



Twentieth-Century Old Testament Studies: A Quick Survey

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THE CONTOURS OF WESTERN CULTURAL HISTORY THROUGH THE TWENTIETH century are in large sweep identifiable: an initial moment of innocence until 1914, the willful barbarism of the two wars (1914-1945), the long tense stand-off of the cold war (1945-1989), and a final decade of localism in the presence of “the last superpower” (1989-2000). I do not suggest that the story of critical Old Testament study is dictated or controlled by the forces of public history. But neither does this particular tale of scholarship exist in a vacuum, without reference to context. In reviewing and assessing such scholarship, it is important to remember that scholarship is conducted by real people who live in the real world with its immense gifts and dangers.

I.

Old Testament studies at the outset of the twentieth century were completely

Among WALTER BRUEGGEMANN’s many writings is his recent proposal, Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, and Advocacy (Fortress, 1997).

In the past hundred years, Old Testament scholarship has moved from the historical positivism of the late nineteenth century through the strong theological interpretations of mid-century and the literary or canonical concerns of the 1970s to the variety of methods given birth by the radical pluralism of century’s end. Great change has brought the field great vitality and energy.

dominated by the historical methods and synthesis of the nineteenth century. Julius Wellhausen's great book of synthesis was at the turn of the century only twenty years old, and it largely carried the field.¹ Indeed, the force of nineteenth-century scholarship continued well into the mid-twentieth century, and it continues to exercise important influence even now. That nineteenth-century synthesis had, of course, reached certain "consensus" conclusions on substantive issues, most notably the "documentary hypothesis" concerning the formation of the Pentateuch.

The defining power of that scholarship, however, is not so much in the substantive conclusions it reached, but in the way in which it legitimated the asking of certain questions. Nineteenth-century scholarship, in almost every intellectual discipline, had come to regard historical issues as primary; not surprisingly, Old Testament study was at the time largely an historical enterprise, asking not only "What happened?" but "When was it written?" The governing assumption was that historical context would decisively illuminate the intent of the text.

Two sub-points need to be noticed under the unchallenged dominance of an historical perspective. First, nineteenth-century history was premised on an assumption of *progressive, unilateral evolution* within the dynamic interpretive categories of Hegel, Marx, Darwin, and Freud. That is, everything was understood to develop from the simple to the complex, from the primitive to the sophisticated. It was no stretch then for the religion of ancient Israel to be understood as a movement from the "mythical" to the "ethical," reflected in the "development of God" and the presentation of God from J through E to DP. Second, such a developmental approach, shared by almost all critical scholars, had the effect of making every religious claim relative to context and sure to be superseded by the next new development. This perspective dissolved all normative claims of the text, and rendered normative theological reflection almost impossible. Indeed, this phase of scholarship is completely lacking in what has since come to be seen as *theology* of the Old Testament.

II.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of Karl Barth for the altered shape of Old Testament studies in the mid-twentieth century. As is well known, Barth, in the context of World War I, published his radical summons to theological reflection and theological obedience in his Romans commentary of 1919.² It was Barth's insistence that scholarly interpretation must break from liberal relativism and must voice normative theological claims that provide a theological place to stand against the emerging barbarism of Europe. Barth's urgency in the wake of World War I was only made more urgent by the rise of National Socialism in Germany in the 1930s, against which Barth stood immovably.

¹Originally published in German in 1878. The English translation is Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885).

²Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, transl. from the 6th ed. by Edwin C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University, 1933).

Barth had no particular interest in Old Testament studies *per se*, but he did trenchantly observe that historical-evolutionary interpretation and the niceties of critical scholarship must not stand as an impediment to decisions about the theological claims of the Bible made for the God who is offered in the testimony of ancient Israel and in the confession of the early church. Barth's daring challenge became a decisive turning point for Old Testament studies. He attracted to his urgent theological enterprise a great company of those who would become the most influential and defining Old Testament scholars in the next generation, since until mid-century Old Testament studies of a critical kind were largely a German enterprise. For some, of course, Barth's break with nineteenth-century evolutionary thought was too radical, too theological, too authoritarian. He was emphatically not followed by all scholars. Those who did not follow his daring challenge by and large continued the evolutionary-historical scholarship of the previous century.

III.

We may observe that the 1930s, the time of Barth's most spectacular theological thought, was a period of uncommon generativity in Old Testament studies, a generativity that was to govern the next decades in the discipline.³ We may identify two developments that lived in considerable tension with each other.

First, Barth's influence evoked and legitimated important efforts at "Old Testament theology," attempts at stating the God-claims of the Old Testament in some coherent fashion. Two scholarly efforts have been most influential. Walther Eichrodt, a Calvinist scholar and colleague of Barth at Basel, published a three-volume theology of the Old Testament.⁴ This effort was an immense breakthrough against the dominance of evolutionary relativity. While Eichrodt paid attention to "developmental" matters, he was concerned to identify the abiding "constancies" of faith that endure in flexible and resilient ways through every stage of religious development. He found these constancies under the rubric of "covenant," that is, the durable God-Israel, God-world relationship that is definitional for the faith of Israel in the Old Testament. Eichrodt made use of old and proven Calvinist categories.⁵ In the 1950s, under the impetus of George Mendenhall and Klaus Baltzer, the idea of covenant came to a dominant position in much critical Old Testament interpretation.⁶

³The early 1930s was a time of great "model building" in German scholarship, especially by Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth; their monographs in this period posited a "tribal confederation" that became the home of Gerhard von Rad's "credo" and helped to make the case for the early location of the generative theological traditions of the Old Testament.

⁴Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1967).

⁵On the Calvinist use of the notion of covenant, see Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

⁶George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1954); Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

The second and more influential effort at Old Testament theology was by Gerhard von Rad, who wrote two volumes in the 1950s on the basis of essays he had written already in the 1930s.⁷ Just prior to his death in 1971, von Rad published *Wisdom in Israel*, a book that constituted something of a third volume to his theology.⁸ In his first and most important volume, von Rad proposed that Old Testament theology consists in the endless, ongoing recital of “God’s mighty deeds in history.” By this formulation, von Rad was able to focus theology on a distinct inventory of God’s “miracles” in the life of Israel, and was able to attend to the “historical” issues related to those “historical miracles.” In this way he made room for the dynamic processes in the continuing development of the classic and stylized recital on the lips of Israel.

It is impossible to overstate the emancipatory power of von Rad’s work, which exercised immense impact in the United States as well as in Europe. It was only later noticed that von Rad had not at all resolved the vexed relationship between the relativity of history and the normativeness of theological claim. In dealing with that issue, he averred:

Historical investigation searches for a critically assured minimum—the kerygmatic picture tends towards a theological maximum.⁹

Indeed, it is not clear that a resolution of the issue identified by Lessing is possible. This lack of resolution was to continue to haunt Old Testament interpretive work with its legacy of nineteenth-century historicism.

IV.

While the theological proposals of Eichrodt and von Rad are the most noticed and enduring German-Swiss contributions, and while conventional historical-critical work continued, a very different enterprise emerged in the United States under the leadership of William Foxwell Albright. This brilliant researcher at Johns Hopkins University almost single-handedly fashioned archaeology to be a credible scientific way to investigate the historical antecedents of the Old Testament.¹⁰ By his excavations in Palestine in the 1930s, his creative powers matched to his vast

⁷The formative essay is Gerhard von Rad, “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 1-78. Derivatively came *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper and Brothers, 1962, 1965).

⁸Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

⁹Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:108. He comments further on the vexing question: “But our final comment on it should not be that it is obviously an ‘unhistorical’ picture, because what is in question here is a picture fashioned throughout by faith. Unlike any ordinary historical document, it does not have its centre in itself; it is intended to tell the beholder about Jahweh, that is, how Jahweh led his people and got himself glory. In Jahweh’s eyes Israel is always a unity: his control of history was no improvisation made up of disconnected events: in the saving history he always deals with all Israel” (302).

¹⁰His programmatic book is *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1957). For an appreciation of his life of stunning contributions, see Leona Running and David Noel Freedman, *William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1991).

learning, Albright formulated methods of research that could be replicated in various digs and assessed on common ground by other scholars. His methods came to be shared by a number of scholars, most especially his brilliant cadre of students who came to dominate Old Testament studies in the United States for over a generation.

The product of Albright's work, summarized and popularized by John Bright in his much used *A History of Israel*, was a consensus presentation of Israelite history that in large measure showed the biblical record to be historically reliable.¹¹ In retrospect, subsequent scholars have been able to see that Albright's work proceeded too much on the grounds of historical positivism to be well connected to theological claim. There is, moreover, the current suggestion that Albright set out to "prove" the Bible in a way that undermines claims to historical objectivity.¹² Be that as it may, the methods of archaeology at mid-century dominated much U.S. scholarship and offered assurance of the historical reliability of the biblical account of Israel's past. While Albright broke decisively with the evolutionary assumptions of the nineteenth century, he continued to be focused primarily upon issues of historicity.

V.

These twin developments in the 1930s—post-Barthian articulations of *normative theological claims* and Albrightian claims of *historical reliability*—dominated the field of Old Testament studies. It may be observed that there was a good deal of tension between these two enterprises; while that tension was voiced and noticed (especially from the Albrightian side), it is now clear that both approaches were deeply concerned with the normative authority of the Bible that was to be established by insisting upon its early dating of historical traditions. Neither approach could break with *historical* bases for *theological* claims.

The key figure in U.S. Old Testament studies at mid-century was George Ernest Wright, a Presbyterian teacher who established the premier Old Testament program in the United States at Harvard in the 1950s. Wright was a foremost student of Albright, and he himself led important excavations and wrote extensively on archaeological matters.¹³ At the same time, Wright emerged as a foremost theological interpreter of the Bible. He published a series of monographs that exercised immense influence, most notably *God Who Acts* and *The Old Testament against Its Environment*.¹⁴ Wright's primary theological point was to insist upon the profound and intentional *distinctiveness* of YHWH as the God of Israel, and derivatively to show that

¹¹John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959). This popular textbook went through a series of editions.

¹²Burke O. Long, *Planting and Reaping Albright: Politics, Ideology, and Interpreting the Bible* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1997).

¹³See his popular summary: G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957).

¹⁴*The Old Testament against Its Environment*, Studies in Biblical Theology 2 (London: SCM, 1950); *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, SBT 8 (London: SCM, 1952).

Israel, as the people of God, lived in the world with a distinct identity and a distinct ethic that we may at every point contrast with “Canaanite religion.” It is evident that Wright’s account of Israel’s faith stands in important continuity with Barth’s rejection of “religion,” even as Wright polemized against “Canaanite religion.”

In retrospect one may see some irony in Wright’s work, for his archaeological leaning appealed to the evidence of borrowings from context, but his theological work in every way possible contrasted Israel with context. In any case, Wright’s great synthetic work, scientifically informed and theologically propelled, came to dominate the scholarly enterprise and to exercise immense influence more popularly in the life of the church in the United States that flourished in the 1950s. (I should note that after the Papal encyclical of 1943, granting freedom to engage in critical scholarship, Roman Catholic scholars began also to participate in the critical enterprise.¹⁵ Given the differences due to confessional awareness, it is fair to say that Roman Catholic scholars participated in the same scholarly work that had heretofore been the domain of Protestants.)

The main lines of influence, in terms of assumptions and methods, that emerged in the 1930s—theological and archaeological—continued to dominate the field through the 1960s. The scholarly synthesis that arose out of these twin perspectives resulted in a great revival of interest in biblical study in seminaries and in graduate programs, a revival in the churches, and the beginning of a new season of publication, most of which sought to move from *evolutionary* historical concerns to the *normative* theological claims now celebrated from the text. The decades of the 1950s and 1960s were a time of stability, confidence, and positive energy in the field.

VI.

The end of the 1960s and the decade of the 1970s were, of course, a time of great upheaval in the United States and in western Europe. This was the time of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, and the Watergate hearings. Perhaps the pivotal symbolic moment was the student revolts in Paris in 1968, matched in this country by the disastrous Democratic convention in Chicago in the same year. Many things came to a decisive and brutal ending in these years, most especially a widespread readiness to accept old certitudes and authorities.

It is fair to say, in my judgment, that Old Testament studies participated in the wider cultural exercise of rejecting long-settled certitudes. The 1960s, it is clear in retrospect, was a period of great scholarly ferment that was not much noticed until later. What began to happen was the challenging, questioning, and break-up of the dominant patterns of the long-standing theological-archaeological-historical settlement. It had long been held that the foremost revelatory claims of the Old Testament were about “God acting in history.” All three terms in this for-

¹⁵The encyclical was *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. See Thomas Aquinas Collins and Raymond E. Brown, “Church Pronouncements,” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 628.

mula are important, and now all three terms were made deeply problematic, so that the familiar formulations of von Rad, Albright, and Wright were now less compelling. Among the contributing factors in the demise of the mid-century consensus the following are most important:

- James Barr published a staggeringly important book suggesting that old habits of “word study,” upon which a great deal of interpretation had been staked, were methodologically indefensible¹⁶
- Brevard Childs began a series of books that repeatedly made the case that reliance on “history” behind the Bible in order to make theological claims for the Bible is an impossible and untenable appeal¹⁷
- John van Seters and Thomas L. Thompson initiated a trajectory of scholarship, later to be joined by many other scholars, making a case that archaeology did not and could not yield the kinds of historical certitudes on which the field had come to count for a very long time¹⁸
- the entire category of “history” was seen to be profoundly problematic, this especially in a much noted essay by Langdon Gilkey¹⁹

It became apparent that the nearly triumphant, mid-century consensus of Old Testament studies had relied upon a finally untenable combination of Barthian *normativeness* and nineteenth-century *historicism*, a combination that under scrutiny could not be sustained. This collage of scholarly critiques brought to an end the dominance of the practices, assumptions, and claims that had governed the field at mid-century. The immediate result was confusion and disarray in the field. The longer-term prospect was to open the field to fresh initiatives. The most obvious outcome of the upheavals of this period has been the serious *deprivileging* of history, its claims and methods. While historical criticism continues as an important work, it is no longer the defining method of the field.

In the face of that displacement, the field of Old Testament studies is opened to a *new pluralism* in methods, perspectives, and constituencies. Here I will mention three facets of that new pluralism.

1. As recently as the 1960s, Old Testament scholarship was largely a contained affair, with agreed-upon issues and methods, identifiable journals, and readily identifiable leaders who defined the field. Since about 1970 or so, the field has been opened to many new practices and perspectives. Particularly significant has been the entry of many new students and scholars who have not subscribed to the old models of white, male, western hegemonic thinking. The entry of many women into the field with various forms of feminist perspective, the emergence of liberation hermeneutics of various kinds, and fresh interpretive trajectories from Central

¹⁶James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1961).

¹⁷Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

¹⁸John van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University, 1975); Thomas Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974).

¹⁹Langdon Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,” *Journal of Religion* 41 (1961) 194-205.

America, Africa, and Asia all attest that there is no one right way to do responsible interpretation. This has led, in turn, to the founding of new journals in the field, so that scholars with different methods and perspectives can have a more formal, formidable say about matters. Among the more important of these is *Biblical Interpretation*, a journal committed to new perspectives and to the continued deprivileging of historical questions.

2. Among the more important emerging methods that now stand to challenge historical criticism is *sociological criticism*. This approach, perhaps most decisively championed by Norman Gottwald, has sought to consider texts along with their social power and social advocacy, and to see that texts may indeed be “functions” of material forces and interests.²⁰ While one does not need to subscribe to a Marxian vision of “text as power,” a Marxian social analysis of the ways in which texts are instruments of power is now an important staple of textual study. Among other things, such a perspective reminds us endlessly that texts are not innocent, nor are our interpretive acts. As long as there was only one dominant interpretive trajectory with a relatively homogeneous community of interpreters, we had not noticed the immense power intrinsic to the act of interpretation. The newer methods permit no such lack of awareness.

3. Along with sociological awareness, *literary, rhetorical study* now pays close attention to the actual workings of texts as an intentional system of signs. The point of such work is to see that the text is not simply “report” or “history,” but a characteristic act of generative imagination that conjures an alternative world well beyond what is taken to be given. Derivative from the initiatory work of my own teacher, James Muilenburg, it is now a principal work of scholarship to notice what texts do, how they function, and how they form worlds that are outside and alternative to our taken-for-granted systems of power and meaning.²¹

It is impossible to overstate the energy and interpretive richness that has been unleashed into the discipline with the deprivileging of historical methods and questions and the fashioning of alternative approaches.

VII.

The general disarray of the field by 1970 had begun to take a new, clear shape by 1990. In conclusion, I want to identify three issues that have more recently emerged in the field that will continue to warrant great energy and attention.

1. By 1990 there has come a renewed interest and vitality in the work of *Old Testament theology*. Given the disarray of 1970, it had been widely thought that one could no longer take up such a theological task, but now there is important energy

²⁰Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989). See his more programmatic statement, “Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993) 3-22.

²¹James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969) 1-18. His programmatic statement has been best explicated by his most important student, Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

in the enterprise. At the end of the century, a great deal of attention is once again given to interpretation that is unabashedly interested in theological questions and that seeks to articulate larger patterns of coherence in the faith of Israel as it is pertinent to the church and the synagogue.

The principal figure in this recovery is Brevard Childs, who culminated a steady stream of books with his programmatic statement in 1993.²² This remarkable book is distinguished in many ways that are representative of Childs's program. Here I will mention only two. First, Childs is clear that he is doing *Christian* interpretation for the sake of the church. Such a claim means that Childs refuses the critical restraints and assumptions of the academy and that, from the start, he eschews any attention to Jewish interpretation with his explicit christological interest.

Second and equally important, Childs distances theological claims he finds in the text from any judgment about history that may be "behind the text." His powerful alternative to "history" is "canon," that is, the larger shape and theological claim of scripture in which any particular text is located. The enduring importance of Childs's work is his effort to interrupt and reverse the long-standing dominance of historical-critical study that has sapped the vitality and courage of theological interpretation. His effort has reasserted the legitimacy of such confessional study; evidence of that legitimation is a sudden flow of new books on the subject. Attention will usefully be paid to the recent work of Rolf Knierim and the forthcoming publications on Old Testament theology by Bernhard Anderson, James Barr, and Rolf Rendtorff, among the most formidable and senior members of the discipline.²³

2. A counter-position to theological interpretation must be noted as a major facet of study at the end of the century, namely, *ideology critique*. Without a very stable or clear understanding of "ideology," a number of scholars are attentive to ideological dimensions of the text, by which is meant special advocacy in the guise of either historical reportage or of disinterested theological claim. This propensity in recent scholarship, informed by a general Marxian analysis of ideology and particularly by Michel Foucault's recognition that discourse is an act of power, takes two distinct forms. Scholars interested in "historical" questions are concerned to establish that the text rather regularly lacks historical reliability.²⁴ Other scholars are more attentive to theological claims that are in fact acts of social power.²⁵ These twin approaches stand in some continuity with the older historical criticism, but

²²Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

²³Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Method and Cases* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). See also my proposal, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, and Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

²⁴See Philip Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Niels P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988); and Keith W. Whitlam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁵See Robert P. Carroll, *The Bible as a Problem for Christianity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), and Wolf in the Sheepfold: *The Bible as Problematic for Theology* (London: SCM, 1997); David Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990).

they stand against an older historical positivism as well as a less suspicious theological perspective.

My impression is that this approach is essentially reactive. That is, the higher the claims made by other scholars (historical or theological) from and for the text, the more vigorous is this critical response. Such scholars regard high claims (historical or theological) as fundamentally dishonest (thus, as deceptive “ideology”), and exposure of such dishonest claims is regarded as a moral responsibility. In the end, I suspect, it will be important, in a dialectical way, to show that such exponents of ideology criticism are themselves propelled by a value assumption that has most in common with the illusions of nineteenth-century objectivity.

3. A third issue emerging at the end of the century, important for students of this text, is how *Jewish reading* toward the synagogue and *Christian reading* for the church are to be related to each other, if at all. Through the twentieth century, two unfortunate tendencies are clear. First, in the interest of “objectivity,” both Jewish and Christian scholars of a critical kind bracketed out any confessional commitment, sharing a critical project devoid of theological passion.²⁶ Second, Christian scholars who dominated the critical enterprise proceeded as if Jewish interpretive work did not exist, assuming a monopoly of interpretation that predictably carried with it nuances of supersessionism and anti-Semitism.

At the end of the twentieth century, it is clear that neither “objective” interpretation nor Christian monopoly of interpretation is viable. This awareness arises partly on academic grounds with the growing awareness that these texts evoke and permit more than one lively interpretive trajectory, that is, that the text is polyvalent. Partly the awareness arises on moral grounds with the recognition that monopolistic interpretive practices lie in the background of the barbarism of the holocaust. It is not easy, however, to find fresh ways of interpretation that are responsible, honest, and open. Here I may mention three factors that will need to be considered in future work.

First, while there have always been prominent Jewish interpreters of the Hebrew Bible, those best known to Christian scholars have largely confined themselves to critical questions that did not pose strong confessional claims. Now attention must be paid to emerging Jewish interpreters of prominence—best known are Michael Fishbane and Jon D. Levenson—who work from a clear Jewish perspective of interpretation.²⁷ As attention is paid to such interpretive work, Christian interpreters will need to proceed differently, not least to unlearn monopolistic assumptions. Second, important scholars—Childs as a Christian and Levenson as a Jew—strongly insist that Jewish and Christian interpreters have quite distinct responsibilities and cannot in fact cooperate without unbearable

²⁶See Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, The Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

²⁷Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), and the book cited in note 26.

compromise of confessional convictions.²⁸ But third, at the end of the century with its immense record of hate and violence, there are scholars who suggest that Christians must rethink and reformulate in deeply different ways the assumptions of Christian interpretation in the presence of Jewish interpretation.²⁹ The work of this latter inclination, in contrast to the positions of Childs and Levenson, suggests that much of the polemical distinction between Jews and Christians is not in fact about truth claims but about the long-standing power of domination. All of that remains to be sorted out.

These three emergences that were hardly on the horizon at the turn of the discipline in the 1970s—fresh impetus in Old Testament theology, ideology critique, Jewish-Christian interfaces—indicate how deeply the field has changed, and how much fresh vitality and energy are present in the field at the end of the century. It is clear that the turn in western culture, with its failed barbarism, and the emerging interpretive pluralism have impacted and changed the discipline in ways that could not have been anticipated in the simpler, more confident mood of the mid-century. The great contributions of the mid-century, still in the grip of nineteenth-century historicism, are not to be scuttled, but become durable resources and reference points out of which the field will continue to change in response to a cultural environment now vigorously pluralistic and deeply at risk. ⊕

²⁸Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*; Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism*.

²⁹Fredrick C. Holmgren, *The Old Testament: The Significance of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Norbert Lohfink, *The Covenant Never Revoked: Biblical Reflections on Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1991); and R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).