoing validity of the Old as the Word of God, we assume that the Old has been superseded by the New. To the extent that something is not on the New Testament's theological map, it does not exist for us.

The bi-polar theme, liberation-salvation, offers a primary illustration. The chief paradigm of God's saving action in the Old Testament is, of course, God's liberation of the descendants of Jacob/Israel from Egyptian enslavement as forced labourers. It is a political-economic liberation, although it issues in a reality of faith and hope as well: our God is a God who wants our deliverance from whoever and whatever enslaves us. The ultimate parameters of this faith em-

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of canonical criticism (like Childs', as well as the one under discussion) hold the same promise, without being burdened by various aspects of rabbinic tradition unhelpful to Christian theology, for example, its legal(istic) orientation.

[53] In this respect I agree with the spirit of James Reimer's proposal. The hermeneutical community must include the church of the early trinitarian and christological debates, just as it must include—as we have come to realize only recently—the church in the Third World. While canonical criticism takes seriously the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, assigning the church's interpretive tradition to a second level of discourse, it does not dismiss that tradition, as the Reformation (including Anabaptism) did in the name of scripture, or as the Enlightenment did in the name of reason. Partnership in dialogue within the court of the canon by all who accept it as canon is the essence of the canonical criticism proposed in this paper.

brace God's salvation from the cosmic enslavers, "sin, death, and devil" (Luther), toward an eternal "rest" (earlier applied to the land of Canaan, for example, Deut 12:9) with God, that is, a "homeland, a better country [than geographical Canaan], that is, a heavenly one" (Heb 11:16). The New Testament focuses on this ultimate salvation. What about the liberation of human beings from enslavement here and now, and their need for a homeland? Is that no longer God's will? In Jesus' concern for the sick, the poor and the prisoners there is enough indication that he affirmed earthly liberation as modeled in the Exodus, as well as eternal salvation from the power of Satan. However, much of this indication is sparse and assumed. Should we not reclaim the full-blown model of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt as a paradigm of God's will for liberation of peoples and groups from political-economic oppression? That is the call of certain brands of liberation theology. While some, from a materialist orientation, go so far as to consider such liberation the real concern of the church, others would like to complete the biblical mandate by adding the concern for (external) liberation to that of (spiritual) salvation.

A canonical reading as advocated here, however, would see such a simple addition of the Old Testament perspective to the New Testament as a shortchanging of theological exegesis. It is interfacing and dialogue between texts, not addition of texts, that is called for. Our needs are not met by adding an Old Testament liberation mandate based on the Exodus to the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ. We need, rather, to reread the Exodus in the light of Jesus Christ. We would then see the Israelites and the Egyptians caught in a common captivity to sin, as the Old Testament also acknowledges. We would recognize the need of both to be saved by the means demonstrated in the suffering servant love of Jesus. We would find a prominent link between Exodus and Jesus in Isaiah 40–55, where a new Exodus from Babylon is promised. To achieve it, God uses both the violent power of the nations (Cyrus) and the (suffering) servant power of God's people. Into this interfacing of texts would soon be drawn texts about God-willed life in exile, for example, Jeremiah 29 or Daniel 1–6. The resultant theology would embrace both liberation and salvation. It would acknowledge God's will for external human freedom and well-being, but also the fact that exile and suffering have their place in a biblical perspective on the God-led path of salvation.

I can do no more here than sketch in the briefest fashion the dynamics and nature of a biblical theology for which a canonical approach holds promise. In particular, I want to conclude with the claim that such an approach should not be felt by us as a "reversion" to "sub-Christian" ways, but rather as a fuller appropriation of the riches of God's truth and grace than a truncated reading of the New Testament can ever offer.

The Old Testament in Mennonite Preaching

Adolf Ens

Mennonite professors of Old Testament, Waldemar Janzen included, have sometimes lamented the under usage of this portion of the canon in the church. They do this not because they feel that "their" part of the Bible is being neglected, but because they are convinced that New Testament concepts, such as church (people of God), gospel and salvation, cannot be properly understood without an understanding of the theological and religious background of Israel within which "Christian" thought developed. This paper attempts to assess the actual use of the Old Testament by Mennonite leaders in their writing and preaching and to identify some of the rationale for their pattern.

Anabaptists were strongly biblicist from the outset.[1] According to Fritz Kuiper, in the sixteenth century there was essential agreement among them that the Gospel call was to the whole of life. This greatly influenced their manner of understanding the Bible. The New Testament received the bulk of their attention.[2] While "they would

[1] Menno Simons' much-used *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* (1539) interestingly does not devote a separate section to the topic of the Scriptures. But its section on "The Vocation of the Preachers" includes this sentence: "We certainly hope that no one of a rational mind will be so foolish . . . as to deny that the whole Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testament, were written for our instruction, admonition, and correction, and that they are the true sceptre and rule by which the Lord's kingdom, house, church, and congregation must be ruled and governed." *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1956), 159–160.

[2] Note Waldemar Janzen's brief documentation in the opening essay of this volume of the scholarly consensus regarding the "preference of authority given by sixteenth-century Anabaptists to the New Testament over the Old."

also read the Old Testament, including the Apocrypha," they would "interpret them according to the Gospel."[3] Further, with their stress on obedience and personal application to everyday life, they emphasized the New Testament over the Old.[4] This tendency to give priority to the Bible as the moral authority for life (rather than for its authoritative doctrine) was further accentuated in second-generation Anabaptism. C. Norman Kraus points out that in the Confession of Peter Jansz Twisck (1565–1636) the article on "The Written Word of God" deals with "the relative authority of the old and new covenants for regulating the Christian life." While the old covenant was "perfect" for those who lived before Christ, the New Testament is "the new law of Jesus Christ."[5] To the extent that Mennonite preaching aimed more at guiding church members in the practical aspects of Christian living than in doctrine, it is not surprising that sermons would be based predominantly on the New Testament.

The Dordrecht Confession (1632) originated among the Dutch but exercised its authority much longer among the descendants of the Swiss and South German Mennonites (Mennonite Church) who translated it into English (1725) and continued to use it in America for a long time. Its article on Scripture entitled, "The Law of Christ, which is the Holy Gospel, or the New Testament," reflects Twisck's understanding of the New Testament as the "new law" and does not mention the Old Testament at all.[6] The Cornelius Ris Confession (1766, translated into German 1849, into English 1902) had a long, if somewhat unofficial, influence among Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonite groups and their descendants (General Conference) in North America.[7] Its second article, "Of the Holy Scriptures," explicitly identifies these as "all those books known as regular or canonical, from the Pentateuch to Revelation." Furthermore, it accepts them "as the only infallible and sufficient rule of faith and conduct to which we owe supreme reverence and obedience."[8]

Among Mennonites in Russia the confession, which was attached to the catechism,[9] was the one most widely known and used. The second of the 20 articles in this *Glaubensbekentniß der*

[3] Fritz Kuiper, "The Pre-eminence of the Bible in Mennonite History," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41 (July 1967): 225.

[4] Henry Poettcker, "Menno Simons' Encounter with the Bible," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 40 (April 1966): 113, 116.

[5] C. Norman Kraus, "American Mennonites and the Bible," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41 (October 1967): 313.

[6] Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America: An Introduction* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 64, Article V.

[7] Ibid., 28.

[8] Ibid., 87.

[9] *Katechismus, oder kurze und einfältige Unterweisung aus der heiligen Schrift, in Frage und Antwort, für die Kinder in den Schulen* (St. Petersburg: Christliche taufgesinnte Gemeine in Rußland, welche Mennoniten genennet werden, 1870).

Mennoniten in Preußen und Rußland[10] was on the "holy Scriptures." It explicitly specified that "all canonical books of the Old and New Testaments" were authoritative. Since "Christ and the apostles cited the Old Testament in their teaching," we also "believe that it is the pure dependable word of God and the eternal truth."

The English language versions of the "Articles of Faith" of the General Conference Mennonites in North America (1933, 1955) retain this second article with some variation in its text.[11] In the Canadian reprints of the catechism mentioned above, the attached *Glaubensartikel* are modified (and reduced to 18 in the process) and the article on the Scriptures has been omitted.[12] However, this does not mean that their affirmation of the role of the Bible, or of the Old Testament, had diminished. Ältester Isaak M. Dyck, elder in Mexico of the Old Colony church, exhorted his members to read the Bible faithfully. "God's Word is like an ocean," he wrote. "Every time one reads in it one discovers something new. Therefore, dear children, let the Word of God be the guide of the whole of your life."[13] Dyck goes on to urge specifically that they read not only in the New Testament but also in the Old, for everything is written to teach us.

It seems clear from a survey of Mennonite confessions and catechisms that the Anabaptist commitment to the centrality of the Bible as the authority for the faith and life of the church and its members has not diminished. In the following section an attempt is made to see how this commitment in principle expressed itself in practice. What is immediately obvious is that the preserved writings of Anabaptist authors are full of scriptural quotations and allusions. Later Mennonite confessions and catechisms are liberally undergirded with biblical citations. The Bible is the authoritative basis for the church's teaching.

In assessing actual Mennonite use of the Old Testament in comparison with the New, several test samples were taken. An effort was made to include data over a longer period of time and over the various areas in which churches of Anabaptist descent have located. Similar kinds of data from third-world Mennonite groups were not readily available. The comparisons that follow are thus confined to Mennonite groups of European descent.

[10] *Glaubensbekentniß der Mennoniten in Preußen und Rußland* (St. Petersburg: A. Jacobson, 1870).

[11] Reproduced in Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church*, 107, 155.

[12] This catechism-confession can be identified by the introduction written for it by the Reinländer Ältester Johann Wiebe on June 27, 1881. It was reprinted, for example, in Scottdale: Mennonitische Verlagshandlung, 1929; and in Altona: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1973, 33rd ed.

[13] Isaak M. Dyck, *Auswanderung der Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde von Canada nach Mexiko* (Cuauhtemoc: Imprenta Colonial, 1970), 42.

Sixteenth-Century Anabaptist Writings

Scriptural references in the writings of two sixteenth-century Anabaptists were tabulated as a kind of bench mark. Menno Simons represents the Dutch stream and Pilgram Marpeck the South German. Menno was trained as a Roman Catholic priest while Marpeck was a layman. Marpeck's writings reflect more consciously on the relation of the Old and New Testaments than do those of any other Anabaptist author. Yet only some 12 percent of his Scriptural references are to the Old Testament, compared to 23 percent for Menno (see Table 1). The material in their writings is, for the most part, not sermonic. The Scriptural references are scattered throughout the text. Some are foundational for the writing in which they are found; many are more incidental or have reference only to a specific point within the writing. Nevertheless, the data compiled for Menno Simons and Pilgram Marpeck are probably a more accurate reflection of these writers' use of the Old Testament than are those given for the sermon collections. First, they are based on a much larger volume of writings than is the case in the sermon samples. Second, all Scripture references—not merely the "text" on which the sermon is based—are tabulated.

Table 1. Summary of Old Testament Usage in Selected Anabaptist Writers and Mennonite Sermon Texts

	Century & Sample Source	Total Bible References	% Old Testament
1.	16th – Pilgram Marpeck	1717	12.2
2.	16th – Menno Simons	3868	23.0
3.	19th – Johannes Molenaar	6	0.0
4.	19th – S. F. Sprunger	20	20.0
5.	20th – Paul Erb	28	35.7
6.	20th – Jacob H. Janzen	75	44.0
7.	20th – E. G. Kaufman	13	7.7
8.	20th – G.D. Huebert	53	24.5
9.	20th – A.H. Unruh	58	20.7
10.	20th – G.D. Huebert	357	30.3
11.	20th – J. H. Janzen	376	58.2
12.	18th – Elbing-Ellerwald	181	21.0
13.	19th – Neu-Chortitza & Eigenheim	61	21.3
14.	20th – Blumenorter Mennonite	735	16.9
15.	20th – Bethel Mennonite	310	35.2
16.	20th – First Mennonite	150	24.0

Note: a detailed tabulation for each of the entries and the source of the data in this table are found in Table 2.

Published Volumes of Sermons: Multiple Authors

The Scripture texts of several volumes of published sermons were tabulated. The collection published in 1844 by Johannes Molenaar, minister of the Mennonite congregation in Monsheim, Germany, is the oldest and smallest of these.[14] Each of its six sermons, by different ministers of German Mennonite congregations, is identified by the Sunday of the church year for which it was prepared. Their texts may thus have been somewhat determined by lectionary prescriptions. In any case, none uses an Old Testament passage as its basis, and only two of them have overt Old Testament references within the body of the sermon.

S. F. Sprunger's volume published in 1891 in Berne, Indiana, represents a broader spectrum of the Mennonite church.[15] Its 20 contributors are from Russia, Germany and Switzerland in addition to the United States. They include many of the leading ministers of the late nineteenth-century Mennonite world. About half of the sermons focus on special days of the church year (such as Advent, Christmas, Pentecost) or special events in the congregation (such as baptism and ordination); the rest are on various themes. One-fifth use an Old Testament text as their basis.

Paul Erb confined the selection for his 1965 volume to English language sermons by North American ministers, primarily from Mennonite Church (MC) congregations.[16] His criteria for choosing from among the sermons submitted on request were: quality of "homiletical know-how" and "good distribution of geographical origin and of subject matter." More than one-third of the biblical passages used are from the Old Testament.

These three collections represent compilations of sermons by a number of preachers from a variety of places. The next three are the output of one person per volume. It is reasonable to expect that in these selections more conscious attention may have been given to representative or comprehensive coverage of the whole range of the Bible.

Published Volumes of Sermons: Single Author

Jacob H. Janzen was a widely respected author, teacher and preacher who immigrated to Canada in the 1920s. As a *Reiseprediger* (itinerant minister) for the Home Mission Board of the General

[14] Johannes Molenaar, *Evangelische Stimmen: Predigtesammlung auf alle Sonn- und Festtage,* Erstes Heft (Leipzig: Karl Tachnitz, 1844).

[15] S.F. Sprunger, ed., *Festklänge: Predigten von Mennonitenpredigern aus den Vereinigten Staaten, Rußland, Pfalz, Baiern und der Schweitz* (Berne: Christliche Central-Buchhandlung, 1891).

[16] Paul Erb, ed., *From the Mennonite Pulpit: Twenty-six Sermons from Mennonite Ministers* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1965). It is interesting that Sprunger begins his preface with the comment: "Another collection of sermons? I hear people ask. Are there not yet enough?" while Erb begins his Foreword: "This volume is, so far as the editor is aware, a first attempt at the publication of a collection of sermons by Mennonite preachers."

Conference Mennonite Church, his ministry extended well beyond the Waterloo congregation which he served as elder. The index of Scripture texts for the volume of 70 sermons published in 1945 shows a close adherence to the church year.[17] Lectionary readings likely played a significant role in the selection of biblical texts chosen. No other collection examined in this study reaches the 44 percent of Old Testament texts used by Janzen.

Thirteen sermons originally preached at Bethel College by professor and president E.G. Kaufman were published on request in 1966.[18] Only the basic text for each sermon was included in the tabulation, of which just one was from the Old Testament. One other sermon on a New Testament text was in fact substantially based on a passage from the Psalms. Kaufman carefully notes references to other scriptural texts in his footnotes; ten percent of them are from the Old Testament. In contrast to Janzen, Kaufman is at the low end of the Old Testament usage scale, with just under eight percent of his main sermon texts taken from its books.

In 1975 Christian Press in Winnipeg published a selection of 53 sermons by the widely beloved Mennonite Brethren preacher, Gerhard D. Huebert. As B. J. Braun writes in the preface, these sermons "breathe the spirit of the profound biblical faith of the *Brüdergemeinden*."[19] Braun also considers this collection as representative of the text selection patterns of Mennonite Brethren preaching of the first half of the twentieth century. Huebert's table of contents groups the sermons thematically, somewhat in confessional categories. About one quarter of the texts used are from the Old Testament.

Published Collections of Sermon Outlines

The publishing of a collection of sermons is usually done "from the barrel," that is, the author or an editor selects them from material written and preached earlier. Sermon outlines, on the other hand, are much more systematically prepared since they are in a sense prescriptive. Therefore, one should expect that such collections more consciously seek to be representative in their choice of biblical texts.

A. H. Unruh was a minister and Bible school teacher in Russia before immigrating to Canada and helping to found both a Bible institute and later a Bible college in the context of the Mennonite Brethren church. However, his teaching ministry extended well

[17] Jacob H. Janzen, *Da ist Euer Gott! Eine Sammlung von Predigten für alle Sonn- und Festtage im Jahr* (Waterloo: By the author, under the guidance of the Board of Home Mission, General Conference Mennonite Church, 1945).

[18] E.G. Kaufman, *Living Creatively* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1966).

[19] Gerhard D. Huebert, *Brot des Lebens: Predigten für die heutige Zeit* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975), 6.

beyond his denomination. The 52 sermon outlines prepared for publication by him were aimed at a generation of lay ministers, many of them with limited or no formal biblical training.[20] One can, therefore, take them as intending to represent a reasonably adequate biblical exposition for the course of one year of Sunday sermons. In a few of them more than one biblical passage is suggested as the sermon basis. One-fifth of the texts listed are from the Old Testament.

G. D. Huebert's compilation of sermon outlines, in contrast, involves 62 different contributors.[21] He organizes these thematically, suggesting that he aimed at some degree of comprehensiveness. The book was apparently very much used and continued to be in demand into the 1970s among various confessional groups in Germany.[22] While only a quarter of his own volume of sermons used Old Testament texts, about 30 percent of the sermon outlines in this volume do so.

The third volume in this category is of a slightly different nature. Jacob H. Janzen published in 1929 a booklet of daily meditations (*Hausandachten*) consisting of 366 Bible stories to each of which he added a stanza of an appropriate hymn. Together they represent a survey of the story of the Bible. Not surprisingly, this results in some 58 percent of the passages coming from the Old Testament. After a more or less sequential walk through the Bible, Janzen concludes with a two-week section of selected themes for special emphasis. It is of interest that over one-half of the latter use passages from the Old Testament.

Sermon Texts Used in Selected Mennonite Congregations

The final category chosen for study consists of listed biblical texts which served as the basis for sermons in five different congregational contexts. The sermons themselves were not available for analysis. It is, therefore, difficult to tell to what extent the sermon in any given service in fact dealt with the text listed. In topical sermons, biblical passages other than the Scripture section listed may be as important as the "text" itself. Without access to the sermon it is also impossible to judge how well a New Testament-based sermon reflects careful study of the Old Testament background. In some cases a text was not available for every Sunday and church festival of the year. In spite of these shortcomings, the tabulated data may, nevertheless, reflect fairly accurately the use of the Old Testament in Mennonite preaching (see Table 2 at end of essay).

[20] A.H. Unruh, *Zwei-und-fünfzig Predigtentwürfe* (St. Catharines: Redekop Book and Music Supply, n.d.).

[21] Gerhard D. Huebert, comp. and ed., *Botschafter an Christi statt: Eine Sammlung von predigtentwürfen über freie Texte* (Winnipeg: By the author, n.d.).

[22] B.J. Braun, "Geleitwort," in Gerhard Huebert, *Brot des Lebens*, 6.

In all cases the preaching was done by several ministers. The "constant" factor here is the congregation. For many of the church members the sermon texts listed would be their basic exposure to biblical teaching for the year.

The eighteenth-century sample is from the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation of the Flemish Gemeinde in Prussia during the last few years before the first emigration of Mennonites from that region to Russia in 1789. The main festivals and seasons of the "church year" are followed, but not according to an external "lectionary." The identified markers instead are Advent, at least two days of Christmas, Epiphany, communion (late January or early February), Lent, Good Friday, Easter (at least two days), catechism season, Ascension, Pentecost (with baptism on or near this date, though sometimes as late as July), and again communion (July or August). Although the list is compiled from the diary of Ältester Gerhard Wiebe, the sermons were preached by the entire group of ministers (*Lehrdienst*) of the *Gemeinde* according to a set rotation and following the framework of the church year outlined above. About one-fifth of the sermon texts listed were from the Old Testament.

The much smaller nineteenth-century sample is compiled from the diary of Gerhard Epp, a deacon in the Neu-Chortitza branch of the Flemish church in Russia, who emigrated to Canada in 1894. Here he was elected minister in the newly organized Rosenorter Church at Eigenheim, Saskatchewan, in 1895. In the Russian portion of the list, five "regular" preachers of the *Lehrdienst* account for most of the sermons; in the Canadian portion almost two-thirds of the sermons were by Epp himself and the rest by half a dozen other ministers. Prominent among these was Ältester Peter Regier, a new immigrant from Prussia. Overall, 21 percent of the sermons were based on the Old Testament, slightly more in Russia (23 percent) than in Canada (19 percent).

The three twentieth-century samples are from congregations of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. The Blumenorter Gemeinde was typical of the way the church reorganized in Canada after their arrival from the USSR. It consisted of some half a dozen preaching locations served on a rotation basis by up to a dozen elected lay ministers. The list analyzed here was kept in the Reinland meeting house from 1931 to 1945. About 17 percent of the texts listed are from the Old Testament.

More recent preaching patterns were extracted from sermons given at the oldest two General Conference congregations in Winnipeg. Bethel Mennonite Church gathered largely descendants of Mennonite immigrants who had come to Canada in the 1870s, while First Mennonite Church attracted immigrants of the 1920s and later. Both had one or more paid pastors during the years of the

sampling (1975 to the present), but lay ministers of the congregation and others continued to take part in the preaching. First Mennonite made more extensive use of its lay ministers in the preaching rotation than did Bethel. About one-third of Bethel's sermons[23] used Old Testament texts compared to about one-quarter for First Mennonite.

Summary

A number of observations can be made on the basis of the data analyzed above. First, the Anabaptist preferential use of the New Testament cited by scholars is confirmed by this examination of the biblical texts cited by Pilgram Marpeck and Menno Simons. The percentage of texts drawn from the Old Testament may in fact be lower (combined 19.7 percent) than expected.

Second, the frequency of Old Testament passages as the text in the Mennonite sermon collections examined is slightly higher but consistent with this pattern (combined 24.5 per cent, excluding the J.H. Janzen *Hausandachten* from the calculation). Among the multi-author sermon volumes, Old Testament usage in the Mennonite Church collection of Paul Erb is highest (36 percent) and, of the single-author volumes, that of Jacob H. Janzen (44 percent). Among congregations, the sermon texts at Bethel Mennonite showed the highest frequency (35 percent) of Old Testament texts. These are the only four samples, apart from the anomalous *Hausandachten* of Jacob H. Janzen, in which Old Testament usage exceeded 30 percent of total biblical references. The samples of the two Mennonite college presidents are lowest in Old Testament usage in their respective categories.

Third, a closer look at the breakdown of texts used (Table 2) quickly reveals that three Old Testament books predominate. The combined references to Genesis, the Psalms and Isaiah make up just over 40 percent of all Old Testament usage in Marpeck and Menno. For most of the Mennonite sermon collections examined, the preponderance of these three books among the Old Testament texts is even more pronounced (60 percent overall, excluding the *Hausandachten*). In the five congregational studies, almost two-thirds of all Old Testament texts are from this mini-canon.[24] On the other hand, the books of Ezra, Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah are not used at all in the sermon collections examined, while the Song of Solomon, Habakkuk and Haggai are used just once each.

[23] Table 1 indicates just over 35 percent overall, but this figure is skewed by the unusual data from 1990 in which over 44 percent of the texts were from the Old Testament.

[24] A similar further analysis of New Testament references shows, for example, that about 52 percent of all the New Testament texts used in Mennonite preaching are from the four Gospels, compared to about 40 percent for the two Anabaptist writers.

Fourth, the variations among the samples considered do not obviously follow a predictable or even a discernable pattern. That is, from the data considered one cannot conclude that biblical usage differed significantly from the general pattern in a particular historical era, or in one geographical, national or denominational group. Perhaps the pattern will shift if more and more congregations decide to follow the lectionary, although even its prescribed readings always include New Testament text passages for each Sunday and church holiday. Such a shift is unlikely, however, since influential Mennonite teachers continue to stress the priority of the New Testament. Consider the warning of the late John A. Toews, professor and president at Mennonite Brethren Bible College: "In studying the Old Testament independently of the New Testament, separated from the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, one arrives at theological and eschatalogical understandings which are fully untenable in the light of the New Testament."[25] The message of Dean Harold S. Bender of Goshen Biblical Seminary in the widely read Focal Pamphlet series was in a similar vein:

> We are Biblical only if our confession, our teaching, our theology, are controlled completely by the great central message of the Bible, and by this we mean centrally the New Testament, where Christ is fully presented. Hence the New Testament becomes the norm of Scripture because of Christ; we see even the Old Testament through Christ.[26]

Such exhortations reinforce for preachers their already apparent inclination toward the New Testament. And perhaps the advice of Old Testament scholars, like that of Millard Lind, does not make it easier for Mennonites to preach from its books. Lind advocates an inductive approach for our hermeneutical method with the corollary that "the Old Testament should not be interpreted in the light of some dogma of the New unless this dogma is itself compatible [with] and pervasive throughout the Old."[27]

[25] J.A. Toews, "Der Gebrauch des Alten Testaments in der Neu-Testamentlichen Gemeinde," *The Voice of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College* VI (September–October 1957): 12.

[26] Harold S. Bender, *Biblical Revelation and Inspiration*, Focal Pamphlet no. 4 (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959), 12–13.

[27] Millard Lind, "The Hermeneutics of the Old Testament," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 40 (July 1966): 233.

Table 2. Comparison of Biblical Texts Cited by Selected Anabaptist Writers with Sermon Texts of Some Mennonite Preachers

Collection	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Genesis	16	114			1	6		2	1	16	54	3	1	20	11	2
Exodus	13	15				11			2	5	21		1	3	7	
Leviticus		23									1			1	2	1
Numbers	10	23				2				1	13	1		3	1	
Deut.	24	78				1				4	1	1	1	2	7	4
Joshua		8			1	1		1		5	11			1		
Judges	1	1				1				1	14			2		
Ruth										3	1					
Samuel	6	19		1		2		1	1	5	26	2		3	3	
Kings	6	31			1	2				6	48			6	2	2
Chronicles	18	11									2	1		1	2	
Ezra	5	2									1					
Nehemiah	2	1				1					1			1		
Esther									1							
Job	1	11						1		2						
Psalms	42	101		1	1	4	1	1	2	28	7	13	3	46	34	16
Proverbs	7	24		1	1				1	6				3	1	
Ecclesiastes	2	4							1	1				2	1	
Song of Sol	4	8													1	
Isaiah	20	151		1	2	4		2	1	15	7	8	3	18	25	9
Jeremiah	20	94			1			2		2		5	3	4	3	
Lam										1		1				
Ezekiel	6	46				1			1			2		1	2	
Daniel	3	15						1	1	3	9			4		2
Hosea	1	14						1		2					1	
Joel	2	1				1									1	
Amos		1			1										1	
Obadiah																
Jonah	2	1								1					1	
Micah		20			1										2	
Nahum																
Habakkuk		2												1		
Zephaniah		2														
Haggai		1												1		
Zechariah		8								1				1	2	
Malachi	1	9						1			1		1			
Total OT	210	889	0	4	10	33		13	12	108	219	38	13	124	109	36
Matthew	200	503	3	4	3	11	1	6	5	32	29	37	7	116	32	22
Mark	45	132	1		1	4	1		1	7	4	1	3	31	12	6
Luke	108	219		2	1	7	2	3	2	33	61	15	21	132	30	12
John	242	379		1	1	2	1	7	6	37	25	17	8	78	20	16
Acts	108	101	1	2				4	6	17	40	12	3	34	22	12
Romans	134	289		2	2	3	1	1	3	16		4	1	40	12	6
Corinth.	232	290		2	3	3	1	5	5	22	4	12	3	48	19	15
Galatians	58	108		1	1				1	2		6		6		1
Ephesians	38	120			1	1		4	3	8	1	9		23	13	6
Philippians	11	55	1		1		2			7	1	2		5	5	2
Colossians	39	74				1	1			5		1		9	5	6
Thess	32	37						1		4		4	1	3	1	2
Timothy	40	83			1	2	1		4	8				17	3	1
Titus	10	45								1		1				
Philemon												1		1		

Collection	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Hebrews	77	136		1		3	1	2	3	25	1	6		17	3	2
James	10	41			1					3				8		
Peter	58	104		1	1			2	2	5	1	4		17	13	2
John	33	112						2	3	5		4	1	8	5	1
Jude	8	12								1				1		
Revelation	24	118			1	5		3	2	11	4	5		17	6	2
Total NT	1507	2979	6	16	18	42	12	40	46	249	157	143	48	611	201	114
Total refs.	1717	3868	6	20	28	75	13	53	58	357	376	181	61	735	310	150
% OT	12.2	23	0	20	35.7	44	7.7	24.5	20.7	30.3	58.2	21	21.3	16.9	35.2	24

Notes

1. Compiled from the "Index of Biblical References," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1978).
2. Scriptural references in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* as compiled by Bruno A. Penner, in "The Anabaptist View of Scriptures" (Unpublished paper, 1955), 37.
3. Johannes Molenaar, ed., *Evangelische Stimmen: Predigtsammlung auf alle Sonn- und Festtage,* Erstes Heft (Leipzig: Karl Tachnitz, 1844).
4. S. F. Sprunger, ed., *Festklänge: Predigten von Mennonitenpredigern aus den Vereinigten Staaten, Rußland, Pfalz, Baiern und der Schweitz* (Berne: Christliche Central-Buchhandlung, Welty & Sprunger, 1891).
5. Paul Erb, ed., *From the Mennonite Pulpit: Twenty-six Sermons from Mennonite Ministers* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1965).
6. Jacob H. Janzen, *Da ist Euer Gott! Eine Sammlung von Predigten für alle Sonn- und Festtage im Jahr* (Waterloo: By the author, 1945).
7. E. G. Kaufman, *Living Creatively* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1966).
8. Gerhard D. Huebert, *Brot des Lebens: Predigten für die heutige Zeit* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975).
9. A. H. Unruh, *Zwei-und-fünfzig Predigtentwürfe* (St. Catharines: Redekop Book and Music Supply, n.d.).
10. Gerhard D. Huebert, *Botschafter an Christi statt: Eine Sammlung von Predigtentwürfen über freie Texte* (Winnipeg: By the author, n.d.).
11. Jacob H. Janzen, *366 Biblische Geschichten als Hausandachten für jeden Tag im Jahren angeordnet* (Waterloo: By the author, 1929).
12. Sermon texts for the years 1787–1789 preached primarily in Elbing and Ellerwald by eight "regular" ministers of the Flemish congregation in West Prussia as listed in the diary of its Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (MHCA, vol. 4355). Included in the tabulation are the texts used by nine visiting ministers who preached only once or twice each. Where the same minister used the same text in two different locations in close succession, it was tabulated only once. Thanks to Irene Blank for tabulating the sermon texts.
13. Sermon texts recorded in the diary of Gerhard Epp during the years 1892–1896 as used by five regular and two guest preachers in Baratov, Russia (to February 1893) and in Eigenheim, Saskatchewan, largely by Epp himself, from September 1893 (MHCA, vol. 1017-3). Tabulation by Irene Blank.
14. Sermons preached at the Blumenorter Mennonite Church at Reinland, Manitoba, compiled from "Verzeichnis der Sonntage und Feste, der Prediger die an denselben gedient haben und der Texte die verhandelt wurden" for the years 1931–1943.
15. Sermons preached at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, compiled by Irene Blank from Sunday bulletins for 1965, 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990 (MHCA, vols. 42, 1612, 2349 and 3906)
16. Sermons preached at First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, compiled by Irene Blank from Sunday bulletins for 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990 (MHCA, vols. 46, 1011, 3133 and 4009)

The Use of the Old Testament in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective

Helmut Harder

The Bible is central to the faith and life of the Mennonite church. That much is clear and simple. What is less certain is how the church should appropriate the Bible correctly when formulating its beliefs and practices.[1] While this may not be a pressing problem with respect to the New Testament, it is readily conceded that the Old Testament represents at least a challenge, if not an impasse. Among theologians and writers of Mennonite confessions of faith there appears to be uncertainty about its authority as well as its relevance for doctrine and ethics.[2]

From the beginning of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement, the question of the use of the Old Testament has remained largely unresolved. On the basis of his examination of the sources, Walter

[1] That this is an ongoing issue is adequately exemplified in the compilation of essays in Willard Swartley, ed., *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), hereafter cited as *Essays*.

[2] I draw the reader's attention to two items that identify the issue, each in its own way. See Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 34. Loewen draws attention to the decreasing use of the Old Testament in Mennonite confessions of faith. See also the critique of the neglect of the Old Testament among Mennonite theologians in Waldemar Janzen, "A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation," in *The Church as Theological Community: Essays in Honour of David Schroeder*, ed. Harry Huebner (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1990), 91–112. Reprinted as Chapter 1 in this volume.

Klaassen concludes that the Anabaptists favoured the New Testament over the Old. The New Testament was primary since it revealed the "doctrine of Christ and the apostles" and instructed the church about its structure and its functions.[3] Based on his survey of Mennonite confessions of faith, Howard Loewen says that increasingly in recent years we have seen a decrease in the use of the Old Testament.[4] Meanwhile the Christian church, including the Mennonite church, continues to believe and affirm that the entire Scripture is the church's canon. In light of this stance, the question of the contribution of the Old Testament to the faith and life of the church will persist.

In July of 1995 the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church jointly accepted a new confession of faith. The document, entitled *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (CFMP)*,[5] was developed over a period of eight years by a joint Confession of Faith Committee.[6] The *Confession* offers us an opportunity to revisit the question of the role of the Old Testament in Mennonite faith and life.

I will begin by discussing how the *Confession* utilizes the Old Testament. Observations will be largely inductive, since the Committee did not formulate a predetermined approach to the Scriptures. While there was some preliminary discussion, for the most part usage was allowed to evolve as the work developed. The summary of how the Old Testament is *used* will be followed by discussion of how the Old Testament is *viewed* in the *Confession*. For this part I refer mainly to Article 4 on Scripture. Reflections and conclusions will follow my report of findings. The hope is that our analysis and subsequent reflections can make a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the appropriate placement and use of the Old Testament in the church.

[3] Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1981), 140. See also William Klassen, "Old Testament," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, Newton: Mennonite Publishing Office, Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1959), 49b–52a. Klassen's article indicates that the Anabaptists in their time did not have clarity on how to appropriate the Old Testament for their theological convictions. See also, John H. Yoder, "Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," in *Essays*, 11–28. Yoder concludes regarding the hermeneutics of the Anabaptists: "We cannot ask what their answers were: at the most we can ask how they went about asking their questions" (16).

[4] Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church*, 34–35.

[5] *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995). Hereafter referred to as *Confession* or *CFMP*.

[6] Discussion of the possibility of preparing a joint confession of faith for the two church bodies began with an exploratory meeting on December 14–15, 1984 in Chicago. The official minutes of the Confession of Faith Study Committee (1984) and the subsequently appointed Confession of Faith Committee (1987–1995) are housed in various places, including Mennonite Heritage Centre, Mennonite Church Canada, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

In this connection, I need to mention a significant encounter in the course of the development of the *Confession*. The story speaks both of the way the Old Testament was taken seriously by the Confession of Faith Committee and of the way Old Testament scholars in our midst reciprocated by taking the *CFMP* seriously. I recall a particular lunch meeting at the Pancake House in Winnipeg sometime in the fall of 1993. It was during the time when congregations and individuals were responding to the first draft of the *Confession*. As co-chairs of the Committee, Marlin Miller and I had invited Waldemar Janzen to meet with us. We were eager to hear his evaluation of the current draft and to benefit from his counsel. During the meeting Waldemar reminded us that the Old Testament belongs to the canon; and he drew our attention to Old Testament texts that would give significant support to a Mennonite Confession of Faith. Conversations such as this one contributed significantly to the formation of the new *Confession*.

How the Old Testament Is Used in the *Confession*

A survey of the 24 articles and the accompanying commentaries that comprise the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* gives evidence of three different ways in which the Old Testament is used. First, textual references appear in footnotes in the articles and within the text of the commentaries. Second, Old Testament narratives are referred to from time to time within the texts of the articles and the commentaries. Third, confessional statements in the articles draw on Old Testament theology for their substantiation and elaboration. The commentaries also include references to themes in Old Testament theology.

It should be remembered that, while these three usages can be differentiated and discussed separately, the writers of the *Confession* did not come to their work with a preconceived design for the use of the Old Testament. The use of the Old Testament was to an extent inadvertent and therefore enmeshed with integrity in the heart of the project.

Textual References. Textual references to the Old Testament occur throughout the *Confession*. In the articles they appear as endnotes. In the commentaries they occur within the commentary text. Textual references are used to support a statement of belief or a subsidiary point in an article. Old Testament texts are intermingled with New Testament texts. The effect of this is that texts appear to be weighted equally.

The very first paragraph of Article 1 on God (*CFMP*, 10) provides a good illustration. The opening assertion that "God exists" has Exodus 3:13–14 as a reference. The following statement, that God is to be worshipped as "the one holy and loving God," is supported

by Exodus 20:1–6 and Deuteronomy 6:4, along with texts from the New Testament. This method continues throughout the article. For example, the assertion in the third paragraph that "God far surpasses human comprehension and understanding" (*CFMP*, 10) appeals to Job 37 and Isaiah 40:18–25 along with Romans 11:33–36. As will be shown below, there may be a neglect of Old Testament references in some articles. However, textual selection does not appear to follow a preconceived discrimination against the Old Testament.

Footnoted references occur throughout the *Confession* with varying frequency. Article 1 on God has the most references with twelve. Next comes Article 5 on Creation and Divine Providence with seven. Articles 4 on Scripture, Article 7 on Sin, and Article 22 on Peace, Justice and Nonresistance each have six references. Article 3 on the Holy Spirit and Article 21 on Christian Stewardship have five each. The remaining articles have four or less, with no references to the Old Testament in Articles 11 on Baptism and Article 13 on Footwashing.

Over all, the first section of the *Confession* (Articles 1 to 8) on theological themes common to all churches has relatively more Old Testament references than the sections on the church and its practices (Articles 9 to 16) and on the life of discipleship (Articles 17 to 23). Indeed, there are several places in the *Confession* where Old Testament textual references should be expected, but are either sparse or missing altogether. In Articles 9 and 10, both of which centre on the church, we find a total of only three Old Testament references: Deuteronomy 10:19, Isaiah 2:2–4 and Isaiah 42:6. This compares with 26 New Testament references in these two articles. Article 11 on Baptism, Article 12 on The Lord's Supper, and Article 13 on Footwashing have only one Old Testament reference among them. The accompanying commentary sections do include some discussion of Old Testament background. In Article 14 on Church Discipline the *Confession* rightly concentrates on Matthew 18 along with additional New Testament texts. But we find only one Old Testament reference, namely Deuteronomy 19:15. Article 15 on Ministry and Leadership has two references to the Old Testament, and Article 16 on Church Order and Unity has only one. The use of Old Testament references is substantial in some articles but sparse in others.

The same observation applies to the section on the life of discipleship, encompassing Articles 17 to 23. Article 18 on Christian Spirituality has only one Old Testament reference: from the Psalms. Article 20 on Truth and the Avoidance of Oaths does not reference the Old Testament at all. The other articles in the section, on Discipleship and the Christian Life (Article 17), on Family, Singleness, and Marriage (Article 19), on Christian Stewardship (Article 21), on Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance (Article 22), and on The Church's

Relation to Government and Society (Article 23) have between four and six references. While this indicates an Old Testament "presence" in these articles, the proportion is small compared to New Testament footnotes.

How does frequency of reference to the Old Testament compare overall with references to the New Testament? Counting biblical usage in both the articles and their commentaries, we find a total of 178 textual references to the Old Testament compared to 545 New Testament references. If one counts only references in the articles, excluding the commentaries, we find 83 Old Testament texts compared with 320 from the New Testament. Obviously this shows a much higher usage of the New Testament than the Old. This is typical of Mennonite confessions of faith.

Which Old Testament books are referenced most often? The top eight are Genesis with 29 references, Isaiah with 28, Psalms with 27, Exodus with 21, Leviticus with 12, Deuteronomy with 11, Jeremiah with 10, and Ezekiel with five. This count includes both the articles and the commentaries. A significant number of books are not referred to at all, namely Ruth, 2 Samuel, 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai and Malachai.

In summary, the following is noted: that Old Testament texts are drawn on freely in their own right to support statements in the articles; that Old and New Testament texts are given equal importance when called upon to give support to confessional statements; that Genesis and the Psalms are the most frequently used Old Testament books; that a relative sparsity of references is evident in the second section (the church and its practices) and in the third section (the life of discipleship); and that the Old Testament could have been utilized for textual support much more than is the case.

Narrative Connections. The *Confession* makes use of Old Testament narrative. Narrative references can include personal experiences, significant events, the larger sweep of historical developments, and also primordial accounts such as the Creation. Narrative serves to substantiate and illustrate foundational beliefs. Narrative is a vehicle that casts confessional statements into story form.

Narrative connections are most prominent in the theological section, Articles 1 through 8. Article 1 on God provides the earliest example. The second paragraph opens with a reference to the story of Abraham and Sarah:

> Beginning with Abraham and Sarah, God has called forth a people of faith to worship God alone, to witness to the divine purposes for human beings and all of creation, and to love their neighbors as themselves (*CFMP*, 10).

Here the Old Testament supplies an appropriate theological medium for speaking confessionally about God; that is, in terms of God's activity through a people in the course of history.[7]

The narrative accounts in Genesis 1–3 are drawn on quite heavily. They form the foundation for three successive articles. Article 5 on Creation and Divine Providence contains confessional statements that rely on Genesis 1:

> We believe that God has created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them . . . . All creation ultimately has its source outside itself and belongs to the Creator. The world has been created good . . . (*CFMP*, 25).

The opening paragraph of Article 6 on The Creation and Calling of Human Beings bases itself on the first two chapters of Genesis:

> We believe that God has created human beings in the divine image. God formed them from the dust of the earth and gave them a special dignity among all the works of creation. Human beings have been made for relationship with God, to live in peace with each other, and to take care of the rest of creation (*CFMP*, 28).

The narrative of Genesis 3 is the point of reference for the opening sentence of Article 7 on Sin: "We confess that beginning with Adam and Eve, humanity has disobeyed God, given way to the tempter, and chosen to sin."

As would be expected, the Article on Salvation (8) is connected with the history of salvation in the Old Testament. We find the connection in the second paragraph, once God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ has been highlighted. The second paragraph of Article 8 opens with the statement:

> From the beginning, God has acted with grace and mercy to bring about salvation— through signs and wonders, by delivering God's people, and by making a covenant with Israel (*CFMP*, 35).

The biblical references for this assertion (Ps 74:12, Deut 6:20–25 and Exod 20:1–17) tell the story of the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt.

In the articles in the next section, on the church and its practices (9 to 16), one should expect to find numerous connections to stories of the Old Testament. But the linkage is somewhat weak. In the two articles on the church (Article 9 on The Church of Jesus Christ and Article 10 on The Church in Mission) the connection between the church and the Old Testament people of God is absent. We do find

[7] The decision to make use of the biblical narrative as a way of expressing and substantiating what Mennonites believe was made consciously and early in the development of the *CFMP*. For further comment, see Article 1, Commentary 2, 12.

several references to Old Testament background in the first Commentary of Article 9:

> New Testament references to the church as God's people (1 Pet 2:10) show that the early church depended on the Old Testament for much of its self-understanding (Exod 7:6; 2 Sam 7:24). As in Old Testament times, the New Testament people of God see themselves as a covenant community, relying on God's promise of steadfast love and sustaining mercy (*CFMP*, 40).

But the article itself might have been strengthened with specific reference to the historical formation of peoplehood in the Old Testament. A similar comment applies to Article 10. The article makes no reference to the significance of the promissory narratives of the patriarchs or to the historic significance of the prophetic challenge for the mission of the church.

The remaining articles in this section (11 through 16) also fail to build strong connections with Old Testament narratives. The stories of water crossings are not drawn into the article on Baptism. There is mention of ceremonial washings in the Commentary section. Old Testament background to the Lord's Supper is not mentioned or even inferred in Article 11 on The Lord's Supper, although the connection is named in the first paragraph of the Commentary section. No connections are made to the people of Israel's experience of ritual cleansing (Article 13), of discipline (Article 14) or of spiritual leadership (Article 15). The Commentary to Article 16 on Church Order and Unity has a note on the importance of order as exemplified in Israel's story of priesthood and temple (*CFMP*, 63).

In the section on the life of discipleship (Articles 17 to 23) there is one notable connection with Old Testament narratives. In Article 22 on Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance we read:

> Although God created a peaceable world, humanity chose the way of unrighteousness and violence. The spirit of revenge increased, and violence multiplied, yet the original vision of peace and justice did not die. Prophets and other messengers of God continued to point the people of Israel toward trust in God rather than in weapons and military force (*CFMP*, 81).

Here an entire sweep of Old Testament history is summarized and placed in the service of an important aspect of Mennonite confessions. The first sentence of the next paragraph in the same article gives a positive interpretation and completion to this Old Testament summary by drawing the narrative into the New Testament as follows: "The peace God intends for humanity and creation was revealed most fully in Jesus Christ" (*CFMP*, 81). This illustration from Article 22 is an exception in this section of articles on the Christian life of discipleship. Narrative connections are sparse here.

The fourth and last section of the *Confession*, which entails Article 24 on The Reign of God, makes a passing reference to the Old Testament experience when it states: "Faithful Israel acclaimed God as king and looked forward to the fullness of God's kingdom" (*CFMP*, 89). While this is an important connection, the Article as a whole does not sufficiently utilize potential Old Testament narratives for Christian belief in the reign of God.

In summary, we have noted that Old Testament narratives contribute substantially to statements of belief. But we also find a sparsity, particularly in the sections on the church and its practices and on the life of discipleship. In both sections matters of morality and ethics could have benefited by the utilization of Old Testament narratives.

Theological Themes. Thirdly, the *CFMP* draws on the Old Testament in its development of confessional themes. This usage occurs in a variety of obvious and subtle ways throughout the *Confession*.

Again, Article 1 on God offers a good example. In the fourth paragraph the *Confession* deals with a longstanding set of questions about the character of God. How is it possible to bring together the seemingly disparate and sometimes paradoxical dimensions of the being of God? Is the Creator of the universe not too distant to care for each individual? Can one reconcile the God of law and the God of grace? The God who demands and the God who forgives? The God who restricts and the God who offers freedom?

Supposedly these questions would pose less difficulty if one could leave the Old Testament behind and concentrate on the New Testament. Here some find in Jesus an overriding emphasis on grace and a personalized replacement for an austere and distant divinity. But the *Confession* persists in placing these paradoxical dimensions in creative tension:

> God's awesome glory and enduring compassion are perfect in holy love. God's sovereign power and unending mercy are perfect in almighty love. God's knowledge of all things and care for creation are perfect in preserving love. God's abounding grace and wrath against sinfulness are perfect in righteous love. God's readiness to forgive and power to transform are perfect in redemptive love. God's unlimited justice and continuing patience with humankind are perfect in suffering love. God's infinite freedom and constant self-giving are perfect in faithful love (*CFMP*, 10).

This full and dynamic way of stating a central theme of the Christian faith is unthinkable and inexpressible without the theological legacy of the Old Testament.

Another kind of illustration of the theological significance of the Old Testament for the *Confession* occurs in Article 2 on Jesus

Christ. After the opening summary, the second paragraph highlights Jesus and his mission in familiar Old Testament terms such as "the Messiah" and "born of the seed of David" (*CFMP*, 13). These references signal a strong and positive relationship between Old Testament expectations and New Testament fulfilment. With this, the meaning of Jesus is wedded to Old Testament theology. The connection is further amplified and accented in the four-fold ascription to Jesus as prophet, teacher, high priest, and king (*CFMP*, 13). It would have been possible to make similar connections between the Testaments in the third paragraph, where Jesus is presented as Saviour of the world, and also in the subsequent paragraph, which names Jesus as Son of God. But this opportunity was missed.

Article 3 on the Holy Spirit reaches deep into the Old Testament for its theological point of reference. The second paragraph *begins* with Old Testament references to the "work of the Spirit" as follows:

> Through the Spirit of God, the world was created, prophets and writers of Scripture were inspired, the people were enabled to follow God's law . . . (*CFMP*, 17).

The Article then *continues* uninterrupted with a listing of New Testament manifestations—Mary's conception, the baptism of Jesus, the visitation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the multiple visitations of the Holy Spirit that result in repentance, in works of righteousness, in mission, in community, and in unity. Here a theology of the Holy Spirit benefits from a theological linkage between the Old Testament and the New.

Another example of the theological role of the Old Testament in the development of the *Confession* is found in Article 11 on Baptism and Article 12 on The Lord's Supper. Within the Anabaptist-Mennonite theological tradition there is continuing discussion on the understanding of what the Christian church refers to as the sacraments.[8] Should Mennonites speak of baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments? As symbols? As signs? After some deliberation, the Confession of Faith Committee gave preference to the term "sign."[9] In setting the stage for this usage in the Article on Baptism, the *Confession* begins with an appeal to the Old Testament, citing Exodus 10:1, Numbers 14:11, and Isaiah 7:14 as background for this choice (*CFMP*, 47). Similarly the Article on The Lord's Supper invokes Exodus 12 for support of the use of "sign."

[8] See Dale R. Stoffer, ed., *The Lord's Supper: Believers Church Perspectives* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1997). This volume is helpful for rethinking an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of the Lord's Supper for our time.

[9] Not inconsequential to this decision at the time was a consideration of the article by Waldemar Janzen, "Sign and Belief," in *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Newton: Faith and Life Press; Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982), 15–26.

In the remaining articles, we find at least three more instances where the Old Testament is used for theological support. In Article 19 on Family, Singleness, and Marriage, reference is made to the creation of human beings for the purpose of relationship, and to God's intention that human life be blessed through families. These points have their basis in Old Testament theology. In Article 21 on Christian Stewardship, consideration of the stewardly use of time and land are based on the Old Testament teaching on the Sabbath and the Jubilee (*CFMP*, 77).

The final article of the *Confession* makes a strong theological connection between the anticipation of the fullness of God's kingdom by faithful Israel and its future realization in accordance with the proclamation of Jesus. The Old Testament is used to support the revelation of Jesus in both its past and its future dimensions. That is, the fulfilment that Jesus brings has its explanation with reference to Exodus 15:8, Judges 8:23 and Zechariah 14:9. At the same time the futurist claim that "for this kingdom, God has appointed Jesus Christ as king and Lord" (*CFMP*, 89) has a point of reference in Psalm 2:7.[10]

It is evident that the Old Testament plays a significant role in the formulation of theological perspectives in the new *Confession*. Classic themes of the Christian faith, such as the relation between justice and forgiveness, depend on the Old Testament. Critical New Testament questions, such as the identity of Jesus, require Old Testament background. Substantial themes, such as theology of time or of land, rely more on the Old Testament than on the New for their explication. The *Confession* follows in the tradition of Jesus himself and the New Testament as such in its reliance on the faith of the Old Testament people of God for significant theological orientation.

How the Old Testament Is Viewed in the *Confession*

Before discussing the implications of what we have found, we need to inquire how the *Confession* views the Old Testament as such. For this we turn mainly to Article 4 on Scripture. What we find in that article can be summarized in three points. First, the Old Testament belongs to the biblical canon of the church, along with the New Testament. It is significant that we find no distinction made between the Old Testament and the New on the matter of inspiration or authority. The Article states:

> We believe that *all Scripture* is inspired by God . . . . We accept *the Scriptures* as the Word of God . . . . We accept *the Bible* as the Word of God written . . . . We acknowledge *the Scripture* as the authoritative source and standard for preaching and teaching . . . (*CFMP*, 21, italics mine).

[10] See *Confession*, 90, footnote 4.

This is a remarkable emphasis, given the tendency in theology to give the Old Testament a lesser status than the New.

Second, Article 4 calls the church to read and interpret the Old Testament, along with the New, in accordance with Jesus Christ. The *Confession* states: "We seek to understand and interpret Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ" (*CFMP*, 21). And further, "Because Jesus Christ is the Word become flesh, Scripture as a whole has its center and fulfilment in him" (*CFMP*, 21). While one might think that by implication the focus on Jesus Christ would favour the New Testament over the Old, the Article appears to give balanced and equal status to both Testaments.

Third, the Article calls upon the church to claim the entire Scripture as "the essential book of the church" (*CFMP*, 22). This means that the Old Testament, along with the New, is essential for nurturing the church in "the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ" (*CFMP*, 22). The Old Testament also "guides the church in shaping its teaching, witnessing, and worship" (*CFMP*, 22). The Old Testament too needs to be submitted to the continuing inspiration and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in the faith community.

In short, the *Confession* embraces the Old Testament, along with the New, in its view of Scripture. In principle at least, the *Confession* makes no distinction between the two parts of the Bible, whether on the view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture or on adequacy for ethics and obedience. The Old Testament, like the New, is subject to the Spirit-led discernment of the faith community. These findings, gleaned from Article 4 and corroborated by what we found in our analysis of Old Testament usage, help form the background for the summary and reflections that follow.

Summary and Reflections

Our study of the way in which the new *Confession* views the Old Testament and utilizes it can be summarized in five conclusions.

1) The Old Testament is used as a resource in the substantiation and formulation of confessional statements. Old Testament texts are footnoted to support statements of belief; the Old Testament story is drawn in for illustration and for substantiation of the faith; confessional themes are stated and nuanced with reference to Old Testament faith and life. The *Confession* draws freely on the Old Testament. There is no predetermined scheme that governs its selection.[11]

At the same time the *Confession* does not utilize Old Testament resources to their full potential. This shows up in the significant number of articles that have very few references to the Old Testament

[11] Nothing shows up in the Minutes of the Confession of Faith Committee that would indicate a predetermined use of the Old Testament.

or do not utilize it at all. Narrative connections and theological motifs are sparse in the second and third sections on church practices and on the practical life. This leads to a second conclusion.

2) The sparsity of references to the Old Testament as compared to the New is a quantitative difference rather than a qualitative bias. Despite this sparsity, the *Confession* does not comply with Loewen's observation about previous confessions, that with respect to the use of the Old Testament, they show "generally an absolute decrease in relation to previous confessions."[12] It is my sense that with this *Confession*, the proportional gap between Old Testament texts and New has narrowed rather than widened when compared with previous confessions. Loewen's further conclusion, that there is clearly a dominant use of the New Testament over the Old Testament, applies to this new *Confession* only if "dominant" has a quantitative rather than a qualitative meaning. I surmise that in terms of its approach to the Old Testament, the new *Confession* goes a considerable distance in recovering a role for the Old Testament compared to the trend identified by Loewen. This is a generalization that needs further testing, which is beyond the scope of this essay.

3) The *Confession* not only respects the Old Testament as authoritative, but actually appeals to the Old Testament as authority. The Old Testament is called upon to substantiate and support statements of belief and practice. This applies especially to the broad range of theological themes such as the being of God, the person of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin and salvation. It applies as well to statements on the practical side of the Christian life. While the New Testament is used much more frequently than the Old, Old Testament texts are often used in parallel with selections from the New Testament to substantiate confessional statements. Nor is the authority of the Old Testament diminished by some imposed category such as "law" or "prolegomena" or "failed attempt." The Old contributes in an essential and primary way to the authoritative basis of the *Confession*.

4) The *Confession* includes the Old Testament, along with the New, as part of the canon. Nowhere is a distinction made in this regard. The *Confession* gives no overt evidence of a canon within the Bible, a selection of Scriptures, or emphases that would govern the rest of the Bible. The entire Bible is assumed to provide the standard for the faith and order of the church. To be sure, as one counts the texts used and themes emphasized, one can identify preferences for certain books of the Bible or sections of biblical text. But this selection appears to be more a result of brevity than of bias. Speaking as a member of the Committee, I recall frequent

[12] Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church*, 34.

expressions of regret because the *Confession* needed to be brief and thus could not allow for added references. The intent was to engage the entire Christian canon in the formulation of the *Confession*.[13]

5) The *Confession* leans toward continuity rather than discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New. To be sure, the distinction between the Testaments is not glossed over. There is the old covenant with Israel and the new covenant in Jesus Christ. There are teachings of Jesus that set themselves over against teachings in the Old Testament. However, the emphasis is on fulfilment of the old covenant and on renewal of original intent rather than on discontinuation. We do not find a depiction of the Old Testament versus the New Testament in terms of tradition over against newness or law over against Spirit or failure over against success. The Old Testament enters into a dynamic relationship with the New in providing understanding and guidance for the renewed people of God.

The key to continuity between the Testaments is Jesus Christ understood and experienced in a reciprocal relationship within the hermeneutical community. It is the responsibility of the church to interpret correctly within a Christ-centred frame of reference. This requires that the Old Testament be read through Jesus Christ, and at the same time, that Jesus Christ be understood in light of the Old Testament. The *Confession's* usage of the Old Testament exemplifies at least the foundation and the beginnings of this approach.

The same pertains to the New Testament. To claim Jesus as the centre is not the same as giving the centre over to the New Testament. Rather, the New Testament stands alongside the Old within the Christological frame of reference.[14] This is evident, for example, in the debate in the Corinthian church over the question of the role of Paul and Apollos in relation to Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:1–11). It is evident in the Book of Revelation which upholds the Lordship of Christ in face of the church's temptation to veer in unfaithful directions (Revelation 2–3). The revelation received in Christ teaches

[13] In this respect, the *Confession* reflects the approach outlined in the essay by Jacob J. Enz entitled, "Canon: Creative Biblicism as a Hermeneutical Principle," in *Essays*, 165–176.

[14] We gain some support from Ben Ollenberger's citing of Menno Simons, of whose view he says the following: "Menno recognized the eschatological significance of Jesus and the importance that this has for understanding the Old *and* the New Testaments. Often the Anabaptists, and their followers, have forgotten this and allowed the New Testament to become law. . . . The Anabaptist emphasis on the decisiveness of Jesus' life for interpreting Scripture subordinates the *New* Testament, as well as the Old, to the intention of Christ. Jesus, the decisive act of God in history, is to be followed above the Old Testament—and the New." Ben C. Ollenberger, "The Hermeneutics of Obedience," in *Essays*, 52–53.

the New Testament church how to understand itself. At the same time, the experience of the church informs: the Christological foundation serves both covenants; both covenants serve the Christological foundation.

It has been characteristic of theologians in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition to accentuate the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, and to affirm the dominance of the New Testament over the Old.[15] Apparently Mennonite Confessions of Faith have reflected this same stance.[16] The *Confession* does not comply with this view. The Old Testament has a primary role as well. For example, Old Testament references to primordial events play a primary role; the Old Testament theme of promise is germane to the New Testament theme of fulfilment. The *Confession* substantiates and illustrates this continuity in its ways of appropriating the Old Testament.

Conclusion

In an essay by Waldemar Janzen, published in 1990, he asks a pertinent question in face of what he shows to be a bias toward the New Testament to the detriment of a rightful place for the Old Testament in our theology. "Is it not high time, then, that we reinstate the Old Testament as a full-fledged conversation partner in our ongoing theological discourse?!"[17] While the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* may not have gone far enough, the analysis and conclusions offered above lead me to claim that the *Confession* does take a significant step forward in reinstating the appropriation of the Old Testament.

[15] See Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptist Hermeneutics: Presuppositions, Principles and Practice," in *Essays*, 5–10. Klaassen cites Pilgrim Marpeck and Menno Simons as reference for this point of view.

[16] See Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church*, 34.

[17] Waldemar Janzen, "A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation," in *The Church as Theological Community*, 100.

Preaching and the Old Testament

John H. Neufeld

The Old Testament in the Life of the Church

During the past several decades a number of writers, both theologians and homileticians, have given focused attention to preaching and the Old Testament. Many of these express regret that the Old Testament has been neglected and argue that it should be reclaimed by the Christian pulpit. This is particularly so in the writings of Elizabeth Achtemeier,[1] Donald Gowan,[2] John Holbert,[3] Walter Brueggemann[4] and Waldemar Janzen.[5] The first three in this list focus on preaching and the Old Testament while Brueggemann and Janzen demonstrate in their theological approach how relevant the Old Testament is to the life of the people of God today.[6] Janzen has been helpful particularly in his book of essays, *Still in the Image*, and more recently in *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*. At the turn of the millennium, the church is benefiting from the coming together of the fruits of the historical-critical study of

[1] Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

[2] Donald E. Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament in the Christian Pulpit* (Nashville: John Knox Press, 1980).

[3] John C. Holbert, *Preaching Old Testament: Proclamation and Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

[4] Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968); *The Bible Makes Sense* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 1977).

[5] Waldemar Janzen, *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Newton: Faith & Life Press; Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982); *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

[6] See also John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967).

Scripture,[7] the canonical approach of Brevard Childs[8] and others, including Waldemar Janzen,[9] as well as a prolific body of literature in homiletics which is solidly based both in biblical interpretation and in theology.[10]

While scholars have devoted creative attention to these matters, and have shown renewed interest in the Old Testament for the faith of the Christian church, the Old Testament itself remains largely unknown among the laity of the church. Many Christians simply do not know the Old Testament and are ill-equipped to use it as a resource in their life of faith. Increasing biblical illiteracy, generally, and even in the churches, has been documented in recent years through surveys and articles. It is safe to assume that there is a higher level of illiteracy in reference to the Old Testament than to the New. In part this growing illiteracy is due to individuals not reading their Bibles, and in part it may be due to preachers not using Old Testament texts in their preaching. Elizabeth Achtemeier contends that for most of the mainline denominations in the United States "the Old Testament is lost."[11]

It is the thesis of this essay that the Old Testament is an indispensable resource in the life of the church, and the church's ministry of preaching in particular. In the following pages, I will address first the church's record in regard to the Old Testament, touching mainly on the early church and on the period of the Reformation, and will then review issues pertaining to the contemporary situation of both the neglect and recovery of the Old Testament in the church. I will then discuss the central reasons for using the Old Testament and consider various challenges in using the Old Testament in preaching.

[7] H. H. Rowley, ed., *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[8] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

[9] Waldemar Janzen, "Interacting with the Current Hermeneutical Debate While Writing a Believers Church Bible Commentary," paper presented at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum, Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion/ Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, November 23, 1996.

[10] Michael Duduit, ed., *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993); Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Leander Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978); Foster R. McCurley, *Wrestling with the Word* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996); Martha Simmons, ed., *Preaching on the Brink: The Future of Homiletics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); Gerhard von Rad, *Biblical Interpretations in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977); John C. Wenger, *God's Word Written* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1966); Richard C. White, *Biblical Preaching: How to Find and Remove the Barriers* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1988).

[11] Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 7.

Preaching and the Church's Ministry

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to clarify fundamental premises about the nature of preaching in the life of the church. It is my contention that our view of preaching should be congruent with our understanding of church and ministry. Preaching is a dimension of pastoral work derived from, subservient to, and congruent with the calling of the whole church to be the people of God in the world. While all believers are called to ministry—that is, to serve in Christ's name—some are called to special leadership tasks within the body gathered. Their two-fold task is: to build up the body and to equip all believers for their ministry, which may be carried out either in the church gathered or the church scattered. In this context, Christian preaching has the following purpose: that the self-disclosing deeds of God be proclaimed so that persons may respond to God in faith, become members of the body of Christ, mature in their faith, and grow in faithfulness as disciples and servants of Christ in the world. Equipping believers for service or ministry involves growth over time in reference to four key issues: 1) increasing awareness of one's Christian identity; 2) increasing awareness of one's Christian vocation; 3) increasing awareness of the issues that need to be addressed by the church or by individual believers; and 4) growth in one's capacity to cope with crises and difficulties that arise in life.

Preaching in the congregation has a cumulative impact in each of these four areas and, I will argue, the Old Testament is an indispensable resource for accomplishing these tasks adequately. Simply put: the use of the Old Testament will enrich growth in Christian identity, a sense of vocation, awareness of issues and the capacity to cope. In other words, building up and equipping the body of believers involves the process of leading the congregation in a life-long conversation with its body of inspired literature. This protracted faith and life-shaping conversation ought to include the whole biblical canon and not be narrowed by exposure and interaction with a reduced "canon within the canon."

With this understanding of the ecclesial context of preaching in mind, we can proceed to explore the church's record in regard to the Old Testament and preaching from the Old Testament in particular.

The Church's Record Regarding the Old Testament

One of the first things to note is that during the first decades, even centuries, of the Christian era, the Christian church had no other Bible than the Jewish community of faith had, namely the Old Testament. This is the point made by Phyllis A. Bird: "So the Bible of the church from its earliest beginnings was the Old Testament,

and the Old Testament alone, until well into the second century AD. The Jewish Scriptures were simply accepted, without question or defense as divine revelation."[12]

This accepting stance was seriously challenged by the work of Marcion (mid-second century) who, as a result of his literal reading of the Old Testament, rejected it as revealing an alien God. Rejecting the Jewish Scriptures, he then sought to define what were the truly Christian Scriptures. In response to his challenge, the church of the second century designated the two parts of the Christian Bible as the Old and New Covenants (Testaments). Irenaeus was the first to work consciously at defining the relationship of the Testaments on a historical rather than on an allegorical basis.[13] In addition to other key theological formulations, the church debated this issue and by the end of the second century the majority had accepted the two-part canon as inspired Scripture. Although the conviction that Scripture consisted of a two-part canon became the orthodox position in the whole church, the relationship between the Testaments continued to be a point of controversy for theologians and preachers for centuries to come.

The church of the sixteenth century inherited the questions about, and the approaches to, the Old Testament from its forerunners. I will only make a few comments on the sixteenth-century Anabaptists' approach to the Old Testament, leaving aside the ways in which Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli used the Old Testament. The Anabaptists' faith in Jesus Christ as the supreme revelation of God given to humanity sharply influenced their approach to a number of doctrinal issues, including their stance toward the Old Testament. William Klassen argues, in his article on the Old Testament in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, that the primary concern of leaders in the radical wing of the Reformation was their desire "to give Christ the honor due Him, and not stressing the Old Testament revelation except where it is in accord with the New."[14] In their public and written statements, often in disputations with the other reformers, Anabaptists taught that the relationship between the Testaments was best seen as historical. Klassen writes that their position was a "historical one in which God is progressively working through his people, preparing them for the fullness of revelation." Viewing the New Testament as "the fullness of revelation" led them at times to take a less than

[12] Phyllis A. Bird, *The Bible as the Church's Book* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 29.

[13] William Klassen, "Old Testament," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House; Newton: Mennonite Publication Office; Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1959), 50.

[14] Ibid., 51.

wholesome view of the Old Testament. Our Mennonite forebears rejected "the flat Bible" approach in which all parts of Scripture were on the same level of importance and as a consequence considered that, since the Old Testament was "not binding in so far as it disagrees with the New, it was superseded and abrogated."[15]

The debate among the reformers about the relationship of the Testaments was not resolved during the Reformation. It continues to haunt Christian leaders and the church as a whole. But, as we shall see, significant strides have been made in clarifying the issue. What William Klassen said about the Anabaptists, namely, that they "have not always taken a wholesome view of the Old Testament," has continued to be a widespread attitude in the churches. He acknowledges, as we all must, that the Old Testament "confronts the Christian church with some gnawing problems" and he is correct in saying that these problems "are not overcome by relegating the Old Testament to an irrelevant position."[16]

As noted in the introduction, the church today faces both a growing neglect and illiteracy in regard to the Old Testament, despite signals of a renewed interest. One of the factors in this increasing biblical illiteracy is that many pastors, while professing that the whole Bible is the Word of God, actually limit themselves to a much shorter "canon within the canon." This has a cumulative and shaping impact on the congregations they serve. Most church members assume (if they think about the question) that the Bible they are hearing is the whole Bible when, in fact, it may be an abbreviated version of the Bible.

The congregation I served for several decades was moulded in its biblical awareness and understanding with virtually no reference to the book of Revelation nor to large portions of the Old Testament. However, young adults with friends in other congregations became aware that the book of Revelation existed and was actually being used in other churches. They approached me and asked, "When will we ever hear something about Revelation in our church?" This led to a series of sermons based on this previously closed and obscure book of the New Testament. A similar thing happened in reference to the Old Testament. My own interest in, and appreciation of the Old Testament, had been aroused and nurtured by seminary professors Jacob J. Enz and Millard Lind. When I became pastor of First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, I preached a number of sermons, as well as series of sermons, on texts from the Old Testament. Members in the church mentioned that they could not recall sermons ever having been preached on some of these passages.

[15] Wilhelm Wiswedel, "Bible," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (1955), 323.

[16] William Klassen, "Old Testament," 51.

Many pastors' "canon within the canon" excludes large segments of the Old Testament. While parts of Genesis, the Psalms, and the messianic passages of Isaiah have been accepted and used by many in a large number of congregations, the rest of the Old Testament's rich body of varied literature has been virtually neglected. As a result of these trends and practices, extending over decades, major portions of the Old Testament have remained silent for the people.

Pastors will have various reasons for not dealing with the Old Testament. Among them may be the fact that they are committed to preaching the good news of the gospel and have not found the Old Testament to be well-suited to that purpose. Others may have the attitude that the Old Testament is primarily preparation for the New, or that the emphasis is entirely too much on law rather than on grace. If it is the pastors' responsibility to assist the congregation in its ongoing interaction and conversation with the whole body of literature which it formally accepts as Scripture, then pastors need to re-examine their approach to and use of the Old Testament.

Indications are that the situation is changing and these changes are being supported by a growing body of literature both by biblical scholars and by preachers. What has contributed to this change from the perspective of pastors? Some have examined their sermons over a longer period of time and have realized that they were not using the whole breadth of Scripture in their preaching and as a result are seeking to correct the imbalance. Some are using a lectionary and thus include Old Testament texts in their worship services, sometimes choosing to preach on them rather than on the New Testament readings. Seminary and Bible college studies of the Old Testament, which have introduced and appropriated the canonical-literary approach to the texts as well as the earlier historical-critical methods, have rekindled interest in the Old Testament. Others have turned to the Old Testament, at least to the narrative portions, because of their growing commitment to narrative rather than to propositional preaching.

In preparing to write this chapter I conducted a limited survey among pastors in Conference of Mennonites in Canada congregations.[17] A number of the respondents indicated that during the previous 12 months they had based about one-third of their

[17] List the Old Testament texts you have used during the past 12 months as well as the sermon titles related to these texts. What fraction of your total sermons were based on the Old Testament? Has your use of the Old Testament changed over the years? If you use the lectionary as the source of your sermon texts, do you sometimes choose the Old Testament reading as the text to focus on in the sermon? On what basis would such a choice be made? Have you preached series of sermons in which you worked through an Old Testament book? If so, please elaborate. Have you preached topical sermons in which Old Testament texts were the primary texts of your sermons? If so, please elaborate. What do you see as the unique contribution the Old Testament makes to

sermons on Old Testament texts. While this is a promising and welcome development, the type of Old Testament texts chosen is still limited. Most of them were making use of the narrative portions of the Old Testament, some prophetic literature during the season of advent and, of course, the Psalms. Many are still hesitant to preach from the prophets generally, or on difficult issues such as war in the Old Testament. Others indicated that passages such as those dealing with dietary laws and other culture-specific matters were consciously avoided. They were judged to be of little significance to the congregation's faith and practice. Many pastors are now in the process of reclaiming the Old Testament for the church. This is a necessary and encouraging development, consistent with our official statements about the Bible in our confessions of faith.

If we, pastors and church members, had taken our confessions of faith seriously the Old Testament would not have remained silent in our congregations. One of the respondents to the survey mentioned above stated it this way: "Anabaptists included the Old Testament in the canon. If it's in the canon, use it. It is considered God's Word." The belief of our forebears that Scripture includes both Testaments has continued to receive support in the confessions of faith produced by Mennonite conferences in North America. A brief review of several confessions of faith created since 1940 indicates that on an official and confessional level the question of the relation of the Testaments and their worth has been addressed.

In the 1941 Statement of Doctrine adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church, the prologue begins with, "Accepting *the full Bible* (italics mine) and the Apostolic Creed." Statement 4 continues, "We believe in the divine inspiration and the infallibility *of the Bible as the Word of God* (italics mine) and the only trustworthy guide of faith and life." The Mennonite Confession of faith adopted in 1963 affirms, "We believe that God has revealed himself in the Scriptures of *the Old and New Testaments* (italics mine), the inspired Word of God, and supremely in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ." The more recent *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) begins Article 4 in a similar way, "We believe that *all Scripture* (italics mine) is inspired by God . . . ."

Christian preaching? Has preaching from the Old Testament been problematic for you? If so, please elaborate. Have members of your congregation requested sermons on Old Testament texts? How have persons in your congregation responded to the sermons based on Old Testament texts? What do you recall about sermons based on Old Testament texts in the congregation(s) in which you were raised? What was the emphasis on preaching from the Old Testament in your training (Bible school, Bible college or seminary) to be a preacher? What is your understanding about preaching on the Old Testament in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition?

Although we have affirmed and used these confessions of faith for many years, the practice of many preachers (as noted above) and the prevalent attitudes of many church members about the Old Testament do not support the official statements. It is clear that many have a negative view of the Old Testament. A brief exploration of the attitudes of laypersons to the Old Testament may be helpful. What is the nature and the source of this common attitude toward the Old Testament? How could one describe the stance that many have taken?

For some the largely negative attitude toward the Old Testament is rooted in a widespread misconception which expresses itself by caricaturing the Old Testament as "strict legalism and works righteousness."[18] The basis for this caricature of the Old Testament may well be Jesus' harsh critique of the Pharisees in the first century. They had developed an approach to their Scriptures, and particularly the law, which wrenched the decalogue, as an example, away from its narrative context. In other words, the "ten words" were abstracted from their historical roots and treated as principles and expectations placed on the people. However, when we read the book of Exodus carefully it is abundantly clear that the ten words from Sinai were not expectations given to the people so that they might, by adhering to them, achieve salvation. This is a regrettable distortion of the ancient text. The prologue to the decalogue is a reminder of God's initiative on their behalf, of God's redemption of the people from their Egyptian overlords (Exod 20:1–2).

When we hear the ten words within the context of the story of liberation and redemption by Yahweh, they have a different ring to them; then they are words of guidance to an already thankful and redeemed people; then they suggest how gratitude for salvation is to be expressed and how their newly received freedom is to be preserved. They do not suggest that the people were to keep the ten words and thus earn their salvation. The way I have come to understand the gospels is that Jesus' harsh criticism of the scribes and the Pharisees was given because of their distortion of the Torah, which had developed during the centuries since the Babylonian exile. By their distortion they removed God's initiative and grace and failed to teach that Yahweh had first redeemed the people before spelling out the expectations.

Somehow the attitude that the Old Testament focuses on "strict legalism and works righteousness" has been transmitted to succeeding generations and surfaces as an implicit and explicit disparagement of the Old Testament. The attitude that then develops is that the Old Testament is sub-Christian (not only pre-Christian); it is second-rate, and is really nothing more than preparation for the

[18] John Holbert, *Preaching Old Testament*, 108.

coming of the Messiah and for God's grace. To caricature the Old Testament in this way is a serious and widespread problem indeed, a problem that will not be dealt with in one fell swoop, but only over a long period by modelling the positive use of the Old Testament and by explicit teaching about it. But the distortion of the Old Testament along the lines of the Pharisees' approach is only one among other problems.

We should be ready to acknowledge that using the Old Testament forces us to deal with a number of complicated issues, to name a few: circumcision, dietary laws, blood sacrifice, stipulations about ritual cleansings and purification, and war and violence attributed to God's will for the people. Some of this material appears to be contradictory or antiquarian, of interest primarily to the Jewish community, while some of it is clearly superseded by additional revelation and insight in the New Testament.

Obviously, these are issues that need to be addressed. But perhaps, except for the question of war, they pose no greater interpretative challenges than do some New Testament passages. It is striking, for instance, that in 1 Corinthians 11 we have what is considered to be the earliest account of the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17–34) immediately preceded by the passage on head coverings for women (1 Cor 11:2–16). We take with utter seriousness the passage dealing with the Lord's Supper, but consider the other part of the chapter on head coverings to be culturally specific and not binding on the church at all times and in all places. This uneven assessment of material in the same chapter from the same writer, Paul, certainly calls for interpretation and explanation. Recognizing this kind of hermeneutical issue in the New Testament may help us as we deal with the critical hermeneutical issues in the Old Testament.

Reasons for Using the Old Testament

We have affirmed preaching as one dimension of the church's ministry and have considered attitudes about the Old Testament throughout the Christian era. We must now ask the question: why should we use the Old Testament in sermons? This way of posing the question already indicates my belief that the Old Testament ought to be used in the Christian pulpit. We should use it not by way of concession, that is, "since it's been part of our Scripture since earliest times we are compelled to use it." Nor should we approach the Old Testament as descriptive of a quaint and ancient world which we find intriguing and interesting from time to time. Nor should we feel obligated to use the Old Testament simply because our forebears included it in our confessions of faith. Rather, we ought to affirm its rightful place in the canon, recognizing the peculiar challenges it

poses for interpretation, and then use it gladly in our preaching and teaching, with conviction and with creative enthusiasm.

On the positive side, there are some very good reasons for viewing the Old Testament as fully canonical in the church and for appreciating it as a full partner in the dialogue of faith. Theologian Douglas J. Hall argues that "the church needs to see its rootedness and find its stability in the Old Testament."[19] I will elaborate on the reasons for this under two broad headings: theological orientation and vocabulary, and specific theological convictions and understandings.

Theological Orientation and Vocabulary

Although the Testaments are distinct from each other they do share a common theological orientation; that is, basic assumptions which show the general but unmistakable direction in which our beliefs about God, the created world and humanity, and the relationship between God, creation and humanity tend to point. The New Testament's theological orientation is solidly rooted in the Old Testament's and in many ways is continuous with it. The Old Testament serves as the starting point, the necessary and indispensable introduction to and background for the New. Consider how difficult it would be for a stranger to the Bible to begin reading somewhere in the New Testament without a guide. The novice reader would soon sense that he or she is in a world in which unknown persons from the past play prominent roles. In addition, the reader would encounter a number of essential theological terms and concepts, each of which has a pre-history, but are not made explicit anywhere in the New Testament.

It is difficult, even impossible, for those who have grown up in Christian homes and in the context of the church in which these key persons and theological concepts have gradually become known, to come to the New Testament as strangers. Consider several examples: John 3:14, "just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness;" Romans 3:21, "But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed;" or Hebrews 3:3, "Just as Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses." In order to begin to understand these and many other passages in the New Testament we must be aware of prior meanings attached to "Moses," "serpent in the wilderness," "law," "righteousness of God," and "glory of Moses," as well as the impact of "but now . . . ."

Implicitly, the New Testament assumes prior knowledge of these persons and terms; it assumes that it is building on a foundation which does not often have to be made explicit. A guide for the

[19] Douglas J. Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989), 32.

stranger to the biblical world would provide minimal background details so that the uninitiated reader could begin to grasp the meaning of what is being read. In other words, the New Testament simply assumes prior familiarity with the language, the assumptions and belief system, the characters of the storyline—all of which are provided in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is seen as the necessary precursor of the storyline associated with Jesus Christ.

Those who acquire this prior knowledge as a part of growing up have a distinct advantage over those who have never been exposed to, or have never been taught, the Old Testament's storyline with its language, characters and assumptions. In other words, the theological orientation established in the Old Testament is assumed in the New and its development continues in the New. The New Testament builds on the Old but, it must be emphasized, not in seamless continuity. While the New Testament provides intensification and clarification of the basic orientation and the range of beliefs introduced there, thus bringing the Old to fulfilment, it also introduces that which is "new" and "greater than" the revelation of God in the Old. This discontinuity or this setting itself apart from the Old is evident at a number of points, yet the New Testament continues to insist that the Old Testament is its soil and the holy root system from which it has grown. In language similar to this, Douglas J. Hall writes that the Old Testament storyline is "germinal for all Christian reflection."[20]

Yet the relationship between the Testaments is not at all clear. Scholars as well as careful Bible readers have tried to make sense of the paradoxes and ambiguities they encounter when reading the whole Bible. Various metaphors have been used to elaborate on the relationship between the Testaments. Probably the most common one is "promise and fulfilment."[21] This has become a fruitful way of considering the issue, yet it is not inclusive of all the dimensions of the relationship between the Testaments. A more recent one is that of drama.[22] The question is: can Act II of a drama be fully understood without Act I in which the issues have been identified and characters have been introduced? In most instances the answer would be an obvious "No."

[20] Ibid.

[21] Paul J. Achtemeier and Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Old Testament Roots of Our Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), develop the "promise-fulfilment" motif using the following outline: I. God's Promise: The Beginning of Biblical History; II. The Reason for the Promise: The Primeval History in Genesis; III. The Working Out of the Promise: The Narratives of Genesis–Joshua; IV. The Relation of the Law to Promise; V. A New Addition to the Promise: The Establishment of Kingship in Israel; VI. The Prophetic Understanding of the Promise; and VII. The Prophetic New Israel and the New Testament Fulfilment of the Promise.

[22] Bernhard W. Anderson's, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible* (New York: Association Press, 1971), views the whole Bible as a drama in three acts: Act I: The Formation of God's People; Act II: The Re-formation of God's People; and Act III: The Transformation

Another metaphor is the one suggested by Roland Allen and John C. Holbert in their study, *Holy Root, Holy Branches.*[23] This metaphor suggests an inseparable link and a dependent relationship between the New and the Old Testaments. It also implies that the Old Testament has born fruit and reached fulfilment in the New. "The First Testament furnishes the basic vocabulary and the conceptual framework within which to understand the nature and the purpose of God's presence in Christ and the church."[24] In their book, *The Old Testament Roots of Our Faith*, Paul and Elizabeth Achtemeier make a similar claim, "The roots of our Christian faith lie deep in the Old Testament."[25]

In an article titled, "If there were no Old Testament," Waldemar Janzen uses another image to clarify the relationship of the Testaments.[26] He draws from the field of building construction. "The Old Testament is to the New Testament and the Christian faith as the forms and the cement are to the house. Some of the Old Testament's message served a purpose at one time, a purpose now accomplished, and is thus comparable to the forms, and some parts remain the foundation of our faith, comparable to the cement." But a little later on in the same article he confesses some uneasiness with his image and wishes he could replace "hardened cement" with "a stiff yet viscous substance capable of holding its shape for a long time, but changing with imperceptible slowness nevertheless." I agree that this image is problematic, partly because of the suggestion that the cement in the finished house requires no further consideration of the forms which were essential at one time.

It is now our task to elaborate and become more specific about the content of this rootedness of the New Testament in the Old, beginning with the theological orientation. What are the comprehensive, over-arching themes which are common to both Testaments? Walter Brueggemann writes of "a defined stock of memories" which inform our present perceptions, attitudes and behavior."[27] In their study, Allen and Holbert refer to these as "shared theological perspectives."[28]

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of God's People. Anderson points out several characteristics of drama and applies them to the Bible: a drama has a beginning and an end; it has a cast of persons and story deals with the whole range of human experience, from triumph to tragedy; it has a plot which moves toward a climax; underneath all the diversity is the movement of the plot to its resolution. For my purposes here, I am simply substituting Act I for the Old Testament and Act II for New Testament.

[23] Ronald J. Allen and John C. Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[24] Ibid., 62.

[25] Achtemeier and Achtemeier, *The Old Testament Roots of Our Faith*, 16.

[26] Waldemar Janzen, "If there were no Old Testament," *The Mennonite* 90 (15 April 1975), 246–247.

[27] Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, 34.

[28] Ronald Allen and John Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches*, 58.

I would like to suggest the following: The orientation shared by the Testaments is that one God has created and sustains the universe; God is revealed as the God of love and mercy through involvement in the world; life is understood as a story in which God plays a dominant role; believing in God has specific ethical expectations for those who enter the covenant; and hope is maintained in the face of hopelessness.

Specific Theological Convictions and Understandings

In addition to a shared theological orientation the two Testaments also share a number of specific theological convictions and understandings. To a large degree, the New Testament's specific theological convictions stand in "seamless continuity" with the Old Testament. Examples of seamless continuity between the Testaments on specific matters are the following: 1) the New Testament assumes and affirms the doctrine of creation which is made explicit in the Old Testament; 2) Jesus assumes the Old Testament's basic understandings of sexuality emphasizing the Creator's original intentions over against concessions granted by Moses; 3) the New Testament's understanding of sin is congruent with that of the Old; 4) the New Testament's conviction that the self-revealing and initiative-taking God is gracious and merciful is also in continuity with glimpses of God and understandings of God deduced from the larger revelatory narrative, for example, in the books of Exodus, Hosea and Jonah, found in the Old Testament.

Some specific teachings of the Old Testament are explicitly superseded in the New. This is particularly evident in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:21–48) where the repeated formula, "You have heard . . . but I say unto you" is used. However, it must be said that even this well-known passage is preceded by a short paragraph in which Jesus declares that he has "not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfil them"(Matt 5:17). When we read the gospels we may get the impression that there is actually more discontinuity than continuity between Jesus and the Old Testament. This impression is related to two related factors: 1) the ongoing tension between Jesus and the religious leaders of his time as reflected in the gospel narratives; and 2) the critical stance Jesus took against the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees on a variety of specific issues, such as the Sabbath and the role of their tradition. While we take seriously these words of critique, even condemnation, we also must remember that Jesus was critiquing not so much the Old Testament, but the distortions which had developed in Judaism in the preceding centuries and were so strongly represented in his time by the Pharisees.

Then, there are specific issues present in the Old Testament

about which the New Testament is silent. I have already mentioned the doctrine of creation. What is to be assumed in such cases? While silence on an issue could indicate rejection, Janzen as well as others suggest that it could also signal acceptance and approval. To quote Janzen, "This may well signal continuity and not rejection of that which had been introduced earlier and was assumed by the New Testament writers."[29]

An important dimension of theological convictions is the vocabulary used to communicate them. In this regard the dependence of the New Testament on the Old is striking. The "defined stock of memories" (Brueggemann[30]) developed in the Old Testament provide more to the New Testament than a common theological orientation. Precise theological terms with inherited and developed meanings are taken over by the writers of the New Testament. Janzen writes that the Old Testament provides the essential "theological vocabulary for the interpretation of the meaning of Jesus. The various names given to Jesus Christ are rooted in the Old Testament and cannot be understood apart from it: Messiah, Son of Man, the new David, the Good Shepherd, the Redeemer, Immanuel, the second Adam, the suffering servant."[31]

Closely related to the precise theological terms are larger theological categories such as: God, creation, humanity, covenant, salvation, sexuality, the identity of the people of God, and the mission of God's people. When we study these, we cannot but be struck by the strong links between the Testaments. All of them are rooted and grounded in the Old Testament. About some of these categories the New Testament is silent while others are given sharper focus. Their meanings are intensified and clarified by becoming incarnate in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In a number of instances specific concepts introduced earlier are reformulated by New Testament writers as fulfillment of Old Testament intentions.

The development of specific theological understandings and the meanings of key terms usually proceeds on the basis of meanings developed during the Old Testament period. I say, usually, because there seem to be exceptions to this general pattern. I take the book of Revelation as an example of a New Testament writing drawing on images, metaphors and language from the Old Testament, but rather than simply building on and intensifying the inherited meaning, Revelation reinterprets the hopes and dreams embedded in the Old Testament from a Christian perspective.[32] That is, John

[29] Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 189.

[30] Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, 34.

[31] Waldemar Janzen, "If there were no Old Testament," 247.

[32] This is in contrast to the dispensationalist view, for example, which seems to interpret New Testament passages in the light of key prophetic passages in the Old Testament, particularly in the books of Daniel and Ezekiel. My own position is that we ought to interpret the Old Testament in light of the New.

"christianizes" the inherited stock of meanings. Take as an example Revelation 21:1–8. John takes the image of "the holy city, the new Jerusalem." Ancient Jewish hopes anticipated the restoration of physical Jerusalem as an integral part of God's plan. John uses the familiar words of the ancient dreams but reshapes them. He gives a Christian re-interpretation of the physical, material, earth-bound dreams of his Jewish forebears. In the genre of apocalyptic literature he pictures eternal bliss as "Jerusalem," not physically restored but in its spiritual function. In his radical rewriting of the ancient hopes he makes it clear that for him the city of Jerusalem is not really a city; it is the bride of the Lamb, which is the church (Rev 21:9–10). While John the revelator radically reinterprets Old Testament hopes and dreams in the form of apocalyptic literature, his reinterpretation is congruent with the larger theological orientation shared by the rest of the New and Old Testaments.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that there are highly significant linkages between the Testaments. In addition to sharing a common theological orientation and vocabulary, the New Testament affirms a number of central convictions introduced in the Old. In some instances these are affirmed implicitly, frequently they are intensified and clarified and, in some cases, convictions taken over from the Old Testament are given a Christian reinterpretation. Brueggemann is correct when he states that the Old Testament is "the memory book for Jews and Christians."[33]

The Challenge of Using the Old Testament in Preaching

The task of using the Old Testament in preaching is, in fact, not an easy one. Several challenges need to be acknowledged and dealt with if we want to do so effectively. Effectiveness includes the realization of the four growth outcomes mentioned at the outset of this essay. Preachers need to give attention to several key areas. First, we need to accept the fact that considerably more background work is necessary if the Old Testament is to be used. For one thing the amount of material one deals with is far greater than that which we find in the New Testament, and it is not as easily accessible to the contemporary reader as is the New Testament. We have to develop creative ways of weaving the necessary background materials into our sermons so that the Word can communicate.

I discovered this some years ago when I preached a sermon on the book of Philemon. Although Philemon is one of the shortest letters in the New Testament, it does help a great deal to know the essential background details about slaves and masters, and what rights masters had over slaves in first-century Roman society. On that occasion I decided to sketch the background even before I read

[33] Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, 79.

the letter Paul wrote to Philemon. After the sermon a choir member commented that that had been very helpful for him. The reading of the passage had been given a context and it began to make sense to him.

Examples of this kind in reference to Old Testament texts are too numerous to mention. Preaching on the creation narratives could include some comments on other creation accounts extant during the biblical period. Preaching on the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) would be enhanced with some comments on the practice of child sacrifice in ancient times. Preaching from the prophets requires knowledge of the socio-economic, political and religious context of the words and allusions found in the text. If preachers themselves could become enthused about the fresh insights available as a result of background studies, they would be able to retell the background in lively narrative, in self-disclosing dialogical fashion, which most congregations would welcome.

Another aspect of the background is that, since large portions of the Old Testament are foreign to the people, we have to assume that most hearers do not have a good sense of the overall storyline for the sequential flow of events. Since there are some who know their Old Testaments well, we may think that we shouldn't bore them with details they already know. This is probably a wrong assumption. Fred Craddock was right when he suggested that people want to hear what they already know.[34] This means that when we refer, for example, to Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel we take the time to retell that dramatic story. Those who already know it are affirmed in their prior knowledge; and the retelling of it to those who did not know the story, or to those who had forgotten it, enables them to hear it with sufficient detail so that it can become part of their faith-forming narrative database. Shouldn't the people become aware of and familiar with the basic three-fold division of the Old Testament: Torah, Prophets, Wisdom Literature? Wouldn't it be helpful when reference is made to any key figure of the Old Testament that the people could mentally place him or her into the overall storyline? This may suggest that at times sermons include a significant teaching element. The risk we take is that this would be done in an unimaginative and pedantic way, but if we give attention to method and form, as well as content, the danger can be avoided. Background materials do not need to be presented as a logical preamble to the sermon. An alternative is to introduce them at critical points within the body of the sermon, somewhat like a novelist brings us well into the plot of a story before taking the time to provide helpful background material.[35]

[34] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 159–162.

[35] For examples of using the Old Testament in preaching, see John H. Neufeld, *The Story That Shapes Us: Sermons* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1997), especially chapters 4, 12, 16, 24 and 30.

A second challenge facing preachers when using the Old Testament is to work theologically within the largely narrative structure of the material. That is, in using the Old Testament in preaching we need to develop the skills of theological reflection as well as the art of literary criticism. Old Testament scholar J. N. Schofield wrote, "it is much more important in biblical study to try to discover why a story was told or a saying recorded than to discover its date, origin or historicity."[36] Waldemar Janzen's *Still in the Image* and Gerhard von Rad's *Biblical Interpretations in Preaching* are two examples of careful theological reflection based on the material in the form in which we have received it.

In his paper on writing a Bible commentary, Waldemar Janzen said, "canonical criticism is an approach that calls, not only for theological astuteness, but also for literary analysis and sensitivity."[37] We must develop the art of delving beneath the text, behind the text, and search for possible intentions by either the writer/editors or by the believing community which were involved in the shaping of the material into the form we now have. In his paper Janzen illustrates this method and its value by showing how he had arrived at an outline for the book of Exodus: "I have simply tried to show how certain literary observations on the basis of the final text provide me with a structuring of the book of Exodus, and therefore with an understanding of it."[38]

John C. Holbert also addresses these concerns. In a chapter entitled, "Reading the Bible's Narrative," Holbert makes a number of suggestions and outlines a basic approach to the material. He writes, "to hear these narratives anew, we must first retrain our eyes and ears." This retraining focuses on three aspects of narrative technique: "plot, characterization, and point of view."[39] Here, I am most interested in his third item, point of view, since it is in the explicit or implicit point of view of a narrative that the theological intent or concerns would also be evident. Sometimes I wish that I as a preacher would have had more training in critical studies of literature—something that Janzen acquired through his graduate studies in German literature. In his paper on the issues connected to writing a biblical commentary, he refers to this as an important factor in his own shift toward narrative criticism in biblical studies.[40] In writing about the two accounts of the death of Samuel (1 Samuel 3, 2 Samuel 1) John Holbert also urges us to consider "the narrator's

[36] J. N. Schofield, *Introducing Old Testament Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 10.

[37] Waldemar Janzen, "Interacting with the Current Hermeneutical Debate," 2.

[38] Ibid., 4.

[39] John Holbert, *Preaching Old Testament*, 62.

[40] Waldemar Janzen, "Interacting with the Current Hermeneutical Debate," 1.

art:" "What the literary analyst assumes, in contradistinction to the historical critic, is that the text *as it stands* (italics mine) makes some kind of literary sense."[41]

The challenge to most preachers will be to modify their approach to the texts in order to include this emphasis on narrative reading. As Holbert says, "In biblical narrative, the form (mode) is inextricably connected to the content (matter). . . . Can anyone learn the techniques of narrative reading? The answer is yes; anyone can learn to read narratively. . . ."[42] The approach suggested here is one that will aid the preacher in exploring the theological focus and intent of the Old Testament. It will require a commitment to ongoing study. On a very practical level it may mean that, in order to preach on a particular passage or narrative, the preacher will need to bring to the text the conscious awareness and theological intent of the whole. More than that, preachers will bring into their sermons the fruit of creative dialogue between a particular text and the overarching theological themes found when one considers the entire Old Testament.

A third challenge facing us when we seek to use the Old Testament is to reflect on our experience with the help of and in light of Old Testament stories and images. Paul may have had something like this in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians, "These things (itemized in verses 1–5) happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us" (1 Cor 10:11). By imaginatively entering the ancient text we may discover analogies to contemporary experiences. Allen and Holbert speak of the "hermeneutic of dynamic analogy" arguing that while "cultural forms and worldviews of the Old Testament people, practices and institutions differ at many points from those of the late twentieth century, there are underlying currents of experience that function similarly in ancient and contemporary settings."[43]

Dynamic analogy to contemporary experiences may be discovered on several levels. Consider the following examples: 1) The Joseph narrative has potential on the personal as well as corporate/systemic levels of experience. More narrowly understood, this extended story is helpful as a depiction of the dynamic interactions between family members over time. Considering the details of plot, characterization and point of view provides rich insights into broken relationships, guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation. However, we would need to ask whether the writer's intent wasn't to address the much broader concern of the threat to the fulfilment of God's promises. Seen in this way, the Joseph

[41] John Holbert, *Preaching Old Testament*, 74.
[42] Ibid., 76.
[43] Ronald Allen and John Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches*, 35.

sequence needs to be seen within the larger framework of the whole of Genesis and even the whole Pentateuch. 2) The book of Job, the third chapter of Habakkuk (esp. 3:17–19) as well as a number of Psalms, wrestle with difficult questions of despair and disillusionment associated with suffering, disaster and tragedy in life. These texts quickly connect with the world-wide disasters and their impact on large numbers of people, as well as the very personal and private difficulties relating to setbacks in life, such as a sudden death or a longer bout with a disease like cancer. 3) Sections of prophetic literature, such as those found in Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah, address larger issues of the relation of the religious community to the state, the role of religious leaders in relation to national and international policies, and issues of justice in society. Walter Brueggemann's *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* deals with these larger questions. He deals with "the contemporary gap between those who want the church involved in the issues of the day and those who cherish the traditional forms and formulations."[44] In this study he shows how the prophetic material is relevant to the late twentieth century.[45]

Admittedly, there are more challenges facing the preacher who wishes to use the Old Testament. But if these three challenges are accepted and worked with, preachers will have made excellent progress in preaching the Word from the Old Testament.[46]

[44] Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for a Crisis*, 11.

[45] Since many pastors find it more difficult to use texts from the prophets for sermons, I suggest that Brueggemann's study on Hosea, *Tradition for Crisis*, serves as an excellent resource for preaching on one book and as a model for working with other prophetic books.

[46] Two works which would be of particular value to preachers as they work with the Old Testament are: Ronald Allen and John Holbert's *Holy Root, Holy Branches* (see note 23), especially the very practical section entitled, "Twelve Steps to the Sermon on the Old Testament," and Elizabeth Achtemeier's book, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (see note 1), especially her sections on "Preaching from the Narratives," "Preaching from the Law," "Preaching from the Prophets," "Preaching from the Psalms," and "Preaching from the Wisdom Literature."

Can New Methods Free Us to Listen to the Old Testament?

Wesley J. Bergen

The revolution which is occurring in biblical studies is not a single movement or organized transformation; rather, a whole host of new methods are being used to study the Bible, under a variety of names and with a whole range of effects. All of these, combined with the response from traditional studies, make this a time of great ferment and confusion in biblical studies. Words like "synchronic" and "socio-literary" and "ideological" are thrown about casually, with each author ascribing a different meaning to them.

Even the most devoted specialist in the field finds it impossible to keep up with all the new methods and terminology.[1] The interested lay person is more likely to be confused than enlightened by the technical discussions. My intention in this essay is neither to add to the confusion nor to pretend to be able to clear it up. Rather, I want to point to a few of the positive contributions which the movement as a whole can make to the way the Old Testament is used in the church.[2]

[1] A discussion of various methods can be found in *The Postmodern Bible,* ed. George Aichele, et al (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) which was collectively written by a group of leaders in the field calling themselves The Bible and Culture Collective.

[2] There are numerous books available to introduce some of the newer methods of Old Testament study. My favourite is David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

The Place of the Reader

Much of the energy in Old Testament studies in the past century has been focused on the questions of history. This focus has been dear to the hearts of many Mennonites who are often interested in, if not obsessed with, the questions of history. The difficulty for the church has been that the movement from historical study to contemporary application is not always easy. Commentaries which explored in minute detail the history or pre-history of a particular passage may provide very little help in trying to make the passage relevant to a modern audience.

This is not to say that scholars were generally disinterested in the relevance of the Old Testament for the church. Most scholars are deeply committed church people, as renowned for their sermons as for their writing. The difficulty was that the "application" part of the study was seldom included in the written work because it was not thought to belong there. Scholarly writing was focused on "objective research," rather than "subjective interpretation," and scholarship which veered toward the sermonic often went unpublished. It became the task of the individual pastor to make the leap from history to meaning, with little or no help from the commentary.

This strict dichotomy between objective research and subjective interpretation has been largely discredited by the new methods. The attack on these categories came from a whole host of directions. French literary theory demonstrated how the entire subjective/objective dichotomy was simply non-existent. Feminist scholars showed how male "objective" research was still dominated by male interests and male perspectives. Scholars from Latin America demonstrated that Euro-American scholars were inheritors of the imperialist assumptions of their society.

The move toward the application of new methods to the study of the Bible has allowed new questions to be asked and new perspectives to enter the conversation. Besides raising fascinating new questions and ideas, the new methods require from the reader less specialized knowledge, which creates the potential for the non-specialist to enter the discussion as a participant rather than an observer. While knowledge of the Hebrew language and Ancient Near Eastern culture are still relevant to the discussion, they are not absolutely necessary, nor do they provide a privileged place from which to expound the "true meaning" of the text. Texts are only meaning*ful* because readers fill them with meaning. Thus the reader of the commentary does not need to accept passively information from the "expert," but can enter the dialogue with the Bible and scholarship as one reader of the Bible among others.

Some readers are cautious about the new methods because

they appear to open up the Pandora's box of individualist interpretation. Since readers supply the "meaning" for the text, are we entering a time when the text can mean anything or nothing? Have we lost a foundation from which we can talk about truth?

The answer to this question is that the box was never closed. While scholars have long agreed that there was a "true meaning" to a text, they were seldom able to agree as to what this was. The "true meaning" differed, and as we look back we can see how the cultural assumptions of the readers affected their "objective interpretations." Thus, instead of arguing about how to achieve the impossible goal of "objective interpretation," the new methods offer us a way of talking about interpretation—real interpretation, how we actually use the Bible—as part of the discussion of the meaning of a text.

One clear advantage for Mennonite readers of the Old Testament is that our peace stance can again enter the discussion about the "meaning" of the Old Testament, without attempting to claim that it is "really" a pacifist document. For example, in the stories about Samson (Judges 13–16), Samson spends a good deal of time killing his (and Israel's) enemies, an action which hardly fits with Jesus' command to love our enemies. Yet it is possible to read the Samson story as ironic. While the narrator never judges Samson's deeds in a negative way, Samson is presented as someone whose moral judgement (16:1) and intelligence (16:16) are open to doubt. This weakens Samson's status as "hero" and opens the way for us to read the narrator's characterization of God's desires (14:4) also as ironic.

The question in the Samson stories is not whether or not the text *is* ironic, but whether or not we can read it both honestly and ironically.[3] We begin with the recognition that we wish to read it ironically, and that the generations before us have not done so. If we begin with the recognition of this desire, we will be less likely to treat our attempt to find "meaning" in the text as an objective observation of the "true meaning" of the story.

Texts do not *have* meaning. "Meaning" is an attempt to provide an understanding of a story, to say what the text says using other words. This is impossible. To use other words is to say something different; it is to substitute our text for the Bible's. This substitution is unavoidable, but we cannot pretend that the words we use to attempt to provide the "meaning" of the text are somehow equivalent to the text itself. As we think about what the Samson story means as a portrayal of the God-human interaction, we must recognize that these thoughts are our own, these words are our own, that our words are not God's.

[3] "Honestly" here refers to our best attempt to come to terms with all the parts of the story, rather than picking and choosing the words that best fit our desires.

How does this free us to listen to the Old Testament? The above description can be applied both to the sermonic use of the Bible and to scholarly observations. Our experience of the world, our preconceptions, our desires, all of these are part of the reading process, the struggle to take the text's words and make them our own. In this sense, all reading is sermonic[4] even when the sermon is preached only to oneself. This recognition is giving rise to a whole new type of commentary where the world of the text and the world of the author interact in a self-conscious way.[5]

This recognition also opens the way for all of us to read the Old Testament without worrying about whether we have read all the necessary background material. We can teach one another some basic guiding principles for interpretation using available guides,[6] and then use these principles on new texts, without requiring specialized knowledge for each book of the Bible. Even as the scholar writes works which are more accessible and user-friendly, the lay person finds herself more able to read without using someone else's interpretation.

The Old Testament as Books of Faith

One of the difficulties in reading the Old Testament as a guide to faith and life is that the Old Testament was not written by or for Mennonites. It was written by and for Jews long before the birth of Jesus. While this appears to be too obvious to state, it needs to be said as a reminder.

Not long ago it was the task of the biblical scholar to find in the Bible the basis for the church's doctrine. Doctrine was primary, and the Bible was read by each denomination as a text which would provide the foundation for that doctrine. The advent of historical criticism largely put an end to this practice, but what it offered as a replacement often left the Bible in the hands of the biblical scholar alone rather than in the hands of the theologian. The replacement of one expert with another was hardly good news for the lay person or pastor.

The question remains, however: how can we take a book we have adopted, rather than written, and make it our own story in a

[4] This idea is not universally accepted by those practicing the "new methods." For instance, Robert Alter, one of the original voices in the field, still attempts to write from the privileged position of "correct interpretation." He does this by allowing control of interpretation to be retained by the author/redactor rather than by recognizing the interested and therefore reader-directed nature of any reading. See Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), and *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

[5] Not all new commentaries are written from this perspective. Scholars are still learning how to do this, and there is much resistance to this type of scholarship.

[6] Again, I would recommend Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible.*

way that takes its character seriously? How can we conceive of a method which would allow us to do this? As Mennonites we are unlikely to be willing to separate doctrine from "biblical principles," yet this always runs the risk of creating the Bible (and also God) in our own image.

One metaphor which I find helpful in this discussion is to think of the Bible as a conversation, a discussion ranging through a whole host of topics. The task of reading is the task of attempting to enter into someone else's conversation. First we need to understand what the conversation is about; then we can attempt to add our own words to the conversation. This metaphor moves us beyond the question of whether or not the Bible contradicts "itself," or the effort to explain that all parts of the Bible really agree with all other parts. It stems from the recognition that the Bible is a collection of books, and many of the books are themselves collections or internal conversations.

For example, the task is to learn how to enter the conversation between Job and Jeremiah on the justice of God. Or between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 on the relationship between woman and man. The task also is to listen carefully enough to hear the conversation, to listen to Psalm 110 as it responds to Deuteronomy 17, to listen to Psalm 23 as it reflects on 1 Samuel 16:11. What sort of conversation is this, and how might we enter it?

Conversations can be entered in a number of ways. We can do so by agreeing with one voice and adding our own thoughts and ideas to that voice's strength. We can attempt to strike a balance between the various voices and come to a compromise. Or we can add another voice, attempting to bring things into the conversation which were lacking, perspectives which the conversation has not considered. All of these are options as we converse with the Bible's conversation.

Entering the Bible's conversation also includes the recognition that we bring other texts into the conversation. For example, when we encounter the metaphor of God as King, what kind of images come to mind? Do we think about Prince Charles, the future King of England, and the stories we have heard or read about him? Or are our minds drawn to Simba from Disney's "The Lion King," where the king is responsible for the fertility of the land, and pretty females say "You are our only hope!"? Other readers may think about the place of the king in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

All of these things may flip through our minds as we read. Some of them share themes with the biblical text, while some of them flatly contradict what we understand the Bible to be saying. They are ideas we bring to the conversation, ideas which both distort and enhance our reading. These other texts which we bring into the

conversation are called *intertexts*. They are not formal textual comparisons but ideas we have picked up from the world around us which influence how we understand the Bible.

Listening to the Voices of Others

The revolution which is taking place in biblical studies is parallel to a larger societal transformation which has influenced the sciences as much as religion. This transformation is often called post-modernism.[7] Included within post-modernism is the recognition of the limits which language and culture place on all attempts to communicate meaning. This limitation is neither to be celebrated nor mourned but merely recognized. The effect of this recognition within biblical studies is that we spend less time debating which attempt to understand a text is the "correct" one and more time trying to broaden our understanding by listening to the voices of others.

This change is already strongly affecting the way the church does mission and the way it relates to Christians from other cultures. The effect has not been to set aside all claims to truth but to recognize the partial, language-bound nature of all truth claims, to spend more time listening and less time assuming that we have a privileged corner on the truth market.

Within biblical studies, cross-cultural sensitivity allows the reader to listen to the ancient Hebrew and Greek voices and attempt to place herself as best as possible within this world, while recognizing that the ancient Hebrew voice may be heard very differently in an Asian culture than in a North American one, or that it may sound different to a wealthy woman than to a poor man. The effect is to provide a much more open learning environment. There are no readings which are not limited by the language, interests and needs of the reader. The "expert" provides specialized knowledge but this brings with it specialized interests and needs.

The movement away from the privileged reader can be seen most clearly within the context of liberation theology. The basic recognition which guides liberating biblical studies is that trickle-down scholarship works about as well as trickle-down economics—well for the rich and not-so-well for the poor. What this means in the North American setting is that the pastor or Sunday school teacher can enter the conversation, not on the basis of specific amounts of expertise, but on the basis of being a reader like all other readers.

[7] George Aichele, *The Postmodern Bible*, 9, states that "the postmodern has to do with the transformation in the local ways we understand ourselves in relation to modernity and to contemporary culture and history, the social and personal dimensions of that awareness, and the ethical and political responses that it generates" (p. 9). A helpful guide to post-modernsn, written from an evangelical perspective, is J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

In order to be able to read Jeremiah, one no longer needs extensive knowledge of political and social structures in the sixth century BCE (or fifth or fourth, depending upon the dating provided by the experts). While this knowledge certainly can still aid the reader, scholars become one set of voices in a much larger conversation, voices which cannot make extravagant claims to true interpretation.

What this means for the reader is that you are once again free to read the Old Testament, to explore its strange world, to expound its glorious truths, recognizing that your reading will be incomplete as all readings are incomplete. This also means that the more voices you listen to which are different from your own, the larger will be your understanding of the Bible and God.

Reading Elisha

Some of the above discussion may sound like a call to "just read the Bible." While there is a certain truth to this, "just reading" is not as easy as it sounds. Part of the difficulty for me is that I am not "just reading," I am writing. In my writing, I am continuously attempting to communicate something specific to someone I cannot see, or know, or receive feedback from. So I ask myself questions like "how does this sound to an educated lay person," or "how would so-and-so think about this?" In addition, reading with me are the hosts of teachers and writers who have taught me to read and whose opinions I value. Inside a *Festschrift* to Waldemar Janzen, I wonder how he would respond to my words.

Aside from these considerations, there is an entire theoretical discussion regarding the whole concept of "the reader" and "reading." One author has noted 15 different theoretical readers, ranging from the *implied reader* through the *competent reader* to the *resisting reader*.[8] Thus, I face the question of which of these readers I wish to embody as I undertake the task of writing a reading.

Perhaps the largest complication to the whole enterprise is that, even choosing to read as "myself," I begin with the recognition that at different points in my life I speak with different voices. I am both a teacher and a pastor, and my sermons sound different than my lectures. I am both a pastor and a parent, and how I read the Bible depends on whether I want to explain it to a congregation or to my children. Besides these *personae*, I have a strongly cynical side which I allow more or less rein, depending upon the situation. And this does not take into account the years I have spent learning to read like people I admire, or have attempted to resonate with the voice of someone quite different than myself.

I'd like to demonstrate a reading of the Bible, done in three of my voices, which I will distinguish by means of columns. You can

[8] Tim Long, "A Real Reader Reading Revelation," *Semeia* 73 (1996): 86.

eavesdrop on a conversation between the various parts of myself as I struggle to understand the portrayal of the enigmatic prophet Elisha. The readers involved are all "me," with the occasional reference to the opinions of others. In order for this reading to be successful, I would invite you to read while listening for the responses from the various voices of "you." I encourage you to listen to yourself and find the parts of yourself which connect with or diverge from the various parts of me.

I'm Wes the scholar. I am the voice that will guide the conversation, since this is an article for scholarly publication. I will ask questions such as the following: Is this academically plausible? Am I straying too far from my text? Am I forgetting that the text's world is not my world? How would some of my professors respond to this? I am also the cautious voice which wonders how this essay might affect my job prospects within Mennonite academia.

Hi, I'm Wes the pastor. This is the part of Wes that cares about how the word remains the Word of God. I want to ask questions like: What difference does this make to my life? How could I preach this? How do I make this word available to the needs of my audience? I am the voice most focused on the audience, on you. The scholar can worry about the paper; the preacher is worried about the message. I have been preaching for more years and in more situations than I have been teaching or writing, so my pastoral voice is more confident than my scholar's voice, and I will likely intrude at will.

I am Wes the poet. Look at those guys up there, wringing their hands, worrying about what people might think. We can't afford to take ourselves that seriously (no one else does).

This is the part of me which prefers to make statements rather than carefully control the questions. I want to make outrageous statements like: We don't have to like everything in the Bible, you know. Sometimes it is more important to be honest than to pretend to be holy. If the Bible is God's word, then we don't

need to defend it all the time. Just let it be what it is.

I know that sometimes the other parts of Wes don't like me.[9] I tend to say things in a way that is incompatible with traditional academic writing. I like to express myself in ways that are raw, rhetorical, confrontational; but this is where the creative energy often comes from.

These are the voices which will form the discussion below. The passage to be read is 2 Kings 8:1–6. The passage is printed below, with comments inserted in my scholar's voice. The question to be discussed is as follows: How does this passage affect my picture of Elisha, specifically in his role as a prophet?

8:1 Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Get up and go with your household, and settle wherever you can; for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will come on the land for seven years." (Here is an extended famine which God has called for, and yet no mention is made of the reason for this famine. In the Elijah stories there was a shorter famine of three years, clearly connected to Ahab's idolatry (1 Kgs 18:18); yet this more devastating famine appears to serve no larger purpose.) *8:2 So the woman got up and did according to the word of the man of God;* (One of the key questions which haunts the Elisha stories is the connection between Elisha's word and the word of God. The usually straightforward answer that Elisha receives messages directly from God is complicated by the fact that we find no direct quotations from God in all the Elisha stories.) *she went with her household and settled in the land of the Philistines seven years.* (The Philistines? Israel's ancient enemy? What true Israelite would associate with this people?) *8:3 At the end of the seven years, when the woman returned from the land of the Philistines, she set out to appeal to the king for her house and her land.* (The real problem begins here. Does the King, within the Old Testament view of

[9] I suspect that my parents would disagree as to which side of the family they come from.

kingship, have the right to say anything about whose land is whose? The striking intertext here is the story of Elijah and Naboth's vineyard [1 Kings 21].) *8:4 Now the king was talking with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, "Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done."* (Are not the kings and the prophets on opposite sides? This was certainly the case with Elijah and Ahab, yet now we have Ahab's successor wanting to hear stories about Elijah's successor. What has changed and why?) *8:5 While he was telling the king how Elisha had restored a dead person to life (see 4:8–37), the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land. Gehazi said, "My lord king, here is the woman, and here is her son whom Elisha restored to life." 8:6 When the king questioned the woman, she told him. So the king appointed an official for her, saying, "Restore all that was hers, together with all the revenue of the fields from the day that she left the land until now."* (Elijah would be livid about this! Not only the land, but the produce, which she has not worked for! And this is done with the "blessing" of Elisha, at least insofar as his name is being used to strengthen the woman's position.)

> Wait a minute. Why do you always need to look so hard for problems? Why can't you just read this as a positive story about the influence of a prophet? God sends Elisha to one woman, possibly one of many. The reason for the famine is not given, but surely it can be assumed to be as punishment for the continued sins of Ahab's house. The woman returns to find her land occupied by others and naturally appeals to the king for its return. The king does a good deed, and you jump all over him for it.

> > Here you go reading all sorts of holiness into an amazingly secular story. We have a word of a prophet and stories about prophet's deeds but no word from God. This is not a story about God but a story about prophets. The story clearly

wants to put prophets in their place, namely, as people who help their friends (v. 1), who used to do wonderful deeds (v. 4), about whom stories are told (v. 5), but who are not really present or relevant for today's situation (Elisha disappears after v.1). If you want a sermon, why not talk about how the church has precisely relegated the prophet to these roles?

Can we get back to the text, rather than questions of relevance? If you keep dragging modern church dynamics into the conversation as the starting point, you'll never learn anything. Maybe you should set aside what you think you already know and open yourself to the new world of the Hebrew Bible.

Okay, let's start with what we know. But what do we know? We know there used to be "prophets." We know that no one listened to them. Now what do we do with a category of people whose job description includes "being ignored"? (This sounds like some pastoral job descriptions I've seen.) This is starting to sound like Niebuhr's "Christ against Culture" model: Jesus set too high a standard so we can safely ignore the tougher parts of the gospel.[10] Jesus then becomes the perfect prophet insofar as he tells us things which would be a good idea if we could do them, but they aren't realistic. Maybe Niebuhr was reading Elisha when he wrote his book, *Christ and Culture.*

So now we have an open intertext, Niebuhr's study of Christian ethics. Aren't we ignoring the more obvious intertext of the Elijah and Naboth story? Surely this would allow us to stay within the immediate context better and thus keep our focus on Elisha.

Elisha's name is being used for a highly questionable move on the king's part (v. 6). Does he have the right to assign ownership of

[10]H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 45–82. The scholar would like to point out here that this is an oversimplification of Niebuhr's position.

abandoned land? What about its produce? Surely one of the lessons of the Naboth story is that the king of Israel has no such right over the land. The transfer of ownership of land is clearly covered in the Law (Leviticus 25), and the king in Israel is under the Law, not over it (1 Kgs 2:3–4). How is it that the name of the prophet Elisha is invoked by the story to sanction rather than condemn this action by the king? Does this not lead us to a rather negative picture of Elisha the prophet?

> If you are going to agree that this story leaves us with a sour taste in our mouths regarding prophets, let me push you a bit further. Perhaps the story is really about the end of the relevance of the whole "god" idea. You can't really run a society based upon the whims of people who claim to speak for "God." You can't base an economic system upon blessing and curse. Why don't we start to take responsibility for our own actions and stop blaming "God" for the things that happen? "God" doesn't fight wars. "God" doesn't build factories that oppress workers and pollute the world. Maybe we should stand on our own two feet for once.

You know, there's a sermon there. Maybe two. Oh, not the sermon the poet wants me to preach, but a sermon that arises from the same impulse. The first sermon in this is easy. Yes, we should not and cannot rely on "prophets" to bring us the "word of God" in every situation or to save us from our problems. We have tradition and the teachings of Jesus to guide us; we no longer need the somewhat unreliable word of the prophet. I think the scholar is going to like this too, using Deuteronomy 13:1–18 as an intertext.

The other sermon would use the "stand on our own two feet" theme, but use it (and the words of Jesus) to talk about taking responsibility before God, actually taking God seriously enough that we allow our actions to be guided by our knowledge of what God desires. I could use any number of New Testament texts

> to argue that God calls us to stand on our own two feet. But I'm really not sure how the poet gets from Elisha to his atheistic argument. How can he make this point when it is precisely a theistic worldview which grounds the whole story? If there is no God in this story, where does Elisha's power come from? How does he know there will be a seven-year famine, and what is it that causes this famine?

I think I can help here. It appears that the poet has abandoned Niebuhr and decided to use Jack Miles' *God: A Biography* as his intertext.[11] Miles argues that the Hebrew Bible, when read in its Hebrew order, entails a movement from the present God (Genesis) to the absent God (Job).

> I'll accept that. After all, if the text is going to make fun of prophets and the whole idea of the direct voice from God, then all the preacher really has access to is words, his own words. Then organized religion finds itself based not upon the power of God to act and proclaim, but on the power of oration and persuasion under the guise of Godly language.
>
> After all, this is where the story of Genesis–2 Kings has been going all along. It starts with the powerful, free God of creation, then puts this God on stone (tablets) in a box (Ark of the Covenant) in a box (holy of holies) in a box (Temple). In this way access to God is able to be strictly controlled by the priests who ensure their own livelihood by insisting that tithes are necessary for blessing.

> It sounds like my poet friend here wants to be able to rant and rave at the evils of the world (and the church) under the guise of "prophetic speech" or some misplaced idea of "honesty." Why does he think the prophetic voice needs to be abrasive? What about the word of God as a "still, small voice"? What about Isaiah's Suffering Servant? Why can't the prophetic voice be part of

[11]Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

> the pastoral role? We need to remember here that the prophetic voice is firmly entrenched in the Bible. It is not a voice from outside. We get our whole idea of "prophet" from the Bible. If the writer of Genesis–2 Kings really doesn't like prophets, why does he include so many in his story?
>
> I would argue that it is the pastor who is best able to fulfill the role of the prophet in the church today. It is the pastor who has the respect and authority necessary to speak the truth in love. It is the pastor who, through Bible study and prayer, can articulate the voice of God for the church. After all, the message is pointless if no one listens.

Obviously we need to step back here and try to come up with a common definition of "prophecy." But how can we even imagine doing this? The preacher is right that our idea of "prophet" comes from the Bible, and I suspect that, at least in the case of Elisha, the definition is written by someone who has little use for "prophets" ("prophets" are the subject of entertaining stories and an excuse for questionable policy).

So let's try another angle. Perhaps there is no need to rescue the idea of "prophet." The word today is used most often of people who can predict the future, an activity in which most people only half believe anyway. Even Luke's portrayal of Jesus as a prophet gives us little reason to believe in the ongoing nature of "prophetic activity," whatever that is. We've agreed that, even in 2 Kings, there are different images of the "prophet" and that this diversity is multiplied in other Old Testament books. Why bring this diversity into the modern situation? Why don't we just use an ancient term to describe people in ancient stories? Then we can use modern terms to describe people who function in similar ways today. If the "prophet" was a healer, today we call them "physicians." If the "prophet" proclaimed God's word, today we call them "pastors."

Thank you.

> And if the "prophet" lay on his side next to his building blocks for over a year (Ezek 4:1–5), today we would call him "mentally ill." And if the "prophet" proclaimed a word of God contrary to the doctrine of the official "church," what would we call her today?

Well, if she was a pastor, we would call her "unemployed."

And so the conversation continues. Usually in the writing process, one voice emerges as the "author's opinion." Yet this single voice does not remain so, as the words are given new "voices" by readers in the reading process. The words on the page are the author's "voice," the words that go through your head as you read are your own "voice(s)." This latter voice is always affected by what you believe, what you want, who you are.

Listening to the Old Testament

The above conversation is among the various parts of myself as I dialogue with the conversation between this Elisha story and other places where the Old Testament talks about prophets. This type of reading can also be useful in most other parts of the Bible: entering into the conversation between Paul and John on the approaching *eschaton* (end/goal of history), entering the conversation between Mark and Matthew on the person of Jesus, entering the conversation between the New and Old Testaments on the place of Law in the life of the community of faith. This way of reading allows us to take seriously both the complexity of the ancient text and our own desires and interests as we read the Bible. It further promotes both the Bible's power as a major influence upon the faith and life of the believer and the believer's responsibility for his or her own actions as an active participant in the conversation.

Writing a conversation with the story of the Bible is not typical of modern or post-modern scholarship. What I demonstrated is more process than result. The reason for taking this approach was not to introduce a particular form of scholarly writing but to introduce a way of reading which can be easily duplicated. One of the strengths of the new methods is that, communicated well, they can provide a simple set of tools for reading the Bible rather than a complex set of answers which the "competent" reader will certainly arrive at.

No amount of method, new or old, will make Zephaniah easy to understand or Leviticus fascinating. There are, however, many

important lessons for Mennonites hidden in the bloody stories in Judges or in the ethnocentric images of the prophets. We do not need to "cleanse" these stories in order to learn from them; neither do we need to claim that they are more than they seem. If we develop tools which allow us to approach the text neither as its master nor its slave, we will find a story which constantly challenges us both intellectually and spiritually. As participants in an ongoing conversation, we allow ourselves to be honest with the text and with our own desires. If read in this way, the "Old" Testament is not merely an extended prologue to the "New" Testament. It is now freed to fill the function of a unique influence upon our faith and our life.

Reaching for a Biblical Theology of the Whole Bible

Elmer A. Martens

The Old Testament and the New Testament need to be heard stereophonically. Roland DeVaux, in his presidential address to the International Congress of Old Testament Scholars in Strasbourg in 1956, expressed his view that the ultimate goal of a Christian scholar must be a biblical theology of both Testaments, since both contain the word of God.[1] Much later into the century H. G. Reventlow, clearly taken by the idea, analyzed with profuse documentation the proposals and problems associated with a holistic biblical theology that would embrace both the Old and the New Testaments. The aims of this essay are modest: to call attention to selected attempts which have been made within the last decades toward a "whole" or pan-biblical theology, and to muse about ways by which the project might be forwarded to bring about better stereophonic listening.[2]

The Season of Specialization

At the often-heralded beginning of biblical theology, conveniently associated with the name of Johannes P. Gabler in the eighteenth century, it was envisioned that this new method of biblical study would have the entire Scripture as its arena.[3] This

[1] Noted in Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 147.

[2] It is a distinct privilege to honour a friend and highly respected scholar, Waldemar Janzen, from whom I have learned much and with whom I share in striving to have the church hear more clearly the Old Testament as a word of divine address.

[3] Rolf Knierim comments: "Gabler's lecture shows that he speaks of a biblical theology of both Testaments." *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method*

hope was short-lived. Within a decade of Gabler's celebrated lecture, G. L. Bauer in 1796 published a theology, not of the whole Scripture but only of the Old Testament. One might suppose that the mass of material alone would justify such a move. Earlier in that century the separate treatment of the two testaments had been proposed by J.S. Semler, but for a theological reason: the New Testament was held to describe a religion different from that of the Old Testament.[4] Compelling reasons, more acceptable than the one given by Semler, for developing a biblical theology of the Old Testament alone have been advanced by Brevard Childs and Rolf Knierim.[5] Toward the end of the twentieth century the number of Old Testament theologies, counting only those produced within the century primarily in English, numbered close to fifty.[6] Such specialization is good and necessary.

However, the liabilities of specialization include the possibility that findings may be skewed, as for example in covenant research, if adequate account is not taken of the larger biblical context. It is often the larger "whole" which determines the meaning or merits of the smaller unit. Besides that, links, whether diachronic or synchronic, need to be made from within the specialization to material outside the specialization in order to establish significance. These linkages from within the Old Testament are especially crucial for the Christian, for whom the Old Testament is not only a

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and Cases (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1995), 550. However, as Knierim sees it, given the view of the New Testament as ultimate criterion, the resultant united biblical theology which was then envisioned would not have been a harmonious biblical theology in which each Testament would bear its own witness. Cf., his elaborations in "On Biblical Theology," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. Craig A. Evans & Talmon Shemaryahu (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 117–128.

[4] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Problems in a Theology of (Only) the Old Testament," in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim*, ed. H. T. C. Sun, K. L. Eades, J. M. Robinson and G. I. Moller (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 275–280 [275–276].

[5] Brevard Childs cites the advantages: 1) It is wise to analyze the complex Old Testament materials before coordinating them with the New Testament. 2) A study of the Old Testament from within a theological discipline "provides a major check against the widespread modern practice of treating it solely from a philological, historical, or literary perspective." 3) Such separate studies will help highlight the unique theological contribution of the Old Testament. 4) The New Testament will be more correctly heard by first giving separate attention to the Old Testament. Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 17. R. Knierim lists two additional reasons for what he terms the "requirement for beginning with two separate theologies:"1) the Tanak for Jews is on a trajectory different than that for Christians; and 2) once the Christian community authenticated itself via the New Testament, the Old Testament, by which it had previously been authenticated, became a problem. Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 73.

[6] For a listing, see Elmer A. Martens, *Old Testament Theology*, IBR Bibliographies, no. 13 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997).

foundation document but a present Word of God. For such reasons and others R. Knierim rightly states, "[We] today, coming from a tradition of the separate theologies of the two Testaments, may and should move toward a biblical theology."[7]

The Season of Integration

As Reventlow shows, calls for an integration of Old Testament and New Testament into a canonical or pan-biblical theology are not novel.[8] By canonical or pan-biblical theology is meant a theological approach that encompasses the whole Bible.[9] A canonical biblical theology is of benefit because it connects easily with other academic disciplines, such as systematic theology, a subject not treated here. It also benefits the local faith communities, offers insight into the mission of the church, and assists in a witness to society at large.

One reason for urging a biblical theology of the whole Bible is that the Christian faith community is in need of the whole counsel of God. The pastor/preacher/leader needs to be intellectually equipped to instruct his/her flock on the entire range of teaching which arises from the complete canon. For it is both the Old Testament and the New Testament that constitute the Christian canon, or standard. What is needed, then, is an integration which goes beyond the separate testaments to the entire Bible. Biblical theology has been called the health department of the church community. If so, then a partial theology of the Bible will be an incomplete monitor of health. The leader needs the whole biblical range to detect aberrations, misguided emphases, and even entire areas of faith and practice too little informed by biblical teaching. The outcome of an exercise in biblical theology is not ultimately a

[7] Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 555. Not all share that conviction. Heikki Raisanen holds that enterprises such as "biblical theology" which would cover both Testaments should be abandoned. Heikki Raisanen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme* (London: SCM Press, 1990), xviii.

[8] H. G. Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology*, 147ff.

[9] The term "pan-biblical" is used by Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 485, and often by James Barr for whom the term represents "one single theology of the entire Christian Bible." James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 1. Barr devotes major discussions to the topic, for example, 362–377, 497–512, and 581–585. Pan-biblical theology readily conveys the notion of a comprehensive theology that embraces both testaments. The term helpfully identifies one of the aspects of "biblical theology," namely that of scope. For example, B.S. Childs states, "Biblical theology is by definition theological reflection on both the Old and New Testament." Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 55. Another meaning of "biblical theology" focuses on a distinct method of study, viz., "a synthesis of biblical data about God, humans, and the world, according to biblical categories." Roland Murphy, "Reflections on a Critical Theology," in *Problems in Biblical Theology*, 267.

written statement, as in a text book, of what is to be believed, but rather an understanding of how the faith community is to perceive itself and behave.[10] Toward this end a distinct Old Testament theology or New Testament theology can each, in turn, make important contributions. But since each modifies and qualifies the other, what is needed is a whole-Bible theology so that the outlook of the membership be wholesome and balanced.

Furthermore, the church is engaged in the mission of conveying the Christian message to peoples to the ends of the earth. In the past, Christian missionaries moved into another culture with the New Testament message as foremost and dominant: Jesus Christ is the world's saviour. While this kerygma is of utmost importance, it is clear that inattention to the Old Testament could result in the mere addition of one more deity, shall we say, to the Hindu pantheon. On the other hand, groups such as the African Independent Churches live intellectually and spiritually primarily in the Old Testament. Not infrequently their approach has led to a syncretism such that their ethnic traditions are incorporated along with Old Testament practices. The full-orbed Christian message requires not a blurred, partial message, but an integrated and fully rounded theology, namely a biblical theology of the whole Bible. A church engaged in a global mission had best be informed by a canonical biblical theology.

One can say more. If neither church nor mission is well served by a truncated theology, it is axiomatic that society at large will be poorly served, perhaps even misguided, by a lopsided theology that fails to capture the entirety of the Christian message. The Bible presents an entirely new worldview, including, for example, a new ethic. Society at large may not see itself subordinated to Christian ethics, but it is surely basic to the church's self-understanding to witness to society about the ethic that flows from Scripture. When the church bears witness to a higher ethical norm, it errs if that ethic derives only from the Old Testament, as it errs if it is informed alone by the eschatological vision of the New Testament. In the

[10] R.W.L. Moberly rightly says, "[The] primary and explicit purpose of a biblical theology should be to relate the Bible to the needs and concerns of the spirituality of the Christian Church, that is, it should inform the corporate and individual living of the life of faith." R.W.L. Moberly, "The Nature of Christian Biblical Theology," in *From Eden to Golgotha: Essays in Biblical Theology*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 141–157 [149]. Cf., Ben C. Ollenburger's comment about the function of biblical theology as that of shaping a community. Ben C. Ollenburger, "Biblical Theology: Situating the Discipline," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*, ed. J. T. Butler, E. W. Conrad and B. C. Ollenburger (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 37–62 [51]. Cf., also Brevard Childs, "Some Reflections on the Search for a Biblical Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 4 (1982):1–12; and John Reumann, ed., *The Promise and Practice of Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 117–208.

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that an eschatological vision of God's Kingdom does not invalidate Old Testament instruction.[11]

Society must hear from the church, not the one note sounded alone from the New Testament, nor the single note intoned from the Old Testament, but a stereophonic message, one which has been well synchronized as to volume, pitch and balance. In short, the church needs a canonical biblical theology in order to understand itself and be equipped for its mission of proclamation and witness.

Harbingers of the Season of Pan-biblical Theology

Given the importance of a holistic biblical theology, it is the more regrettable that John Reumann could say as late as 1991 that biblical theologies incorporating the entire Bible were so rare they could be counted on two hands.[12] Attempts to provide a pan-biblical theology can be summarized from mid-century onward as following four avenues of approach.[13] One approach was to urge salvation history as a decisive category found in both testaments. Another utilized various themes as overarching devices which pulled the whole Bible together. A third approach focused on process of transmission; and a fourth centred on canon.

G. E. Wright is illustrative of the first approach, which majored on salvation history.[14] Wright was not addressing the need for a pan-biblical theology, except indirectly, since his interest was to find a way for the Old Testament to speak to a post-World War II

[11] "The law holds." Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 83. Cf., Waldemar Janzen, who, while delineating an ethic from the Old Testament, nevertheless correlates this with the New Testament. Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 187–216.

[12] John Reumann, *The Promise and Practice of Biblical Theology*, 5. Two early attempts were Millar Burrows, *Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946); and W. Harrington, *The Path of Biblical Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973).

[13] An analysis of pan-biblical theologies is made by M. Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985, 1987). An extensive summary in English is given in James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 497–509. Barr says, summarizing Oeming, "[P]an-biblical theology in the sense of a unitary doctrine constantly witnessed by the entire Bible does not exist and cannot exist" (506).

[14] George Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, SBT 8 (Naperville: Allenson; London: SCM Press, 1952). Others, such as Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 1965); Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982); Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978); and, in a somewhat different way, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) also leaned on the history paradigm, but their works were limited to the Old Testament. For the New Testament, see Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1967). For a more canonical treatment in this vein cf., Daniel Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

world. Still, by noting the way in which the New Testament rehearsed parts of the Old Testament, he advocated both a theological entry point and also a theological summary for all biblical material in the phrase, "the God who acts." The genius of such a biblical theology consisted in the recital of what God had done and, since such recitals were to be found in both testaments, his theological synthesis had an integrative ring. The entire Bible was consistent in its message: God acts.

Wright's work had a larger impact on the life of congregations in North America than most such works. Upon closer examination, however, scholars fingered shortcomings, for the recitals left aside the Wisdom literature and also marginalized the speeches of God. Still the advantage of Wright's work was that continuity between Old and New Testament was clearly established, and a message of direct relevance to the Christian community was announced.

Samuel Terrien is representative of those who wish to synthesize the entire biblical message around God, but who are not enamoured with the historical sequence; rather they see continuity in the biblical material via themes.[15] Terrien proposed the theme of God's presence—a presence sometimes elusive—as binding together the two testaments. Appearances of God, theophanies or epiphanies, most notably in Jesus, speak forcefully of God's presence; but the laments of God-fearers, as in the Psalms, or even of an entire nation, as in Lamentations, tell of another perception, namely, that God is absent. For the life of the Christian community Terrien's work had an existential relevance, perhaps because it resonated with peoples' experiences of God, which are not uncommonly characterized by ambiguity and ambivalence.

Into this category of themes might be placed a good number of shorter monographs which appear in "biblical theology" series. None of these, it should be pointed out at once, is on the order of a pan-biblical theology. However, they are works which seek to bridge the two testaments in theological fashion. Some works, such as Claus Westermann's, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, and Walter Brueggemann's, *The Land*, both in the series, "Overtures to Biblical Theology," begin with an exposition from the Old Testament and then incorporate the New Testament material on the topic.[16]

[15] Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, Religious Perspectives 26 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). Terrien was preceded in the attempt to encapsulate the biblical material around a single concept by Geerhardus Vos whose book, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) was structured around "revelation" and was comprised of summaries on this subject from the law, the prophets and the New Testament. Vos's theme of revelation was later treated more fully by Chester Lehman, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 1: *Old Testament*; vol. 2: *New Testament* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1971, 1974).

[16] Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

Similarly the book by Ray C. Ortlund, Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, the first offering in another series, "New Studies in Biblical Theology," moves from the Old to the New.[17] The application of such a work to the current life of the church is not far to seek. The work by Tremper Longman III and Daniel Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, in yet another series, "Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology," investigates each testament by turn. Perhaps because it is written by two specialists it lacks the desirable integration.[18] The books in this category could perhaps be appropriately described as half-way houses to a biblical theology of the whole Bible. At least they have the potential of minimizing the "Great Divide" that typically separates the Old and New Testaments.[19]

A blend of sorts between the historical and thematic approaches is represented by those who focus on process. H. Gese traces themes along trajectories from the Old Testament into the New Testament, utilizing the tradition-history method followed by Gerhard von Rad.[20] Gese's work consists of essays probing this method but can hardly be said to have resulted in an integrative biblical theology. This method may spark interest in the academic community, notes Childs, who doubts, however, that the method will offer help or guidance to the current faith community.[21] James Barr, while offering a critique of the method, is more sanguine about Gese's work and thinks that it holds at least some promise.[22] Somewhat along the same lines, though more oriented toward historical events, Paul Hanson describes how the faith community has appropriated the canon.[23] Hanson moves through both Testaments in the hope of helping the current faith community utilize its canon creatively, not slavishly.

Distinguished from all these approaches—salvation-history, theme, tradition-history—is the canonical approach taken by Brevard Childs of Yale. His approach is best represented in his two works, *Old Testament Theology in its Canonical Context* (1986) and *Biblical*

[17] Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, NSBT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[18] Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, SOTBT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

[19] Examples could be multiplied and would include F.F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); H. Seebass, *Der Gott der ganzen Bibel* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982); and Bruce Waltke, "The Kingdom of God and Biblical Theology," a lecture given at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 1999.

[20] Hartmut Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1981). Others of his works are noted, with evaluations, by James Barr in a chapter, "Gese and the Unity of Biblical Theology," in *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 362–377.

[21] Brevard Childs, "Some Reflections on the Search for a Biblical Theology," 5.

[22] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 362–377; 585.

[23] Paul Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of the Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

Theology of the Old and New Testaments (1992).[24] His approach is intentionally integrative, since in the latter volume he is not much concerned to work the historical critical angles when doing theology. Nor does he search for any single unifying theme, or thread his way, except occasionally as with the commandment, "You shall not kill," through the stages of emergence, waning or adaptation. Rather, on the order of seeing the Scripture as authoritative literature, he describes the discrete witnesses of each Testament, and in the last half of the book (more than 350 pages) reflects on the Christian Bible as a whole. Here he concentrates on such topics as God's identity, covenant, Christ the Lord, reconciliation, and God's kingdom and rule.[25] His synthesis, albeit hardly tidy, is intended to give guidance to the life of the church. All seven chapters in the last half of his *Biblical Theology* illustrate this objective. The chapters on "Biblical Faith" and "The Shape of the Obedient Life" are particularly pertinent.

These several harbingers of a canonical biblical theology are to be applauded. The material to be mastered is extensive, the methods uncertain, the challenge for balance formidable, but the contribution which each of these scholars has made is substantial. Past efforts clarify where weaknesses may lie and invite further explorations.

The Changing of Seasons: Explorations

That biblical theology should be nudged beyond its specializations of Old Testament theology and New Testament theology toward a comprehensive, holistic truly biblical theology is a conviction that drives this essay. Several kinds of exploration seem appropriate as part of this nudging exercise. The first two have to do with conceptual reorientations; the third is more methodological.

Two patterns of thinking have impeded moves toward a pan-biblical theology. One hindrance has been a preoccupation with the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament, an issue unavoidable from one point of view, but from another vantage point quite overplayed. A second hindrance toward a synthesis of the whole of the Bible revolves about the notion of progressive revelation.

Rethinking Old Testament-New Testament Relationships as the Problem. Not infrequently the issue of a truly biblical theology has been analyzed with major attention on the way the

[24] See note 2 and note 9.

[25] A helpful summary, especially of Childs' method along with an assessment, and references to pertinent literature is found in Leo Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 155–196. Cf., also Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Theology in Crisis?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Old Testament and the New Testament are to be related.[26] The reasons are obvious. With the Christ event God has singularly and signally intervened in the world's history, so the newness and the decisiveness of the event must be recognized and not muted. Moreover, part of the canon, the Old Testament, has God and Israel as the subject; but the New Testament has God and the church as the chief subject. Besides, each testament is written in a different language, each has its own history of canonization, and hence each is the subject of specialized studies. Clearly a pan-biblical theology must come to terms with the relationship of the two testaments. But the greater the stress on the differences between the two testaments, the greater the problem of synthesizing the two.

To be sure, on the one hand, specialty studies of each testament are necessary and valuable. But on the other hand, if specialty studies are not transcended by a set of more umbrella-like studies of the entire Bible, these specialty studies appear to exacerbate the differences between the two testaments.

The basic agenda needs to be redefined. Is the problem of a canonical biblical theology lodged in the existence of the two testaments? Is it the bipartite canon that constitutes the primary set of difficulties? The shape of the problem would be different if one were to think of three, rather than two testaments, as R.W.L. Moberly has suggested. Were the oldest "testament" to extend from the story of creation through the story of the patriarchs, and the second from the call of Moses in Exodus to Malachi, then the third testament would be our current New Testament. Moberly holds that God was indeed known to the patriarchs as El Shaddai (Exod 6:2–5) but not as Yahweh, so that any references in the patriarchal story to Yahweh are anachronistic, not unlike the designation of Zaire/Congo in current politics. In telling the story of the patriarchs Moses would use Yahweh, the name for God known to him, even though that name was unknown to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So, in the first testament God was known as El Shaddai; in the second God was revealed as Yahweh; and in the third God disclosed himself through Jesus.[27] A three-fold canon, quite plausible, would diffuse some of the polarity now associated with two testaments. The issue of the relationship between these blocks of Scripture can never be ignored,

[26] H.G. Reventlow devotes the bulk of his discussion of biblical theology to this problem of the relationships of the testaments. Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology*, 10–144. Cf., Childs' discussion on "The Problem of the Christian Bible" where the subject is the bipartite canon, addressed both from a historical and a theological perspective, in *Biblical Theology*, 55–69. Cf., David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: A Study of the Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

[27] R.W.L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, OTB (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

but that these are the major hurdles in reaching for a biblical theology of the whole Bible is questionable. After all, more limited syntheses, for example, an Old Testament theology, over-arch diverse Scriptural text blocks such as wisdom and prophets, so that different text blocks need not in themselves be the insuperable problem.

The shape of the problem would also appear different were the two testaments not so inextricably defined in terms of historical sequence. If one underscored not the history-oriented sequence of the biblical books, but the reality that the biblical books—all of them—are the church's canon, then the problem of synthesis could more quickly be addressed. It is the initial mind-set of prioritizing the New Testament over the Old that sets unnecessary landmines in the way of formulating a biblical theology.[28] It is not only a pre-understanding of a two-tier canon, but also a worldview that elevates history (especially since Hegel) as progressively marching in an upward advance that has led to the marginalization of the Old Testament compared with the New. When two entities—Old Testament and New Testament—are bound to one another like Siamese twins, but nevertheless so differently evaluated, then the issue of synthesis becomes extremely complicated. James Barr's reservations about the possibility of a pan-biblical theology arise from his conclusion that the two testaments represent two very different worlds of thought.[29] On the other hand, R. Knierim, while recognizing and explicating the differences, sees the mutual and equal openness of each testament to the other as positively shaping the program for a "biblical theology of the Christian Bible in which the two Testaments are equally open for each other."[30] Were it possible to disengage, even a little, from the hold that thinking along historical lines has on Christians, then the problem of the relationship of the two testaments would be lessened and it would be possible to work toward a synthesis in a climate less highly emotionally charged. Moreover, the work toward a theological synthesis would be centred, as it should be, in the canonical nexus, rather than only in events "behind" the canon.

Another problem is the academic nature of the effort of relating the two testaments primarily via concepts rather than historical progression. The exercise of sorting out topics such as covenant or

[28] Cf., Rolf Knierim's comment: "The difference between the Testaments, in their mutual critical complementarity, is not a weakness but a strength. It amounts to the strength of a biblical theology," in "On Biblical Theology," 127.

[29] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 374. Barr states that he "has nothing against this principle" [namely, of having 'one theology of this one great twofold corpus'], but he registers several difficulties, one of which is the temporal gap between them (584). Cf., his opinion that the "search for a pan-biblical statement, as if this was the essence of theology or the culmination of all biblical study, was a mistake" (144–145).

[30] Rolf Knierim, "On Biblical Theology," 128.

reconciliation has its benefits. But the exercise can be cerebral and academic only. Biblical theology must keep the church community in focus, for the Bible is God's address to the church and the world. A biblical theology that treats all 66 books as canon, and hence as the basic datum, without undue distinctions between Old and New Testaments, will more likely breathe the fresh word of divine address. Might not a theology be framed which overarches all of the biblical books in a way that retains the Bible as a word of address?

It is unrealistic to expect that the time-honoured grids, for example, the *two* testaments with its designations of *old* and *new*, will be overturned. My proposal is not that they be overturned, but that they be held less tightly. The argument is not that these ways of thinking are wrong; it is that they have factored too heavily into the enterprise of formulating a biblical theology of the whole Bible.

Rethinking Progressive Revelation. There needs to be an examination not only of the orientation that so categorically divides between the Old and the New, but also of the time-worn notion of "progressive revelation." This cliche is one of a piece with the belief, noted above, of history construed as an advance upon itself, with inevitable benchmarks of progress. My proposal for reorientation is that we think and speak not of "progressive revelation" but instead of "cumulative revelation."[31]

The origin of the phrase, "progressive revelation," has been traced to the 1830s, when liberal Anglicans such as Thomas Arnold reached for a way to show how biblical criticism could aid in understanding the Bible.[32] Scholars such as Arnold had a high view of the Old Testament, although they did not hold to verbal inspiration. Charles Darwin's theories about evolution, which were also rooted in Hegelian philosophy, were published in 1859. Perhaps too harshly, but not too inaccurately, "progressive revelation" may be thought of as evolutionary theory in theology baptized and renamed. Along with evolution, "progressive revelation" shares the idea that the advanced stages of development are more complex than earlier stages. For the most part the latest stage is the defining stage.

The mental construct that accompanies this notion of progressive revelation is that of a series of steps leading to a platform. Once one is on the platform, unless there is need to retrace one's path, the set of steps can be discarded. To have reached the platform is what matters. Analogically, the Old Testament is a preparatory set of stairs to reach the platform, the New Testament, out of which

[31] I owe the term, as an alternative to "progressive revelation," to Marlin Adrian, a student in a class on Old Testament Theology some years ago.

[32] John Rogerson, "Progressive Revelation: Its History and Its Value as a Key to Old Testament Interpretation," *Epworth Review* 9 (1982): 73–86.

the Christian now lives. Anabaptists, among others, have seized on this notion as a guide to interpretation. Thus, John A. Toews, in a book on non-resistance entitled, *True Non-resistance through Christ*, makes the often-heard claim that, since the final revelation is in Christ, cues on controversial subjects must be taken from him, especially since "the Old and the New Testament teachings on the subject [non-resistance] seemingly cannot be reconciled."[33] The impression left is that, except for the sake of historical curiosity, the Old Testament might be jettisoned. In this view the stair-steps are important and interesting, but mostly dispensable. No one would deny that there are increments of revelation. Greater clarity does come in later stages. Still, "progressive revelation" has the effect of devaluing the Old Testament because in the sequence of revelation the coming of Jesus Christ in the New Testament replaces former revelation.[34]

To speak, as I suggest, about "cumulative revelation" does not undercut what the author to the Hebrews says about increments in revelation (Heb 1:1–2), but provides a language that is more constructive (and accurate) than "progressive revelation." Cumulative revelation as a term preserves the idea constitutive of "progressive revelation," namely, that revelation occurs over time, but the key difference is that in speaking of cumulative revelation one visualizes a process of additions without the subconscious pejorative assessments of earlier stages of revelation. While the notion in progressive revelation, even if not explicitly stated, is that earlier revelation is abrogated or absorbed in later revelation, language about cumulative revelation does not necessitate such conclusions. Instead, it leaves in place all disclosures as constitutive in some way of the "total revelation." At the same time, the concern of progressive revelation to see in Jesus God's ultimate disclosure is safeguarded. Only now, in the proposed language, Jesus does not come in linear fashion as the revelatory figure to displace and override all previous disclosures, but rather unifies all previous disclosures, leaving each disclosure with a value that is more than antiquarian.

If the pictorial construct for progressive revelation is a series of steps, virtually disposable once the platform is reached, the mental construct for cumulative revelation is a picture puzzle. Here certain pieces are put in place prior to others. There is "growth" or

[33] John A. Toews, *True Non-Resistance through Christ* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1955), 10–11.

[34] John Rogerson, "Progressive Revelation," 74, regards progressive revelation as an unsatisfactory notion, because "theologically it has been responsible for a downgrading of the Old Testament." Cf., Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 550–554 and "On Biblical Theology" for comments on the penultimate status of the Old Testament.

accumulation in the sense that the picture puzzle takes shape in stages. Sometimes several pieces, already grouped, find their niche quickly in the larger picture, and may even be the block that is highly strategic for the project. The concept of cumulative revelation keeps in place the idea of unfolding and increasing specificity which is an aspect of progressive revelation. Also, some pieces are clearly more striking than others, yet each contributes to the entire design. The person of Jesus Christ is the most striking and impressive of all pieces, even the largest, and certainly the most strategic, central and integrating, for with his coming the contributions of all other disclosures find their rightful place. Jesus Christ unites and integrates all else. By Jesus all things consist and cohere. The coming of Jesus makes for "more" and greater revelation, but not at the expense of past revelation.

The term "cumulative revelation" is preferred over "progressive revelation" because by it the legitimacy and necessity of the less prominent stages are preserved. Older revelations are not so much superseded by the new, as they are complemented by the new. To speak of cumulative revelation enables the Old Testament particularly to be heard canonically. Both testaments then have an equal claim on the Christian community as authoritative.

Rethinking Methodological Options: Intertextuality. This is not the place to propose a schema for the representation of a biblical theology. Proposals are not lacking, and that makes for some of the excitement in biblical studies. One of these, offered by Hans Klein, focuses on "life" as a unifying theme for a canonical biblical theology. The Old Testament treats "life" more generally; the New Testament speaks of "new life."[35] C. H. H. Scobie suggests a skeleton outline for a canonical biblical theology. It would consist of themes which, he observes, are something of a consensus among biblical scholars. The four major themes serving as an umbrella for a pan-biblical theology are listed following a discussion of criteria: 1) God's Order, which includes God's ruling activity, and seems to be akin to kingdom of God; 2) God's Servant, which stresses human agency in the Old Testament and the God-human figure of Christ in the New; 3) God's People, both Israel and the Church; and 4) God's

[35] Hans Klein, "Leben-neues Leben: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer gesamtbiblischen Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments," *Evangelische Theologie* 43 (1983): 91–107. C. H. H. Scobie, who calls attention to Klein (177–178), offers an excellent overview of our topic: "The Challenge of Biblical Theology" and "The Structure of Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42:1 (1991): 31–61; 42:2 (1991): 163–193. Other proposals are: J. Christiaan Beker, "Paul's Letter to the Romans as Model for a Biblical Theology: Some Preliminary Observations," in *Understanding the Word*, 359–367; and H. H. Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: 'Creation Theology' as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 102–117.

Way with sub-topics such as piety, ethics, law, life. For each category Scobie sees the Old Testament functioning as *proclaiming* and the New Testament as *offering*.

Others have been more exercised about method, an endeavour to which we now move. Scholars of general literature, such as Northrop Frye who deals with the Bible as a whole piece of literature, while not directly fuelling a pan-biblical theology have at least provided a hospitable academic environment for it.[36] Whatever might be said about the category of "story" (contrasted with "history") for a pan-biblical theology, one can agree with James Barr, "One great advantage of the concept of 'story' is that it sees the story as a whole."[37] Metaphor, along with story, to mention two options, has been put forward as offering possibilities.[38] In these methods analysis is supplemented by imagination. A method that remains with analysis but affords some scope for imagination is intertextuality. The promise that it holds for pan-biblical theology is at least intriguing.

Intertextuality is a literary approach to the study of texts that makes much of comparisons with other texts, both those antecedent and those subsequent to the particular passage under study. The theory behind this method is that rarely in literature anywhere is something totally new created. Literary works are creative in that they draw on former ideas and expressions and give them a new setting or juxtapose them in fresh ways. Writers appropriate wordings and images from a vast pool of previous literary works. Allusions to former characters, episodes and vocabulary, whether in history or fiction, add both colour and depth to their works. Investigation of texts, therefore, includes attention to the interplay of a given text with other texts. "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."[39]

[36] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1982). For a discussion of methodological issues and a 34-page bibliography on biblical theology from 1982–1985, see *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*, vol. 1 (1986); cf., Petr Pokorny, "The Problem of Biblical Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 15 (1993): 83–94. For some guidelines in formulating a pan-biblical theology, see Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 77–79; G. F. Hasel, "Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34 (1996): 23–33; and M. Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien*, whose theses are summarized in James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 505–509. Note should be taken, too, of John Sailhamer's chapter, "A Proposal for a Canonical Theology," in which he also touches on intertextuality, in *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 197–252.

[37] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 350.

[38] Leo Perdue, in *The Collapse of History*, 225, summarizes some of the new territory being explored, such as metaphor and story. After describing the theory behind metaphor and reviewing exemplars such as those given by Sally McFague and Phyllis Trible, he comments, "Their work suggests a radical reorientation of Old Testament theology that holds much promise." What is true for an Old Testament theology is in this case equally true for a pan-biblical theology.

[39] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66, quoted in Robert L. Brawley, *Text to Text Pours Forth Speech: Voices of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995),135, fn. 6. For a concise introduction to the method see Brawley, 1–14.

So, for example, when persons knowledgeable in American history hear the pastor say, "Ask not what this congregation can do for you, but what you can do for this congregation," they hear a clear echo of J. F. Kennedy's famous speech. The pastor's statement is neither a direct quote nor an exposition. The statement by Kennedy is transfigured not only by a new context (a church) but with new, although recognizable, content. In both Old Testament and New Testament there are numerous such echoes from canonical literature, quite in addition to actual quotations. An example from within the Old Testament would be the echo in Jeremiah 3 of the legislation in Deuteronomy 24 on the subject of divorce.[40] An example from the New Testament would be the large number of allusions in the book of Revelation to other canonical texts.[41] Important to the method of intertextuality is attention to the ways in which the author utilizes precursor texts. More than repetition is present. It is repetition with a difference!

This newer method proceeds very differently from what has been stressed for decades, namely, that investigations focus on identifying the limits of a pericope (discrete passage) and examine it within its boundaries, taking care not to import notions alien to the text. "The force of intertextuality is to problematize, even spoil, textual and interpretive boundaries—those lines of demarcation that allow a reader to talk about *the* meaning, subject, or origin of a text."[42] The intent now is to go outside the text boundaries to discover literary sources which the text has brought into play. The method is reminiscent of the older system of biblical cross-referencing, except that the theory underlying it is sophisticated and so are the actual procedures.[43] The vocabulary is definitely technical.[44]

[40] See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 307–312.

[41] See George W. Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy*, The Mellen Biblical Commentary, vol. 22 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993). It is the first volume to appear in a series that is dedicated to the exploration of intertextuality.

[42] Timothy K. Beal and Tod Linafelt, "Sifting for Cinders: Strange Fires in Leviticus 10:1–5," *Semeia* 69/70 (1995): 19–32 [19]. The entire issue is devoted to "Intertextuality and the Bible." Cf., the editors' statement apropos to our argument: "Intertextuality serves as a critical gateway that opens out onto matters of ideology . . ." (7).

[43] On theory, see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). For illustrations of its use, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1989); the extensive reviews in Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, eds., *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, JSNT Supp. 83 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993); Danna Nolan Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); and Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah*, SBL Dissertation Series 161 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

[44] Cf., "traditum" and "traditio" in Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, or Bloom's terms, "clinamen," "tessera," "askesis" helpfully illustrated in Robert L. Brawley, *Text to Text*, 10–13.

Rather than elaborate the theory, highly interesting and debatable in its own way, I choose some examples which show how this method of study interconnects material across the canon and how it could enhance the formulation of a pan-biblical theology.[45] The examples are taken from the level of a single sentence, from a pericope and from larger literary blocks.

At the level of a single statement we may follow Richard Hays who refers to Paul's word, "I know that this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:19). Hays points out that Paul's statement echoes a phrase from the Septuagint of Job 13:16: "Even this will turn out for my deliverance, for deceit shall not enter in before him." Hays probes the nuances in the reuse of an earlier text, since the correspondences are not articulated but intimated. Even the differences in the two situations can both help and delight the reader. In Job, for example, Job depicts himself as a prisoner, and as a righteous sufferer. "By echoing Job's words, Paul the prisoner tacitly assumes the role of righteous sufferer, as paradigmatically figured by Job."[46] As a single sentence the statement from Paul with its echo from Job is perhaps more of an interest to exegesis than it is to theology. Still, such insights pave the way for some interesting and important thematic linkages between parts of the canon.

At the level of the pericope, an example could be Jesus' story of the banquet to which many were invited but to which none came (Matt 22:1–14). The story is straightforward enough except for the fact that those who refused to come to the banquet were sought out and destroyed by the king's armies. Such a drastic reprisal is strange unless Jesus was echoing a similar story from Old Testament wisdom. Wisdom, so says Proverbs, invited persons to come to her house to enjoy a lavish banquet (Prov 9:1–12). In the sequel to that scene is the call of Dame Folly, who also offers an invitation, but hers is to clandestine pleasures of evil. Those who declined the invitation to Wisdom's banquet and followed instead the invitation to Dame Folly's table soon find themselves with others in Sheol. It is a drastic destiny. In brief, Proverbs presents two ways in life, with the implication that if a person does not follow the invitation to Wisdom's house, the alternative is to be caught in the ploys of Dame Folly and consequently to self-destruct.[47] Such an interpretation serves to

[45] The notion of employing intertextuality for a pan-biblical theology is not novel. As Leo Perdue notes in *The Collapse of History*, 163, Childs on occasion uses intertextuality. In a conference devoted to Biblical Theology co-sponsored by Wheaton College and InterVarsity Press in April 2000, Paul House presented a paper on "Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture: Steps towards a Program for the Future." In it House delineated a methodology for "Canonical Biblical Theology" which included attention to intertextuality. The essay is projected to be published in a work tentatively titled: *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*.

[46] Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 22.

interconnect the biblical literature, to add to the insight that Jesus presents himself as Wisdom personified, a sub-theme in Matthew, and to enforce the unity of the biblical message. At the pericope level, the method of intertextuality could facilitate a biblical theology.

An example of intertextuality at the pericope level is the reading of the Palm Sunday story (Luke 19:28–40) against the background of Solomon's royal accession (1 Kgs 1:28–48). Laurie Guy, who draws on the work of D. L. Tiede, details the way the earlier account is paralleled in Luke, for example, the bands of people who accompany the central figure (1 Kgs 1:33–40; cf., Luke 19:37), the identification of each of the animals being ridden, and the acclamation of kingship (1 Kgs 1:39). Guy concludes that "the parallels overall point to Luke (and probably his source/s) engaging in intentional intertextuality."[48] The significance of such parallelism may be a subtle suggestion of Jesus' induction as king, but at least "all the overtones of the story point to Luke adorning the account with hints of Jesus' royal status" which, along with other considerations, means that for Luke "Jesus is now king." Mark's story, by contrast, points to a future king. Observations such as these add to the explicit statements of Jesus as royal figure and so not only provide some interweaving from disparate parts of the canon, but contribute something to the theological shape of Jesus' royal status. Jesus can be compared to David, of course, but also to Solomon.

R. Brawley explores in detail an impressive set of intertextualities in Luke-Acts. From his close readings there emerges, he claims, "1) a theocentric appropriation of scripture, and 2) the prominence of God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth."[49] Both conclusions are of a theological nature, and both are clearly pertinent to a pan-biblical theology.

At the level of the larger text blocks, intertextuality calls attention both to content and literary form. At the content level we might cite proposals made about Wisdom literature, which is often considered to be a theological strain separate from the more pervasive biblical content of redemption history. Connections have been forged between creation and wisdom. R. Schultz argues that not only creation but also covenant represents the roots of wisdom. He enlists intertextuality to make his point by drawing examples from Proverbs 30:1–9, noting the echoes there from Psalm 73:22 (Prov 30:2), Psalm 18:30 [31] (Prov 30:5), and Deuteronomy 4 (Prov 30:6).[50]

[47] I owe this example to Samuel Lamerson, a participant in a doctoral seminar on intertextuality at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

[48] Laurie Guy, "The Interplay of the Present and Future in the Kingdom of God (Luke 19:11–44)," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 119–137 [131–33]. Seven parallels are listed.

[49] Robert L. Brawley, *Text to Text*, x.

[50] Richard L. Schultz, "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and

An examination of framing devices is even more intriguing than concept correlations. Guy's example from Luke is already one example of the use of a framing device. Millard Lind shows how "the flow of the book [of Ezekiel] compares to that of Israel's ancient victory hymn (Exod 15:1–18)."[51] J. D. Nogalski writes about the intertextuality in the Book of the Twelve. Within this "book," which incorporates the so-called "minor prophets," Nogalski identifies five framing devices. These include superscriptions (cf., Hosea, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah), genre similarities (for example, theophanies begin or end four successive works: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah), and structural parallels (Amos 9 with Obadiah). The interpretive insights following from this intertextual echo become grist also for a pan-biblical theology.[52]

A highly intriguing proposal on framing devices is given by Willard Swartley, who claims that the extended Exodus story serves as a pattern for the synoptic gospel writers as they relate the story of Jesus. Swartley finds each of the gospel writers following the moments of the foundational story: exodus/Sinai, the way in the wilderness/conquest, temple, and kingship. Swartley summarizes: "This study contends that the Synoptics contain a story structure significantly correlated with the form of an older story, a story that the Gospel-makers heard in the liturgy of the synagogue and in the nurture of the home as well."[53] In this recapitulation of the Old Testament by the New Testament one may see how one story shapes another. Critical to his argument is the observation that the faith traditions embedded in the older story were not only reused but transformed in their reuse. For example, the 10 plagues in Egypt associated with death become 10 miracles related to life. The way of conquest becomes the way of suffering. In Mark, "the Warrior tradition has also undergone transformation in that the Conqueror has now become the Servant who gives his own life as a ransom for many."[54] Notable also is Luke's use of Deuteronomy for the journey narrative, a recasting which is not only of literary interest but which has major theological significance.[55]

Covenantal Perspective," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 271–306 [301]. Of interest to our subject is his reference to S.L. Harris, *Proverbs 1–9: A Study in Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

[51] Millard Lind, *Ezekiel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1996), 324, cf., 352.

[52] James D. Nogalski, "Intertextuality and the Twelve," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays in Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of J.D.W. Watts*, JSOT Supp. 235 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 102–124.

[53] Willard Swartley, *Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels: Story Shaping Story* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 258.

[54] Ibid., 265.

[55] Ibid., 126–132, esp. 131.

Clearly, a consequence of employing the method of intertextuality is to see the two testaments not as sharply discontinuous but, on the contrary, as both part of a story with recurring patterns. The canon is interlaced in content but is interconnected also by similar patterning.[56] The Old Testament is "older" but not thereby irrelevant. Instead, it is foundational, not only in a historical kind of way, but in a literary way as shown especially by Swartley. The method of intertextuality facilitates moving from the traditional diachronic review of the history of redemption to a more synthetic representation of the material.

Highlighting the literary method of research as a path to biblical theology is not intended to disparage other methods. The method which traces the historical development of themes, for example, has been enormously productive of insights.[57] Indeed, the literary approach can be added to other methods. It moves easily both forward and back and, while acknowledging the newness of the Christ event, is not so encumbered by the disjunctions of two testaments that it cannot forge a way toward synthesis. It is not limited to the interplay of the testaments alone, but takes advantage of the interplay of texts however they occur. Stereophonic listening becomes a reality.

But given this preoccupation with methods, a caveat is in order. The Bible is a word of address from God to us humans. Any method, including close readings which involve intertextuality or literary sensibilities about metaphor, if it does not assist in clarifying who it is that is addressing humankind and the church, and what the Almighty Yahweh is saying, will be for the church an exercise in futility. Formulations about biblical theology are important and necessary only in order that the encounter with God, who is Yahweh, Jesus and also Spirit, be understood, and the ensuing address heeded.

[56] Cf., Marvin A. Sweeney's comment: "It is striking that the structure of the New Testament canon is parallel to that of the Old." He notes that like the Old Testament the New Testament begins with foundations of the Christian revelation (Gospels), continues with history (Acts), presents timeless concerns (epistles) and offers an eschatological scenario (Revelation). Marvin A. Sweeney, "Tanak versus Old Testament: Concerning the Foundation for a Jewish Theology of the Bible," *Problems in Biblical Theology*, 353–372 [364–365].

[57] A review of the way "history" has functioned in shaping Old Testament theologies is given in Elmer A. Martens, "The Oscillating Fortunes of 'History' within Old Testament Theology," in *Faith, Tradition and History*, ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier and D.W. Baker (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 313–340.

The Old Testament Speaks

The Poetry of Praise
Some Comments on the Old Testament and the New Music

Victor G. Doerksen

The chief end of man is to glorify God,
and to enjoy him forever.
(Old Scottish Catechism)

In his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, C.S. Lewis tells of his difficulty as a new Christian with the element of praise in those texts. He could not understand why the Almighty would demand praise from his creation, and he did not appreciate the Psalmist's continual insistence that others should praise the Lord. In a short but eloquent chapter called, "A Word about Praising," Lewis answers these and other questions about this central element of Christian worship. Praise, he discovered, is the only "correct, adequate or appropriate" response to the Giver of life:

> He is that Object to admire which (or, if you like, to appreciate which) is simply to be awake, to have entered the real world; not to appreciate which is to have lost the greatest experience, and in the end to have lost all. The incomplete and crippled lives of those who are tone-deaf, have never been in love, never known true friendship, never cared for a good book, never enjoyed the feel of the morning air on their cheeks, never (I am one of these) enjoyed football, are faint images of it.[1]

[1] C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 79.

And what Lewis initially had found annoying, that the Psalmist would insist that others praise with him, he eventually recognized as the most natural behaviour of a human being "living and moving" in God. This, says Lewis, is where that strange sounding expression, "to enjoy him forever," comes in. "I had never noticed," he says, "that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless (sometimes even if) shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it."[2] Lewis goes on to list the many forms in which human praise documents his statement, and to argue finally that praise is the consummation of enjoyment, its fulfilment.

C.S. Lewis was no Old Testament scholar and his study of the Psalms was informed more by a keen literary interest than a theologian's curiosity. He discovered that one of the effective poetic elements of Psalm literature was the parallel construction that characterizes many of the texts, as in: "He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday" (Ps 37:6). This literary device, not simple repetition, allows for imaginative variation, and Lewis documents at length the range of imagery that one finds in the body of Psalm literature. He notes with approval that such parallelism, unlike some other poetic features, can be translated into many languages and is thus not lost for those of us who cannot read (or sing) Hebrew.

The New Testament documents Jesus' use of this same literary device, as in "For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (Matt 7:2). This parallel structure can at times take on more complex detail, as it does in some of Jesus' sayings.[3] As a Jew, Jesus was of course well versed in Old Testament literature, which is the tradition informing his own speech.

What follows from these observations is that the form of the Psalms is anything but simple, its parallel structures allowing for a wealth of imaginative expression in praise of God. One more point made by C.S. Lewis should be mentioned here. He speaks of what he calls "second meanings" in the Psalm texts, referring to references that have been made in hindsight regarding the coming of Jesus Christ and the salvation of the world. Without going into the question of whether there is a prophetic element in them, it seems that as canonical texts the Psalms are brimming over with meanings to which we can return again and again in our lifetimes. Such is the nature of a true poetic use of imagery, which is suggestive association with the most diverse elements of our world. But we should not forget that the Psalms predate Christianity.

[2] Ibid., 80.

[3] As in Matthew 7:7, for example.

The Psalms have, of course, been used in Christian worship for centuries, whether read or sung or preached upon. No doubt they have also been misused, for example, in some literal interpretations. Their largely agricultural imagery has worn very well over the centuries and particularly for the Mennonite peasantry of the past several hundred years. We live in a different world today—different from that of the Psalmist and from that of several hundred years ago—and one might well expect that our language of praise would change and adapt to the concrete realities of our urbanized lifestyles. What is surprising is that, instead of a change of imagery and language, it seems that the new church worship in its popular forms has changed the music and kept the old language, Old Testament imagery and all.

This raises a serious question regarding the appropriateness of our worship. C.S. Lewis points to a crucial difference which should have an effect on the praise texts of New Testament Christians:

> All Christians know something the Jews did not know about what it "cost to redeem their souls." Our life as Christians begins by being baptized into a death; our most joyous festivals begin with, and centre upon, the broken body and the shed blood. There is thus a tragic depth in our worship which Judaism lacked. Our joy has to be the sort of joy which can coexist with that; *there is for us a spiritual counterpoint where they had simple melody* (italics mine).[4]

A typical contemporary chorus will, for example, take a line like, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised" into a new musical setting, usually in unison and with a band accompaniment. Many of these texts are citations from the Psalms and similar passages, or approximations of that language, usually removed from their contexts and repeated, mostly without the imaginative variation characteristic of the original texts. It is likely that the musical accompaniment in some ways resembles the music one imagines in use in the time of the Psalms, with stringed instruments, "timbrel and drum." Whether or not this is historically accurate is not as important as whether it is, in Lewis' terms, "appropriate" for the task and the occasion. And this in turn raises the question as to whether this "new" kind of musical text can do justice to the counterpoint to which Lewis alludes.

I think we can agree that praise and worship are nothing if they do not proceed from the heart. In my lifetime and within my Mennonite culture I have been able to worship in spirit and truth, whether in singing "Gott ist die Liebe" or the "Hallelujah Chorus." Both of these very different works are capable of expressing strong

[4] C.S. Lewis, *Reflections*, 48.

feeling, albeit at different levels of musical sophistication and for different occasions of praise. If we look back over the history of the Anabaptist-Mennonite musical culture, we will see varying accommodations to the times and the religious atmosphere in order to arrive at appropriate expressions of praise.

Early Anabaptist songs took their lead from Reformation leaders, particularly Luther, whose hymns arise out of a time of struggle (for example, "A Mighty Fortress is our God") and often use the imagery of battle. For the Anabaptists, who were involved in the same struggle but from a different perspective, the texts were also different: as in the case of the Psalmist, the Anabaptist looked to God to take his part in the struggle, albeit with a view of what victory meant quite different from that of the Psalmist. Many of the early songs are detailed reports of gruesome martyrdoms, hardly the stuff of praise literature. But at their conclusion one finds lines like: "So therefore let us praise God/ who will save us from this evil world . . .". Exile and martyrdoms in their thousands in fact became almost commonplace and furnished the setting of the religious expression. This is a very rough counterpoint indeed, but the praise in these songs expresses the joy which, as one historian has expressed it, was "three-fourths pain."

In these early songs one also finds the practice of substituting a religious text for a secular one, as in "Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen" (Innsbruck, I must leave you)—a love song—changed to: "O Welt ich muss dich lassen" (O World, I must leave you)—a common martyr theme. The secular melody then was likewise borrowed, since such tunes were known by many. In these early collections of Anabaptist songs one will see, for example, the notation: "Im Ton 'Entlaubet ist der Wald'" (Based on the tune, "The Forest Leaves Are Gone"), thus enabling the common folk to sing a tune, which they presumably knew, with the words (often many stanzas), which arose out of their experience. There is a certain parallel here to the current practice of borrowing a contemporary musical idiom, with a similar rationale.

When we look at these texts today, far removed from the kind of persecution which defined their faith experience, we may have difficulty recognizing such martyr songs as praise literature. Song 17 of the *Ausbund* tells the powerful story of Mary Beckom who, when arrested, asked her sister-in-law Ursel to accompany her, and together they go the way of the Anabaptist martyrs of the time.[5] Stanza 43, the last, then says: "Gott woll'n wir darum loben,/ Der solche Gnad und Kraft/ Den Menschen gibt von Oben" (Therefore we will praise God, who gives his people grace and power from

[5] *Ausbund, das ist: Etliche schöne christliche Lieder*, 13th ed. (Lancaster: Verlag von den Amischen Gemeinden, 1962), 94–109.

above), expressing the profound and paradoxical experience of the first Anabaptist generation: salvation as rescue *out of* a world of pain and darkness. God is great because he has the power to overwhelm the violence, suffering and death with the promise of his steadfast love and ultimate deliverance.

Some of this same sense of praise "out of the dungeon" can be felt in letters and songs written by later Mennonites in Soviet exile, where an image like that of the refiner's fire is used appropriately, if somewhat paradoxically, considering the fact that many in Siberia froze to death. However, here is another instance of an experienced spiritual insight regarding the painfulness of purification and the apparent disproportion of pain and glory, which we find in the Anabaptist songs.

The harsh dichotomies of the Reformation period gradually gave way to psychologically more sophisticated avenues of perception and thought. Enlightenment thinking put the individual and his/her reason in a primary position over against the authority of biblical revelation, with the result that songs of praise also sought to explain why the people of God should praise him. The order of the universe, for example, gave reason for wonder and praise.[6] But *explanations* of God's goodness proved unsatisfactory to the wider worshipping public, which turned in great numbers to the new renewal movement: Pietism. In simple terms, the focus moved from the head to the heart. Theologically, there was a new emphasis on the Cross of Christ, as received via the contemplative mystics, a vivid view of the dying Jesus in his wounds and blood. Count Zinzendorf, whose two thousand song texts inform much of what we call the Pietist hymn tradition, had a fascination for the wounds, especially the "wounded side" where he finds refuge.[7] Here praise arises as a thankful

[6] The classical example is Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's (1715–1769), "Preis des Schöpfers:"

> Wenn ich, o Schöpfer, deine Macht,
> Die Weisheit deiner Wege,
> Die Liebe, die für alle wacht,
> Anbetend überlege,
> So weiß ich, von Bewundrung voll,
> Nicht, wie ich dich erheben soll,
> Mein Gott, mein Herr und Vater.

[7] Zinzendorf manages to include the word *Wunden* (wounds) 25 times in one stanza (*Brüdergesangbuch III*, v. 2). A good example, not by Zinzendorf, is "In the rifted rock I'm resting" (Mary Dagworthy James, 1875), which has become a Mennonite *Kernlied* (song at the "core" or heart or our tradition) as "Wehrlos und verlassen sehnt sich . . .":

> In the rifted rock I'm resting, safely sheltered I abide.
> There no foes nor storms molest me, while within the cleft I hide.
> . . . . . .
> Long pursued by sin and Satan, weary, sad, I longed for rest.
> Then I found this heav'nly shelter, opened in my Saviour's breast.

response for the bloody sacrifice, but one cannot ignore the great difference between this imagistically dramatic situation and that of the first-generation Anabaptists, who are reporting what is literally happening to them and theirs, while the Pietist, personally not threatened in that way, attempts to empathize with the suffering and death of Jesus in order to truly *feel* what has been done for him by the Divine sacrifice.

The experience of the Pietist is internalized. While Anabaptist praise arose directly, albeit paradoxically, from daily life, the Pietist carried on an inward spirituality which took its sustenance from the Bible and religious tradition. Meanwhile, the daily life of the Christian might or might not feature directly in worship and praise, and the question of the appropriateness of Pietist praise arises. The disproportion between the outer and inner life is a counterpoint of another kind. It is true that classical Pietist hymns, for example, "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden," (O Sacred Head Now Wounded) do not falsely portray supposed sufferings of the individual (as one might well imagine in keeping with the fictions of Jung-Stilling, whose heroes lived dramatic spiritual adventures vicariously for generations of "ordinary" Christians[8]), but direct our thoughts to the death of Jesus and his salvation, which are truly grounds for praise.

One of the dangers of this kind of removal from one's own experience is that of losing a sense of the reality of what is being sung. Consider a song like "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins,/ and sinner's plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains."[9] A contemporary mind must boggle at these words—or learn to ignore their images and somehow understand them abstractly, since the counterpoint here approaches the grotesque. Imagery is by nature suggestive, and that means that its associations, which are time-bound, will change incalculably. Like some of Zinzendorf's songs, this text is made impossible (or should be) for a contemporary perception by seemingly reducing a profound theological concept to something like an archaic sounding commercial. It can hardly now be called appropriate. Still, many Pietist songs which express thanks for the love of God are truly timeless, like the grandly simple "Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe" (O Power of Love), and, as religion of the heart, contribute depth and feeling to our hymn tradition.

[8] See Victor G. Doerksen, "From Jung-Stilling to Rudy Wiebe: 'Christian Fiction' and the Mennonite Imagination," in *Mennonite Images*, ed. Harry Loewen (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), 197–208.

[9] Omitted from both *The Mennonite Hymnal* (Newton: Faith & Life Press; Scottdale: Herald Press, 1969) and *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin: Brethren Press; Newton: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992).

The Great Awakening of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought a new imagery to songs of praise, which now returned to the experience of the individual who is rescued. For the Wesley brothers, who crossed the Atlantic several times and experienced life-threatening storms at sea, the appropriate imagery was that of "Some poor, fainting, struggling seaman, you may rescue, you may save." As the lines suggest, the agency of the Christian is required to "throw out the life-line."[10] But although the sea-faring experiences of the Wesleys and others may have been vivid enough to evoke this dramatic imagery, it was clearly that; a death at sea would be a terrible fate but no martyrdom. Like the Pietist hymns these songs were poetically removed from real, everyday experience; theirs was an "inner truth."

Just as the preaching which characterized the Revival Movement was dramatic and drastic, so were the songs, which concentrated on a crisis experience, a moment of decision. In this movement, as in Pietism, the Cross of Christ was at the centre, as in the hymn of Charles Wesley, "O For a Heart to Praise my God:"

> O for a heart to praise my God,
> A heart from sin set free!
> A heart that's sprinkled with the blood
> So freely shed for me.[11]

The cross of Christ, "the old, rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame," is a powerful symbol for the "tragic depth" which C.S. Lewis speaks of as a part of our worship. It is "despised by the world," but it has a "wondrous attraction" for the Christian. For the contemporary song writer the Cross too easily becomes cliché, but it is necessary for Christian praise, precisely as a tragic counterpoint for praise.

At the same time that songs were composed in order to bring sinners to repentance as much as to praise the God of salvation, this music moved via Baptist and other German hymn collections into Mennonite congregations, so that songs like "Wehrlos und verlassen" (In the Rifted Rock) became part of what Ben Horch came to call *Kernlieder,* or songs at the "core" or heart of our tradition. Most of these songs arise in the world of Pietism and/or Revivalism (and not from Anabaptism), reflecting the theology of the Cross and the personal experience of salvation which dominate these movements. One does not find many Psalm texts among them,[12]

[10] There is a new *via activa* in the Revival Movement, in contrast to the predominant *via contemplativa* of Pietism.

[11] *Mennonite Hymnal*, no. 283.

[12] Earlier song collections of the Mennonites had included a goodly number of Psalms. See articles on "Hymnology" in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House; Newton: Mennonite Publication Office; Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1959), 869–886.

apart perhaps from the image of the shepherd and the sheep, which lends itself readily to Pietist and Revival thinking ("The Ninety and Nine . . ."), but even that is also a New Testament image, renewed by Jesus himself. And the image of sacrifice, adopted from the theology of the Cross, similarly is a motif out of Old Testament religious experience. It was carried over into the New Covenant with great consequences for hymn literature, though perhaps somewhat problematic in terms of contemporary soteriology.[13] Songs of praise which base their thanks upon a sacrifice of blood and wounds abound in the literature, for example, "O wie dank ich deinen Wunden, schmerzenreiche Liebe du" (O how I give thanks for your wounds, you pain-filled love), but the modern singer of these hymns cannot have the same perception or experience as had the Hebrews of the Old Testament, or even the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.

When we turn from these traditional hymns to the contemporary praise songs of Evangelical America, there are several substantial changes which may be observed. There is, as I mentioned at the outset, a decided reaching back to Old Testament text excerpts. A quick survey of a "Chorus Hymnal" currently in use showed some seventeen choruses which derive directly from Psalms, and only few from New Testament texts. In addition there are texts from Exodus, Leviticus and Isaiah, while the New Testament references are to the Letters to the Philippians, Hebrews and the Book of Revelation. Where, one might ask, are passages from the Gospels, and from the Sermon on the Mount in particular?[14] This concentration on the powerful God of the Old Testament necessarily involves a new theological emphasis. The situation of the Psalmist was one in which his supplication was on the basis that he was being wronged and that the Lord should protect him and his. Then he, the Psalmist, would praise God for his mighty deeds.[15]

Unlike the Anabaptist, the "sheep" of the twenty-third Psalm is not on its way to the slaughterhouse. Rather, the Lord will slay his enemies and he will prosper. The Anabaptist could only identify with that sheep in a paradoxical fashion. Unlike the Psalmist,

[13] The idea of a substitutionary atonement can be accepted more readily by a contemporary perception than can the blood sacrifice which underlies the image of the Lamb of God. See the discussion of various understandings of the atonement in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995), 35–38.

[14] A notable exception is an adaptation of the Prayer of St. Francis of Assissi.

[15] The Horse and the Rider (cf., Exod 15:1, 21): "I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously/ The horse and rider fell into the sea./ I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously./ The horse and rider fell into the sea./ The Lord is God and I will praise him;/ The Lord is God and I will exalt him. . . ."

[Stanza 2:] "I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously/ The grave is empty won't you come and see. . . ."

Anabaptist men and women called upon God for strength in the trial (and for them "trial" was not a figure of speech) and for forgiveness of their enemies. The strong arm of God is understood in different ways by the Psalmist and the Anabaptist. It had taken the event of Jesus Christ to teach the paradox of the Gospel, the "upside-down kingdom": strength in weakness, life in death, love of enemies. This is the counterpoint of which C.S. Lewis speaks, and which must be addressed by contemporary music.

When we then return to Old Testament materials in our songs of praise how do we take account of this reversal? Can we celebrate the (destructive as well as protective) power of God in the same way and with the same words as did the Psalmist? Can we simply spiritualize the whole text (as we must in texts like "The battle belongs to the Lord")? Is it possible for us to understand these texts with New Testament eyes, or is there a carry-over of an Old Testament consciousness, a sense of "my god is greater than your god?" This is the language of Elijah versus the prophets of Baal. Many of the praise choruses extol the greatness of God in ways that leave such questions unanswered.[16]

It must be added here that many of these texts are inadequate from a literary point of view, although there are notable and beautiful exceptions. Mere repetition does not necessarily add substance to a text, and the mechanical—or hypnotic—effect of such line repetition is exacerbated by repetitions of the whole stanza or chorus. This seems to be a direct transfer from the practice of secular pop music, which repeats even good lines to the extent that they become instantly forgettable. Surely there is a challenge here for Christian song writers, who are presumably not writing for the charts but for God and his people.

As in the writing of all poetry, good texts are rare. Much of the Psalms is good and great poetry. It arises genuinely from a historical religious situation and gives expression to genuine experiences of God and God's people. But we should remember that those are not our times, and while we may read and sing those songs as part of our traditional faith, our world, our experience and our Christian faith are all different in significant ways from that of the Psalmist. How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land? We have been given a new song to sing; our praise should be appropriate to our experience of faith as well as to the God of our salvation.

Our forefathers and mothers of the Reformation time gave expression to their faith in their own words; they told their story and praised God for his leading, even to death. In the later centuries,

[16] Words like "great," "mighty" and "awesome" have fallen upon hard times in contemporary speech. Poets need to create new images (comparisons) which use the stuff of our lives, as did much of the agricultural imagery of the past.

with the new inwardness of Pietism it was natural for the song writer to explore his feelings and experience about the sacrificial death of Christ, although that could be taken to extremes, as it was by Count Zinzendorf. Likewise, the concentration on crisis conversion by the Revivalists can be understood as theologically one-sided. But it is fittingly clothed in the imagery of the experience of that time and situation. In addition the many abstract terms used in English hymnody, like "salvation," "blessing," and so on, have proven to be durable through time. The same cannot be said for many contemporary expressions which are finding use in our choruses.

And so the question arises: how can contemporary Christians appropriately form their praise to God? Several years ago I attended a Mennonite conference at which many learned papers were given. Between the sessions a music professor led the large academic gathering in the singing of traditional hymns, which, fortunately for us as Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, were sung with great gusto and feeling. It was a robust worship which left many exhilarated and moved. In those moments of harmony we were all together, united in another place, on a different plane, so to speak. It was there that I realized profoundly what is meant by the epigraph which stands at the beginning of this paper: "the chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." As C.S. Lewis knew—although he never knew Mennonite harmony—there is an enjoyment in musical worship which transcends ordinary pleasure. Worship, as we know, can only happen "in spirit and in truth." Only the best is good enough; both the words and the music share in this great Christian ministry. There is already a strong body of recent church music for those churches fortunate enough to maintain a choir. There are poets like Jean Janzen, for example, who are turning their gift to this calling.[17] It is to be hoped that the singing of congregations, large and small, will not be reduced to a meagre common denominator, but will take seriously the need to praise God appropriately, in other words, with our best, be it simple or sophisticated. After all, the images of our singing worship not only express, but also shape our personal theology, our imagination of religious reality.

[17] Eight song texts by Jean Janzen are in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

Hebrew Magic
"If the Bible is so patriarchal, how come I love it so much?"

Margaret Loewen Reimer

In 1985, I wrote a Christmas pageant for my congregation. It had seven scenes, drawn from seven biblical moments in which God enters the world through rather unlikely people in bizarre situations. The characters were: 1) Adam and Eve, with Cain and Abel; 2) Abraham, Sarah and Isaac, with Hagar and Ishmael; 3) Puah and Shiprah, Miriam and Jochabed; 4) Rahab, Joshua and Deborah; 5) Hosea and Gomer; 6) David, Tamar and Rachel; 7) Mary and Joseph. Framing the action were two narrators—the angel (played by a boy) and the devil (played by a girl).

To prepare for the "unfamiliar" scenes, the children's stories during Advent focused on the Old Testament stories—one each Sunday. Parents were encouraged to review these stories at home with their children. The Sunday morning storyteller was obviously perplexed by his assignment; the congregation was uneasy. The night of the pageant arrived. The children, though they had little sense of what their brief parts signified, gamely saw the action through. The angel and devil were suitably arch and competitive. The highlight for me was a spiteful squabble between Gomer and Hosea, performed by my 10-year-old daughter and her friend. They played it up for all it was worth. The result was pure camp:

> *Hosea*: Gomer, will you listen to me? You can't just run off and leave me with the children. I'm supposed to be a prophet.

> *Gomer*: Why did you marry me in the first place? I told you I wasn't interested in settling down.
>
> *Hosea*: But you have three children now.
>
> *Gomer*: That's another problem. You insisted we give them these silly names . . . . "Not pitied." What kind of name is that for a girl?

Congregational response was muted. One man was outraged: "This has nothing to do with Advent!" he spluttered. "How could you do such a thing?"

That modest Christmas pageant is one of the most satisfying encounters with the Bible I have ever had. It signifies for me the delight of coaxing a text into meaning, of exploring unexpected connections and stumbling on new possibilities. It also reminds me of what we are missing when we mute or censor this literary treasure, allowing it to recede into obscurity and irrelevance.

Over the years, my experience with the Bible and other literature has convinced me of three things. First, all those bizarre stories and ancient utterances of our sacred Scriptures beg to be understood within the framework of a coherent narrative. This sprawling collection of writings, not without contradiction and offence, hangs together by a clearly visible thread: human beings interacting with the God of the universe, defined in Hebraic terms as creator, redeemer and sustainer. Limiting ourselves to the acceptable, not even a lectionary to nudge us, we lose sight of the colourful pattern of the whole.

Second, if the Bible is to make any sense at all, the biblical past must be linked with our present—not only by deducing moralisms from the sayings of Jesus or jumping over history into personal spirituality, but by allowing the ancient imagination to interact with the contemporary imagination. This means risking readings of the text that make direct connections with our computerized, media-driven lives and with the lives of our teenagers. I am not calling for new interpretations as much as a renewed attitude toward the Bible, an openness that allows the Word to become alive in the present as it was in the past.

Third, the Bible needs to be allowed out of the religious closet where it has been tucked away from the larger conversation. By our hesitance to place it alongside other cultural texts, we have confined our Scripture largely to an intra-textual debate. Anxious to preserve its unique truth, we have shielded it from the broader human quest for truth. How can we expect so much from the Bible and yet risk so little?

To venture further into what I am suggesting here, I offer a narrative of my own pilgrimage with the Bible. I offer it both as

interpretation of the convictions outlined above and as illustration of how the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, might speak to us today. Not a specialist in biblical studies, I bring insights from other disciplines that are indispensable to the pursuit of biblical truth.

II

At least two "streams of consciousness" have shaped my interaction with the Bible: 1) the historical-critical approach of my theological education; and 2) the study of English literature, particularly the risqué imagination of the medieval mind.

My generation, growing up in the 1950s, was fortunate to receive the biblical canon—eviscerated and piece-meal though it was—through stories in Sunday school and perhaps Bible reading at home. (I don't know how to evaluate the impact of the German pietist sermons I grew up with—I would not call them "memorable." The hymns are another matter.) My love of story and thirst for knowledge made me an easy target for Waldemar Janzen's propagation of Old Testament truth at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. In his classes, the world of the ancient Hebrews began to take on form; the fragments of my biblical knowledge began to sort themselves into a pattern that promised greater meaning. But more than that, those fierce Old Testament stories sprang to life and grasped permanent hold of my imagination. That experience continued while studying Job with Samuel Terrien at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

I began to understand what Dietrich Bonhoeffer meant when he said, "Only when one knows the unutterableness of the name of God may one utter the name of Jesus Christ; only when one submits to God's law may one speak of grace; and only when God's wrath and vengeance are hanging as grim realities over the heads of one's enemies can something of what it means to love and forgive our enemies begin to touch our hearts."[1]

My compelling encounter with the Old Testament, however, "spoiled" the rest of the Bible for me. How could the sanctified Gospel narratives, with the exception perhaps of the Passion story, ever compete with the blood and thunder of Israelite history? Where could one find a more stark cosmology or searing truth-telling than in the Hebrew texts? I had learned to hear the voices of the Hebrews—the rage and the lyricism, the pleading and the denunciation, the terrible voice of God himself.[2]

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 156.

[2] I use the male pronoun for God deliberately here. Despite qualifications one could make, I believe that the God of the Hebrews is portrayed in the Old Testament in unmistakeably male terms. This depiction of Yahweh is for me both fascinating and disturbing, and it colours my experience of the Christian God.

I soon realized that I was reading the Bible in at least two very different ways. As fascinated as I was with historical excavation of the text, I was equally compelled by the imaginative truth of the unmediated word (unmediated, that is, by anything except my own imagination and experience). To express the dichotomy another way, my religious sensibility is shaped both by theology (historical/systematic thought) and by art (story). So the structured certainty of Deuteronomy continues to interact in my experience with the turbulent soap-opera of Samuel and Kings. Therefore, I move between a fascination with the chaos of existence and the desire to organize its essence within a cosmic pattern. That dialectic is what drew me into the study of literature, where I could locate myself at the intersection of story and theology.

When I applied for doctoral studies at the University of Toronto, the English department head listened to me describe my interests, then curtly informed me that I was in the wrong place. He told me to go over to comparative literature or theology. I refused, and subsequently found more than enough riches in a traditional English department. For here I could explore characters as diverse as Chaucer's Wife of Bath—that saucy biblical exegete in *The Canterbury Tales*—and George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver, the excruciatingly moral heroine of *The Mill on the Floss*. I could enjoy the "brightness" of classical symmetry and the profane delights of Shakespeare or Emily Dickinson, while delving into the dark worlds of Faulkner or Kafka.

Ultimately, however, I am most fiercely drawn to writers whose works have been shaped by the uncompromising, harsh worldview of the ancient Hebrews: Nathanial Hawthorne with his stark Puritanism; John Ruskin whose thunderous prose echoes the cadences of the Hebrew prophets; Flannery O'Connor with her gothic vision of Christianity. Many Canadian Mennonite writers also partake of this Hebraic heritage, revealed most clearly in a heavy moral consciousness, whether didactic or tortured. Rudy Wiebe is the most obvious heir of this tradition, both in language and sensibility. Even poet Patrick Friesen was recently accused of being too preachy. A critic of his new collection of apocalyptic verse, *A Broken Bowl*,[3] cited Friesen's "biblically parodic language" and stated: "I felt I was being lectured to by someone whose morality is presented as gospel."[4]

III

These diverse streams of biblical/literary interest converged in an unexpected way when I stumbled onto medieval drama. What a

[3] Patrick Friesen, *A Broken Bowl* (London, Ontario: Brick Books, 1997).

[4] Tim Bowling, Review of *A Broken Bowl*, by Patrick Friesen, in *Quill and Quire* (November 1997).

surprise! Here were biblical plays from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that brim with action, humour and ingenious characters. Here were writers who dared to take sacred figures from the Bible and plop them straight into the hurly-burly of contemporary life, and laugh at them. What happened to that imagination over the centuries?

These dramas have their roots in church liturgy, as procession and ceremony expanded into pageant and role-play. By the tenth century, the dramatic moments of the church year, particularly Easter, were often "acted out" in front of the congregation. One of the earliest of these liturgical dramas was the visit to the sepulchre by the three Marys on Easter morning. The texts that remain all involve a dialogue between an angel (or two) and the Marys approaching the tomb. "Quem quaeritis?" (Whom do you seek?) was the standard opening. The next two centuries saw the development of full-fledged Easter and Christmas dramas, as well as plays on other biblical subjects such as Cain and Abel, and Daniel.[5]

By the fourteenth century, the dramatized liturgy in England had led to a far more elaborate form of Bible drama: the Corpus Christi Cycle, sometimes called Mystery or Miracle Plays, performed in the marketplace each year by the town's craft guilds. These colourful, festive events included the whole range of biblical history, from Creation to Doomsday. Like the pictorial windows and carvings of the medieval church, these "folk dramas" brought the sacred story to the laity, in their language. Here the sacred and the profane appeared side by side—biblical heroes were "humanized" in sometimes startling ways, and the "bad guys" made obscenely wicked. Comedy, often lewd, portrayed unregenerate humanity. The Devil was the supremely ludicrous figure. But the dramas never lost sight of the larger picture: each character was playing a role in the cosmic drama of salvation; each was both human and "type" in the sacred story. The patriarchs and prophets prefigured the Christ who was to come; Cain, Pharoah and Herod were caricatured as types of Satan.

Four complete English cycles remain. The York cycle, consisting of 48 pageants or scenes; the Towneley or Wakefield cycle with 32 scenes; Coventry or N Town with 43; Chester with 24. The cycles differ considerably in tone and content. The York cycle, for example, moves abruptly from Moses and Pharaoh to the Annunciation, while N Town presents an extended series of Old Testament figures derived from the tradition of the tree of Jesse. Because of their emphasis on

[5] My main source for the discussion of medieval drama is David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975). A taste of this drama can be found in a contemporary work, *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff (1936), which uses texts from twelfth-century manuscripts found in the Benediktbeuern monastery in Germany.

the humanity of Christ, all the cycles contain extensive scenes of "buffeting" or torture.

Wakefield illustrates best the extremes of these plays: the perpetrators of evil are generally noisy, brash and obscenely humorous; the defenders of virtue are serene and idealized. The Wakefield Annunciation draws on apocryphal books and legends to offer a comic tale of human jealousy and divine mystery. The famous Second Shepherds Play presents a burlesque of the nativity through the story of Mak the sheep stealer and his shrewish wife Gill. Without blaspheming the birth of Christ, the scene sets up a comic comparison between Mak's stolen sheep and the Lamb of God.

The biblical cycles flourished until well into the sixteenth century, but they could not survive the increasing hostility of the church which more and more perceived them as idolatrous. By the 1560s, the Corpus Christi plays had been effectively suppressed. It was a parallel genre, the Morality Play, which survived to become the formative influence on modern drama, perhaps because it was less directly linked to the Bible. The Morality Plays were allegories which pitted virtues and vices against each other in highly entertaining battles for the soul of "Everyman," the title of the best-known such play. In 1979, I had the good fortune to see a performance of one of the oldest and most elaborate of these Morality Plays, *The Castle of Perseverance*, dated around 1405. The performance took place outdoors on five stages, with the besieged castle in the centre where Good and Evil, Life and Death, Heaven and Earth, Body and Soul fought it out for seven hours. We had two four-year-olds with us and their attention seldom flagged.

Today, these plays are largely forgotten. Why? Part of the answer is that the genius of the medieval mind—which was able to hold all things together in one cosmic, coherent scheme—was also its great weakness and could not be sustained. The Reformation reflected a modern consciousness that was driven to divide up and categorize, to analyze and question, rather than strive for unity at all costs. And so came the separation into sacred and secular, church and world, liturgy and "plays." The Bible was relegated to the sphere of the sacred, removing it from the marketplace, ironically, just as people were beginning to read it for themselves.

Today, for all our dissecting and contextualizing, Christians "fear" the sacred text in ways the medievals did not—we fear its savage primitiveness and "tactlessness," on the one hand, and its holiness on the other, Monty Python excepted.[6] And so we keep the Bible on

[6] One could argue that Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (Westport: Heinemann, 1992) is the closest thing we have to medieval biblical drama. It has the same fearlessness and comic flair. But can a farce of Jesus' life have much significance for an audience that has little at stake in the source of the satire? Can one make fun of something one does not take seriously to begin with?

a special shelf in our lives, suspicious of artists or movie-makers who take it on or attempt to translate it into the contemporary. The Christian attack against a work such as Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ*,[7] illustrates our insecurity—it's the same impulse that fuels the Muslim death-threat against Salmon Rushdie: fear of blasphemy and of losing interpretive control. The confusion is understandable—in our pluralist, "secular" culture, the Scriptures belong to the church more exclusively than ever before. At the same time, the Bible is at the heart of our cultural heritage. By trying to protect it from the marketplace, the church withdraws it further and further from engagement with the present.

A remarkable attempt to bring the Bible back into the cultural discussion came with the publication in 1982 of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code*.[8] His attempt to trace the mythic patterns of the biblical story took me back to his groundbreaking work on myth in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957).[9] Frye's passion for coherence and universality was a breath of fresh air to someone accustomed to defining the Bible by chapter and genre and era. Another literary approach was emerging with narrative studies, most notably Robert Alter's work, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*,[10] which came out in 1981. Alter, as professor of both Hebrew and comparative literature, was part of a new group of mostly Jewish scholars who used literary critical tools to analyze themes, narrative techniques and poetic forms in the Old Testament, bringing this ancient collection of poetry and prose back to life as part of the "secular" literary canon. In 1987, Alter joined with eminent English literary critic, Frank Kermode, to edit an impressive, though numbingly technical, collection of essays, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*.[11] The foundation for this approach was laid in 1946 by Erich Auerbach in his amazing study, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*,[12] in which he contrasted the storytelling styles of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks.

These writers heightened my interest in the Bible as "literary canon" as part of the world collection of story, myth and poetry. Christians have resisted that move, jealously guarding the Bible against being reduced to "mere" literature. Interestingly, we have

[7] Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960).

[8] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1982).

[9] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[10] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

[11] Robert Alter & Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

[12] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946).

fewer qualms about reducing the Bible to history or morality in ways that would have perplexed even the history-minded, moralistic Hebrews.[13] Our enlightened worldview has succeeded in flattening our perceptions, luring us into false distinctions between story and history, myth and reality. Biblical criticism in this context has succeeded mainly in literalizing what was literary.[14] In the current climate, "I believe in God the Father Almighty" becomes an issue of chronology and gender, and "Maker of heaven and earth" a technological problem. The word "myth," especially, is caught in its own whirlpool of confusion.

While researching mythology during my studies in literature, I was hard pressed to find a work that placed biblical myths alongside the myths of other cultures (for example, creation, fall, the dying god, end of the world). Nor do we find many biblical scholars comparing "the Hebrew mythos" as a whole to the mythic structures of other cultures. Is this an issue of semantics or apologetics? Brevard Childs, who did his doctoral work on myth in the Old Testament, illustrates the confusion. After setting forth a compelling understanding of the mythic paradigm of the ancient world, he sets the Hebrews outside of it. His reasoning is that because the biblical writers "break" prevalent myths and transform them, it follows that the Hebrew concept of reality is "in conflict with the mythical." By shaping a reality based on the "new Israel," the biblical writers "succeeded in overcoming the myth," announces Childs, who can't resist adding that the Hebrews "demythologized myth." This specious reasoning is baffling from a critic who insists that Hebrew reality "is not tied to the historicity of biblical events." Childs seems unable to follow through on his introductory paradigm and simply speaks about the "myth of the new Israel."[15]

Much of the problem lies with the word itself—"myth" in our context seems beyond redemption.[16] Let us speak instead of the "religious imagination" or the "language of divinity," of that understanding which takes us beyond the moral and the allegorical

[13] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*, proposed as a general principle that if anything is historically true in the Bible, it is there not because it is historically true but for different reasons.

[14] Conrad Hyers speaks of the "hermeneutical fall" into literalism in "Biblical Literalism: Constricting the Cosmic Dance," *The Christian Century* 99 (4–11 August 1982): 823–827. Hyers' job description is informative—he teaches "comparative mythology and the history of religions" at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota.

[15] Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1962).

[16] How can one speak of the biblical "myth" in our time when the dictionary defines myth as both "a traditional story that unfolds the world view of a people" and "an ill-founded belief held uncritically?" The whole history of Western culture can be seen as a history of demythologization, observes Belden Lane in "The Power of Myth: Lessons from Joseph Campbell," *The Christian Century* 106 (5–12 July 1989): 652–654.

to spiritual or mystical reality.[17] Whatever we call it, it is that larger vision of reality that enables us to appreciate how Israel transforms her "history" into a sacred story by an imaginative bridge of faith between the divine God and the affairs of this world.

IV

An imaginative bridge between the Old Testament and contemporary culture was the subject of my doctoral thesis on "Hebraism" in English literature.[18] The starting point for the study was Matthew Arnold's identification of Hellenism and Hebraism as the two forces that have shaped western culture (*Culture and Anarchy*, 1869).[19] Arnold defined Hellenism as the love of "pure knowledge," that which allows one "to see things as they are, and by seeing them as they are to see them in their beauty." Hellenism invests life with "clearness and radiancy," and is governed by flexibility and "spontaneity of consciousness." In contrast, Hebraism is "the energy driving practice," the overriding obligation to "duty, self-control, and work," rooted in earnestness and "strictness of conscience."

Most critics have assumed that Arnold's formulation is simply a restating of the classical/Christian dichotomy, or the "thinking-doing" dualism at the heart of western consciousness. But my study demonstrated that Arnold coined the term "Hebraism" to emphasize a specific aspect of Christian culture—that Puritan obsession with moral living, individual conscience, sin and judgment. In other words, Arnold was seeking to describe a foundational impulse in the western psyche that is much more akin to the spirit of the Hebrew scriptures than to the Hellenized New Testament. His term sought to capture the notion of the individual striving for righteousness in a world that considers goodness, not beauty, to be the highest good.

The topic became a passion for Arnold who turned away from cultural criticism in the 1870s to write three books on the Bible: *St. Paul and Protestantism*, *Literature and Dogma* and *Last Essays on Church and Religion*.[20] He was desperately trying to find a way to retain the moral imperative of Christianity—which he saw as essential for a culture that was losing its religious moorings—without

[17] Although these may qualify as "air routes" in Waldemar Janzen's typology (*Still in the Image* [Newton: Faith & Life Press; Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982]), I see current biblical criticism as much more inclusive of various "elevations" in approaching the text.

[18] Margaret Loewen Reimer, *Hebraism in English Literature: A Study of Matthew Arnold and George Eliot*. Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of English, University of Toronto, 1993. I was led to the topic by Frederick Flahiff, an English professor of Catholic background.

[19] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (New York: Macmillan, 1869, 1902).

[20] Matthew Arnold, *St. Paul and Protestantism . . . and Last Essays on Church and Religion* (New York, Macmillan, 1883); *Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (New York: AMS Press, nd).

having to hang on to its doctrinal baggage. Arnold's writings betray his deep aversion to Christianity, particularly its "Hebrew" elements. In arguments riddled with ambivalence and contradiction, Arnold praises St. Paul as an enlightened Hellenist, while attempting to strip him of all dogmatic or metaphysical intent. He champions Hebrew religion for its exclusive focus on right conduct and then belittles the Hebrews for lacking the "Aryan genius for abstraction." At his worst, Arnold is alarmingly racist: "In spite of all which in them [ancient Hebrews] and in their character is unattractive, nay, repellent . . . this petty, unsuccessful, unamiable people, without politics, without science, without art, without charm, deserve their great place in the world's regard . . . ."[21] Quite a recommendation!

In literary criticism, the word "Hebraism" has become identified with the preference for the "natural" (real) over the artificial (ideal), the word over the image (Hebrew iconoclasm), the individual struggle over the realized universal. One can trace a Hebraic stream in English literature, beginning in Reformation fervour, that flows through works such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Donne's tortured poems and sermons, and Milton's Hebraic epic, *Samson Agonistes*. The stream rises to the surface again in the intensified Puritanism of the nineteenth century, particularly in the novel.

A major part of my study used this understanding of Hebraism to analyze George Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, a truly Hebraic work with a Jewish hero who calls decadent England back to its Hebrew roots. Eliot learned Hebrew to lend credence to her subject, and Jewish readers lauded the book for its authenticity and seriousness. She also drew upon contemporary European theology, such as the works of Ludwig Feuerbach, Joseph Ernest Renan and David Friedrich Strauss.

Daniel Deronda is an earnest, young Englishman whose discovery that he is Jewish ignites his messianic consciousness. Deronda has a gift for drawing people to him by his generous and self-sacrificial spirit. He gives up personal status and ambitions to serve his new-found community, sailing off to Israel at the end of the book. But underneath the portrait of this contemporary Jewish saviour flows a subtle critique. In my reading of the novel, the author brilliantly portrays the human complexities of radical goodness: Deronda's noble intentions are tainted by self-righteousness; his lack of self-awareness makes him at times an irritating prig; his passion to save others, particularly needy, young women, blinds

[21] Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol. VI, ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 199. Since the mid-1980s, several scholars have sought to rehabilitate Arnold's "biblical criticism." In my opinion, however, Arnold's views represent the worst of liberal "broad church" thinking in mid-nineteenth-century England.

him to his sexual power. The novel is made all the more interesting by the author's own ambivalence about her hero.

My study of Hebraism also led me into many fascinating byways, such as exploring myths of origin which link Western cultures to the ancient Hebrews, the nineteenth-century fascination with things Eastern (Orientalism), and the connections between the "gothic" (both architectural and literary) and the Hebraic spirit. A sub-theme running through my study was the relationship between Hebraism and European Jews, both historically and as portrayed in nineteenth-century English literature.

Like my experience with the Christmas pageant, the critics proved to be uneasy with my study of Hebraism. My examiners at the thesis defence became most agitated over my assumption of "coherence." Did I actually assume a direct connection between the Bible and the views of a nineteenth-century writer? they asked. Why would I use outdated criticism from before 1970? How can one presume to trace a theme through several centuries? In a literary climate enamoured of disjunction, deconstruction and post-modern jargon, it was hard to communicate.

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And that is the problem we all face today. How can we presume a connection between this assortment of archaic documents and the television age? How can our children make any sense of such a different universe? As Christians, we believe that there is continuity through the ages, that we stand in a tradition that is still guided by the same Hebrew scriptures that guided the first Christians. In other words, we assume that there is a universal coherence, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Can we extend that faith claim to the wildly disparate worlds of media and culture which also participate in God s truth? Contradictory and even abhorrent as some of these worlds may be, they are contemporary "expressions of faith" that shape our imaginations . . . even more than the Bible does.

Like many parents, some of my most delightful hours have been spent exploring the worlds of fairy-tale and myth with my children. I tried to introduce the Bible to them in the same way—as exciting tales of treachery and heroism, violent deeds and shining goodness. I tried to resist moralizing, for these stories illustrate truth just in their telling. Television provided another opportunity to probe connections: How does Hercules compare to Samson? Star wars to Israelite wars? How does sexual abuse in our culture relate to that of Lot's or Tamar's culture? Above our kitchen table hangs our little compendium of essential knowledge, our family Summa: The Nine Orders of Angels are ranged alongside the Nine Muses, the Seven

Virtues beside the Seven Deadly Sins; the list of Olympic gods is followed by an outline of the House of Israel. Quirky, but perhaps a nudge to the imagination. Despite our many provocative discussions, however, I now regret not having been more systematic in telling Bible stories; no other context, not even Sunday school, has given our children the overall narrative.

In spite of the efforts, our youngest son came storming into the house recently after an argument with his friends, announcing that "none of the Bible is true because you can't prove any of it!" (He recanted later, sheepishly admitting that he didn't really think that "scientifically.") In such a climate, the church's task is not to de-mythologize the message but to re-mythologize it, not to humanize the gospel but to divinize it so that it can speak a living word to the deadening spirit of materialism. That is why we need to read the Old Testament—its words of power and judgment are the counterpoint to our delusions of self-sufficiency; its God of might is the corrective to the inadequate Jesus with whom we generally content ourselves. And the ragged edges of its tumultuous narrative warn us against too-easy assertions of meaning and coherence.

The distasteful aspects of the Bible—the savagery of Yahweh, Paul's put-downs of women—will continue to plague us. They are part of the tension that keeps the Bible alive for us. "We weren't given a sanitized Bible," observed Phyllis Trible in a recent interview. "You can preach against a text, you know."[22] It is in this spirit that Trible took on the *Texts of Terror*, those biblical stories about women who are raped, abandoned and murdered.[23]

In the Trible interview, entitled, "Can biblical faithfulness absorb postmodern suspicion?", this professor of sacred literature was asked how her feminism informs her scholarship. She replied, "When I began to be challenged by a feminist critique of the Bible, I said to myself: if the Bible is so patriarchal, how come I love it so much? . . . There is patriarchy—for sure—but there are other ways of reading it." Trible confesses that she has no option but to live by the biblical story: "In part that's a choice. In another part, I was chosen. It still speaks to me with power, and with healing and with blessing. But not without a struggle . . . . You're always wrestling with the God who emerges from this Bible. And that's worth wrestling with."[24] Amen.

[22] Phyllis Trible, "Can biblical faithfulness absorb postmodern suspicion?", interview by Janet Somerville (Toronto, Ontario) in *Catholic New Times* (15 June 1997), 6. I first encountered Phyllis Trible in 1971 at Union Theological Seminary in New York, where she currently teaches. Her inspired reading of Genesis 2 opened my eyes to the possibilities that lurk in even the most hackneyed texts.

[23] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[24] Phyllis Trible, "Can biblical faithfulness absorb postmodern suspicion?", 6.

For us at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the question is not, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" but "How can we sing a strange song in a familiar land?" We are no longer exiles; we are now more estranged from our biblical roots than from our culture. By tracing my own experience with the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, I have tried to suggest a few ways we can remain connected with that ancient word. Earlier ages sought coherence in systems and typologies within a cosmic order. We will have to seek it by bringing the fractured knowledge and discontinuities of our experience into creative encounters with the age-old story of faith.

"Do not abandon the text," says Trible. "Instead, move more deeply into it, bringing with you not only the requisite tools for analysis, but also a commitment to healing and redemption. The healing is for the sake of both the text and the reader."[25] I would add: Bring your imagination, and prepare to be surprised.

[25] Phyllis Trible, speaking at the conference, "Trust and Suspicion: Hermeneutics in a Broken World," hosted by the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Ontario, May 21–23, 1997; quoted in *Catholic New Times* (15 June 1997), 6.

Reading Psalm 139
Opting for a Realistic Reading

Lydia Harder

Mennonites are seeking an "undisturbed, soothing religion of psychological well-being" by avoiding the realism of the Old Testament in which "God's activity cannot be disentangled from history, war and judgement."[1] These observations by Waldemar Janzen deserve our close attention because they come from a person deeply committed both to the church and to biblical studies. Janzen's suggestion that Mennonites have effectively reduced the biblical canon to the New Testament is disturbing in light of Mennonite affirmation of the authority of the whole Bible. The further implication, that somehow Mennonites have missed seeing God's real activity in the world, creates a discomfort for those of us who have insisted that biblical interpretation be, above all, practical and connected to our daily lives. Moreover, Janzen's charge, that Mennonite acculturation to the individualism and privatization of our Western world has created this reduction, flies in the face of an emphasis in Mennonite theology on community and non-conformity to the world. These observations, therefore, warrant a second look at how our understanding of the Bible, as the church's authoritative book, and our understanding of God's salvation, experienced as "well-being," relate to each other.

[1] Waldemar Janzen, "A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation," in *The Church as Theological Community: Essays in Honour of David Schroeder*, ed. Harry Huebner (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1990), 94–95. Reprinted as Chapter 1 in this volume.

Janzen is right when he says that in Mennonite theology, both formal and informal, the authority of the Old Testament frequently has been superseded by the New. Many of us have accepted John H. Yoder's teachings that the Bible must be understood as a story of promise and fulfilment and that, therefore, it should be read "directionally."[2] We have affirmed the view that the New Testament goes beyond the Old, especially in its rejection of violence and in its promotion of a trajectory of peace. However, by doing this we have subtly taken away the opportunity for the Old Testament to speak an authoritative Word. After all, in our social climate the latest model of everything—whether computer, car or dishwasher—is considered the best.

However, it may be that the problem is deeper than avoiding the Old Testament. Perhaps Janzen is detecting a general tendency among Mennonites in these early days of the twenty-first century to avoid tension and contradiction whenever they arise in our Bible reading. In fact, I suspect that there may be a pattern of superficial reading that has developed in Mennonite tradition to deal with the dissonances that come when texts don't fit with each other or don't fit with an assumed Mennonite theology. What is needed is guidance to help us discern the difference between avoidance techniques, that contribute to our "comfortable pew," and an interpretive stance, that helps us respond to the message of God communicated even in dissonant texts.

The affirmation of biblical authority in our confessions of faith does not give us adequate guidance for this task, since differing practices can grow out of the same affirmation. Therefore, we must turn to an analysis of our normal reading habits in order to see exactly what this affirmation means in practice. We must identify the customary ways of interpreting that have developed through time and be willing to evaluate the motivations and the ethics of the interpretive choices that we make as we read. The usefulness of this kind of analysis depends on our willingness to repent of those interpretive practices that serve to justify our comfortable life, rather than open us to true well-being, often named *shalom* in the Bible.

One approach to this analysis is to note how we deal with the inherent tension in the biblical texts themselves. I have chosen Psalm 139 as a test case to help us reflect on our own reading practices and interpretive choices. The focus will be on illuminating the tensions within the text and suggesting possible implications of embracing the realism of the psalm. Perhaps this can be one way to avoid the temptation of a "soothing religion" that is not life-giving.

[2] John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 9.

Why Psalm 139?

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up. . . . (vv. 1–2a)
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast. . . . (vv. 9–10)
For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . .
(vv. 13–14a)
O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me. . . . (v. 19)
Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. (vv. 23–24)
Psalm 139, *NRSV*

Tension and ambiguity lie at the heart of this psalm's poetic language and cannot be avoided by interpreters who are committed to reading the complete text as it stands in the Bible. The drastic shift in mood and theme in verses 19–22 presents challenges to the most experienced interpreter as well as to the first-time reader. How does an interpreter bring together the reflective mood at the beginning and end of the psalm with the plea for revenge in the middle? In particular, how do Mennonite interpreters, who have embraced Jesus' call to love their enemies, read this psalm? Do we excise verses 19–22 out of Psalm 139 because of our convictions on peace-making?

Psalm 139 has been one of the most difficult psalms for scholars to classify because it expresses the variety of moods and themes also present in scripture as a whole. H. Gunkel regarded it as a "mixed type" that has "burst" the structural forms which have long been recognized in the various psalms.[3] Elements of a creation hymn, a psalm of trust, a lament and a wisdom saying can be detected in its 24 short verses. Its connections to themes in Genesis, Job, Isaiah and Jeremiah place it squarely into the Old Testament. Yet its understanding of human nature in the presence of God has the same kind of universal appeal that many of the parables in the New Testament have.

Not only the structural form but also the theme of Psalm 139 invites diverse interpretations, identifications and connections. The

[3] H. Gunkel, as quoted in, John H. Bullard, "Psalm 139: 'Prayer in a Stillness'," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1975 Seminar Papers*, vol. 1, ed. George MacRae (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 141–150.

prominence of the "I" suggests that it can easily connect with the subjectivity of our day. Yet this psalm is part of a collection of songs arising out of the communal worship of an ancient people. It is certainly one of the most personal psalms in the Psalter, exuding trust and assurance in God's presence. Yet it portrays a sense of order in the universe that names certain ways as wicked and portrays some people as bloodthirsty enemies.

This psalm is familiar to regular church attenders. We are re-readers, reading the psalm in the context of a history of interpretation that subtly influences our responses. We have read and heard this psalm many times, using it to inspire, comfort and teach each other. It is included in the biblical readings in the *Hymnal: A Worship Book*,[4] suggesting its popularity in worship settings. Choirs and soloists have sung the words of this psalm into our hearts and mind so many times that we cannot think of words such as "Search me, O God" without accompanying melodies. Settings in which meditation is encouraged, such as campfire services or family devotions, seem to suit this psalm well. And yet this psalm also has been used in arguments for the rights of the unborn, suggesting a more political context of interpretation.

Despite its popularity, most of us have not heard the whole psalm read publicly nor read the whole psalm in devotional material. There is a common discomfort with verses 19–22, no matter whether the reading focuses on a theological, psychological or political interpretation of the text. Why is this so? Has the example of Jesus and his teachings made this kind of prayer obsolete? Or is this a case in which our search for "psychological well-being" has taken precedence over a Word from God that would shatter the barriers protecting our comfort zone?

My analysis of the interpretations of Psalm 139 will focus on three different ways in which the connection has been made between the psalm and the real world in which we live. In each interpretation we will explore the tensions that come when verses 19–22 are included in the reading. Each section will also include an example from my own experience that suggests the importance of wrestling with this tension as we seek to create *shalom* for ourselves and our communities.

A Theological Connection

A prevailing approach to Psalm 139 assumes that it is the *presence of God in our world* that creates the connection between the psalm and our reality. In fact, some interpreters would call this psalm a "doctrinal classic" because it expresses basic doctrines that

[4] *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Elgin: Brethren Press; Newton: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1992), # 823 (Ps 139:1–18).

have developed in the community of faith to talk about God's presence among us. Most interpreters who emphasize this approach realize that Psalm 139 is not abstract speculative thinking about God. The psalm itself concentrates on those convictions that are developed out of personal experience and expressed in the profound poetry of the psalm. Patrick Miller, for example, notes several theological topics that seem to open naturally out of the text.[5] These themes include God's omniscience and omnipresence, God's purpose and calling, God's eternal preservation and God's judgement and anger. James Luther Mays suggests that Psalm 139 is a doctrinal classic because it "portrays human existence in all its dimensions in terms of God's knowledge, presence, and power."[6]

The psalm nurtures a sense of God as the total environment within which every aspect of life, from beginning to end, finds its meaning. It is, therefore, natural to read Psalm 139 as a psalm of worship and praise. However, the very context of worship creates a tension with those troublesome words of vengeance that sit in the middle "of this otherwise marvellous, deep well of living water that is the Psalter."[7] In worship, we concentrate on praise, thanksgiving and trust. We confidently proclaim that God will protect us and keep us from evil, because God is on the throne and therefore in control of the world. As Walter Brueggemann points out, through the words we use in worship, we re-experience and re-describe "the safe world over which God presides."[8] It is this world of well-being, of blessing, in which we wish to live.

What is shocking in this psalm is that verses 19–22 disrupt our worship by suggesting disappointment in God's lack of intervention in the world. In fact, these verses imply that God has not yet acted with justice to make the world a safe place to be. At the same time they give the impression that God shares our anger and will act out of vengeance to punish the enemy. As Miller puts it, these curses and imprecations against enemies sound very much "as if Archie Bunker of *All in the Family* is correct: God zaps people to get even."[9] These verses do not allow us to imagine an abstract transcendent God extending bountiful blessings from above to all God's people. Instead, they raise the question of God's presence and activity within the real world of violence in which we live. They point to a tension within our image of God that emerges whenever our safe world is

[5] Patrick Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 144–153.

[6] James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 425.

[7] Patrick Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 150.

[8] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1984), 26.

[9] Patrick Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 152.

shattered by experiences of war, evil, injustice and death. These verses, therefore, raise the ultimate question about God's relationship to a world in which evil also resides. They force us to wrestle with the seemingly absent God as Elijah did in the desert. They free us to pray as Jesus did in the face of violence, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46). The questions that these verses raise lead us ultimately to the cross of Jesus who died for his enemies, while feeling forsaken by God. Wrestling with these tensions can lead us to a deeper understanding of God's ways and to a trust in a God who stands in solidarity with us in our pain. However, this deeper understanding does not come easily. Sometimes we need to be jolted out of our easy assurances before we can truly worship a God who embodies both compassion and judgment.

I will never forget the moment when, in the midst of a worship celebration, I heard my father, who has always expressed strong pacifist convictions, speak about how he "could have cursed God to his face!" The occasion was the 50th-wedding anniversary celebration of my parents. Instead of focussing only on God's goodness, my Dad began to recall the difficult years in Russia, just before the family immigrated to Canada. With strong emotion he remembered the struggle to believe in a God of love while standing beside his father's death bed, a father who had been murdered by a band of robbers. Yet somehow Dad was able to end his testimony with a strong affirmation that the all-knowing God had surrounded him with grace so that he finally had been able to embrace the way of love instead of vengeance. His stance of peace had never seemed as real as at that moment!

Psalm 139, prayed in its entirety, does not give us easy assurance that God will always make life comfortable for us. However, it encourages us to struggle with the contradictions that we see in God, until we again recognize God's presence transforming the evil among us into ways of peace.

A Psychological Connection

Some interpreters direct their attention more primarily to the individual human feelings and thoughts expressed in the psalm. In this psychological reading of the psalm, the connection to our present reality is made within ourselves. For example, Walter Harrelson suggests that this psalm focuses upon "the inner being of [humans], that sense that every man [and woman] has of being dealt with by God at every moment, whether waking or sleeping."[10] In fact, in Harrelson's view the external world hardly appears at all in this psalm.

[10] Walter Harrelson, "On God's Knowledge of the Self—Psalm 139," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2 (1975): 261.

It is this very personal nature of the psalm that makes it appealing to many people in our day. We can identify with the contradictions and complications within our own hearts that this psalm expresses. Its poetic quality and its use of the personal pronoun throughout invites reflection on one's individual spiritual pilgrimage. Thus Gene Rice names this psalm "A Diary of the Inward Journey."[11] He suggests that each section of the psalm is a stage on the way to a mature spirituality. In the encounter with the Holy One the psalmist moves from flight from God, to joy of surrender to God, to a passionate self-righteous outburst, and finally to a mature realization that God must continually search and cleanse him.

Throughout the psalm we sense an ambivalence about God that feels very familiar to many of us. God is pictured as "the very life and breath of the self" while at the same time God is seen as the "scourge and nemesis" of the self, the one who searches and exposes every evil thought.[12] God's presence with us, no matter where we go, can be comforting, but also somewhat frightening as all our motives and thoughts are exposed and revealed. As Donald R. Glenn suggests, the point in Psalm 139 is not that God is everywhere in a more general way, but that everywhere the psalmist turns he is confronted by God who knows him so thoroughly, who will then also judge him.[13]

The fact that this psalm is used in Jewish worship on the day of atonement (Yom Kippur) points to a possible context for this interpretation. The purpose of the prayer seems to be personal preparation for communal worship, an introspective moment that is intended to lead to repentance and change. However, this makes verses 19–22 particularly disturbing because they seem to claim personal innocence while projecting the evil onto the enemy. The psalmist clearly disassociates himself from the wicked and bloodthirsty people and claims that he and God are on the same side.

This is not an unusual thing for us to do, as Gene Rice reminds us: "One has only to recall the intolerance, the injustice, the oppression, the violence practised with religious sanction to realize that this passionate, self-righteous outburst of the psalmist is also a fact of spiritual pilgrimage."[14] The temptation is to censor this aspect of ourselves, to cover it over with pious assertions that we have no enemies, or that this is talk of only spiritual foes, or that we already

[11] Gene Rice, "A Diary of the Inward Journey," in *The Journal of Religious Thought* 3 (1946): 63.

[12] Walter Harrelson, "On God's Knowledge of the Self," 263.

[13] Donald R. Glenn, "An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Psalm 139," in *Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, eds. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 181.

[14] Gene Rice, "A Diary of the Inward Journey," 66–67.

love our enemies. The honesty and courage to speak publicly subverts a tendency toward denial of the inner anger and prejudice that our pious words would not allow. In fact, the psalm seems to suggest that after this cry of revenge one is more ready to submit oneself to the searching eye of God who tests every heart for wickedness.

I remember a story from my home church which resonates with this reading of the psalm. A woman who had been hurt deeply by the words and actions of a male leader in the church participated in a service of reconciliation, designed to end the conflict. The leader asked for forgiveness and each person in the small circle assured him of their forgiveness, including the woman. However, when she got home, she recognized that the feelings of anger and mistrust were still very strong. She could not gain peace within herself until she turned around and went to the leader's home. There she confessed her lack of real forgiveness, but also said that she would like to be able to forgive him. As they began to talk about what had happened she suddenly realized that the feelings of anger had disappeared. The gift of forgiveness had come, but only after she had admitted her own inability to forgive. A life-long friendship resulted from this honest exchange.

Praying Psalm 139 in its entirety will encourage us to go beyond a superficial identification with the feelings of the psalm to probing into the unresolved hatred and anger within us. The plea for justice will then not be based on a projection of evil on to others, but will become a real wrestling with evil both within ourselves and others.

A Social-political Connection

In this third approach to the interpretation of the psalm, the connection to our reality arises from similarities in the external context, in the social fabric of our lives which include conflict and enmity. The passionate outburst in verses 19–22 becomes the vital clue to the meaning of the whole psalm. For it is these verses that bring the external world to our consciousness, that can move us from introspection to ethical action.

This focus reminds us of the "political background integral to the language of prayer."[15] In this context, the words of the psalm that cry out to God for justice are taken seriously because they echo our own experiences with "those who speak maliciously" or "those who lift themselves up against us." As Gerald Sheppard suggests, the Psalms point "to a world of intimate enemies not so different from our own."[16]

[15] Gerald T. Sheppard, "'Enemies' and the Politics of Prayer in the Book of Psalms," in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, eds. David Jobling, et al. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 82.

[16] Ibid., 80.

Some interpreters see this psalm as a plea of innocence in the face of false accusations. Thus Robert B. Coote suggests that this psalm is a "plea of the exploited," of those who do not easily gain justice in human courts and who therefore bring their appeal to God. When the psalm is reread from the beginning with this perspective in mind, both the mood and the character of the poem change. The agitation felt in verses 19–22 can also be sensed in the first verses as the plaintiff opens himself to the searching eye of God. In the face of accusation, only God can make a fair judgment, because God knows both the external circumstances and the innermost motivations of the plaintive. In the first few verses, therefore, God can be understood as conducting a trial which supersedes and invalidates the trial of others. As Coote suggests, God is Perry Mason on the bench conducting a trial.[17] God is both advocate and judge as every circumstance of life and every motive is searched and examined. In the darkness of condemnation the plaintiff moves through every aspect of his life, from birth to the present moment, asking the God whom he trusts to search out the truth.

By the time the psalmist reaches verses 19–22, he is convinced that his personal enemies are also God's enemies. Therefore, the cry for vengeance is a cry to God to protect his own interests by protecting him. In this psalm the plea of innocence and the accusation of the wicked stand side by side waiting for God's judgment. The context is injustice or conflict in the societal order. The psalmist is not satisfied that the imbalances of life will somehow be corrected in heaven. Instead, he pleads for justice now. Jesus echoes this need for God's justice to permeate present social/political reality when he teaches us to pray: "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

Gerald Sheppard has suggested that when the Psalms were collected in a book, they became public prayers that could be "overheard" by the enemy, thus adding a prophetic dimension to this kind of discourse.[18] The prayers clearly name injustice and evil, frustrating the denial of evil which the enemies would like to foster within the community.

My most poignant memory of Psalm 139 is of its use in a worship setting by survivors of incest and sexual abuse. They used this psalm to speak about their own innocence, particularly as they recalled their childhood experiences of abuse. For them, it was crucial that the whole psalm should be read in public worship. They wanted to express their faith that they too were wonderfully made, that no

[17] Robert B. Coote, "Psalm 139," in David Jobling, ed., *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, 36.

[18] Gerald Sheppard, "'Enemies' and the Politics of Prayer," 78–79.

matter where they had tried to flee, God's right hand had held them fast. Yet they could also identify with the words, "O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me . . ." (v. 19). It was important to proclaim publicly what had happened, to name the evil that had been done and to cry out for justice from God.

Allowing the whole community to overhear the cry for justice means that personal pain becomes a communal issue. Bringing about justice is no longer a lonely enterprise. Instead, the community can gain passion and understanding, can begin to find ways to hold the abuser accountable, while encouraging members of the community to stand with victims in their struggle for justice. Together they can now find redemptive ways to bring about that justice.

Conclusion

In our exploration of the various directions that have been taken in the interpretation of Psalm 139, we have noted the tensions that come with reading verses 19–22. The option to ignore these verses is there for all interpreters of these texts, whether they focus on their theological, psychological or social/political aspects. The temptation to move into an idealism that does not connect with the reality of our lives is common to all readers of the text.

The canon, which we accept as Scripture, includes Psalm 139 in all its complexity, even though our hymn books and devotional books usually do not. In these prayers, human projections and human imagination are present, though intertwined with divine disclosure. The Hebrew people and the early church did not attempt to censor the human elements in the Psalms, because prayer by nature is dialogical and interactive, including both God and humans. And it is within this relationship that transformation happens, though usually not without a struggle.

Should Mennonites read the whole psalm in their worship? That can be dangerous if we read it as an ideal vision. However, if the psalm helps us connect to the reality of our own lives in such a way that the psalm becomes our prayer, transformation is possible. We can become open, ready to discover the God who alone can transform our imprecations and pleas of innocence into celebrations of true *shalom*. That kind of reading of the Psalms may be risky, but it will help us overcome the temptation toward "undisturbed, soothing religion." Instead it may lead us to a faith that is dynamic and life-giving because it is rooted in the reality of a God who responds to our human prayers in ways beyond our imaginings. Thanks be to God!

The Prophetic Emphasis of the Sinai Tabernacle Pericope Exodus 25:10–22

Millard C. Lind

Statement of Issue and Method

It may seem presumptuous that I involve myself with a text from the book of Exodus, since Waldemar Janzen has written a commentary on this book.[1] Although I have not had the benefit of his work for my effort, I hope that I honour him by acknowledging my indebtedness to Frank Cross, one of Waldemar's professors of his graduate school days.

In 1947, Cross published an article rejecting J. Wellhausen's reconstruction of the history of Israel's worship which regards the tabernacle as a retrojection of the temple into Israel's pre-kingship wilderness period.[2] Cross contends for the continuity of Israel's tabernacle tradition from Moses to David, who established the tabernacle par excellence in Jerusalem, the structure described in the book of Exodus. Most important, Cross posited the significance of the tabernacle as the seat of Israel's pre-kingship religious and political structure which housed the ark, symbol of Yahweh's rule by law and by prophetic oracle. Cross says, ". . . in the amphictyonic gatherings, Yahweh was considered to be the head of the covenant

[1] Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2000).

[2] Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 10 (1947): 45–68.

assembly, and it was He who made the important decisions in war and peace (through oracle by human mediation). There was no separation of church and state in early Israel."[3]

While much water has gone over the dam of biblical and archaeological studies since his 1947 essay, Cross still maintains his basic premise.[4] My essay will focus on Exodus 25:10–22, a text in which Yahweh gives commands for the construction of the ark. I will argue that the prophetic function of receiving Yahweh's oracle is the dominant motif of this ark text and the broader tabernacle worship texts (Exodus 25–Leviticus 27) which are a part of the larger Sinai pericope (Exodus 19–Numbers 10). I will argue further that this prophetic function is integrated with the functions of law (torah), of priesthood and sacrifice, and even with the concept of the elemental powers of the universe. In other words, in these texts prophecy, although unpredictable in its pronouncements, is institutionalized. That is, it is placed under the constraint of Yahweh's basic law, and is an integral part of Israel's worship, a worship which gives direction to Israel's public life and institutions, and which is supported by the elemental powers of the universe.

Although my method is canonical in that I give precedence to the present text in its literary context, since the canonical principle is claimed by the ancient text itself (cf., Exod 25:16, 21), I subsume the historical-critical and form-critical methods under the canonical approach.[5] I tentatively assume with Cross that the present text is the work of a priestly editor(s) of the late exilic period who had access to temple archives, and that, though stylized, it is essentially an accurate reflection of the centralized worship of pre-kingship Israel, an hypothesis based on the evidence of Israel's ancient poetry and extra-biblical texts from the ancient Near East.[6] A canonical literary approach does not necessarily eliminate history.

Description of Exodus 25:10–22

The instructions for the ark in Exodus 25:10–22 begin with a plural verb, indicating the community to whom the commands are ultimately to be given, the Israelites (25:2, 22), followed by a series of singular verbs which state what shall be done, and are addressed to Moses, the immediate receptor and mediator of the command

[3] Ibid., 65.

[4] Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research," in Abraham Biran, ed., *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times: Proceedings of the Colloquium in Honor of the Centennial of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Jerusalem, 14–16 March, 1977* (Jerusalem: The Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981), 169–180.

[5] Cf., Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

[6] Frank M. Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle," 169–178.

(25:1). After a description of the box-like ark—its gold overlay and moulding, its rings and poles by which it is to be carried (vv. 10–15)—there follows a description of a mercy seat or covering for the ark (*kappōret*, vv. 17, 20ab, 21), and of the cherubim on its two ends (*kĕrubîm* , vv. 18, 19abc, 20ab, 22). The purpose of the ark is stated in vv. 16, 21–22: it is to be the repository of the covenant (*ʿēdut*), and the place where Yahweh will meet (*yāʿad*) with Moses to give commands for the Israelites:

> You shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites. (25:21–22)

The final statement, which highlights the prophetic purpose of the ark, forms the climax of the ark segment, as indicated by the change of subject from *they/you* (people/Moses, vv. 10–21) to the *I* of Yahweh (v. 22). This statement of purpose is likely the reason for the placement of this ark segment in this preferential position, at the head of the section of instructions for the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31).[7] It reverses the order which Moses saw on the mount, "the pattern of the *tabernacle* and of all of its *furniture*" (italics mine) (Exod 25:9).

This logical order seen on the mount—description of tabernacle and *then* of its furniture—is followed in the segment on the actual construction of the Sinai tabernacle (Exod 36:8–40:38), and in all five of its summary statements (Exod 31:7–11; 35:10–19; 39:33–43; 40:1–15; 40:16–33). Apparently, the ark text (25:10–22) is here placed first, giving it a preferential position in the segment on tabernacle instructions (Exodus 25–31), because it is at the heart of the purpose of the tabernacle itself, the dwelling place (25:8) from which God rules—enthroned "between the two cherubim"—from above the ark where the covenant law is kept, and from where the prophetic oracle is received by Moses for the guidance of Israel (25:21–22).

Yahweh's Meeting with Moses to Give Communal Direction

A review of the places where the word "meet" (*yāʿad*) is found in the Sinai and wilderness pericopes confirms the centrality of the prophetic oracle in worship and for divine guidance in public matters. With God as subject, the word "meet" occurs in five passages (Exod 25:22; 29:42–43; 30:6, 36; Num 17:19 [Eng. 17:4]). In Exodus 29:43 the Samaritan reading for *yāʿad* is *nidrasti*, "And I will let myself

[7] For the history of scholarly speculation on this placement, see Helmut Utzschneider, *Das Heiligtum und das Gesetz: Studien zur Bedeutung der Sinaitischen Heiligtumstexte (Ex 25–40; Lev 8–9)* (Goettingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 224–226.

be inquired of" or "consulted."[8] This is a meeting to determine Israel's direction in a one-time situation to which the law itself does not speak. While this includes cultic concerns, as is evident by the instructions for tabernacle and worship itself,[9] Cross states that the word *mô'ēd* (meeting) is used in the "Tale of Wen-Amun" (1100 BCE) of the city assembly of Byblos, an assembly called to consider a request for the extradition of Wen-Amun.[10] This consideration was not merely a cultic but a "secular" political matter.

In the Sinai and wilderness texts, the divine decisions made at the tabernacle or at its door are also not restricted to cultic matters. They were: 1) about a dispute over prophetic leadership (Num 12:1–9); 2) a response to the rebellion of the people against Moses because they feared annihilation by their enemies (Num 14:1–12); and 3) judgments against Levitical leaders who incited the congregation to rebel against the leadership of Moses and Aaron because they had failed to lead the people into a fertile land (Num 16:1–50). In connection with the cloud, the ark and tabernacle themselves performed a prophetic function by signalling when the congregation was to set out and encamp on each stage of its wanderings through the wilderness (Exod 40:34–38; Num 10:33–36).

The Place and Context of the Meeting for Communal Direction

The place and context of Yahweh's meeting with Moses was in the Most Holy Place (cf., 26:33), "from above the mercy seat (*kappōret*), from between the two cherubim (*kĕrubîm*) that are on the ark of the covenant" (*'ărōn hā'ēdut*, 25:22). These three items which provided context for Yahweh's prophetic meeting with Moses will now be considered: the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat and the cherubim.

The Ark of the Covenant ***('ărōn hā'ēdut).*** The ark, generally considered as the footstool of Yahweh's throne,[11] is the receptacle for the covenant (*'ēdut*, 25:16, 21; cf. 40:20). This covenant is identified by the Exodus tabernacle text as the decalogue (31:18; 32:15; 34:29),[12] although some scholars would interpret these references as including other basic texts of the normative Sinai tradition.[13] This suggests that the priestly writers understood the unity of prophetic oracle with basic Sinai law, and that both have their centre for continuity in cultic tabernacle worship.

[8] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 205.

[9] Cf., Helmut Utzschneider, *Das Heiligtum*, 145–151.

[10] Frank M. Cross, "The Tabernacle," 65.

[11] C. L. Seow, "Ark of the Covenant, " in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 388; cf., 1 Sam 4:4; 1 Chron 28:2.

[12] Cf., Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 10:4–5.

[13] Helmut Utzschneider, *Das Heiligtum*, 110–117.

The prophets from Mari (upper Mesopotamia, 18th to 16th century BCE), like Israelite prophets, prophesied not by external means such as observing the movements of the stars or configurations of the sacrificial liver, but intuitively, by inner discernment.[14] Israelite prophecy differs, however, in that it was not nationalistic. Rather, it was based on the moral law of Moses,[15] which differs from other ancient Near Eastern law collections in these respects: in the Sinai pericope law it is enclosed within the literary envelope of Yahweh's covenant with Israel[16] rather than within a prologue and epilogue which emphasizes a "state" power structure;[17] its justice is egalitarian; it unites both ethical and cultic law; and its central driving power is the divine motive clause rather than the human threat of violent power.[18]

The important "grace principle" of this moral torah is the first word of the decalogue, "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). By this self-predication, Yahweh declares the divine person rather than "the land of Egypt" as Lord of history (cf., Isa 46:9–10; 47:8–9). This self-predicating Yahweh leads history forward toward freedom from state slavery. Prophecy in Israel was to give guidance in this movement toward freedom, not the freedom of individualism, but freedom for individual and community within the communal worship of Yahweh (Exod 4:23; 5:1; 7:16; 7:26 [Eng. 8:1]; 8:16 [Eng. 8:20]; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7).

It is at this point of difference of Sinai law from ancient Near Eastern law that one must redefine Frank Cross's statement, "There was no separation of church and state in early Israel."[19] Indeed, there was no separation between Israel's worship and Israel's public "secular" life. But already in its earliest poetry, Israel defined itself as separate from the nations in the totality of its life: "Here is a people living alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations" (Num 23:9).

[14] For the ancient Near Eastern roots of Israelite prophecy, see Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Origins of Prophecy," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, ed. F. M. Cross, Jr. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 171–186.

[15] On the Mari prophets and nationalism, see A. Malamat, "Mari," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 34 (1971): 2–22. For the Deuteronomic concept of the prophet's relationship to Moses, see Deut 18:14–18.

[16] Exod 19:4–6; 24:3–8.

[17] Cf., J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 164–165, 177–180; in the epilogue, Hammurabi is called "the king of justice."

[18] For a discussion of these differences, see Millard C. Lind, *Monotheism, Power, Justice: Collected Old Testament Essays* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990), 61–81.

[19] See note 3, above.

The basis and character of this separation is revealed in torah, whose most important principle is this first and second word of the decalogue. The freedom-giving Yahweh alone is to be worshipped; the worship of all other powers, the power-gods of the nations, leads back to state slavery. It is in the interest of this freedom-giving God, rather than in the interests of the power gods of the nations, that prophecy in Israel is enlisted, and it is this which distinguishes Israel from the nations. This self-conscious separation of Israel from the nations is the proper paradigm for the New Testament concept of "separation of church and state."[20]

Prophetic oracle is not in tension with basic torah, but is congruent with it, giving guidance to the community of Yahweh as to what it means in the present situation. In the Sinai pericope, the law of tabernacle worship provides institutional structure for the continuing experience and enforcement of Sinai covenant law (cf., Exod 24:15–25:9). One may generalize that cultic law provides structure for covenant justice.

The Mercy Seat (kappōret). In the Sinai pericope, the verb "to meet" is conjoined to the noun "mercy seat" in only one other reference (Exod 30:6).[21] Here the prophetic task of Moses is set within the context of the command to make the incense altar, upon which Aaron is to offer incense twice daily and upon whose horns he is "to perform the atonement for it once a year with the blood of atoning sin offering" (30:10).[22]

The prophetic oracle is to be received within the context of these relationships: it is to be congruent with basic covenant law, which itself can be obeyed because it is covered by the mercy seat where atonement is made. This relationship is paralleled in the decalogue itself where punishment for violation of the first commandments is qualified by Yahweh's steadfast love to infinity (Exod 20:5–6).[23]

[20] In the New Testament, the Sermon on the Mount includes teaching which regulates both inter-human relations (Matt 5:21–48) and divine-human relations (6:1–18), and corresponds with Cross's claim about early Israel—"There is no separation between church and state" (note 3 above). However, the tension as seen by Jesus and the Jewish leaders of his day is not between moral law and laws of worship, but between the demand of God made by the synagogue scriptures (our Old Testament) and the demand of empire; this is illustrated by the discussion on the tax question (Matt 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–16; Luke 20:20–26). That which is "lawful" is determined not by the empire but by Israel's God.

[21] But cf., Num 7:89, obviously a repetition of Exod 25:22, although with the *piel* of the verb *dābar* ("speak with") instead of *yā'ad.*

[22] Also, in Exod 29:38–46, the verb "to meet" is used in the literary context of a description of daily sacrifices and the consecration of the tent of meeting, altar and priesthood; in 30:36 this verb is used within the literary context of a recipe for incense offering; in Num 14:9 [Eng. 14:4] it is within the context of Aaron's ascendancy over the heads of the 12 ancestral houses. Although all usages of the verb are within the context of priestly concerns, it does not necessarily follow that the oracle dealt only with cultic matters (cf., above, "Yahweh's Meeting with Moses to Give Communal Direction").

[23] Cf., Exod 31–34 where forgiveness for false worship is granted, although with reticence.

The Two Cherubim. The term cherub(im) (*kĕrûb*) occurs in seven passages of the Sinai pericope (Exod 25:18–22; 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35; 37:7–9; Num 7:89) and seven times in 25:10–22 (25:18, 19abc, 20ab, 21).[24] Such winged creatures were commonly portrayed in iconography throughout the ancient Near East and are in the service of both royalty and divinity.[25] In biblical texts they are in the service exclusively of God.

Although somewhat hazardous to hypothesize on their meaning, in the ark passage these mixed creatures may symbolize primal universal powers (cf., Ps 18:11=1 Sam 22:11), who act as sentinels and guardians of the divine throne (cf., Gen 3:24; Ezek 28:14, 16).[26] It is significant that the faces of the two cherubim are "turned toward the mercy seat" (Exod 25:20), perhaps denoting an attitude of intercession. This possibility is supported by the meaning of the related Accadian term *karubu* ("one who prays," "intercessor"); correlate terms may also mean "great, powerful, mighty" as well as "gatekeeper."[27] In Isaiah's call-vision a winged creature (*śārāp*) performs the atoning act (*kuppār*) for Isaiah (Isa 6:7).

If this analysis is correct, then the symbols portray cosmic powers in the service of Yahweh, guarding divine law, involved in atonement, and undergirding prophetic oracle. Secondary powers, as well as the primal personal Power, are involved in the tabernacle service, although only the latter is an object of Israel's proper worship.[28]

Prophecy in the Camp and Prophecy in the Tabernacle

In the wilderness pericope, prophesying might happen within the camp, without the prophets going out to the tent (Num 11:26–30). Although some would regard this text as speaking to a condition of the exile, it may have been a phenomenon of early times, since even the sixteenth-century BCE texts from Mari speak of prophecy by persons apart from the temple.[29] Although this certainly happened

[24] Denoting composite creatures, the term occurs 91 times in the Old Testament, once in the New Testament (Heb 9:5; cf., Rev 4:6). For a general discussion to which I am here indebted, see T. H. Gaspar, "Cherubim and Seraphim," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, eds. George A. Buttrick & Keith R. Crim (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 131–132; Carol L. Meyers, "Cherubim," in *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 175–176; *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, ed. Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 203–204; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5 (1971), 398–399.

[25] James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), nos. 128, 332, 386, 393, 456, 644–647.

[26] An ancient Near Eastern parallel may be the portrayal of the throne of King Hiram of Byblos which is flanked by winged creatures. James Pritchard, *Ancient Near East in Pictures*, no. 458.

[27] *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, 204.

[28] Cf., Exodus 32–34.

[29] Cf., Herbert Huffmon, "The Origins of Prophecy."

in Israel, the ark text (Exod 25:10–22) still provides the paradigmatic relationship between prophecy, torah and worship. The prophets who direct their withering criticisms against Israel's worship practice also contend for Israel's worship of Yahweh, the Sinai God.[30]

Isaiah's call is an example of a prophet who, although likely receiving his call outside of the temple precincts, nevertheless experienced as the paradigm for his vision events which transpired in the most holy place of tabernacle and of temple (Isaiah 6). His seeing Yahweh is not literal, for there was no image of Yahweh in the temple. Winged artificial animals worship Yahweh, and one of them is involved in Isaiah's cleansing.[31] In vision, the place was before the ark, symbol of the footstool of Yahweh's throne. After this cleansing, he was sent forth with a prophetic message to all Israel (cf., Exod 25:22).

Summary and Conclusion

The ark of the covenant text stands at the head of the tabernacle worship pericope. Its concern is the preeminence of prophecy in Israelite worship, both establishing the worship institution and giving direction for Israel's public, "secular" existence. Even when prophecy was not received within Israel's tabernacle worship institution, it still assumed as its context the paradigm of this Yahwistic establishment. To be a genuine prophecy from Yahweh, it must not be divorced from torah, but based upon it; torah in relation to prophecy has a canonical function. Nor may the difficulties of history or past disobedience vitiate the obligation of obedience to the prophetic word, for torah is "covered" by the mercy seat. Toward this torah and toward this mercy seat, the cosmic powers are turned in their supportive function, a function supportive, not of the status quo which they may appear to represent, but of the prophetic future to which the community of faith and to which these powers are called (cf., Rom 8:22–23).

[30] Isaiah, who condemns Judah's worship (Isa 1:17), tells of his call via a vision set in temple worship (Isaiah 6).

[31] Isa 6:7.

Missionary Vision and Practice in the Old Testament

Titus F. Guenther

> *The Church stands or falls with the Old Testament, as it likewise stands or falls with Jesus Christ. Without the Old Testament there is no Jesus Christ. . . . The Old Testament is related to the New Testament as the beginning of a sentence to the end. Only the whole sentence, with beginning and end, gives the sense.*—Emil Brunner[1]

> *The decisive difference between the Old and the New Testament is mission. The New Testament is essentially a book about mission.*—Horst Rzepkowski[2]

Introduction

Ever since the Christian church affirmed a two-part canon, it has strongly affirmed the inseparability of the two parts; the New Testament is inconceivable without the Old Testament just as the Old remains incomplete without the New. This affirmation of continuity notwithstanding, many scholars postulate a certain discontinuity between the Testaments regarding how each conceptualizes and demonstrates the practice of mission toward

[1] Cited by G. Ernest Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. G. Anderson (London: SCM Press, 1961), 26, note 9, from Brunner's essay, "Die Unentbehrlichkeit des Alten Testamentes für die missionierende Kirche," in *Basler Missionsstudien*, no. 12, 1934.

[2] Cited by David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 17, from H. Rzepkowski, "The Theology of Mission," *Verbum SVD* 15 (1974): 80.

those of other faiths. The renowned missiologist, David Bosch, speaks for many when he states: "There is, in the Old Testament, no indication of the believers of the old covenant being sent by God to cross geographical, religious, and social frontiers in order to win others to faith in Yahweh."[3] The New Testament church, by contrast, was a veritable missionary movement encircling the Mediterranean world and penetrating far into Asian countries with the gospel, winning massive numbers to the Christian faith in a short time.

To explore this problem of continuity and discontinuity, I will address the following questions. What evidence does the Old Testament offer of Israel's concern about sharing its faith in Yahweh with the Gentile nations? Does Israel actively seek to win the nations to faith in God and membership in the people of God? If the answer to these questions were to be in the negative, what then is Israel's "ministry" among the nations of the world? Finally, in what sense may the Old Testament supply a foundation for the flourishing mission of the New Testament church? It is unthinkable that the New Testament should have to stand alone with its most important missionary agenda, even if we were to discover notable differences in either conception or practice between the two Testaments. If we should discover a novel quality in the "mission" described in the New Testament, how would we explain it?

The thesis of this essay is that, while a vision of a universal salvation is plainly evident in Old Testament promises, this vision may correspond only partially with the "missional practice" of the Old Testament people of God. The Old Testament contains many promises of the coming of the nations to Israel to seek the knowledge and salvation of the Lord. These and other passages, which demonstrate Yahweh's concern for the nations, have come to be known as the Old Testament's "missionary texts."[4] Yet, these texts seem to find only limited fulfilment in Old Testament times, leaving mostly an eschatological vision or promise. Even so, the faith and life of God's people in the Old Testament did have a significant "missional dimension" toward other nations.

[3] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 17. This does not mean that Bosch believes the Old Testament is irrelevant to the church's mission. On the contrary, he will assert farther on that: "Even so, the Old Testament is fundamental to the understanding of mission in the New," because of how Israel's concept of God transforms the surrounding nature religions, because of its theology of election and covenant, and because of its sustained conviction that God cares for all nations (17–18). The voice of David Bosch carries much weight because his epoch-making book, *Transforming Mission*, represents a wide-ranging, penetrating discussion of the literature on mission as it pertains to its biblical grounding, its history and contemporary developments.

[4] For example, Gen 12:3; Exod 19:6; Ps 117:1; Isa 2:2–4; 19:21–24; 40–55; 60; Jonah 4:11; Mic 4: 1–4; Zech 8:20–23; Mal 1:11.

Not "Missionary" in the Normal Sense

We begin by inquiring as to whether the Old Testament contains specific stories of Gentile conversions to the faith of Yahweh in which they become integrated into God's covenant people. Eugene Heideman, in his article, "Proselytism, Mission, and the Bible," has noted that the Hebrew Old Testament does not contain the notion of a foreigner as a religious "proselyte" (Greek, *proselytos*), as later found in the Greek Old Testament. Instead, it designates foreigners as "resident aliens" (Hebrew, *ger*) sojourning among the Israelites. The Old Testament enjoins that such "sojourners" are to be treated with equality (Lev 24:22), are to be loved (Deut 10:19), and are not to be oppressed (Lev 19:33–34). But uncircumcised foreigners may not take part in the Passover celebrations (Exod 12:48–49).[5] While resident aliens were entitled to full rights to hospitality and justice in Israel, they were not seen as religious converts until a few centuries before Christ, when proselytizing came to involve three things: a) circumcision for males, b) baptism for cleansing, and c) the offering of sacrifices.[6] Accordingly, the Greek Old Testament (beginning in the third century BCE) translated the Hebrew *ger* with the Greek *proselytos*, literally, "one who has crossed over," that is, a "convert," indicating the increased role of religious conversion to Judaism.

Heideman also finds next to no reports in the Old Testament of the "full-blown," cross-cultural conversions that are common in the New Testament. No male outsiders are reported to have been circumcised and integrated into the covenant community, he notes, adding: "the two most prominent outsiders to enter fully into the life of Israel were women—Rahab the prostitute of Jericho (Josh 2:1–3; 6:22–25) and Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 1:6–18; 4:7–22)." An exceptional group of Gentiles joining the covenant community are the Gibeonites. These, however, had to use deceitful means to bring this off. They were not circumcised but rather consigned permanently to the margins of Israel as "slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Josh 9:3–27).[7]

This virtual absence of "conversions" to the Israelite faith in the Old Testament record supports the argument that its writers did not envision Israel's mandate to be a "missionary mandate" of outreach toward other nations, as it would be understood in the

[5] Eugene Heideman, "Proselytism, Mission, and the Bible," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20 (January 1996): 10–12.

[6] Ibid., 10. Heideman notes that in the New Testament *proselytos* is used only four times: three regarding a positive response to the gospel by Gentile converts (Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43); one in which Jesus chides the Pharisees for enslaving proselytes to Jewish law (Matt 23:15).

[7] Ibid.

Christian era. It could be countered, however, that the book of Jonah and latter segments of Isaiah give evidence that Israel was, at least in some instances, "reaching out" to the Gentile nations to lead them to faith in, and worship of, Yahweh. Bosch dismisses this emphatically, saying:

> Even the book Jonah has nothing to do with mission in the normal sense of the word. The prophet is sent to Nineveh not to proclaim salvation to non-believers but to announce doom. Neither is he himself interested in mission; he is only interested in destruction. Contrary to what earlier scholars have suggested, not even Second Isaiah is to be regarded as a book about mission.[8]

Robert Martin-Achard, in *A Light to the Nations*, concurs that the so-called Old Testament "missionary texts" (e.g., Isa 19:21–24; Jonah 4:11; Mal 1:11) are not about an outreach mission by Israel. Instead they convey Yahweh's infinite concern for the nations, and were written to remind the chosen people that their God has not forgotten the peoples of the world. However, if these texts "outline no plan of action [for Israel] to be undertaken on behalf of the [nations]," they urge Israel not to stand in the way between God and the nations.[9]

It would appear, then, that the people of God in the Old Testament did not feel called to mission outreach—as the Christian church understands it.[10] And, in terms of the traditional concept of mission, the story of the Old Testament hardly offers the Christian church a model for mission outreach to other peoples. But the Old Testament clearly affirms that Yahweh's salvation is aimed at all nations. I shall turn, then, to take a closer look at this affirmation and what Israel perceived its role to be with respect to the other "families of the earth."

[8] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 17.

[9] R. Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*, trans. John Penney Smith (Edinburgh & London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), 54. His interpretation of Jonah is similar to that of Bosch: Jonah contains a call to conversion addressed to the Israelites, based on the same lesson as Amos 9:7. "There is here no question of the conversion of the Ninevites or of a preaching mission devolving on Israel. . . . The book of Jonah is not a piece of propaganda written to promote missionary work among the heathen. It does not directly invite the Jews to take definite steps to show the heathen how much God loves them. It remains a theological *midrash* whose ultimate meaning will not become apparent until Christ by living, so to speak, through Jonah's experiences in His own death and resurrection, has inaugurated the age of world evangelisation; we shall then be permitted to find a call to the work of mission in this book [of Jonah]" (53–54).

[10] The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, Waterloo: Herald Press, 1995, article 10) contains a good definition of mission as a crossing over from one culture to another: "The church is involved in cross-cultural mission whether it reaches out to people of the majority culture, to people of minority cultures within the society, or to various cultural groups in other countries," in the sense that "the church is called to live as an alternative culture within the surrounding society." As the church we are

Israel's Vision of Its Role in the World

Martin-Achard examines the "missionary texts" in the Old Testament for clues to what God's missionary task was for his people. He states both the goal and the findings of his investigation in these words:

> The starting-point of our study was the question: does Israel's mission to the nations consist in seeking to convert them? Our answer . . . has been "No," and, contrary to a time-honoured interpretation which claims that in certain Old Testament passages a missionary mandate is to be found, we have laid stress on the special character of the ministry that the Chosen People has to fulfil for the [Gentiles].[11]

Israel's special ministry is not "going out" to the nations, but she is to be involved in bringing about the gathering of the nations into the presence of God. But, according to this author, the future gathering of the nations at Jerusalem, promised in Isaiah, in order to witness God's glory, learn God's ways, and worship God there depends entirely on the divine initiative and not that of Israel. Israel will be God's channel for making himself known to humankind.[12] He concludes in ascribing the initiative to God: "We must stress this point: the gathering of the nations together at Jerusalem, is due to God alone."[13] Similarly Roelf Kuitse, commenting on the "missionary texts" in the Old Testament, states unambiguously: "It is the work of God that brings the nations to Zion. The nations will be drawn to Israel, as a result of God's work (Isa 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–5; Zech 8:20–23)."[14] And Bosch concurs: ". . . if there is a 'missionary' in the Old Testament, it is God himself who will, as his eschatological deed *par excellence*, bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship him there together with his covenant people."[15]

In what way is Israel to serve as "God's instrument" if not through active mission outreach? Israel as God's covenanted, holy, priestly nation is called to mediate between God and the nations like the prophets mediated between God and the Israelite people. Israel, by living in obedience under God, vicariously represents all nations before God and foreshadows thereby that one day all nations will live thus under God. This is Israel's only mission before the Gentiles: to live by its covenant with God.[16]

"called to both live within and to provide a critique of every culture [including our own], knowing that Christ is Lord of all the nations."

[11] Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 76.

[12] Ibid., 75.

[13] Ibid., 69.

[14] Roelf Kuitse, *Hope and Mission: Five Bible Studies* (unpublished essay, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary Library, 1981), 7.

[15] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 19.

[16] Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 75.

If Israel's role consists strictly in living as the chosen people of God amidst the nations, is this not a rather modest, almost passive missionary role? This role of Israel in God's salvation of humanity should not be underestimated.[17] Being God's elect and "priestly" people among the Gentile peoples is an awesome task. The character Tevye in the movie, *Fiddler on the Roof*, illustrates this in his protest against this "burden" before Yahweh: "I know we are the Chosen, but can't You once in a while choose someone else?" The Hebrew people must often have felt this on their historic journey.

Mission through Election and Covenant

If we wish to understand Israel's relationship to God and to the Gentiles we need to understand the meaning of election and covenant.[18] The apparent particularism and exclusivism in God's electing one person (Abraham, Gen. 12:3) and one people (the Israelites, Exod 19:3–6), is but the flip side of the universalism also present in both texts. Each of these texts merits closer attention.

According to Genesis 12:3, God chooses Abraham so that in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." It is important that we see God's calling of Abraham in the context of the larger biblical story, especially over against Genesis 1–11.[19] The choice of a covenant people shows its fuller meaning only when contrasted with "the preceding stories" of "the Fall," Cain's evil, the flood and, of course, Babel. In these stories, humans are seen to be grasping at power and security (building cities and a tower) yet ending up with the opposite: insecurity and dispersion. By contrast, God opens the future with a vulnerable individual and ties the hope of the world to him. Thus, these earlier stories show that human hubris leads to "curse," loss of future and death. But a life of faith under God's leading and providence brings "blessing" which means a future with God, or life. Humanity, before Abraham, shows a propensity towards the former, while Abraham opts for the latter and thus becomes a source of divine "blessing" and life, not for himself alone or his descendants, but for all of humanity. The story of Abraham is therefore not a private story but has to do with the hope of all of humanity.[20]

[17] Roelf Kuitse points out that the prophets "reject the attitude which sees the future as a product of [human] dedication and work." At the same time, however, "they reject moral laziness. Israel is expected to take steps in the direction of the future, the goal, intended by God." Roelf Kuitse, *Hope and Mission*, 7.

[18] Roelf Kuitse, *Sent* (October 3, 1989): 2.

[19] Kuitse, *Hope and Mission*, 4–5; John Driver, *Images of the Church in Mission* (Scottdale, Waterloo: Herald Press, 1997), 23–26; Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 36.

[20] Kuitse, *Hope and Mission*, 5.

Abraham, obeying God's call, reverses the human trend by leaving behind all the human securities (home country, the city, ancestral clan and the Chaldean religion with its gods) and placing his faith in God's promise to lead him to a new home in a future unknown to him. Abraham thereby experiences as a gift from God that which rebellious humanity before him failed to achieve through its own efforts: a great name and a large nation with a secure future, because it is based on God's acts and promises.[21] In short, Abraham (and Israel) becomes the hope of the world's salvation, because in him "God creates . . . a people who bear his name."[22]

According to the Sinai covenant (Exod 19:3–6), Israel is to be present among the nations in a special way as the people of God. As Yahweh elects Israel, the people are first reminded: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (19:4). Then, inviting them to a covenant relationship, God assures them: "if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples" (v. 5). The covenant, based on the saving acts of God, has ethical implications for Israel.[23] Thus far the election could be read in terms of "special status and privilege" if it were not for the words immediately following: "Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (vv. 5b–6a).[24]

John Driver's exposition on Israel as God's "treasured possession" is instructive with respect to Israel's relation to other nations: "The biblical term translated 'treasured possession' in these passages [Exod 19:5–6; Deut 7:6–11] refers to a portion withdrawn from the whole property [which is] designated as a special donation. . . . This accounts for the accompanying clause, 'indeed, the whole

[21] John Driver states the contrast succinctly: "The abortive attempt to create human society at Babel was based [on] the power to dominate, and it ended in confusion. God's answer to this quest is community freely given to those who will obey him in confident faith. This is God's community of blessing [for] all of humankind." John Driver, *Images of the Church*, 25.

[22] Ibid., 24. God's name is itself highly significant, as is shown in the story of Moses' call. Moses is told that "I am who I am" (Exod 3:13–14) is sending him to lead the Israelites out of slavery and into the Promised Land. Kuitse interprets Yahweh's name as follows: "The divine answer means: 'I am the one who is present, wherever you go. The one on whom you can count; I am the one who is with you, for you. . . . The message contained in this name finds expression in the divine promise and act. . . . [which] are the basis for human hope." Roelf Kuitse, *Hope and Mission*, 5–6. Cf., the comments of Frank McGurn of the Maryknoll Language Institute in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in an oral address in May, 1989, reminding the aspiring mission workers that God is always present on the mission field long before the missionaries get there.

[23] The primacy of the ethical dimension of the covenant is especially evident in Jeremiah 7:22–23.

[24] John Driver, *Images of the Church*, 27. Biblical quotations here and henceforth are from the NRSV.

earth is mine' (Exod 19:5c)." Seen in this way, Israel's status as the elect is more a "sacramental" one than one of privilege: "election is to service—to mission," says Driver.[25]

Waldemar Janzen's comments regarding the Old Testament theology of holiness with respect to space and time shed further light on the "organic" type of relation it envisions between the people of God and the nations. Israel, Janzen points out, is called to be God's "instrument of holiness." Israel is to allow its "awareness of God's holiness . . . to penetrate all aspects of daily life" as Israel's cultic institutions and rituals well illustrate: "It [God's holiness] is centrally represented by the Holy of Holies, . . . constituting the dwelling place of Yahweh's Name. . . . Surrounding it in concentric circles, there follow the Holy Precinct, the Temple Courts, the holy Jerusalem/Zion, the Holy Land promised to Abraham and given to Israel, and eventually the realms of the nations extending to the farthest isles."[26] Divine election and covenant could therefore never be a private matter only. God's dealings with Israel would unavoidably have an effect upon the nations—an insight apparently not always remembered by Israel.

This relationship with Yahweh gives Israel its identity as a people belonging to God. In fact, before they entered into this relationship they were not a people at all (cf., Hos 2:23). God's election of Israel is for her to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, showing justice and concern for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger. Only so can Israel be God's presence in the world, and shine as a light before the nations.[27] Then the nations may be drawn to Israel because they will sense God's presence among them.

Israel's special task in the world is twofold: a) to represent God among the nations through righteous living as stipulated in the Torah, by showing special concern for the needy in their midst; and b) to represent the nations before God in adoration, prayer and

[25] Ibid. Bosch concurs with this: "The purpose of the election is service . . . and when this is withheld, election loses its meaning." David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 18.

[26] Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 113. "Holy space is paralleled by holy time," Janzen continues. "It is regularly marked by the Sabbath and eventually centered in the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), surrounded by the three great festivals. Holy time extends in concentric circles to Sabbath years, jubilee years, and eventually the eschatological day of Yahweh."

[27] Roelf Kuitse, *Hope and Mission*, 6. On this point, Bosch also observes that "primarily Israel is to serve the marginal in its midst: the orphan, the widow, the poor and the stranger." There are some similarities here to today's Theology of Liberation as he continues: "Whenever the people of Israel renew their covenant with Yahweh, they recognize that they are renewing their obligations to the victims of society." David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 18.

intercession. The praises of God that should be given by all creatures and all the nations can be heard in Israel. Israel is doing what all the nations should be doing: adoring the Creator of the world. Intercession for the nations is also part of the sacerdotal duty.[28]

Implicit in the theology of the covenant is the centrality of a new peoplehood in God's plan of salvation and mission that is common to both Testaments. A biblical view of mission requires a radical return to the peoplehood intended by God.[29] This implies a life of pilgrimage under God's guidance and a reordering of life according to God's character, forming a "contrast-society" which relies on God's grace and providence for sustaining it. "Whenever Israel has this vision of its distinctive identity as God's contrast-society in sharpest focus, then it will most faithfully fulfill its mission to serve [as] the blessing of all the earth's families."[30]

Israel's practice was not always exemplary and, in the context of degeneration during the period of the monarchy,[31] prophets came forward to call for the renewal of the vision of God's universal salvation. Driver puts it this way:

> They bring God's message to a people who have long since ceased to be a contrast-society in the midst of the nations; they warn of impending judgement. But they also share a vision of hope beyond the judgement—a hope based upon the restoration of God's reign of righteousness and peace. Picking up the theme of the ancient promise to Abraham, the prophets perceive the blessing of God's righteous reign reaching to all humanity through the faithfulness of his restored people. It is a vision of the "mountain of the Lord's house" being established in a highly visible way among the peoples of the earth and the nations being attracted by the gracious covenant relationship of righteousness, peace, and salvation which characterize God's people.[32]

This vision is expressed with special clarity in two almost identical passages, Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–4. The first one reads:

> In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house
> shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
> and shall be raised above the hills;

[28] Roelf Kuitse, *Sent*, 2; cf,. Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 40, note 12.

[29] John Driver, *Images of the Church*, 24.

[30] Ibid., 25–26; cf., J. H. Yoder, *The Original Revolution* (Scottdate: Herald Press, 1971), 27–31.

[31] John Driver comments that the change from a people living under the rule of God, led by charismatic leaders, to leadership by earthly kings represents unfaithfulness, for it rejects the providential rule of God. As Samuel had foreseen (1 Sam 8), greedy and power-hungry kings would oppress and exploit the Israelites much like the pharaohs of old had. John Driver, *Images of the Church*, 28–29.

[32] Ibid., 30.

all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

A few significant lines are added in Micah 4:4:

but they shall all sit under their own vines
and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

This then is what the prophets foresee as Israel's and the world's future "in days to come." The violent ways of the nations in dealing with conflicting interests will be set aside; instead, God will be ruler and judge, not of his chosen only, but of all nations. All peoples will learn to depend on God alone as Israel's founders did, and all humanity will order its social relationships according to the "values of righteousness and peace" contained in the Sinaitic covenant. The result will be a restored peoplehood under God, a kind of sabbatical or jubilee economy in which debts are forgiven and property is restored to all (cf., Leviticus 25), as hinted at in Micah 4:4;[33] this jubilee will extend beyond Israel and assume a global scale.

This vision anticipates the fulfilment of the universalization of God's blessing promised in the beginning. It will be embodied in a new social structure of the messianic people of God that includes all peoples and nations of the earth.[34] The means for bringing this about, as the prophets see it, are still the same: through the mediation of Israel's priestly servanthood to the nations.

The nations will be irresistibly drawn to Jerusalem, when God's "holy people" worship God and walk in "his paths" (cf., Isa 2:3). The life of devotion to God and ministry to the needy by God's "kingdom of priests" will attract the nations. Isaiah's Servant poems also foresee that God will bring this about through his people: "my servant . . . my chosen . . . I have put my spirit upon him; . . . he will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the

[33] Ibid., 31.
[34] Ibid.

earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching" (42:1–4). About this servant, God further declares: "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon. . . . " (Isa 42:6–7; cf., Isa 61:1–2a)

The servant in question appears to be Israel, for another Servant passage states: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (Isa 49:3).[35] At the time Isaiah uttered this prophecy about the coming of the nations, he was painfully aware that the people of Israel had, alas, retreated from being "the light of the Lord!" "For you have forsaken the ways of your people, O house of Jacob" (Isa 2:5–9); specifically, they had taken up the idolatrous and superstitious practices of other peoples, instead of faithfully upholding their unique status as God's nation of priests, God's special possession.

The Ambiguity of the Vision

As we have noted, the vision that God as Creator and Lord of history wills for all nations to share in Israel's blessing and that Israel, like a priest, was to be God's mediating servant was inherent in Israel's faith from the beginning. Nevertheless, Israel struggled with an ambivalent attitude toward the other nations in the Old Testament. Israel considered other nations to be rivals, even enemies; yet the prophets bring God's concern for the other nations unavoidably into Israel's field of vision. David Bosch points to "the Old Testament's dialectical tension between judgement and mercy... of which both Israel and the nations are the recipients." This, he argues, is illustrated by Isaiah 40–55 and the book of Jonah which speak to the same issue from different angles:

> Jonah symbolizes the people of Israel, who have perverted their election into pride and privilege. The booklet does not aim at reaching and converting Gentiles; it aims, rather, at the repentance and conversion of Israel and contrasts God's magnanimity with the parochialism of his own people. Second Isaiah, on the other hand, particularly in the metaphor of the suffering servant, paints the picture of an Israel which has already been the recipient of God's judgement, and which now, precisely in its weakness and lowliness, becomes a witness to God's victory. Just at the moment of Israel's deepest humiliation and despondency we see the nations approach Israel and confess: "The Lord . . . is faithful, the Holy One of Israel . . . has chosen *you*" (Isa 49:7).[36]

[35] However, the New Testament church would contend that the servant's calling or ministry did not find its full expression until God's Messiah came to realize it decisively in the person of Jesus Christ (cf., Luke 4:16–21). "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21) are the words by which Luke's Jesus ends his inaugural speech in the synagogue of Nazareth.

[36] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 18; italics his.

Bosch asserts that, although Israel's faith in one God as Lord of the world held out the possibility for outreach to the nations, neither did Israel reach out to them, nor was Israel actually calling the nations to faith in Yahweh. But if they did come, it was because God was bringing them in. Thus it is asserted that the only "missionary" in the Old Testament is God himself.

Indeed, Bosch points to a certain "ambiguity" in the Old Testament whereby an ethnocentric faith takes over, even in positive passages about the nations coming to worship Yahweh. In this matter, both a positive and a negative interpretation of Isaiah are possible. Bosch summarizes the "most positive composite picture" from Old Testament prophecies as follows:

> The nations are waiting for Yahweh and trusting in him (Isa 51:5). His glory will be revealed to them all (Isa 40:5). All the ends of the earth are called upon to look to God and be saved (Isa 45:22). He makes his servant known as a light to the Gentiles (Isa 45:6; 49:6). A highway is constructed, from Egypt and Assyria to Jerusalem (Isa 19:23); the nations encourage each other to go up to the mountain of the Lord (Isa 2:5), and they carry precious gifts with them (Isa 18:7). The purpose of all of this is to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, the sanctuary of the whole world, together with the covenant people (Ps 96:9). Egypt will be blessed as God's people, Assyria as the work of his hands, and Israel as his heritage (Isa 19:25). The visible expression of this global reconciliation will be the celebration of the messianic banquet upon the mountain of God; the nations will behold God with unveiled faces, and death will be swallowed up forever (Isa 25:6–8).[37]

Nevertheless, alongside this picture in Isaiah is a negative companion picture. Thus some people come in chains and must bow down before Israel (Isa 45:14); others will suffer judgement—perhaps more for being Israel's enemies than for having refused God's offer of mercy (cf., Isa 47). Indeed, Israel remains at the centre, as the one who receives "the wealth of the nations" (Isa 60:11). If Second Isaiah represents the highest point of Old Testament universalism, there are traces of an Israel-centredness even here. And over time, this negative attitude toward the nations prevails, resulting in the widespread view that when Messiah appears, Israel would be restored and the nations conquered.[38]

Thus, the passages that promise the coming of the nations to Israel to seek the knowledge of the Lord find but limited fulfilment in Old Testament times and remain an eschatological vision or

[37] Ibid., 19, drawing on the work of Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 57–60.

[38] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 19.

promise. This did not of course extinguish the salutary influence of Israel's covenant life with Yahweh, when they were faithful, upon the Gentile nations. Certainly the reports of Paul's missionary journeys in the New Testament show that the number of "proselytes" and "God-fearers," who had attached themselves to Jewish synagogues, by circumcision (and full submission to the Torah) or association respectively, was considerable.[39] But even so, there is no record of the representatives of the nations actually streaming to Jerusalem in order to be instructed in the Israelite faith before Pentecost (Acts 2). The missionary vision in the Old Testament remains above all a promise.

Rooted in and Transcending the Old Testament

What, then, is the relationship between the Old Testament vision of universal salvation and the subsequent mission of the Christian church? There seems to be no major difference in the missionary vision(s) found in both Testaments, whereas the difference in the implementation of this vision is notable. An iceberg of common faith content exists between both Testaments. At the same time, we can discern a qualitative difference in the mission dynamic of the New Testament, as I shall point out shortly.

G. E. Wright's discussion of the indebtedness of Christian mission to the Old Testament is still apropos. According to Wright, the common vision of an inclusive salvation allows for a multi-faceted "rootage of the Christian mission in the faith of Israel."[40] But surely, the richest gift to New Testament missiology is the Old Testament's understanding of and faith in God. Wright notes that the Old Testament doctrine of God constitutes the indispensable foundation for such Christian doctrines as the trinity, the incarnation, the atonement, and the church.[41]

Israel's doctrine of God as sovereign Lord over both nature and history relativizes the "earthly powers" of all cyclical nature religions,[42] making possible a "processual understanding of time"[43] or what Bosch calls a dynamic understanding of history.[44] By extension, the Christian conceptions of human individuals, of

[39] Bosch notes that this is the case, despite the paucity of evidence for any active proselytizing. Ibid., 25

[40] G.E. Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," 17.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 20.

[43] From a CBC Radio interview by Michael Enright of Thomas Kahel (third hour of "This Morning," August 18, 1998) on "The Gift of the Jews." Kahel prefers "processual history" to linear history, because the former leaves more room for genuinely unpredictable newness to happen in history.

[44] Bosch contrasts Israel's faith with the other religions as follows: the Israelites "have only become a people because of God's intervention" and the covenant he made with them "determines their entire subsequent history. . . . In the religions of Israel's neighbours God is present in the eternal cycle of nature and at certain cultic places. In Israel, however, history is the arena of God's activity. The focus is on what God has

community, and of freedom and responsibility, are inconceivable apart from Israel's historical experience of both God's judgement and liberation throughout its long history. Again the importance of the Old Testament doctrine of a personal, dynamic, passionate and compassionate God for engendering a similarly dynamic concept of human being, as the image of the Creator, with the need for loving and being loved, is evident.

The Old Testament therefore makes it impossible to "spiritualize" God's salvation and makes it into something other-worldly because it is effected by God's acts in history, in the lives of persons and peoples. Nor can spirituality and ethics be separated;[45] the requirement of a just social order is surely among the central themes that resonates through the pages of the Old Testament (cf., Lev 25; Jer 7:21–23; Mic 6:8); especially towards the poor among the people of God (cf., Ps 72). This lesson is not lost on the New Testament where it forms the platform of the inaugural speech of Jesus' ministry, making the Jubilee concept of the Old Testament a concrete reality (Luke 4:16–21). It also reverberates consistently in the life and ministry of the early church (e.g., Acts 2–6; 1 John; James). If Liberation Theology, with both Catholic and mainline Protestant representatives, has elevated this theme to centre stage in the theology of our time, the Evangelical movement now also expressly recognizes that Christian missionary proclamation must be accompanied by "social action."[46] Historically, Mennonites have emphasized the need to keep in balance proclamation and service in mission. Our confession of faith says this succinctly: "Neither word alone nor deed alone is sufficient for mission. Word explains deed, and deed authenticates word."[47]

The Old Testament's perspective on the atonement is also relevant to missiology. The Servant of the Lord shows to Israel what its mission is to be, although it would be fulfilled only in Christ on whom the Church must pattern its life in the world. G.E. Wright maintains, "Not only has the servant suffered for his own sins (Isa 40:2, 42:18–25), but he has vicariously borne in his body the wounds inflicted by the world's evils (52:13–53:12)." Wright goes on to say that the servant's (and the church's) function is to testify that the meaning of history is found in the God of Israel and that there is no

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done, is doing and is yet to do according to his declared intention." In other words, Israel's faith challenges the nature religions to break free from the powers of nature by recognizing God as the "God who acts" (citing Wright), and to embrace an "historicalized" faith in God who reveals himself by what he does in history. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 17.

[45] Cf., Roelf Kuitse, *Sent*, 2.

[46] John R. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World: What the Church Should Be Doing Now* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 25–34.

[47] *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995), article 10.

salvation without God (43:8–13).[48] This missiology of witness through suffering, learned by Israel in her prolonged experience(s) of exile, later becomes the foundation for the New Testament theology of mission through peace.[49]

The New Testament community of believers, centred around what God has done for them in Christ, is, of course, deeply rooted in the Old Testament covenant community with its basis in God's acts of redemption like the exodus. Like Moses at Mount Sinai, Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount invites his followers to a (renewed) covenant and a life of true freedom under God's rule. Put another way, as the chosen people of God are both the goal and the means for the world's salvation in the Old Testament, so they are that in the New.[50] The role of the renewed, more inclusive, people of God is also to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light in the world" (Matt 5:13–16). They too are a people of priests who live between God and the world. They are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." They are who they are because of God's grace: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people . . . [because] you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9–10). Clearly then, the renewed people of God has the same "priestly" task toward the peoples of the world as did the Old Testament people of God.

What then does it mean to say, "The decisive difference between the Old and the New Testament is mission?"[51] I submit that the decisive difference between the Testaments is found more in terms of the respective mission dynamics than missionary vision(s).[52] Israel's actual mission to the nations tended towards exclusion, rather than inclusion, which Jesus and the church practised. In actuality, Israel was called to be a "people apart," but in order to represent (not exclude) the nations. However, Israel was tempted to see God as their tribal God, and to interpret God's election as privilege rather than mission (cf., Jonah).

[48] G.E. Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," 19.

[49] All expansionist mission by the Christian church through coercive, violent means must therefore be seen as unfaithful not only to the teaching of Jesus, but also to the best insights on witness in the Old Testament. Cf., Robert Ramseyer, ed., *Mission and the Peace Witness* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1979).

[50] Cf., Donald R. Jacobs, *Pilgrimage in Mission: Mennonite Perspectives on the Christian Witness Worldwide* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1983), chap. 10, esp. p.132.

[51] See note 2 above.

[52] Martin-Achard argues that Israel and the church are called by God at "different moments" in salvation history; therefore, they have different responsibilities: "Israel lives under the sign of promise, its business is simply to live; its presence in the world is a miracle which must in the end draw the Gentiles to Yahweh. The mission of the Church," on the other hand, "is to tell the nations the good news, that the divine purpose has now at last been fulfilled." Martin-Archard, *A Light to the Nations*, 77, note 3.

The community of Jesus' followers is also called to witness to the world by being a unique society. This in fact is central to the entire New Testament—while registering also an unprecedented quality, embodied first in the person of Jesus and then in his community of disciples. This continuity-with-a-difference in Jesus' ministry is expressed well by John Howard Yoder, when he writes: "Jesus did again what God had done in calling Abraham or Moses or Gideon or Samuel: He gathered His people around His word and His will. [Yet] Jesus created around Himself a society like no other society [hu]mankind had ever seen."[53] Yoder convincingly argues that the founding of a new humanity, without destroying the old, is Jesus' chief strategy for redeeming the world.

The hallmark of the mission of the New Testament people of God in the world is its inclusiveness of all ethnic groups and economic classes. This is evident even though Jesus, when he undertook the restoration of the true people of God, "clearly and unequivocally understood his mission in terms of the Old Testament tradition."[54] It was Jesus' conviction that he was sent only to Israel (cf., Matt 1:21; 10:6; 15:24; Luke 1:54).[55] At Pentecost the divine Spirit is poured out without regard to age or social class (Acts 2), as foretold by Joel. The same Spirit is also given to Gentile believers (Acts 10).

In contrast to some of his contemporary religious groups, who envisioned a salvation of only some select Israelites, Jesus' mission was aimed at all Israel. This is evident from his extended ministry throughout the Jewish territory, his choice of twelve disciples, and especially his inclusion of the crowds on the margins of the Jewish establishment. They were known variously as "the poor, the blind, the lepers, the hungry, those who weep, the sinners, the tax-collectors, those possessed by demons, the persecuted, the captives, those who are weary and heavy laden, the rabble who know nothing of the law, the little ones, the least, the last, the lost sheep of the house of Israel, even the prostitutes . . . all people who have been pushed aside."[56]

It may be countered that even so Jesus is only fulfilling Israel's prophetic ideal. The prophets never tired of pleading for the widow, the orphan and the stranger. But the *inclusiveness* of Jesus' mission does break new ground when he advocates that the community of

[53] Yoder proceeds to enumerate the novel characteristics of this radically new society: it is "a voluntary society," with Jesus as its king, of racially, religiously, and economically mixed composition; the upside-down-kingdom values in Jesus' new humanity are stunningly different from the values of their contemporaries in regards to enemies, offenders, money, power and leadership, and family and gender relationships. John H. Yoder, *The Original Revolution*, 28–29.

[54] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 20.

[55] Ibid., 26.

[56] Ibid., 27.

disciples must love even their enemies—Orthodox Jewish writer, Pinchas Lapide, has called this "an innovation by Jesus."[57] It comes as no surprise then that the logic inherent in Jesus' genuinely inclusive ministry in Judaism—"embrac[ing] both the poor and the rich, both the oppressed and the oppressor, both the sinners and the devout"[58]—must ultimately break out of any strictures and, when taken to its logical conclusion, open up to include the Gentiles also. This indeed happens at several instances during his earthly life.

When attempting to explain this missional innovation, Bosch would warn us against locating the inspiration for the worldwide Gentile mission by the Christian church solely in the Easter event. We may not exclude Jesus' earthly ministry from playing a decisive part in this, as some New Testament scholars have tended to do. Rather, he asserts that the origin of the Christian mission is found in the earthly Jesus, citing New Testament scholar Martin Hengel:

> The content of the preaching of Jesus had just as much "missionary" character as that of the disciples after Easter. Here we are confronted with the real starting point of the primitive Christian mission: it lies in the conduct of Jesus himself. *If anyone is to be called "the primary missionary," he must be.* . . . The ultimate basis for the earliest Christian mission lies in the messianic sending of Jesus.[59]

It is through the whole ministry of Jesus then, including the cross and the resurrection, that God performs the eschatological, boundary-breaking deed, promised in the Old Testament. This irrevocably sets in motion the salvation of all peoples in concentric, ever widening circles, "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, citing Isa 49:6; cf., Matt 28:16–20; John 20:21). What was formerly at best a "centripetal" mission, drawing the nations into Israel's sacred centre, becomes now a "centrifugal" mission, which fans out to all the Gentile nations.[60]

[57] Cited by David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 28. This radical demand is by no means marginal to Jesus' missionary message; it is central to it since "the injunction to love one's enemies has rightly been described as the most characteristic saying of Jesus" (28). Jesus' nonviolent, invitational approach must therefore be seen as basic to Christian mission, as they imitate the Good Shepherd in his search for the lost. The "Q prophets," according to Bosch, understood this clearly: "Evidently their compassion for all Israel, like their Master's, is total. And like him, their proclamation knows nothing of coercion. It always remains an invitation. Is it possible to imagine a more ardent and compelling missionary spirit?" (29).

[58] Ibid.

[59] Cited by David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 30–31, from Martin Hengel, "The Origins of the Christian Mission," in *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 61–63; emphasis mine.

[60] Cf., Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 61, 78; Don Jacobs, *Pilgrimage in Mission*, 37.

Likewise, the idea of a restricted holy centre now opens out to potentially all places, or more precisely, "the Gospel teaches us that God calls us to meet Him in Jesus Christ. Messiah has taken the place of Holy City."[61] The place of true worship is no longer only Jerusalem. In fact, the place is no longer important. What matters is that Jews and Samaritans (really all nations) worship God together, as Jesus reveals to the Samaritan woman (John 4:21–24). In God's acceptance of Cornelius the Roman, Peter discovers that God's love is boundless and impartial (Acts 10:34–35), and that Jesus Christ "is Lord of all [people]" (v. 36). Thus Jesus is seen as overcoming the ethnocentrism from which Israel in the Old Testament was never able to break fully free. Jesus sets in motion the Old Testament vision of God's universal salvation in an unprecedented way because he allows God to act through him in love for the world. New Testament writers regularly point to the fulfilment of this vision when they narrate the ministry of Jesus and the new reality of the church's emergence and expansion.[62]

Summary

In summary, the promise of the Old Testament to unite all nations into God's covenant people is a fundamental vision that appears throughout the Old Testament. But it only begins to take on concrete form in Jesus Christ and in the New Testament church, and so constitutes the completion of the "sentence" begun in the Old Testament (to refer again to Brunner's metaphor). Without it the Old Testament would remain unfinished. But without the rich Old Testament background, the Christian mission of the church would indeed be foundering without a sure foundation or direction. It is true for Christian mission that there is no other foundation than Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11). But we could not understand the significance of Jesus for salvation apart from Israel's vision and experience in the Old Testament in which he is deeply rooted, and to which he gives concrete expression for the first time in history.[63] The Old Testament will always remind the church that we are the people of God only because God has elected us for the purpose of being his presence in the world, and for being Christ's ambassadors, inviting

[61] Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 78.

[62] For example, Matt 5:14–16 (citing Isa 2:2). The author of Luke-Acts in particular makes frequent reference to Isaiah's vision of universal salvation: e.g., Luke 2:29–35 (citing Isa 40:5; 42:6; 49:6; 52:10; 56:1–8); 3:3–6 (citing Isa 40:3–5); 3:21–22 (citing Isa 42:1); 4:16–27 (citing Isa 61:1–2; 58:6; also 1 Kgs 17–18 [Elijah and the widow from Sidon] and 2 Kgs 5 [Elisha and Naaman]); Acts 1:8 (citing Isa 49:6); 2:17 (citing Isa 2:2); 10:36 (citing Isa 52:7); 13:47 (citing Isa 49:6); 15:18 (citing Isa 45:21); 28:28 (citing Isa 40:5 LXX).

[63] For as Wright, summing up Brunner's thesis, says: ". . . Jesus as the Christ is the Word of God, the King in whom God's kingdom is come, and the one in whom the right

all the world to be reconciled with God (2 Cor 5:21). The Old Testament will not allow us to reduce mission to mission agencies, because it is the calling of the entire church. The church's ultimate purpose is that of uniting persons "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9) into one world-wide people that worships God and witnesses to what God in Christ has done, and will yet do, for the salvation of the world.

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offering by the right priest is brought. The message of the cross is completely incomprehensible apart from the Old Testament. Indeed, the revelation of the love of God in Christ could only be mystically-sentimentally or esthetically grasped, apart from the Old Testament." G.E. Wright, "The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," 27, note 9.

The Sword, the Stone and the Holy Grail

Jo-Ann A. Brant

Introduction

A sword, a stone and a grail occupy the hall of Arthurian legends, but these legends dwell within a larger mythic structure. The once and future king, the ideal king who makes right rather than might the basis of justice, is but a copy of the true king, the king of the Bible, none other than God or his heir, Jesus Christ. It should be no surprise, then, that a quest for the symbols of the sword, stone and cup within the biblical story should be successful. The purpose of such a quest, in this case, is to make greater sense of a troublesome passage in the Gospel of Matthew. In the missionary discourse, Jesus challenges Messianic expectations by saying, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt 10:34).[1] Hitherto, the sword has been treated as metaphor for division (v. 35). In the following analysis, metaphoric interpretation will give way to symbolic interpretation that focuses specifically upon the sword. Jesus takes up a sword that has a history and by doing so appropriates and alters its symbolic import. The sword draws its power from the Old Testament narrative's use of the myth of the divine warrior king. While it cleaves

[1] Attempts to soften the image by suggesting that Jesus wields only a dagger (Greek, *machaira*) are in vain. The Septuagint renders the Hebrew *xereb* (sword) as *machaira*. Cf., Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *'Put on the Armour of God': The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1997), 142.

a rift between the disciples and their families, it marks continuity with rather than a break from the story of the Israelite people. It also signals a surprising turn of events. The sword, wielded upon the disciples' families rather than upon God's enemies, participates in a story in which the righteous heirs to God's promise and to the kingdom become the blessing to the nations by drinking from the cup of God's divine wrath and receiving the blows of God's sword.

Methodology

Symbols, unlike metaphors, have physical referents.[2] For example, Peter as the rock refers to the foundation of the temple, God's dwelling place. If Jesus were using the word metaphorically—as in "Peter, you are like a rock"—he would be referring to qualities such as firmness or solidity that Peter might share with a rock. In the context of the Gospel, Peter seems to possess few of these qualities. The metaphor does work in other contexts, insofar as Peter seems intransigent, but not in this context. If Peter were merely like a rock, it would be a vain act to ask the question to which rock Jesus refers. Jesus' use of the word sword does give rise to metaphoric interpretations that substitute the object for qualities that the object possesses, such as the capacity to sever. Interpretation becomes an act of tidying meaning. In contrast, a symbolic interpretation opens a door into a world of story and divine mystery and is, therefore, never complete and always equivocal. Nevertheless, it makes evident a complex of symbols in the Gospel of Matthew that tend to be treated as discrete metaphors.

Symbols are multivalent. They participate in the realm of the sacred and the profane. Meaning becomes more difficult to untangle into linear analysis, and linear analysis always runs the risk of reduction and exclusion. In order to proceed in this perilous course of interpretation, Paul Ricoeur's model of analysis for the symbolism of evil provides a method. Step one sets the symbol within the narrative from which it derives its meaning, for the sword belongs to a species of symbols that Ricoeur calls myths. Myths are not fictions but rather symbolic treatments of sacred truths.[3] In this case, the myth of the divine warrior points to God's authority over and presence in the created order. Step two supplies a rational account of the import of the symbol as a linguistic act in the context of human experience, the story told within the Gospel of Matthew and the events that follow after Jesus' death and resurrection. Step three

[2] On the distinction between symbol and metaphor, see Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and Symbol," in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 45–69.

[3] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 14–18.

marks a return to narrative, for as Ricoeur notes, when a symbol is taken up it is changed; the story takes a new turn. Set once more in a narrative context, the sword expresses truths not limited by empirical experience.[4]

The Narrative: Part One

In an effort to describe the hierophany (sacred manifestation) of creation and God's ongoing involvement in that order, biblical authors draw upon a mythic narrative in which God appears as a warrior king, whose sword serves in the ongoing struggle to establish his throne and dominion, to protect his people in that struggle, and to enact judgment upon the enemies of his purpose. In its capacity to cut, pierce and sever, the sword manifests the purposeful judgment and discernment of divine intellect. It warns of the pain of that judgment. True to its double edge, it also heralds restoration of justice and order, for it purifies by cutting away the diseased or impure, it condemns the guilty, and it creates and multiplies by division.[5]

The divine sword is forged in the pre-biblical period in which YHWH is associated with the sky god and the sword with the lightning bolt. The rumble of the thunder, then, signifies divine utterance. Thus, the image of the sword coming out of Jesus' mouth (cf., Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16; 2:16; 19:15) has its source in ancient tradition and is prefigured frequently in the Old Testament canon. For example, Psalm 104 equates the word of God with thunder that chases the waters to their appointed place (Ps 104:5–9; cf., Ps 68:33). The use of the word rock with reference to God may be tied to this paradigm if its original association was with thunderstones, that, is meteorites.[6] The Genesis account of creation depicts God's word separating darkness from light, land from sea, but other biblical authors, such as the Psalmist, describe creation as the salvific act of God the King who, by slaying Leviathan, divides the sea (Ps 74:12–17).[7]

[4] Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols: 1," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 296–303.

[5] Richard W. Thurn, "Blades," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 237–238.

[6] The word for meteorites in pre-Islamic Arabic is *baytili*, meaning "house of God" (*bethel*). Jacob's words and actions in Genesis 28:17–22 seem to reflect this tradition in that he calls the stone *bethel* and identifies it as the gate of heaven. Cf., Mircea Eliade, "Sacred Stones," in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Meridian, 1958), 228–229.

[7] Cf., Ps 93:3; Job 40:19; 41:9. For the genesis of the warrior myth, see Carola Kloos, *YHWH's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986); Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973); John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For the place of the myth in Old Testament thought, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

When Isaiah prophesies of paradisal restoration and asks, "Was it not you [God] who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?" (51:9b), he alludes not to creation but to the Exodus. The theophany of the parting of the Red Sea in the Exodus is treated as an act analogous to creation. Opposition to God's will is equated with chaos; consequently, God's enemies are equated with the primordial beast. Consequently, God's final victory and establishment of his rule is portrayed as the dispatching of the serpent: "On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea" (Isa 27:1).[8] As Millard Lind points out, on the plane of human experience God acts by means of miracles, not swords and spears.[9] The sword then symbolizes acts of recreation or restoration, not just violence.

True to its association with war and death, the sword appears frequently as a manifestation of God's sovereign power to judge and punish. In the Song of Moses, God describes his sword, "For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear: As I live forever, when I whet my flashing sword, and my hand takes hold on judgment; I will take vengeance on my adversaries, and will repay those who hate me" (Deut 32:40–41).[10]

Jeremiah picks up the image of the sword of vengeance in his prophetic judgment against the nations and couples it with the symbol of the cup of vengeance: "Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them" (Jer 25:15–27, cf., Deut 32: 32–35).[11] The cup may also have its provenance in divine kingship. In the rabbinic discussion of forbidden images, the presence of an object that signifies sovereignty renders an image prohibited; the sword and the cup number with the coronet and the signet ring (*Numbers Rabbah* 13:14). H. A. Brongers describes the cup as symbolic of an anti-banquet.[12] The image of abundance evident in Psalm 23 and central to the tradition of the messianic banquet (cf., Isa 25:6; *2 Baruch* 29:1–8) metastasizes into a lethal intoxication in the prophetic indictment.

The sword is also lifted against those who commit infractions against the covenant. In the Song of the Sword (Ezek 21:9b–17), God unsheaths his sword against Jerusalem: "A sword, a sword is

[8] Pss 74, 93, 29 associate subjugation of chaos with kingship.

[9] Millard Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980), 23.

[10] Cf., Isa 31:8; 34:5–6; Jer 43:6–7; 50:35–38; Ezek 30:4; and more.

[11] On the cup of wrath, cf., Pss 11:6; 75:9; Lam 4:21; Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 51:7; Ezek 23:31–33; Obad 16; Hab 2:15–16; Zech 12:9; Rev 14:10; 16:19; 17:4; 18:6.

[12] H.A. Brongers, "Der Zornesbecher," *Oudtestamentliche Studiën* 15 (1969): 190.

sharpened, it is also polished; it is sharpened for slaughter, honed to flash like lightening! . . . Cry and wail, O mortal, for it is against my people; it is against all Israel's princes; they are thrown to the sword, together with my people. . . ." (Ezek 21:9b–12b).[13] The divine warrior can become a dread to his own people.

God's sword is unique. It alone accomplishes its task; the limits of human agency are made clear. "Then the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of mortals; and a sword, not of humans, shall devour him" (Isa 31:8a). Reliance upon God's sword is underscored by references to the lack of weapons borne by the Israelites.[14] In the battle against Goliath, David rejects Saul's sword and acknowledges that the victory comes from God (1 Sam 17:45–47).

Throughout the biblical canon, the narrative confirms the truth of Jesus' words, "[A]ll who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52). In the story of Gideon, the Midianites wield their swords against each other (Judg 7:22). Abimelek and Saul, the two kings who rule without divine sanction, choose to die by their own swords (Judg 9:54; 1 Sam 31:4).[15] The story of Goliath's sword illustrates the danger of raising the sword. David fells Goliath with a stone but then severs his head with the giant's sword. The sword then finds its way to the sanctuary at Noth and becomes sanctified property. After his flight from Saul's household, David takes up Goliath's sword and it becomes the hallows of his kingship (cf., 1 Sam 21:11), but perhaps, like Arthur's sword, its power to protect would have been more potent if it had remained in its scabbard.[16] Once David picks up the sword, violence ensues; Saul has the priests and the entire city of Nob massacred, for which David accepts blame (1 Sam 22:22), and when David exceeds his royal power, the sword never departs from his house (2 Sam 12:9–10).

God's sword has an afterlife in the intertestamental literature within messianic expectations. In 2 Maccabees 15:12–16, Jeremiah appears in a dream and hands Judas Maccabeus a golden sword saying, "Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries." The text expropriates the symbolic power of the divine sword in an attempt to legitimize Judas' rule. In *Ethiopic Enoch*, the sword appears in the hand of the son of man, a priestly messiah, who uses it to provide a sacrifice for a memorial feast, the messianic banquet (*1 Enoch* 62:12–13). 4 Ezra 13:9–11 describes a vision in which a peaceable multitude watches a man

[13] For the sword as punishment for covenant violations, see Lev 26:25, 33; Ps 7:12; Jer 34:17; Amos 7:11,17; and more.

[14] Cf., Exod 14:14; Judg 5:8b; 1 Sam 2:9; Ps 37:14; Isa 2:4; Jer 2:30; 13:22.

[15] Cf., Jer 2:30.

[16] Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: 1 Samuel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 133.

from the sea battle those who wage war with his flaming breath.[17] The complex symbol of word and sword seen later in John's vision of the son of man (Rev 1:12) delegates the authority or power held by God in the creation and Exodus stories to his messianic general.

While the sword is part of divine warfare, that warfare, as Waldemar Janzen observes, "serves a restorative purpose," and the warrior serves no role within the cosmic government that he inaugurates.[18] The warrior relinquishes a military career for that of bridegroom and householder (Isa 62:4–5; Rev 21:2). Likewise in Matthew, the sword plays a preliminary and restorative role. Moreover, its place in the messianic battle is in its scabbard.

From Myth to Lived Experience

Historical critical analysis tends to see the "not peace but a sword" saying as an independent saying, in which Jesus speaks figuratively, that is later connected to an allusion to Micah 7:6 in the life setting of persecution experienced by the early church.[19] Most conclude that Jesus speaks metaphorically and means that families will reject the disciples. The sword signifies Jesus' rejection or judgment of these family members.[20] According to Otto Betz, the sword is a threat (*Drohwort*) against the godless who will fall by the divine sword (*Gottesschwert*) at the Last Judgment: "[t]he frontline between righteous and godless is drawn through the close fellowship of the family."[21] Matthew Black is one of a small number who place this saying in the context of the messianic tradition by placing the sword in the hand of Jesus whom he depicts as a political zealot anticipating an apocalyptic, messianic war.[22] J. J. Collins objects, for history is at odds with myth: "Jesus of Nazareth shed no Gentile blood in Jerusalem as the paradigm demanded."[23] The solution to this tension is, however, not necessarily the rejection of

[17] For the sword as agent of punishment for the ungodly on the day of reckoning, see Sirach 39:30; Wisdom of Solomon 5:20; *Jubilees* 9:15; *Psalms of Solomon* 15:7; *1 Enoch* 63:11; 90:19; 91:11–12; 4Q244.

[18] Waldemar Janzen, "God as Warrior and Lord," in *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Newton: Faith and Life Press; Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982), 190.

[19] Cf., Stephen Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161.

[20] Cf., Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 154; John Dominic Crosson, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 300, who goes so far as to argue that Jesus judges the patriarchal family.

[21] Otto Betz, *Jesus, der Messias Israels: Aufsätze zur biblischen Theologie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 90.

[22] Matthew Black, "'Not Peace but a Sword': Matt 10:34ff; Luke 12:51ff," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. Ernest Bammel and C.F.D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 289–290.

[23] J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 208.

the role of symbolic myth in the narrative, but rather attention to how history, that is, lived experience, renders a symbol dynamic.

In the Micah passage, the prophet describes the corruption of the people that God's salvation will put right. In the Matthean text, Jesus' mission is the cause of family division. Jesus also strains traditional expectations regarding peace. Peace is a legitimate hope of eschatological salvation; a fragment from Qumran proclaims that with the coming of one called "Son of God" "the sword will cease from the earth." According to the tradition prevalent in the intertestamental literature and central to the divine warrior myth, in the war that establishes this peace, God or his messianic general defeats the nations and the cosmic forces of evil.[24] The actual conflict described by Jesus is not a war with the nations but domestic strife for Jesus' Jewish disciples. Although such conflict is anticipated as part of the messianic age in the intertestamental literature, it is typically set in the context of the families of the nations:

> And they shall begin to fight among themselves; and (by) their own right hands they shall prevail against themselves. A man shall not recognise his brother, nor a son his mother, until there shall be a (significant) number of corpses from among them. Their punishment is (indeed) not in vain. In those days, Sheol shall swallow up the sinners in the presence of the elect ones. (*1 Enoch* 56:5–8)[25]

Any chaos of this sort experienced by God's elect results because God withdraws in preparation for the final conflict. By equating the sword with judgment, exegetes overlook the dissonance with the tradition upon which Jesus' relies. By beginning "[d]o not think," Jesus calls his disciples to alter their expectations. The accent is upon transformation rather than retribution.

Just as God's sword divides in order to conquer chaos and establish order, Jesus' incisions generate something new. Seen from the hindsight of history, the division of kinship structures in Jewish society is a necessary precursor to the inclusion of the gentiles within the covenantal family of God. The sword that is expected to turn against the nation now turns upon the biological family, the identity of the children of Abraham. This meaning is supported by John the Baptist's warning not to presume that descent from Abraham is sufficient for salvation and the claim that "God is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham" (Matt 3:9), as well as by

[24] Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 203–204; Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 313.

[25] Translation from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. J. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983). *Mishna Sotah* 9:15, citing Micah 7:6; *Jubilees* 23:16; *1 Enoch* 100:1–2; 4 Ezra 5:9, 6:24; *2 Baruch* 10:3 describe generational conflicts that confront the messiah rather than those generated by the messiah. All seem to refer to the nations.

Jesus' assurance that the loss of family members is compensated by the creation of a new kinship structure (Matt 12:48–50; 19:27–30). Jesus' progression from family strife to the claim "who ever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matt 10:38–39) equates the loss of family with death on the cross. His sword is lethal, for separation from family cuts at the very notion of life found in scripture in which life apart from the family is inconceivable.[26] Just as Jesus drinks from the cup that has previously been intended for the nations, the sword turns from the nations to the disciples, who are Israel. The disciples' actions and convictions are the divisive agents: they sacrifice their kinship ties for the sake of the kingdom, a sacrifice equivalent to Jesus' death.[27] As a result, the nations are no longer made to bear the price of the past and they are invited into intimate fellowship with God's people.

As William Klassen contends, Jesus must have sifted through the legacy of messianic expectations in order to understand his mission and then affirmed that the kingdom would not come without violence, but that violence is done to Jesus and the disciples.[28] The sword saying relates closely to Jesus' charge, "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"(Matt 1:16). A description of the violence that the disciples will experience in the synagogue and at the hand of family members follows. The allusion to sheep recalls the prophetic traditions in which the shepherd suffers as God's servant.[29] Jesus is the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter (Zech 11:4), whose wages are 30 shekels (Zech 11:12; Matt 26:15), against whom God's sword is awoken and strikes (Zech 13:7). In *1 Enoch* 90:19, the sword is handed over to the sheep who march against all the animals. In Matthew, the sheep "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" among the "lost sheep" of the house of Israel (Matt 10: 6–8). In symbolic terms, the battle is waged against Beelzebul (Matt 12:27–29). In empirical terms, the battle is waged not against the family but against human suffering.

[26] Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 45: "God's preservation of humanity repeatedly assumes the form of reconstituting kinship structures and initiating new possibilities throughout them."

[27] Cf., Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 114–115, who stresses the active role of the disciples and the violence of their experience.

[28] William Klassen, "Jesus and the Messianic War," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 156, 172–173, although Klassen locates Matt 10:34 within the legal tradition of Deut 13:6ff, in which one raises one's hand against family members who attempt to lead one to apostasy, and Deut 33:9, in which Levites vow not to recognise their families so that they can minister to God without distraction.

[29] Cf., Klassen, "Jesus and the Messianic War," 169–175.

The violence of the sword, then, is of a particular sort. The sword does not come against one's adversaries; its blows are absorbed by the body of the disciples. This conclusion is supported by the way swords are handled in the narrative of the Gospel. At Jesus' arrest, he affirms that the disciples' swords are to remain sheathed when he restores the slave's ear that has been sliced off by a disciple's sword and decries, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52). Jesus' arrest is accomplished, albeit unnecessarily, with swords and clubs (Matt 26:55).

The Narrative: Part Two

The last stage in Ricoeur's method of investigation calls for a return to narrative. What becomes of the sword once it is claimed by Christ? According to the *Testament of Levi*, in end times, the priestly messiah, "shall open the gates of paradise; he shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam, and he will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life" (*T. Levi* 18:10).[30] While the claim that Jesus takes hold of the flashing sword of Genesis 3:24 cannot be substantiated, the Christian tradition in which the tree of life and the cross are conflated into one means of attaining eternal life suggests that the heirs to the Gospel tradition saw Jesus' actions effectively removing the sword. Matthew links Jesus' claim to have brought a sword to the hope of eternal life when, later in the Gospel, Peter asks, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" (Matt 19:27). Jesus then describes how those who have left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother will inherit eternal life (Matt 19:29). Moreover, Matthean parallels to the tradition in the *Testament of Levi* affirm that Matthew sees the consequences of Jesus' mission within the same narrative framework. The priestly messiah's "star shall rise in heaven like a king" (*T. Levi* 18:3; Matt 2:2). "The heavens will be opened and from the temple of glory sanctification will come upon him, with a fatherly voice as from Abraham to Isaac" (*T. Levi* 18:6; Matt 3:16–17). "Beliar shall be bound by him and he shall grant to his children the authority to trample on wicked spirits" (*T. Levi* 18:12; Matt 12: 29; 10:8; 16:18). The defeat of Beliar (Satan) recalls the story of God battling the primordial beast of chaos as the act preceding God's reign.[31]

[30] Howard C. Kee, "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 775, dates this text to the second century BCE.

[31] Cf., Ragnan Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 11–18; Bruce A. Stevens, "Jesus as Divine Warrior," *Expository Times* 94 (1982–83): 329, who cites Matt 10:34 in his argument that the "divine warrior ideology" is evident in the characterization of Jesus as "our champion in the battle with the forces of evil."

Moving beyond Matthew's Gospel to the vision of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John, in which the restoration of paradise is found in the vision of a heavenly city, we find the tree of life standing accessible to the city's residence (Rev 22:1–2). The text makes no mention of a sword, but this should not be surprising. The New Jerusalem needs neither the sword of sacrifice, for the city is without a temple; nor the sword of protection, for the gates will never be shut; nor the sword of vengeance, for death shall be no more.

Conclusion

The sword in human experience is an instrument of violence and death. By opening up the Bible to locate the sword within its mythic narratives, more possibilities of meaning are unleashed. The sword becomes God's instrument of creation and regeneration. In the context of the Christian story, the consequence of the rending of the disciples from their families becomes the effective means of bringing into being God's eschatological family, the Church. The pain that the sword inflicts is real, but the brunt is the cost of discipleship rather than judgment of the godless. The *telos* (purpose) of the sword is not to wage war against one's enemies; by receiving its blows, the disciples lay their own swords to rest. Within the lived experience of the Church, the sword dwells only within the halls of the sacred narrative.

> There likewise I beheld Excalibur
> Before him at his crowing borne, the sword
> That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
> And Arthur row'd across and took it—rich
> With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
> Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright
> That men are blinded by it—on one side,
> Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
> "Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,
> And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
> "Cast me away!"
>
> Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*,
> "The Coming of Arthur," lines 294–304

The LORD Has Truly Sent the Prophet[1]

Daniel Epp-Tiessen

The title for this article, "The LORD Has Truly Sent the Prophet," is taken from Jeremiah 28:9, where the prophet Jeremiah is locked in a conflict with another prophet by the name of Hananiah. The conflict centres on the issue of what will be the fate of God's people, and these two prophets, both claiming to speak for the same God, present totally opposite visions of God's plan for the future. The question is posed in stark terms: how can God's people know whether "the LORD has truly sent the prophet," or whether the prophet speaks what arises out of his own mind?

This question of whether or not "the LORD has truly sent the prophet" was raised over and over again in the history of ancient Israelite prophecy. Time after time people heard prophets uttering conflicting words in the name of the same God, claiming that they and not their opponents were the ones whom the LORD had truly sent.[2] Caught between two opposing prophetic words, how were the people to decide? It has even been argued that the problem of prophets uttering conflicting messages was a significant factor in the discrediting and subsequent demise of the entire prophetic

[1] This essay is a revised version of a speech delivered on the occasion of Waldemar Janzen's retirement banquet, May 24, 1997, Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

[2] See texts like 1 Kgs 13:7–22; 22:1–28; Is 9:13–16; 28:7–8; Jer 5:12–13, 30–31; 6:13–15=8:10–12; 14:13–18; 23:9–40; 26:7–15; 27:8–22; 28:1–17; 29:1–32; Ezek 13:1–23; 22:28; Mic 3:5–8,11; Zeph 3:4; cf., Deut 13:1–5; 18:20–22; 1 Kgs 18:17–40; Jer 2:8, 26–28; Ezek 14:9.

movement in ancient Israel.[3] It seems to me that this view fails to reckon with a crucial piece of evidence, namely, the fact that the ancient Israelite community of faith placed so much value on the words of at least some prophets, that some 15 prophetic books have been preserved in our scriptures.[4] Ultimately, prophecy was venerated not discredited. But that in no way eliminates the difficulty of discerning between true and false prophecy in any given situation.

It seems most appropriate to reflect on the topic of true and false prophecy in a book which pays tribute to Waldemar Janzen's teaching, scholarship, and leadership in the church. One of the concerns that has informed much of Waldemar's work over the years is how contemporary Christians can derive guidance from the writings of the Bible, particularly from the Old Testament. The question of how and where we today find theological and spiritual guidance is, of course, not unrelated to the question of true and false prophecy.

I also have a personal reason for turning to the issue of true and false prophecy. My fascination with the topic was first triggered in a masters level course that I took with Waldemar more than 20 years ago. One particular comment he made stayed with me during my doctoral studies when I eventually wrote a dissertation on the topic of true and false prophecy. Waldemar's observation was that the situation faced by the ancient Israelites when they were confronted by conflicting prophetic messages is not that different from the situation confronted by communities of faith in any generation. We too know the experience of standing between different parties who claim to have insight into God's will, yet have very different visions of what that will is. We hear conflicting voices addressing us on issues like women in leadership roles in the church, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, euthanasia, abortion, and other issues. Sorting out who speaks for God on such issues is often not an easy matter.

The situation is complicated by the fact that over time our convictions about who speaks for the LORD on such issues may change. I grew up in an era and in a church where we were

[3] See James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 124 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 108, 110–111.

[4] For other critiques of this argument see, Waldemar Janzen, "Withholding the Word," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 97–98; Brevard S. Childs, "True and False Prophets," in *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 140–142; Gerald T. Sheppard, "True and False Prophecy within Scripture," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen and Robert R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 265–273.

convinced that we knew which "prophets" the LORD had truly sent to speak to us on issues like women in leadership roles in the church, or on the possibility of being divorced and still remaining in the church. Now, some 30 or 40 years later, we recognize that perhaps the LORD was speaking to us through some different "prophets." Lest we jump to the conclusion that the LORD always speaks to us through those persons who challenge the traditional teachings of the church, let me cite another historical example. During World War II a considerable number of our Mennonite young men enlisted in the military which was, of course, not consistent with the peace tradition of the Mennonite church. At that time and ever since, for a variety of different reasons, there has been considerable pressure in some Mennonite circles to soften or give up the commitment to follow the non-violent way of Jesus. Many congregations have indeed abandoned the peace position, and even whole conferences are in danger of doing so. Through whom has the LORD been speaking to the Mennonite church? Is it through the "conservatives" who have continued to hold to the centuries-old Mennonite tradition of non-violence, or is it through those "liberals" who have been willing to let go of this tradition? I believe that on this issue it is the "conservatives" who represent the "prophets" whom the LORD has truly sent to us.

I think Waldemar was right in his assessment that the biblical issue, has the LORD truly sent the prophet, is quite similar to the situation which the community of faith faces in any era. Some of the biblical writers were keenly aware that false prophecy and the conflict between prophets posed great problems for the community of faith, so they sought to provide the community with guidance about how to discern between the true and the false prophetic word. The question that I want to explore in the rest of this essay is: can this biblical material about true and false prophecy provide contemporary believers with any insight or guidance as we today struggle to discern which "prophets" the LORD has truly sent to us?

If we listen to the biblical scholars who have worked on this issue in recent years, the answer is a resounding "No." Numerous studies have been written which examine each one of the criteria or guidelines put forth by the biblical writers for distinguishing between the true and false prophetic word, and in the end each criterion is found seriously wanting.[5] Crenshaw is by no means atypical when he concludes at the end of his discussion, "What can be said then

[5] James A. Sanders observes that scepticism concerning the adequacy of any criteria has been characteristic of recent scholarship. James A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy," in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 23. A helpful summary of the history of this research can be found in Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 13–22.

about the various criteria discussed above? All are inadequate as a means of illuminating false prophecy. . . ."[6] Given such a conclusion, it is no surprise that the stated or unstated conviction is that contemporary believers can find little help or insight here for their own struggles.

Much is worthwhile in the analysis of scholars like Crenshaw and others, and I agree that ultimately there are no foolproof criteria. As humans we simply have no perfect methods for discerning the will of God (or else we would not have such divergent opinions in the church). However, I remain convinced that the experience of God's people in past generations may have something to teach us. Therefore, I want to take another look at some of the biblical criteria because I believe they offer us some helpful insight and guidance.

There isn't space to examine all the biblical criteria so I will just focus on four.[7] The first one may seem like the most straightforward. According to Deuteronomy 13:1–5, any prophet who in any way urges disloyalty to Israel's God Yahweh, even if this prophet demonstrates great wonder-working abilities, is to be regarded as false and is to be executed. This passage, and a number of other texts which critique prophets for encouraging worship of other gods (Deut 18:20; 1 Kgs 18:17–40; Jer 2:8, 26–28; 23:13,27), are in essence asserting that all true prophets are preachers of the first commandment, "you shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3).

On the surface this criteria seems quite straightforward. Any prophet who urges disloyalty to Israel's God Yahweh is by definition false. The problem comes from the difficulty of discerning what is allegiance to Yahweh and what represents allegiance to other gods. A text from the book of the prophet Hosea illustrates how this was a problem in ancient Israel.

> She [Israel] did not know
> that it was I who gave her
> the grain, the wine, and the oil,
> and who lavished upon her silver
> and gold that they used for Baal. (Hosea 2:8)

[6] James Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 61. This scepticism with respect to the value of any criteria was first expressed by the German scholar Gottfried Quell, *Wahre und falsche Propheten: Versuch einer Interpretation*, Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie, 46. Band, 1. Heft (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1952). See, for example, page 13. Other scholars who share this scepticism include: Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Ivo Meyer, *Prophet gegen Prophet: Eine Analyse der alttestamentlichen Texte zum Thema: Wahre und falsche Propheten*, Biblische Beiträge, 9 (Fribourg: Verlag Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1973), 161–163; and Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1981), 187.

[7] For a fuller list and discussion of the criteria suggested by both the Old Testament and modern biblical scholars, see James Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 49–61.

Hosea is accusing the people of confusing the Israelite God Yahweh with the Canaanite fertility God Baal. We know from Hosea and other sources that many Israelites had difficulty distinguishing between the worship of these two gods, and that they often worshipped Yahweh as if he were Baal. That is, they worshipped Yahweh with rituals and practices that were borrowed from Baal worship. We also know that many Israelites were quite content to worship both Yahweh and Baal and saw no tension between the two. However, the biblical prophets repeatedly stress that the people must distinguish clearly between Yahweh and other gods, and that Israel owes allegiance to but one God.

That is a message the community of faith needs to hear in every generation. Because we do not live in a time and place where the cosmos is believed to be full of a multitude of deities vying for our allegiance, we often naively assume that we are not tempted to pledge our loyalty to other gods. However, there are in our world, in our society, and in our churches, spiritualities and types of religious expression that claim to be Christian, but are really encouraging us to worship other gods. Sometimes this is easy to see, especially when it is far away. In Bosnia and Rwanda, for example, we have in the last years observed how ethnicity has become a god, and how Christians have committed horrible atrocities because they have come to worship their own ethnic or racial group above the God of the Bible. There is some of this in our own experience as well. One need only look at how many North American Christians rallied enthusiastically to support the Vietnam War or the more recent Gulf War, because the cause of the West or the cause of America had become a higher god than the biblical God who is God of all people in this world.

The ancient Israelites were seduced by fertility gods like Baal and Astarte who promised them abundant rains, rich harvests, and fertile flocks. Today we are wooed by the gods of a capitalist and materialist culture which promise us abundance, prosperity, and the good life. We are seduced by our consumer society to provide us with those things which we think really matter in life. One of the problems in ancient Israel was that many people believed that they were worshipping Yahweh, but in reality their allegiance was to gods of fertility, prosperity, and physical well-being. I suspect our situation is not much different. As Christians we often live with the allusion that we worship and serve the God of the Bible, but our lifestyle testifies that in reality we serve very different gods. When we as Christians reject a simple lifestyle, in favour of a North American middle-class lifestyle of over-consumption, then we serve the God of Materialism, not the God who encourages us to be rich in the values of God's reign (Matt 6:19–21; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:15–21, 32–

34). When North American Christians maintain a standard of living which most of the world's people can never hope to achieve, and which the earth's environment could never sustain if they could, then we serve the God of Greed, not the biblical God who created the world's resources for the benefit of all God's children. When Christians spend their money on luxurious homes, cars, cottages, and vacations instead of devoting that money to meet the needs of hurting people and to carry on the work of God in this world, then we serve the God of Wealth (or "Mammon" as the New Testament calls it [Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13]), not the God who calls us to seek first the Kingdom.

Walter Wink has made the provocative suggestion that the old gods of paganism are still very much alive, and that denying their existence only allows us to be "unconsciously tyrannized by them."[8] Wink is not arguing for a new form of polytheism, but is encouraging us to adopt a language and way of looking at reality that unmasks the destructive nature of the powers that seek to enslave us as individuals and as a society. I wonder if the ancient gods of fertility, whom the Israelites were tempted to worship, don't continue to live on as the modern Gods of Materialism, Greed, and Consumerism. These are far more than mere abstract concepts, as is illustrated by their ability to enslave millions of people and hold our whole society in their grip. Wink suggests that the way to deal with the gods is to acknowledge their reality, to learn their characteristics, and to become conscious of the way that they affect us at the core of our being.[9] Only then will we be able to subject them to the sovereignty of the God of gods.

Given the temptation we modern Christians face to serve other gods, one of the marks of true prophets in our age will be that they help us name and understand the gods who seek to seduce and enslave us. As Deuteronomy warned the Israelites (13:1–5), there are in the larger culture, and even within the community of faith, false prophets who can produce impressive signs and wonders but who ultimately lead us to follow other gods. True prophets will help us sort out what it means to pledge our allegiance to the one God of the Bible.

A second guideline for distinguishing between a true and false prophetic word is found in Jeremiah 28, the story referred to at the outset of this essay. The prophets Hananiah and Jeremiah are locked in a conflict over who has true insight into God's plans for the future. Hananiah announces that in the near future God will intervene and

[8] Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 123. See his discussion on 108–127.

[9] Ibid., 123.

defeat the hated Babylonians, and then the people will experience liberation (28:2–4). Jeremiah's message all along has been that Babylonian hegemony will last for a long time and that the people had better accept this reality (27:1–22). In response to Hananiah's promise of imminent deliverance, Jeremiah utters these words.

> The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet. (Jeremiah 28:8–9)

Jeremiah looks back on a long prophetic history, and he summarizes that history as being one of announcing disaster and judgment. If a prophet deviates from this tradition by announcing salvation, then the prophet can be validated only by the fulfilment of the word of deliverance.

There are at least two problems with this criterion. The first is that it is not helpful in assisting people in the heat of the moment to discern between true and false prophecy. If people had to wait until the fulfilment of the prophetic word before they could know if the message was true or false, by then it was far too late. The prophets called for, and often the political situation demanded, an immediate response to the prophetic word. A second problem with this passage from Jeremiah is that it characterizes true prophecy as judgment prophecy. This is certainly the dominant tone of the prophetic literature, and the failure to announce judgment is one of the things false prophets are criticized for most often.[10] Yet, despite the emphasis on judgment, virtually every book of prophecy in the Bible also contains promises of future salvation. That is certainly true even of the book of Jeremiah, which contains many passages that look for a time of God's renewed favour in the future (see especially chaps. 30–32). However, for Jeremiah and many of the other prophets, there is no deliverance this side of judgment. According to the judgment prophets, the people have sinned grievously by forsaking their God and practising injustice. Such a lifestyle brings horrendous consequences, and there will be no salvation until these consequences have been both accepted and lived through. The prophets of salvation have a very different analysis, as they do not perceive their people's deeds as being so evil as to merit such severe judgment.

Few religious communities like to see themselves in a negative light, and fewer still like to see themselves standing under divine judgment. Yet it is clear that most of the prophetic books of the

[10] See 1 Kgs 22:1–28; Jer 5:12–13, 30–31; 6:13–15=8:10–12; 14:13–18; 23:16–22; 26:7–15; 27:8–22; 28:1–17; 29:8–9; Ezek 13:1–16; 22:28–31; Lam 2:14.

Bible have deliberately been edited and shaped in such a way that, in their final form, the message alternates between judgment and salvation. God's people live their lives between these two poles of salvation and judgment. God is a God who calls for faithfulness, righteousness, and justice. The tradition of judgment prophecy reminds us that God takes human sin with utmost seriousness.[11] However, the final form of the prophetic books asserts that as God's people we also live under God's salvation. God's ultimate will and final word for us is not judgment, but well-being, wholeness, and deliverance. Nevertheless, as Jeremiah warns, any prophet who comes to God's people only with a message of deliverance, should immediately be suspect.

The third criterion is closely related to the previous one, and should perhaps not even be treated separately. True prophets are painfully honest in pointing out the failings of God's people, because only such an honest assessment can lead to repentance, healing, and new life. Jeremiah says of his prophetic opponents:

> They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,
> saying, "Peace, peace,"
> when there is no peace. (Jer 6:14=8:11; cf., 23:17)

Jeremiah's contemporary, Ezekiel, compares the actions of false prophets who announce only peace and well-being to smearing whitewash onto a crumbling wall, and thereby obscuring the true condition of the wall (Ezek 13:10–16; 22:28). God had hoped for something more from the prophets.

> The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress. And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. (Ezek 22:29–30)

The book of Lamentations sums up the results of such prophecy which does not expose human guilt and sin.

> Your prophets have seen for you
> false and deceptive visions;
> they have not exposed your iniquity
> to restore your fortunes,
> but have seen oracles for you
> that are false and misleading. (2:14)

[11] Despite making this statement, I want to be clear that I do not promote a simplistic interpretation of history which sees suffering as a sign of God's punishment for unfaithfulness, and which views material well-being as a sign of God's favour upon faithful Christians and a faithful church.

True prophets do not call attention to the sin of God's people out of malicious delight or because they enjoy the prospect of divine judgment. True prophets expose evil and sin because ultimately such exposure holds the possibility of repentance and salvation or restoration of fortunes, in the words of Lamentations, or repairing the wall, as Ezekiel puts it. False assurances of divine favour in the face of great sin are so dangerous because they obscure the real condition of God's people; they whitewash a crumbling wall, and allow people to continue living with allusions about themselves (see Jer 23:14). Only a realistic facing up to our sin, our brokenness, and our shortcomings makes repentance, healing, and new life possible. True prophecy comes with a frank and realistic assessment of the individual and corporate life of God's people. True prophecy issues God's call for repentance and God's call for just and righteous living.

The fourth and final guideline for distinguishing between true and false prophecy is the criterion of morality. Micah asserts that some prophets tailor their message according to how well they get paid (Mic 3:5,11). Ezekiel charges certain prophets with causing the death of innocent people (Ezek 13:17–23), and Jeremiah accuses prophets of committing adultery (Jer 23:10,14; 29:23) and promoting wickedness (23:14). One scholar, who has dealt with the issue of true and false prophecy at some length, concludes that the criterion of morality is essentially useless because, after all, even an immoral person can sometimes speak the truth in God's name, and even a thoroughly moral person may sometimes be mistaken in discerning the divine will. Robert Carroll summarizes the matter by using an analogy, "This is the old problem of 'would a good man make a better pair of shoes than a good cobbler?'"[12]

Analogies like this can be enlightening, if there is indeed a close correspondence between the two items being compared in the analogy. Analogies can also be quite misleading, if they suggest that two situations are similar when in fact they are not. There can be little doubt that a competent but immoral cobbler probably makes a much better pair of shoes than a good person who knows nothing about shoemaking. However, the deeper question is if there is a close similarity between shoemaking and prophesying. I would argue that morality may have little to do with shoemaking or carrying out the duties of many other professions, but that morality has everything to do with prophecy. The prophets were messengers of God, and the God they spoke for was a God who demanded faithfulness, righteousness, justice, and basic human decency. It was

[12] Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 193.

the task of the prophets to be closely attuned to the divine will so they could communicate that will to the people, and so they could point out any breaches in the covenant relationship between Israel and God. In order to perform this function the prophets themselves had to be persons of high moral standing and sensitivity, whose personal lifestyle and message promoted adherence to God's will.[13]

It is important to recognize that, while the criterion of morality may be helpful, it also has serious limitations. As mentioned earlier, even an immoral person can sometimes speak the truth in God's name, and even a thoroughly moral person may be mistaken in discerning the divine will. And yet, when we see persons acting in ways that are incongruent with our convictions about our faith tradition and Christian morality, or are inconsistent with what these persons themselves proclaim publicly in their speeches, sermons, lectures, or writings, then their credibility is weakened and it becomes very difficult to hear the "truth" of their words. This is one of the reasons the crossing of sexual boundaries by pastors or Christian teachers is so devastating for the victims and so detrimental to the witness of the church. Such actions rip apart word and deed in a way that destroys the individual's and the institution's credibility.

In contrast, when word and deed come together in the life of an individual, and arise out of a deep commitment to our faith tradition, then a powerful witness to the reality of God's word is created, and an invitation is extended to others to live in light of that word. I remember the day more than 20 years ago now when I helped Waldemar move his mother into an apartment. She was aging and the time had come for her to sell her house and move into smaller living quarters. Understandably, the move was emotionally difficult, and I remember vividly the care with which Waldemar arranged the furniture and some other items in the new apartment—not because that would be their permanent position, but so that when his mother walked in, the apartment would have a homey and comfortable feel about it. That day I learned more about the commandment to honour one's father and mother (Exod 20:12) than I ever could have learned about it in any lecture or article. The criterion of morality is by no means foolproof, but the kind of witness involving the unity of word and deed and faith tradition is certainly one of the marks of true prophecy in any age.

I believe that Waldemar was correct in observing that the Christian community will continue to struggle with the question of who speaks for God on issues of importance to our life and faith,

[13] For an excellent discussion of why personal morality was central to prophetic ministry, see Sigmund Mowinckel, "'The Spirit' and the 'Word' in the Pre-exilic Reforming Prophets," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53 (1934): 219–126.

that is, how we can know the "prophet" whom the Lord has truly sent. The history of biblical prophecy informs us that there are no formulae or foolproof criteria which we can apply to every situation. And yet we are not left entirely without guidance. The true spokesperson of God will remind us of the first commandment, and will help us sort out what it means to pledge allegiance only to the Lord our God. The faithful prophet will not just announce to us words of divine grace and favour, but will also place us under the divine word which judges our sin, our unfaithfulness, and our injustice. The true spokesperson for God will not whitewash a crumbling wall, but will expose our sins and shortcomings to the light of day, so that we do not live with allusions about ourselves, but are confronted with our need for repentance and healing and new life. The true prophet will model a life that brings together word and lifestyle and our faith tradition in such a way that a powerful witness is created to the reality of God's word. Then indeed we may know that "the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

Beware of Burning Bushes
A Biblical-Theological Foundation for the Ministry of Political Advocacy[1]

Dorothy Jean Weaver

To live as aware and informed Christians within the global village of the early twenty-first century is to hear daily the call to political advocacy. Regardless of our nationalities and social backgrounds, we all are confronted day by day with structural injustices deeply rooted in the soil of human society. And whether it is vicariously on the television screen or "up close and personal" in our own everyday lives, we regularly witness the brutal impact of such structural injustices. There is no alternative, if we keep our eyes and ears open to the world around us.

Then it is that we as Christians hear the call to political advocacy. This is the call not merely to show compassion to the oppressed, but rather to challenge the very structures in society which create this oppression in the first place. It is to call the powerful to account for all those legal means by which they brutalize the powerless. This is seldom a comfortable call. Nor does it usually present itself as easy or safe. Political advocacy, by its very definition, arouses controversy and gives rise to opposition. And we as Christians frequently debate whether the political sphere is even an appropriate place in which to expend our energies.

[1] This essay is a revision of an oral address by the same title presented at the Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office Spring Seminar, April 13, 1997. The biblical citations are based on the New Revised Standard Version.

Does political advocacy in fact belong to our mandate as Christians? And if it does, what are the biblical-theological underpinnings of this mandate? Where in the Scriptures do we encounter an imperative to challenge the political powers and to call them to account for their oppression of the powerless? And who is the God who confronts us with this imperative?

Multiple methods are available for resolving these questions. One approach would be to do an encyclopedic search for biblical perspectives on political advocacy. This sort of approach would include the study of significant word groups related to the topic at hand (for example, widows and orphans, the needy, deliverance). It would also include the study of relevant types or genres of texts (such as, prophetic call accounts, prophetic pronouncements to kings and high officials, and prophetic pronouncements concerning social abuses carried out by the rich and powerful). Such an approach would provide a more or less panoramic view of the biblical landscape with the question of political advocacy in focus.

An alternative approach would be to identify a single text as a "case in point" for reflecting on the issue of political advocacy. Such an approach would involve analysis of the vocabulary, structure, and overall dynamics of the chosen text in a search for the specific outlook of one writer on the question of political advocacy.

It is this approach which I have adopted for the present study. And the text which I have chosen as my "case in point" is Exodus 3:1–4:17, the account of Moses' encounter at the burning bush. If there is any one individual within the framework of the biblical accounts who is called very directly to a ministry of political advocacy, it surely is Moses. And Moses' experience is one that can offer us helpful insights as we think about the meaning of political advocacy and its significance for us as Christians. Accordingly, in this study I want to focus on the experiences of Moses recounted in the Exodus text and to reflect on the very real danger—and the very real gift—of encountering burning bushes.

But I want to do something else too. As I reflect on Moses' experiences, I also want to reflect on my own personal experiences from a recent sabbatical leave in the Middle East. For four very tense months I lived at Tantur Ecumenical Center just south of Jerusalem and directly on the borderline between Israel and the Occupied Territories. The experiences I encountered there were ones which had the impact of a burning bush to me. And, just like Moses, I have not found it possible to disregard that "burning bush" experience or to walk away and forget about it. My life has not been changed in ways nearly as dramatic as the things that happened to Moses. But it has been changed in significant ways. So I offer these personal reflections as a word of testimony to the call of God

on my life, and as a word of encouragement to others as they watch out for the burning bushes they themselves may encounter.

The story of Moses' encounter at the burning bush begins in Exodus 3:1–10:

> Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro,
> the priest of Midian.
> He led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb,
> the mountain of God.
> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him
> in a flame of fire out of a bush;
> He looked, and the bush was blazing,
> yet it was not consumed.
> Then Moses said,
> I must turn aside and look at this great sight
> and see why the bush is not burned up.
> When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see,
> God called to him out of the bush,
> Moses, Moses!
> And he said,
> Here I am.
> Then [God] said,
> Come no closer!
> Remove the sandals from your feet,
> For the place on which you are standing is holy ground.
> He said further,
> I am the God of your father,
> the God of Abraham,
> the God of Isaac,
> and the God of Jacob.
> And Moses hid his face,
> For he was afraid to look at God.
> Then the LORD said,
> I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt.
> I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.
> Indeed, I know their sufferings,
> and I have come down
> to deliver them from the Egyptians,
> and to bring them up out of that land
> to a good and broad land,
> a land flowing with milk and honey,
> to the country of
> the Canaanites,
> the Hittites,
> the Amorites,
> the Perizzites,
> the Hivites,
> and the Jebusites.
> The cry of the Israelites has now come to me;

I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.
So come, I will send you to Pharaoh
to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. (Exod 3:1–10)

This story offers a number of vital insights into the character of God and, by the same token, into the nature of political advocacy. Perhaps the most fundamental of these insights is found in the parallel passages in verses 7 and 9. When the Lord finally succeeds in gaining Moses' full and awestruck attention, he announces the reason for this highly extraordinary encounter. That reason lies grounded in a crucial self-revelation. In verse 7 God says, I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings. And in verse 9 God repeats the same essential message: The cry of the Israelites has now come to me. I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

For us as Christians, political advocacy is grounded above all in the fact that we serve a God who "sees," "hears" and "knows" the sufferings of his people. Our God is not one who remains divinely aloof from the painful and ugly realities of everyday human life. Our God is not one who sits above the fracas in majestic indifference and disregards the individual and corporate brutalities which we as humans and as human societies carry out against each other. No! The God we serve is one who observes the anguish of those who are suffering, the despair of those who are oppressed, the hopelessness, fear and bitterness of those who are powerless in the face of great injustices. The God we serve is one who notices all this, one who cares about it all! We serve a God who is distracted by human suffering!

And for us as Christians this is where political advocacy has its necessary point of origin. If we have committed our lives to a God who sees and hears the anguish of the oppressed, then our eyes must be open as well to the same scenes of human distress and our ears must be open to the same voices of human despair. Moses, for his part, may well think that he has escaped from the ugly sights and sounds of oppression which face the Israelites in Pharaoh's Egypt. Here, on the backside of the desert, he may well think that he can forget about all of that. But he can't. God still hears the cries of the Israelites, even when Moses no longer can. And God pursues Moses all the way into the desert and ignites a bush in front of him to remind him of what he has tried to blot out of his memory. For a very simple reason: God wants to work with Moses. But God cannot work with Moses until Moses also sees and hears what God has seen and heard. To carry out the work of God, it is essential that we have the eyes and the ears of God. It is that simple.

I was not thinking about Moses last year. At no time or place

did I ever see any supernatural foliage. And neither did I hear the audible voice of God. But I saw Moses' burning bush. And I definitely heard the message that God had for Moses. I am convinced of it. For me it came down to the gradual awareness that I was in fact listening to the sounds around me in a way that I had never before listened. It was a very tense time in the Holy Land. Tantur lay on the borderline between Israel and the Occupied Territories, right up the hill from an Israeli checkpoint. There was a strict closure on the West Bank. Palestinians could not enter Jerusalem legally. But they did try to enter—through our back gate and across our property. The Israeli soldiers knew this well. And they patrolled the back gate and the Tantur property with increasing regularity. They also patrolled from the air in a daily helicopter overflight to search for Palestinians hiding in our bushes. All this added up to a lot of sounds. And these sounds I was hearing grabbed my attention and completely distracted me, no matter where I was or what I was doing. A few lines from a letter home describe their effect on me:

> *April 1–3, 1996.* I have, over time, become aware of how very sensitive I have become to all the sounds around me, particularly the "mechanical" sounds: helicopter sounds; sirens of all types; deep, ugly beeps that emanate from the check-point; loud, arrogant voices being broadcast over loudspeakers; and even just the purely human sounds of loud, arrogant voices (attached to powerful machine guns and a far more powerful military infrastructure) barking out commands to hapless and powerless civilians living under hostile occupation! I have discovered that I "hear" all these sounds very keenly, no matter where I am or what I am doing; and when I do, my first instinctive thought is, "Now who is in trouble?" or "Now who is being pursued?" or "Now what awful thing has happened?" My instincts are now well trained to classify all "extraordinary" sounds as hostile ones. That seems to be what 2½ months of living here has done to me already.

I didn't think about it in those terms. But in listening to all those sounds and allowing myself to become distracted by them, I was in fact standing in front of my own burning bush and listening to the voice of God, just as Moses did. Most importantly, for the first time ever in my very sheltered life, I was hearing, up close and very personal, the sounds of oppression and the cries of the oppressed, those sounds that God has always heard. This was the first step for me down Moses' road. But it was only the first step. There was much more to follow. The story of Moses once again points the way:

> Then the LORD said,
> I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt;

I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.
Indeed, I know their sufferings,
and I have come down
to deliver them from the Egyptians. . . .
The cry of the Israelites has now come to me;
I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.
So come, I will send you to Pharaoh
to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.
(Exod 3:7–8a, 9–10)

There is a sudden and unexpected twist in this text which completely transforms God's message to Moses. In 3:7 God starts out by speaking in first-person language about the situation of the Israelites: "I have observed, I have heard, I know, I have seen the oppression of my people." The message here is that God cares about the Israelites, a message which restates and reinforces the third-person language of the immediately preceding text, 2:23–25:

After a long time the king of Egypt died.
The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out.
Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God.
God *heard* their groaning,
And God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
God *looked upon* the Israelites,
and God *took notice* of them. (italics mine)

In 3:8 God continues on in first-person address to announce the deliverance of the Israelites: "And I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians." Now, in God's own words, it is God's time to take decisive action on behalf of the Israelites. Moses, for his part, has already made his own attempt to rescue the Israelites from their Egyptian overlords (2:11–12). This attempt ended in complete failure. On the one hand, not even the oppressed Israelites appreciated his efforts on their behalf (2:14). And, on the other hand, Moses feared for his life at the hand of Pharaoh and was forced to flee to the land of Midian (2:15). For this reason Moses now finds himself back on the far side of the desert, "beyond the wilderness," tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian (3:1). Moses has done the thing he knows how to do. He has taken his social action. And he has failed. Now it is God's turn to act! Surely God can do what needs to be done! God has the power! God cares about the suffering Israelites! Let God take care of it!

But no sooner must these thoughts have flashed through Moses' mind when he hears God saying, "So come, I will send YOU to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (3:10). Suddenly, without warning, the first-person language concerning God's actions on behalf of the Israelites is transformed effectively

into second-person imperative directed at Moses himself. God wills to bring deliverance to those who are oppressed! And God is already present on the human scene! God has already "come" (3:8) to bring the deliverance for which the Israelites cry out! But the deliverance that God has come to bring demands the personal involvement of Moses. He is himself the deliverance that God has come to bring! This is clearly no spectator sport, where Moses gets to sit on the sidelines and watch while God defeats the Israelites' oppressors! Rather, God calls Moses right into the middle of the action. "I am going to deliver my people," God says to Moses. "And I am going to do it through you!"

God has indeed come to work in our world, to bring deliverance to those who need it. But if we take our cues from the story of Moses, we see that God has chosen to carry out this deliverance not, above all, through super-natural displays of divine power (although they may still occur!), but rather through the agency of ordinary human beings! God chooses to work with real people such as Moses, real people such as ourselves, real live human beings, ordinary folks with ordinary names and ordinary gifts and ordinary fears and anxieties, to carry out God's purposes in this world! It is we, the people of God, in all our humanity, whom God has called to the work of deliverance!

I stumbled onto this awareness somewhat gradually last year, and by means of an ongoing dialogue with God in my prayers and in my prayer journal. Here are fragments of a journal entry from March 28:

> Lord, why is it that you have brought me here? Who is it that you want me to become out of my encounter with this world? And what do you want me to do with this education I am gaining and this conversion I am undergoing? Am I simply to go home and get caught up once again in a totally different world, and leave all these people and their grief and suffering behind me? If that is not the answer, what is it then? . . . Is there something more concrete that you want me to do with this education? . . . To what and for what are you seeking to convert me? . . . God, I feel inundated, overwhelmed by the incredible sweep of events and the unrelenting tension of living in this land right here and right now! What do I do with all these feelings and impressions and all this anger and all this pain? What do I do with all this? And how can I once again become a productive human being, with focus and direction and ability to concentrate? O God, what an academic disaster this has become for me! And what a real-life education!

This was another step for me down Moses' road. But there was still much more to come. The story of Moses is once again instructive. No sooner has Moses heard and understood the words of God calling

him into action than he comes back with a very quick response. And his response makes it clear that Moses does not like the prospect of being God's agent of deliverance!

What the writer of Exodus tells us reveals that Moses has a very fertile mind capable of thinking up all manner of things which could well go wrong with the mission to which God has called him. In Exodus 3:11–4:17 Moses comes up with an entire litany of "what if's" that he lays in front of God:

> Who am I
> that I should go to Pharaoh,
> and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? (3:11)
>
> If I come to the Israelites and say to them,
> The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,
> and they ask me,
> What is his name?
> what shall I say to them? (3:13)
>
> But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say,
> The LORD did not appear to you! (4:1)
>
> O, my LORD, I have never been eloquent,
> neither in the past
> nor even now that you have spoken to your servant;
> But I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. (4:10)

And when all possible logic has been exhausted, Moses comes back with a final desperate rejoinder (4:13): "O, my LORD, please send someone else!" Moses does not want to be the agent of God's deliverance! He knows that he cannot do it! He has already tried! And it didn't work! God has made a huge mistake this time! And if Moses doesn't set the record straight and make a few things very clear to God, he will be handed a job that he knows is completely beyond his capabilities! Moses is clearly terrified by the call of God!

But God does not back off. Neither does God get angry. At least not until Moses refuses outright. Instead, God calmly, patiently, firmly, persistently responds to Moses' panic with words of assurance and encouragement and with deeds that empower Moses for his task. Every time Moses raises a new objection, God comes right back with a new word of courage or a new act of empowerment.

> I will be with you;
> And this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you:
> When you have brought the people out of Egypt,
> you shall worship God on this mountain. (3:12)
> I AM WHO I AM! . . .
> Thus you shall say to the Israelites,
> I AM has sent me to you. (3:14)

> What is that in your hand?
> Throw it on the ground.
> Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail. (4:2a, 3a, 4a)
> Put your hand inside your cloak.
> Put your hand back into your cloak. (4:6a, 7a)
>
> Who gives speech to mortals?
> Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind?
> Is it not I, the LORD?
> Now go,
> And I will be with your mouth
> and teach you what you are to speak. (4:11–12)

And finally, when even God's patience has evidently worn thin, God still comes back with one final gift for Moses:

> What of your brother Aaron the Levite?
> I know that he can speak fluently;
> Even now he is coming out to meet you,
> and when he sees you his heart will be glad.
> You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth;
> And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth,
> And will teach you what you shall do.
> He indeed shall speak for you to the people;
> He shall serve as a mouth for you,
> and you shall serve as God for him.
> Take in your hand this staff,
> with which you shall perform the signs. (4:14–17)

The message is very clear. God wants to work deliverance through Moses. And God will take not take "No" for an answer. Moses is terrified. But God promises Moses everything that Moses needs to carry out his task: God's presence (3:12); God's name and authority (3:14); God's power to do things which Moses truly cannot do (4:2–5, 6–9, 11–12). And last, but not least, God gives Moses a partner, a human partner, Moses' own brother Aaron, to work together with Moses, to assist Moses with the things for which Moses is not the most gifted (4:14–17).

God has chosen to work through Moses. And God has likewise empowered Moses for the task he has to do. Moses can rest in this assurance. And so can we. Whenever and wherever it is that God sends us to "Pharaoh" to "bring God's people out of Egypt," we too can rest in the assurance that God will empower us for that task. God will take our human fears and anxieties and transform them into the power that we need for whatever tasks we have been called to do. This is God's truth; and this is Good News!

I discovered this Good News for myself last spring through very personal experience. There were moments in which I found myself doing things that I could never have anticipated doing. And

in those moments I often found myself empowered in ways that I might never have believed possible. I offer one such moment as a testimony to the faithfulness of God:

> *April 29, 1996.* The day still wasn't over. When we got back to Tantur from our field trip, I took Sandra, who had been with us for the day, back to the Bethlehem Room balcony to see the back gate and the back lane. As we were standing there, we saw a Palestinian couple come up the back lane to the corner; and instead of turning the corner toward the back gate, they came through an open gate into the fields down below the back wall. Presently we saw them climbing the wall, much to my very great astonishment. What made this so critical was that we had also seen soldiers down in the vicinity of the back gate; so we knew these folks would undoubtedly get caught. As they came down off the wall, they were in fact noticed. And at that point, I said, "I'm going down there!" So I headed out by the front door and around the building to the back path.
>
> By the time I got there, the soldiers were inside the property and had already contacted the couple and evidently instructed them to come out the gate. (When you're facing men with machine guns, it doesn't take a lot to "encourage" your compliance!) So as I headed down the back path, they were slowly and hesitantly making their way toward the back gate as well. I passed the young Muslim woman on my way down the path; and I came up right behind her husband or boyfriend as he went through the gate. I turned left and headed straight out the lane toward Hebron Road, walked out around the corner and out of sight, then turned right around and headed back the way I had come.
>
> I walked back as slowly and deliberately as I could, so as to have as much opportunity as possible to observe what was going on before I went in the gate. As I got within sight of the back gate area, I saw the Muslim woman sitting on a chair and her companion standing behind her. They were obviously being detained. Two soldiers stood a short distance away, just outside the gate. Four pairs of eyes watched me as I approached the little crowd; and the silence was electric. There was no sound but the sound of my footsteps on the rocky lane. I looked into the eyes of the young woman as I approached; her face was full of despair and dejection. I don't know what my own eyes registered—I hope compassion—but I know that I felt utterly pained and very helpless. I wanted to be able to help these people, this very sad woman and her companion; but I had no obvious power to do so.
>
> Just as I was about to walk in the gate, one of the soldiers addressed me in Hebrew. When I indicated that I did not understand, he repeated his question in English, "Where are you from?" "From the United States," I said. And since he had addressed me, I decided to address him in return. "Can't these

people go?" "No." "Why not?" (I always pretend to the ultimate ignorance, when addressing soldiers, so that they need to explain everything to me.) And then he went into an attempted explanation of why they couldn't go. He wasn't macho or loud or abusive. He didn't ridicule me. He consulted with his companion to find the right English word to respond to me. It appeared that he truly was "just doing his duty," as the captain at the checkpoint had instructed him to. "How long must they stay here?" "I don't know. I will have to ask." And presently, two more soldiers walked up, one of whom seemed to be in charge of this little patrol group. There was a brief conversation between the soldiers and then an extended interchange in Hebrew between the lead soldier and the Muslim man. The soldier had papers in his hand, papers which ultimately turned out to belong to the Palestinians. I couldn't understand the conversation, except for "Lo, lo" (No, no) on the part of the Palestinian man and "min Hebron" (from Hebron).

I said nothing. I just stood there, right outside the gate, and watched the proceedings. I had no idea how long I was going to stand there, or what my standing there actually was proving. But I figured it was my right to stand there and observe, as long as they didn't chase me off; and I also wanted the Palestinian couple to know that someone was watching and was caring about what happened to them. The woman was basically overcome with dejection. She put her head in her hands. And her companion came around in front of her and lifted her face to his. You can't believe the pain of helpless watching until you have had to stand by in such a situation.

After quite a bit of dialogue had transpired, the lead soldier turned to me and said, "You have a problem?" "Yes," I said, "these people aren't free to go." "Why are you arguing?" "Am I saying anything? I'm just standing here." "The soldier told me that you were arguing with him." "I live up there [pointing up the hill to Tantur], and I am very sad about what happens down here." A bit incredulous: "Why are you sad?" "Because people aren't allowed to walk freely. Because they are stopped by men with machine guns." With a genuine smile and even greater incredulity: "I wouldn't shoot them!" "How do they know that? Why can't they simply go back where they came from?" "She came from Hebron. I'm just doing my job. If you have a problem, tell your problem to the captain at the checkpoint."

This soldier was perhaps the most polite, almost deferential soldier that I have encountered in my very lengthy and extensive (!!) history of encountering these folks. It may not be apparent from the soldier's words; but he, like the first soldier with whom I had spoken, was polite and gentle and neither angry nor macho nor abusive in his manner with me nor, I think, with the Palestinian man. Their conversation was engaged, but hardly abusive. There was, I think, a bit more dialogue in Hebrew. Then, much to my overwhelming astonishment, the lead soldier

handed the papers back to the Palestinian man and reached out his hand to shake hands with him! I was completely dumbfounded! This was the last thing I expected to see happen! Such a token of personal respect I have never before witnessed between soldiers and Palestinians, and surely not as initiated by the soldiers! The two men shook hands, then the couple seemed to be preparing to leave. I decided that my mission had obviously been accomplished; and I turned my back and walked in the gate and up the path. When I got up to the building, I went back to the Bethlehem Room balcony, to where people had been watching the proceedings at the back gate. And I inquired of Sandra whether they had really let the couple go. "Yes," she said, "we saw them walking down the back lane."

I'm still overcome with astonishment and gratitude for what happened. I truly don't know whether my presence at the back gate had anything in the world to do with what happened. It seems a bit presumptuous to imagine that it did. Who knows? Vivi thought so, to be sure. "Oh yes!" she said, "they don't like anybody watching them when they are intimidating people!" Whatever the case may be, I just know that I was following my strong instinct to be present and to watch whenever possible. And this time there was a victory, a partial victory, that is. The couple obviously wanted to go to Jerusalem; and they were, to be sure, kept from doing so. But they were likewise released, and in the most civil and respectful manner imaginable! A tiny victory in a very large war! But thank God even for tiny victories!

Two final words of reflection emerge from our focus on the story of Moses: a word of caution and a word of encouragement. The word of caution comes first. Political advocacy, whatever shape that takes for us as Christians, will put us on dangerous ground. This is so for several reasons. First, we never know where God is going to take us. We can never anticipate God's moves in advance. And secondly, there are always forces out there who are dead set against God's purposes in this world to set people free from oppression. This is the truth in our world. And we cannot escape its ugly reality.

There is also a word of encouragement. Political advocacy, whatever shape that takes for us as Christians, will also put us on holy ground. There is a very simple reason for this. Wherever we find ourselves engaged in God's work of setting people free from oppression, that is where we will find God; since that is the work that God is about in our broken and suffering world.

Beware of burning bushes! They may change your life forever! God grant that they do so!

Farming Encounters the Bible
"What if I don't want to compete against my neighbour down the road?"

Gary F. Daught

> *They said [to Joseph],*
> *"You have saved our lives;*
> *may it please my lord,*
> *we will be slaves to Pharaoh."*
> (Genesis 47:25)

I live in a city in the southwestern United States, but for a time I pastored a rural congregation in southern Manitoba. It was also in Manitoba that I got to know Waldemar Janzen. I have always been partial to Old Testament studies, so my association with him was a natural. But more, it was Waldemar who helped me appreciate that often the Old Testament is the *better* resource for thinking through certain issues of faith than the New—better, because the New Testament may pass over such issues in silence, or because it simply assumes the validity of the Old Testament's perspective without further comment. It is true that Jesus frequently drew on agricultural images in his teaching. But these were primarily descriptive.[1] It is

[1] Gordon Zerbe, in a private correspondence, has suggested to me that, while less explicit than the Old Testament, the New Testament is not entirely silent on the issues of agriculture and land use. For example, implicit in Mark 12:1–12 (probably explicit for Jesus' original listeners) is a critique of land tenure, use, and land conversion patterns. Similarly, we might look at the parables codifying systems of unjust agricultural arrangements (e.g., Matt 20:1–16; Lk 12:16–31; 16:1–13, 19–31). The quotation of Psalm 37:7 in Matthew 5:5 should ultimately be taken in its original sense, involving land redistribution (the humble poor shall inherit land [not generic earth]). Also, the allusion to Jubilee themes in Luke 4:16–30 (cf., Leviticus 25) envision concrete land redistribution.

the Old Testament that grapples extensively with the role of faith applied to such concerns as land use and agriculture. These struggles can be carried into our time with remarkable relevance.

Maybe I'm just being nostalgic, but I think the Canadian prairies left their mark on me—especially in the autumn. It is then that my thoughts are drawn to those endless fields of heavy-headed wheat and barley, rippling like golden seas to the very edge of the horizon. The farmers venture out into those golden seas with their machinery to bring in the fruit of the earth. The crisp air and intense blue skies swirl with clouds of chaff that spew from the tails of those monstrous combines, obscuring the sun. The farmers ride them deep into the night. Their lights rove nervously back and forth across the fields, gripped by a tense and fearful sense of urgency. Yes, they are big and powerful. But they are defenceless against a Canadian prairie winter. No one relaxes until the very last of the golden seas is mown close to the black earth, and the treasured grain is safely hauled to the storage bin or delivered to the elevator. Only then, when the harvest is complete, does one sense the community's collective sense of release. All had been waiting anxiously, together. The long months of bitter cold loom ahead. But the harvest is successful, and so winter is robbed of its deathly terror in a mood of celebration and thanksgiving. Although I was an outsider and a stranger to this rhythm of seedtime and harvest, it didn't take me long to appreciate its deep spiritual power.

The harvest is life. I am thankful for having had the opportunity to experience that truth first-hand. I told my rural church people of my appreciation. "We who live in the midst of the fields have been blessed to participate directly in the miracle of growth that God has granted to the seed sown there. Our friends living in the cities do not understand this. They still believe that bread comes from the local Safeway."

But even farmers occasionally can forget, and at times I would have to add, "Yet even we, who daily witness the miracle from the beginning, are in danger of losing consciousness of the harvest as life. We are no longer certain that it is a blessing to participate in the miracle. Even as we work the land we feel ourselves alienated from it. The spiritual bond we have with the land has been weakened. Our lives and livelihoods are increasingly tied to the economics of the harvest. A modern agricultural mind set has reduced the harvest to a commodity—a product to be bought and sold—whose value is measured in dollars and cents, tied to markets and international trading agreements. We reach out our hand to catch some of the miracle as it spills out of the back of our grain trucks. But with curses of frustration on our lips we sin because we have been led to believe that that which sustains life is without value."

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A number of years ago I attended a conference on the globalization of agriculture and the implications this held for Canadian farmers. The keynote speaker over the lunch hour was the federal Minister of Agriculture. I found his comments that day very troubling. The Minister accepted the ideology of the global marketplace and its demands, and he perceived the entire process of agriculture solely in economic terms—essentially stripped of its human, relational and environmental dimensions. The only goals worthy of pursuit in this ideology (beyond profit of course) were *productivity* and *efficiency*. And the only driving force was *competition*. The Minister intonated that each farmer must think only about themselves in this global economy. The farmer *had no choice* but to vigorously compete for survival, even if it put the neighbour down the road out of business.

I was troubled not only by what the Agriculture Minister said. I was also troubled by the way he said it. Someone in the audience that afternoon had the presence of mind to speak up and ask, "What if I don't want to compete against my neighbour down the road?" The Minister looked at this person as if he was speaking in a foreign language. After a second or two of silence he replied in a patronizing tone, "Well, if that's what you want to do, I suppose that's up to you."

It was clear to me that the Minister (who was himself a farmer) had sold himself to espouse an ideology which idolized productivity and efficiency as its gods. To worship these gods properly, *everything* would ultimately have to be sacrificed—the environment, the land, a satisfying and meaningful lifestyle, even family and community. Indeed, the implementation of this ideology was already at work. The countryside was being emptied of its people, and its communities were being destroyed. But perhaps the Minister was unaware of the basic incompatibility of these two notions.

I thought about what impact this ideology was having upon the church community that I pastored in rural Manitoba. I tried to put myself in the place of a farmer. If what the Agriculture Minister was saying was true, then the person sitting next to me in the pew on Sunday—the person I was worshipping with in the name of Jesus Christ—was the same person I was in a bitter economic struggle with on Monday morning. And if that was true, then perhaps the idea of community we professed as a church had become only an illusion. Perhaps *we* were unaware of the basic incompatibility of these two notions.

I had occasion to talk with a number of farmers in my congregation. As if drowned out by the chant of productivity and efficiency, each in their own way echoed a similar refrain: "We have no choice. This is bigger than us. It is out of our control." Some

were genuinely concerned about what was happening to them, to their community, but they were afraid of the implications of opting out of the system, especially if they were carrying significant debt on their farm operations. They were forced to play along—put in the crop again this year; extend the line of credit; apply the anhydrous ammonia; spray the herbicide; and the fungicide; and the insecticide; hope for the best. Others were essentially pacified, content to keep their complaints to the daily ritual of coffee shop talk, especially if they were otherwise enjoying the benefits of playing along—a comfortable house, the biggest and newest farm equipment, a fancy four-wheel drive half-ton (which could easily be construed as a farm expense). But whether pacified with "comfort" or silenced by fears, the nagging truth was that these farmers were being robbed of their self-determination. They were becoming subservient to agendas that clearly originated outside their community, and about which they had very little to say. They were becoming slaves on their own land.

* * * * * *

Slaves on their own land. Now where have I heard that before? In 1 Samuel 8 we read how the tribes of Israel asked Samuel to give them a king, to govern them "like other nations." Samuel is displeased by their request, but Yahweh tells him to listen to the people. They are not rejecting Samuel (although it must be admitted Samuel's sons "took bribes and perverted justice" [v. 3]); they are rejecting Yahweh as their king (vv. 7–8). The people thought of the security the king could provide (against the Philistines). But security would come at a price:

> . . . he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. (1 Samuel 8:11–17)

The text uses the word "take" four times, and twice uses a word meaning to "take one tenth." The good labour and produce of the harvest, resources with intrinsic value which sustained community

well-being and self-determination, will be exploited and converted into commodities which flow out of the community to generate a militarized national and transnational economy, and subsidize a non-producing system of government bureaucrats. Practically every aspect of a local community's economic life will be managed by the king until finally, "you shall be his slaves."

Earlier the tribal elders had flatly rejected the king's option (Judges 9). It is not entirely clear why (in spite of the reasons given [vv. 5, 19–20]) the more decentralized system of intertribal mutual aid and defense now was deemed inadequate. An editorial comment at the end of the Book of Judges (21:25; see also 17:6; 18:1; 19:1) suggests that corruption, social and family disintegration, idolatry and military defeat were due to the fact that "in those days there was no king in Israel." Clearly there is ambivalence about whether the monarchy would be a good thing. This ambivalence was to continue as Israel experienced the monarchy first-hand.

The 1 Samuel 8 text describes the changing state of affairs in a "solemn warning" of what *will* happen. But one wonders whether there isn't also some bitter reflection of what, in fact, *has* happened as a result of this move toward a centralized and self-validating form of government. David brought all the tribes together into one United Kingdom of Israel. But it was King Solomon who articulated and implemented a full-blown monarchical system, complete with a royal ideology and supportive theology. Some would say that Israel under Solomon experienced a Golden Age. We think of Solomon's patronage of wisdom and learning (1 Kgs 4:29–34), his building acumen, including the glorious temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5–8), development of managed agricultural concerns (1 Kgs 4:22–23), military might (1 Kgs 4:21, 26; 10:26–27), and international prestige, built on trading savvy which included a merchant marine and a vigorous arms trade (1 Kgs 9:26–28; 10:1–15, 28–29). Because of Solomon, Israel was no longer a third-rate, petty kingdom in the ancient Near East (1 Kgs 10:23–25)! The view from those dizzying heights could confidently declare:

> Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. . . . During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees. (1 Kgs 4:20, 26)[2]

Everyone eating, drinking, happy, and living in safety. This is truly a paradisiac vision, and surely what the people had envisioned

[2] Walter Brueggemann, "Monopoly and Marginality in Imagination," in *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 184–204, suggests that in using the words, "all of them under their vines and fig trees," the royal monopoly has co-opted even this modest peasant hope which looked to a day when there would be enough for all, freed from anxiety (cf., Mic 4:1–4).

in requesting a king from Samuel. But was it reality, or only political rhetoric from the speech writer of a regime that had lost touch with its worker and producer classes? How was the Golden Age being financed, fuelled and fed? From international trade? Yes. From military conquest outside the boundaries of Israel? Yes, definitely. But also from burdensome taxes, military conscription and forced labour laid upon the backs of Solomon's own citizens. Solomon reconfigured the map, which once recognized and respected the ancestral tribal landscape, and divided Israel into 12 administrative (read taxation) districts. His policies of control were applied preferentially toward Judah, the northern tribes bearing a greater part of the burden for "provisioning" the royal court and bureaucracy (1 Kgs 4:7–19). Although 1 Kings 9:20–22 denies that Israelite citizens were conscripted for forced labour on Solomon's building projects, 1 Kings 5:13–18 and 11:26–28 appear to dispute that claim. Others would ask: If "everyone" was so well-fed, happy and living securely during Solomon's reign, why did the northern tribes subsequently make their support of Rehoboam (Solomon's son) conditional upon his lightening "the hard service and heavy yoke your father placed on us" (1 Kgs 12:1–4)?[3]

* * * * * *

Maybe the dissenting citizens of Israel just didn't appreciate the social and political appropriateness of their king ruling in such a way as to transform a rough collection of herding and agrarian tribes into a respectable power in the ancient Near East. It is beyond question that a concentration of wealth and royal sponsorship contributed greatly to the growth of knowledge and scholarly pursuit in Israel. From this vantage point, Israel could reflect, perhaps for the first time, on its history in a panoramic way. There is general consensus that during the reign of Solomon, or perhaps already during David's reign,[4] Israel's first coherent history—known as the Yahwist History—was composed out of older oral and written materials.[5] But history writing (historiography) is never innocent in its supposed objectivity. It is always written as an interpretation of events from a given perspective. The Yahwist historian wanted to demonstrate that the promises Yahweh had made to the ancestors

[3] As it turned out, Rehoboam arrogantly refused to negotiate with the tribal leaders. He boasted, "My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions" (1 Kgs 12:11). In response, the "happy" citizens of the north revolted against Rehoboam, which forever tore apart the United Kingdom Solomon had built!

[4] This is the view developed by Robert B. Coote and David Robert Ord, *The Bible's First History* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989).

[5] The Yahwist History includes significant portions of Genesis and Exodus, and parts of Numbers, Joshua and Judges.

find their fulfilment and divine sanction in the United Kingdom of Israel under Solomon. Israel is now truly a great nation, with a great international reputation (name), enjoying a position of blessing, and conceptually capable of being a source of blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:1–3).

Was there a precedent for what Solomon was trying to accomplish in Israel's larger historical memory? Within the complex of ancestor narratives attributed to the Yahwist in Genesis is a description of Joseph's agrarian policy found in Genesis 47:13–26. In its current placement, the description interrupts a narrative telling how Joseph settled his father Jacob and his brothers in "the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses (Goshen)" as a grant from Pharaoh (Gen 47:1–12, 27–28). The text deals with a severe famine in Egypt and Canaan, and so appears to revisit the story of the seven-year famine described in Genesis 41—the famine which set the stage for Joseph's elevation in Pharaoh's court, his reunion with father and brothers, and their subsequent settlement in the land of Egypt. The current text betrays no direct knowledge of the Hebrews in Egypt and, apart from an initial reference to the famine extending to Canaan (47:13–15a), the transactions take place strictly between Joseph (as the unseen Pharaoh's representative) and "all the Egyptians."

In the face of this persistent and severe famine the Egyptians are forced, first to buy (with money, Gen 47:14–15), and subsequently to sell their livestock (vv. 16–17), and then their own bodies and lands to Joseph (Pharaoh) in exchange for food/seed (vv. 18–19). It is observed that the Egyptians are *buying* the food that was *taken* from them in the implementation of Joseph's original agrarian policy (Gen 41:46–49). It is further observed that the Egyptians themselves *initiate* the offer to exchange their bodies and their lands for food. They obviously believed they had no other option. But the famine and Joseph's administration of centralized food resources (cf., Gen 41:33–36, 47–49) become the catalyst for Pharaoh gaining absolute control over the Egyptians and their land. They declare Joseph their saviour and, in gratitude, offer themselves perpetually to be Pharaoh's slaves (Gen 47:25).

How should this story be understood? For in truth, it operates at many levels. One level of interpretation fairly innocently acknowledges and admires Joseph as a person placed, led and gifted by God, who demonstrates God's power and helps to bring about God's salvation (cf., Gen 50:19–21). At a slightly more nuanced level, it is a story that in the telling would offer much satisfaction to an Israelite audience. Joseph, son of Israel (Jacob), a Semite, is given wisdom from God and rises to great power (functionally overshadowing the Pharaoh), to become a saviour of all the

Egyptians. Joseph was sold as a slave into Egypt (Gen 37:25–28). He in turn makes slaves of all the Egyptians. How delightfully ironic![6]

At another level of interpretation the Yahwist historian is describing a present religio-cultural reality in Egypt. The Pharaoh, perceived as deity, was *de facto* owner and manager of the land and its people.[7] Joseph's contribution was to formalize this religious understanding into an effective instrument of state political and economic control. The story is offered to explain the origins and rationale for the perpetual tax in Egypt (Gen 47:26).[8] But further, the story could also offer an interpretive justification of royal power in Israel. Joseph (read Solomon) is the astute socio-political planner and manager, who utilized the intellectual infrastructure and centralized power of the monarchy to bring about salvation (as needed) in his kingdom. How should the citizens of this kingdom respond to Joseph/Solomon's gracious and life-giving use of power? True, there is no famine now, but should they not still bring their harvests, livestock and lands under the wise management of the monarchy? Indeed, like the Egyptians, should they not be willing to offer their very selves as "slaves" to the monarchy?

Even if the people's offer to make themselves "slaves" was only a conventional way of speaking, the appeal to Joseph's action in Egypt as a precedent has dangerous implications for governance in Israel. The line between an exercise of power which brings life and salvation or oppression and slavery is easily blurred. Perhaps Joseph was truly able to shelter his father and brothers for a time from the impact of his own policies. But how long would it be before "a new Pharaoh arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exod 1:8)? Although the Yahwist historian likely composed his account under royal sponsorship and was generally supportive of its development (as was noted above from Gen 12:1–3), he clearly was not simply a propagandist for the monarchy. He was also aware of the dangers of concentrated power.[9] He knew Joseph had walked a dangerous line. Could it be that he knew Solomon was now walking a *very* dangerous line, and dared to offer this reminder as a critique and a warning?

[6] This ironic reversal of fortune shows up many times in the larger exodus story. The literary device only works because the Israelite audience is conscious that they were once slaves but are now free.

[7] It is reasonable from this understanding that the priests were supported by Pharaoh and their lands exempted (Gen 47:22, 26b).

[8] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), 353, writes: "There is no evidence that Egyptian society would have found such changes to be anything but constructive." George W. Coates, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 298–300, categorizes this narrative as an etiology, "a narrative justification for the tax proclamation."

[9] For example, the Tower of Babel story (Gen 11:1–9) is also a Yahwist critique on the unmitigated exercise of human (royal?) power and ingenuity disassociated from a consciousness of God's sovereignty and blessing.

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Slaves on their own land? The word "slavery" surely strikes us as overly harsh. We may deny the appropriateness of using it to describe our present North American situation. But Walter Brueggemann has suggested that the Egyptians (and Israel's children) "became slaves not by whips and brutality, but by the slow erosion of their economic independence through tax and land policies that enforced the monopoly which claimed the land. Slavery, 'the house of bondage,' is an achievement of the imperial economy (Exod 20:1)."[10] This "erosion of economic independence" was easier for me to observe in the rural environment because most of the activities of persons and communities there were intimately related to one narrowly focused but very important sector of the economy—agriculture. The cumulative impact of government trade, transportation and agricultural policies, the decisions of financial institutions, and the promotions of multinational grain trading and petro-chemical corporations[11] was readily discernible by those who cared to see. It seems somewhat awkward to say, but I appreciated living in the midst of those Manitoba fields not only because of the spiritual link that experience gave me to the land, and the rhythm of seedtime and harvest, but also because it opened my eyes to "the house of bondage" slowly being constructed there, and here in the city, by stakeholders who attach very little value to such things as true worship, community and a quality of life not measured in materialistic terms.

The gods of productivity and efficiency have their priestly spokespersons, and for their efforts they are well cared for (cf., Gen 47:22). But on the day when I heard the Minister of Agriculture speak, it suddenly dawned on me that the church in the countryside could also be made to serve the purposes of these gods by maintaining a neat and peaceful separation between farm faith and farm business. Preach a Sunday sermon of God's goodness in the land (especially on Thanksgiving). Sing a heavenly song. Pray for God's spiritual salvation. Take up an offering for missionaries far away. But, come Monday morning your competency ends.

[10] Walter Brueggemann, "The Land and Our Urban Appetites," in *Interpretation and Obedience*, 264.

[11] While living in the Manitoban countryside I was surprised to observe the concept of "vertical integration" being applied to the agricultural economy. Vertical integration involves the development of patented hybridized seed that is genetically engineered to respond optimally to all the fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides developed by the same corporation. Although promoted to farmers as offering convenience and guaranteeing higher yields, the unspoken benefit is reduced choice for farmers, greater corporate control and greater corporate profit.

I have often wondered what shape Israel's worship took in Egypt until that day when they began to cry out to Yahweh "on account of their taskmasters" (Exod 3:7). Had they been content to maintain a peaceful separation between their God and the gods of Pharaoh (especially considering his gracious land grant)? But when that person interrupted the Minister and said, "What if I don't want to compete against my neighbour down the road?" I heard this as a call to exodus. It was a proposal to forsake Pharaoh's grant and to recover the goodness of the land and the health of the community on a different basis, accompanied by another God who sets people free. Indeed, the most potent biblical critique of the enslaving gods of Pharaoh/Joseph, or Solomon, or the modern globalized economy, is a concrete exit from "the house of bondage" led by a God who says, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me!" (Exod 7:16; 8:1; 8:20; 9:1; 9:13; 10:3)

The Yahwist historian does not tell us what happened to Joseph. But another tradition tells us that in the end Joseph made his choice. He forsook the predictable control and management of Pharaoh who takes, in favour of the precarious promises of a God who gives (Gen 50:24–25).

Jubilee
"The land is mine; you are aliens and tenants with me" [1]

Ben C. Ollenburger

In prospect of the year 2000, organizations around the globe began talking about Jubilee. More than just marking the turn of the millennium, the year 2000 was seen as an auspicious moment to address the problems of entrenched poverty and crippling debt that afflict many poor and developing nations. Some have seen it also as a moment to renew their commitment to the Christian faith and to the dimensions of social justice that inhere within it. Those dimensions have their source in the Bible, which specifically addresses the two problems already mentioned: entrenched poverty and crippling debt. Indeed, the Bible offers remedies for poverty and debt, and it offers freedom for those enslaved by them. In consideration of the new millennium, Christians have appealed to the image of Jubilee, which epitomizes a biblical concern for freedom from all kinds of enslavement.

Waldemar Janzen, in his stimulating work, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*, speaks only briefly of Jubilee.[2] But in his observations Janzen instructively brings Jubilee under his definitive "familial paradigm," within which he includes the interrelated themes of life, land, and hospitality.[3] The following remarks

[1] Waldemar Janzen's scholarship has been both unfailingly exact and innovative. I am pleased to offer this essay as a modest token of appreciation for both his contributions to biblical studies and his example as a Christian scholar.

[2] Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 116–117. He offers a broader survey of Jubilee in "A Call to Jubilee," *Catholic New Times* (28 February 1999), 10–12.

[3] Janzen sets out the dimensions of his familial paradigm in *Old Testament Ethics*, 26–54. I will not here address the argument he pursues throughout the book, that the familial paradigm "represents the primary ideal of the Old Testament's ethic" (3).

will confirm the substance of Janzen's observations. I intend them also to show the limitations of the familial paradigm, or its redefinition, in the subsequent and current appropriation of Jubilee. The first two parts of this essay will focus on Old Testament texts, while a third will consider Jubilee in the New Testament and beyond. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

Jubilee: Redemption and Release

When the Old Testament treats Jubilee, primarily in Leviticus 25, it does so under two principal rubrics: redemption and release. Following some preliminary considerations, I will explore the meaning of those terms in relation to the kind of theology and society that Leviticus assumes.

Preliminary Considerations. The term Jubilee, as used in the Bible, derives from the Hebrew word יוֹבֵל [*yôbēl*], which literally refers to a ram and, by extension, to a ram's horn used as a trumpet—at least that is the common view which amounts to an educated guess.[4] The term יוֹבֵל [*yôbēl*] with the meaning Jubilee occurs only in Leviticus 25:10–54; 27:17–24; and Numbers 36:4. In these passages it refers to the fiftieth year—the year following a cycle of seven sabbaticals; according to Leviticus 25:9, a trumpet announces the beginning of this fiftieth year. In English, Jubilee has become associated with words like "jubilation" that derive from the Latin word *jubilare*; they have no etymological relation to the Hebrew word יוֹבֵל [*yôbēl*].[5]

Leviticus 25:10 associates Jubilee with another term, "release" or "liberty" (דְּרוֹר [*dᵉrôr*]). Whatever may be the etymology of יוֹבֵל [*yôbēl*], release or liberty has given Jubilee its meaning. However, Leviticus 25 treats another matter as well, namely, redemption. In the context of Leviticus 25, as elsewhere, redemption is an economic matter. It ensures that tenure of the land—in this case, agricultural land—will remain within the family or clan. I will have more to say about both of these matters, release and redemption, but it will help to have in mind some rudimentary features of Israelite social organization, as assumed in the book of Leviticus and, first, to summarize its basic assumptions about the land.

Theology of the Land. That the land of Canaan belongs to YHWH forms the first of these assumptions. As YHWH asserts expressly in Leviticus 25:23, "the land is mine."[6] Consequently, YHWH has pre-

[4] While the word for trumpet in Leviticus 25 is שׁוֹפָר [*šôpar*], Josh 6:4–13 identifies the שׁוֹפָר [*šôpar* sounded by the priests before the battle of Jericho as the trumpet of the ram's horn (יוֹבֵל [*yôbēl*]).

[5] Here and elsewhere I have benefited from Christopher J. H. Wright's concise article, "Jubilee, Year of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1025–1030, which provides much useful information in summary fashion and includes a bibliography.

[6] My quotations of scripture generally follow the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*, which I have sometimes modified.

rogative over the disposition of the land, its stewardship, and its stewards. Much of Leviticus concerns itself with cultic matters: with sacrificial ritual, the tabernacle, festivals, and so forth. About these matters pertaining to worship, YHWH, through Moses, issues detailed instructions, or *torah*. But Leviticus also concerns itself with what we might distinguish as moral matters pertaining to Israel's conduct. YHWH instructs Israel on these moral matters as well. All of this instruction, whether it be cultic or moral, has to do with holiness. YHWH tells Moses, in Leviticus 10:10, "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean." This concern for holiness and purity extends also to the land—to YHWH's land. Indeed, Leviticus says that YHWH removed the Canaanites from the land because they had defiled it; they had made it unclean, impure, *un*holy (Lev 18:25).

This introduces the second basic assumption about the land: that the land is YHWH's gift to Israel. Leviticus makes the connection explicit: "But I have said to you: You shall inherit their land"—that is, the Canaanites' land—"and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am YHWH your God; I have separated you from the peoples" (Lev 20:24).[7] Leviticus nowhere says that the land itself is holy—the term "holy land" appears only in Zechariah 2:12 (Masoretic Text [MT] 2:16)—but Leviticus does say that the land belongs to YHWH, who entrusts it to Israel as a gift to possess, and that YHWH is holy. Moreover, not only does YHWH say "the land is mine," but also, to Israel, "*you* are mine." Consequently, *Israel on the land* must also strive for holiness: "You shall be holy to me; for I, YHWH, am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine" (20:26; cf., 11:45). Once again, holiness with respect to the land extends to both ritual and moral matters, and YHWH's instruction extends to Israel's life on the land.

Much of this instruction concerns the poor. Israel may certainly enjoy the fruits of the land that YHWH has given them to possess, but they must also ensure that the poor enjoy some of those fruits as well. This requires a certain amount of inefficiency in harvest: in the grape harvest, the Israelites must not strip the vines bare or pick up grapes that have fallen; these are to be left for the poor to gather (Lev 19:10). In the grain harvest, the edges of the fields must be left for the poor to harvest, and stalks of grain that fall to the ground must be left for the poor, and for aliens, to gather (Lev 23:22).

These measures may save some people from starving, but they are by themselves an inadequate solution to the problem of poverty. Redemption and Jubilee, the measures described in Leviticus

[7] The word "to separate" (הִבְדִּיל [*hibdîl*]) figures prominently in the Priestly creation account in Genesis 1 (see vv. 6, 7, 14, 18). In a sense, this creative pattern of God continues with the separation of clean from unclean (Lev 11:47), Israel from the peoples (Lev 20:24), the Levites from the congregation of Israel (Lev 16:9), and the most holy place from the merely holy (Exod 26:33).

25, are designed to address that larger problem. We should remember to associate this remarkable concern for the poor with the holiness that characterizes YHWH, and which YHWH calls Israel to embody on the land. Indeed, the laws requiring provision for the poor, along with the laws of redemption and Jubilee, fall within a block of literature, Leviticus 17–26, that scholars have designated the Holiness Code.

Kinship and Social Organization on the Land. Before turning to the details of redemption and Jubilee, I will comment briefly on Israel's social organization—or, better, its kinship structure—as assumed in the Holiness Code. Already from the book of Genesis we know that Israel understood itself as one extended family. "Israel," of course, was the name given to Jacob, the father of twelve sons whose own names became those of the twelve tribes.[8] The tribe, then, served as the largest social unit within Israel, although it played almost no role in routine matters. By contrast, the smallest and most significant unit was the family. Typically designated the בֵּית אָב [*bēt 'āb*], or "father's house," this unit comprised perhaps three or four generations forming a household, or "nuclear domestic unit," with several such families living together in a village. Villages were agrarian communities surrounded by cultivated land and pasture, to which their respective families held tenure by inheritance. The inheritance of land circulated within family units that were part of a much larger territorial unit, the clan or "descent group."[9] While the family unit or בֵּית אָב [*bēt 'āb*] was *exogamous*—that is, one had to marry someone from outside it—the clan was in most cases *endogamous*: marriages were required to be within the clan, although we know of exceptions to this rule. The rule of endogamous marriages was itself designed to preserve land tenure within the clan; that is, to prevent rights to the land from passing from one clan or tribe to another.

Families on their land practised an agricultural subsistence economy: they produced enough to supply their own needs. In the case of other demands, such as the repayment of loans or the payment of taxes, families would need to produce a surplus. If they could not do so, they risked their property or their independence, or both. To mitigate these risks, Leviticus 25 contains legislation regarding the two different practices I mentioned above: "redemption" and Jubilee, or "release." Each of these practices, although in

[8] Joseph's sons gave their names to two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, but the point remains that each tribe had an eponymous ancestor. Resident aliens fell outside of this family structure, and hence outside of Israel's identity-conferring "family" history.

[9] The quoted terms in this paragraph are from Paula McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999), 90, 92. The term "clan" has fallen into disfavour (to a smaller degree, so has "tribe"), for good reasons that need not concern us here.

different ways, seeks to preserve land tenure within families, and hence to prevent their impoverishment. For reasons that should become clear, I will first discuss "redemption."

Redeeming the Land (Lev 25:24–27). As indicated above, redemption is an economic matter. It ensures that tenure of the land—specifically, agricultural land—will remain within the family or clan. However, circumstances could arise to threaten a family's ability to retain possession of its share of the land. For example, a family could become impoverished due to drought, pestilence, mismanagement, or other factors. Should a family fall into such economic distress that they are forced to offer their land for sale, the closest relative or next of kin has an obligation to preempt the sale by buying the land. If the sale has been completed, the former landowner has the right to buy back the land, in case the family's circumstances have improved. Otherwise, the closest relative bears responsibility for re-purchasing the land—*redeeming* it and restoring it to its owner. Hence, such a relative is called a *redeemer* (גֹּאֵל, [*go'ēl*] Lev 25:26).

The book of Ruth provides a narrative example. Naomi's security and that of her daughter-in-law, Ruth, depended on the fealty of a familial redeemer, Boaz. Naomi's late husband, Elimelech, was heir to a share of land belonging to the Ephrathite clan near Bethlehem. Boaz, from the same clan, redeemed the land, inheriting Ruth along with it! (Ruth 4:3–10). The daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1–11) present a different example. Their father died without a male heir, so his share of land would be lost to his immediate family. The women prevail upon Moses (and YHWH) to permit daughters to inherit land when there is no male heir. However, they must marry within their own tribe (Num 36:1–10). Both of these examples illustrate the importance of the smallest agnatic unit,[10] the בֵּית אָב [*bēt 'āb*] or "father's house," in relation to land tenure within the clan. Boaz and Ruth form a new unit, perpetuating Elimelich's name (Ruth 4:5),[11] while Zelophehad's daughters will preserve the heritage and name of their father (Num 27:4).

Fundamental to Israel's kinship structure and its concern with land tenure are the basic assumptions about the land that I described earlier. The people and the land belong to YHWH, who has granted tenure of the land to Israel—Israel as a "family of families." However, this possession does not amount to *ownership.* Strictly speaking, YHWH retains ownership of the land; the people are, in that

[10] An "agnatic unit" is a kinship unit identified by paternal, male descent.

[11] Baruch A. Levine points to an important difference between Leviticus 25 and earlier practices of redemption; in the latter, a "redeemer" acquired the land on behalf of the clan, while in Leviticus 25 the land is restored to its distressed owner. He describes this as a shift of concern "from the clan to the individual owner." Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus,* JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 168. The book of Ruth evinces precisely a concern for the family when restoration to an owner is impossible.

respect, like aliens and tenants (Lev 25:23): they do not hold real title to the land. For that reason, a family or clan cannot make a permanent sale of its land.

We have an example in the story of Naboth in 1 Kings 21. King Ahab wanted to purchase Naboth's vineyard—to treat it as a commodity and make it part of crown lands adjoining the king's palace. But Naboth refused: "YHWH forbid that I should transfer to you my ancestral inheritance" (1 Kgs 21:3). The economic well-being of agrarian families depended on the inalienability of their land. Hence, the kinship structures of family, clan, and tribe took moral precedence over royal prerogatives, wealth, and power.[12] The practice of redemption, in which the next of kin has the responsibility to redeem land whose inalienability is jeopardized, aims to guarantee the economic well-being of such families.

But the principle and practice of redemption contains within itself the potential for abuse. Within a clan, one family may enjoy greater wealth than others: its land may be more fertile and productive, for example, or it may include terraced hillsides irrigated by a spring or a cistern that other farms, other shares of the land, lack. In a period of drought, other families may become so impoverished that they have to offer their land for sale. In that case, the already wealthier family, through redemption, may gain control of many family estates, thereby further increasing its wealth and its ability to control even more property, while also accelerating the cycle of poverty and dependance. Leviticus 25 envisions such an increasingly desperate situation in which now landless peasants have nothing more to sell but themselves (Lev 25:39)—to become servants indentured to the family whose wealth has enabled it to acquire estates and, now, people. In brief, the rules of redemption by themselves permit the centralization of property and wealth in a single family and its head, for whom his own clan members work as permanently indentured servants. A principle and practice meant to preserve the economic welfare of agrarian families could leave them landless and turn them into slaves.

Jubilee: Liberty and Release (Lev 25:10–55). The institution of Jubilee, or release, prevents the kind of centralization that the practice of redemption by itself could permit. It prevents poorer agrarian families from losing their ancestral land, and thus it prevents wealthier families from acquiring increasingly large estates. In that way, Jubilee also prevents the emergence of permanent, eco-

[12] John Gray points out that accepting Ahab's proposal would have relegated Naboth and his family to the status of royal dependants. John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, 2d ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 439. See also Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 16.

nomic class distinctions within and among Israelite clans. We should notice, then, that Leviticus frames the rules for redemption within the larger context of Jubilee.

Leviticus 25 sets out the provisions of Jubilee along with illustrative cases and exceptions. It stipulates that Jubilee shall commence on the Day of Atonement at the conclusion of the forty-ninth year. That year marks the completion of a seven-year cycle of seven years; and each seventh year is to be a sabbatical year—a sabbatical for the land. During that year, Israel must refrain from planting. They may eat what the land yields of its own and the surplus, promised by YHWH, of the sixth year's crop. In this way, the land will be rested and replenished, and Israel will remember that the land is a gift entrusted to them (Lev 25:1–8; 20–22).

This same sabbatical rule apparently applies to the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, the year of release or liberty.[13] But in that year, people must return to their own family estates—to their family's allotment of the land (Lev 25:13)—thus symbolizing or enacting the family's inalienable claim to the land. Thus, even if a family's economic circumstances have forced it to sell its land, or some part of it, the Jubilee year *releases* it from sale and it reverts to the original family of ownership. If an Israelite family head has fallen into deep poverty and has no more land to offer as collateral for a loan, so that he has to sell himself and his family into bonded or indentured service, in the Jubilee year he and (or) his family are released from their indenture and may return to their allotted land (Lev 25:39–43).

These measures seek to ensure that poverty will not become a permanent condition among the people of Israel. They do so by guaranteeing a fresh start to each generation. Since this fresh start occurs only every fifty years, it would be unlikely that an individual who lost his property could return to it himself. More likely, his family would enjoy its use after the Jubilee year. In that way, the Jubilee does not immediately reward mismanagement, for example, but provides that heirs will not permanently suffer economic hardship from the irresponsibility or misfortunes of the previous generation.[14]

The Jubilee year does not cancel every kind of indebtedness. Indeed, contrary to common assumptions (see below), the Old Testament's Jubilee legislation never mentions the cancellation of debts. Deuteronomy 15:1–5, while promoting the ideal that there will be no "poor" within Israel (v. 4), does legislate the remission of debt-claims every seventh year (except for claims against non-Israelites).

[13] I say "apparently" because, while Lev 25:11–12 stipulates that the 50th year is to be another sabbatical for the land, the assurances provided in vv. 20–22 speak only of the seventh year.

[14] Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 124.

But Deuteronomy nowhere mentions Jubilee, and neither does its sabbatical-year legislation, in chapter 15, have anything to say about the land, which is of principal concern in Leviticus 25. It is commonly assumed, even by some scholars, that, since Leviticus 25 incorporates the sabbatical-year cycle into its Jubilee legislation, it implies the provisions of Deuteronomy 15:1–3.[15] But this is most unlikely.[16] Rather, Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25 propose different solutions to the problems of poverty and indebtedness. (The *Excursus*, below, discusses the different policies among three of the Old Testament's legal collections.)

The Holiness Code's Jubilee legislation does require that people and land be released or liberated from creditors holding them. At the same time, certain conditions and exceptions accompany Jubilee.[17] One condition concerns the price of land, which shall be valued on the number of years until Jubilee. The first of the exceptions concerns cities (Lev 25:29–31). Property, specifically houses, within a city may be sold. Someone who sells a city house may redeem it within a year; otherwise, it passes permanently into the possession of the purchaser.[18] For purposes of clarity, Leviticus stipulates that it is speaking of cities with walls. By contrast, an unwalled village shall be accounted part of the agricultural land. Someone who sells a house in a village may redeem it at any time, and it returns to the seller in the year of Jubilee. Once again, Jubilee focuses primarily on the land and the families who farm it. Cities in Israel, of course, depended on the viability of farms to sustain them. But cities and farming villages operated according to different, though partially (or sometimes) interdependent, economies.

The second exception concerns Levitical cities (Lev 25:32–34); indeed, this forms an exception to the rule about cities just described. In Levitical cities, houses sold may be redeemed at any time, and they may not be sold in perpetuity; that is, in the year of Jubilee the Levites' houses revert to their original owners. The Levites, a priestly tribe within Israel, do not participate in the normal economy of Israel, in which they remain unique. Their houses, within their cities, are regarded in the same manner as is the agricultural land of other Israelites: their houses are inalienable property. Their land may not be sold at all.

[15] For example, Paul Hertig, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversals of Fortunes," *Missiology* 26 (1998): 167–179, see 171. Cf., Jacob Milgrom, "The Antiquity of the Priestly Source: A Reply to Joseph Blenkinsopp," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 111 (1999): 10–22, esp. 17.

[16] See Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code*, SVT 67 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 158–159.

[17] See C.J.H. Wright, "Jubilee, Year of."

[18] Naboth claimed his vineyard as his ancestral inheritance (1 Kgs 21:3), even though it apparently lay within the city. Simon J. DeVries cites Leviticus 25 as the basis for Naboth's claim. Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, WBC (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 256.

The third and most significant, not to say most troubling, exception concerns foreigners and aliens (Lev 25:44–55). From such people the Israelites may acquire slaves, and these slaves are to be regarded as property. Thus, an Israelite family could inherit slaves from generation to generation just as it inherited land. The Holiness Code also envisions circumstances in which an Israelite, having fallen into economic difficulty, may sell himself or his family to a wealthy alien. In that case, the rules of redemption apply: the Israelite may purchase his own redemption; if he is unable to do so, his brothers have that responsibility; if they are unable to exercise it, his uncle or some member of his more extended family must do so. In any event, an Israelite is liberated, released, from indenture to an alien or foreigner in the Jubilee year. Moreover, Leviticus 25 makes explicit that: 1) an Israelite indentured either to another Israelite or to an alien shall be regarded as a hired labourer, not as a slave; 2) Israelites are not to make slaves of each other; and 3) an Israelite indentured to an alien must not be treated harshly. But Leviticus extends none of these humane considerations to aliens or foreigners, who instead may be enslaved by Israelites and, by implication, treated harshly.[19]

The word here ("harshly" פֶּרֶךְ [*perek*]) is the same one Exodus 1:13–14 uses to describe the way Egypt treated the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt: that is, harshly! The very last verse in Leviticus 25 (v. 55) refers to Egypt and to the exodus: because God brought Israel out of Egypt, they are *God's* slaves (the word, עֶבֶד [*'ebed*], means both servant and slave). And because Israelites are the slaves of God, they must not be enslaved to or by anyone else, including each other. As slaves of God, Israel enjoys extraordinary freedom—freedom from permanent debt slavery and freedom from institutionalized poverty. The laws of redemption and release together form a gift of God to the family of Israel.[20]

Further Considerations of Jubilee and the Old Testament

We have no report from the Old Testament whether or not Israel ever acted on the Holiness Code's Jubilee legislation.[21] Numbers 26:35 implies that Israel did not (or, in the logic of the text, would not) observe the sabbatical-year requirement that the land lie fallow. In his vision of Israel's future, Ezekiel assumes that the

[19] By contrast, Ezekiel grants aliens landed status within Israel (Ezek 47:21–23).

[20] Arndt Meinhold, "Zur Beziehung Gott, Volk, Land im Jobel-Zusammenhang," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 29 (1985): 245–261, esp. 258.

[21] The term "legislation" may be misleading in any event. The current trend is to regard Mesopotamian "law codes" as belonging to an intellectual tradition and academic context, and as expressing ideals for just rule, rather than constituting "laws" applied in court. Niels Peter Lemche, *Prelude to Israel's Past: Backgrounds and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 207–210. The Old Testament's "legislation" may be analogous.

"year of release" ("liberty," *NRSV*) *will be* observed (Ezek 46:17). Other texts as well speak of the release of slaves or release from debt—we will consider these momentarily. We have seen that 1 Kings 21 assumes the *inalienability* of a family's agricultural property in the story of Naboth's vineyard; and various texts, for example, Ruth, speak of redemption. Jubilee, and Jubilee alone, includes all of these features.[22] However, as I pointed out above, only Leviticus 25 and 27, and Numbers 36:4, speak expressly of a *Jubilee year.* It may be, then, that the Holiness Code in Leviticus 25 incorporates older, discrete traditions and practices under a comprehensive Jubilee portrait. Rather than describing pre-monarchic legislation, it proposes policies and practices for preserving the economic welfare of agrarian families. In this case, the question whether Israel observed Jubilee during the period of the monarchy vanishes.[23] Several factors would have militated against it regardless, including urbanization and the monarchy itself.

Cities and Kings. We noted above that Jubilee exempts cities from certain of its provisions. Cities stand outside the convictions about the land that govern Jubilee. Yet, in Israel's history cities grew increasingly important. To put it another way, Israel's society became increasingly urbanized.[24] Cities were centres of commerce, crafts, international trade, and cultural exchange. They doubtless absorbed excess population from rural villages. Some of them also served as garrisons or as royal capitals.

The values underlying the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25 conflict with those of an economy with a high concentration of power in the urban elite and a royal court. It served the latter's interests to have land and wealth owned by the crown and controlled by royal patrons, who could pay taxes out of rents charged to tenant farmers on land devoted, not to subsistence farming, but to regionally specialized surplus agriculture.[25] It would *not* have served their interests—interests in efficient management and production, and profit—

[22] These features may have come together over time, since Leviticus 25 likely contains several layers of tradition. See Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, JSOT Supp 155 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 123–125.

[23] Baruch A. Levine observes, as have others, that "it would be unrealistic to suppose that under the Judean kings the priesthood would have had jurisdiction over such matters" as Leviticus 25 discusses (*Leviticus*, xxix). However, this does not settle the matter of date, in part because "jurisdiction" may be beside the point. See note 21, above.

[24] In fact, the region was urbanized in the Early Bronze Age (down to about 2000 BCE), but cities subsequently declined in what some scholars refer to as a period, or periods, of retribalization. It would be more accurate, then, to speak of the *re*-emergence of urban centres in the Iron Age (Iron Age II, beginning around 950 BCE). See Paula McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 151–152; Niels Lemche, *Prelude to Israel's Past*, 100–111.

[25] A contemporary example would be Scotland's feudal land-tenure laws, prior to modern limitations on royal power. See Andy Wightman, "Land Tenure," at *http://www.cybersurf.co.uk/cscoparl/briefing/land.html.* Accessed November 16, 1999.

to redistribute the land and release indentured servants (or serfs) in a Jubilee year. In summary, we could say that, as Leviticus 25 suggests, Jubilee was suited to an agricultural economy in which power was distributed among tribes, clans, and families, who understood themselves to be part of one large family and, together, tenants on land that belonged, finally, to no one but YHWH. The monarchy, with its standing army and royal projects, and the highly stratified urban society accompanying it, represented a much different economy. Jubilee's provisions counter and correct such developments as I have been describing: the development of *latifundia*—or, more simply, feudalism—within a tributary economy.[26] Put another way, Jubilee counters a centralized redistributive economy with a village-centred economy of reciprocity.[27]

This does not mean that centralized (monarchic) urban societies were necessarily inimical to the defining provision of Jubilee, "release." To the contrary, the earliest, Mesopotamian examples of these practices come from just such societies, centuries earlier than the Old Testament texts and long before Israel existed. Through royal proclamations, kings granted debt relief, manumission of slaves, release of prisoners, and tax exemptions.[28] Kings issued such proclamations upon their accession, in response to economic crises, on festival days, or on other occasions, sometimes to specific groups or cities. The Holiness Code reflects knowledge of these practices.[29] However, Leviticus 25 remains unique in at least two respects: 1) it commends an entire economy oriented to the provisions of Jubilee, which it incorporates within the regular cultic calendar; 2) it consequently removes these provisions from royal prerogatives.[30]

Excursus: *Policies in the Covenant Code, Deuteronomic Law, and the Holiness Code.* Modern scholarship has identified three principal legal collections in the Pentateuch: the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22–23:33), Deuteronomic Law (Deuteronomy 12–26), and Priestly legislation (most of Exodus 25–40, Leviticus, and

[26] Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[27] Paula McNutt, *Society of Ancient Israel*, 154–158.

[28] Moshe Weinfeld discusses these matters thoroughly, with quotations from a host of texts, in *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 157–168. In discussing these texts, Weinfeld makes repeated comparisons with Leviticus 25, which he discusses on 175–178.

[29] The biblical term for "release" (דְּרוֹר [*d'rôr*]) is cognate with the Akkadian term *andurāru*.

[30] Ezekiel's vision of Israel's future in the land (chaps. 40–48) does the same. See Jeffrey Fager, *Land Tenure*, 70–81; Millard Lind, *Ezekiel*, BCBC (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1996), 326–327, follows Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, vol. 2, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 346, in identifying Jubilee symbolism throughout these chapters.

Numbers). Within this Priestly legislation, the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26) represents a distinct body of instruction. Typically, scholars have taken the Covenant Code to be the earliest of these collections. I share that view. The relation between Deuteronomic Law and the Holiness Code is disputed. Klaus Grünwaldt has argued recently that the Holiness Code draws on Deuteronomic Law, while Jacob Milgrom has argued just the reverse.[31] I remain agnostic on this issue.

In the chart below I have illustrated the specific differences among the Covenant Code, Deuteronomic Law, and the Holiness Code on policies relevant to our discussion. Deuteronomic Law in chapters 15 and 23 exhibits several differences from the Covenant Code in Exodus 21:2–11. Regarding slaves, the Covenant Code draws a distinction between male and female slaves that Deuteronomic Law ignores. Similarly, Deuteronomic Law ignores the Covenant Code's stipulation that a slave who marries while enslaved forfeits to his master his wife and any children, should he leave after six years. On the other hand, Deuteronomic Law provides that their erstwhile masters furnish released slaves with economic goods. The Covenant Code does not include such a provision regarding male slaves and forbids it in the case of female slaves (Exod 21:11). Three other features distinguish Deuteronomic Law from the Covenant Code.

First, Deuteronomic Law's material concerning slaves (Deut 15:12–18) comes in the context of a concern for alleviating poverty (15:4–11), which in principle should not exist in Israel. The Covenant Code does speak to the issue of poverty (Exod 23:6, 10–11), but not in connection with slavery.

Second, Deuteronomic Law's concern with poverty issues in the governing stipulation of a regular sabbatical-year remission of debts (Deut 15:2–3) does not appear in the Covenant Code.[32] Evidently, this sabbatical-year stipulation provides a literary link with the six-year limit on enslavement.[33] Deuteronomic Law derives that limit from the Covenant Code, with which it shares certain other

[31] Klaus Grünwaldt, *Das Heiligkeitsgesetz Leviticus 17–26: Ursprüngliche Gestalt, Tradition und Theologie*, BZAW 271 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999); Jacob Milgrom, "The Antiquity of the Priestly Source" (note 15, above). John Van Seters argues that Deuteronomic Law precedes the Holiness Code, while the Covenant Code is the latest of these three legal collections in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues*, ed. S. L. McKenzie and M. P. Graham (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 47.

[32] Jacob Milgrom argues, as have others, that these items of legislation, including the Holiness Code's sabbatical policy, are complementary, since the ability to pay debts would require the use (tilling and reaping) of the land. In other words, without the sabbatical-year release from debt, the sabbatical fallow year would work extreme hardship.

[33] The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi limits debt slavery to three years. Hammurabi #117 in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 170–171.

Comparison of Policies in the Covenant Code, Deuteronomic Law, and the Holiness Code

	Covenant Code (Exodus)	Deuteronomic Law	Holiness Code (Leviticus)
Sabbatical policy	Fallow sabbatical year	Fallow 7th year	Fallow sabbatical year Fallow fiftieth year
Loan Policy	No interest to Israelites No seizure of property	No interest to Israelites Liberal lending	No interest to Israelites
Debt Cancellation		Remission in 7th year Non-Israelites excluded	
Policy re: Hebrew Slaves:		Freedom for escaped slaves	
Males	Release after six years	Release with provisions after six years	
Females	No release except in special circumstances	Release with provisions after six years	
Policy re: Non-Israelite Slaves			Permanent property of Israelite masters
Policy re: Indentured Israelites:			
Indentured to Israelites			Release in fiftieth year
Indentured to Non-Israelites			Redemption any time Release in fiftieth year
Policy re: Sale of Property:			
Open land			Redemption any time Release to seller in fiftieth year
Levitical Land			No sale permitted
Houses in Cities			Redemption in first year
Houses in Rural Villages			Redemption any time Release to seller in fiftieth year
Houses in Levitical Cities			Redemption any time Release in fiftieth year

details—notably, the rite by which a slave is marked as his master's in perpetuity, should he choose to remain beyond six years (Exod 21:5–6; Deut 15:16–17). Despite the temporal analogy between a sabbatical-year remission and a six-year limit on enslavement, and their similar social-economic intentions, they have only an artificial relation. That is, while the six-year period begins whenever someone is sold as a slave, the sabbatical remission must occur at regular intervals in all Israel.[34]

Third, unlike the Covenant Code, Deuteronomic Law expressly bases its laws concerning remission of debts and the release of slaves on YHWH's liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt and gift of the land, along with Israel's corporate memory of its own former enslavement (Deut 15:4–6, 15). This latter feature Deuteronomic Law shares with the Holiness Code which, in Leviticus 25, makes repeated reference to slavery in Egypt, the exodus, and the land—YHWH's land. Moreover, the Holiness Code shares other features with both Deuteronomic Law and the Covenant Code. All three traditions prohibit charging interest on loans to fellow Israelites, for example. And all three closely regulate the enslavement of Israelites—or of Hebrews. But this difference in terms points to other differences.

The Covenant Code's and Deuteronomic Law's specific reference to Hebrew slaves is remarkable. The term *Hebrew* appears in the Covenant Code and in the book of Deuteronomy only in laws concerning slavery and only in reference to slaves. Apart from the narrative of Israel's own enslavement, it seems to designate, not Israelites in general, but specifically landless members of the community; Deuteronomy 15:12 specifies "your brother, a Hebrew"—that is, an Israelite who is also a Hebrew.[35] We should further suppose, then, that slavery in both traditions amounts to debt slavery, not wholly different from the Holiness Code's permission of indentured service or contracted employment. However, the Holiness Code does not have in mind a landless class (the term *Hebrew* does not appear in Leviticus); to the contrary, Leviticus 25 speaks specifically

[34] The Covenant Code's provision of a fallow sabbatical year is an analogy with the weekly sabbatical (Exod 23:10–12).

[35] My conclusion thus opposes Ringe's claim (supported by Niels P. Lemche, "The Manumission of Slaves," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 [1976]: 44) that "the term 'Hebrews' . . . had come to identify the ethnic community of Israelites rather than an economic class." Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 20. Earlier, she claimed that "in Exodus 21 the term is equivalent to 'Israelite'" (18). These claims ignore the distribution of the term "Hebrew" in both the Covenant Code and Deuteronomic Law, where it occurs *only* in reference to slaves sold (Exod 21:2) or purchased (Deut 15:12). Exodus outside the Covenant Code uses "Hebrew" only in reference to the slaves in Egypt. Note also that Jeremiah 34:9–14, discussed above, speaks specifically of "*Hebrew* slaves." The term "Hebrew" occurs nowhere else in Jeremiah.

about landed families who fall into grievous debt and poverty.[36] If such families do have to resort to indentured service, in the Jubilee year they can return to their familial estates (Lev 25:40–41).

In turn, the Holiness Code uniquely legislates a Jubilee year, while ignoring the seven-year limit on enslavement common to the Covenant Code and Deuteronomic Law as well as the sabbatical-year debt remission of Deuteronomic Law. Leviticus 25 does contain sabbatical-year legislation, in verses 1–7, but it stipulates only a fallow year—a seventh year in which both sowing and systematic harvesting are prohibited. The subsequent Jubilee legislation, beginning in verse 8 and continuing through the end of the chapter, incorporates the sabbatical year, in verses 20–22. These verses, in fact, seem to ignore Jubilee and speak only of the sabbatical. However, Leviticus nowhere mentions a remission of debts, and its Jubilee legislation postpones the regular release of slaves—or indentured servants and their families—until the fiftieth year, as opposed to the seventh year in the Covenant Code and Deuteronomic Law.

In this sense, then, the Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25 seems more conservative than the Covenant Code and especially Deuteronomic Law. On the other hand, Leviticus 25 provides for the redemption of both real property and, in certain cases described below, individuals or families at any time, even prior to the six years that the Covenant Code and Deuteronomic Law stipulate. In addition, Leviticus 25 regards indentured servitude as imposing a communal, familial responsibility (27:47–55), while the Covenant Code and Deuteronomic Law appear to regard debt-enslavement as a matter between individual debtors and creditors.[37]

The Holiness Code does not provide for the redemption of impoverished Israelites from relatives on whom they have become dependent (Lev 25:39–41). But it does provide for the communal redemption of family members indentured to a non-Israelite (25:47). In the former case, the ancestral estate remains within the family; the dependent (family) will return to it in Jubilee. Just as important, this dependency specifically excludes enslavement: it amounts to temporary, even if mandatory, hired labour. In the latter case—in the case of indenture to a non-Israelite creditor—the indentured Israelite must still be treated as a yearly-contract labourer (Lev 25:53), and redemption at any time is the prerogative of the debtor and the responsibility of any member of his extended family. In both cases, Jubilee terminates any encumbrances on agricultural estates and on people entitled by inheritance to continued tenure of those estates.

[36] The exclusion of houses in walled cities, and of Levitical property, from laws concerning rural estates illustrates the rural and agrarian perspective of Leviticus 25 and the Holiness Code (see Jan Joosten, *People and Land*).

[37] So also Sharon Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 27.

In other words, foreign debt does not threaten individual families, extended families (clans), or Israel itself.

Finally, while the Holiness Code does not mention debt cancellation, Jubilee would have the effect of canceling at least most debts. The rural or village economy that the Holiness Code assumes did not involve money, which in any event did not come into play until the sixth century BCE. Economic exchange, as it involved agrarian estates free from centralized control, amounted to the redistribution of commodities, livestock, or goods. Debts of this kind, especially in terms of commodities owed, presumably would have been assumed by whoever gained use of the land—a creditor who would also be, in preferred cases, a family/clan member. We may think of bankruptcy laws as a contemporary, not necessarily agrarian analogue.[38] In any event, onerous debts (again, presumably) would be retired by indentured service and land use. The Holiness Code remains silent on these matters.

Harbingers (Echoes?) of Jubilee. Other Old Testament texts reflect in varying ways the ancient, especially Mesopotamian, background to which I alluded above. Hence, they may also bear some relation to Jubilee. Here I will comment briefly on three such texts: Jeremiah 34, Nehemiah 5, and Isaiah 61. Each of these is situated in a time of national and social crisis.

Jeremiah. During the reign of Zedekiah, when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were threatening Judah and Jerusalem, Zedekiah made a covenant—a formal agreement—with the people and issued a royal proclamation that the nobility and others in Jerusalem should *release* their Hebrew slaves and not enslave them again (Jer 34:6–14). The term *release* here (דְּרוֹר [*d*^{e}*rôr*]) is the same one used in Leviticus 25, which forbids enslaving fellow Israelites. On the other hand, Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12 do permit holding Hebrew slaves but require that they be set free in the seventh year of their service; Jeremiah cites this tradition in 34:14. Zedekiah's proclamation was a transparent attempt to win YHWH's favour in the desperate circumstances of a protracted war that they were losing. And this attempt was hardly genuine: some time later, the people brought their former slaves back into subjection.

The release proclaimed by Zedekiah was not the implementation of Jubilee or of any other legislation regarding the release of Hebrew slaves. It was an *ad hoc* royal proclamation—a spontaneous emergency measure that had no enduring social effects.

Nehemiah. In a later period, long after Jerusalem had been destroyed and when Judah was a Persian province, a Persian agent

[38] I owe this suggestion to my colleague Ted Koontz. Robert North argued that "the ultimate significance of the jubilee was as a bankruptcy-law." Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, AB 4 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954), 176.

named Nehemiah also instituted reforms that contain echoes of Jubilee (Nehemiah 5). Apparently, when Nehemiah came to Judah from the Persian court, in Susa, the Judeans were suffering through a famine, which brought them severe economic distress. Nehemiah, who served as governor, reports that the people lodged a complaint in three parts: (1) in order to feed their children they had to acquire grain; 2) in order to acquire grain, they had to pledge their fields, vineyards, and houses as collateral; 3) in order to pay the king's tax—a tax exacted by the Persians—they had to borrow against their fields and vineyards. As a consequence, they were having to press their children into debt-slavery and were losing their land. Their complaints disturbed Nehemiah, who remonstrated with the nobles and officials for charging interest against their own kin: their own family members ("brothers"). Nehemiah's language resembles most closely that of Deuteronomy 23:19–20 which, like Leviticus 25, forbids exacting interest on loans to a fellow Israelite (vv. 36–37; cf., Neh 10:31; Exod 22:25; Deut 24:10–11).[39] The officials and nobility agreed henceforth to refrain from charging interest, and to return what they had taken.

Nehemiah did not put in place anything so sweeping as Jubilee. However, he did bring about economic reforms that freed farmers from crippling debt, slavery, and poverty. Moreover, he based these reforms on the notion of Israel, farmers and nobles alike, as one extended family, just as in Leviticus. Nehemiah's reforms were not institutionalized; they did not have the force of law. But by appealing to the community's sense of solidarity—the family solidarity of rich and poor alike—he won the consent of the leaders to reform their economic practices. We should also notice that, when they first made their complaint, the oppressed people also appealed to solidarity, and that of an even broader sort: "Their flesh is the same as ours," they said of their creditors (paraphrasing), and "their children are no different from ours. So how can they deprive us of our children and of our property just because we are in need?"

Isaiah. Isaiah 61 may be a third text that echoes Jubilee. Much about this text remains uncertain, including its date and the identity of the speaker. Regardless of its date, the text clearly reflects a situation of oppression and great distress. And regardless who he or she may be,[40] the speaker claims to have been given the spirit of

[39] Joseph Blenkinsopp cites Leviticus 25:35–39 as an expression of the same "traditional ethos" that lies behind the complaints in Nehemiah 5:1–6. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 258. See also Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 168–174. Wilma Ann Bailey provides a most instructive analysis of Nehemiah 5, in "Nehemiah: An Old Testament Model," in *Building Communities of Compassion*, ed. Willard M. Swartley and Donald B. Kraybill (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1998), 40–56.

[40] This is not a gratuitous gesture toward gender inclusiveness on my part. I take the speaker to be personified Zion, who speaks in 61:10–11 as the bride whom YHWH (re)marries in 62:3–5, which echoes 50:1 and 54:5.

YHWH and to have been anointed by YHWH to proclaim good news to the oppressed. In fact, the speaker's assignment includes two more actions: to proclaim release to the captives and an opening, or freedom, to the prisoners. Isaiah 61 here addresses conditions within Judah. Notice that verse 3 speaks of "those who mourn Zion" (NRSV: *in* Zion), and the speaker's task includes turning their mourning into joy and praise, so that they can build up the ruins and restore destroyed cities (v. 4). These are the conditions in which the people live whom the speaker addresses, conditions afflicting Jerusalem and Judah.

What, then, does Isaiah mean by a proclamation of *release*, and specifically the release of captives? The term "captives" is one of several that Isaiah uses here in close combination; the others are: oppressed, broken-hearted, prisoners, those who mourn. These descriptive terms refer, not to different groups, but to the community as a whole; if we take them together, we form the picture of a dispirited community living in conditions of hardship and bondage. And accompanying each descriptive term, or each category of deprivation, is a remedy: for the oppressed, good news; for the broken-hearted, healing; for the captives, release; for prisoners, freedom; for the mourners, comfort. The *speaker's* task consists primarily of proclamation, and that proclamation—that good news—itself accomplishes part of the speaker's commission: it comforts those who mourn, for example. But it does so primarily because part of what the speaker proclaims or announces is "the year favorable to YHWH, and the day of our God's vengeance" (Isa 61:2).

These enigmatic phrases resemble ones from earlier (34:8) and later (63:4) in Isaiah: "For YHWH has a day of vengeance, a year of vindication for Zion's cause" (34:8); "For the day of vengeance was in my [in YHWH's] heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come" (63:4). Each of these texts, like Isaiah 61:2, mentions both a year and a day; each of them speaks of YHWH's vengeance; and in each case, YHWH's vengeance means salvation for Zion/Jerusalem. "Vengeance" means setting things right, or redressing wrong: acting *on behalf of* someone who has been harmed, and against the party who has harmed them. Isaiah 61:2 affirms that *now* is the moment—the year, the day—when YHWH will act to remedy the conditions that the text describes.

Isaiah 61 forms part of a larger unit, comprising chapters 60–62, which speaks more fully of YHWH's promise to restore Zion. The most important feature of that restoration is YHWH's own return to Zion, as a groom to his bride (62:3–5). But it also includes both the return of Zion's people and an international pilgrimage to the newly glorified site of YHWH's dwelling (60:1–11; 62:10–12). *Release*—the release of prisoners—is but one image within this larger picture of

Zion's restoration. As we have already seen, in the ancient world it was not uncommon for a new king, upon ascending the throne, to proclaim at least a partial amnesty or release of prisoners, or to publish a decree remitting debts and allowing land to revert to its original owners—an act of generosity demonstrating the new king's gracious qualities, but also symbolizing the beginning of a new regime.[41] Isaiah 60–62 announces the dawn of a new reign, the reign of a gracious and universal king, and the restoration of Zion.

The New Testament and Beyond

Jesus and Jubilee? Because Isaiah 61:1–2 mentions *release* (דְּרוֹר [*dᵉrôr*]) in the context of the "year favorable to YHWH," interpreters often associate it with the year of Jubilee. Moreover, since Jesus quotes this text in his inaugural sermon, in Nazareth, according to Luke 4:16–30, some have understood Jesus as proclaiming Jubilee.

Luke places the story of Jesus in Nazareth between the temptation narrative and the exorcism Jesus performed in Capernaum. Luke reports that, following his encounter with Satan, Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (4:14). Jesus then demonstrates this power in the following episodes: first, he begins his reading in the synagogue with Isaiah 61:1, announcing, in effect, that the spirit of the Lord rests on *him*, and that *he* is the "anointed one" (ἔχρισέν [מָשַׁח *māšaḥ*] με); second, in Capernaum he demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit by teaching with authority and exercising authority over Satan's demonic agent (4:35–36). Indeed, the demons recognize, as do Luke's readers, that Jesus is the Son of God, the messiah (τὸν Χριστὸν [מָשִׁיחַ *māšîaḥ*], 4:41). But Jesus instructs them to remain quiet. The people, including those in the synagogue of Nazareth, are left to draw their own conclusions, as witnesses to Jesus' authority and his identity—and, in just that sense, about the new initiative of God.

In his *The Politics of Jesus*, first published in 1972, John Howard Yoder proposed that, in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus proclaimed the year of Jubilee in four dimensions: the fallow year, remission of debts, liberation of slaves, and the redistribution of capital.[42] Yoder was not the first to propose an association between Luke 4, hence also Isaiah 61, and the Jubilee tradition represented by Leviticus 25. Indeed, Yoder drew especially from the earlier work of André Trocmé, the pacifist Huguenot pastor, whose congregation hid Jews from the Nazis in France during World War II. Like others before and since,

[41] See "The Edict of Ammisaduqa," from Babylon, ca. 1646 BCE, in James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 526–528.

[42] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 60.

Yoder did not restrict his understanding of Jubilee to the legislation in Leviticus 25, but also incorporated material from Exodus and Deuteronomy concerning the sabbatical. Deuteronomy, but not Leviticus 25, expressly includes the cancellation of debts.

Research on Jubilee since Yoder's work in 1972 has tended to affirm many of his insights, including the presence of jubilary themes throughout the New Testament.[43] Perhaps Yoder's most important insight, argued throughout his book, concerned the political and economic character of the gospel. Regardless of any disagreements about Yoder's specific points, it seems clear enough that Jesus advocated, and announced, a new pattern of social and economic relationships among God's people, marked by generosity and forgiveness, including the forgiveness of debts. "Generosity" may seem too weak a term, or too abstract. Jesus, according to Luke, made it quite specific: generosity meant, for example, lending without interest and even without expectation of repayment. This strange economic teaching cohered with an even stranger political one: love your enemies. Lending without interest or without hope of repayment, and loving one's enemies, Jesus did not consider extraordinary acts of human virtue. Rather, they demonstrate trust in God, whose own generosity knows no limits (Luke 6).

Yoder's work has changed the way many of us think about Jesus, the gospel, and ethics. He has helped us to read the New Testament through the lens of Jubilee. Part of that reading depends on the quotation of Isaiah 61:2a in Luke 4:18–19. However, I do not take Isaiah 61 to be a Jubilee text. The phrase "year of YHWH's favor" *may* echo a Jubilee tradition, especially if we understand it in connection with the remarks about "possession" in Isaiah 61:7. There, those who have suffered extreme shame and dishonour are promised that they will possess a "double portion in their land" (*NRSV* omits "in their land"). The following verse (61:8) suggests that this promised gift of land represents a double restoration of land that was taken by robbery.[44] This gift or restoration of land forms part of the good news that Isaiah 61:1–3 proclaims to the oppressed, to Zion's mourners. Even so it remains unclear what relation Isaiah 61 might have to Leviticus 25 and Jubilee.

Some scholars adduce a Qumran text, 11QMelchizedek, as supporting the association of Isaiah 61, and thus Luke 4, with Jubilee, since it quotes parts of Leviticus 25:13, a Jubilee text; Deuteronomy

[43] Yoder himself surveys some of this research in the second edition of *Politics of Jesus* (see 72–75). See also C.J.H. Wright, "Jubilee, Year of." Sharon Ringe and Paul Hertig repeat in greater depth—Ringe especially—some of Yoder's arguments. Curiously, neither refers to Yoder. See Sharon Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee* (note 35, above); Paul Hertig, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus" (note 15, above).

[44] The text does not make clear whether the "robbery," this theft of land, was committed by fellow Judeans or by the imperial powers that have ruled Judah—or perhaps both.

15:2, a sabbatical-year text; and Isaiah 61:1–3.[45] However, 11QMelchizidek quotes, in the same context, a large number of other biblical passages that have no relation to Jubilee. Moreover, it combines these various biblical passages, using Isaiah 61:1–3 as a framework, to announce God's vindication of the sectarian community and God's judgment—vengeance, or revenge—on their opponents.[46] Perhaps Jesus and his contemporaries knew this kind of interpretation. If so, that may explain why Jesus, as represented by Luke, omits the middle part of Isaiah 61:2, which speaks of "the vengeance of our God." Jesus had something different to announce, namely, God's extension of divine mercy to the poor and the sick *beyond* Israel (Luke 4:25–27). It was this announcement that, on Luke's telling, provoked those who heard it to a murderous rage.

Indeed, it is Luke's presentation of Jesus in chapter 4 that serves to confirm Trocmé's and Yoder's basic intuition of an association with Jubilee.[47] In his Nazareth reading of Isaiah 61:1–2a, as presented in Luke 4, Jesus inserts a clause from Isaiah 58:6—"to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18). While the content of this clause from Isaiah 58 fits the context of Isaiah 61, the Hebrew text suggests no verbal association. This combination of texts depends, rather, on the occurrence of the term ἄφεσις (*aphesis*) in both Isaiah 61:1 ("release") and 58:6 ("[let go] free"), and thus twice in Luke 4:18—that is, it depends on Luke's use of the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek version of the Old Testament. Moreover, the LXX uses the same term, ἄφεσις (*aphesis*), to render both יוֹבֵל [*yôbēl*], "Jubilee," in Leviticus 25 and 27, and (דְּרוֹר [*d*^{e}*rôr*]), "release," in Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61:1. In other words, what Jesus *reads* in Luke 4 includes the language of Leviticus 25, Isaiah 61, and Isaiah 58, thereby forging a jubilary context, not only for that combination of passages, but for Jesus' own reading of them, and thus for Jesus himself. That this reading occurs in Nazareth strengthens the point, Nazareth being the place where Jesus was brought up (Luke 4:18) and, hence, his πατρίς (*patris*) or "hometown" (Luke 4:23–24 *NRSV*). The Lukan Jesus thereby enacts the first of the jubilary instructions, that all should return to their "property" (*NRSV*) or ancestral estates (Lev 25:13); the LXX uses the same term, πατρίς (*patris*), in Leviticus 25:13 that Luke does in 4:18.

These considerations make it evident that Luke read Isaiah 61, in Greek, as a Jubilee text. However, this conclusion does not mean

[45] See, for example, Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 103, note 18, and the literature she cites there.

[46] James A. Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, vol. 1, SJLA 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 75–106, esp. 89–92.

[47] For the lineaments of the following argument I depend on Gordon Zerbe, "An Unfavorable Reception in a Favorable Year: A Study of Luke 4:16–30," unpublished paper, January 1984.

that, in his quotation of Isaiah 61:1–2a, Jesus was calling the Judean community to enact Jubilee. Isaiah 61 announces, through the medium of one anointed by God and empowered by God's spirit, what *God* has set about doing on behalf of Zion and its oppressed community. It does not exhort God's people or anyone else to do anything. Isaiah 58 assuredly counts as a hortatory text—it exhorts the community to redefine fasting in a way that promotes, rather than subverts, justice. But the Lukan Jesus incorporates this clause into a reading of Isaiah 61, thus including it among the things that God is going to do and *is now doing* in and through Jesus himself. Subsequently in Luke, as in the other Gospels, Jesus both says and illustrates in parables the kind of social, economic, political behaviour—that is, the kind of community—this new action of God calls forth.

In light of Jesus' teaching in Luke and in the other synoptic Gospels, biblical scholars have tended to interpret Luke 4, and Jesus' reading of Isaiah 61, in light of Jubilee—and have interpreted Jubilee with reference to texts from Exodus and Deuteronomy. For this, too, the LXX provides some warrant: it once again uses the same term, ἄφεσις (*aphesis*), in Deuteronomy 15:2, 3, 9, for "remission" (שְׁמִטָּה, *šᵉmitā* in the Hebrew Masoretic Text [MT])—debt remission—that it uses in Leviticus and Isaiah, among others, for "Jubilee" and "release" (see also Exod 23:11). Since Deuteronomy 15:9 mentions "the year of remission," its Greek version contains a verbal association with Jubilee legislation that mentions the year of Jubilee and the year of release. Even though that legislation does not expressly mention debt remission, and the latter is independent of Jubilee in Deuteronomy, biblical scholars have tended to make the remission of debts a defining feature of Jubilee. In effect, if also to good effect, they have added new meaning to Jubilee, sometimes virtually equating it with the gospel. This has the merit of stressing the consistency of God's moral concerns while recognizing the novelty in Jesus' embodied interpretation of them.

The Church and Jubilee. In the preceding section I noted certain differences between the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX)—the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament. The LXX uses one Greek term, ἄφεσις (*aphesis*), to translate a number of Hebrew terms, including those whose English equivalents are Jubilee, release, and (debt) remission, each of which has a distinct sense in Hebrew. I also pointed to Luke's dependence on the LXX in his presentation of Jesus. As it happens, the Lukan Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61:1 acquires nuances not present in either its Hebrew or its Greek version. In the New Testament, the term ἄφεσις (or, in its verbal form, ἀφίημι [*aphiēmi*]) acquires an expanded meaning—namely, "forgiveness," and specifically the forgiveness *of sins*. That both debts and sins can be forgiven should be abundantly clear

from the two versions of the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our sins . . ." (Luke 11:4), and "Forgive us our debts . . ." (Matt 6:12). However, the church, in most places and at most times, has understood forgiveness in a way that ignores material concerns, including the matter of *debt*. Or, rather, the church has tended to understand the forgiveness of debt exclusively as the remission of sins. We are often asked to recite the Lord's Prayer as if it said: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Such a petition is foreign to the Lord's Prayer, as is the notion that material concerns are not spiritual ones.

The Early and Medieval Church. The church has not always and everywhere ignored the material, economic dimensions of spirituality. Luke reports, in Acts 4:34, that Christians distributed their wealth so that "there were no poor among them"—a verbal parallel of Deuteronomy 15:4.[48] Encouraged by Paul, churches in Achaia, Macedonia, and Corinth shared their resources with impoverished believers in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25–29; 1 Cor 16:1–4). In his monumental study, *Faith and Wealth*, Justo González demonstrates the persistence of Christian economic solidarity, or *koinonia*, into the first five centuries of the church's history.[49] Throughout the period, Christian convictions tended to expand the notion of the land, God's land, to the created world, God's world, whose benefits were for all; and to expand the notion of family so that it included the poor *beyond* the natural and immediate family.[50] These convictions made usury a sin and wealth a problem, except as an instrument for the alleviation of poverty. Emperor Constantine's advent complicated matters. The anchorite community, in the desert, escaped forced labour and imperial taxation—and "the emperor system" itself—in a dramatically alternative economy.[51] While these persistent Christian convictions did not employ, much less arrange themselves around, the term *Jubilee*, they emulated the values underlying Jubilee. The term itself came to figure prominently in the later Roman church.

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has associated Jubilee with an extraordinary remission of sins. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913) expressly describes this as a "spiritualized" conception of the

[48] See also Acts 2:44–47. I owe this observation to my colleague Perry B. Yoder.

[49] Justo González, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Wealth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990). See also Willard M. Swartley, "Mutual Aid Based in Jesus and Early Christianity," in *Communities of Compassion*, 21–39.

[50] Willard Swartley, "Mutual Aid," 32–33.

[51] On the emperor system in a modern form, see Robert Lee, ed., *The Japanese Emperor System: The Inescapable Missiological Issue* (Tokyo: Tokyo Mission Research Institute, 1990). González discusses the impact of Christianity's inclusion in the empire (or the emperor's inclusion in Christianity), in *Faith and Wealth*, 149–166.

Old Testament Jubilee.[52] Apparently, the fiftieth or *Jubilee* year retained special significance in the early medieval church, for example in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of a monk's "religious profession." And, at least by the thirteenth century, Jubilee had become associated with the idea of remission or forgiveness.[53] In 1300, Pope Boniface VIII's proclamation, *Antiquorum fida relatio*, "granted remissions and indulgences for sins," to be obtained "by visiting the city of Rome" and its basilicas.[54] Boniface VIII did not use the term Jubilee in this proclamation, and the celebration he institutionalized was to occur every 100 years, not every 50. After some variation, later Popes eventually reduced this number to 25. Still, subsequent writers referred to this as the year of Jubilee (*annus jubileus*) or the "Holy Year," which retained its association with the remission of sins.

We may agree with the *Catholic Encyclopedia* that the Christian Jubilee, as Boniface VIII established it, represents a decidedly spiritualized version of the Old Testament Jubilee. However, Jubilee did retain a material, economic component, since penitent pilgrims would visit and support the basilicas in Rome in order to gain remission of and full pardon for their sins. In many parts of the early church, wealthy Christians could atone for their sins by devoting their resources to the poor.[55] Medieval Jubilee celebrations substituted the church itself, in Rome, for the poor.

Especially dissidents and reformers preserved the material spirit of Jubilee. The followers of Peter Waldo and John Wyclif, centuries later and in different places, protested the kind of feudal economy that provoked Israel's prophets. Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, very early in the Reformation, actually appealed to Jubilee (and Deuteronomy's sabbatical legislation) in his 1522 tract, *There Should Be No Beggars among Christians.* And Jacob Strauss, another Lutheran, protested against charging interest on loans to those in need. We may even see in the ill-fated Peasants' Revolt, and the ill-reputed Thomas Müntzer, impulses similar to those behind the more pacific legislation of Leviticus 25.[56]

[52] The following information derives from Herbert Thurston, " Holy Year of Jubilee," transcribed by Donald J. Boon. From the *Catholic Encyclopedia* © 1913 by the Encyclopedia Press, Inc. Electronic version copyright © 1996 by New Advent, Inc., available at *http://www.csn.net/advent/cathen/08531c.htm.*

[53] The Vulgate translation that the western church used for much of its history could employ the same term—*remissionem* ("remission")—both for "release" (as in Lev 25:10) and for the forgiveness of sins (*remissionem pecatorum*).

[54] Ibid.

[55] Justo González, in *Faith and Wealth*, provides many examples. Willard Swartley, in "Mutual Aid," 32, mentions Cyprian of Carthage, who brought the sharing of wealth under the concept of "almsgiving." González argues that "alms" in early Christianity involved substantial financial resources. Justo González, *Faith and Wealth*, 125–127.

[56] I have taken these examples from John Driver, *Radical Faith: An Alternative History of the Christian Church* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1999), 166–170.

Contemporary Appropriations of Jubilee. So far as I am aware, only the Roman Catholic Church has retained regular observance of Jubilee in any form. However, the approach of the year 2000 gave new life to the idea of Jubilee, and the idea took two slightly different shapes. The *Jubilee 2000* movement refers explicitly, in its "Platform," to the biblical Jubilee, which it defines as a year "when slaves are set free and debts cancelled."[57] It joined a wider movement to cancel the enormous debts that developing nations owe to developed ones, either through direct loans or through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. *Jubilee 2000* includes among its goals the participation of "ordinary people" in the process of planning debt relief and debt cancellation. It also hopes to put into place an international monitoring system that would "prevent recurring destructive cycles of indebtedness." *Jubilee 2000* calls both lenders and borrowers to recognize their responsibility, and to take action that would recover "resources diverted to corrupt regimes, institutions, and individuals."

In the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the year 2000 as a Jubilee year in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*—"As the Third Millennium Draws Near."[58] The Roman Catholic Jubilee shares the sentiments and some of the same goals of *Jubilee 2000*, including debt relief, and perhaps debt cancellation, for poor nations, but it is broader in scope and more theological in character. *Tertio Millennio* refers to Leviticus 25 and Luke 4 as the basis for Jubilee, and also to the Jubilees observed since 1300 in the Roman Catholic Church. But the Pope gives broader theological interpretation to the celebration of Jubilee 2000. For example, the doctrine of Creation and Providence, as the Pope interprets it, leads us to understand God's creation of the earth as God's gift to all people. Understood this way, Jubilee extends beyond the repatriation of land in Canaan among Israelite families to a consideration of how *all people* can share the earth and its resources. Here the Apostolic Letter follows Jesus' extension of God's gifts to Gentiles (Luke 4:25–27). In addition, the Pope's reflections on Jubilee are Trinitarian; they are especially Christological, since Jubilee 2000 also celebrates the second millennial anniversary of Christ's birth: *anno domini* 2000. Appropriately, then, the Pope encourages Catholics to meditate on Christ's incarnation and gift of redemption—appropriately, since redemption (גְּאֻלָּה [*g^{e}'ulā*]) figures prominently in the Jubilee legislation of Leviticus.

[57] *Jubilee 2000/USA*, "Platform," available at *http://www.j2000usa.org/usa/platform.htm*, accessed November 27, 1999.

[58] The text is available at *http://www.xibalba.com/solt/jubilee/*, courtesy of Eternal Word Television Network. My quotations are from this digital version. Accessed November 27, 1999.

Finally, *Tertio Millennio* urges Catholics to practise the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The first and last of these figure most prominently. The Pope encourages Christians to reflect on and renew their faith as preparation for the Jubilee. He especially, and perhaps surprisingly, encourages Catholics to renew their commitment to the spirit and the reforms of Vatican II. Charity here extends to other Christians, and the Vatican's Jubilee included a significant ecumenical component, appropriate to the spirit of reconciliation in the biblical Jubilee. Charity, of course, can return us to the matter of the poor, especially those poor nations oppressed by debt. At its beginning, the Apostolic Letter makes "a commitment to justice and peace . . . the necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of Jubilee."

While *Tertio Millennio* situates Jubilee 2000 in the tradition of medieval Jubilee celebrations, it clearly goes beyond the "spiritualized" understanding that characterized Boniface VIII's declaration in 1300. It does so by recovering the liberating social and economic dimensions of the biblical Jubilee, and by placing those dimensions within the framework of God's action on our behalf in Jesus Christ.

Conclusions

Within the biblical canon itself, and from the history of its appropriation in the church, Jubilee acquires a depth of meaning and a range of associations not apparent in Leviticus 25. In that chapter, Jubilee has four components, including the release of ancestral land from the hold of creditors, the release of indentured servants from creditors, and the redemption of ancestral land by family members. All of these components have their basis in God's twofold action of redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt and granting them the land of Canaan. The fourth component of Jubilee in Leviticus 25 is the fallow sabbatical or seventh year, extended in the fiftieth. The incorporation of sabbatical-year legislation within Leviticus 25 encourages the secondary association of Jubilee with sabbatical-year legislation elsewhere in the Pentateuch—in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Those texts do not speak of Jubilee, but they do mandate the seventh-year release of Hebrew slaves and, in the case of Deuteronomy, the cancellation of debts. The association of debt-cancellation with Jubilee, abetted by the LXX (see above), has become so fixed that both Pope John Paul II and the New Testament scholar Sharon Ringe cite Leviticus 25 as mandating it—even though Leviticus 25 makes no mention of debt cancellation.[59]

Ringe describes Jubilee as having the character of an image—a literary and social image, including the features of a symbol and a

[59] Sharon Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 16.

metaphor—that attracts a wide range of associations to it. As an image, Jubilee suggests God's concern for the poor, for arrangements that alleviate poverty and ensure that it will not be a permanent condition, and for a community of God's grace that embodies social justice. The New Testament, in Luke's Gospel, extends the image of Jubilee by incorporating Isaiah 61 and a larger range of associations within it. In that case, the gospel announces the dawn of the messianic age as Jubilee, which includes healing and freedom: freedom from oppression and release from bondage, including the bondage of sin. Ringe summarizes the good news of Jubilee as freedom from enslavement of every kind.[60] Paul Hertig points to inclusivity as one of the New Testament Jubilee's defining marks—the inclusion of rich *and* poor within the messianic community, and the inclusion of Gentiles in the mission of Jesus.[61] The platform of *Jubilee 2000* and especially Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter address a much different, contemporary situation and call Christians themselves to advocate for the poor within the one human family. I suggested, above, that the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25 aims to ensure that Israelite families, no matter how poor or indebted they may have become, or how rich, will regularly enjoy a fresh start. In that way, they will remember that the land belongs to God, even as they belong to God. Indeed, the world itself belongs to God, who has given us a fresh start in Jesus Christ. If Christians have come virtually to equate Jubilee and the gospel, this has the merit of reminding us that release, or remission, or forgiveness has spiritual *and* political-economic social dimensions that we dare not sunder.

Israel may never have practised Jubilee. As Israel became more urban and supported both a royal court and a standing army (not to mention the Temple and its priests), Jubilee would have become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to practise. But Waldemar Janzen is right: "the important question concerning the jubilee is not whether it ever functioned effectively as law, but rather, whether it continues to be for us a parable of God and the world."[62] Our modern world differs vastly from ancient Israel. Besides, we are not Israel. But if Jesus remains our guide, then God's passion to free people from all kinds of enslavement has never diminished. This divine passion, which is also the divine mission, greets the church as grace and demand. "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us" (Luke 11:4).[63]

[60] Ibid., 48.

[61] Paul Hertig, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke" (see note 14, above).

[62] Waldemar Janzen, "A Call to Jubilee," 11.

[63] Earlier, much different versions of this essay were presented to the ecumenical Jubilee 2000 seminar at Waseda University in Tokyo, as the annual peace lecture at the Tokyo Peace Church; and to the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary faculty. Discussions following these presentations contributed much to my education on matters related to Jubilee.

Forgiveness and the Transformation of Conflict
The Continuity of a Biblical Paradigm

Gordon Zerbe

During the academic years 1991–1992 and 1993–1994, it was my privilege to co-teach a full-year course with Waldemar Janzen. At the time it was CMBC's capstone course in biblical studies—Biblical Theology. From time to time, Waldemar would ask the rhetorical question: is not the Old Testament more than merely the lexicon for the New Testament? By this he meant to address the question of the substantive role of the Old Testament in Christian theology and ethics, as opposed to a commonly assumed, more circumscribed role for the Old Testament as offering simply the linguistic or conceptual framework for the New Testament, or merely the preparatory stage for Christian theology. This essay will attempt to honour Professor Janzen by inquiring as to the substantive continuity of the biblical tradition on the subject of forgiveness, in particular through the examination of biblical "paradigms" (models of ethical living, especially cast in stories), a framework of analysis for which I am indebted to Professor Janzen.[1]

The contemporary discussion about forgiveness in the context of various disciplines has become something of a hot topic. For the decade of the 1990s, the American Theological Library Association's

[1] For a discussion of his use of the term "paradigm," see Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1994), 26–33.

Religion Database identifies 420 entries to the topic, compared with 300 for the previous decade. Leading journals have devoted entire issues to the subject, and the discourse on forgiveness ranges from the fields of political-international relations,[2] to restorative justice, pastoral psychology, and conflict mediation.[3] Forgiveness is identified both as a problem in the healing process (as, for instance, in treatments regarding forgiveness in civil conflict or domestic violence),[4] and as the necessary ingredient in the healing process.[5] In this essay I will not try to interact directly with these varied and valuable contributions; but it is my hope that what follows may have a useful bearing on the discussion of forgiveness and the reconciliation process in our real-life contexts, from domestic and interpersonal, to political and international relations.

I proceed on the assumption that forgiveness is a cultural and social construction—namely, that each culture, including that of the biblical tradition, has a set of shared patterns, images, and words related to what we think of as the general topic of forgiveness.[6] As David Augsburger observes in *Conflict Mediation across Cultures:*

> Each culture shapes its understandings of forgiveness from its central values. Harmony calls for a forgiveness of overlooking; justice for a forgiveness of repentance; solidarity for a forgiveness of ostracism; honor for a forgiveness of repayment; dignity for a forgiveness of principled sacrifice. Each group gives forgiveness a face composed of multiple values, framed by its unique history, and formed by its collective ledgers of justice and injustice received and given, harmony and disharmony chosen or imposed, and honor or dignity won or lost.[7]

[2] For example, Jean Elshtain, "Politics and Forgiveness," in *Religion, Politics, and Peace*, ed. L. Rouner (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 32–47; D. Schriver, "An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 2 (1999): 257–259; M. Battle, "A Theology of Community: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu," *Interpretation* 54 (April 2000): 172–185.

[3] For example, *Word and World* 16 (Summer 1996); *Church and Society* 88 (May–June 1998); *Interpretation* 54 (April 2000). See also the new journal, *The World of Forgiveness*, published by the International Forgiveness Institute, P.O. Box 6153, Madison, Wis.; www.forgiveness-institute.org.

[4] For example, John Paul Lederach, *The Journey toward Reconciliation* (Scottdale, Waterloo: Herald Press, 1999), 20; Susan Hylen, "Forgiveness and Life in Community," *Interpretation* 54 (April 2000): 146–157; Troy Martin, "The Christian's Obligation Not to Forgive," *Expository Times* 108 (1997): 360–362; E. Keene, "Structures of Forgiveness in the New Testament," in *Violence against Women and Children*, ed. C. Adams, et al (New York: Continuum, 1996), 121–134; G. Gerber Koontz, "As We Forgive Others: Christian Forgiveness and Feminist Pain," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68 (April 1994): 170–193.

[5] For the duality of forgiveness discourse, see the popular, classic work by David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Forgive/Caring Enough Not to Forgive* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981).

[6] T. Trzyna, "The Social Construction of Forgiveness," *Christian Scholar's Review* 27 (Winter 1997): 226–241.

[7] David Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 262.

Thus, as we discover the linguistic and cultural concreteness of "forgiveness" in the biblical world, we will find not only strong points of continuity with our own patterns, but also points of discontinuity. And it is especially at places of discontinuity with our own framework that the biblical world has much to say to us.

Throughout the Bible, forgiveness in human-human relationships largely (but not entirely)[8] mirrors forgiveness in divine-human relationships, and vice versa—one provides the paradigm for the other. But the two relationships are also integrally related insofar as an offence by a human against another human is understood also to be an offence against God,[9] if not also something that pollutes the land.[10] Thus forgiveness is part of a comprehensive restoration that includes spiritual, relational and physical healing.[11] As J. J. Stamm observes: "The OT does not know forgiveness in the modern sense of a spiritual phenomenon; rather, it knows it only as a concrete, comprehensive process that also affects the individual or society externally."[12] The vast majority of occurrences of words related to the topic of forgiveness in the Bible centres on dynamics related to the divine-human relationship. Unlike most treatments of forgiveness in the Bible, however, this essay will focus instead on the horizontal dynamics of dealing with offences and of restoring relationships in human community.[13]

The Structure and Language of Forgiveness in the Hebrew Old Testament

We begin by investigating the structure of the reconciliation process in the Hebrew Old Testament, of which forgiveness is one integral component. This structure, which has its culturally specific linguistic and social patterns, can be conceptualized as involving the interrelated paths of the offender and the offended. What follows is a cumulative listing of aspects of each path, from stories or from admonitions in the Old Testament, and is thus a mental construct; nowhere do all of these elements appear together in a single incident.

[8] See below, nn. 19–24.

[9] For example, Lev 6:1–7; Num 5:5–10.

[10] For example, Num 35:33–34; 2 Sam 21:1–14.

[11] The classic text in this connection is 2 Chron 7:14—"if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (NRSV). For the close tie between forgiveness and healing in the New Testament, see e.g., James 5:14–16 in addition to Gospel texts (e.g., Mark 2:1–12).

[12] J. J. Stamm, "סלח *slḥ* to forgive," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, trans. M. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 799.

[13] By contrast, see e.g., Dorothy Jean Weaver, "On Imitating God and Outwitting Satan: Biblical Perspectives on Forgiveness and the Community of Faith," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68 (April 1994): 151–169.

The listing also does not take adequate account of the various types of relationships involved, the varied types of offences committed,[14] and the varied motivations that push each party to pursue the path of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the listing can still serve as an initial heuristic outline, and will be followed by a treatment of concrete paradigms of model behaviour illustrating the reconciliation/forgiveness process.

The Path of the Offender

Once an offender has realized the fact or gravity of an offence, or has decided to pursue reconciliation (from whatever impetus, or to whatever end), one can find the following responses.

Humiliation. In most stories of the pursuit of reconciliation where there is a clear offending party (see below), social and ritual humiliation is a chief element of the pattern, if not also the initial act. This is displayed in physical acts of obeisance (bowing to the ground), and of offering oneself as a servant/slave in relation to a noble lord who is begged for "favour." This is perhaps the most striking feature of the pattern of pursuing reconciliation. In many cases, the socially patterned humiliation seems to be the social gesture which communicates—even takes the place of—the words of confession and repentance (the next two elements).[15] Ritual humiliation is finally resolved when the offended person "lifts up the face" of the prostrated offender. "Contrition," with its focus on internal feelings, is inadequate by itself to describe this aspect of the offender's path.

Confession. In legal codes, direct acknowledgement of wrongdoing is required of those who wrong another (for example, Num 5:7). Actual cases of verbal confession of offences in human relationships can be found in the stories of Pharaoh and Moses (Exod 9:27; 10:16), Saul and Samuel (1 Sam 15:24, 30), Saul and David (1 Sam 26:21), Shimei and David (2 Sam 19:20), and Hezekiah and the king of Assyria (2 Kgs 18:14).[16]

[14] Israel had an extensive vocabulary for offences. The three most important words are: חָטָא, *ḥāṭ'*, fault, mistake, wrong; עָוֹן, *'āwôn*, crooked activity, guilt, offence, wrong; פֶּשַׁע, *peša'*, breach of relationship, offence, rebellion. These, however, can be interchangeable, and the type of offence designated needs to be determined from the context.

[15] For this pattern in the divine-human relationship, see e.g., Lev 26:41; 2 Chron 7:14.

[16] Cases of individuals confessing offences to God are those of Balaam (Num 22:34) and David (2 Sam 12:13; 2 Sam 24:10, 17 [=1 Chron 21:8]). Classic cases of corporate confession to God (by the people, or by an individual on behalf of the people) can be found in 1 Kgs 8:46–53 (=2 Chron 6:36–42), Ps 106:6, Dan 9:3–11, Neh 1:4–11, to name just a few. Striking about these last examples (except for Neh 1:4–11) is the use of Israel's three-fold "sin" vocabulary: "We have wronged (חטא, *ḥṭ'*); we have committed iniquity (עוה, *'wh*); we have done wickedly (רשע, *rš'*)."

Repentance. The notion of "repentance," expressed with terms such as "turning from" or "putting away" wrongdoing, indicates the change from persistent misdeeds, and thus can especially be found in cases where corporate repentance occurs or is enjoined (for example, Lev 26:41; 1 Kgs 8:48; 2 Chron 6:37; 7:14).[17] There are no specific acts of repentance in stories of reconciliation in human relationships; but this appears to be the case only because those stories focus around a particular offence, not persistent wrongdoing.

Pleas that the offended party "bear" (or "forgive") the offence. "Forgive" must be left in parentheses here, since the language and nuances of these pleas differ significantly from what westerners may consider to be the meaning of "forgive." Hebrew, indeed, has a rather rich, and notably concrete and metaphorical vocabulary for this part of the process, which is tied closely to the next item: to make amends, or to offer compensation.[18] For many of these terms there is no direct English equivalent, and the translation "forgive" may be quite misleading. In pleas by offenders, we find the following expressions:

- that the offended person "bear (נשׂא, *nś'*) the offence," that is, tolerate, endure, or forbear the offence (for example, Gen 50:17; Exod 10:17; 1 Sam 15:25; 25:28);[19]
- that the offended person "not remember (זכר, *zkr*) the offence" (2 Sam 19:20); that the offended person "not reckon (חשׁב, *hšb*) the offence" (2 Sam 19:20); and that the offended person "not put the offence into one's heart," that is, "not keep the offence in mind" (1 Sam 25:25; 2 Sam 19:20);[20]
- that the offending person "find favour" (מצא חן, *mṣ' ḥn*) with the offended person (Gen 33:8, 10, 15).[21]

[17] For "putting away" (*rḥq*) offences, see e.g., Job 11:14; 22:23.

[18] For an overview of the vocabulary, see e.g., Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 212–218; John S. Kselman, "Forgiveness: Old Testament," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 831–833.

[19] Since the verb נשׂא (*nś'*) can mean "bear," "lift up," or "take away," there is some uncertainty about the precise meaning of this idiom in different contexts; Kselman, "Forgiveness," 832. The meaning "to bear" offences appears to be the meaning particularly in cases in which humans ask other humans "to bear" offences. When God is the subject, the meaning tends to go in the direction of "take away" offences, but not in all cases. When a person "bears" one's own wrongdoing or "God's wrath" (Mic 7:9), the person's own guilt is indicated. Others, however, can also "bear" the offence, sometimes vicariously: the scapegoat (Lev 16:22), God (Num 14:19; Ps 32:5; 85:2[3]), an offering to God (Lev 10:17), the injured party (e.g., Gen 50:17), and finally a third party (e.g., the suffering servant, Isa 53:4; Abigail, 1 Sam 25:24).

[20] Note also the expression that God not "forget" (שׁכח, *škḥ*) the offences of adversaries (Ps 74:23). Conversely, to "remember" offences is to ensure requital and justice (Ps 25:7; Jer 14:10; 31:34; Hos 7:2; 8:13; 9:9).

[21] The related expression to "show favour" (חנן, *ḥnn*) is used in situations of wrongdoing only in reference to divine "favour," e.g., Ps 51:1(3).

Further expressions for how an offender person would have an offended person act in response to humilation and confession are as follows:

- that the offended person "accept someone favourably" (רצה, *rṣh*, Gen 33:10) or "take pity" (חמל, *ḥml*; Prov 6:34);[22]
- that the offended person "pass by" (עבר, *'br*) the offence, in the sense of "overlooking" (Prov 19:11).
- that the offended person "cover" (כסה, *ksh*) the offence, also in the sense of "overlooking" (Prov 10:12; 12:16; 17:9);
- that the offended person "not repay" (שלם, *šlm*) the offence (Prov 20:22; cf., Prov 17:9) or not "take vengeance" (נקם, *nqm*), that is, "seek requital on one's own" (Lev 19:18);
- that the offended person not "keep" (נטר, *ntr*), that is, not "keep a grudge or be angry," not "hold onto" the offence (Lev 19:18).[23]

In texts where God is invited to respond mercifully to offences or offenders, or is described as willing to do so, we find all of the above expressions. But the language of "forgiveness" in reference to God also goes beyond these notions of "forgiveness" to entail the complete "removing," "erasing," or "cleansing" of wrongdoing.[24]

Someone else's "bearing" of one's offences, however, does not always provide one with immunity, amnesty, or impunity, even when God does the "bearing." Rather, when someone else "bears" one's

[22] The related expression to "show compassion" (רחם, *rḥm*) is used to designate forgiveness only in reference to divine compassion (e.g., Ps 103:12–13; 1 Kgs 8:50; Isa 55:7). For the dual characteristics of God as רחום (*raḥûm*, "compassionate") and חנון (*ḥanûn*, "gracious") in the context of dealing with offences, see Exod 34:6; Neh 9:17; Ps 103:8.

[23] In regard to divine forgiveness, see Ps 103:9; Jer 3:5, 12.

[24] The following expressions occur: a) That God "indulge" or "pardon/forgive" (סלח, *slḥ*) the offence (e.g., Exod 34:9; 1 Kgs 8:30–50; Ps 103:3; Isa 55:7). This verb most closely approximates the usage of the English word "forgive," but is only used in connection with divine-human offences, where God is the subject. In modern Hebrew the cognate noun סְלִיחָה (*s'liḥâ*, "pardon, forgiveness," Ps 130:4; Dan 9:9; Neh 9:17) has become the common expression for the colloquial "pardon me." b) That God "take away" (נשא, *ns'*) the offence; that God "remove/take far away" (רחק, *rḥq*) the offence; that God "remove" (סור, *swr*) the offence (Isa 6:7); that God "let pass/remove/put away" (עבר, *'br*, hiphil) the offence (2 Sam 12:13; 24:10; Mic 7:18; in some cases this expression seems to refer to the "transference" of the guilt to another party, not simply the erasing of it; Kselman, "Forgiveness," 833); that God "wipe away/blot out/erase" (מחה, *mḥh*) the offence (Ps 51:1[3], 9[11]; Isa 43:25; 44:22); that God "throw away" (*šlk*) and "tread underfoot" (*kbš*) the offence (Mic 7:18–19). c) That God "burn/purge" (בער, *b'r*) the offence/guilt; that God "wash away" (כבס, *kbs*) the offence (Ps 51:2[4]; Jer 2:22; 4:14); that God "purify/cleanse" (טהר, *ṭhr*) the offence (Ps 51:2[4], 7[9]; Jer 33:8). d) That God "heal" (רפא, *rp'*) persons or diseases, in connection with dealing with sins (Ps 103:3; 2 Chron 7:14; Ps 41:4[5]; 107:20; 147:3; Isa 53:5; 57:18; Jer 3:22; Hos 7:1). e) That God "acquit, leave unpunished" (נקה, *nqh*; positively, Ps 19:12[13]; negatively Jer 30:11; 46:28; Exod 34:7; Job 10:14).

wrong (including God), the full consequences may be mitigated or transferred elsewhere (for example, 2 Sam 12:13; 24:10–17). Especially in human relationships, "forgiving" in this sense does not "erase" the wrong in any sense. The one "bearing" certainly does not give up hope for complete vindication or compensation; rather, the total removal of the guilt, or the final requital/vengeance for the wrong is typically deferred to God. And so some expressions of "bearing" offences assume that such behaviour will not only produce a reward for the one forbearing, but also incite God to do the repaying in a compensating manner (1 Sam 25:26, 28, 39; 2 Sam 16:12; Prov 24:17–18; 25:21–22). This leads directly to the next item.

Offer of amends (appeasement, reparation, compensation, indemnification, restitution). In legal codes dealing with litigious offences (offences subject to judicial litigation), the principle of *lex talionis* ("law of retaliation") provides the basic assumption for establishing justice or restoring wrongs, the main purpose of which was to avert retaliatory violence (Exod 21:23–25, 36; Lev 24:18–20; Deut 19:21). In cases other than murder,[25] however, this principle was usually expressed through some form of "proportional compensation" (for example, Exod 21:34–22:15). In legal texts, the notion of "restoring, compensating, and making restitution" (even "retaliating" extra-judicially) is expressed by the verb שלם (*šlm*), "to make whole," cognate to the noun *shalom*, "wholeness, peace, well-being." Restitution could be imposed by the court/judge, or offered by the aggrieved party, either in non-litigious offences, or to preclude litigation or retaliation in more serious cases. Depending on the case, the restitution could be full (100 percent), full with an additional one-fifth (Lev 5:16; Num 5:7), double (Exod 22:4, 7, 9), four-fold (2 Sam 2:6), or even seven-fold (Prov 6:31).[26] Even in non-litigious offences, however, the pattern of offering a "gift" or "ransom" as an appeasement to "make amends" was fundamental to the reconciliation process. Words used for this activity include the following:

- "to cover" (כפר, *kpr*) offences in the sense of "making amends," or "compensating for" offences (e.g., Prov 16:6). With the same verb is expressed the notion of "appeasing" someone by "covering" someone's face (Gen 32:20) or someone's wrath (Prov 16:14);[27] and in some cases the verb can be used without an object, indicating simply "make amends," or "compensate for" (e.g., 2 Sam 21:3). Invariably, the mode of

[25] No "ransom," compensating payment is permitted for intentional murder (Num 35:31; cf., Lev 24:17); even accidental manslaughter is to be compensated for by flight to a "city of refuge" (Num 35:22–28), not by "ransom" (35:22).

[26] For a ruling demanding compensation for persistent economic exploitation against the poor, see Neh 5:1–13, esp. vv 11–12.

[27] Cf., the prayers that God "hide his face from offences" (Ps 51:9[11]) and that God "turn away wrath" from adversaries (Jer 18:20).

"making amends" was by offering an "appeasement," usually a "gift" or a "ransom." The noun "covering" (כֹּפֶר, *kôper*) is the actual term for an "appeasement" or "ransom," and in some cases designates a "bribe."[28]

- "to pay for" or "make pleasing" (רצה, *rṣh*) offences is a less frequent idiom (e.g., Lev 26:34, 41, 43); in the passive voice, an offence can be "paid for, pleased" and thus "pardoned" (Isa 40:2).[29]
- "to wipe away (מחה, *mḥh*) shame," in the sense of dealing with the stigma of an offence, is also an expression found in the context of offering reparation for wrongs committed (Prov 6:33).

Generally speaking, in Old Testament texts, there is no full restoration following the "bearing" of offences without "making amends" for wrongdoing. "Forgiveness" (full releasing, amnesty, restoration, reconciliation) is achieved only after one "makes amends" for wrongdoing.[30]

The Path of the Offended Person

Anger, desire for requital or vengeance. In cases where serious offences have occurred, anger and the desire for repayment are assumed to be the normal responses of the offended party, whether human or divine. While there are plenty of proverbs advising restraint of anger,[31] the acknowledgement of legitimate anger is expressed through the pattern of "appeasement" noted above, and constantly in the language of divine anger in response to offences committed.[32]

[28] As "ransom, reparation:" Exod 21:30; 30:12, 16; Num 35:31–32; Job 33:24; 36:18; Ps 49:7[8]; Prov 6:35; 13:8; 21:18; Isa 43:3; as "bribe:" 1 Sam 12:3; Amos 5:12. The verb *kpr* is especially used in cultic contexts (Lev, Num) to designate "appeasing" wrath, "making amends" for sin, or both (i.e., "making atonement") and is associated with the offering of sacrifice and gifts.

[29] In the hithpael stem (reflexive use), a related meaning of this verb is "to make oneself pleasing to someone" in the sense of "reconciling oneself to someone" (1 Sam 29:4). Cf., also the use of the term שוה (*šwh*), to be "equaled," "suitable," "satisfying," and thus "tolerated" in Est 3:8; 7:4 (in the sense of "compensate for"); Job 33:27. The piel stem of חטא (*ḥṭ'*) also has the meaning "to compensate for" and thus of "bearing the loss" for something (Gen 31:39). This usage is often translated as "cleansing" or "purging" in ritual contexts (whether the altar [Lev 8:15] offences [Lev 9:15; Num 19:19; Ps 51:7(9)], offender [Ps 51:7(9)], contexts where חַטָּאת (*ḥaṭṭā't*) is the compensating "sin-offering" (repeatedly in Lev, Num, and Ezek).

[30] Note accordingly the passive (niphal) usage of סלח, (*slḥ*) as "forgiven" in the context of cultic rituals following the "compensating for" offences; e.g., Lev 4:20–6:7; Num 15:25–28.

[31] For example, Prov 15:18; 19:11; 29:22.

[32] For example, 1 Kgs 8:46; Jer 18:20; Mic 7:9.

Overlooking offences. In minor, non-litigious cases involving local kinship or neighbourhood relationships, a pattern promoted is that of "covering" or "passing by" offences, apparently in the sense of "overlooking" or "excusing" the offence. Related to this would be the response of "not holding a grudge/maintaining anger" (for example, Lev 19:17; cf., Ps 103:9).

Confronting offences. The notion of "confrontation" is expressed by the verb יכח (*ykḥ*), which is usually translated as "rebuke/reprove," but can also have the meaning of "correct, discipline," or, in legal contexts, "accuse, litigate." "Rebuke" of one's neighbour, primarily for offences against oneself but probably also for offences in general, is not only recommended; it is presented as an obligation (Lev 19:17). In the case of Laban and Jacob, where both parties feel that they have been wronged, there is mutual "rebuke," as both present their claims to their kinfolk (Gen 31:37, 42). The importance of "confronting" is especially highlighted in the wisdom literature (Prov 9:8; 10:10;[33] 17:10; 19:25; 24:25; 25:12; 27:5; 28:23; 30:6; Eccl 7:5), even though it is observed that rebuke is lost on scoffers (Prov 9:7–8; 15:12). The Wisdom of Ben Sirach (ca. 180 BCE; now included in the Old Testament Apocrypha) continues this tradition, noting that "rebuke" must be timely (20:1; 31:31), that it is needs to be carefully considered (11:7), that it is better than staying angry (20:2), and that it is preferable to threatening, as one leaves vengeance to God (19:17). The sages who compiled the ethical advice of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (ca. 100–70 BCE; now included in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha) also promoted the response of timely and peaceful "rebuke" without provocation (*T.Gad* 6.3–7). And the communally oriented Essenes of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the centuries before and during the time of Jesus, made mutual rebuke without anger, on the basis of Lev 19:17,[34] a moral duty for relationships within the community, with the proviso that rebuke not take place on the same day as the offence itself.[35]

"Bearing" offences. As the counterpart to the offender's plea for "bearing the offence," so also the model offended person is presented as eventually "bearing an offence," "showing favour," "not remembering," or "not repaying/taking vengeance." "Not repaying/taking vengeance" can mean not taking judicial matters into one's own hands, in cases of litigious offences, or it can mean not holding a grudge, or not responding in kind in cases of non-litigious cases (while deferring one's case to God).

[33] From the Septuagint's translation: "but the one who rebukes with boldness makes peace."

[34] On reproof without anger, see also Ps 6:1; 38:1.

[35] CD 9.2–8; 1QS 5.24–6.1; 9.16–18. See further G. Zerbe, *Non-retaliation in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Contexts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 110–111.

Reconciling with the offender. The signal from the offended person, indicating that the broken relationship has been transformed, or that the offence has been adequately compensated for, never occurs in the Old Testament with words, such as, "I forgive you." Rather, reconciliation is indicated by means of social ritual—the offended person, usually cast in the role of a superior who can choose to extend or not to extend unmerited "favour" to a vassal, a) "receives the gift" (Gen 33:11; 1 Sam 25:27, 35), (b) "lifts up the face" of the offender (Gen 32:20; 1 Sam 25:35; Prov 6:35), c) provides protection (Gen 33:12–15; 50:19–21), or d) expresses "kind words" (Gen 50:21).[36]

Prayers that God "not forgive" offences or offenders. In some cases the desire for requital is expressed in prayers that God "not cover/pass by/pardon/forget" offences of some "other"—opponents or enemies, often political enemies.[37] These expressions, closely related to the curses of the "imprecatory" psalms, warrant specific consideration. These prayers are often treated as representing an un-Christian desire for revenge or, in some cases, an ethnically-oriented we/they demarcation. More significantly, these prayers indicate the acknowledgement that justice is being (or is to be) deferred to God. As such, they show the complex interplay of "bearing" and "compensating for" offences. Indeed, we shall see prayers that opponents be judged by God and a sharp inside/outside boundary marker also in the New Testament (see below).[38]

Paradigms of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

We turn to paradigms which illustrate the two paths toward transforming relationships marred by offences. First, we will review stories from narrative segments—three from the patriarchal age and three from the world of David—then review proverbial advice from Israel's sages. A crucial argument of Waldemar Janzen's *Old Testament Ethics* is the centrality of a "familial paradigm" of ethical modeling, the end of which is kinship shalom; other paradigms (involving king, prophet, priest, and sage) provide supporting models of the

[36] For a discussion of "rituals of reconciliation" in various cultural contexts, see David Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation*, 275–278.

[37] For example, Jer 18:23; Neh 4:5; Amos 7:8; 8:2; Ps 74:18, 23.

[38] The ethnic framework of elect people's identity is a decisive difference that separates the Old Testament's perspective on forgiveness from that of the New Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, it is assumed that God will especially "forgive" the chosen people based on a prior covenant. The ethnic framework changes in the New Testament, but not the importance of "election" in communal identity, with its strong inside/outside boundary. For a discussion of the role of competing claims to God's "election" in conflict transformation today in South Africa (involving both Afrikan and African), see Battle, "A Theology of Community," 173–174.

basic familial paradigm.[39] The treatment below will also find a fundamental familial paradigm, supported by aspects of the royal and wisdom paradigms.

The reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 32–33). The dramatic story of Jacob and Esau is an instructive case of the forgiveness-reconciliation process in Israel, even though actual words of repentance, apology, or forgiveness are absent. The conflict emerges when Jacob cheats Esau out of his birthright and blessing (Gen 25:29–34; 27:1–45); Esau is both mournful and enraged, and decides to kill Jacob. Rebekah, however, prevents an act of violence and the permanent dissolution of the family by convincing Jacob to flee the land: "until your brother's anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him" (Gen 27:45).[40] The story of Jacob and Esau then takes a twenty-year hiatus, as the story of Jacob turns to the land of Haran and another instance of family conflict and reconciliation (see below, on Jacob and Laban; Genesis 29–31). Finally, Jacob resolves to return to the land of his birth. Fearful of what might befall him and his family, Jacob frames his apology and request for reconciliation in two significant ways: a) implicitly acknowledging his indebtedness to Esau, he repeatedly presents himself as an obsequious servant, ready to do homage, and begging for unmerited favour from his lord (32:3–5; 18, 20; 33:3, 5–11, 13–15); b) he offers a substantial gift to Esau as an appeasement, a sort of reparation, and as an offering to gain "favour" (32:13, 18, 20–21; 33:8–11). The word for "gift" here (*minḥâ*) is typically used for gifts as a show of respect, thanks, homage, or political friendship. In one place the text also calls the gift a *bᵉrākâ* ("blessing;" 33:11), indicating that Jacob is now returning part of the stolen blessing (27:30, 35–36, 38, 41) back to Esau. Jacob's intention is literally phrased: "I will cover (*kpr*) his face with the present . . . and perhaps he will lift up my face" (Gen 32:20)—the former idiom signifies appeasement, and the latter the extension of lordly favour, an act of pardon, or the acceptance of compensation.[41] For his part, Esau embraces Jacob (33:4), "receives him with favour" (33:10, 15),[42] and eventually "accepts the gift" (33:11), formalizing the reconciliation, and then protects his new vassal as would a noble lord (33:12–15). Ancient Israel undoubtedly perceived this story to be a central paradigm of the dynamics of divine-human reconciliation. This can

[39] Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 177–178.

[40] Note here the role of time, distance, and ostracism in conflict resolution.

[41] "To lift up one's head" is to grant pardon in Gen 40:13, 19–20; 2 Kgs 25:27; "to lift up one's face" can imply receiving compensation in Prov 6:35.

[42] Using the verb *rṣh* ("receive someone favourably") in 33:10; *mṣ' ḥn* ("find favour") in 33:8, 10, 15; thus Esau "shows favour" to Jacob just as the LORD has "shown favour" to Jacob (33:5, 11).

be seen especially a) in the use of the term "cover" (*kpr*, the common word for cultic atonement) for the appeasing of the injury, effected through the offering of a gift, b) in the language of Jacob's seeking to "find favour" in response to being "shown favour" from the LORD (Gen 33:5, 11), and c) in Jacob's comment that "to see your face is like seeing the face of God" (Gen 33:10). Moreover, the parallel between Jacob's struggle with Esau and his struggle with the LORD (32:22–32; 33:10–11) indicates that one comes to terms with God as a person comes to terms with the one who has been wronged.[43]

The truce between Laban and Jacob (Genesis 29–31). Sandwiched within the story of Jacob and Esau is the story of Jacob and his father-in-law Laban, in which we find multiple examples of mutual deception, including deception in matters of property, wages, and relationship. After enduring years of deception from his father-in-law, Jacob finally resolves to return to the land of his birth (30:25–26; cf., 31:3), but before doing so manages to outsmart (deceive) Laban in mutually-held assets (30:25–43). Learning of disgruntlement by his relatives against him (31:1–2), and securing sympathy from his wives Leah and Rachel for his side of the dispute (31:4–16), Jacob deceives (31:20) Laban one last time, taking flight with his wives, family, and property (31:17–21). To make matters worse, Rachel, unbeknown to Jacob, has stolen Laban's household gods (an offence which, to Jacob's favour, is never actually solved by Laban). After three days delay and seven days of pursuit, Laban catches up to Jacob. The narrator indicates that in this case, Laban could easily have pursued his right to punish Jacob for the injustice committed (31:24, 29). But instead we find a segment of mutual "rebuke" and explanation of actions in the presence of the kinfolk of both claimants (31:25–42). The narrator notes that the God of Jacob's father (!) ordered Laban not to pursue his case as he might (31:24), something that Laban is sure to tell Jacob (31:29). But one might also note that Laban's eventual offer of a truce ("covenant") was also prompted because of his realization that he had more to lose (especially family solidarity) if he had claimed his right, and because of the effect of Jacob's "rebuke." Jacob itemizes the wrongs he had suffered and retorts that the message of God to desist from punitive action was actually God's "rebuke" of Laban's own legacy of injustice. And so, letting God "be the judge between us" (deferring the pursuit of claims to God's prerogative; 31:37, 42, 49, 50, 53), they erected a stone heap as a memorial and to mark the boundary between their lands, then offered sacrifice and ate bread together in celebration all night to mark their mutual commitment to the truce.

[43] I am indebted to Dan Epp-Tiessen for this last observation.

A significant feature of this story is the role of a covenant meal as the social ritual marking the transforming of conflict.[44] Whereas Jacob has earlier hosted two meals to take advantage of people (Esau), this third meal in the Jacob stories seals a covenant. This story also has a political meaning. Since Jacob and Laban represent Israel and Syria respectively, the story asserts not only the need for peaceful co-existence between the two nations but also indicates that the way to do it is through respecting the boundary (31:52).[45]

The reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 50:15–21). The matter of kinship shalom also comes to the fore in the story of Joseph and his brothers, although there are elements of the story that, given Joseph's political position, suggest an ideal royal model.[46] Somewhat ironically, but perhaps realistically, the offending brothers of Joseph plead for mercy only after the death of their father Jacob, in whose honour they presumably earlier would have all kept the peace. Their concern is that Joseph would somehow still be holding a grudge (שׂטם, *śṭm*, cf., Gen 27:41) and would seek revenge for the evil perpetrated years earlier. Appealing indirectly to family honour and solidarity, they entreat Joseph initially with instructions ostensibly from the mouth of Jacob, including an acknowledgement of wrongs: "Please, bear the offence and wrong of your brothers, for they treated you wrongly." The brothers then proceed with their own words: "So now, please bear the offence of the servants of the God of your father" (Gen 50:17). Subsequently, they prostrate themselves before him and say: "We are your servants" (Gen 50:18), repeating the pattern of humiliation noted in the Jacob-Esau story. For his part, Joseph weeps upon receipt of the request for "bearing" offences (forgiveness), and then implicitly accepts their request with reassuring words: a) they should not fear; b) requital of wrongs is God's business anyway; c) the consequences of their wrong was mitigated in that the wrong turned out for the good of all (cf., Gen 45:4–7); d) he now promises to provide (as a noble lord) for them and their children (Gen 50:19–21).

The reconciliation of David and Nabal's house through Abigail (1 Samuel 25). The narrator tells the story of David, Nabal, and Abigail in their roles as hero, buffoon, and wise mediator; and so the story is a prime exemplar of the "wisdom paradigm."[47] The situation presented represents a conflict between rivals (a rich, powerful landowner, and an emerging military leader): although David sends his men to Nabal requesting a favour as from a lord (25:6–8), he is actually himself hoping to be treated as a lord, seeking provisions in exchange for safety (25:14–17, 21–22). When Nabal

[44] For another example of a "covenant" meal that transforms a conflict and symbolizes forgiveness, see 2 Kgs 6:20–23. Cf., also Rom 12:20–21.

[45] I am indebted to Dan Epp-Tiessen for these observations.

[46] See Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 125–126.

[47] See ibid., 14–15, 120–121.

refuses—undoubtedly to retain his independence, not only because of his ill-natured character (25:3, 17, 25)—David's honour is impugned by Nabal's contempt/insult (25:39) and he readies his warriors. Blood would have flowed but for the intervention of Abigail, Nabal's "wise and beautiful" wife (25:3). Abigail readies a substantial gift, and then proceeds to intercept David. To appease David, Abigail a) plays the part of servile humiliation, through prostration before him (25:23) and constant references to "my lord" and "your servant" in her speech (25:24–31); b) claims to be taking all the guilt of the insult onto herself (25:24); c) asks that Nabal's behaviour "not be put into his [David's] heart" (25:25; cf., 2 Sam 19:20); d) reminds David of the LORD's role in meting out justice so that he should not be guilty of retaliatory bloodguilt (25:25–26; cf., 31, 33, 39); e) requests that the gift (*bᵉrākâ*, literally "blessing") be accepted (25:27); f) asks that he "bear" her (!) offence, which she has taken on vicariously (25:28); and g) promises good fortune to David (25:28b–31). David for his part immediately blesses God for having been met by her, and blesses her for having restrained him from his own bloodguilt and from hurting her unknowingly. He then formally receives the offering which she brought, and sends her back home with shalom, saying, "See, I have heeded your voice, and I have lifted up your face" (25:35), idiomatically signalling reconciliation in the same manner as in the Jacob-Esau story (Gen 32:20). While this story indicates appeasement and reparation for impugned honour, in some ways it seems that "forgiveness" is not quite appropriate here (despite the translation of "bear" as "forgive" in most English translations) since Nabal's subsequent death is, for David, an act of divine justice confirming that he was in the right (25:39).

The reconciliation of Shemei with the House of David (2 Samuel 19:16–23). In 2 Samual 19 we find a story of the reconfiguration (reconciliation) of clan relationships in the context of the emerging kingdom of David. Shimei of the house of Saul had earlier cursed David for the deposing of Saul during a time of misfortune for David (the loss of Jerusalem to Absalom); at the time David had not exacted blood revenge, even though being urged to do so by friends, thinking that the cursing was bidden by the LORD and that his restraint would eventually be rewarded (2 Sam 16:1–14). Now that David's rule is secured once again in Jerusalem, Shimei is the first to come out to do homage and to plead for mercy. Prostrating himself, placing himself as a vassal ("your servant/my lord"), and acknowledging his offence ("I your servant know that I have wronged"), he asks that David "not reckon the offence" against him, "not remember" the wrong, and "not put it into his heart" (2 Sam 19:19–20). For his part, despite being enjoined to execute Shimei, David relents and promises with an oath that Shimei will not die (19:22–23).

The appeasement of the attempted genocide against Gibeon (2 Samuel 21:1–14). A rather gruesome appeasement occurs in a case of civil tension during David's reign. A three-year famine has come to the land of Israel, and David receives an oracle from the LORD that the cause is the remaining bloodguilt of Saul and his house for attempting to wipe out the Gibeonites on behalf of the people of Israel and Judah (2 Sam 21:1–2), despite an earlier treaty in the time of Joshua assuring their safety (Josh 9:3–27). So David inquires of the Gibeonites: "How shall I cover (*kpr*, make amends, appease), that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?" The guarded answer is first that they desire neither silver or gold (that is, a financial appeasement, ransom), nor the death of anyone in Israel (direct compensation). Yet, when David asks a second time, "What do you say that I should do for you?" (that is, to make amends for the wrong), the Gibeonites respond that seven descendants of the perpetrator Saul should be handed over to them for execution—indeed, for ritual impaling and exposure "before the LORD;" and David obliges (21:4–9). However, David becomes convinced that the expiation was overdone (at least the exposure and desecration of the bodies), so he gathers the bones of Saul and Jonathan and the bodies of the victims for a proper burial in the land of Benjamin (21:10–14). And as a consequence, says the narrator, the famine was lifted. While this may not appear to us as the noblest of ethical paradigms, it does highlight the importance of ritual appeasement (compensation) in the structure of restoration in ancient Israel.

Besides these paradigms from narrative sections of the Old Testament, there are proverbial maxims which clarify and extend a "familial-wisdom paradigm" of virtuous behaviour with respect to forgiveness:

- Hatred stirs up strife; but love covers (*ksh*) all offences (Prov 10:12).[48]
- The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent one covers (*ksh*) an insult. (Prov 12:16)
- The one who covers (*ksh*) an offence seeks love, but the one who responds in kind (lit., repeats a matter) alienates a friend. (Prov 17:9)
- By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is covered (*kpr*, compensated); and by the fear of the LORD one avoids evil. (Prov 16:6)
- When the ways of people please the LORD, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them. (Prov 16:7)
- Good sense makes people slow to anger, and it is their glory to pass by (*'br*) an offence. (Prov 19:11)

[48] Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

- The beginning of strife is like the breach of water (from a dam); so drop (the matter) before it leads to litigation. (Prov 17:14)
- Do not say, "I will repay (*šlm*, compensate for) evil;" wait for the LORD and he will vindicate you. (Prov 20:22)
- Do not say, "Just as he has done to me, so I will do to him; I will pay the man back (*šwb*) for what he has done." (Prov 24:29)

This wisdom paradigm continues among Jewish sages in the centuries before Christ, anticipating themes in the New Testament. The Wisdom of Ben Sirach (ca. 180 BCE), elaborating on the meaning of Leviticus 19:17–18, exhorts this way:

> Rage and anger, these also are abominations . . . .
> The one who takes vengeance will find vengeance from the LORD [cf., Lev 19:18a]
> and [God] will surely retain (in memory) his wrongs.
> Remit for your neighbour the injustice (done against you)
> and then when you pray your wrongs will be remitted.
> A person harbours anger against another, [Lev 19:18a]
> and then seeks healing from the LORD?
> That person has no mercy for a person like himself, [Lev 19:18b]
> and then begs on behalf of his own wrongs?
> Keeping anger though being of like flesh, [Lev 19:17a]
> who will make compensation for his wrongs?
> . . . Remember the commandments,
> and do not hold anger against your neighbour [Lev 19:18a],
> (remember) the covenant of the Most High, and overlook the mistake. (Sir 27:30–28:7)

The *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* (ca. 100–70 BCE) also stresses the virtue of forgiving love, based on the portrait of Josesph and his brothers in Genesis 50:15–21:

> For when we went down into Egypt, Joseph did not recall evil toward us,
> but when he saw me he had compassion.
> Taking heed to him [Joseph], you also become forgetters of evil, my children,
> and love one another;
> and do not reckon, each of you, the evil of his brother. (*T.Zeb.* 8:4–5; cf., *T.Sim.* 4:4–7)

> And if someone offends you
> speak to him in peace
> after having cast away the poison of hatred;
> and do not harbour guile in your heart.
> And if he confesses and repents, release him.
> And if he denies, do not become contentious with him. . . .

If, then, he denies, and yet feels shame when reproved,
keep silent, do not provoke him;
for the one who denies will repent, so as not to offend you again,
but he may even honour and respect you and be at peace with you.
But if he is shameless and persists in wrongdoing,
even so release him from the heart,[49]
and give vengeance (justice) to God. (*T.Gad* 6:3–4, 6–7)

The Nature and Structure of Human Forgiveness in the New Testament

As we turn to the New Testament, we find a basic continuity with the "familial-wisdom" paradigm of the Old Testament, aimed at maintaining or restoring community shalom. The same pathways for offender and offended on the way to reconciliation are either presumed or identified. Yet, the language and imagery of "forgiveness" do shift to some degree, a fact not surprising once the different cultural and linguistic environment of the New Testament is taken into account. Thus the concrete pattern of ritual humiliation, appeasement (through gift), and restoration (receipt of gift) is lacking. Finally, if in the Old Testament an offence against another person is perceived as a personal injury or social breach to be restored (compensated), a weight to be carried, a pollution or stain to be cleansed, a shame to be covered or removed, or a dishonour to be recovered, in the New Testament the new imagery is of an offence as an indebtedness to be released or remitted.

The New Testament's Greek vocabulary for "forgiveness" in human relationships can be placed in the following categories.

Words for "releasing" and "remitting." The most frequently used word is *aphienai*, which can mean a) let go, send away, release; b) leave, tolerate, allow; and c) remit, cancel, pardon. In Greek cultural environments, this word often had a particular legal nuance, indicating the "release" of someone from an office, marriage, obligation, tax, debt, or punishment, or indicating the "remitting" of an object or obligation for someone.[50] Of the 142 occurrences of this word in the New Testament, it is used 13 times for human "releasing/remitting" of offences (Matt 6:12, 14, 15; 18:21, 35; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3, 4; John 20:23) and another 30 or so times for the "releasing/remitting" of offences by God or Jesus. Other words expressing this notion in human relationships are the verbs *apolyein* ("release, set

[49] It is unclear whether this phrase suggests that one "let it go" (in continuity with the Hebrew idiom not to put an offence into one's heart), or whether it suggests the "remitting" of the offence.

[50] See R. Bultman, "*aphiēmi*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 509–512.

at liberty," Luke 6:37) and *lyein* ("loosen, release," Mattt 16:19; 18:18), and the nouns *aphesis* and *paresis* ("release, remission").[51] Related to this usage is the notion of an "offence" as creating an indebtedness, a theme highlighted in two parables illustrating the dynamics of forgiveness (Matt 18:23–35; Luke 7:36–50). While this understanding has it roots in the Greek tradition,[52] by the time of Jesus the usage of "debt" (*opheilēma*) to indicate "offence" and "debtor" (*ophelētēs*) to designate "offender" (Matt 6:12; Lk 13:4) had also become a distinctive Aramaic idiom.[53]

Words for "showing favour." In Paul's writings there is no occurrence of the vocabulary of "releasing/remitting" offences;[54] rather, to express forgiveness he prefers the word *charizesthai*, a word which in non-biblical, Greek settings expresses the idea of "showing unmerited favour or generosity," "gratifying," even "indulging" (typically by a superior toward an inferior). Corresponding to the Hebrew idiom of "showing favour" (*ḥnn*), this verb is found in the New Testament only in Paul's writings, and only in the sense of "showing favour" for offences (2 Cor 2:7, 10; 12:13; Col 2:13; 3:13).[55]

Less frequent terms, literally translating Hebrew idioms, are "covering" offences (*kalyptein*, *epikalyptein*, Rom 4:7; Jas 5:20; 1 Pet 4:8), "not reckoning/counting" offences (*mē logizesthai*, 1 Cor 13:5; 2 Cor 5:19; 2 Tim 4:16; Rom 4:8), and "bearing, taking away" offences (*airein*, *aphairein*).[56]

[51] Thus "releasing" offences is the opposite of "holding fast" (*kratein*; John 20:23) or "establishing" (*histenai*) offences (Acts 7:60). *Aphesis* is used in the New Testament only for the "remission" of offenses, except in Luke 4:18, where socio-economic "releasing" is also indicated; *paresis* is found in the New Testament only in Rom 3:35, and seems to indicate the "passing over" of prior sins in forbearance, picking up the Hebrew notion of "passing over" offences.

[52] The Greek word *opheilein* (to owe, be in debt) was used regularly in Greek environments to signify both commercial indebtedness and moral obligation. It was used also commonly in relation to revenge and law. In personal offences, the transgressor was in debt as far as the injured party was concerned; only the injured party could remit revenge as a debt owed to him. The injurer was expected to pay compensation and to do sacral penance. With the development of legal structures, the guilty party became a debtor to the law. See F. Hauck, "*opheilō*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 560. When Paul uses the phrase, "owe no one anything," in Rom 13:8, the meaning seems to be, do not become indebted to anyone through personal offence.

[53] In the Aramaic Targumim, "debt" (*ḥwb'*) became the regular term and metaphor for "offence," and "debtor" (*ḥyyb*) for "offender." See B. Chilton, "Debts," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 114–116.

[54] The only exception is Rom 4:7, where *aphienai* is part of a quote from the Septuagint.

[55] The language of "receiving mercy" (*eleeos*; Heb 4:16) and "showing mercy" (*eleeō*; Rom 11:30) is also used in relation to dealing with offences, but only where divine forgiveness is the focus. The plea for mercy (*eleison*) is found throughout the Gospels, but mostly in cases of physical healing, although the need for forgiveness is not always absent in these cases.

[56] The last words are used only for divine forgiveness: John 1:29; Rom 11:27; Heb 10:4; 1 John 3:5; cf., Luke 1:25, "bear reproach/disgrace."

Mention should also be made of words for "bearing, enduring, tolerating" offences or persons[57] and the closely related virtue of "forbearance" (*makrothymia*, 2 Cor 6:6; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12).[58]

This vocabulary, when applied to human relationships, can be found in three types of literary contexts, which will be examined in turn: a) Paul's recounting and advice on a particular case of communal conflict to which he was a party (2 Cor 1:23–2:11; 7:8–15), b) admonition and community guidelines, and c) prayers that the responsibility for forgiveness (or justice) be transferred or deferred to God.

Paul and conflict in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 1:23–2:11 and 7:8–15 Paul speaks to a case that involves a multi-layered, three-way conflict situation and a direct and indirect process of resolution. While many of the details of the case are unknown and recoverable only by conjecture, and even though the incident is presented only through Paul's perspective (one of the principals), the case does provide an intriguing paradigm of conflict resolution in early Christian communities.

The conflict is not horizontal, and the three main parties (Paul, an unknown opponent, and the congregation) have varying perceptions of their relative statuses. In particular, Paul perceives of himself as the parent ("apostle") in relation to his children (the congregation, 1 Cor 4:15–21; 2 Cor 12:14), and assumes his role's accompanying powers and responsibilities (for example, 2 Cor 10:6). Apparently Paul has suffered some public humiliation (shame, loss of face) in relation to the congregation through the actions of a now unknown opponent within the congregation who questioned his credentials or abilities. The congregation apparently did not immediately support Paul, resulting in Paul's immediate retreat from Corinth and the situation. Subsequently, Paul writes a strongly confrontational letter in which he commands the congregation to discipline the offender and in so doing to show their loyalty to him. The majority do obey Paul's ultimatum and punish the offender. Paul sees this as an opportunity to consider visiting again, and so in 2 Corinthians he exhorts the congregation now to "show favour" (*charizesthai*) and to "be reconciled with" (*parakalesai*)[59] the offender, and to reaffirm love for him, since sufficient grief and punishment have been demonstrated (2 Cor 2:6–8).

[57] Using: *stegein*, cover, bear, endure (1 Cor 13:7); *anechesthai*, bear, endure, tolerate (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13); *makrothymein*, bear, forbear (1 Cor 13:4; 1 Thess 5:14; Jas 5:7); *hypomenein*, bear up, endure (1 Cor 13:7).

[58] "Patience" is a common mistranslation of this word. The related virtue of "endurance" (*hypomonē*) is usually used in cases of tribulation or affliction (e.g., Rom 12:12).

[59] For this meaning of *parakalesai*, see *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. W. Bauer, et al (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. *parakaleō*, #5. The meaning "console" would also suit here.

Three separate processes at the different levels of conflict can be noted:

Paul and the congregation. a) Paul feels that he has suffered humiliation (perhaps not all in the congregation perceive it the same way). b) Paul directly confronts the congregation. c) The congregation responds with regret and grief (7:8). d) The congregation accepts the disciplinary action by Paul; they "repent" (7:9—"you were grieved into repenting"). e) Paul says that the purpose of his confrontational action was not for the sake of the offended party (himself) nor for the offender, but for the health of the community (7:12). f) Recognizing that the rifts between Paul and the congregation are in fact deeper than he had originally thought, he engages in a further confrontational speech to the congregation (2 Cor 10–13), in which he in fact offers an ironic apology for the behaviour for which he is questioned, but which he defends (12:13).

The congregation and the offender. a) In Paul's view the offender, through his behaviour toward Paul, has actually "pained" the congregation, not Paul himself (2:5). b) Following Paul's ultimatum, the church responds with "alarm, indignation, the desire to clear themselves" (7:11). c) A judicial body apparently metes out punishment against the offender (2:6; 7:11). d) The punishment is deemed sufficient by Paul when the offender is "overwhelmed with sorrow" (2:6–7). e) Following Paul's recommendation, they forgive and console/conciliate, and reaffirm their love for him (2:7–8).

Paul and the offender. Paul's approach to the offender is entirely indirect. His main problem is with the congregation who tolerated the offender's actions such that Paul was humiliated. Paul indirectly demands compensation and punishment through the actions of the congregation. Following expressions of sorrow (humiliation) and repentance by the offender, Paul also includes his word of forgiveness: "Any one whom you show favour, I also show favour. That for which I have shown favour, if I have shown favour for anything, is for your sake in the presence of Christ," that is, for the health of the congregation (2:10–11).[60]

Admonitions and community guidelines. Isolated and brief admonitions in the Gospels and Letters also promote the virtue of forgiveness, in most cases implying a setting of interpersonal, intra-communal conflict. In the Letters, forgiveness is associated with the virtue of love, the virtue of "bearing" or "enduring" offences, and the virtue of putting away the response of anger (Col 3:8; Eph 4:31); it is patterned on Christ's act of forgiveness; and it is to result in communal or relational harmony:

[60] This case also raises interesting questions about the role of power and punitive measures in conflict resolution, and the relative priority of community versus the individual.

- [With the virtues of] compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and forbearance, bear one another and show favour to one another, if one has a complaint against another. As the LORD has shown favour to you, so you also must show favour. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ function as arbitrator[61] among your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. (Col 3:12–15)
- With forbearance, bear one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:3)
- Be kind to one another, charitable, showing favour to one another, as God in Christ has shown favour to you. (Eph 4:32)
- [Love] does not reckon a wrong [that is, is not resentful], . . . bears all things . . . endures all things. (1 Cor 13:5, 7)
- Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since "love covers a multitude of offences" [Prov 10:12]. (1 Pet 4:8; cf., James 5:20)

In the Gospels, the importance of "releasing/remitting" offences in human relations is highlighted by the notion of reciprocity: receiving "remission" from God is contingent on granting "remission" to fellow humans, a notion earlier highlighted in Sirach 27:30–28:7 (see above):

- If you remit the offences for humans, your Father in heaven will also remit your offences; but if you do not remit the offences for humans, your Father will not remit your offences. (Matt 6:14–15; cf., Matt 18:23–35)
- Remit, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven may remit your offences for you. (Mark 11:25)
- Do not requite justice (on your own), and you will not be judged; do not mete out punishment (on your own), and you will not be condemned; release *(apolyein)*, and you will be released. . . . For the measure you give will be the measure you get back. (Luke 6:37)[62]

These admonitions sometimes leave readers with the impression that forgiveness is a simple and straightforward mandate, to be

[61] "Function as arbitrator" is a more explicit translation than the usual "rule." The verb here, *brabeuein*, is the word for "umpiring" in athletic contests, or "adjudicating" in judicial contexts, literally referring to the "awarding of the prize." The cognate word "prize" (*brabeion*) can be found in 1 Cor 9:24 and Phil 3:14.

[62] Here the emphasis seems to be on not taking justice into one's own hands. It is unclear whether the reciprocity ("measure" in return) is from God or from fellow humans (thus proverbial about human relationships). Probably both aspects are assumed. A very similar saying is found in James 2:13: "justice is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy."

practised as a virtue in itself. However, it is in the community guidelines of Luke 17:3–4 and Matthew 18:15–22 where forgiveness is explicitly placed in a larger framework. Indeed, the points of continuity between these passages and *Testament of Gad* 6:3–7 (cited above) suggest that all of these texts represent a long-standing tradition of Jewish wisdom for dealing with offences. It should be observed that all of these texts refer to local, interpersonal dynamics among relative social equals, and do not address the problem of reconciliation in cases where the offence is associated with significant power imbalance.

In the parallel texts of Luke 17:3 and Matthew 18:15 we are first introduced to the simple pattern of restoration:

- offence ("if your brother offends you"—Matt; "if your brother offends"—Luke)
- confrontation ("go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone"—Matt; "rebuke him"—Luke)
- repentance ("if he listens to you"—Matt; "if he repents"—Luke)
- restoration/forgiveness ("you have gained your brother"—Matt; "release him"—Luke).

Two further issues are also addressed: the problem of repeat offences (Matt 18:21–22; Luke 17:4), and the problem of recalcitrance (Matt 18:16–17). As for the former, the hyberbolic answer is that there is no limit on the requirement to forgive. But the proviso in Luke is that repentance also must be assumed; and whereas Matthew 18:21–22 seems to imply unlimited, unconditional forgiveness, the parable which follows in Matthew 18:23–35 confirms that recalcitrance can result in the withdrawal of forgiveness—that is, forgiveness is neither unlimited nor unconditional. Moreover, while not stated explicitly in these texts, there is little question that restitution is implied in the act of repentance. The classic story illustrating this aspect of repentance is the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10).

Matthew alone takes up the question of how to proceed with confrontation and restoration in the case of recalcitrance (Matt 18:16–17). Rebuke must proceed first in the company of two others, and if that fails, rebuke proceeds in the company of the gathered community; and if that fails, expulsion is mandated (cf., 1 Cor 5:12–13).[63] Thus Matthew also implies that judicial procedures of the community be initiated in the cases of persistent wrongdoing. When explaining the final result of expulsion, Matthew observes that the

[63] *Testament of Gad*, by contrast, advises a) that repeated rebuke be limited in favour of giving time for reconciliation to take its course, and b) that when there is persistent wrongdoing without willingness to change the offended person be willing to "release him from the heart" and defer judicial vindication to God (*T.Gad* 6:4–7).

framework for judicial procedure is the community's obligation "to bind" (that is, not forgive the unrepentant) and "to loose" (that is, to forgive the repentant: Matt 18:18; cf., 16:19). The communal process is similarly described in John 20:23: "If you remit the offences of any, they are remitted (by God); if you retain the offences of any, they are retained (by God). Similarly, Paul advises that some disputes be either adjudicated or mediated within the congregation (1 Cor 5:12–13; 6:1–8; Phil 4:2–3), to the point of expulsion,[64] but that offences by outsiders is a matter to be deferred to God (1 Cor 5:12).

Transferring forgiveness (or justice) to God. Expulsion or ostracism appears to be the final sanction in cases in which wrongdoers display an unrepentant posture. What other options are open to a victim when there is no opportunity to pursue the course of restoration? It is sometimes assumed that forgiveness must be granted unilaterally, without opportunity for restitution/repentance, let alone confrontation, on the basis of prayers that God forgive abusers or persecutors (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60; 2 Tim 4:16).[65] While these texts indeed suggest that God treat the offenders in the best possible light (cf., Rom 12:14; Matt 5:44), they do not indicate that the victim in fact must forgive the abuser. More to the point, these prayers transfer the responsibility for forgiveness to God—God is now responsible for holding the offenders accountable or for forgiving them should they repent.[66] There are indeed repeated admonitions that victims sometimes take unilateral steps to begin the reconciliation process (e.g., Rom 12:17–18; Matt 5:39–41); but these steps are usually taken within the framework of deferring ultimate justice to God (e.g., Rom 12:19–21). When in situations of conflict with unrepentant "outsiders" there is often no practical recourse to pursue restoration. In these cases, the more common prayer is that God bring "justice" to these offenders, not "forgiveness."[67] Paul nowhere advises that one "forgive" persecutors outside the community; rather, one refuses to retaliate, does good in return, but leaves justice to God.[68]

[64] For the role of "ostracism" in the reconciliation process of some cultures, see David Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation*, 272–274.

[65] Luke 23:34—"Father, release them for they know not what they do." Acts 7:60—"LORD, do not hold onto (lit., establish, *histanai*) their offence." 2 Tim 4:16—"May it not be counted against them."

[66] See esp. Troy Martin, "The Christian's Obligation Not to Forgive," 362.

[67] Especially in Paul (Phil 3:18–19; 2 Cor 11:15; Rom 3:8; Gal 1:8–9; 5:10; cf., Phil 1:27–30; 2 Thess 1:4–10; 1 Thess 2:16) and in Revelation (e.g., 6:10; 11:17–18; 16:5–6; 19:1–3), in the context of persistent unwillingness "to repent" (e.g., Rev 2:21–22; 9:20–21; 16:9, 11).

[68] See further G. Zerbe, "Paul's Ethic of Nonretaliation and Peace," in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. W. Swartley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 177–222.

Reflections

On the subject of forgiveness, the Old and New Testaments display a remarkable continuity. It would be entirely wrong to suggest that the Old Testament fosters a vindictive ethic and that the New Testament promotes an irenic ethic. One can find a forthright dialogue between Mercy and Justice in both testaments.[69] Where the New Testament highlights the critical role of forgiveness, it is based squarely on Old Testament paradigms.

In the biblical world of both testaments, however, forgiveness is not a simple, isolated transaction. Rather, it is a part—albeit a critical part—of a larger process toward reconciliation and transformation—transformation of both persons and relationships.[70] Both wrongs and relationships are taken seriously. The path of the offended includes anger and confrontation. In response to the offender's path of humiliation, confession, repentance, compensation, and appeal for "favour," the offended may eventually move toward forgiveness and a relationship may be restored.

Perhaps the most striking feature of forgiveness in the biblical world is the presence of concrete social rituals that facilitate the reconciliation process. One of these is the covenant meal. In addition, there are culturally prescribed patterns of subservience, humiliation, or gift-giving by the offender, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the formal receiving of gifts offered and actions of favour by the offended, demonstrating the readiness to restore a breach. Where for us words seem to be the only mode of communication, and where words can be so cheap—whether "I'm sorry," or "I forgive you"—we may do well to think of concrete social rituals in our own context to facilitate the paths of both offender and offended.

[69] For the imagery of a conversation among Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace (cf., Ps 85:10), see John Paul Lederach, *Journey toward Reconciliation*, 51–61.

[70] Cf., M. Suchocki, "Reflections on Forgiveness as Transformation," *Dialog* 35 (Spring 1996): 95–100.

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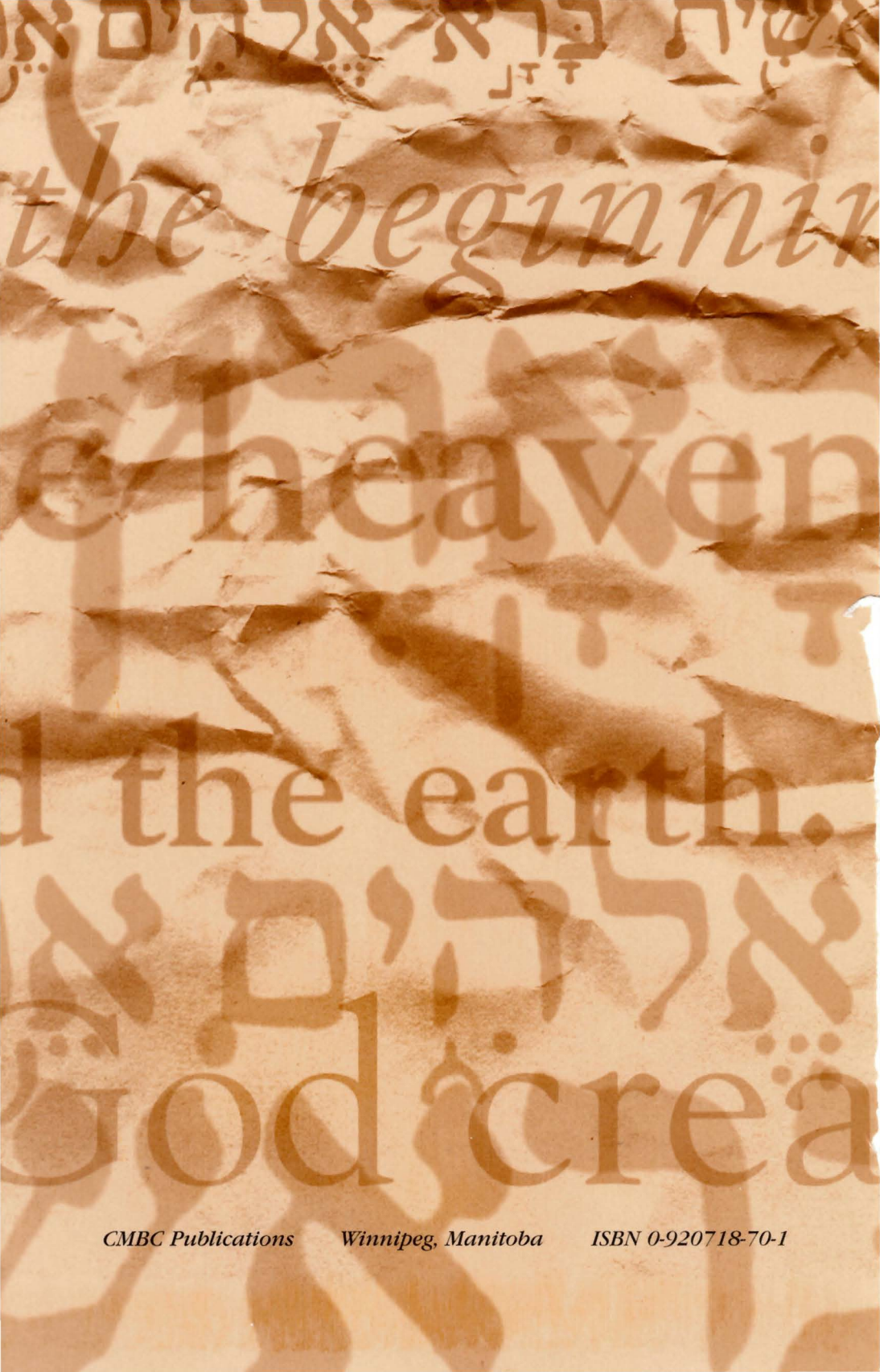

CMBC Publications *Winnipeg, Manitoba* *ISBN 0-920718-70-1*