



The Childs Proposal: A Symposium

with RALPH W. KLEIN, GARY STANSELL, and WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

The publication of *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* by Brevard S. Childs (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) has produced considerable reaction. It has occasioned symposia both at professional meetings and in printed form and prompted longer than usual book reviews. The attention is merited because of the magnitude of the challenge it presents to the way the study of the Old Testament is commonly undertaken. Childs asserts,

I am now convinced that the relation between the historical critical study of the Bible and its theological use as religious literature within a community of faith and practice needs to be completely rethought. Minor adjustments are not only inadequate, but also conceal the extent of the dry rot (p.15).

Those of us who were weaned on (or at some later point learned) the distinction between “what the text meant” and “what the text means” are directly challenged by the central contention of this book. For Childs the canonical shaping of the text in antiquity rendered the message accessible to all future generations within the community of faith “by means of a ‘canonical intentionality,’ which is coextensive with the meaning of the biblical text” (p. 79). The canon is a “collection of scripture through which every subsequent generation was to be addressed” (p. 78). Thus, the materials have been so shaped that what they meant is what they mean. The distinction is dissolved.

The canonical shaping has actualized the message for the faithful of a different age. Childs, however, denies that the canonical perspective implies a non-historical reading of the Bible, for he states,

There is no ‘revelation’ apart from the historical experience of historical Israel....The study of the canonical shape of the literature is an attempt to do justice to the nature of Israel’s unique history. To take the canon seriously is to stress the special quality of the Old Testament’s humanity which is reflected in the form of Israel’s sacred scripture (p.71).

The experience of the Jewish community shaped, but did not create, scripture, for their very shaping was testimony to their having been shaped. There is, thus, a continuous divine initiative within the tradition.

It should be pointed out that Childs has published more than a proposal—he has done

what he proposed for each book of the Old Testament. There is an introductory section for each of the three parts of the Hebrew canon: Torah, Prophets (subdivided as Former and Latter) and the Writings. Within each section, one chapter is devoted to each book of the Old Testament with at least three topic headings: “Historical Critical Problems,” “The Canonical Shape,” and “Theological and Hermeneutical Implications.” In addition, a list of commentaries from the mid-nineteenth century to the present and a bibliography are given at the beginning of each chapter, and at the end there is a list of references for the history of exegesis of each book. For each book Childs evaluates the lines of the discussions among historical critical scholars, frequently claiming that an impasse has been reached. In matters such as date, authorship and sociological setting Childs often directs the reader to introductions such as those by Eissfeldt, Fohrer and Kaiser. He refuses to focus on those questions, for he wants to “describe the form and function of the Hebrew Bible in its role as sacred scripture” (p. 16). The standard fare of introductions whether from a ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ perspective is, in his opinion, simply incompatible with the collection and transmission of the literature *as scripture*.

The responses by Klein, Stansell and Brueggemann to Childs’ proposal amply illustrate the rethinking and reassessment that *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* has generated. We are pleased to pay tribute to this important book with this symposium.

RALPH W. KLEIN

Christ Seminary-Seminex, St. Louis, Missouri

Ten years ago Brevard Childs announced the end of the Biblical Theology movement; his latest book proposes a post-critical alternative in exegesis. This alternative to historical criticism results not from the paranoid fears of fundamentalism, nor the vagaries of structuralism, nor even from the perspective of one who would read the Bible from the “new criticism” in vogue among students of literature. His proposal, rather, is theological: he would have us read the Old Testament as *Scripture*. By this he means to read the Bible in its final, authoritative form, as the product and legacy of the community of faith which produced and shaped it in such a way that it would be accessible as Word of God to all subsequent generations.

Despite all the other things he contributes in the way of bibliography and history of scholarship (for my views on these aspects of his book see my review in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 7 [1980] 57-63) it is this theological statement and its implications which provide at once the assets and the potential liabilities of this epochal work.

ASSETS

Recent research on the Old Testament canon by Sid Z. Leiman and Albert Sundberg have brought new life to the old question of which books were counted in

and which were counted out. Childs has his own views in this area, too, but he marks a major shift by understanding the canonical process as something far broader. As the various sources were woven together in the Pentateuch or the words of Second Isaiah were integrated into the book we now call Isaiah, the community of faith was attempting to make the Scriptures useable for all future generations. While not every stage along the way is still recoverable and the

tradents may even at times have intentionally hidden their traces, Childs enables us to understand the Scriptures as the final product of a centuries-long effort and to see a continuity in that effort between tradents and redactors and scribes until gradually the canonical status of these thirty-nine books was recognized by all. This suggestion takes seriously what we have discovered about how the Bible came to us, and it eliminates the gap between the time when the books were composed and when the canonical decisions were made. Because canon-making was a process connected with the community of faith, the old argument about the priority of Scripture or Tradition is shown to be somewhat beside the point.

One significant way in which this canonical shaping took place is what Childs terms the addition of an eschatological framework. This is a second asset of his work. While he never really provides an adequate definition for eschatology, he apparently means the understanding of Scripture as promissory and moving toward fulfillment. Tentative and partial fulfillments abound, but the thrust of many parts of Scripture puts the reader in the tension between promise and fulfillment, where he or she feels addressed by the promissory word as something not yet cashed in. The eschatology of the Bible is not some thin redactional layer that can easily be peeled off, but it is constitutive of the literature itself. While the stories about the patriarchs in Genesis may once have dealt with the founding of sanctuaries or inter-tribal strife, the dominant force in their shaping was the promissory framework. God's word to the patriarchs about the land, children and blessing is the core of the book of Genesis as we have it. To attempt to document the historicity of the patriarchs or to reconstruct its long tradition history runs the risk of missing the canonical arrows that point to a God who promises.

A third major asset of the book is its manifold attempt to understand the Old Testament holistically. A recent lecture I heard on the theology of the prophet Micah derived all its data from that book's first three chapters and understood the prophet only as one who accused Israel. The canonical Micah, of course, also talks of the final exaltation of Jerusalem, the coming of the messiah, and the incomparability of a God who casts our sins into the depths of the sea. Childs stresses that the canonical shaping intended us to read a book like Micah from this fuller perspective. Similarly, the historical Amos may have been able to formulate his message under the title, "The end has come for Israel," but the book as is winds up with a ringing announcement of the restoration of the fallen booth of David and the gift of unparalleled fertility to the land. This positive ending is not something disconnected, a "Hollywood" ending. Rather it maintains continuity with the historical Amos by showing that the good news only comes to people who have been judged because of their sins, and it comes only by the grace of Israel's God. Israel's future for both the historical and canonical Amos is a future given by Yahweh. Deuteronomy 31-34 are not an appendix to the "real"

Deuteronomy, and they can be ignored only at the risk of totally misunderstanding the final book in the Pentateuch. Chapter 31, for example, shows that previous chapters of law function as a witness against all future generations who rebel; chapter 32 contrasts the unchangeable fidelity of God with the perversity of his faithless people; chapter 33 shifts the focus from Israel's behavior to God's ultimate promise-full purpose; chapter 34 assesses Moses as one who wrought great deeds for Israel through the power of God and whose deeds are now recorded in the law of Moses.

LIABILITIES

Childs provides many examples of how the canonical shape affects the meaning of the text, but he is somewhat unclear about the method to be used in discovering the canonical meaning. Despite his own excellent credentials as an historical critic, displayed in numerous articles and a major commentary on Exodus (*The Book of Exodus* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974]), he does not specify how—if at all—historical criticism contributes to an understanding of the canonical text. Historical criticism enables us to describe what a given author meant in his original historical context, but the message Childs finds is often more timeless. His procedure has some resemblance to redaction criticism, but it is hardly a one-to-one relationship. His is not the method of a David Clines, who has attempted to understand the Pentateuch as a literary whole by isolating its theme and who begins with the final form of the text and virtually ignores its prehistory. Childs acknowledges the prehistory and finds the meaning-making in the gradual production of the text. I suspect that Childs would also find inadequate attention to the community of faith in the work of Clines. So how are we to interpret from a canonical perspective?

A second liability in the Childs proposal revolves around the question of the source of Scriptures' authority. Is it their canonical form which makes them authoritative, or is it their testimony to the God who promises and judges? Perhaps I am making a dichotomy where a synthesis is called for, or, perhaps, I am arguing for what I understand to be a particularly Lutheran insight into the nature of Scripture. In any case, the point is not unrelated to the fact that many biblical critics who want to proclaim the full message of the Scriptures occasionally find some of the most precious accounts of God's goodness in pre-canonical documents. I do not want to surrender the message of the Deuteronomistic Historian, Second Isaiah, and the Priestly stratum in the Pentateuch to the category of the history of Israel's religion. I find in these and similar documents powerful and authoritative witnesses to the living God (for my understanding of these documents see *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979]). While caution is surely called for, there are times when the message of J, P, and Second Isaiah witnesses more clearly and poignantly than the final form of the Pentateuch and Isaiah. If it is the Gospel which gives the Scriptures their authority, it is not all that surprising that pre-canonical documents can be fully authoritative.

Finally, one wonders why the focus is limited to understanding the *Old Testament* as Scripture. Childs has elsewhere discussed Psalm 8 in its total biblical context, both in the Psalter and as reflected in the book of Hebrews, and in his

Exodus commentary he devoted major sections on each pericope to the Old Testament Context and the New Testament Context. Childs himself is aware of this important issue (see p. 338). But if it is the final, authoritative form that is to be the basis for the Scripture's use, is not that form for us the Christian Bible? To have written this book from such a perspective would have cut down on its ecumenical value for Jewish-Christian dialogue, and it also would have raised a persistent and necessary question: "But what did the Old Testament mean in its original context?" I understand and support Childs' decision to write the book as he did. But once he has retreated to a pre-New Testament context, can he defend against those who want to push back to *other* "pre" forms—like J and P and the rest?

However that may be, we might make bold to ask Childs for a reprise: How about an *Introduction to the Old Testament as Christian Scripture*? That request is only a roundabout way of expressing my deep esteem for the work we have in hand, a book I deeply treasure.

GARY STANSELL

St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota

Neither biblical scholarship nor biblical preaching can live without a continual reassessment of what each is about, and how each relates to the other. Brevard Childs' new book serves as a thorny goad which will prod the exegete and the preacher toward a profound rethinking of how one ought to read the biblical texts and understand them theologically. As traditionally understood, the genre "Introduction to the Old Testament" has unmistakably functioned in a sphere other than that of theological understanding; it has sought "to describe the history of the development of the Hebrew Literature and to trace the earlier and later stages of this history" (Childs, p. 40). A response to the inadequacies of this approach, Childs' book is more than an "Introduction;" indeed, Childs' concern with the normative quality of the Scripture and the authority of its final shape place the book more in the category of a "theology of the Old Testament." Speaking of the Pentateuch, although this would apply to the whole of Hebrew Scripture, Childs writes: "The critical task at hand is to describe the actual characteristics of the canonical shape and to determine the *theological significance* of that shape" (p. 128; italics mine).

On a very sophisticated level, Childs' *Introduction* is a "how to" manual: it intends to instruct us on how to read the Old Testament and understand its nature "in relation to its authority for the community of faith and practice which shaped and preserved it" (p. 41). It succeeds admirably in helping the reader to do this. But in its success, a host of questions arise, several of which I should like briefly to address.

1. The historical-critical method (understood here as an umbrella category embracing literary, form, tradition, and redaction criticism) is both praised and damned by Childs. On the one hand, he recounts its definite gains over the past generations and makes use of its results; on the other, he attempts to show its great limitations for the task of understanding the Hebrew Bible's canonical

authority and theological significance. In my judgment, there is little to quarrel with here. But in the actual practice of doing a canonical reading of the various books, one is struck by how the multiplicity of voices and messages is smoothed out, the contours removed, and a unity discovered which appears not always to do justice to the differences in the textual units. To illustrate: Childs' canonical reading, say, of the book of Micah disregards the form critical distinctions between the various units. It is no longer of import that Micah of the 8th century on a particular occasion announced the destruction of Samaria in a prophetic judgment speech (2:2ff.), and on another occasion proclaimed divine judgment on the "false prophets" (3.5ff.), or on another, disputed with the wealthy brethren in the community (2:6ff.). The various messages and their specific intentions are now "flattened out," detached from their original historical context and setting, and viewed broadly from the perspective of the book's final, canonical shape. The

“messages” of the individual units give way to the “message” of the book, for those editors of the final form of the book have placed the oracles “within a framework which supplied a theological interpretation to the meaning of the original oracles” (p. 437). The question for the interpreter is: Does this do justice to the contents of the book, the different tones, forms, motifs, intentions, etc.? The parts now appear to be neglected in favor of the whole; the textual units and their historical contexts are now more or less irrelevant. The reason: the canonical editors who shaped the book have given not only to their own time but to “every succeeding generation of Israel” (implied is *every generation*) the valid interpretation of Micah’s work. But one must ask whether this canonical reading, significant as it is, does justice to the messages within the book. Is it not important that all voices within the Micah tradition be heard, without absolutizing the final form?

2. A canonical reading emphasizes not only the final shape of the book, but also its connection with other books and traditions. Thus, for example, Second Isaiah is to be read in its present literary connection with First Isaiah; the Micah tradition is to be read in relation to the Isaianic corpus. In both cases, some immensely helpful and stimulating insights are brought forward. To take the latter case, Childs demonstrates that there are common formal elements and theological patterns in Micah and First Isaiah. Concluding that the final editing process of the book of Micah took place within a theological tradition which also shaped Isaiah, Childs’ interpretation underscores the unity and similarity between these two prophetic books. For the book of Micah, this means that we must see it in terms of its affinity with the Isaian material. “The two are to be heard together for mutual enrichment within the later corpus of prophecy” (p. 438).

The helpfulness of this approach and the enrichment of our understanding of the prophetic corpus is surely evident. Yet several questions remain. Is justice done to the unique voice and message (or messages) which the book of Micah speaks when a method of interpretation so strongly emphasizes commonality, affinity, similarity? Micah, who was Isaiah’s contemporary in the Southern Kingdom and who responded to some of the same historical and political crises of the day, spoke out on certain issues not only *differently* from Isaiah, but even in contradiction to Isaiah. We need only mention the significant differences in the way they assessed and/or adapted the Zion tradition or the theophany tradition in their proclamation, or the distinction in the way each prophet addressed the issue of (false) trust in Yahweh. If a canonical reading of Micah and Isaiah over-

looks the *uniqueness* of the traditions and motifs employed by each of the prophets, are we fully hearing what these prophetic voices have to say? To read Micah in comparison with Isaiah points equally to the differences between prophets. This presupposes, to be sure, that critical study distinguishes between the material deriving from the prophets themselves and oracles deriving from the later communities and tradents.

3. These observations and questions lead to a third and final point. Childs’ canonical reading of the Scriptures attempts to stress the “historical nature of the biblical witness” (p. 41). Indeed, he affirms that his method is misunderstood when it is described as a “non-historical reading of the Bible.” But the result of canonical analysis is to subordinate the historical to the theological. This is clear, for example, in Childs’ treatment of Second Isaiah, Amos, and Micah. According to his interpretation of Second Isaiah, its present canonical shape results in “the loss

of an original historical context” which gives “the material an almost purely theological shape” (p. 326). The book’s message is not unrelated to a specific historical referent and is instead related to the future. Of Amos, Childs argues that the decisive force which produced the book’s final form is not historical but theological (p. 408). Similarly, Micah (p. 434). Now, granted that more than historical forces and contexts exert their influence on the traditions and the editors, one is inclined to question a methodology that appears consistently to *subordinate* the historical to the theological. While it may be true that the redactors cut Second Isaiah’s ties with the book’s original historical context and meaning, it remains a serious question whether the modern interpreter is bound by the redactors’ interpretation. Moreover, can a method which so effectively stresses the theological over the historical enable us to hear and read the biblical text in a way that its very historical rootedness requires?

It is eminently clear from this book that Childs is not offering a refinement of present methodologies for Old Testament exegesis. Having fundamentally rethought how the interpreter and also the preacher should go about the task of understanding the text, he provides us with a quite different model for our work. The overriding question that remains, for this reviewer, at least, is whether the canonical reading of Scripture as presented here does not take us too far away from what is still a necessary first exegetical-historical question: What *did* the text mean?

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

Interpretation of the Bible is never unproblematic. It has never been so, not from the beginning. And those who think it is clear and unambiguous mostly are unaware of the issues, and unaware of the interpretive moves they themselves are making. Indeed, “they know not what they do.” The problem is that at the same time the Bible is *a complicated reflective literature* fashioned in and valued in various contexts, and a singular norm for life and faith in several communities of faith. The former characteristic, which can hardly be disputed, requires sensitivity and acuteness to follow its shape. The latter characteristic,

page 112

which cannot be ignored, requires a movement beyond “criticism” that controls the text.

Each new generation must make a fresh settlement concerning the relation of its complicated, reflective character and its function as a singular norm. Each new generation must pay attention to both these factors, somehow to value both, keep them in tension and refuse to let either obliterate the other.

This important and inescapable tension may take various forms. It is the issue of *faith and criticism*: faith without criticism always borders on obscurantism which serves unrecognized interests. Criticism without faith violates not only the claims of the communities gathered around the text, but the claim of the text itself. Recently this problematic has been apparent in the tendencies of Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad in Old Testament theology. Eichrodt tried to structure his interpretation around a normative claim of the text, and imposed his controlling categories on the text to claim more for his categories than the text would allow. And von Rad sought to avoid theological imperialism and so paid overriding attention to the historical dynamic of the text, nearly to a dissolution of its theological normativeness.

While that particular problem of *theology and history* will permit no resolution on those grounds, it is apparent that criticism of late has overridden all faith claims, that attention to the complicated, reflective character of the text has preempted attention to the normative character claimed not only for but in the text. Indeed, scholars other than Childs (e.g., Walter Wink, Peter Stuhlmacher) have pointed to the imbalance in scripture study which minimizes or ignores the character and function of the Biblical literature as theologically normative.

It is, as I understand it, Childs' interest to redress the balance, to reclaim the text as theologically normative. Thus in the title of his book, the key claim is "as scripture." By this Childs makes a *theological* point by a statement about *literature*. The literature as such is not properly understood unless it is interpreted in relation to the faith communities which shaped it, valued and transmitted it, and continue to appeal to it. And to ignore this claim is to misunderstand seriously the nature of the literature being interpreted. (Childs' argument about the nature of the proper study of the text is in this regard closely parallel to Barth's understanding of "scientific" theology, i.e., theology which is determined by the nature of the subject of study, "God.")

Thus I understand Childs' claim to be that critical study must take into account the kind of literature before us, literature that cannot be understood apart from the faith community which shaped it. I judge this theological claim to be behind his specific argument about the canon as such. "Canon" as a formal mode fully serves Childs' primary theological argument which is more broadly hermeneutical than simply canonical.

1. There is a problem about the relation of the *shape* of the canon and the *process* of the canon. James Sanders has paid particular attention to the process of canon-making, with due consideration for the dynamic of that process. Childs is certainly no stranger to those concerns. But his book tends to focus on the *fixed shapes* of the canon which seems static and beyond dynamic.

I am not sure this is a fair judgment. But if it is, I have great misgivings about it. Such a view tends to flatten the text so that one cannot value the moves or turns that have brought this text to this point. One cannot fully appreciate the

ambiguities in the process nor the circumstantial factors that led to the text as it stands. This is not simply a scholarly concern, but a pastoral one as well. It is my own experience that when members of the community of faith can participate in the ongoing traditioning process which continues to derive from the text, two things happen, both of which are important. First, persons come to see that there was a parallel traditioning process which resulted in the text coming to its present form. Second, it becomes clear that vitality of the traditioning process does not detract from the authority of the text, but in fact embraces its dynamic and resilient claim upon the community of faith. To bracket out awareness of this process both before the present shape of the text and the ongoing process after the text seems to work against, not toward the canonical authority of the text.

2. As Childs is fully aware, critical analysis of the processes which led to canon has made important gains that must not be given up. Childs fully affirms this, as the comprehensive coverage of his book attests. But Childs is likely to be misunderstood by those who share neither his vast learning nor his critical commitments. Very likely Childs' canonical stress is for post-

critical folks who move through and beyond *critical dissection to confessional affirmation*. But as Barth has been used by pre-critical people who have not sensed the danger of his evangelical faith, so Childs' program may be misunderstood by pre-critical interpretation. I do not believe Childs means to bracket out such work, but to move through it. The temptation of the book is the same temptation every pastor or teacher faces; namely, to announce the *conclusions* of critical study, rather than the *slow, painful work* of helping people move through the critical process. If it is intended to bracket out and/or nullify such a process, then I think the proposal runs the risk of delivering the text over into the hands of those who yearn for authority that is easy and without scandal.

3. I am puzzled about the relation of this book to Childs' remarkable commentary on the book of Exodus. That book also appears to be programmatic, but in a different direction. In that book (*The Book of Exodus*, [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974]), the stress is not on canonical shape as such, but on the layers of historical interpretation which must be taken into account. Such a view is much more processive than seems to be suggested here. I have no doubt that canonical fixity is important. But in light of Childs' own work, I do not see how that fixity can ignore the *pre-fixity process* (as in critical study) or *post-fixity interpretation* (as in Childs' own commentary). I do not believe Childs has adequately clarified the relation between his two major contributions. For the focus on canon here seems uncompromising, but clearly subsequent traditioning shifts that focus in various directions. And if post-canon interpretation can shift things, then on principle how can pre-canon processes be excluded?

4. While lacking Childs' expertise on canon, I wonder if the canonical *book* is the proper unit of analysis. To be sure, it is clearer than the way much study has proceeded, e.g., in the Yahwist or the pre-history or the Succession Narrative. But one may arrive at other conclusions. Childs, of course, is not unaware of this matter. Other elements of canon, e.g., the tripart canon, the whole Old Testament as canon, the relation of the Testaments, might be more crucial or helpful at some points. Childs' judgment may be correct, but he has in any case made a judgment which is his own and not mandated by the text itself. And it is thinkable that other judgments might be made. Moreover, even if one focuses on a book, Childs

makes it seem as though his statement on any given book is obvious or beyond dispute. While I have learned so much from him and would not wish to minimize the power of his insights, one might claim that different sensitivities or different questions asked of a Biblical book might yield a different interpretation. That is, his canonical question may give us the right *unit* for interpretation, but within that *unit*, other readings might also be pursued. Childs' tendency is to let his canonical reading work mainly to refute the *critical dissection* of the book. But one may ask if that is a legitimate or worthy task to assign the function of the canon. That is, canon as a theological claim does not, as I see it, have any particular bias toward unity rather than parts. Rather it is to make *an evangelical claim* about the text, which may be in whole or in parts. While it is an overstatement, the impression I have is that Childs is primarily concerned with the dissection and fragmentation of the text under critical methods, and he wishes to reverse that argument. It is by no means clear to me that this is the main issue. Thus again a *theological* issue is argued on primarily *literary* grounds.

5. I would insist that Childs' canonical program must be understood in relation to

ongoing critical study. I assume Childs would agree with this, though he lets himself be misunderstood on this point. And it is noteworthy that Childs makes his major point just as fresh scholarship sees even the canonical claim critically. That is, the canon does not override the critical questions but must itself be submitted to criticism. This fresh work includes such diverse offerings as Norman Gottwald (*The Tribes of Yahweh* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974]) and Elaine Pagels (*The Gnostic Gospels* [New York: Random, 1979]). It is the claim of Gottwald that the earliest Old Testament canon (von Rad) is sociologically understandable as an ideology for a liberated community. But to introduce such a sociological awareness is to move away from Childs' proposal. Elaine Pagels, in a very different direction, understands canon as a limiting device politically motivated to exclude threats to a political monopoly. Perhaps neither Gottwald nor Pagels is correct, but they do require even the canonical process and outcome to be discerned critically and historically. And perhaps that is the hardest question left for us by Childs, not the *substance* of the canon but the very *existence* of the canon itself and the *reasons* for its formation. I share Childs' concern to find a sure point outside criticism. But I doubt if it will come from the shape of the literature. More likely it will be found in the risky bold interaction between the text and the community which not only *articulates* "truth" but which *practices* it as a mission and vocation. Literature, whatever its shape, will not give such authoritative claim. But to serve missional practice would require a more missional interpretation. That is, the bold theological claim for the text which Childs asserts cannot, I suspect, be made about the text as a literary shape. It can only be made "as scripture." And in the Biblical tradition, that means as a literature confessed and practiced by a believing community which permits itself to be criticized by the text, and out of its faithful practice, returns to criticize the very text it claims as canon.

6. Let me return to Childs' claim, "as scripture." That seems to me the important point Childs makes, and one with which I fully agree. It is the claim that in doing Bible study, we are doing *theological* study. While all the other arts and skills practiced in Bible study may be gains, none of them penetrates to the real issues which are theological, i.e., which reflect upon the authoritative claims of the text in asserting news, in reshaping identity and in summoning to mission.

(Even to write such a sentence requires categories and terminology not usually permitted in critical study.)

Childs' program evokes for me two main urgings. First, the relation of "canon criticism" to Biblical criticism generally. Much reaction to Childs' work (including some of my own) has been focused on the relation of canon and criticism. Childs himself is partly responsible for linking the term "canon" to "criticism," as though this were another in the inventory of criticisms. But with more recent prodding from Childs, it is clearer that this misunderstands the point. Criticism there must be, but because criticism itself is *informed by canon* and not only *aimed at canon*, we are invited to a wholly new kind of criticism, new not only to scripture study, but new to the whole enterprise of Enlightenment scholarship. Now we are concerned for criticism that does not focus "objectively" on the text, but also upon the interpreter and the responding community.

Canon as *foundation* of criticism as well as *focus* of criticism places the text in a fresh relation to theology. And it makes a more radical break with conventional critical study than has

been recognized. It requires a different starting place with a very different set of questions.

My second point is derived from this—that Childs has not gone nearly far enough. His argument thus far has been confined to the single pieces of literature, and indeed his claims have formally stayed very close to the specific pieces of literature. And that surely is appropriate for an “introduction.” He has laid the ground for a “truly robust, theological option.” One may hope he will move on to this theological option which will move beyond both pre-critical fundamentalism and critical modernism. But to do this Childs (and other colleagues who join the task) will need to move ostensibly “critical” concerns to substantive, hermeneutical matters. Whoever does that will have much more to articulate hermeneutical presuppositions and face up to the claims of *revelation*. When that happens, Scripture study will have on its hands real theologians, and that no doubt will cause a considerable crisis among us. When that happens the break with other “criticisms” will be clear. And linkages to the “scriptured community of mission” will be unavoidable.

Having said all of that, I conclude with a statement of my deep and unqualified appreciation. Childs has changed many of the questions we will now face. He has done so by calling scholars and pastors back to their main work. My comments intend only to say that Childs has not resolved all the questions. Childs surely knows that, and we may be grateful for his having left us some additional, difficult work to do. My comments are not in criticism of Childs but to think about next questions that his book has brought to surface. Childs has opened up perspectives in *literary* matters, but behind those lurk *theological* decisions that Childs has only posed and not resolved.