# Historical Imagination: Addressing the Impasse of Old Testament Theology

Daniel D. Pioske

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Gustavus Adolphus College
Professor Darrell Jodock
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Contents

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

# Chapter 1: Old Testament Theology and its Present Crisis: The Collapse of History

Debate continues concerning the value of Old Testament theology, its place within biblical studies and theology, and the adequacy of the methods employed in constructing a theology relevant to contemporary communities of faith. The current epistemological climate, which questions pure objectivity and absolutes, has also challenged the validity of the historical-critical method in its attempt to illuminate a theological understanding of the Old Testament. The prestige and stature that the historical-critical method enjoyed through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has crumbled with the objectivity and confidence of the modern age.[1] In light of this development, the purpose of this study is to reevaluate historical criticism's relationship with hermeneutics and to argue that historical criticism remains a valuable tool for a post-modern Old Testament theologian.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, amidst the ruins of a Europe desolated structurally and idealistically, Karl Barth challenged the liberal theology of his time. A century prior to Barth, Friedrich Schleiermacher proposed that God was experienced in one's self conscious through the feeling of absolute. In the awakening and cultivation of a person's self-conscious the 'Whence' (i.e. God) of this dependence was discerned and a relationship maintained.[2] In a reorientation of Schleiermacher's theological perspective, Barth offered a 'Krisis theology' that emphasized the Word of God through which

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[1] Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 4-7.

[2] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1928), 16.

humanity encountered the mystery and incomprehensibility of God. In his commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth expressed that true knowledge of God could not be attained outside of biblical revelation or through a subjective construction. God, not humanity, used the Word of God to produce the miracle of faith. Redirecting the liberal theological tradition in which he was educated toward a knowledge of God through revelation, Barth deemed human efforts at understanding the divine to "break into pieces on the impossibility of God."[3] The Bible was the medium in which the reality of God provided a normative claim over and against the inferences of liberal theology, which "confused culture with the Christian Faith."[4] The influence of Barth in theology also altered the discipline of biblical studies, creating the opportunity for the Bible to be once again interpreted theologically in order to explain the peculiarity of the biblical voice. An examination of the Bible need not be restricted to description and categorization, but should also be normative for the life of a Christian.

In the wake of these developments two biblical theologians, Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad, wrote Old Testament theologies that would shape and direct the discipline for the latter half of the twentieth century. Eichrodt's monumental Old Testament theology, written in 1993, analyzed the developments and diversity of the Old Testament in relation to a single theme, covenant. Eichrodt examined the covenant of

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[3] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 185.

[4] Karl Barth quoted in K. W. Clements, ed. *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 63.

God as presented in the Old Testament, the instruments of covenant, and how the notion of covenant affected the lives of individuals.[5]

Twenty years later Von Rad provided another great contribution to the discipline of Old Testament theology. Von Rad's approach differed from Eichrodt's in identifying the subject matter of the Old Testament as a constant retelling of the historical acts and interventions of God for Israel. This theology of recital investigated the God who performed normative acts and the community who were transformed by them. Both of these men, therefore, responded to the challenges of Barth and contributed theologies articulating, "that which is normative, characteristic, and enduring in Israel's faith."[6]

The breadth and scope of the theologies produced by Eichrodt and von Rad attested to each man's scholarship, wisdom, and faith. The theologies of Eichrodt and von Rad and their methodological approaches can however, as with every great contribution to the study of religion, be connected to the presuppositions and context of their own time—an epistemological atmosphere no longer relevant for contemporary Old Testament theology. Eichrodt's attempt to relate an Old Testament theology to a single constant theme neglected certain parts of the Old Testament corpus such as wisdom, creation, and poetic material. His endeavor, therefore, at revealing the constant (the covenant) in the Old Testament in response to the developmentalism of liberal theology limited the dynamic nature of Israel's faith—falling into a reductionism unacceptable for current theological discourse.

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[5] Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 28.

[6] Brueggemann, 38.

Von Rad, who predicated his theology on the dynamic historical dimension of the Old Testament, nevertheless offered a theology that was in constant tension between 'salvation history' as recited in the Old Testament and recoverable empirical historical data.[7] As von Rad himself commented in the years following his Old Testament theology, there was a sharp contrast between "modern critical research and that which Israel's faith has built up."[8] The 'mighty acts of God' has become an ambiguous and problematic term in light of the contemporary historical record. One must either understand the mighty acts of God in an uninformed pre-critical light, or define the term in philosophical categories unconnected to the Old Testament witness.

The past four decades of Old Testament theological scholarship have wrestled with the inadequacies of the Biblical Theology Movement generated by Eichrodt and von Rad and the vacuum it left behind. Scholars who rejected the possibility of Old Testament theology echoed Johann Gabler's famous three-century-old dictum[9] that a distinction between the proper function of biblical studies and dogmatics was needed both in the academy and in the church. Scholars within theology and biblical studies considered the failure of the Biblical Theology Movement as verification of the fact that theology and biblical studies were disparate disciplines within the study of the Christian religion. The Christian community was better served by theologians who addressed theological questions and biblical scholars who produced scholarly material on the Bible.

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[7] Ibid., 43.

[8] Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Altes Testament*, I, 8 quoted in Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 29.

[9] For a translation of this speech and commentary, see Johann Gabler, "An Oration on the Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objections of Each (1787)." In B. Ollenburger, E. Martens, and G. Hasel (eds.). *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology.* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 489-502.

The repercussions of the failure of Eichrodt and von Rad's theologies to respond to a new era of Old Testament theology are reflected in Gerhard Hasel's comment that, "Old Testament theology today is undeniably in crisis...though it is centuries old, OT theology is now uncertain of its true identity."[10] This sentiment and opinions similar to it still permeate the discipline of Old Testament theology today. As recently as 1993 John J. Collins noted, "Biblical theology...has in recent years been relegated to the margins of the discipline."[11] Collins' observation, however, has been met with a flurry of new theologies from a wide spectrum of academic interests—ranging from Paul Ricoeur's development of imagination to Phyllis Trible's feminist hermeneutics. That biblical scholars still engage in the process of contemplating and writing new Old Testament theologies is clearly evident. Old Testament theology, though immersed in a crisis, nevertheless remains a vigorous and lively discipline within biblical studies.[12] Before examining the current status of Old Testament theology, however, some background must be provided into the nature of the crisis itself. How does one define 'Old Testament Theology'? How did Biblical theology, which once dominated biblical studies after World War II, prove inadequate to a new generation of scholars? Why has historical criticism been dismissed or ignored as a relevant method for doing Old Testament theology?

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[10] Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 1.

[11] John J. Collins, "Historical Criticism and the State of Biblical Theology" *Christian Century* Vol. 110 No. 22, 743.

[12] Hasel notes in his introduction to the fourth edition of his work that "recent major contributions in monograph form indicate that the debate concerning the nature, function, method, and shape of OT theology continues unabated." *Old Testament Theology,* 9.

## Definition of Old Testament Theology

At its most basic level, Old Testament theology seeks to move beyond an exegetical description of Scripture and provide a *constructive* theological rendering of the text for *contemporary* communities of faith. 'Constructive' and 'contemporary' are indispensable terms because Old Testament theology recognizes the dynamic character of both the Scriptures and a society continually faced with new challenges. The task of the Old Testament theologian therefore is to reexamine, recontextualize, and re-construct the theological insights of the Bible. As Walter Brueggemann states:

> This work of fashioning a larger, coherent portrayal of Yahweh is the proper work of an Old Testament theology. Doing Old Testament theology is not finally the same enterprise as commenting on one text at a time. Its work is to construe out of the text a rendering of God.[13]

To grasp better the concept of Old Testament theology, one can assert what it is not: Old Testament theology is not limited to the examination of the history of Israelite religion, it is not a philosophical or naturalistic theological inquiry into the Bible, and it is not a partial analysis of a passage or a book within the Old Testament—it is a theological evaluation of the whole. Old Testament theology, as a discipline, understands that reading and interpretation must take seriously "the claim of the text that it is speaking about an encounter and relationship with God."[14] Old Testament theology is a theological

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[13] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 267.

[14] Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament.* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 17.

endeavor; it is a reflective activity in which religious statements are extracted from the text, thought over, reflected upon and discussed, and purposely reformulated.[15]

One may assert, however, that the Old Testament is comprised of creation, historical, prophetic, wisdom, and eschatological material, but it is not a book of theological precepts. And indeed, such an assertion is accurate. The Old Testament contains implicit theological material, but only rarely does it present a systematic theology. Thus, the definition of Old Testament theology must be winnowed further into a more precise description. The point needing elucidation is not "the general *fact* but the *way* in which theology is *related* to the Bible."[16] In this clarification a delicate distinction must be made. Persons of faith find that, although the Old Testament does not present a unified theology, it does contain material that demands theological explanation. Therefore the task of an Old Testament theologian is to give an account of the theological questions that arise from the text. As demonstrated below, this is a task that must be done repeatedly by every generation of believers.[17]

## The Failure of the Biblical Theology Movement

In the early 1960s scholars and laity alike recognized a change in sentiment concerning the Biblical Theology Movement. Although Karl Barth was cool toward the prospect of biblical theology[18], the focus of Neo-Orthodoxy on revelation and the Word

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[15] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 249.

[16] Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, Translated by James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 80.

[17] Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 96.

[18] Barr, The Concept of Biblical Theology,

of God buttressed the work of biblical theologians. The disintegration of Neo-Orthodox influence in European and American circles also had an adverse affect on the Biblical Theology Movement. Soon cracks appeared in the logic of the movement and in the relationship between its proponents. Biblical theology had succeeded in creating a renewed interest in biblical studies, but its desire to provide the foundation for all theology became illusionary. As new insights were generated into biblical theological scholarship, members of the movement appeared to continue with their work by "simply adjusting the footnotes to take notice of the latest continental research."[19] Only after the popularity of the movement diminished did it become apparent that a deep cleavage existed between the use of history by von Rad and Eichrodt. Although von Rad used historical criticism, it was focused solely on the tradition of the faith of Israel and not on the events that caused this faith to emerge. Another shortcoming of the movement was the tendency of biblical theologians to ignore certain Old Testament material in order to produce a more cohesive theology. A criterion of selectivity seemed evident in many approaches that emphasized historical, prophetic, and eschatological material but failed to account for creation or wisdom literature.

By the mid 1960s serious contradictions and volatility plagued the Biblical Theology Movement. The reaction of biblical theology and Neo-Orthodoxy against the liberalism of the early twentieth century was too narrow in its scope, and the grand synthesizations of the era revealed a dependence on homiletic aspirations.[20] Soon Emil Brunner's attitude regarding the impossibility of Old Testament theology began to appear

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[19] Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 62.

[20] James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 3-4.

with a new generation of theologians. The contradictions among the leading scholars of the movement further pushed many biblical scholars who had formerly been persuaded by the value of Old Testament theology to cast doubt on the process. Thus biblical scholars such as R.N. Whybray stated that the Old Testament, with its multitude of voices, could be approached historically and structurally – but never theologically.[21] These sentiments forced Old Testament theology to reconsider the methods used in constructing a theology and to reexamine arguments for the value of the discipline for biblical studies and constructive theology. The most devastating critique of the movement, however, was the condemnation of historical criticism.

## The Collapse of History[22]

Old Testament theology through the mid twentieth century was dominated by scholars who employed historical-criticism in an effort to uncover the mighty acts of God in the history of Israel and who attempted to close the historical gap between contemporary society and ancient Israel. History was the medium in which an essential continuity occurred between the biblical stories and historical data. The ruins of the walls of Jericho and the occupation of Canaan by the Israelites witnessed to the power of the Israelite God as portrayed in biblical narrative. As time progressed and a more accurate historical record emerged from archeological data, however, the essential continuity between the historical acts of God as presented in the Bible and the actual historical data no longer existed. The pillars which once supported the work of Old

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[21] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 226.

[22] The title of this section and its contents has been drawn from the work of Leo G. Perdue's *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

Testament theologians began to crumble and "for at least a generation now active revolt against the domination of history and historical method for Old Testament study...has been under way."[23] Not only was history unable to be reconciled with the Old Testament corpus, the historical-critical method itself was attacked as an ineffective hermeneutical tool.

The assault on the once uncontested hegemony of historical criticism stemmed from theologians and biblical scholars alike. Biblical scholars who tended to focus only on historically accurate segments of biblical material were charged with distancing the reader from the text. Practitioners of new methods in Old Testament theology, such as canonical criticism, phenomenology, and feminist hermeneutics, argued that these new approaches allowed theology to be more accessible than a detached impersonal examination of historical data.[24] Another major hurdle for historical criticism was the dissolution of the epistemological claims of the Enlightenment—an epoch in human thought that placed preeminence on the value of objective historical data. A purely objective and rational inquiry into historical questions was denounced by post-modern scholars who recognized that every historical investigation contained the presuppositions and values of the historian.[25] Lastly, the descriptive nature of the historical-critical method failed to address contemporary society and culture. Modern culture was left to theologians such as Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr to grapple with, leaving the biblical material disengaged from the problems of contemporary society.[26] Lessing's

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[23] Perdue, *The Collapse of History*, 4.

[24] Perdue, 7.

[25] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 4.

[26] Perdue, 9.

'ugly ditch' that separated the *Gesellschaft* (society) of the modern age from ancient times extended under the neglect of historical criticism.

The revolt against historical criticism as a valuable tool for constructing an Old Testament theology created a dichotomy between theologians and biblical scholars. Biblical scholars began to view themselves less as theologians and agreed more with the assertion of a Society of Biblical Literature speaker that "We are all historians."[27] Such opinions, however, had a direct affect on Old Testament theologians. The self-designation of historical-critical practitioners as historians and not theologians gave impetus to the suspicion of many Old Testament theologians that history was the enemy of biblical theology.[28] Anti-historical sentiments entered the works of the most important biblical theologians of the contemporary era. A leader in the post Eichrodt/von Rad era of biblical theology is Walter Brueggemann, whose recent contribution to Old Testament theology reflects a scholarly approach that desires to move beyond the current impasse in Old Testament theology and provide a theology which addresses a post-modern audience. Brueggemann is a scholar familiar with the shortcomings of the Biblical Theological Movement and in his recent theology commented, "A fresh theological exposition must work its way cautiously and provisionally in the midst of enormous unsettlement."[29] The novel construal provided by Brueggemann, a theology that challenges the validity of the historical-critical method, will be examined in light of the rhetorical approach the author espouses.

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[27] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 223.

[28] Ibid., 224.

[29] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* xv.

## Walter Brueggemann and the Rhetorical Approach

Walter Brueggemann's contribution to the discipline of Old Testament theology is dedicated to overcoming the ideological, methodological, and textual difficulties that afflict this field in order to "find a new shape"[30] in which to organize an Old Testament theology that is relevant in a postmodern setting. Brueggemann moves beyond Eichrodt and von Rad but also breaks with the historical-critical method; he concludes that Old Testament theology must restrict itself to the speech of the Bible.[31] Brueggemann insists, "*that the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way.*"[32] This emphasis on the rhetorical nature of the text is reminiscent with Luther's notion of sacrament, possibly testifying to Brueggemann's desire to portray rhetorical criticism of the Bible as the ultimate method to interpret the Old Testament theologically. Brueggemann argues that restricting a theology of the Old Testament to the speech of the Bible allows one to witness the tension and dangerousness of Yahweh and his relationship with the Israelite people that could not be viewed through the lens of historical criticism.[33] A theology of the Old Testament for Brueggemann must articulate the tension-filled faith of the Israelite

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[30] Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation" in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 1, pg. 28.

[31] Brueggemann comments on pg. 47 fn. 136 "At the end of the twentieth century, we face both a crisis and an opportunity, as history is now largely displaced as the primary co-discipline of Scripture study in favor of rhetorical and sociological disciplines."

[32] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 66.

[33] Ibid., 71.

people and recognize both the legitimation of the common theology present in Israel's relationship with Yahweh and their protest against it.[34]

Brueggemann's desire to limit an Old Testament theology to rhetoric is predicated on the author's uneasiness with the historical critical method. Brueggemann states that historical criticism,

> by which I shall refer to the entire Enlightenment enterprise that came to associated with Julius Wellhausen...was committed to a Cartesian program that was hostile (in effect if not in intention) to the main theological claims of the text...but operated with naturalistic assumptions, so that everything could and must be explained, without reference to any theological claim.[35]

Brueggemann avoids historical criticism because he considers the method "hopelessly intertwined with positivistic historicism"—a criticism that had slipped into rational skepticism.[36] Old Testament theology, according to Brueggemann, must circumvent a need for rational criticism and employ hermeneutical methods that embrace the awkward and scandalous nature of the biblical corpus.

Brueggemann abstains from historical criticism using a method of interpretation that is deeply indebted to new post-modern approaches in hermeneutics—specifically rhetorical criticism in which "what we have in the Old Testament is speech, nothing else."[37] Brueggemann embraces a nonreductionist examination of the plurality and

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[34] Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation," 43.

[35] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 727.
[36] Ibid., 727

[37] Ibid., 713.

complexity of Israel's faith that does not seek to simplify or unify the narratives, but rather to maintain the tension that exists between them.[38]

A great strength of Brueggemann's work is his ability to address the plurality of testimonies found in the Old Testament and form a coherent theology out of the diversity found in the texts. In maintaining the anxiety, apprehension, and restlessness of both Yahweh and the biblical authors, Brueggemann allows the Bible to be used in different contexts – reducing the risk of colonizing the texts. Brueggemann's theology is also important because it addresses the contemporary Christian church. The task for biblical theology, Brueggemann asserts, is to "relate to its second referential group, the community of faith. I take this to mean not only the historical community, but the contemporary one."[39] Brueggemann's approach is highly attractive because it presents a theology that incorporates postmodern scholarship, including Norman Gottwald, Paul Ricoeur, and Perdue, while also focusing on the development of a theology valuable for the contemporary community of faith.

Brueggemann's approach, however, is not void of weaknesses. An essential problem of Brueggemann's approach, and one that is the focus of this study, is *Brueggemann's understanding of historical criticism.* Setting up historical criticism as a purely Wellhausian enterprise neglects the careful work of biblical scholars who employ history to appreciate better the theology of the biblical text. Defining historical criticism as "positivistic historicism" that leads to theological "skepticism" creates a straw man easily defeated by post-modern biblical hermeneutics such as rhetorical criticism. Yet, if

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[38] It should be noted here that this study does not perceive historical criticism as the reason for the simplification and unification of the narratives, but rather that many biblical theologians who employed this method sought a unifying theme for their theology.

[39] Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation," 45, fn. 46.

it can be illustrated that historical criticism is a richer and more complex method of hermeneutics than what Brueggemann recognizes, then this method may be used alongside Brueggemann's to construct a fuller and more comprehensive Old Testament theology.

Brueggemann's theology can be supported by a more developed definition of historical criticism. In magnifying the importance of the rhetorical character of Scripture, Brueggemann limits humanity's ability to interact with God. Restricting knowledge of God to the speech of the Bible fails to account for the historical dimension in which the biblical authors experienced the divine and also distances itself from an ontological reality of God that may be extra-biblical. Although Brueggemann strives to avoid making God a rhetorical construct, he concedes that "this is an exceedingly important and dense issue, one I am not able to resolve clearly."[40] If pressed, Brueggemann's limitation of biblical theology to the speech of the Bible could be perceived as a rhetorical construct vulnerable to the same criticisms leveled by projection theorists. Secondly, a theology based strictly on rhetoric in the Old Testament fails to safeguard against evil appropriations of the text. Interpreting the Bible through rhetoric alone, without the aid of historical investigation, fails to place any boundaries on an anti-Semite or sexist evaluation of the text—thus leaving the Bible open to interpretations that have haunted Christianity throughout the centuries.

The crisis of Old Testament theology continues even as new theologies that address a postmodern audience are produced. The foundation upon which Old Testament theology was once placed has become exposed, and the great theologies of the mid-

[40] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 65 fn. 11.

twentieth century have been found susceptible to critiques of a new generation of biblical theologians. Although Brueggemann's theology moves the discipline of Old Testament theology forward with progressive and innovative insights, it still contains instability in its effort to explicate the voice of the Old Testament. The purpose of this study is to introduce a definition of Old Testament theology that combines Brueggemann's ability to retain the plurality of testimonies about Yahweh in the Old Testament corpus with a renewed emphasis on the value of history for Old Testament theology. Before addressing the crisis of biblical theology using a re-explication of historical criticism with Brueggemann, this study first must answer two questions: "Why should the unresolved crisis in Old Testament theology matter?" "What is its value for the Christian community?"

# Chapter 2: The Value of Old Testament Theology and its Importance in the Lutheran Tradition

The scope and magnitude of the current crisis in Old Testament theology is difficult to overemphasize. Brueggemann, recognizing the postmodern context in which Old Testament theology now finds itself, commented, "we have not yet understood with sufficient clarity the epistemological break before which we stand."[41] Old Testament theology faces the difficult task of appropriating new methods into its interpretative program while also investigating how old methods may still be used to assist in the theological exposition of Scripture. Just as important, or perhaps more so, is the need for Old Testament theology to redefine its significance within the current state of biblical scholarship.[42] The future of Old Testament theological scholarship depends upon Old Testament theologians overcoming the ambiguity of their field by expressing the value of this discipline to biblical scholars, theologians, and the church. In light of the need for such an explication, the following will describe the value of Old Testament theology for contemporary Christianity and utilize the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as a specific example of how Old Testament theology can support a denomination's understanding of the Bible.

## The Value of Old Testament Theology

This study has suggested that Old Testament theology is a discipline that seeks to construct a theology from the Old Testament corpus for the communities of faith. Yet, why is this important and how is this valuable? Why can we not examine the Bible

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[41] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 49.

[42] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 252.

semantically, philologically, socially, and historically and leave theology to those trained in systematics or metaphysics? Why should biblical theology be a discipline within biblical studies? The answer to these questions can be placed on three different levels: the value of Old Testament theology for the individual, the value of Old Testament theology for the academic discipline of biblical studies, and the value of Old Testament theology for the church.

Old Testament theology is valuable at the individual level because the Bible is authoritative for those who claim the Christian faith tradition as their own. Declaring oneself a member of the Christian faith connects oneself to the Bible and what it claims about the nature of God, God's will, and the role of humanity in the world. The Bible is authoritative not because it is inerrant or free of inaccuracies, but because it has proven helpful for the community of faith – both functionally and materially.[43] The Christian community has, throughout its existence, turned to the Bible and encountered in it stories, symbols, and metaphors helpful in understanding life and the divine. As each new era of Christians confronted and engaged the text, they too discovered its voice to be transformative—and thus the Bible has been woven into the fabric of Christian faith and religion. Materially, the Bible is authoritative because it provides a language of faith to mediate the gulf that exists between humanity and God.[44] A Christian may use the Bible to experience the activity and reality of God in the world. The Bible bears witness to God's immanence through the words of those who have been touched by the *mysterium*

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[43] Darrell Jodock, *The Church's Bible: Its Contemporary Authority* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 108-16.

[44] Jodock, 114-16.

*tremendum et fascinans*[45] and who have provided an account of this transformative event. These words reveal a reality of God that could not be possessed without the imagery Scripture provides. In the context of faith an individual is caught up in this imagery of the Bible and the claims it makes about the divine. It provides a language of faith to meditate upon and inform one's relationship with God, functioning as a window into the nature of God and God's will.

Old Testament theology is also important for the individual because, as David Tracy notes, it acts as a classic text for the Christian faith. According to Tracy, a classic is a text in which "certain expressions of the human spirit so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot deny them some kind of normative status."[46] A recognition of the authoritative and normative character of the Bible for the Christian faith demands that the individual converse with the text, reflect on it, and then interpret it. The classic text bears an excess of meaning that requires a proper hermeneutical investigation into its nature, the willingness to be confronted by its claims, and the courage to be caught up in the questions and answers it provides.[47] In the entering into this world of meaning and truth presented by the classic an individual experiences the transformative capacity of the text. Old Testament theology is valuable for the individual because it perceives the authority that the Bible has in relation to a member of the Christian faith and constructs a theology that enlightens the character of the biblical testimony about God. It is also important because it identifies the need for the individual to be in conversation with the text and illuminates the spirit of this conversation partner.

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[45] "a mystery awful and compelling" from Rudolf Otto's explication of the numinous in *Das Heilige*, 1917.

[46] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 108.

[47] Tracy, 154.

Old Testament theology is important as a separate theological discipline in the study of religion because it explores questions often overlooked by those trained in biblical history, languages, and exegesis and those who specialize in theology. Examining the Bible exegetically and philologically is a significant aspect of understanding the message of the biblical authors, but it fails to take into account the theological ramifications of how it would be it if this were an accurate portrayal of God. Placed in a similar context, James Barr uses the analogy of the study of Plato and the impoverished condition of scholarly efforts in understanding the Greek thinker if "scholars had confined themselves to expounding the text and its internal semantic linkages and had rigorously excluded from their minds the question 'Is Plato right?'"[48] The Bible is a complex text in which linguistics, history, and sociological investigations play an essential role in comprehending the theological character of the text, but individually these methods do not address theological questions. Only in the discipline of Old Testament theology will such methods be used to construct a theology in which theological inquiries about the God of the Old Testament are discussed.

Related to this contribution, Old Testament theology also receives value as an independent discipline in biblical studies because it works to bring together an often-fragmented field. Old Testament theology asks, "What can we do with the archeological and sociological data in relation to the semantics and narrative function of the text?" "How can we take the nuanced and technical information provided to us by biblical scholars and construct an understandable depiction of God?" As Brevard Childs notes, "there is a need for a discipline that will attempt to retain and develop a picture of the

[48] James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 25.

whole, and that will have a responsibility to synthesize as well as analyze."[49] The responsibility to produce a coherent picture of the whole falls in part upon those trained in biblical studies who are willing to approach the Bible in a theological way. A separate discipline of Old Testament theology creates a dialogue between theologians and biblical scholars—it challenges theologians to appropriate biblical material in their own thinking and also provokes biblical scholars to consider how their work affects theology.

Old Testament theology is also important for the church because the individual and the scholar are vital components of the church. An individual who engages in conversation with Scripture and thinks theologically about the God of the Bible can influence others to be more active in faith, to challenge traditions and systems that colonize Christianity, and to incite discussion and deliberation about current issues facing the church. Correspondingly, a discipline that works toward explicating the theological nature of God in the Old Testament and works to be in dialogue with other religious fields strengthens the academic structure of Christianity and enriches the church through its insights. Old Testament theology also is valuable because the church needs the guidance of the Bible when confronted by the world. Every minister does Old Testament theology, consciously or unconsciously, and the development and refinement of this discipline will assist in instructing ministers for their congregations.[50] A fragmented and dissatisfactory theological portrayal of God by Old Testament theologians will lead ministers away from the Old Testament into a Marcionistic perception of its theological value for the contemporary church.

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[49] Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 92.

[50] Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 95.

Old Testament theology, however, is not without opposition from those within biblical studies and those within theological circles. An important facet of arguing for the value of Old Testament theology is answering two important critiques of the discipline, one from dogmatic theologians and the other from those within the discipline itself. First, Old Testament theology must be shown to have theological value. Statements from leading dialectical theologians such as Emil Brunner that "There is no 'theology of the Old Testament'" necessitate thoughtful deliberation and evaluation in order to demonstrate the value of Old Testament theology.[51] Secondly, Old Testament theology, as defined in this study, must provide a method of incorporating the diverse body of material within the Old Testament and produce a coherent theology out of it—without reducing or conforming the theology the Old Testament contains.

The discipline of Old Testament theology has wrestled with dogmatic theologians who expressed dissatisfaction with the insights Old Testament theologians were hoping to provide. As James Barr notes, "The fall from grace of biblical theology was welcomed with warm acclamation by a very large number of leading theologians."[52] The central argument of theologians opposed to Old Testament theology was that the biblical corpus was not by its nature theological. Here, the sentiments of Ebeling are an important response to this accusation. The Old Testament may not contain explicit theological material, but it does consist of material that demands theological articulation. The task of Old Testament theology therefore, as defined by this study, is to explicate the theology of the Old Testament implicit in the text and apply it to the contemporary situation in which

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[51] Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), 290.

[52] James Barr, "The Theological Case against Biblical Theology" in G. M. Tucker, D. L. Peteresen and Wilson, eds. *Canon, Theology and Old Testament Interpretation.* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1988), 5.

the community of faith resides. It is necessary for the Old Testament theologian to render an account of Yahweh as expressed by the Old Testament authors and to develop a framework in which to apply these articulations to current issues facing the community of faith. This theology is not authoritative, yet neither is this theology irrelevant—thus Old Testament theology should be used *alongside* the work of other theologians to inform the individual, academia, and the church.

Standing in opposition with dogmatic theologians are Old Testament scholars who assert that a theology of the Old Testament is impossible. This sentiment is based on the plurality of voices in the Old Testament corpus and the diversity of the material itself. How can the Psalmist, Deutero-Isaiah, and the Chronicler be used to provide a coherent theology of the Old Testament? How can one avoid placing a theology under a single theme as in Eichrodt while also overcoming von Rad's failure of incorporating Old Testament material that was not historical? This study's conception of Old Testament Theology—specifically Brueggemann's notion of *thematization* versus *systematization*—allows for Old Testament theology to work within this quagmire.[53] Brueggemann's observation that Yahweh exhibits, in an unsettled balance, an unlimited sovereignty and risky solidarity is crucial for the development of Old Testament theology because the nature of Yahweh prohibits closure. Thematization supplies a theology with the leeway to account for the bi-polarity, the variation, and the incongruence of the Old Testament portrayal of Yahweh. An Old Testament theology that works within these confines does not seek to provide a closed system in which to describe the Old Testament God, but endeavors to procure a persuasive thematization that may lead to a systematic

[53] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 268.

understanding – a task that may be undertaken by an ecclesial community.[54] Thus, Brueggemann offers a theology that incorporates the plurality of voices in the text and retains its tension – presenting an alternative to the structure of both Eichrodt and von Rad.

## Old Testament Theology and its Value for the ELCA

The value of Old Testament theology has thus far been presented using broad strokes that attempt to incorporate diverse segments of the Christian community. A more specific and concrete example of Old Testament theology's importance to the church can be witnessed through an examination of the impact and influence that Old Testament theology has had and continues to have on the ELCA. The significance of Old Testament theology for the ELCA will be approached through three different inquiries: 1.) A historical investigation into the relationship between Lutheranism (as it is manifested in the ELCA) and Old Testament theology. 2.) An examination of the influence of the Biblical Theology Movement and Old Testament theology within the ELCA. 3.) An analysis of Lutheran theological principles that are supported by Old Testament theology.

The contemporary Lutheran tradition within the ELCA continues to be supported and enriched by the *solas* of Martin Luther: *sola gratia, sola fide, et sola scriptura*—one is saved by the grace of God alone, through faith alone, guided by the normative teachings of scripture alone. A right understanding of the relationship between humanity and God, according to Luther, needed to be derived and informed by revelation through the Word of God. Luther predicated his theology on an assiduous examination of biblical material. Luther commented, "If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every

[54] Ibid., 268.

word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant."[55] The attentive and scholarly examination of the Bible by Luther for the purpose of gaining a theological understanding of God serves as a quintessential example for those influenced by the Lutheran tradition.

The discipline of Old Testament theology was not an operative academic field within biblical studies during the time of Luther, yet Luther was a masterful biblical interpreter. Luther's gift of simplicity stood in stark contrast to the method of scriptural hermeneutics in the scholastic period. The Reformer vigorously attacked the scholastic allegorical, anagogical, and tropical senses of the text. He refused to place the authority of the church above that of Scripture and repudiated the church's reductionist efforts of using the Bible to strengthen papal and ecclesiastical power. Luther's exclusive centering of his theological work on scriptural exegesis prepared the path for the growth of Old Testament theology. As Gerhard Ebeling noted, "Reformation theology is the first attempt in the entire history of theology to take seriously the demand for a theology based on Holy Scripture alone."[56] The genesis of Old Testament theology can therefore be traced to the courage and passion of Luther, a biblical interpreter who recognized the importance of placing biblical passages into a theological context.

Old Testament theology as a discipline is supported by the Lutheran tradition and remains a valuable contributor to the church's continued self-understanding today. This is not an *a priori* assessment, but one that can be discerned both through the scholarly

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[55] Martin Luther, *Table Talk*. Volume 54 of *Luther's Works* Edited and Translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 165.

[56] Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*. Trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 82.

efforts of Lutheran theologians and its compatibility with Lutheran theology.[57] The largest ELCA seminary, Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, illustrates the strength of the Biblical Theology Movement.[58] By the late 1950's Luther's department of Old Testament contained a selection of courses devoted to Old Testament theology. As Old Testament theology gained more influence in the United States, the biblical theological programs at Luther became more concentrated, including courses devoted to the theologies of Eichrodt, von Rad, and Westermann. By the late 1970s, however, the presence of Old Testament theology courses had diminished. Fred Gaiser, professor Old Testament at Luther Seminary during this period, recalls that the disappearance of Old Testament theology courses was due to a cutback in classes that could be offered and a general sense by the older Old Testament faculty members that the biblical theology curriculum was declining in significance.[59]

Although Luther Seminary no longer offers courses specifically orientated toward the discipline of Old Testament theology, the decline in courses with that name has not meant a decline in attention to the subject. Professor Gaiser, who studied in Heidelberg under both von Rad and Claus Westermann, contends that deriving theological statements about God from the Old Testament is "essential" for the church because it grounds the church in creation and the Semitic tradition.[60] Terence Fretheim is an influential figure in Old Testament theology and professor at Luther. Today, he incorporates a theological

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[57] Interestingly, Ebeling connects biblical theology to the notion of 'justification by grace through faith.' For further explication of this connection, see Ebeling's *Word and Faith*, pp. 17-61.

[58] Copies of course catalogs from Luther can be found in Appendix A of this study.

[59] These comments stem from an interview with Professor Gaiser on March 18, 2004.

[60] Interview with Gaiser.

approach to biblical studies by helping "students encounter the God that is presented in the text."[61] The presence of Old Testament theology can also be seen in the syllabi of both Gaiser and Fretheim.[62] One can argue, therefore, that Old Testament theology still remains an integral part of the theological education of ELCA ministers.

The ministry of the ELCA is further supported by Old Testament theology because of its compatibility with the Lutheran tradition. There are within the Lutheran tradition certain principles congruent with Old Testament theology that allow the discipline to contribute to the church's understanding of the Bible. These principles include Luther's 'literal' appreciation of the Bible, the Lutheran notion of paradox, and Luther's celebration of diversity within Scripture. These principles are not an exhaustive list, but rather are focused on facets of Old Testament theology especially congruent with a Lutheran perception of biblical material.

Luther's technique of reading and interpreting Scripture was conditioned by the religious environment of his time. Scholasticism placed great value on the allegorical method, an approach to biblical literature in which one interpreted Scripture symbolically and metaphorically to gain a more spiritual and profound sense of the text. Thus Augustine would interpret the creation story using the allegory of six mystical days of knowledge among the angels concerning order in the universe. Luther rejected such a method of hermeneutics and instead interpreted the Bible 'literally[63]- an approach to reading Scripture by understanding it in its plain sense. This involved attention to the

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[61] E-mail from Professor Fretheim concerning Old Testament theology, March 11, 2004.

[62] http://www.luthersem.edu/tfrethei/IC2633/IC2633GodEvilSuffer.htm and http://www.luthersem.edu/fgaiser/Syllabi/ot2111-summer03.htm for Fretheim and Gaiser, respectively.

[63] It is important to note here that Luther's literal method of interpreting Scripture is not the same as what many today understand as literalistic.

historical and sociological context of the biblical authors and sensitivity to the theological statements the author espoused. This did not prohibit allegories from assisting in one's comprehension of biblical material, but emphasized the literal meaning of Scripture rather than radical allegorization.[64] Thus, the Bible did not have an infinite range of meanings, but instead could be apprehended simply through the voice of the biblical author – a voice Luther regarded as God inspired. Old Testament theology is indebted and conditioned by Luther's emphasis on the literal sense of the text, for the discipline seeks to describe what the biblical author says about his or her encounter with God and construct a theology from this revelation.

Luther also viewed the Bible through his unique awareness of paradox within the text. The notion of paradox was central to many of Luther's theological writings, including the explication of *simul justus et peccator*[65] and *the theology of the cross*. Luther based his understanding of paradox on biblical material, particularly concerning law and gospel in relation to faith. According to Luther, the Bible was filled with antitheses that, when viewed dialectically, could strengthen one's understanding of God. The notion of paradox is also tied to Old Testament theology and the tension that fills much of the biblical material. Recognition of the pluralities of testimonies in the Old Testament corpus and the use of paradox to understand better the witness of biblical authors has become more prevalent in recent approaches to constructing an Old Testament theology.[66]

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[64] See especially Luther's treatment of Galatians 4 and the allegory of Sarah and Hagar used by Paul as an example of Luther's understanding of allegory in biblical interpretation.

[65] "At once both justified and a sinner"

[66] Brueggemann's recent contribution to Old Testament theology is particularly indebted to a paradoxical understanding of the Old Testament's testimony of God.

The last principle of Lutheran thought that can be enriched by the process of Old Testament theology is Luther's comfort with the diversity of Scripture. Luther often made distinctions among various books of the Bible based on their relevance to the theology he espoused. As Paul Tillich stated, "Luther could say very courageous things...He even said that anyone today who had the Spirit as powerfully as the prophets and apostles could create new Decalogues and another Testament."[67] Luther was untroubled by identifying passages in the Bible which held more theological weight in his eyes. Luther believed that the Bible pointed toward an understanding of the relationship between God and humanity, namely through the law and gospel, and placed greater importance on those passages which enlightened this relationship. Luther felt strongly about this connection, so much so that "he regarded only those portions of scripture as genuinely true and authoritative which proclaimed or clearly implied this awesome tension between law and gospel."[68] Luther's understanding of the nature of Scripture and his willingness to search for a common thread to unite the biblical witness corresponds to the responsibility of Old Testament theologians today in their construction of a theology of Old Testament material. Although a single theme, such as law and gospel, may not be viable in contemporary approaches to Old Testament theology, the combination of using the literal sense, being aware of the tension filled and paradoxical material of Scripture, and the appreciation for the diversity of the Bible all resonate with the work of contemporary biblical theologians. The connection between Lutheranism and Old

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[67] Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism.* Ed. by Carl E. Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 243.

[68] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 20.

Testament theology is also a give and take. Just as the Lutheran tradition has informed and assisted the Old Testament theologian, so too does Old Testament theology illuminate and enrich the Bible for the Lutheran tradition.

The preceding arguments have illustrated the present difficulties with which Old Testament theology must wrestle. This dilemma is one that demands a resolution because Old Testament theology is valuable to the Christian community and, as is evident in the ELCA, is also beneficial for the church. If, as has been demonstrated, Old Testament theology is a worthwhile endeavor, then what can be done to rectify the current impasse? What can be done to move beyond the accomplishments of the Eichrodt/von Rad era while also incorporating the insights of postmodern biblical theologians such as Walter Brueggemann? The next section of this study will reexamine the role of historical criticism in alleviating this dilemma, contending that although the historical-critical method no longer holds a hegemonic position in Old Testament theology, it still plays an integral role in addressing the current impasse of the discipline.

# Chapter 3: A Reassessment of the Historical-Critical Method for Old Testament Theology

The beginning of this study asserted that the hegemonic position of the historical-critical method in Old Testament theology has come to an end and that this approach, by itself, cannot support the weight of a contemporary theology. John Barton, the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, comments that when the book was being planned, "some advisers suggested that there should be no chapter on historical criticism at all, since it was now entirely passé."[69] Walter Wink, in a more polemical and sensational manner, declared, "The historical critical method has reduced the Bible to a dead letter. Our obeisance to technique has left the Bible sterile and ourselves empty."[70] As these sentiments express, historical criticism within Old Testament theology has lost the prestige it attained during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and has been replaced by new methodological approaches.[71] Yet, as the dust settles from the collapse of history, the time has come to examine the critiques of historical criticism and to reassess its place in biblical studies in an effort to overcome the current impasse in Old Testament theology. A reevaluation such as the one proposed is necessary because, as Brevard Child contends, the relationship between Old Testament theology and historical criticism is imperative to any advance in Old Testament theological scholarship.[72] A key

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[69] John Barton, "Introduction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

[70] Walter Wink, *Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 4.

[71] Examples of these methods include rhetoric criticism (as used extensively by Brueggemann), canonical criticism (Brevard Childs), imagination (David Tracy), narrative criticism (Hans Frei), sociological criticism (Norman Gottwald), and feminist hermeneutics (Phyllis Trible).

[72] Brevard Childs, "Critical Reflections on James Barr's Understanding of the Literal and the Allegorical," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46 (1990) 3-9.

component in this reexamination is to move beyond the desire to reclaim historical criticism's hegemonic position in Old Testament theology or to restate stubbornly past arguments on the importance of the historical-critical method. Instead, the following will explore how historical criticism can respond to postmodern inquiries and provide insights valuable to a theological articulation of the Old Testament for the contemporary communities of faith.

## The Dilemma of Historical Criticism: Essential Continuity and History of Tradition

As discussed briefly in the beginning of this study, the problem of history runs deep into the discipline of Old Testament theology. Prior to the Neo-Orthodox movement, historical criticism was used as a scientific and rational method to describe the events that lay behind the biblical material. This was done, it was believed, in an objective and nonjudgmental manner to produce factual evidence of what happened in the past. Although historical criticism effectively defeated the claims of fundamentalists, it often neglected the redeeming and normative character of the biblical text amid an obsession with historical particulars.[73] Theologies influenced by the Neo-Orthodox movement reacted against this tendency and used historical criticism to focus on the normative acts of God within the Old Testament. The essential continuity upon which the leading theologies were based, however, fell apart with the discovery of more reliable historical data. The notion that historical criticism could provide data to 'prove' continuity between the biblical narrative and empirical historical evidence fell by the wayside.

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[73] Leo Perdue, *The Collapse of History*, 21. This was especially the case in the history of religions school which sought to trace the development of the religious tradition in history.

In response to this development, Gerhard von Rad offered a traditio-historical approach that bypassed the need for an essential continuity between historical evidence and the biblical narrative. Von Rad recognized that the historical-critical method of the modern period "searches for a critically assured minimum—the kerygmatic picture [of Israel's history as built up by its faith] tends toward a theological maximum."[74] To avoid this tension, von Rad argued that an Old Testament theology needed to focus on the kerygmatic[75] and "the world made of testimonies."[76] Thus, von Rad set up a dichotomy between historical criticism's pursuit of empirical historical data and the kerygmatic history (*Heilsgesichte* "salvation history") as presented in the Bible. Von Rad, influenced by historical criticism's pursuit of the historical minimum, denied empirical historical data theological value concerning the revelatory acts of God, since historical criticism was used without a God-hypothesis and because historical criticism could not provide a unified picture of ancient Israel. [77] Historical criticism was thus effective in providing information about the development of Israel's faith in history, but could not contribute to a theological understanding of the historical events that sparked this faith tradition.

Although von Rad circumvented a need for essential continuity that plagued theologies such as Ernest Wright, he nonetheless used a history (*Heilsgesichte*) that

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[74] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Vol.I*, Translated by D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 108.

[75]"Kerygmatic," as it is used in this study, implies "that we have somewhere, in some text, a normative statement of faith by a confessing community" as explicated in Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Know Press, 1975), 13.

[76] Ibid., 111.

[77] Ibid., *II*, 417. See especially the differences presented by the Alt-Noth school and the Albright-Wright-Bright school.

eschewed any need for Israel's faith to be "founded on facts of history."[78] Von Rad stated that the prophets of Israel selected, rejected, and combined the data of the ancient traditions in a charismatic-eclectic process, a method von Rad termed "actualization" (*Vergegenwärtigung*).[79] While the traditio-historical method moved the discipline of Old Testament theology forward, von Rad was criticized for presenting the Bible as only a traditio-historical event. Why must one begin with the tradition of actualization and not investigate the events that led to this tradition? Why must an Old Testament theology be reduced to a theology of the tradition-historical process? In response to such questions, a need arose to move beyond the approach of von Rad and re-unite the dichotomy that von Rad set up – to develop a concept of historical criticism that connects "facta and dicta, fact and interpretation, event and word, happening and meaning."[80]

The two foremost methods of employing history to understand the Bible theologically, which this study has designated as the essential continuity and traditio-historical methods, have failed to articulate adequately the relationship between recoverable empirical data and the biblical narrative. The result has led to a revolt against historical criticism in Old Testament theology. Von Rad's sophisticated observation of Israel's faith and its highly dynamic character is effective in overcoming the need for essential continuity. Yet von Rad's unwillingness to relate his kerygmatic

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[78] Walther Eichrodt, T*heology of the Old Testament, Vol. I*, Translated by J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 517.

[79] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Vol.II,* 108. The English translation "actualization" fails to describe this process adequately. The prophets of Israel, in this actualizing process, used past promises and re-presented them as meaningful for the present and the future – a tradition also witnessed in New Testament writings.

[80] Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 40.

portrayal of history to historical-criticism's empirical data has created a conundrum for those who desire to use the "facts of history" in a theologically meaningful way—historical criticism is either a tool of modernist historians who provide only the minimum of factual certainty or a method employed by essential continuitists in an effort to prove the biblical narrative as factually true. Thus it is imperative to reexamine historical criticism in a postmodern context and explore how historical criticism can be used theologically in a non-essentialist manner.

## Ernst Troeltsch: History as Relative

Ernst Troeltsch, a theologian who devoted much of his life to investigating the relationship between history and faith in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is important to this study because the theologian provides an explanation of history that contains enough malleability to connect the kerygmatic and empirical historical data. Responding to the objectivity, universality, and progressivism of the Enlightenment conception of history, Troeltsch placed the nature of history into two categories: individuality and development. Individuality refers to a unit (i.e. nation, religious community, historical epoch) that displays an inner unity. The important facet of these units in history was that each had its own unique meaning and value relative to its context.[81] The second feature of history, development, was the process in which an individual unit exists in a state of becoming. Contra Hegel, Troeltsch perceived

[81] Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Christian Faith and History: A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 23.

development as a fluid process that involved decline and decay as well as growth.[82] The individuality of historical units and their development in history served as the foundation for a comprehension of cultural-historical units.

Issuing from Troeltsch's basic understanding of history was the notion of relativity. For Troeltsch, nothing in history could be perceived as absolute. Troeltsch remarks, "In no moment can there be such a value that is free of the special character of the momentary situation."[83] To avoid a religious skepticism in which all values in history are meaningless, Troeltsch contended that one must distinguish the normative significance of certain beliefs and ideas within a historical and cultural setting. The reality of cultural-historical traditions being connected to a certain time and place was not a hindrance in providing normative values—individuality was the essence of historical units. Furthermore, the pursuit of the normative within a historical unit was important because history was always something more than history: "Wafting over history is the fragrance of supra-history, inextricable from the unity of the divine life."[84]Although history was relative and particular, it was nevertheless imperative to provide a set of normative values for a historical setting—such values transcended the relative and pointed toward the absolute outside of history.[85]

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[82] Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme: Erstes Buch, Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie, Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. III (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922), 72. Translated by Thomas Ogletree in *The Christian Faith and History.*

[83] Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Absolutheit des Christentums and die Religiongesichte* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1929), 22. Translated by Thomas W. Ogletree in *The Christian Faith and History.*

[84] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 81. Edited by Gertrud von le Fort and Translated by Garrett E. Paul.

[85] Ogletree, 38.

The importance of Troeltsch for the implementation of historical criticism today is the recognition that history is particular and individualistic. According to Troeltsch, knowledge of the past presupposes at least some analogy with the present. The penetration of history by historical criticism must be sensitive to the values of the historical tradition being investigated. History, as defined by Troeltsch, is comprised of individual units, or unique wholes, which can only be understood from *within*. Historical understanding requires that the historian feel his way (*Nachempfindung*) into the past and "participate in its own inner life."[86] The difference between Troeltsch's suggestion for historical criticism and von Rad's perception of the method is striking. Essential to von Rad's argument against using historical criticism to investigate the events that sparked Israel's faith was that historical criticism was a detached method that lacked faith and revelatory premises.[87] The objective manner through which historical criticism worked could not take into account the confessional character of Israel's testimony.

Troeltsch, however, provides the venue through which historical criticism can be used in a postmodern setting. Troeltsch agreed enthusiastically that historical criticism could not be done with absolute objectivity. This, however, did not prevent historical criticism from providing valuable insights into the nature of a historical unit. To appreciate fully the historical value of a tradition an individual must be willing to project one's own values into the empirical study of the past and, just as importantly, allow one's values to be subject to revision and question by the history unearthed.[88] Historical tradition provides the historian with the language and symbols needed to disclose the

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[86] Ibid., 48.

[87] Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 30.

[88] Ogletree, 48.

meaning of historical data. A Westernized Christian can explore the history of Japanese Zen Buddhism and gain both a clearer understanding of Zen Buddhism and also a greater self-understanding. A Westernized Christian would be arrogant and ignorant, however, if he or she believed one could make value judgments about Zen Buddhism that were not influenced by a "Westernized Christianization" of the Buddhism being studied. Nevertheless, a Westernized Christian is fully equipped with the ability to make value judgments, to speak theologically of the significance of revelatory events, and to use history in a meaningful way for those who are also within the same Western Christian historical individual unit. Given the problem of maintaining the dichotomy between empirical historical data and kerygmatic history or seeking a unity between the two, Troeltsch's notion of historical relativity allows one to pursue the latter. Troeltsch challenges an interpreter to use empirical historical data in order to comprehend the kerygmatic picture of history given by the biblical narrative—to search for a common ground between the two.

### Historical Criticism as Historical Imagination: The Function of Criticism

Understanding history in a post-modern context through Troeltsch permits this study to reevaluate the role of historical criticism. Historical criticism, from this point forward, will be redefined as historical imagination[89] in order to incorporate this method

[89] This terminology is indebted to Andrew G. Vaughn, especially his essay "Is Biblical Archaeology Theologically Useful Today?—Yes, a Programmatic Proposal" in Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killabrew, eds. *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 407-430. Vaughn recognizes that interpretation is controlled by the philosophic and religious ideology of the reader. He argues that although one may assert, "such a bias is inevitable, I argue that there are ways out of this trap"(410). Vaughn provides a helpful illustration in which history contributes to a theological understanding of the Bible, but does not provide concrete arguments in which bias can be avoided. A key component of this section will be to deal this issue in addition to arguing for the usefulness of historical imagination in interpretation.

into a framework that addresses the new challenges facing Old Testament theology and that also supports and strengthens Brueggemann's theology. Historical imagination involves two distinct tasks: the first task is to use the tools of historical criticism as it was utilized in the modern period to question the text critically.[90] The purpose of this method is to gather empirical data regarding the historical events in the Bible and compare that data with the kerygmatic portrayal given by the biblical narrative. The critical nature of this method pursues ideological, sociological, and theological motivations of the biblical author for an understanding of why discrepancies exist between empirical evidence and the biblical account. The second aspect of historical imagination uses the imaginative capacity of the human mind to produce positive or background information on the biblical narrative that aids in illuminating the Old Testament corpus. The importance of the imagination for hermeneutics will be investigated using the insights of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. It will be argued that the dual focus of historical imagination provides the reader with a method in which to employ history in a theologically meaningful way.

The critical function of historical imagination involves an attempt at reconstructing spatial-temporal events of the past. This type of reading inquires into both the actual sequence of events as dictated by the text and the sequence of events by which the text came into existence.[91] The critical feature of historical imagination takes into consideration the possibility that an event as described by the Bible may not have

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[90] This highlights the author's own dilemma with the term 'postmodern.' The current epistemological climate has not severed itself completely from modernism and 'postmodernists' remain very connected to the modern period and the insights it produced. Historical criticism, as it was used during the modern period, still retains value for contemporary hermeneutics.

[91] James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, 30.

transpired as narrated and explores the reason such a discrepancy exists. Historical criticism investigates the historicity of a biblical event but, in light of the failures of Albright, Wright, and Bright, does not seek to expose an essential continuity between the Bible and the historical record. As Roland de Vaux expressed in his essay entitled "On the right and wrong uses of Archaeology," the correct way to use the critical aspect of historical criticism is to disprove or to support previously constructed theological and historical interpretations of the biblical texts.[92]

An example of this can be witnessed in the Deuteronimistic Historian's treatment of the reforms of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18. Scholars have shown that a major redaction of the Deuteronomistic history took place during the reign of Josiah toward the end of the 7th century B.C.E. During this time in Judah, a renewed emphasis on religious reforms took place—including the centralization of worship in Jerusalem, the destruction of other cultic worship cites, and the observance of religious festivals. Historical evidence supports the view that similar reforms were also undertaken a century earlier during the reign of Hezekiah,[93] Josiah's great-grandfather. This observation leads to a clearer understanding of why the Deuteronomistic Historian focused on the "incomparable trust" of Hezekiah rather than on his religious reforms.[94] Although Hezekiah survived the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians, a large part of his kingdom was devastated and the

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[92] Roland de Vaux, "On the Right and Wrong Uses of Archaeology," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by James A. Sanders (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 70-76.

[93] These reforms have been especially connected to the archaeological findings of Yohanon Aharoni as discussed by Oded Borowski "Hezekiah's Reform and the Revolt Against Assyria." *BA* 58 (1995), 148-55.

[94] Gary N. Knoppers, " 'There was None Like Him': Incomparability in the Books of Kings." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992), 418. This is also highlighted by the failure of the Deuteronomistic Historian to include aspects of Hezekiah's reforms that the Chronicler includes and that archaeological evidence supports (the invitation to the remnant of Israel to participate in Passover, the emphasis on the Levitical role in the Temple, etc.).

reforms that he set in place were soon abandoned. The failure of Hezekiah's reforms from taking root in Judah influenced the Deuteronomistic Historian decision to portray his contemporary monarch as the leader in bringing Judah back to the Mosaic Covenant, elevating the stature of Josiah above the previous kings in Judah. The critical feature of historical imagination thus leads to a clearer awareness of the ideological (Josiah as a great king) and the theological (Josiah re-aligning Judah with the Mosaic Covenant) values of the biblical author.

The questions that historical criticism seeks are intrinsically theological questions. The critical function of historical criticism, contrary to the purely descriptive nature of Enlightenment rationalism, is to get at the theological essence of a biblical narrative that does not openly provide its theology—echoing the sentiments of Ebeling. It is advantageous, theologically speaking, to be able to distinguish the occasion for the writing of the text, the authorial intent, and what a narrative may be reacting against. This information is important for attaining an accurate understanding of the biblical material, for "if we decide simply to ignore it, then the chances that we will misjudge the theology of the passage are all the greater."[95]

**Historical Criticism as Historical Imagination: The Function of Imagination**

The critical feature of historical imagination, when guided by the desire to understand the theology implicit in the text, is a valuable contributor to the construction of an Old Testament theology. A distance is created between the reader and text important to the interpretive process—a distance that prevents the reader from perceiving

[95] James Barr, "The Literal, the Allegorical, & Modern Scholarship," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. Volume 44, No. 1 (1989): 15.

the historical context of the biblical world and the contemporary one as the same. Once historical criticism has provided this distance, an entrance into the narrative world of the Bible to further aid the hermeneutical process may begin. In this development, the use of imagination to understand the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of the biblical author is essential.[96] Imagination, as it is used to appreciate the lifeworld of the biblical narrative, is the ability of the human mind to form mental images that lead to the attainment of meaning.[97] Imagination contains the potential to organize and synthesize the past and present into a conceivable whole, allowing the reader to transcend the historical gap and participate in the world of the biblical story.[98]

The use of historical imagination also corresponds to the notion of *nachempfindung* and the relativity of history as articulated by Troeltsch. Hans-Georg Gadamer asserted that interpretation is made possible through belonging to a particular historical tradition. An individual's participatory belonging (*Zugehoerigkeit)* to a certain lifeworld presents one with a historical tradition, language, and necessary prejudices to engage in interpretation: "If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate...the fact that there are legitimate prejudices."[99] Thus, as Troeltsch argued, a scientific pursuit of historical data free from

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[96] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Translated by Joan Stambough (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 248. The term "lifeworld" designates the meaningful world of human activity, a world not only of objects and environment, but also the *experiential situation* of a human being.

[97] Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History*, 264.

[98] Ibid., 270.

[99] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 276.

prejudices is impossible and, if pursued, impotent. Historical data attains meaningful results "only by *beginning* from a tradition that interpellates it."[100]

The capability of inserting oneself using imagination into the lifeworld of the Bible is through the language of the text, a shared understanding between author and reader that transcends time. Thus, the distance created by historical criticism is balanced through a "fusion of horizons" between the reader and the biblical author. The reader, aware of the historical gap that separates oneself from the biblical world, uses imagination to enter in and experience the lifeworld of the biblical period. One does not seek to ignore the distance between two time periods, but instead to employ imagination to intersect the horizon of the past with one's own and gain a greater understanding of the culture, traditions, and insights of antiquity. This fusion is important because "only insofar as I place myself in the other's point of view do I confront myself with my present horizon, with my prejudices."[101] An awareness of one's own bias is important to the imaginative process so that "the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings."[102]

In presenting bias as a natural part of interpretation and rejecting absolute objectivism, a central question pertaining to the interpretive value of imagination threatens to undermine even the possibility of hermeneutics. If I cannot free myself from the tradition in which I have been placed or from the prejudices inherent in the tradition, then how can I avoid determining the meaning of the text before I read it? How can an

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[100] Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 283. Italics are mine.

[101] Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, 283.

[102] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269.

individual avoid construing meanings of the text that are unacceptable and potentially dangerous? The strength of Troeltsch's description of history is that it denies perfect objectivity while allowing for a "limited but adequate measure of objectivity"[103] for historical study. Within the confines of this objectivity interpretation may attain a degree of appropriateness.

Ricoeur, who suggests one view interpretation through the dialectical process of "guess" and "validation," illuminates the development of confining interpretation into an acceptable range of understanding. In this process a subject contributes an initial guess (controlled by one's religious bias and tradition) as to the meaning of the text. This guess is then validated by its congruence with empirical historical, sociological, and philological evidence. The empirical evidence does not stem from perfect or pure objectivity, but it is evidence that is publicly shared and accepted by a community of interpreters. This "limited but adequate" form of objectivity in a post-modern society comes out of the conversation between particularities of opinions, where "partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims."[104] The evidence to which one's guess may be validated is found within the references of the biblical material – the "world" disclosed by the text – which are open to investigation. Thus Ricoeur states:

> If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal...The text is a limited field of possible constructions. The logic of validation allows us to move between the two limits of dogmatism and skepticism.[105]

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[103] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 204.

[104] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 195.

[105] Ricoeur, From *Text to Action*, 160.

The unavoidable reality of prejudice does not suggest that there is limitless potential to interpretations or that one's bias prevents an individual from grasping the 'otherness' of the text. The constraints to such interpretations are found in the reference of the text susceptible to empirical investigation. Thus, Ricoeur provides an explanation of how one may be open to a text and confronted by its "otherness" as articulated by Gadamer.

Imagination therefore contains a twofold importance: it empowers the reader to participate in the past and exist outside the usual parameters of one's own time, space, and perspective in order to experience the lifeworld of biblical times. The act of imagination allows an individual to replicate the *Lebenswelt* of a biblical period and employ an image that has found for itself "a continued existence beyond the mind of the one who constructed the image."[106] Imagination also permits one to confront the horizon of the biblical author and be confronted by one's own prejudices, creating an atmosphere in which one can be open to new modes of being in the world.

The inherent danger within any imaginative endeavor is the possibility of distortion – to be completely arbitrary in one's capacity to generate images containing inappropriate sexist, racist, and patriarchal interpretations. In this dilemma the dialectic of guess and validation becomes crucial. An individual's guess at the meaning of the text is suspended and held up to empirical evidence. If this initial guess does not conform to the empirical reality of the narrative, then the guess is invalidated. Thus, one's interpretation is limited by the suspicion (validation) of criticism and the historical reality it provides. An example of this is witnessed by the genocidal actions of the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan. If one espouses a theological interpretation that Yahweh is a

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[106] Leo Perdue, *The Collapse of History*, 268.

genocidal deity who supports ethnic cleansing, this interpretation can be met with the historical reality that the conquest of Canaan did not occur as the biblical narratives suggest. The theological focus of this narrative is not on genocide, but on the presence and promise of Yahweh with the Israelites. Criticism also prevents imagination from functioning as a purely human construct. The imaginative world of an individual is grounded in the historical data provided by criticism – in revelatory events experienced by biblical authors that occurred in history.

## Summary

This chapter on the reassessment of historical criticism has offered an illustration of how historical research can be incorporated into an Old Testament theology. This section has argued that Brueggemann's assessment of history for Old Testament theology was too simple – history still contains a richness and complexity that is valuable for the discipline of Old Testament theology. This section has also sought to push the insights of Vaughn further by acknowledging the relativity of history and affirming the role of bias in the hermeneutical process. Bias is not a feature of the interpreter that can be avoided, but neither does bias lead directly into a super-dogmaticism that determines the meaning of the text before it is read—leaving the text sterile and static.[107] Rather, bias can be sustained and controlled by incorporating the dialectic of guess and validation. One's dogmatic presuppositions are validated or invalidated by the reference of the text, a reference that can be held apart and investigated using historical data. Thus historical imagination is one method by which interpretation can be limited from improper and malignant assertions.

[107] Andrew G. Vaughn, "Is Biblical Archaeology Theologically Useful?", 410.

It is important to note at this point that the critical aspect of historical imagination is not the only means by which an interpretation can be judged. One's ethical and moral values must also play an important role in distinguishing appropriate interpretations of a passage or story. These ethical and moral values inform the imagination in a manner similar to historical imagination. If an interpretation surfaces outside the parameters of one's ethical and moral beliefs, then such interpretations can also be deemed inappropriate.[108]Thus ethical and moral values are an essential component, along with historical imagination, in assessing the appropriateness of an interpretation.

Interpretation cannot be accomplished within a vacuum void of history—a reality that every Old Testament theology must take into consideration. The notion of historical imagination, as offered in this study, avoids the trap of essential continuity while also working toward a synthesis of the kerygmatic and empirical historical data. The critical nature of historical imagination focuses on the implicit theology of the biblical text through an exploration of the historical and sociological setting of the narrative. The imaginative aspect of historical imagination assists in illuminating the theology of the text by allowing one to participate in the lifeworld of the text—it encourages an individual to use imagination to see, touch, and experience the historical references of the biblical narrative. Transcending the method of von Rad and Wright, historical imagination is used specifically within the historical individuality of one's cultural historical unit. Historical imagination, when understood in this way, retains its value for Old Testament theology in a postmodern setting.

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[108] The notion of morality and ethics also poses a problem in hermeneutics for those in a postmodern setting who do not recognize an "absolute" in these values. Although not the focus of this study, Paul Tillich provides interesting insight into these questions in his book, *My Search for Absolutes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967). See especially pps. 92-112.

The final section of this study will provide an example of the way in which historical imagination functions to bring about a clearer understanding of the theology of the Old Testament. Using a piece from Brueggemann's theology, historical imagination will be applied to the section to strengthen and extend the insights Brueggemann provides. This section will also address the failures of historical criticism during the "collapse of history" and will argue that historical imagination is one possible way to attend to these shortcomings. Lastly, historical imagination will be applied to the ELCA in an effort to illustrate how this method contributes to the denomination's understanding of Old Testament theology.

# Chapter 4:
# An Illustration of Historical Imagination and the Ramifications of Applying Historical Imagination to Old Testament Theology

The description of historical imagination provided in the third section of this study argued that history remains theologically useful in a postmodern context. The redefinition of historical criticism as historical imagination is a reaction against historical criticism being bracketed into a discipline that attempts to provide a rationalistic and purely objective rendition of historical data—a method hostile to the theological claims of the biblical material. As Gerhard Ebeling states, "Everything depends on the critical historical method being freed from this mistaken curtailment to a mere technical tool and being understood in such a way as to include...the whole of the hermeneutic process."[109] This endeavor has been challenged by Walter Brueggemann's comment in his recent theology that "a new settlement still to be worked out between criticism and interpretation"[110] must be proffered to strengthen the effectiveness of contemporary Old Testament theology. Historical imagination, as this study has defined it, is an attempt in this direction—it is a reassessment of history seeking to retain what is valuable from the historical criticism practiced in the modern period while also taking into account emerging methods of postmodern hermeneutics. The concluding section of this study will contribute an example of how historical imagination informs the hermeneutic process of Old Testament theology while also exploring the ramifications of this method for Brueggemann's theology. Lastly, this section will investigate how a mergence of historical imagination with Brueggemann's rhetorical method is valuable for the ELCA

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[109] Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 50.

[110] Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 728.

and how this combination addresses the problems plaguing contemporary Old Testament theology.

### The Nations as Yahweh's Partner: The Arrogance and Autonomy of Assyria[111]

The purpose of this section is to explore how historical imagination can clarify and enrich Brueggemann's theological motif of "the nations as Yahweh's partner" as presented in his theology. It will be shown that historical imagination, which incorporates background history to illuminate the imaginary world of the biblical narrative and critical history to investigate the historicity of the events described, is a valuable contributor to Brueggemann's theological analysis. Although the narratives concerning Assyria in the Bible are primarily rhetorical testimony, the information provided by historical imagination grounds the biblical theology of the testimony in the real world of its time. This "grounding" attests to Israel's claim that God was not limited to a rhetorical phenomenon but was experienced in profane human history.[112] Historical imagination, used in this way, enhances Brueggemann's theological inferences by placing his conclusions in a historical context while also preventing the author's ideological biases from encroaching upon the theological nature of the text.

Assyria, as presented in the Bible, is an international political tool that Yahweh uses to control the politics of the Near East.[113] Brueggemann asserts that Assyria, however, oversteps its role within the region and acts autonomously - disobeying the will

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[111] This section is taken from Walter Brueggemann's theological investigation of Israel's unsolicited testimony in *Old Testament Theology*, pps. 506-527.

[112] Paul D. Hanson, "A New Challenge to Biblical Theology" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67/2: 450.

[113] See especially Isa. 10:5,15.

of Yahweh. The indictment against Assyria found in the Bible is based upon the nation's inability to curb its destruction and to know the will of God.[114] The autonomy of Assyria and its disobedience are connected to the Deuteronomistic Historian's accusation that Assyria mocks Yahweh and compares the Israelite God to other impotent gods from the Near East. Thus, Assyria is condemned to massive destruction and its power is handed over to another nation.[115] Assyria, as portrayed in the Old Testament, is a nation that failed to recognize the sovereignty and authority of Yahweh, resulting in divine punishment.

Brueggemann suggests two theologically significant aspects are provided in the Old Testament concerning Yahweh's partnership with the nations of the world. First, these narratives illustrate that God is not "singularly preoccupied with Yahweh's powerful commitment to Israel."[116] Brueggemann finds that Yahweh is depicted as having a rich relationship with other nations, a relationship that is not governed solely by the deity's association with Israel. He further concludes that the Old Testament alludes to Yahweh as being concerned with all the nations of the earth and not solely committed to Israel.[117] Secondly, Brueggemann argues that the prophetic oracles against the superpowers of the Near East contain forewarning that arrogant nations operate

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[114] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 507.

[115] Isaiah 10:19 reads," The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down."

[116] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 525.

[117] Ibid., 525.

autonomously at their own risk. Yahweh's pursuit for justice is continually at work, a justice that limits unchecked power and self-deceiving illusions of indestructibility.[118]

The motif of "the nations as Yahweh's partner" presented by Brueggemann is attractive from an ecumenical standpoint, and it may provide lively insight into the nature of Yahweh's relationship with the world outside of Israel. The two theological precepts offered by Brueggemann concerning this relationship are not only informative for an understanding of the God of the Old Testament, but also (if substantiated) may serve as a powerful reminder for contemporary citizens of the Western world. Historical imagination, when used together with Brueggemann's rhetorical method, supplements the creative work of Brueggemann's theology and helps provide some context for the substantiation of his conclusions. The following provides an example of how historical imagination can be used alongside the observations of Brueggemann.

## The Use of Background History as a Means of Strengthening Brueggemann's System

The first function of historical imagination to be exercised in an effort to strengthen the insights of Brueggemann is the presentation of background information on the kingdom of Assyria. The Assyrian Empire began its domination of Syria-Palestine in the mid-eighth century B.C.E. with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III in 744. During this time Assyria began to expand to the south and west toward the region of Palestine, most notably the northern nations of Israel, Damascus, and Moab.[119] The northern

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[118] Ibid., 526.

[119] J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 221.

countries united in a coalition against Assyria that resulted in their destruction (including Samaria in 722). Ahaz of Judah, however, gave his support to Assyria and paid tribute to the monarch—saving Judah from the fate of its northern neighbor.[120]

The actions of Ahaz had further implications for the religious environment of Judah as a vassal state. When the Assyrians gained control of an area, the rulers frequently "imposed more than political subservience upon their vassals. They also required them to accept their deities."[121] Whether Ahaz was forced to bring Assyrian deities into Jerusalem is uncertain, yet Jerusalem temple worship was affected by Assyrian culture. Upon returning from a trip to Damascus, which the Assyrians had just conquered, Ahaz erected an altar in the Solomonic temple, shaped after Assyrian craftsmanship, and introduced cultic innovations—including the practice of child sacrifice.[122] The pressure to introduce Assyrian culture and religion into Judah is an important example of the relationship between Assyria and its vassal states.

Another illuminating aspect of Assyria's domination of the Near East was the manner in which the military extended its control of southern Palestine. Upon the death of Sargon II, Hezekiah of Judah initiated a rebellion against Assyria to remove its vassal status. The new Assyrian king, Sennacherib, swiftly entered Palestine and captured the Shephelah region of Judah and destroyed Lachish, its most important city.[123] Apart from

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[120] Mordechai Cogan, "Into Exile" in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 321.

[121] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Hezekiah's Reform and the Deuteronomistic Tradition." *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979): 37.

[122] Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 345.

[123] The ruins of Lachish III depict a violent destruction, supported by bas-reliefs found in the temple of Sennacherib at Kouyunjik. See appendix B for drawings of these reliefs.

the utter desolation brought on a besieged city, the Assyrians often resorted to intimidation – a tactic that is supported by the biblical account of the Rabshekah taunting both Yahweh and the Jerusalemites. This verbal tactic, when placed alongside the ruthlessness of Assyrian army, was a significant aspect of Assyrian military control.[124]

The historical background information on the nature of Assyrian domination expands an individual's imaginative appreciation of the lifeworld of the biblical narrative. The reader is invited to participate in the life of the biblical author and to be confronted by the sociological, economic, and political situation of the Judean nation. The narrative of Assyria's domination of Syria-Palestine is enlightened and made alive by the knowledge history provides. One is able to participate in the political situation of the region and perceive the way in which Assyria fulfilled the prophetic oracles against the northern kingdom of Israel—acting as a tool of Yahweh to bring about his judgment. An individual is also immersed in the threat of Assyrian influence upon the cultural and religious aspects of Judean life. The Assyrians not only placed political control over a nation, but also strived to transpose their deities onto the vassals they controlled. Lastly, one's imagination is broadened by the formidable threat of the Assyrians and the manner in which they waged military campaigns. The Assyrian's military operations included a siege on the holy city of Yahweh – an action that, for the biblical authors, highlighted the arrogance of the Assyrians.

[124] This is evidenced by the response of Shebna to the growing Assyrian threat in which Isaiah condemned the royal steward for preparing a tomb for himself (Isa 22:15-23).

**The Use of Critical History to Strengthen Brueggemann's System**

As an individual participates in the anxiety of the Judean situation, the critical feature of historical imagination also enriches the biblical narrative. An important contribution criticism provides is a historical account of the siege by the Assyrians on Jerusalem. Archaeological evidence supports that a siege on Jerusalem did take place during the time of Hezekiah and that the Judean king performed a number of tasks to prepare for the coming invasion. Discoveries made by Yohanon Aharoni also reinforce the notion that worship was centralized in Jerusalem during Hezekiah's kingship. These discoveries include destroyed remains of cultic centers in Judah during the reign of Hezekiah that essentially bound anyone wishing to worship Yahweh to come to Jerusalem.[125] Archaeological remains also attest to the refortification of the wall around Jerusalem, the completion of the Siloam tunnel, and the mobilization of a national militia joined by foreign mercenaries.[126]

Criticism also uses historical evidence to understand the unsuccessful attempt of the Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem and remove Hezekiah from power. Although it is uncertain why Sennacherib abandoned the siege of Jerusalem, historical data confirms that the king turned away from Judah to put down insurrections in other regions of his kingdom. The important aspect of this failure, however, was that Jerusalem was spared destruction and forced only to pay tribute. The deportation and slaughter that Sennacherib enacted against every other rebellious king in the region did not occur in Jerusalem, testifying to Hezekiah's strength, cunning, and fortune. Hezekiah survived

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[125] Oded Borowski, "Hezekiah's Reforms and the Revolt against Assyria" *Biblical Archaeologist* 58 (1995): 148.

[126] Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 354.

the Assyrian invasion and rebuilt his kingdom in an independence that would continue for another century in Judah.[127]

The use of historical information, both in its ability to broaden the imaginative lifeworld of the biblical text and by verifying historical events, contributes to a theological understanding of the material as explicated by Brueggemann. This is accomplished through a dual process of *illumination* and *clarification* provided by the dual function of historical imagination. The historical context of Judah and Jerusalem illuminates the imagination of the reader and also substantiates Brueggemann's assessment of Assyrian arrogance in their dealings with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Historical imagination also provides clarification to the theological motif of "the nations as Yahweh's partner." Rather than partners, one perceives the nations in the Near East as instruments in bringing about the sovereign will of Yahweh in the Deuteronomic and Isaiah texts. Although the notion of partnership may develop in later prophetic writings[128], Brueggemann's assertion that a nation such as Assyria is in a partnership with the sovereignty and pathos of Yahweh is strained.[129] The historical record does not support a partnership between Yahweh and the powerful nations of the Near East, as though these nations understood the will of Yahweh and chose to obey or disobey it. Historical imagination attests to the Assyrians acting autonomously in the region without being confined or affected by Yahweh and the future of Israel. Rather than partnership, these nations can be perceived as unknowing instruments that bring about Yahweh's

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[127] T.C. Mitchell, "Israel and Judah from the Coming of Assyrian Domination until the Fall of Samaria, and the Struggle for Independence in Judah" in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 3, bk. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 370.

[128] The messiah language regarding Cyrus of Persia is one possible occurrence in which a more developed partnership is maintained between Yahweh and a foreign power.

[129] Brueggemann, Old Testament Theology, 507.

desired agenda. Brueggemann's theological conclusions, therefore, can be clarified and substantiated using historical imagination.

Along with the illuminating and clarifying the theological insights of Brueggemann, historical imagination can also augment Brueggemann's conclusions with further theological insights. An example of this resides in the motif of "incomparable trust" applied by the Deuteronomistic historian to the kingship of Hezekiah in the narrative of Assyria and Judah.[130] Hezekiah's trust is unique during the Assyrian crisis, a trust never before seen since David ruled Jerusalem. The historical information provided by the Deuteronomistic Historian is purposely limited, particularly when compared to the Chronicler's account, in order to focus on the "incomparable trust" motif. The theological essence of these passages, which is a large part of the author's focus, strains to emphasize this sine qua non aspect of Hezekiah's character. Hezekiah's trust emboldens the Judean king to prepare for the coming invasion and to take active measures in order that Jerusalem may endure siege and battle. Against insurmountable odds, and with the knowledge of the destruction of Judah's neighboring nations by the Assyrians, Hezekiah remains steadfast in his conviction that Yahweh will deliver Jerusalem.

Historical imagination allows the reader to use both the Deuteronomistic Historian's account of the Assyrian invasion with the historical record in order to gain a greater understanding of the theological implications of the passage. This is done when one's imagination is immersed in the chaotic and tragic position of Jerusalem before the coming siege. History provides a glimpse into the situation of Jerusalem and beckons the

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[130] Gary N. Knoppers, " 'There was None Like Him': Incomparability in the Books of Kings." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992): 418.

reader to contemplate the special trust needed to stand fast against the Assyrian army. Historical criticism also contributes to the theological nature of this passage by illustrating the preparations of Hezekiah and the reality of the destruction caused by the Assyrians. Hezekiah's trust was an active trust that refused to acquiesce to the Assyrian threat, a trust energized with the knowledge that Yahweh was with him. The Deuteronomistic Historian asserts that at a period in which Judah faced total destruction, Hezekiah courageously engaged the threat of the Assyrians and relied upon the promises of the Deuteronomistic theology. Through Hezekiah's incomparable trust the city of Jerusalem was miraculously delivered from ruin and the Judean king's legacy continued.[131]

## The Benefits of a Collaboration between Historical Imagination and Brueggemann

Walter Brueggemann's theology is exemplary at producing a theology sensitive to the concerns of this study: it is a theology capable of incorporating the plurality of voices in the text, a theology that refuses to "explain away" the tension of the biblical corpus, and a theology that addresses the contemporary community of faith. These strengths, however, are affected by Brueggemann's insistence that Old Testament theology must be limited to the rhetorical character of the text. Brueggemann's confinement of a theology to only the speech of the Bible leads the scholar into an ontological and historical quandary. Brueggemann is unable to take into account the external historical reality of the events described in the Bible that informed and shaped Israel's faith. An important aspect of the Old Testament is the Israelite's encounter of Yahweh in history—whether such an encounter took place in the exodus, the administering of the divine name, or the

[131] Knoppers,425.

conquest of Canaan. Another difficulty with Brueggemann's limitation of Old Testament theology is that one can know God only through the rhetoric of the Bible. This, in effect, reduces God to a construct of human speech—a problem that Brueggemann acknowledges as one that he cannot "resolve clearly."[132]

Historical imagination assists Brueggemann's weaknesses from both a historical and ontological standpoint. Ontologically, historical imagination assists in our understanding that historical individuals experienced God outside of the biblical text and that this revelation entered into and affected profane human history. Our knowledge of God is not limited to the rhetoric of the Bible, but can be informed by an engagement of historical material. Historically, historical imagination grounds the interpretation of the Bible into appropriate representations of the biblical corpus. Anti-Semitic, sexist, or Marcionistic interpretations are prevented with an appeal to historical data. One cannot fully appreciate the early Jesus community without understanding Second Temple Judaism or the Gospel of John's polemic language against Jews without recognizing early Christianity's desire to distinguish itself from Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem in 69 C.E. The context of a narrative and an awareness of the biblical author's world assists in safeguarding evil appropriations of biblical material and preventing God from being a rhetorical construct.

It is important to assert that historical imagination is limited in its scope and effectiveness. Sapiential and poetic material from the Old Testament do not benefit from historical imagination in the same manner as the historical narratives of the Bible. This study disagrees with von Rad's notion that the Old Testament is primarily a *Gesichtebuch* (History book). Instead, the Old Testament is more story-like in its form and content—a

[132] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 65, fn. 11.

story that still benefits from historical analysis. Historical imagination is also not a method that can be used alone to safeguard against potentially harmful interpretations. Moral and ethical considerations must also contribute to one's hermeneutic endeavor. Historical imagination used in conjunction with Brueggemann's methodology, however, opens new possibilities for addressing the collapse of history in Old Testament theology.

## Historical Imagination and Walter Brueggemann: Addressing the Collapse of History

Leo Perdue cites three overarching flaws with historical criticism as it was practiced in the twentieth century. The first was the inability of Old Testament theologies to incorporate the diverse character of the Bible. Often, Old Testament theologians framed their theology on one central theme or confined their approach to only one method.[133] Secondly, the twentieth century gave rise to a loss of confidence in the epistemological claims of the Enlightenment.[134] The desire of modernity to explain everything in objective rational categories and remove the oddities of the biblical corpus were rejected by new scholarship that recognized the importance of the tension in the Old Testament depiction of God. Thirdly, the purely descriptive approach of Old Testament theology in the modern period failed to engage the struggles of the contemporary communities of faith. The descriptive approach left the Bible static and prevented the church and society from articulating new theological understandings.[135]

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[133] Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History*, 8.

[134] Ibid., 8.

[135] Ibid., 10.

A combination of historical imagination and Brueggemann's theology engages each of the failures of historical criticism as explicated by Perdue. Historical imagination, when used with Brueggemann, combines historical analysis, imagination, and rhetorical criticism to produce a theology that addresses the plurality of voices within the Old Testament. The plurality of methods employed in the creation of a postmodern Old Testament theology is important, for "no one method, however rigorous, will answer all the questions that may be brought to a text."[136] Historical imagination and Brueggemann's methodology incorporate creation, sapiential, poetic, and historical material into a coherent theology void of one central theme.

Historical imagination and Brueggemann also offer a venue through which the pure objectivism of the Enlightenment can be overcome. The recognition of bias and the relativity of history create an awareness of one's presuppositions and prevent any claims of a pure objectified investigation of the biblical material. One must, however, avoid a relativism that denies a shared vision of God and humanity for a community of faith. The notion of "guess" and "validation" is one way through which such relativism is avoided. A key component in this process is incorporating a plurality of voices into the discussion. Donna J. Haraway argues convincingly that a limited but adequate objectivity in the postmodern world comes out of the conversation between particularities of opinions.[137] Although the Old Testament is interpreted individually through historical cultural units, it is imperative that a multitude of voices are involved in the discussion to reduce the risk of colonization and oppression.

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[136] Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6.
[137] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 195.

Historical imagination and Brueggemann's methodology also seriously pursue a theology sensitive to contemporary society and the church. Brueggemann's theological motifs, as is evidenced by his short discussion on "the nations as Yahweh's partners," continually seek to make connections to current crises and world situations. Historical imagination also takes into consideration the dynamic nature of society and church. Historical imagination insists that an individual immerse oneself in the lifeworld of the biblical narrative while also recognizing the distance that separates one from the biblical story. Brueggemann's methodology, when supported by historical imagination, provides a venue through which the failures of historical criticism in the modern period can be addressed.

**Historical Imagination and Walter Brueggemann: The Value for the ELCA**

The second section of this study asserted that Old Testament theology is valuable for the contemporary church and the Christian community because of the Bible's authoritative position in Christianity, its value as a classic text, and Old Testament theology's synthesization of the work of biblical historians, sociologists, and philologists into a coherent theological analysis. The section went on to argue that Old Testament theology was also specifically valuable for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This affirmation was based on Luther's dynamic appreciation of the Bible, the influence Old Testament theology had and still has on the seminaries of the denomination, and Lutheran theological principles that are supported by Old Testament theology. The question now arises, how is historical imagination and Walter Brueggemann distinctively valuable for the ELCA?

The first area in which historical imagination and Brueggemann are valuable for the ELCA can be found in Luther's observation of the diversity and dynamism of the Old Testament. Luther recognized the plurality of voices in the Bible and was comfortable with the heterogeneity of the material. Luther was aware that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 differs greatly from the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam. 7:14 and the transcendent creator of Genesis 1 is very unlike the anthropomorphic God of Genesis 2. The value of historical imagination and Brueggemann is the recognition of the diversity of the Old Testament and a disinclination to unite the Old Testament under a single theological theme. Brueggemann suggests, "any theology must be bi-polar to reflect the central tension of the literature...This articulation of OT faith seeks to present the faith as both *in the fray* (Gottwald) and *above the fray* (Childs)."[138] Historical imagination also works toward enriching the multiformity of Scripture by illustrating the actualization (*Vergegenwärtigung)* of the promises of God for each separate historical community in Israel by the prophets. As Luther desired, the richness of the Old Testament and the plurality of voices within it are allowed to testify about their encounter with God through a combination of historical imagination and Brueggemann's approach.

Another significant advantage for using historical imagination alongside the methodology of Brueggemann is that it conforms to the Lutheran awareness of paradox within the biblical corpus. Brueggemann notes that within the Old Testament there is a "common theology" that offers a description of God similar to many cults in the Near East. Yahweh is transcendent, incomparable, just, and retributive—a God who enacts a contract with a people and rewards and punishes accordingly. This common theology,

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[138] Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology," 30.

however, is placed alongside the embrace of pain experienced from "underneath."[139] The traditions of Israel are in tension between the common theology viewed through the contract at Sinai and "the protest against it."[140] A sharp critique occurs in the Old Testament against the common theology, a lamentation about a relationship that contains no room for human error or failure. Thus, an example of paradox in the Old Testament presents itself within the notion of Yahweh as transcendent, just, and omnipotent and the notion of Yahweh as immanent, merciful, and 'in the fray' of humanity. Historical imagination also assists in illuminating the paradox of Yahweh in the Old Testament. Historical data demonstrates the similarities between Israel's common theology and other Near Eastern religions.[141] Yet historical imagination also enlightens the imagination concerning the protest of the Israelites against Yahweh, their struggles in history, and their tumultuous relationship with Yahweh. Historical imagination and Brueggemann do not seek to explain away this paradox or to reduce its significance, but rather reinforce the relationship of Yahweh and humanity.

The combination of historical imagination and Brueggemann is valuable for the ELCA because the synthesis of these methodologies provides one possible medium through which the church can inform its constituents about the God of the Old Testament. This synthesis is aware of the postmodern context in which the church operates and seeks to address contemporary issues with which the church must wrestle. This synthesis is also conducive to a Lutheran understanding of the Bible and the dynamic, living Word of

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[139] Ibid., 31.

[140] Ibid., 43.

[141] One prominent example can be found in the Enuma Elish.

God. Its embrace of biblical theological diversity and paradox correspond to Lutheran tradition and theological principles. In doing so, this synthesis exhibits Luther's passion for the Bible and continues Reformation's theology's attempt to demand a theology based on Holy Scripture alone.[142]

In propounding a fusion of Walter Brueggemann's methodology with historical imagination to address current problems facing Old Testament theology, this study humbly recognizes that many questions have been left unasked and that new challenges will emerge to dispute the value and validity of the discipline. This is buttressed by the observation that "theological interpretation is a modest enterprise that always, inevitably, must leave much unsaid and perhaps even unnoticed."[143] The spirit of this study, however, has been strengthened by the conviction of Gerhard Ebeling that the inchoatic nature of Old Testament theology is in keeping with the character of theology itself. Old Testament must continually seek to expound better the message of the Bible and work among diverse disciplines:

> in which the conversation is kept open between the historian and the systematic theologian because the historian, if he is to be a historian, must also be a systematic theologian, and the systematic theologian, if he is to be a systematic theologian, must also be a historian, seems to me to be peculiarly in keeping with the Reformers' understanding of theology. For theology in this sense is never a completed task, never attains its goal.[144]

The inclusion of Brueggemann's insights into a framework that contains the potential to employ historical imagination is an attempt to remain true to the sentiments of Ebeling.

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[142] Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 82.

[143] Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 80.

[144] Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 96.

An Old Testament theologian must remain in discussion with systematics, metaphysics, philosophy, and linguistics and allow their insights to assist in shaping a theology beneficial for the contemporary community of faith.

In the end, this study has devoted a great deal of its energy toward the notion of biblical interpretation—particularly the interpretation of the theology contained in the Old Testament. Interpretation has and continues to be an issue of great importance for the church and the Christian community. As Walter Brueggemann recognizes, hermeneutics is caught between two restrictive poles: interpretation must be open enough to allow for new insights to emerge through revelation, yet it must contain a discipline that promotes "sound method and intellectual consistency" in order to avoid harmful and inappropriate perceptions of the biblical material.[145] This study has attempted to provide a freedom for interpretation—specifically through the imaginative capacity of the reader—while also striving to bound interpretation through the "sound method" of historical criticism. The interpretation of the Old Testament and its depiction of God must grasp the vivaciousness and dynamism of the biblical material, for the theological significance of the Old Testament corpus "rests in the conviction that these texts constitute a witness in behalf of the God of Israel that can make a difference in the public issues and crises of our time."[146]

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[145] Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, 7.

[146] Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 27.

## Appendix A

**131H. Psalms.** Detailed exegesis of selected Psalms illustrating the various kinds of Psalms included in the Psalter. Class reports on values in the Psalter. The Hebrew text is used as basis for study. 4 hours per week, one quarter.

*Seniors*

**132H. Messianic Prophecies.** Exegesis of selected prophecies in their historical succession. Hebrew text. 3 hours per week, one quarter. Elective.

*Seniors and graduate students*

*Theology*

**141H. Seminar on the Spiritual Vocabulary of the Psalms.** Prerequisite: a working knowledge of the Hebrew language and ability to use a Hebrew lexicon. 3 hours per week, one quarter. Elective. *Seniors and graduate students*

**142. Seminar on the Covenant in the Old Testament.** There is no language prerequisite, but a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek will be helpful to the student who elects to take the course. 3 hours per week, one quarter. Elective.

*Seniors and graduate students*

**143. Old Testament Theology.** 3 hours per week, one quarter. Elective.

*Seniors*

**144H. The Theology of the Prophets.** A study of the Old Testament teaching about God, man, sin, salvation in the Prophets. 3 hours per week, one quarter. Elective. *Seniors and graduate students*

Luther Theological Seminary 1957-58

The first appearance of Old Testament theology in the courses offered in Old Testament.

## Theology

141. SEMINAR ON THE SPIRITUAL VOCABULARY OF THE PSALMS *Three hours*

Prerequisite: a working knowledge of Hebrew language and ability to use a Hebrew lexicon. Elective. Seniors and graduate students.

142. SEMINAR ON THE COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT *Three hours*

There is no language prerequisite, but a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek will be helpful to the student who elects to take the course. Elective. Seniors and graduate students.

143. OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY *Three hours*

A comparative study of the various "Theologies of the Old Testament" available in English and German (e.g., Eichrodt, vonRad, Jacob, Koehler). Elective. Seniors and graduate students.

144. THE THEOLOGY OF THE PROPHETS *Three hours*

A study of the Old Testament teaching about God, man, sin, salvation in the Prophets. Elective. Seniors and graduate students.

145. THE PROPHETIC VIEW OF MAN AND HISTORY *Three hours*

A study of the Biblical interpretation of man and history with emphasis in the area of the Old Testament prophets and their significance for contemporary culture. Special attention will be given to the historical context to which the prophets spoke and to their concept of history. As an example of the prophetic voice in contemporary culture, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* by Reinhold Niebuhr will be discussed. Elective. Seniors and graduate students.

Luther Theological Seminary 1958-59

The theologies of Eichrodt and von Rad incorporated into curriculum.

### OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

**120. Old Testament Theology.** Two hours. The focus of this course is upon the content and varieties of theology in the Old Testament. The class may take different approaches to the subject such as concentration on Old Testament theologians, seminar papers on various Biblical themes, or research papers. Required. Middlers. Boyd, Gaiser, Simundson, and Stensvaag

**135. Old Testament Theology.** Two hours. See course description under 120. Required. Seniors, 1975-76. Frerichs, Gaiser, Simundson, and Stensvaag.

### ISRAEL'S RESPONSE

The Old Testament core course requirement in the general area of the Writings may be fulfilled by taking at least one course from the following elective offerings: The Psalms (130E or 131H), Worship in Israel (132E), Wisdom Literature (136E), Job and Contemporary Man (163E).

**135. Biblical Theology.** Two hours. This course is designed to focus attention on the varieties of theology within the Scriptures, the fundamental unity underlying this variety, and the relationship between the Testaments. Required. Seniors—1974-75. Department

Luther Theological Seminary 1975-76

The influence of Old Testament theology grew at Luther and expanded to include a variety of courses. Gaiser was also a member of the faculty who taught Old Testament theology courses.

146 **The Suffering and Humanity of God.*** Three hours. A study of Old Testament texts that speak of God's repenting, suffering and earthly appearances. The problem of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism in Old Testament interpretation, with a view to New Testament and contemporary formulations. (Not offered 1980-81.)

150 **The Old Testament and the Ancient Near East.** Three hours. A study of translated texts from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor which aid in interpreting the Old Testament. (Not offered 1980-81.)

153 **Archaeology and the Bible.*** Three hours. An examination of the purposes, techniques and results of archaeology in providing a background to Biblical knowledge and understanding through the use of visual aids and discussion. Prerequisite: 810 and 112. Boyd

155 **Christianity and Judaism.*** Three hours. A study of the theological, historical and practical relationship between Christianity and Judaism, with special reference to such aspects as fundamental beliefs shared by both; fundamental differences; relationship of Jesus and N.T. Church to Israel; history of anti-Semitism; and current relations between Christians and Jews. Limited to Seniors and Graduate Students. Frerichs

157 **Messiah.** Three hours. An investigation of Messianic texts in the Old Testament, examining the ways in which these texts are understood in the New Testament and in the history of the church. Some attention will be given to Jewish interpretations. Limburg

161 **The Concept of Blessing.*** Three hours. A study of the biblical and ancient near eastern data dealing with the idea of blessing, with a view of implications for contemporary Christian life and thought. Hillmer

163 **The Theology of Walther Eichrodt.*** Three hours. A study of the two volumes of Old Testament theology by the famous Basel professor and comparison of them with the theology of G. von Rad. Prerequisite: 112, 121/2H and 810, including the reading of von Rad's Old Testament Theology. (Not offered 1980-81.)

165 **Human Words in the Divine Word.*** Three hours. An analysis of Israel's interaction with Yahweh as seen in the human speech of the Old Testament historical writings. Special attention will be given to the extended speeches which are passed down to us in poetic form. The significance of these human songs and speeches for Old Testament theology and interpretation will be considered. (Not offered 1980-81.)

167 **Old Testament Theology.** Three hours. The focus of this course is upon the content and varieties of theology in the Old Testament. The class may take different approaches to the subject such as concentration on Old Testament theologians, seminar papers on various Biblical themes, or research papers. (Not offered 1980-81.)

168 **"Story" in Scripture and Tradition.** Three hours. An investigation of Biblical materials representative of the "story" genre, including the stories of Joseph, Ruth, Esther, and Jonah from the Old Testament, selections from the Apocrypha, and some consideration of Jesus as teller of stories. Elie Wiesel's Collection of Hasidic Stories will also be considered. Limburg

169. **Jeremiah's Laments.** Three hours. A study of Jeremiah's complaints to God concerning the difficulties of his ministry, the rejection of his preaching, his persecution by authorities and everyone, imprecations and prayers for enemies, many suffering for the sins of a few, the prosperity of the wicked, and God's inscrutable ways. Frerichs

171 **The Theology of Claus Westermann.*** Three hours. An examination of Westermann's approach to the interpretation of the Old Testament. Readings will include: **What Does the Old Testament Say About God? Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church, The Old Testament and Jesus Christ, God's Angels Need No Wings,** as well as translated sections of his recent theology. (Not offered 1980-81.)

172 **What Shall I Preach.*** Three hours. This course will relate the theology of the Old Testament to this question of the prophet of the Exile (Isaiah 40:6). The work of several important Old Testament theologians, such as Von Rad, Westermann, Bright, will be examined through a study of their sermons. The use of the Old Testament in contemporary Christian preaching will be considered. Prerequisites: 810, 112, and 121-122H, or permission of the instructor. Gaiser

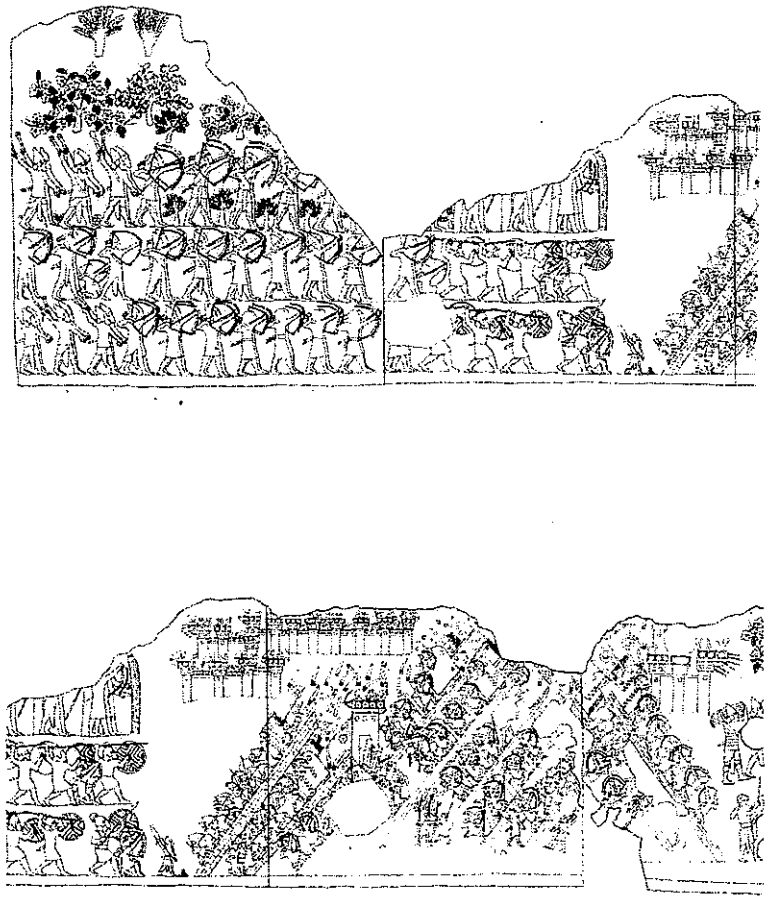
175 **The Concept of Righteousness in the Old Testament and Its Implications for Preaching Today.*** Three hours. Righteousness in the Old Testament is often seen in contrast to justification by faith as it is set forth in the New Testament. A closer examination of Old Testament texts shows, however, that they give evidence for a specific righteousness which is closely related to faith in the God of Israel. What does this mean for our preaching today? (Not offered 1980-81.)

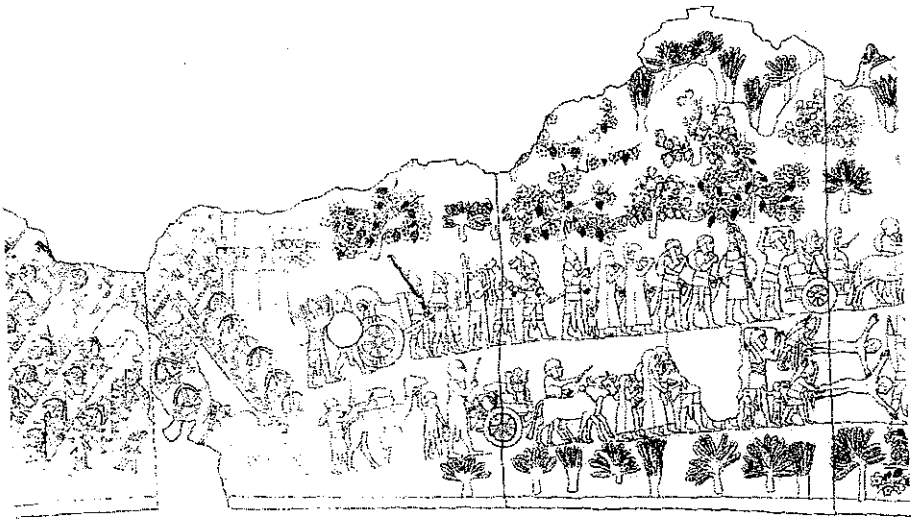
Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminaries 1980-81

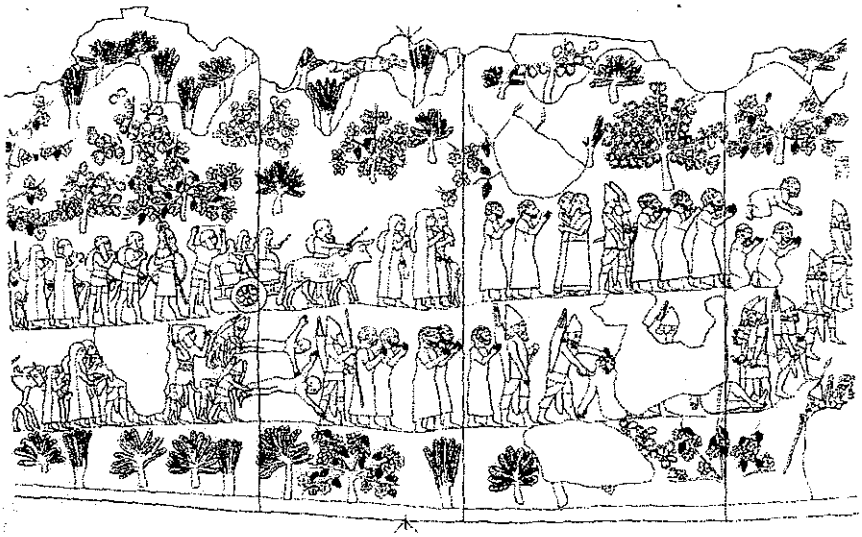
Courses offered specifically on Old Testament theology ended with the decade of the 1970s.

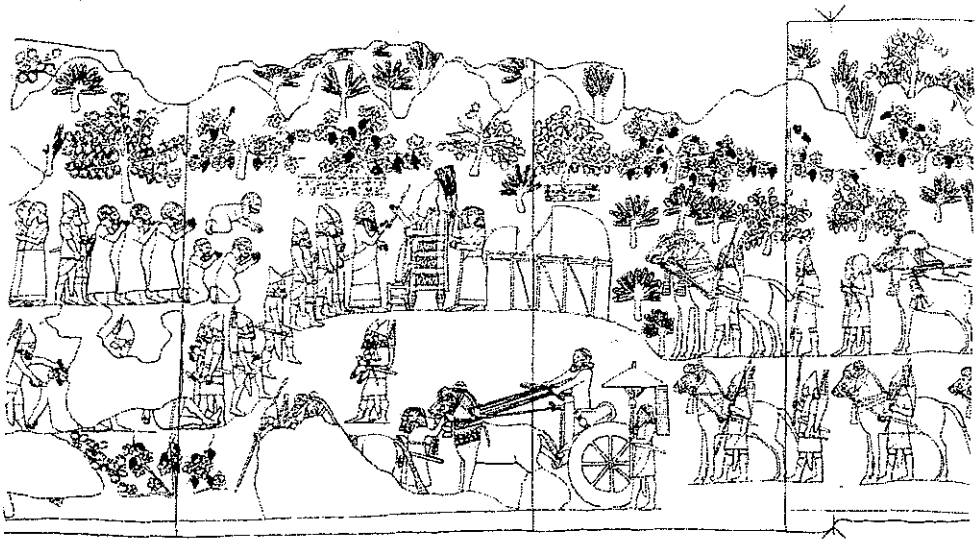
# Appendix B

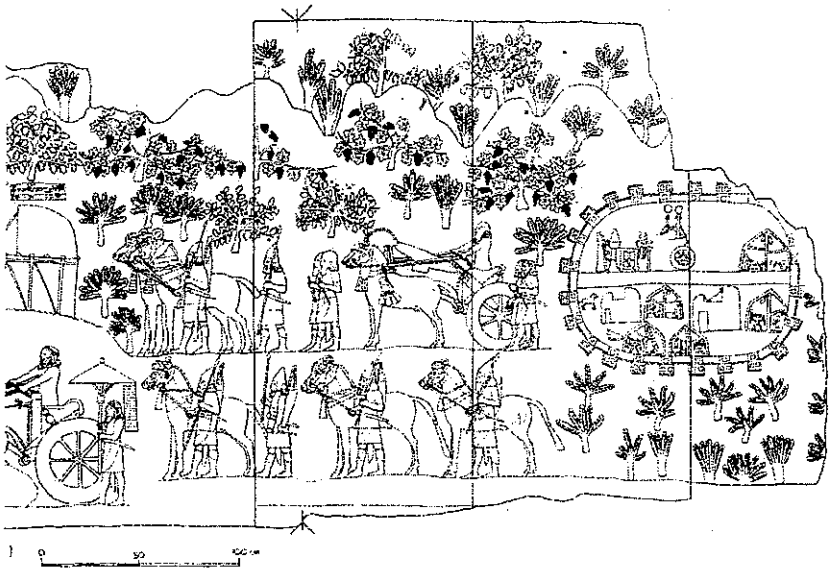
Fig. 14. Series of bas-reliefs which decorated the walls of room XXXVI in the Palace of Sennacherib at Kouyunjik, the citadel mound of ancient Nineveh. The reliefs depict the siege and capture of the city of Lachish by Sennacherib in 701 B.C. The sequence of the action proceeds from left to right: Assyrian troops, including bowmen and slingers, advance on the city; the city is attacked up ramps by infantry following siege engines which are protected with water from large scoops against burning brands thrown down by the defenders; booty and captives are driven out of the city; Sennacherib on his throne in front of his tent receives the capitulation of the city; Sennacherib's chariot stands by, and behind him other troops wait in front of his fortified camp. A cuneiform inscription beside the king identifies him and names the city. (Drawing by Ann Searight.)











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