To Sing a New Song:

New Perspectives for Doing Old Testament Theology

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In the past fifteen years Old Testament scholars have critically assessed existing paradigms used not only in scholarly research but also in our textbooks and found them to be wanting. In this period of scholarly ferment one cannot be too sure where the new scholarly paradigms will take us, but a new consensus seems to be emerging on a number of issues, some of which may have significant implications for how Christians and Jews draw forth theological and religious meanings from the biblical texts. Two areas of study in Old Testament research have drawn the attention of this author for the past ten years: first, how archaeologists have begun to interpret the process by which the Israelites "conquered" Palestine; and second, how historians of Israelite religion have begun to portray the emergence of monotheism among the Israelites. Many biblical theologians have taken their cue for the creation of biblical or Old Testament theologies from an understanding of these two aspects of Israelite existence. The emergence of new scholarly understandings will cause biblical theologians perhaps to fine tune their explications and stress different nuances in the future. This paper is designed to be a tentative probe in articulating what might be the themes that biblical theologians will stress in the future as they reflect upon the biblical literature of the Old Testament or Hebrew canon.

I shall first make some general observations about the nature of biblical theology in the Old Testament. Then a brief summary will be made of some of the significant new directions taken by scholarship in the discussions about the nature of the Israelite conquest and emerging monotheism. Finally, I will make my own subjective observations as to what the implications might be for such future theologizing. Above all, my comments are meant to be a creative, perhaps experimental, exercise in articulating a prolegomenon to an Old Testament theology. In no way is this an attempt to articulate the structure for a well developed approach to Old Testament theology in the classical sense.

I

Ever since the famous lecture of J. P. Gabler at Altdorf, Germany in 1787 biblical theology has been regarded as a separate discipline within theological studies, especially for Christian students of the Bible. Biblical scholars have sought to articulate in organized form the overall theological message of the biblical text in countless volumes. Such works may bear the general title of biblical theology, but more likely they will be dedicated to either the consideration of Old Testament thought or New Testament thought, because advanced students of the Bible tend to specialize in one Testament or the other. The purpose for creating a theology of the Bible, or of either testament, was not to invalidate two thousand years of theologizing by Christian scholars who more systematically organized Christian doctrines with philosophical categories. Rather, biblical scholars recognized a primary insight of the post-enlightenment age, that is, human thought, including theology, developed over the years and changed according to the social-cultural and intellectual needs of the believing community. Thus any systematic theology articulated by any Christian theologian after the apostolic age uses the language of its own cultural era to proclaim the essentials of the faith, and such language would be alien to the biblical authors. Therefore, modern biblical scholars seek to create theologies of the biblical literature in order to develop a feeling for the beliefs of that particular stage of human theological or religious evolution, which is as objectively free as humanly possible from later intellectual developments of the church. These teachings then may be perceived as foundational for all later Christian thought. They also may be used by modern theologians and historians of Christian thought as a norm by which to evaluate religious speculation in the later Christian tradition and to inspire the continued development of systematic theologies. Hence, biblical theologies are meant to be a source or aid for systematic theologians, practical theologians, and ethicists whenever possible, in that they seek to provide a clear focus into the message of the Bible and to avoid the bad habit of quoting and using biblical passages out of their original literary and historical context. Scholars produce their works for the church and for other biblical scholars. New Testament theologies are foundational for Christian theology in general, Old Testament theologies are foundational for the doing of New Testament theology, and some comparative scholars even study ancient Near Eastern thought to obtain insight into the Old Testament categories of thought. The entire endeavor testifies to our recognition of the evolution of religious thought which the Christian believer feels has somehow been directed by God.

Gabler was correct to view biblical theology as a distinct discipline; both seminary and undergraduate curriculla recognize the separate existence of biblical courses. But he was incorrect to call biblical

theology a science; rather it is an art, or at least a very subjective endeavor on the part of scholars and theologians. The divergence among biblical theologians in teasing forth the central themes from the biblical text and the even greater divergence in organizing these themes reflects the enormous challenge faced by scholars in bringing inspired, artistic biblical literature to heel for the categories of theological thought. It is also evident that every biblical theologian is a product of his or her own intellectual milieu, and no truly objective portrayal of biblical thought can be made. Further, it is questionable whether biblical literature can be organized into a so-called biblical theology, because there may be no truly unifying themes to connect all the different books of the bible, save for the vaguest of notions, such as "God," or the "Lordship of God," or the "elusive presence of God" (1). We too often content ourselves with such generic themes without admitting that they demonstrate the difficulty of organizing biblical thought. Particularly among Old Testament theologians it is increasingly recognized that Old Testament theologies invariably have utilized themes from the Pentateuch and the Prophets but ignored the Writings (which would include Psalms, Proverbs, Job, etc.) because they do not fit neatly into our biblical theology paradigms of a God who acts in history to save people. To use the resurrection of Jesus as a central theme for a biblical theology of the entire Bible does justice to the New Testament but only selectively uses Old Testament passages in allegorical or typological fashion. Thus there are difficulties in writing any biblical theology, and one may find flaws in the text of any author who has written on the subject. But bible scholars will continue to produce them whether they theologize upon the entire bible or either testament, because in general they have provided Christians with a deeper feeling and appreciation for the message of the biblical text. In some way they have served the corporate theology of the church.

This presentation shall focus on the potential direction that biblical scholarship might take when speaking of the theological message of the Old Testament and its implications for theology. Prior to 1800 Christian theologians simply subsumed the Old Testament into the categories of Christian thought and used texts for their anticipatory function, that is, how the Old Testament prepared for the Christ event of the New Testament in either predictive, typological, or allegorical fashion. Since 1800 it has become customary among Christians to evaluate the message of the Old Testament on its own terms, momentarily setting aside Christian assumptions, so as to see how the Old Testament might speak to us by itself. The fact that Jewish scholars do not generate such works to organize the thought

of the Hebrew Bible in some form of systematic thought might warn us that perhaps the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible does not lend itself easily to the writing of such well organized Old Testament theologies. Perhaps, too, the Jewish tendency is to view the literature in terms of directions for living, and this is a different perspective than the Christian desire to organize the literature for the sake of abstract doctrine (2).

It is not our place here to review the history of Old Testament theology. Rather, we wish to focus upon the doings of the past two generations. For since World War II a vibrant movement arose which provided numerous Old Testament theologies for consumption by theologians, preachers, and seminarians, especially among Protestants, but also to a certain extent among Roman Catholics in the later years of the movement. Since 1970, however, this biblical theology movement has slowed or perhaps collapsed, and biblical scholars and theologians are uncertain as to the future direction theologizing upon the Old Testament will take. This paper shall humbly assess the reasons for the quandry and make speculative suggestions as to potential themes which biblical theologians might stress in the future.

II

The old biblical theology movement, which was most popular from 1945 to 1970, looked upon the Old Testament texts, particularly the Pentateuch and the Prophets and championed the theme of a "God who acts in history to save people." This emphasis captures the feeling in the biblical accounts where we observe God's guidance of the patriarchs, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the wandering of the people in the wilderness, the entrance into the arable land (or conquest), the occasional charismatic leadership of judges, the unification of the people under David, the sad history of later apostate kings in two divided monarchies who failed to heed the warnings of prophets, the cataclysmic destruction of Israel and Judah (with the Temple in Jerusalem), the sorrowful exile, and finally the return to the land to await a glorious future. This historical format also makes for good textbooks today. Throughout this religious history the theme of obedience to God's law and the concomitant blessings from God were stressed by the biblical authors, who thus created a sermon out of the biblical traditions they inherited. Modern Christian biblical theologians readily seized upon this model and then extended the sacred history into the New Testament, especially with the help of the book of Acts, which told of the

first generation of Christian growth and also left the impression of divine guidance in the historical arena.

The image of a "God who acts in history" to save people predominated in the theology of the post World War II generation and it inspired a dynamic perception of the biblical materials for many students. Biblical accounts recorded the history of the Israelite religious struggle, the power of divine grace, and the living call of prophetic voices demanding change and renewal. Those prophetic voices of reform also called upon modern Christians to seek social reform in industrial and urban America.

In that past age of biblical theology scholarship was generated which further undergirded the model. American archaeologists, such as William F. Albright, George Ernest Wright, and John Bright, promulgated a view of the Israelite settlement of Palestine as one of violent conquest (3) in opposition to the older German theories of peaceful infiltration which had been espoused by Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth (4). The vision of Israelites committing themselves to a new religious and social ethos by standing in opposition to Canaanite values was strengthened by historical models which viewed Israelites as outsiders who invaded Palestine, or as internal revolutionaries, as the later model of George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald would have it (5). One could then theologize about Israel's new egalitarian ethos and use it for a contemporary imperative to commit oneself to the Kingdom of God and social religious reform. Gerhard von Rad's Theology of the Old Testament (6) laid out the historical and literary development of Israel's thought as it testified to a God active in the events of Israel's experience, even though he doubted much of the historical veracity of the biblical text. More conservative American authors likewise described the text as testimony to divine action in human history as well as Israel's great religious and intellectual breakthrought in the ancient world. William F. Albright saw monotheism emerging in the Mosaic period to set Israel apart from other cultures (7). He and his students wrote about the dramatic cultural and religious conflict between Israel and the neighboring cultures which resulted from this new monotheistic faith and its corresponding social values (8). Later theorists on the American scene out of this same school of thought, most notably George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald, reacted against Albrightian models of conquest, but still perceived the Israelites emerging in reaction to more primitive beliefs and creating their own egalitarian social polity and religion by revolution (9). They, too, shared the vision of their

predecessors, but their emphasis was designed to inspire the modern church with models of liberation theology.

This perception of Israel's emergence resonated well with early twentieth century theology, especially with Karl Barth's rejection of late nineteenth century liberal and idealistic thought and the subsequent emergence of Neo-Orthodoxy (10). Dialectical or neo-orthodox thought built upon a revised form of reformational theology and similarly stressed a kerygmatic or proclamatory mode of discourse. Speaking to the modern world it called for action--to believe, to act, and to be authentic. Biblical theologians, for their part, were describing the biblical text with similar kerygmatic terms; both testaments purportedly proclaimed a God who intervened in human affairs to dramatically alter the human condition. As in Israel of old, modern Christians were to decide for God and perhaps live in opposition to contemporary cultural values.

This contrast between Israel and Canaan served not only as a scholarly paradigm but also as the basis for theology and preaching. But the models became self perpetuating until the portrayal of ancient Israel was motivated primarily by our modern ideational needs and secondarily by the desire to characterize accurately the dynamics of the biblical text.

In the past two decades we have witnessed the demise of salvation history themes in biblical theology due to philosophical, theological, historiographical, and scriptural critiques, and biblical theology now finds itself in a period of transition (11). The ability to speak of God as discernible in history has been questioned by biblical theologians who recognize that all we have before us are sacred literary texts, which by themselves provide us only with a very subjective and faith oriented interpretation of those ancient events. Also, our inability to integrate the third part of the Hebrew canon into the salvation history theological model became increasingly evident as scholars became more interested in Wisdom Literature after 1965. Further, contrasts between the Bible and ancient Near Eastern thought diminished in the opinion of many scholars as the continuities between Israelite historiography and religious piety and the corresponding values of the ancient world were observed by critical scholars, especially those interested in ancient Near Eastern study (12). Finally, our confidence in the actual historicity of the events reported by the biblical narratives began to erode in the minds of many. Perceptions especially of the patriarchal period and the nature of the Israelite conquest underwent

modification, and we have evaluated the religious and political trajectories of Israel with new social-historical and literary-structural models. Pentateuchal narratives are viewed increasingly by authors in the field as post-exilic literary and theological creations out of the slimmest of historical memories (13). Now that the old paradigms have faded, the result is a dilemma for pedagogues and textbook authors: should we continue to use the old models or forge ahead by anticipating the new synthesis of the next generation in a speculative fashion, which in turn might be eclipsed in this period of scholarly ferment? This author can personally testify to these problems, having recently revised an introductory textbook on Old Testament for the Loyola Institute in Ministry extension program two years ago. Only a few authors have attempted to create a new synthesis either in describing the ethos of Israel or by generating a biblical theology in a new mode (14).

III

A review of contemporary scholarly literature reveals the emergence of new paradigms which grapple with the social-historical and religious origin of Israel. These models stress gradual, evolutionary origins for political identity and monotheistic faith. Continuity with surrounding cultures is emphasized rather than dialectical opposition. As these new views become increasingly accepted by scholars and classroom teachers to be the new consensus, textbooks and the articulation of biblical theology may change significantly.

In the last decade field archaeologists and historians have moved in a new direction to describe the Israelite settlement process which occurred from 1200 to 1050 B.C.E. In general, the internal origin suggested by George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald has prevailed, but their notion of social revolution has not. Rather, a return to the notions of Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth concerning the peaceful nature of the process is evident among scholars. The result is the rise of a fourth model for understanding the conquest, a settlement process which characterized as peaceful and internal (15).

Archaeologists working in Israelite village settlements since 1980 have sensed the great cultural continuity between Israelites in the Iron Age I period (1200 to 1050 B.C.E.) and the earlier Late Bronze Age culture of the Canaanites (1550 to 1200 B.C.E.). Israeli and American archaeologists have sensed that the vast bulk of Israelites were really Canaanites who underwent a gradual metamorphosis over several centuries to become Israelites. Continuities were observed between the two cultures in regard

to pottery, building techniques, agricultural terracing, livestock herding, and village layouts (16). The transformation may not have been totally complete until the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century B.C.E. The Israelites who came in from the outside, such as with Joshua, may have brought the sacred name for God, Yahweh, with them, but their numbers were negligible. In fact, even the name Israel may betray a Canaanite origin, since the title is built upon the name of the Canaanite deity, El.

Different variations on this explanation are provided by the scholars who endorse the model of a peaceful internal origin for Israel. Some archaeologists stress the peaceful withdrawal of the Canaanites from burned-out valley cities to developing highland villages after 1200 B.C.E. (17). Some theorists suggest that the highland nomads were forced to become village dwellers when the lowland cities collapsed and trade connections strangulated (18). Still others prefer to speak of the ability of the highland populations simply to increase more rapidly than in the lowland urban centers (19). Finally, some suggest the combination of all these factors with the stress on the synthesis of divergent highland elements (20).

Regardless of which theory prevails, the resultant perspectives will stress Israelite continuity with the former Canaanite culture more than did the old theories of conquest and revolution. In addition, historians now speak of the process of emerging national identity as a later phenomenon, not accomplished until the efforts of David (21).

Even more important for the task of biblical theology are the newer theories concerning the emergence of monotheism. Israelite monotheism now is seen as a minority movement in the pre-exilic period, or even non-existent until the Babylonian Exile. Pre-exilic syncretism of Yahwism and Baalism may not have been the policy of Israelite and Judean kings designed to appease a mixed population of Canaanites and Israelites; rather, it may represent the normal religious experience of the people, and the distinction between Israelite and Canaanite which we draw may be bogus in regard to religious issues. Both early pure Yahwism and wicked syncretism may be the retrospective interpretations made of the past by the Deuteronomistic and Priestly reformers in the biblical literature of Joshua through Kings. Their call to return to an old, pure faith was really an intellectual advance of significant magnitude to a newly emerging worldview. Thus Yahwism never "fell," rather it emerged as a new

Iron Age religion out of the old Bronze Age religion in a gradual process comparable to the settlement. These views are reflected increasingly in the writings of Old Testament scholars.

Several of these scholars merit our attention in this paper. Morton Smith was one of the first to propose that the "Yahweh alone" party was a minority movement in the pre-exilic era in opposition to the royal cult and popular forms of religion (22). Bernhard Lang believes that Yahweh was merely a national high god in the pre-exilic period, at times (usually in a crisis) elevated above the other deities, who otherwise were equals to Yahweh (23). Christoph Dohmen describes the rise of monotheism in conjunction with the development of the prohibition against images. The imageless cult of the early period created a proclivity to worship one God by the early monarchy, but only with Deuteronomistic reform and post-exilic developments did true monotheism emerge among the people (24). Gösta Ahlström reconstructs this early Yahwism as a national cult of a high god (Yahweh) with attendant deities, such as Asherah, Baal, Shamash, and Yerach (25). Niels Peter Lemche reconstructs the pre-exilic Israelite religion with the aid of Psalms and finds great continuity with Canaanite religion. Yahweh was actually subordinate to El, equal to Baal or equated with him, and had a consort in what was primarily a fertility religion (26). Mark Smith provides paradigms for understanding the process of religious evolution. Yahwism emerged from a Canaanite background as Yahweh merged with several deities in a process called "convergence," while at the same time certain practices were eliminated in a process of "differentiation," including the cult of the dead, child sacrifice, and worship at high places. Monotheism arose as both a product of evolution, often in irregular fashion, but was complete only with the literary production of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets in the later monarchical period (27). A number of scholars in specialized studies now give greater consideration to the presence of Canaanite elements in the Yahwistic faith. George Heider and Susan Ackerman conclude that infant sacrifice was an integral part of the Israelite cult until Josiah's reform (28). Carola Kloos maintains that early Yahwism was influenced by Baal worship significantly, so that we cannot contrast the "mythic" religion of Canaan and the "epic" or "historical" religion of Israel (29). Gary Anderson notes the continuity of Canaanite thought in Israel's theology of the Temple, even into the post-exilic era (30). A number of scholars acknowledge that Asherah was a legitimate deity and consort of Yahweh until Deuteronomistic reform or perhaps even later (31). One increasingly finds among authors too numerous to cite here the observation that in the future we ought to stress the continuity which Israelite religion had with Canaanite culture. Serious scholars now declare that we must critically

reassess our definition of monotheism in Israel and how we should speak of its emergence both in theory and in our historical surveys.

In conclusion, scholarship has begun to stress the gradual nature of Israel's religious and social-political development. The final crystallization is seen to be much later than our scholarly and pedagogical literature formerly assumed. The resultant perception has moved from models which spoke of Israel's "breakthrough" to those stressing Israel's continuity with the contemporary milieu. Israel arose out of a matrix which was part of a spectrum of values in the ancient world.

IV

Now that scholars are beginning to speak of gradual process and evolution rather than revolution, sudden emergence, and dialectical opposition to previous values, what will be the impact upon biblical theology and biblically inspired ethics? This essay will offer a few probing but tentative observations in this regard.

Whereas a former generation saw the church's cry on behalf of the oppressed grounded in the biblical call to oppose the popular culture of this world, as did ancient Israel and the early Christians, this new model may observe the gradual processes in human culture which bring about justice and equality. The "eye of faith" may see the action of God in the development of human culture today, just as biblical theologians now may perceive that God was active in the social-historical dynamics of Israel's gradual evolution. By recognizing that monotheism arose in an evolutionary process, we might realize the unfinished nature of that process--we are still on the trajectory of an unfolding and emergent monotheism yet today. Our modern call to reform is not really a "call to return" to the values of the biblical era; rather, it is the imperative to continue the natural, God-given process of unfolding the implications of monotheism. The process has been interrupted often in the history of the church by periods of stasis and doctrinal ossification. It took us nineteen centuries to realize our faith entailed the abolition of slavery, and twenty centuries passed before the equality of men and women began to be actualized in the church. But those values were latent in the biblical tradition awaiting the time to come fruition.

This new perception implies that the "monotheistic revolution," if we wish to retain that expression, is akin to planting a seed. From its early inception in ancient Israel the implications for a new humanity were present in embryonic fashion. Advanced ideas sometimes surfaced at an early stage, but in general the full system of thought had to move slowly as the values took root in the minds of people, their culture, and finally the socio-political ethos. We observe a limited breakthrough with some of the early laws in the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21-23, but fuller explication and application of these laws would come four centuries later with the Deuteronomistic Reform movement and its legislation in Deuteronomy 12-26. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount contains insights which for us still await a fuller application in the arena of human culture. Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. in this century first seriously applied the principle of non-violence or passive resistence to evil on a large social scale, while previously Christians considered these sayings of Jesus to be too ideal for the "real world." Monotheistic "revolutions" or "evolutions" plant seeds with key ideas inherent in the early moments, but the blossoming of the system requires a long process as it effects change in the lives of many people in society.

There is an interesting parallel here with recent evolutionary theories. No longer do biologists and paleontologists view evolution as a gradual process which is uniform in its advances. Now they speak of leaps in the evolutionary processs, wherein periods of stasis in a species' existence are punctuated by periods of fast biological transformation, which in turn are followed by long periods of stability. Evolution proceeds by graduated steps, or periods of "equilibrium" punctuated by fast change. This theory is called Punctuated Equilibria by its advocates (32).

Our new perceptions of Israel's development may resonate with this scientific model. Political and social change in Israel occurred over a long period of time, but signficant persons and events produced critical stages of advance in which the system of thought unfolded latent ideational and social implications (33). Old theories of gradual evolution for Israel advocated by critical German and British scholars at the turn of the century distorted the biblical data and later led to the negative reaction of scholars in the neo-orthodox era to any evolutionary paradigm. This contemporary theory, however, appears to be more sensitive to the biblical materials. Evolution of thought and culture occurs in periodic "leaps" as latent ideas in the tradition become manifest. The approach gives due recognition

not only to founders of religious movements but also to those subsequent individuals who arise for centuries after the movement has begun.

The seed was planted in the Palestinian highlands in the early Iron Age as people regrouped to form new social communities. Though not radically different from the predecessor culture of the lowlands, their embarcation on their new course was significant, for it would lead to a monotheistic faith and culture. Thus, for example, the particular historical identity of Moses is not as important as the perception that he stands as a symbol for the beginning of the process. There were individuals in this early age who would be recalled by later generations and lionized as great founders, and they would be characterized in the garb of later institutions. Thus Moses and Samuel would be portrayed as prophets and priests, even though in their own era those offices had not yet come to be clearly defined in the society. A figure such as Moses, Samuel, or Elijah symbolizes the beginning of a developmental process, and they are recalled and portrayed by authors only at the end of that process. Yet to praise them as the later traditions did was not a false endeavor, for those early individuals and many others along the way help to unfold the implications of the monotheistic movement. Without them the great intellectual advance would have died, and a later era would have had to reinitiate the "monotheistic evolutionary/revolutionary process." The old debate as to whether monotheism began with the classical prophets, as suggested by Julius Wellhausen, or with Moses, as suggested by William Foxwell Albright, is misplaced. Monotheism begins with all the persons involved in the process, or more properly the emergence of monotheism is a process which lasts for six centuries from the settlement in Iron Age I until the Babylonian Exile six centuries later.

Highlighting the role of individual people as well as specific eras of cultural turmoil set this model apart from nineteenth century theories of cultural evolution. Those theories too often lost the significance of the contributions of individuals or of a specific historical event in the portrayal of a blind impersonal process of evolution (34). This newer model of punctuational advance requires the contributions of great individuals to unfold the implications of the initial breakthrough or germination.

Concomitant with religious evolution was the generation of a social ethos of justice and equality in Israel. Christianity subsequently arose out of that milieu of Jewish values and continued the great evolutionary thrust. For two millennia the church has carried the message of Jesus, Paul and other New

Testament authors. Though the spiritual or pyschological dimension of that message, the proclamation of salvation, has been spoken with varying degrees of clarity over the centuries, too often the social dimension of the proclamation was not impressed upon the masses. The modern era has seen the awakening of a Christian social message in the popular theology and proclamation of the church: the call to abolish slavery, attempts to aid the poor, well-intentioned though misdirected movements for temperance, efforts for racial equality, campaigns for women's rights, the drive to end world hunger, and many other movements inspired by Judeo-Christian values. New movements in the future, such as the recognition of diverse sexual identities and rights for artificial and hybrid life forms, may proceed likewise from the biblical tradition.

In our past rhetoric we spoke of a return to the biblical tradition for inspiration, but the newer perception will lead us to see ourselves as an extension of it--a trajectory evolving into the future. We will unfold the further implications which lie latent in the ethos of the Hebrew Bible and the sayings of Jesus. Thus tradition is given a new, deeper meaning: no longer the repository of long-held beliefs, tradition is the on-going and dynamic process of growth which continues to work out the implications of the monotheistic "breakthrough." We are the "tradition-making process" as we proclaim the Gospel anew in each generation. We are the evolutionary thrust developing the message planted centuries ago in the matrix of our fluid and growing cultural experience.

V

A theological idiom which resonates with these categories is Process thought. Perhaps the new direction of biblical studies may foster increased interest in Process Theology. The mere emphasis upon evolution or a developmental process makes the reader think first of Process Theology, but there are some deeper nuances which may connect newer biblical attitudes to it.

In Process thought the present moment is viewed as an "apprehension" of the past moment, each "moment of becoming" remembers the past in a new construct. Each moment in the organic flow of time reinterprets as it uses the past. Each moment intuits or draws upon the past and adds the new dimension of the present in a new configuration. This organic notion of changes sees the present flowing out of the past and into the future in the ever constant "moment of becoming" (35).

The image dovetails with the new perception of Israel's social and religious development. Israelite values do not radically break with the past, rather they "flow" out of them. Elements of the old world view are not negated, they are appropriated and transformed in the new "moment of becoming" which represents the stages of Israel's evolution. With this model one can simultaneously speak of continuity with the past and ideational advance.

The corollary for present day Christians is the perception of our place in the continuum of religious change. Our duty is to contribute to the process of creative advance, not to venerate our received ideational values as icons. We are the agents for unveiling the continuing implications of the millennia-long revolution of monotheism. Process thought especially encourages us to think in these categories. If religious values are seen to emerge in a gradual process for us, and we no longer speak in terms of contrast and dialectical opposition, we may be more inclined to see our own culture and worldview less in dialectical opposition to other world cultures (as once we viewed Israelite values in opposition to ancient Near Eastern thought). Our feeling for the world ecumene may be enhanced, and this will deepen our sense of Christian mission to the world. We will be inspired not so much to convert others as to share our beliefs, and we may find our mission more effective. We may develop a "renewed appreciation for our seamless world with its diversity of cultures and cultural embodiments" (36). The principal of a Christian day school in India, affiliated with a conservative Protestant American denomination, privately reflected to this author on his philosophy of Christian mission. He sought not to convert students, for that would isolate them from their family and society, thus rendering them ineffective. Rather, he sought to graft Christian ideals upon Hindu values so as to produce students who might influence the religious and social values of their land positively. His views reflect the role of Christian interaction in our "seamless world culture" better than the old model of conversion.

In Process Theology God is seen as being involved in the world and its development. Likewise, the biblical tradition portrays God as personally and emotionally involved in the human dimension more clearly than systematic theology has done in past centuries. Biblical theology and Process thought resonate better than former theological models in describing divine nature, especially in talk about theodicy, or more properly, human suffering. Some biblical theologians have begun to address the question of divine identification with human experience through these categories (37). Process thought

enables us to place more emphasis upon this form of discourse. Contemporary critical biblical scholarship may pave the way for an alliance between biblical theology and Process thought to produce more meaningful modes of theological and pastoral discourse.

Critical research is impressing upon us the gradual nature of social and religious evolution, so that we might perceive the grandeur of the unfolding human condition led by the power of the divine. We may see ourselves as part of the "flow" of human existence, and this will shape our attitudes about the Christian tradition in a new and richer fashion.

It is the subjective perspective of this author that the future direction of biblical theology, and in particular Old Testament theology, may assume these new paradigms in the writing of creative theologies for consumption by theologians in the church.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) Samuel Terrien, The Elusive Presence (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 1-483.

(2) Jon Levenson, The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1993), pp. 33-61.

(3) William Foxwell Albright, "Archaeology and the Date of the Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," BASOR 58 (1935): 10-18, "Further Light on the History of Israel from Lachish and Megiddo," BASOR 68 (1937): 22-26, "The Israelite Conquest of Canaan in the Light of Archaeology," BASOR 74 (1939): 11-23, and The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp 24-34; George Ernest Wright, "The Literary and Historical Problem of Joshua 10 and Judges 1," JNES 5 (1946): 105-114, and Biblical Archaeology, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), pp. 69-85; Yehezkel Kaufman, The Religion of Israel From Its Beginning to the Babylonian Exile, trans. Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1960), pp. 245-261; and John Bright, A History of Israel, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), pp. 127-130.

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