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**Interpretation and Exegesis:**

**An Investigation into  
the  
Canonical Approach of  
B. S. Childs.**

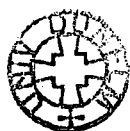
*Norman Samuel Wilson.*

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**Thesis submitted for the Degree of M. Litt.**

**University of Durham.**

**Department of Theology.**



1999.

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**Name.** Norman Samuel Wilson.

**Title.** Interpretation and Exegesis: An Investigation into  
the Canonical Approach of B. S. Childs.

**Degree.** M. Litt. **Year.** 1999

**Abstract.**

We begin this study by delineating the canonical approach pioneered by B. S. Childs. Five critical perspectives on Childs' work follow raising important hermeneutical problems. M. G. Brett, C. J. Scalise and P. R. Noble respond by trying to modify and strengthen Childs' claims by invoking hermeneutical theory. J. Barr, is highly critical while J. Barton views the canonical approach as having close affinities with the 'new criticism' in secular literary studies.

We next examine the exegesis of Childs in the context of his BTONT (1992). In evaluating two examples, it is found that Childs does not produce sustained and memorable exegesis, but instead becomes pre-occupied with the problem of methodology, the exegetical debate, and the history of exegesis. Thereafter our main focus is a substantial comparative study of the classic text of God's self-revelation to Moses in Ex. 3 - 4. A comparison of Childs' handling of this key passage is made with the work of J. I. Durham, T. E. Fretheim, and D. E. Gowan. Finally, we consider a Jewish contribution from N. M. Sarna.

Childs' canonical exegesis does not produce sustained theological illumination; he becomes absorbed with diachronic procedures and hermeneutical debate. The other Christian commentators make some astute theological comment but this is not sustained. Of all the exegetes Sarna's work yields perceptive theological comment to a degree not found in the others. The constraints of the commentary format vis-à-vis achieving sustained theological insight are noted and a practical proposal is made. But Childs' emphasis on the hermeneutical significance of "canon" and the theological nature of interpretation is broadly welcomed, though some outstanding difficulties are highlighted which need further development. The conclusion is drawn that the most effective way to enhance the canonical approach to biblical interpretation is for Childs (and others) to produce sustained and memorable exegesis.

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Author's Declaration.

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I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University.

Signed: Norman S. Wilson.

Date. 8<sup>th</sup> June 1999

**CHAPTER 1.**

**The Interpretational Concerns**

**of**

**B. S. Childs**



## CHAPTER 1.

### THE INTERPRETATIONAL CONCERNS OF B.S.CHILDS.

When Professor Childs published his Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (1) it met with critical scrutiny by the guild of biblical scholars being hailed in Old Testament study as, 'the most important new publication of recent years.' (2) James Barr, who has come to be a trenchant critic of Childs' canonical approach to biblical interpretation, thought that the book presented a strange set of puzzles and potential contradictions (3), yet conceded that suitably re-assessed and pressed farther, 'the magnificent but sometimes ill-judged imaginative enterprise of this book will indeed count as a major landmark in modern Old Testament study.' (4) Perhaps a more balanced observation was made by J. Blenkinsopp when he wrote, 'In his latest book Brevard S. Childs is concerned with the gap between the historical-critical method which has dominated Old Testament studies since the nineteenth century and the specifically religious meaning of the texts - or, in other words, their status as scripture.' (5)

This observation accords well with two key words in the title of the book, 'Introduction' and 'Scripture' and as one reads through the text of the book it becomes clear that Childs' concerns focus sharply on these two concepts. In the Preface he outlines the status of the biblical discipline relating to 'Introduction'. For Childs the heart of the matter is, 'I am convinced that the relation between the historical critical study of the Bible and its theological use as religious literature within a community of faith and practice needs to be completely rethought.' (6)

In Part 1 of the book Childs considers the history of the discipline of OT Introduction, the problem of the canon, canon and scripture, and concludes with text and canon. His work in these areas shows his mastery of past literature and from his engagement with the history of the discipline Childs expresses his exegetical concerns. What then are the major concerns of biblical interpretation which prompted Childs to advocate the canonical approach to the OT as an alternative to the impasse into which OT study has fallen?

The first substantial exposition of Childs' hermeneutical concerns is to be



found in the section, "A Critique of the Historical Critical Introduction" (7) Here he points out that the broad general lines of the history of the OT Introduction are agreed on by most scholars, but the real issue involves the evaluation of that history. One response to the emergence of the historical critical methods as purveyed in OT Introductions is that the development of these interpretational methods represents a journey from ignorance and error to a point where creative scholarly freedom from ecclesiastical dogma is finally assured. On the other hand, some Christians view the Enlightenment of the 18th century, with its emphasis on critical standards of objective truth, as being detrimental to biblical truth. The growth of unbelief, from this viewpoint, is held to be synonymous with human pride and wisdom, all of which have been fostered by the rationalism underpinning historical critical methods.

Childs distances himself from these bipolar responses to critical Bible study. In this context it is important to note what he says about critical methods relative to the interpretation of scripture. 'It seems impossible to deny the enormous gains which have been achieved in many areas of the study of the Old Testament. To compare the church fathers, or the Reformers for that matter, with modern scholarship in terms of philological, textual and literary criticism, or of historical knowledge and exegetical precision should convince any reasonable person of the undeniable achievements of historical critical scholarship in respect to the Old Testament.' (8) Childs goes on to present what is the vital issue regarding the use of historical critical methods in biblical study. While the critical Introduction has emerged victorious over the last 200 years of Old Testament scholarship, serious losses have been occasioned by its use, according to Childs. In terms of the subject matter he writes: '. . . serious reservations can be held regarding the form of the critical Introduction as an adequate approach to the literature it seeks to illuminate.' (9)

Childs explains this comment by advancing three key observations. Firstly, the historical critical Introduction since the time of Eichhorn works on the assumption that its main objective is to describe the history of the development of the Hebrew literature, tracing its earlier and later stages. Such an approach to the OT therefore, does not have for its goal the analysis of the canonical literature of the synagogue and

the Church. As a consequence there always remains, ' . . . an enormous hiatus between the description of the critically reconstructed literature and the actual canonical text which has been received and used as authoritative scripture by the community.' (10)

Secondly, because of this predominately historical interest, the critical Introduction generally fails to understand ' the peculiar dynamics of Israel's religious literature, which has been greatly influenced by the process of establishing the scope of the literature, forming its peculiar shape, and structuring its inner relationships.' (11) For Childs, to use the historical critical methods disregards the peculiar function of canonical literature; consequently, a serious imbalance occurs when seeking to understand the meaning and function of Holy Scripture. Childs' use of the canonical approach to Holy Scripture is thus an attempt to restore a better balance which does justice to both the history of Israel and the interaction between God's people and the literature which is derived from their distinctive experience.

And thirdly, the use of critical Introductions has simply failed to relate the nature of the religious literature correctly to the community which treasured these writings as Scripture. Consideration of this dialectical interaction between the religious community and the development of its literature is missing when historical critical methods assume that a preferred historical reading of the OT is the key to its interpretation. Childs pointedly comments on the genre of the critical Introduction thus: 'It assumes the determining force on every biblical text to be political, social, or economic factors which it seeks to establish in disregard to the religious dynamic of the canon.' (12) In short, the fundamental issue which Childs is raising has to do with interpretational epistemology. How are we to understand the meaning of the biblical text today? What principles of interpretation should we use in determining the meaning of Holy Scripture? Which principles of interpretation should have priority and what is the philosophical/epistemological basis which informs exegetical procedures?

It is important to emphasise that Childs is not adopting an ahistorical approach to the OT texts; indeed, he is confirming an historical approach to the OT but, at the same time, he is posing the vital question: what is the nature of the

historical categories which are to be applied when interpreting the OT as Scripture? The history of the discipline of OT scholarship over the past two centuries has thrown up a false dichotomy between the objective and the confessional approach to the OT. As a result, there has been confusion in modern biblical study and the development of critical scholarship has been a mixed blessing. Childs observes, 'In my judgement, the critical issue which produced the confusion is the problem of the canon, that is to say, how one understands the nature of the Old Testament in relation to its authority for the community of faith and practice which shaped and preserved it.' (13)

Childs presents a resume of the history of canon from the early church through the medieval period and down to the modern times. He states that with the emergence of modern historical criticism there has been a concomitant reduction in the emphasis on, and the place given to, the concept of canon. The converse of this is also true; where writers have sought to hold to a significant role for the concept of canon, they have also tended to de-emphasise the role of historical criticism. This central polarity, Childs maintains, requires us to rethink the problem of Introduction so as to overcome the dialectical tension between the canon and historical biblical criticism. For Childs, the crucial issue is, can we understand the OT as canonical Scripture and at the same time, make full use of historical critical tools?

Childs addresses the problem of canon by determining what is exactly meant by the term 'canon'. (14) Despite the ambiguity of the term, Childs advances an account of the traditional view of canon and its resulting demise from critical study since the 18th century. In the search for a new consensus the works of a variety of scholars like Holscher, Freedman, Kline and Sanders are given in summary form. While Childs agrees that these scholars have shown insights and sound judgements regarding the concept of canon and its history, he is not fully convinced that a consensus has emerged to replace the traditional view of canon and/or the classic literary critical reconstruction of the history of canon which evolved in the 19th century. G. Holscher, according to Childs, adopted a narrow definition between the growth of the collection of Hebrew writings and the development of the concept of canon. However, Holscher assumed a narrow late rabbinic definition of the term canon and as a consequence,

failed to explain the forces which led to the collection of the writings and the authoritative function behind the final rabbinic form.

An opposing theory was posited by D. N. Freedman in that he believed that when literary works were compiled and published, some form of canonical status was accorded to them. Childs rejects this approach. 'By simply identifying the history of the literature's growth with the history of canonization Freedman has closed off any chance of understanding the special history of the book's growth and collection as canonical scripture which is the very issue at stake.' (15) Sid Z. Leiman's reconstruction of the history of OT works is based on the view that there was an unbroken succession of authoritative canonical writings from Moses to the close of the canon. The belief that the entire Pentateuch was canonized during the period of Moses is rejected by Childs on the grounds that his portrayal of the canonization process fails to take into account the complex history of the literature's development.

Childs acknowledges the bold attempt by James A. Sanders to reinterpret the history of the canon as an ongoing hermeneutical process discernible throughout Israel's history. Sanders advances the view that the canon is both stable and adaptable. It is stable in that it has an established structure and content: it is adaptable in that it addresses the community of faith in each new generation. Childs is well disposed to Sanders' move to broaden the definition of canon to cover a process extending throughout Israel's history which affected the shaping of the literature itself. But he parts company with Sanders in that he is critical of his existential categories by which he seeks to 'understand the growth of canon as a search for identity in times of crisis, oscillating between two poles of stability and adaptability.' (16) The crux of the matter for Childs is that the historical and theological forces which brought about the formation of the canon were of a different kind from the psychological and existential categories proposed by Sanders.

Childs concludes that the role of the canon in understanding the OT has proved to be a very difficult problem. He proposes to move the discussion forward by adopting a definition of the term 'canon' which he views having both a historical and a theological dimension. Sundberg's and Swanson's insistence on the distinction

between 'scripture' and 'canon' - (where 'scripture' means authoritative writings and 'canon' is restricted to a dogmatic decision through which the limits of Scripture are defined and fixed) - is regarded by Childs as being too narrow and limiting. To deem the term 'canon' as a dogmatic decision places too great an emphasis on one feature of the process and to maintain this distinction is to emphasise the final stages of a long and complex process which had been started in the pre-exilic period. 'Essential to understanding the growth of the canon is to see this interaction between a developing corpus of authoritative literature and the community which treasured it.' (17)

This constituent element in Childs' understanding of canon in highlighting the dialectical interaction between the Word of God and the community of faith is a central one in his approach to biblical hermeneutics. 'The reception of the authoritative tradition by its hearers gave shape to the same writings through a historical and theological process of selection, collecting and ordering.' (18) Therefore, the formation of the canon did not simply result from some very late confirmation of a body of writings as authoritative but involved a number of decisions which profoundly affected the shape of the books. And to sharply distinguish between 'scripture' and 'canon' is to obscure essential elements in the process. Thus, when Sanders views Israel's alleged search for identity as being at the heart of the canonical process, Childs sees this approach as turning the canonical process on its head by couching a basically theological phenomenon in anthropological terms. According to Childs this approach to canon 'replaces a theocentric understanding of divine revelation with an existential history.' (19)

It is clear from this observation that Childs' view of the canon and Sanders' differ in that Childs sees the theological and the historical factors as paramount in his understanding of the canonical process. He writes, 'Rather, the decisive force at work in the formation of the canon emerged in the transmission of a divine word in such a form as to lay authoritative claims upon the successive generations. . . . The heart of the canonical process lay in transmitting and ordering the authoritative tradition in a form which was compatible to function as scripture for a generation which had not participated in the original events of revelation.' (20) Childs emphatically indicates

that only when these historical and theological concerns are taken with great seriousness will justice be done to the interpretation of the biblical text. The usual practice of the historical critical Introduction in treating the canon in the end chapter is, in Childs' estimation, both misleading and deficient.

In depicting the possible relation between literary and canonical history, Childs sees both histories belonging together but not identical. Whatever may be the exact relationship, Childs points out that more intensive research is needed in this area, but he does make a key point at this juncture, one which runs through the canonical approach like a thread. 'Although non-religious factors (political, social and economic) certainly entered into the canonical process, they were subordinated to the religious usage of the literature by its function within a community.' (21) One question to pose here in passing is: how does Childs know this to be the case? Perhaps these political, socio-economic factors were very much to the fore at various times in the canonical process. These factors, among others, are held to be important parameters in biblical interpretation by postmodern interpreters like D. J. A. Clines. (22)

Childs concludes that his findings show that there was a genuinely historical development involved in the formation of the canon. Yet, the OT canon was brought into being through a complex historical process which is by and large inaccessible to critical reconstruction. If we have only skeletal evidence at our disposal to aid us in illuminating the canonical text, how may we proceed out of this hermeneutical impasse? Childs explains his approach to the canonical text in Ch. 3 which is entitled, 'Canon and Criticism'. His approach to the OT Scriptures has as its goal, '. . . to take seriously the significance of the canon as a crucial element in understanding the Hebrew scriptures, and yet to understand the canon in its true historical and theological dimensions.' (23) The canonical approach to the OT Scriptures, in Childs' view, is his response to the failure of the historical critical method to deal adequately with the canonical literature. He rejects any suggestion that his approach is ahistorical. Rather, he seeks to establish the nature of the Bible's historicity and to develop a historical approach which is commensurate with it.

The first major task of the canonical approach, as Childs sees it, is a descriptive

one. His purpose is to understand the peculiar shape and function of those books which constitute the Hebrew canon. Such a project does not demand or assume a particular stance of faith on the part of the reader. What is relevant though, is the literature which was derived from Israel's faith. The modern reader will undoubtedly have a religious position and can choose to identify with the canonical texts which are being studied. But the literature of Israel must be studied on its own merits as it has its own special history of reshaping and growth, and its own 'peculiar features must be handled in a way compatible to the material itself.' (24)

Childs moves on to what is the general thrust of his approach to OT interpretation. Critical methodology seeks to focus the attention of the interpreter on the pre-history of a multi-layered text, with the hope that one will be able to come close to the original text as possible. Not so with the canonical approach to biblical interpretation. 'Canonical analysis focuses its attention on the final form of the text itself.' (25) Thus, in exegetical practice, this statement has a very decisive implication in that the literature, as we have received it, has its own integrity. The text is not to be treated merely as a resource for obtaining information like political, sociological, economic or religious development. Canonical analysis studies the features of a particular set of religious texts in relation to the way they were used within the historical community of ancient Israel. 'To take the canonical shape of these texts seriously is to seek to do justice to a literature which Israel transmitted as a record of God's revelation to his people along with Israel's response.' (26)

To describe this approach to the OT Scriptures as an attempt to bring external, dogmatic categories to the task of interpreting the biblical text is firmly rejected by Childs. He contends that the canonical method seeks to work within the ambience of that interpretive structure which the text has received from those who formed and used it as sacred scripture. Interpreters will certainly disagree on the nature of the canonical shaping, but this will be an advantage when the variety of interpreters have a common understanding as to the nature of their hermeneutical task.

Since the canonical approach focuses attention in the final form of the text, it could be suggested that Childs' proposal is but another method of biblical study to be



added to the long line that has arisen in the wake of the 18th century Enlightenment. Childs does concede that his canonical approach has a shared interest with newer literary critical methods as in the 'newer criticism' of English studies, structural analysis and rhetorical criticism. But this approach to interpretation differs from these critical methods in that, 'it interprets the biblical text in relation to a community of faith and practice for whom it served a particular theological role as possessing divine authority.' (27) The canonical approach is therefore concerned to understand the nature of the theological shape of the text rather than seeking to detect and recover an original literary or aesthetic unity. Nor does the canonical study of the OT identify itself intrinsically with the traditional critical approach which seeks to evaluate the history of the text's formation. Childs insists on the final form of scripture because of the very special relationship between the text and the people of God. As he puts it, 'A corpus of writings which has been transmitted within a community for over a thousand years cannot properly be compared to inert sherds which have lain in the ground for centuries.' (28)

The canonical shape of the text reflects a history of encounter between God and Israel and it is the canon which serves to offer a descriptive analysis of this unique relationship. But why should one stage of the process be assigned a special significance? Is it not true to say that the earlier levels of the texts were once regarded as canonical as well? And why should these earlier levels of the text not be taken as seriously as the final form in biblical exegesis? Moreover, is it not the case that the history that emerges from a study of the growth of the text reveals Israel's development of a self-understanding which is vital to OT theology? Childs does not deny the force of these questions and to pursue them is part of a legitimate critical methodology. But if one fastens attention on them to the exclusion of his canonical proposals then he concludes that the exegete will not hear the full force of the meaning of the text. A much quoted sentence makes Childs' position clear, 'The significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation.' (29) And again he states, 'It is only in the final form of the biblical text in which the normative history has reached an end that the full effect of this revelatory history can

be received.' (30) The earlier stages of the development of the literature were often held to be canonically prior to the establishment of the final form. However, the canon did exercise a critical function in relation to the earlier stages. Some times the material passed unchanged; at other times, tradents sought to select, rearrange and expand the received tradition.

Final form study does not end in losing this historical dimension in its handling of the text. To distinguish the Yahwist source from the Priestly source in Pentateuchal criticism simply enables the interpreter to hear the combined texts with a new force and precision. Childs says, 'But it is the full, combined text which has rendered a judgement on the shape of the tradition and which continues to exercise an authority on the community of faith.' (31) Childs resists any exegetical move which shifts the canonical ordering or shaping of the literature by employing an overarching category like *Hellsgeschichte*. Important questions arise from this: how important is the significance of source criticism in final form exegesis? Does the employment of source or form criticism really enable the interpreter to hear the combined texts with a new force and precision, theologically speaking? These are vital questions and we will address them later in this thesis when we examine Childs' exegesis of Ex. 3 - 4.

Childs' enunciation of his interpretational proposals in IOTS only had immediate application to the OT, but he recognized that his position regarding the canonical approach to the Christian Bible would be incomplete without directing his attention to the NT literature. Childs spent the following five years researching this crucial area and in 1984 *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (NTCI) was published. (32) In customary fashion Childs outlines the role of canon in NT Introductions and offers an historical conspectus from the period of the Reformation. He describes the seminal influences and the shifts in perspective which occurred regarding the Introduction to canon. As he sets the scene for the modern period, he describes the dogmatic formulation of the role of canon which emerged by the end of the 17th century thus: 'The New Testament was seen as a collection of apostolic writings, universally acknowledged by the Church as authoritative in its entirety,

written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and guarding the truth of Christianity against all heresy in order to provide an eternal norm for church doctrine.' (33)

Childs gives an account of the work of a variety of scholars which need not concern us here save but to say that he concludes that the result of historical critical study right into the 20th century was that the NT canon is now regarded mainly as a post-apostolic development which sheds no real light for understanding the shaping of the NT itself. Though this approach to the NT canon gained widespread currency by the middle of the 20th century, Childs shows with scholars like von Campenhausen, Hoskyns, Moule and Koester, there has been a shift in perspective regarding the relation of Introduction to canon. And in this new situation Childs feels that there is a great challenge to develop a new approach to the discipline.

Childs affirms the view that the NT canon, as with the old, cannot be fully understood without attention being paid to both its historical and theological dimensions. To suggest a new approach to the discipline is not to return to a pre-Enlightenment understanding of the Bible. Childs does not regard the effects of the Enlightenment as being unhelpful in Bible study. 'Only someone who is unacquainted with the contribution which two hundred years of critical research has achieved could lightly disparage its significance.' (34) This is similar to his view regarding the OT. But with these undoubted insights accruing from modern critical methodology also comes some demerits. 'Yet along with its massive accomplishment lie major problems respecting its adequacy in handling the biblical text.' (35)

Childs enumerates several reservations. In the first instance, there is an assumption that every correct reading of the Bible must involve a historical critical approach. But can the role of critical methodology be universalized, or has it a more restricted role? The critical method proceeds on the basis that the biblical text must be put through a multi-layered sieve before it can yield its secrets. To establish the milieu of the text, probable date, authorship, provenance, audience and literary growth are the features Childs has in mind here. Childs is not disregarding these areas of concern as irrelevant, but he is fundamentally questioning their priority as perceived and used in biblical scholarship.

Secondly, Childs observes that the critical method rests 'on the assumption of a uniformly historical critical reading of the biblical text.' (36) But does the Bible not bear witness to a multi-dimension theological reality which cannot simply be understood through the constricting features of historical critical study? This observation is a clear reference to basic epistemological judgements as to how biblical interpretation should be conducted. As we have already seen, such a theological perception lies at the heart of Childs' exegetical proposals. The point can be put as follows: how can a theologically informed biblical text be understood today without approaching it with a theologically informed mind? Admittedly, having a theologically informed mind will not effectively guarantee that any exegesis of the text will of necessity always reveal its fuller riches. But, according to Childs, it is more likely that perceptive insights will be achieved by scholars who stand within the biblical tradition and whose minds are theologically sensitised within a community of faith and practice.

Childs' third observation considers the precedence given to historical considerations in biblical understanding. Critical Introductions, Childs notes, emphasise the approach which identifies the key to any text's meaning with an attempt to determine its historical origin. There are times when such insights do prove to be helpful but they can also restrict the hearing of 'other literary notes within a book which only sound from the synchronic level.' (37) Both historical and literary approaches have their place, Childs affirms, but they both can be useful or detrimental for interpretation depending upon how the method is applied to a given biblical text. Finally, Childs' observation regarding the historical critical method is a vital one and applies to both the interpretation of the Old and the New Testaments. Of the historical critical Introduction, he says that it, ' . . . has not done justice in interpreting the New Testament in its function as authoritative, canonical literature of both an historical and a contemporary Christian community of faith and practice.' (38) Literary or historical analysis of a text does not exhaust its possibilities, rather, the text calls for a 'theological description of its shape and function.' (39) And both the descriptive and constructive tasks of interpretation must be held together. In other words, Childs

states that in a new vision of the biblical text justice must be done to the demands of our own post-Enlightenment, and at the same time, to the confession of the Christian faith, 'for which the sacred scriptures provide a true and faithful vehicle for understanding the will of God.' (40)

Childs does not rule out the right of a pluralist reading of the Bible, yet, 'The theological issue turns on the Christian church's claim for the integrity of a special reading which interprets the Bible within an established theological context and toward a particular end, namely the discerning will of God, which is constitutive of the hermeneutical function of canon.' (41) Childs acknowledges that he uses the term 'canon' in a number of ways. 'Canon' can mean a fixed corpus of sacred literature which was deemed normative in the early church. 'Canon' can also refer to a particular theological construal of the tradition which was absorbed by the literature giving it its literary, historical and theological dimensions. And finally, the term 'canon' involves an interpretative activity which seeks to discover the truth of the gospel message in the present age; this hermeneutical intention thus seeks to distinguish between the time-conditioned and the transcendent, between past and present, and between the descriptive and the constructive.

In IOTS Childs had stressed the integrity of the final form text as being the object of interpretation. But he now modifies this approach by expanding his view that the final form of the text is not to be treated as a monolithic block. The biblical interpreter will proceed to discern the canonical, that is, the kerygmatic shaping of the text. When one takes the canonical view seriously, all biblical texts will not be treated on the same level. The canonical shaping will therefore render the perceived tradition in a variety of critical ways. But the starting point for biblical interpretation remains the same. 'Only by beginning with the final form can the peculiar features of a passage's intertextuality be discerned which is blurred if one first feels constrained to force the text through a critical sieve.' (42) With reference to the NT, Childs states that '...the entire biblical canon in the sense of the whole New Testament collection must remain the authoritative starting point for all exegesis.' (43) This will require a two-fold strategy; on the one hand, the interpreter will constantly strive to discover

fresh theological perceptions which will take cognizance of the variegated texture of biblical thought. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of the biblical exegete in dialectical relation to the modern world provides a forum for interactive understanding, analysis and application of the biblical text. So it cannot be said that the canonical approach is inherently static in nature.

We have observed that the primary interest of the canonical approach is the text's theological dimension and this is an observation which is forthrightly confirmed by Childs when he writes, '... the priority of the theological for the Christian Church is aggressively reaffirmed by the focus of the canon.' (44) The theological nature of Childs' hermeneutical enterprise is vividly demonstrated when he refers to the NT in these terms: 'These writings were preserved, not because of interesting historical, religious or sociological data, but solely for their theological role in speaking of God's redemption in Jesus Christ.' (45) From this it follows that the term 'canon' for Childs indicates a body of writings which were received as authoritative. Whence came this authority? 'The canon's authority, much like a creed, derives from its unique witness to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.' (46) It can, therefore, be said that Childs views the interpretation of the NT canon as a dynamic, interactive activity between the text and the reader and 'this interaction between text and reader comprises every true interpretation'. (47)

Critically decisive for this process of interpretation is the context in which it is carried on. The canon functions in a way which involves accepting that a received tradition has been shaped towards an end, namely 'engendering faith in the risen Lord of the scriptures.' (48) It is within this context of interpretation, or, as Gadamer would put it, this context of pre-understanding, where '... the modern Christian interpreter strives to discern how the time-conditioned, historical witness of the Bible becomes the medium of revelation of God's present and enduring will.' (49) The encounter between the testimony of the NT canon and the modern reader is constitutive of interpreting the biblical literature as a canonical rather than an antiquarian enterprise. Interpretation begins with the canonical form of the text and both the text's pre-history and post-history are subsidiary to the form deemed

canonical. The purpose of this interpretational enterprise is to illuminate the biblical writings which have been and continue to be received as authoritative by the community of faith.

The question arises: how is the interpreter to discern the 'canonical shape' of the text at the outset. This inevitably raises the further question as to the legitimacy of the role of historical critical methods in the application of the canonical approach as outlined by Childs. To postulate a specific, concrete historical referent does not intrinsically mean that the canonical features of the text will be held in tact. As Childs puts it, despite all the new information at our interpretational disposal, an undue emphasis on the use of historical critical methods could lead to the fact that '... the true theological witness of the text is rendered mute.' (50) However, '... it would be erroneous to infer that the canonical approach which is being outlined is opposed to historical criticism in principle.' (51) The historical critical method has a positive role to play in canonical interpretation as it aids the interpreter in sharpening his ability to detect and distinguish various voices within the text. While the detection of diversity within a text is not the high point in interpretation, it nevertheless remains an important factor in the intertextuality of the book. These comments are especially apposite in respect of the interpretation of Romans as Childs later points out.

The descriptive analysis which Childs presents of the approach of the biblical critic who employs historical critical methods and the practitioner of the canonical approach lucidly reveals the contrasts of position in biblical exegesis. The critic who assumes a posture of detachment outside the tradition under discussion and attempts to employ objective scientific description and analysis, seeks to assess the truth or error of the NT's time-conditionality. Conversely, the practitioner of the canonical approach stands within the received tradition, and well aware of his own finitude and the time-conditionality of the scriptures, strives to perceive what is to be learned from the message of the NT despite the historical groundings of both the text and the reader. 'The difference between the methods does not lie in an alleged polarity between tradition and criticism, but between the nature of an analytical approach and one which is consonant with the theological function of a normative religious canon.' (52)

The very fact of the existence of a NT canon points clearly to the fact that this material of the NT, ' . . . was shaped toward engendering faith and did not lie inert as a deposit of interrupted data from a past age.' (53) It is this emphasis on the theological dimension of biblical hermeneutics and the entire process of interpreting the NT which makes Childs' proposals so refreshing, and at the same time, so challenging in a contemporary context.

Following hard on the heels of the publication of NTCI, Childs' Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context. (OTTCC) appeared in 1985. (54) He set out to argue that a canonical approach to the interpretation of the OT Scriptures opens up a fruitful avenue along which to explore the theological dimensions of the biblical text. He claimed that his approach could, (i) contribute to solving many existing problems, and (ii) assign to the OT a more powerful role in the life of the Christian church. This volume presents Childs' understanding of OT theology in a less technical form than his earlier work.

Childs presents a synopsis of the present task of OT theology followed by a survey of the history of the discipline including reference to continuing problems in the field. He acknowledges that to write an OT theology is an awesome task, though he is convinced that a strong case can be made for the basic importance of such a theological enterprise. Just how such a task should proceed is an area of dispute as far as contemporary scholars are concerned, but germane to such a task is the question as to 'how theological reflection of the Old Testament relates to the prior analytical study of the biblical text which is generally subsumed under the rubric of the historical critical study of the Bible.' (55) It is Childs' contention that the canonical approach which he advances opens up a fresh and fruitful approach which sets out to explore the theological dimensions of the biblical text.

Childs, in customary fashion, sets the scene for launching his proposals. He gives a brief survey of the history of the discipline and reviews the continuing difficulties which have resulted in stalemate. At this point Childs addresses the problem by presenting an outline of his canonical approach as applied to OT theology. He submits that the discipline of OT theology is essentially Christian in outlook.



Failure to take cognizance of this enterprise as a Christian one has resulted in a great deal of confusion in its history. However, he points out that it is a highly complex and controversial matter to determine the exact shape of the discipline. In his view some past solutions have not been very successful. For example, the exegetical move in medieval theology whereby the OT was interpreted at metaphorical levels in order to accommodate references to Jesus Christ vitiated the canonical integrity of the passage in question. Placing the OT within fixed reference criteria of prophecy and fulfilment, suggesting that Christians should read and interpret the OT as if they were living in a pre-Christian setting, and proposing that Christians should read the OT as Jews and the NT as Christians, all impose serious limitations on the canonical OT within the Christian Bible.

Childs is well aware of the potential and acute difficulties of the placement of the OT with the NT from a Christian perspective. He affirms that the Christian canon upholds the integrity of the OT in its own right as Scripture of the Church, but it is set within 'a new canonical context in a dialectical relation with the New Testament.' (56) Biblical theology, as is commonly understood, can only be undertaken when both the OT and the New are held together in creative tension; and when this is done the procedure becomes an intrinsically Christian enterprise. Childs maintains that 'the Old Testament functions within Christian scripture as a witness to Jesus in its pre-Christian form'. (57) This does not involve Christianizing the OT by seeing it through the eyes of, or identifying it with, the NT witness. For Childs the OT must be heard on its own terms because 'the Christian church recognized the integrity of the Old Testament for its own faith within its canon of authoritative scripture.' (58) The God who revealed himself to Israel is the God and Father of Jesus Christ, and it is therefore necessary to hear the witness of Israel so that we can understand who the Father of Jesus Christ is. In a recent essay Childs writes: 'The Old Testament's discrete voice is still to be heard, but in concert with that of the New. The two voices are neither to be fused nor separated, but heard together. The exegetical task thus becomes one of doing justice to the unique sounds of each witness within the context of the entirety of the Christian Scriptures.' (59)

Childs therefore sees the task of biblical theology as the exploration of the revelation between the witnesses of the OT and the NT taken together, but how does the canonical approach operate in this theological context? As we have indicated in our earlier comments, Childs sees a canonical approach as a distinctively theological activity. 'It is a basic tenet of the canonical approach that one reflects theologically on the text as it has been received and shaped.' (60) To regard the final form of the text as 'tradition frozen in time' is not convincing for Childs as this gives the impression that the canonical text is static. Rather the canonical text is viewed by Childs as a theological witness and any attempt to fracture this by laying emphasis on the pre-history of the text is to be resisted. Childs writes in decisive terms thus, ' . . . the canonical approach to Old Testament theology is unequivocal in asserting that the object of theological reflection is the canonical writing of the Old Testament, that is, the Hebrew scriptures which are the received traditions of Israel.' (61)

The proposed canonical approach in the context of OT theology is not to be understood as a return to pre-critical interpretation: Childs confirms that ' . . . a canonical approach envisions the discipline of Old Testament theology as combining both descriptive and constructive features.' (62) In this respect, however, he is very clear on priorities. Modern study of the Bible 'is heavily influenced by the legacies of the Enlightenment. One implication of this is the recognition of the time-conditioned quality of both the form and the content of scripture. But, as Childs points out, the historical critical methods are also bound by their own time-conditioned quality:- ' . . . to take seriously a canonical approach is also to recognize the time-conditioned quality of the modern, post-Enlightenment Christian whose context is just as historically moored as any of its predecessors.' (63)

Central to the thesis of Childs' canonical approach is the stance which the interpreter assumes in facing the exegetical task of interpreting the OT texts. 'The canonical approach to Old Testament theology is insistent that the critical process of theological reflection takes place from a stance within the circle of received tradition prescribed by the affirmation of the canon.' (64) As far as Childs is concerned, the application of historical critical methods gives no guarantee that such a theological

perspective would be assured. Indeed, so much so that Childs regards one of the disastrous legacies of the Enlightenment to be the confidence displayed by those scholars who purported to stand outside the stream of time, armed only with rational powers, seeking to distinguish between truth and error. 'The canonical approach to Old Testament theology rejects a method which is unaware of its own time-conditioned quality and which is confident in its ability to stand outside, above and over against the received tradition in adjudicating the truth or lack of truth of the biblical material according to its own criteria.' (65)

Childs acknowledges the divine revelation in the OT and this, he asserts, cannot be separated from the literary witness which the historical community of Israel gave it. Succinctly put, 'The canonical approach views history from the perspective of Israel's faith construal.' (66) If it is a choice between regarding OT theology as a faith construal of history (Geschichte) or a reconstructed scientific history (Historie), then Childs has no doubts about the priority of a faith construal in his canonical approach. It is evident that when one approaches the task of theological reflection from a canonical context, there is (i) a received tradition in which interpretation takes place, and (ii) 'a faithful disposition by hearers who await the illumination of God's Spirit.' (67) The OT interpreter seeks to understand how the bible functions as a vehicle of God's truth. 'By accepting the scriptures as normative for the obedient life of the church, the Old Testament theologian takes his stance within a circle of tradition, and identifies himself with Israel as the community of faith.' (68) Childs' canonical approach in the context of OT theology is, therefore, convinced of the ongoing nature of biblical interpretation in the contemporary life of the church. The OT scriptures, forming as they do an important and very substantial segment of the Christian scriptures, serve as, ' . . . a continuing medium through which the saving events of Israel's history are appropriated by each new generation of faith. Thus God's activity of self-disclosure is continually being extended into the nature of revelation through scripture.' (69)

Finally, we shall briefly consider the canonical approach in the context of biblical theology as adumbrated in Childs' *magnum opus*, Biblical Theology of the Old

and New Testaments which was published in 1992. (70) This monumental work was the natural culmination of Childs' lifelong interest in biblical theology. The sheer mass of the material covered by Childs in this work is a clear indication that he recognizes the awesome task of constructing a new biblical theology in the prevailing hermeneutical climate. Childs is under no illusions as to the immense problems which will have to be overcome if such a venture is to be regarded with any measure of success. This work is therefore not offered as a definitive statement on the subject; rather, what we have here is 'an attempt to do no less than reconceptualize the nature of the study of the Bible in relation to Christian theology' (71), a view which is reflected in the book's sub-title, 'Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible.'

How then does Childs envisage the task of biblical theology from the perspective of a canonical approach? At the very commencement of Part 2. Chapter 1 he states that, 'Biblical Theology is by definition theological reflection on both the Old and New Testament. It assumes that the Christian Bible consists of a theological unity formed by the canonical union of both testaments.' (72) This emphasis on the importance of both testaments in canonical interpretation rejects out of hand any attempt to accommodate a Marcionite/Gnostic type of reductionism. The central task of biblical theology is 'to reflect on the whole Christian Bible with its two very different voices, both of which the church confesses bear witness to Jesus Christ.' (73) Childs is aware of the difficulties which occur when the exegete seeks to interpret the OT alongside the New, but nothing less than doing full justice to the canonical relationship of the two testaments within a Christian context will be good enough. Any attempt to bring the OT into conformity with the New, in particular by the use of Christian allegory, is to be rejected because such a move refuses to hear and respect the canonical integrity of the OT on its own terms. 'Yet the challenge of Biblical Theology is to engage in the continual activity of theological reflection which studies the canonical text in detailed exegesis, and seeks to do justice to the witness of both testaments in the light of its subject matter who is Jesus Christ.' (74)

In Childs' view a distinctive feature of the canonical approach to biblical theology is the interpretational move from the Christian Bible as witness, to the

subject matter (res) of that witness. Because biblical theology seeks to come to terms with the reality to which the text points, there is here a move which goes beyond the historical moorings of the text. As a consequence, the accusation is often made that such a hermeneutical paradigm is ahistorical, idealistic and abstract. Childs rejects this suggestion by stating that the heart of the hermeneutical enterprise is Christological: ' . . . its content is Jesus Christ and not its own self-understanding or identity.' (75) As there is an interpretational move from the biblical witness to the divine reality, so also there is a movement in the reverse direction, from the divine reality to the biblical witness.; ' . . . there is a legitimate place for a move from a fully developed Christian theological reflection back to the biblical texts of both testaments.' (76)

Childs is not advocating a simplistic biblicism, nor will he countenance an approach to the OT which regards it as subordinate to the New for that would diminish its theological significance. Such an approach undercuts the continuing role and relevance of the OT as Christian scripture. It is important for Childs to hear the whole of Christian scripture in the light of the full reality of God in Jesus Christ. Within this dynamic understanding of biblical theology the role of the history of interpretation assumes its true significance within the exegetical enterprise. 'The history of interpretation serves as a continual reminder that biblical interpretation involves far more than 'explanation' but demands a serious wrestling with the content of scripture.' (77) Being conversant with the history of interpretation will act as an important corrective, especially in showing that there is a distance between the interpreter and the text which will impinge on the reader's hearing of the text. But this recognition should not lead to cultural relativism, rather it should lead to 'a profounder grasp of the dynamic function of the Bible as the vehicle of an ever fresh Word of God to each new generation.' (78) Readings of scripture which come from a mature Christian theological perspective, such as Milton's work on Genesis, 'illustrate in a profound way the ability of creative resonance of the text to illuminate concrete communities of faith through the study of scripture.' (79) In this sense a modern biblical theology provides a proper context for understanding the Bible, and this context, Childs asserts, is of a very different order when compared with that of modern

critical exegesis.

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In summary, it would be helpful to outline the salient features of Childs' canonical approach.

- The underlying conviction of Childs' approach to biblical interpretation is that the relation between the historical critical study of the Bible and its theological use as religious literature needs to be completely rethought.
- The concept of canon (displaced by the Enlightenment) must be brought back into the study of the Old and New Testaments as Holy Scripture. The notion of canon was not, as some have stated, an arbitrary and late imposition on the Old Testament texts by religious tradents. Rather, canon is a term which refers to a complex historical process which led to the collating, sifting and ordering of texts to serve an authoritative function as Scripture within the continuing community of faith. As such, this process has decisive hermeneutical significance.
- Canonical analysis is concerned with understanding the theological shape of the final form. The major purpose of biblical exegesis is the interpretation of the final form of the text; the study of the earlier dimensions of historical development should serve to bring the final stage of redaction into sharper focus. The significance of the final form is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation; diachronic study of the pre and post-history of the text are important and necessary steps in the process of biblical interpretation, but ultimately they are subordinate to the final form.
- Historical critical methods have lead to undoubted insights since their inception, but they are inadequate in handling the biblical text as Holy Scripture. Childs' approach demands that historical critical tools be used to detect various voices within the text and to illuminate the canonical text as we have it; these writings were not preserved as a source book for historical, religious or sociological data, but

primarily for their theological role in revealing the nature and character of God.

- The canonical approach is not to be viewed as another historical critical technique like form criticism and source criticism. Rather, it seeks to establish the appropriate context for interpretation. In modern critical study the Bible has been removed from a specifically Christian context of interpretation. While Childs accepts the legitimacy of pluralism in biblical interpretation, the Scriptures must be interpreted in relation to their function within the community of faith which actively received, shaped, and transmitted them. It is the church which provides the context for its correct interpretation for faith and practice. Childs stands within the tradition of the church which has recognized the biblical writings in their canonical form to be normative for its faith, a channel of life through which God instructs and admonishes his people.

- Childs vigorously defends the view that the Christian Scriptures consists of two parts, an Old and a New Testament. The goal of the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures is to understand both Testaments as witness to the self-same divine reality who is the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The canonical approach is therefore an exegetical and theological enterprise which offers the prospect of bridging the gap between Bible and theology.

Childs' programme has been developed over the past three decades and has inevitably been adjusted in the light of further thought and criticism. While we have confined our attention in this chapter to IOTS (1979), NTCI (1984), OTTCC (1985), and BTONT (1992), Childs, in fact, started developing his ideas on the canonical approach in the 1960s. Especially significant was his programmatic essay, "Interpretation in Faith" (80) followed by his book Biblical Theology in Crisis (81). Then in 1974 he published his Exodus commentary in which he sought to apply the canonical approach in the context of practical exegesis. It will not be our intention at the present moment to delineate the way(s) in which Childs has developed his canonical approach; this aspect of Childs' work will emerge in the course of the next chapter in

which we will examine a variety of critical responses to Childs' work. And it is to this that we now turn.



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## **CHAPTER 2.**

**Critical Perspectives On Childs'**

**Hermeneutical Programme.**

## Chapter 2

### Critical Perspectives on Childs' Hermeneutical Programme.

Childs' advocacy of his canonical approach has generated considerable comment among biblical scholars both sympathetic and antagonistic. We shall now consider responses to Childs' work from several scholars who have exposed the canonical approach to rigorous and incisive scrutiny. Perhaps the best known of Childs' critics is James Barr who has described himself as 'A severe opponent of the canonical approach.' (1) Barr's most sustained attack on the canonical approach is to be found in his Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism. (2) For the purpose of this analysis of Barr's critique it would seem unnecessary to review every facet and detail of the wide range of issues which he raises and the analogies which he draws on. Rather, we shall focus on the salient features of Barr's approach.

At the outset I wish to draw attention to the use of analogies which Barr employs in the scrutiny of Childs' work. For instance, he draws analogies from the theology of K. Barth, form-criticism and literary critical theory in evaluating Childs' exegetical proposals. But it is important to note that the utilisation of analogy does not in itself establish the validity of one's argumentation. This is particularly the case in one instance where Barr states that, ' . . . Childs' valuation of traditional critical scholarship is almost exactly the same valuation attached to it by conservative/fundamentalist circles.' (3) Childs sees this opinion as playing a major role in Barr's negative reaction to his hermeneutical proposals as set out in his IOTS (1979). Barr observes that Childs' work will give succour to fundamentalists and that, by implication, will render the canonical approach suspect. To state that Childs' proposals have an alleged conservative bias is to say nothing intrinsically significant about them. The key issue is not whether Childs' work is like any other work in this respect or that; it is whether Childs' proposals for the reading of biblical texts successfully and convincingly establishes a coherent paradigm in biblical hermeneutics. And that can only be ascertained by critical discernment and balanced evaluation of his proposals. Childs' response to Barr's comment is direct, 'I suppose that if one has a fixation on Fundamentalism and considers it as a major threat to

serious biblical scholarship, then any measure of comfort would automatically suffice to condemn a position. I would have thought a book should be judged on its merits and not from its possible misuse.'(4) In a recent interview with the author, Childs said that Barr was following his own agenda on this matter. He went on, 'With Barr, one of his criticisms was that I was lending support to Fundamentalists. My response was that that had not happened. I have gotten no support from conservative groups. They hold me in great suspicion. So that is Barr's problem, and not theirs. I would be happy to get more positive support from the various sides. I do not regard that as a serious charge. Barr just didn't do his homework there. In terms of information he was wrong.' (Appendix G. 39) On this issue it is difficult not to agree with Childs; to categorise scholars as liberal or conservative is a procedural tactic which obfuscates rather than enlightens.

Barr does however advance perceptive comments on Childs' work. He says he was initially favourably disposed to the general movement known as 'canonical criticism'. He published an article in 1974 (5) which was very sympathetic to the general approach to canonicity and the final form of the text. Barr continued to be well disposed to the movement until the publication of Childs' IOTS(1979). 'The effect of Childs' Introduction was to convince me that the programme of canonical criticism was essentially confused and self-contradictory in its conceptual formulation.' (6)

Barr first of all seizes on Childs' use of the term "canon". He outlines three definitions of canon. Canon 1 means, in its usual sense, the list of books which, taken together, comprise Holy Scripture; and this is a fact universally attested in all branches and traditions of Christianity. Canon 2 is different from Canon 1 in that there is an emphasis on the final form of the text rather than on the early formative elements out of which the book was formed. Thus, the literary work which stands complete at the hands of the final editor has precedence over the prehistory and sources of the text. To a canonical critic like Childs it is quite in order to search for and identify the early stages of a book; but this is a very different context from that of coming to the book(s) as Holy Scripture. Theologically and liturgically, the final form is what really matters for Childs. This observation of Barr is true, but it must be borne in

mind however, that in Childs' view, the final form is to be understood in the light of its prehistory. This is an aspect of Childs' work which will occupy our attention at a later stage in this study.

Finally, Barr states that Canon 3 can be identified with the term "holistic" which means that this understanding of 'canon' is more of a perspective or a way of looking at texts. The community of faith submits itself to the canonical authority of Scripture and looks at Scripture viewed as a whole as it has come down to us. There is therefore in Canon 3 a principle of finality and authority. Biblical texts are meant to be understood on the basis that their meaning is to be determined within the totality of the text.

Barr sees Canon 1 as having a strong affinity with the Reformation interpreters in that they stressed the oneness of Scripture. Canon 2 and Canon 3, with their emphasis on the final text, have close parallels with some approaches to modern literary theory, where the previous sources, stages and editions along with the historical boundaries of the text and authorial intentions, are largely irrelevant to the interpretation of the literary work. (This is where Childs differs from modern literary theory; he does take cognizance of these factors in his approach, though they are not assigned a role of paramount importance). Barr observes that canonical criticism flourishes in a context of cultural and literary trends where a shift of emphasis from historical critical study of a text to approaching it as a synchronic entity in its own right is discernible. In this respect, Childs' canonical approach can be seen as an emerging interpretative interest set against the background of sociological, cultural, literary and theological realities, much in the same way that other historical movements like the Reformation theology of the 16th century, and the biblical theological movement of the mid 20th century have emerged.

According to Barr, Canons 1, 2, and 3 are all put together by canonical criticism, but he is quick to point out that they are very different and at times this leads to mutual conflict in their usage. The strategy of canonical criticism lumps them (sic) together, because it is thought that all three have alike been neglected in scholarship, and this gives a unitary character to a scholarly programme which

demands more attention to all three.' (7) Barr holds that all three aspects of the word 'canon' are held by canonical critics to be good things, but it has not been noticed that these different meanings attached to 'canon' function in different ways. It is therefore in this area of terminological meanings ascribed to the word "canon" which has, for Barr, produced 'systematic confusion'. (8)

Now it is certainly true that Childs' usage of the term "canon/canonical" is not always characterised by terminological exactitude. Sometimes these terms are used by Childs in a diversity of ways that is annoying. B. Metzger has pointed out that the word "canonical" in Childs' NTCI (1984) is qualified by almost thirty different words. (9) Such a variety of assigned meanings to the word "canon" does not make for coherence and clarity when one is seeking to present what is widely regarded as a new conceptual framework for biblical interpretation. Childs has recognized that his understanding and usage of the term "canon" is a recurring theme in criticisms of his proposals. He has responded by saying that some of the misunderstanding of parts of his IOTS emanate from replacing his broad use of the term "canon" with a much narrower traditional usage. Hence, Childs claims that the force of his argument has been missed. These terms "canon/canonical" can be regarded as a convenient shorthand for his overall approach which is sharply focused on the vital issue of the relationship of the Bible to a community of faith.

Childs has conceded that some of his formulations need improvement and more precision, but in his review of Barr's Holy Scripture he claims that the level of Barr's misunderstanding of his position is disturbing. 'I feel strongly that Barr has misconstrued my approach and consistently read my book against the grain.' (10) And this is the crux of the matter. One could easily be taken up with the definition of terms and phrases surrounding the word "canon", but I feel that Barr does not focus the debate on the significant issues that are at the centre of Childs' concern, which is to reformulate the classic Christian understanding between the Bible and the Church so that the Bible can function as a witness to the reality of God in Christianity. It is this deep concern of Childs to establish a context and perspective for interpreting Holy Scripture that is not fully appreciated by Barr. The context for interpreting the



Scriptures is one of faith in the corporate life and witness of the Christian church in the modern world; and at the centre of this living faith is the use and interpretation of Holy Scripture as the Word of God.

Childs contends that when Barr offers the three different usages of the term "canon: and proceeds to separate and analyse each of these alleged usages in isolation, he misses the major phenomenon for which he, Childs, uses the term. What Childs is proposing can be explained without any reference to the term "canon" As Childs puts it, 'I feel that the complexity of the process being described within the OT has been underestimated, and that one is asking for an algebraic solution to a problem requiring calculus.'(11)

In the very early history of Israelite society, Childs argues, there emerged a religious understanding of Israel's traditions which found expression in oral, literary and redactional stages of the growth of the material. Eventually it reached a fixed form of relative stability. 'This religious interpretation involved a peculiar construal which sought to give the developing material a shape which could be appropriated by successive generations.' (12) The process had no overarching hermeneutic to bring it to an end, but the canonical shaping which did ensue did not occur in a historical vacuum. Rather, Israel sought to bear witness to this multi-layered text of the OT which 'bears eloquent testimony to this process.'(13) Childs thus broadens the term "canon". 'to encompass the complex process involved in the religious usage of tradition which extended far back in Israel's history and exerted an increasing force in the post-exilic period.' (14) In his more recent BTONT (1992) Childs refers to his usage of "canonical" as a cipher to encompass the various and diverse factors involved in the formation of the literature. He further elaborates that, ' the concept of canon was not a late, ecclesiastical ordering which was basically foreign to the material itself, but that canon consciousness lay deep within the formation of the literature.' (15)

A major criticism made by Childs with reference to the term "canon" as understood (misunderstood) by Barr is that Barr reads IOTS using his own narrow and traditional definition of canon. Consequently, the force of Childs' argument is badly misconstrued and the central suggested hermeneutical concern is rendered

inoperative. Thus, when Barr states, 'Scripture is essential; canon is not.' (16), Childs regards this observation as meaningless in the context of his argument. As one writer has put it, 'The incommensurability of the paradigm Barr uses with that of Childs tends to negate many of Barr's criticisms of Childs. As a result, one gets the impression that both scholars are talking round each other.'(17)

Another area of concern which Barr fastens on is the role and function of historical critical methodology in the canonical approach of Childs. Barr sees himself standing in the tradition of the historical critical paradigm which arose out of, and has developed since, the Enlightenment of the 18th century. At the heart of this approach to the study of the Bible lies the belief that since the Bible is a collection of ancient documents, the essentials of biblical interpretation are best assured by obtaining accurate historical awareness and understanding of these documents. Thus, whatever means fall to the scholar should be used in order to reconstruct that historical context and so facilitate the placement of the document within its appropriate setting. More precisely stated, the phrase 'the historical critical method' is, in the words of M. Hengel, ' . . . a necessary collection of the 'tools' for opening up past events; that is, it is not a single, clearly defined procedure, but rather a mixture of sometimes very different methods of working.'(18)

Today, modern biblical exegetes have a plethora of methodologies and approaches to Bible study at their disposal which is unprecedented in the history of biblical scholarship. Textual criticism, tradition history, source criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism; all of these are well known techniques in the repertoire of the biblical guild. Latterly some scholars are opening up lines of communication between biblical and literary studies. Feminist interpreters are now raising hermeneutical issues which have to be addressed, and there are those who are seeking out subversive texts, while others are deconstructing apparently respectable texts for all their worth. And this is not to mention rhetorical criticism, structuralism, and the materialist readings which bring into the area of biblical interpretation sociological and anthropological categories. There is a hermeneutical pluralism in biblical studies as never before. As Childs, along with many others, has pointed out,

the biblical guild is now so 'shattered and fragmented' that the integrity of the discipline is threatened. (Appendix G. 15) Writing on the state of OT studies as it has developed over the past thirty years, J. Barton writes, 'We seem to have moved from a pluralism in which anyone of broad sympathies should rejoice, to what amounts to a breakdown in communication between experts in what are perceived not as complementary but as competing, even mutually exclusive, interests.' (19) As a consequence of these developments in biblical interpretation, the Bible, at least in the guild of biblical scholars has become, 'increasingly detached from an ecclesiastical context and transferred to a secular and historically-oriented university context.' (20) This is a problem area to which we shall later return.

Meanwhile let us resume the Barr/Childs exchange. In his article review of IOTS, Barr makes the observation that Childs' understanding of Deutero-Isaiah within the new context of the book of Isaiah, where it is lifted out of its original context and placed on a more metaphorical and universal semantic level, is both suggestive and promising. But, Barr goes on, 'Could it not, however, count as redaction criticism and thus as an extension of existing historical methods?' (21) Childs however, is not happy with the term 'canonical criticism' which Barr uses to describe his canonical approach. As we have already indicated in the previous chapter, Childs is not positing a new critical method at all. What he is attempting is to establish the appropriate context for interpretation.

Barr asserts that Childs leaves us in no doubt that canon is a good thing. He says that Childs' IOTS is 'an utterance of entire approval of the idea of canon: everything about canons, canonicity, canonical form is good.' (22) This, for Barr, leads Childs to de-emphasize the value of historical exegesis the result of which is, 'to contrast the weaknesses and antinomies of historical criticism on the one hand and the virtues of the canonical reading on the other.' (23) According to Barr, Childs depicts historical criticism in rather dark colours; his deep disillusionment with historical study is made very apparent. In this instance, Barr's rhetorical remarks are not helpful in seeking to understand Childs' concerns. Nowhere in Childs' writings can he be observed painting historical criticism in dark colours; rather, his task is to

explore the most appropriate role for historical methods in biblical interpretation. But Barr is certainly correct in drawing our attention to historical criticism in the work for it raises vital questions about interpretation in general.

At the centre of this debate regarding the use of historical critical methods in biblical interpretation lies profound epistemological issues. Barr recognizes this and sees Childs as advocating the view that the exegete must not take up a hermeneutical base extrinsic to the text. Barr writes, 'A truly theological reading of scripture, he seems to think, must be based not on any reconstructed entity outside scripture, or on any selection within it, but on the totality of canonical scripture alone.' (24) This comment shows that Barr has not fully grasped an essential point in Childs' writing, i.e., Barr fails to appreciate the importance of the community of faith that seeks to live by the scriptural witness. The notion of "witness" is vital to Childs' thought as it refers to an anterior reality, namely, the reality of God.

There is no doubt that Childs emphasises the failure of historical critical methods to deal adequately with, and to do justice to, the canonical literature of the OT. But he is not the only voice in this field as many have expressed serious doubts as to the adequacy of these tools in theological interpretation. More recently Childs said, "The problem comes about when one says what the critical method sees is the only reality; so, I think our historical method can help us in understanding historical questions. It is a very useful tool. It is when one brings the dogma in by saying there is no reality apart from that which this tool can measure. This is the problem." (Appendix G. 1). To the question, do the historical critical methods deal with the issue of theological truth?, for example, in the OT, it says that 'God is Holy.' Can historical critical tools confirm or deny this?, Childs gave the answer, "No, that is what they cannot do. The historical critical methods do not raise this question. Ultimately, historical methodology is so inadequate. It has its limits. As D. Steinmetz astutely observes. ' . . . the historical critics share a proclivity to defer the truth endlessly.' (Today, 1980, p.38).' (Appendix G. 2) In Barr's critique of Childs he does not consider this kind of question which is essentially a theological question. Of course, one does not wish to drive a disjunctive wedge between theological and historical

considerations, but as Childs says, 'There are different kinds of referentiality. At times, historical referentiality is absolutely important, at other times it is minor. And in any case, what does historical referentiality mean?' (Appendix 9.3)

Childs insists that his canonical approach is not a non-historical reading of the Bible. When modern exegetes come to the text of the Bible they will come to it with a wide range of extrinsic referents at hand. Childs, however, advocates a different approach. 'It begins with the recognition that a major literary and theological force was at work in shaping the present form of the Hebrew Bible.' (25) This approach recognizes the essential theological nature of biblical interpretation, but it could be argued that the real starting point for biblical interpretation is from within the context of the reality of the Christian faith today.

Be that as it may, Barr maintains that all theological interpretation has worked with extrinsic hermeneutical data. Augustine and Calvin are cited by Childs as examples of better interpreters of the Psalms than modern scholars because they stand firmly within the canonical context. Barr rejects this view by stating that these interpreters, 'had exactly what Childs forbids, a clearly worked-out theological system as extrinsic hermeneutical datum.' (26) Barr goes on to make this observation, 'Moreover, the essential extrinsic datum, the basic structure of faith and religion of Israel, is not a posterior interpretation gained from scripture but an anterior reality through which scripture as a secondary product was generated.' (27)

It is clear that both of these scholars are poised at different ends of the interpretational linear spectrum. Childs is adopting a position in interpreting the biblical text which assumes that proper discernment in interpretation will be assured when the interpreter is conscious of the relationship between the community of faith and the theologically conditioned writings which were given a normative function and authoritative status in the life of that community. Barr comes to biblical interpretation within the context of modern critical study, which has at its disposal multifarious methodological tools, neither one nor the other being hailed as the lynch-pin of interpretation. All critical methods have their usefulness and Barr makes no claim that any one of these methods should be accorded a privileged status.

Nevertheless, in the Preface of Barr's first major book, he said, 'It is a main concern of both scholarship and theology that the Bible should be soundly and adequately interpreted.' (28) In a more recent volume of essays in honour of Barr, one contributor stated that this sentence (sic), '. . . set forth the objective that has guided his career through more than three decades of biblical scholarship.' (29) Without doubt Barr has made considerable contributions to biblical scholarship, but he does not clearly indicate in this context of debate what is meant by "sound" and "adequate" interpretation. For Barr, the historical critical paradigm is foundational to the interpretational enterprise as it can act as an important corrective enabling the scholar to pursue the truth wherever it may lead. It provides checks and balances. (30) But Childs is not saying that historical critical methods are to be dismissed and replaced by adopting a thoroughgoing theological stance. What Childs is maintaining is that it is simply not the case that the more historical and literary knowledge we acquire, the better we are able to understand the biblical text. One must also remember that modern Bible criticism achieved self-definition by defining itself in opposition to ecclesiastical approaches to the text, a view which R. P. Carroll has recently restated.(31) Childs wants to overcome that opposition, retaining genuine insights of historical critical techniques, but reintegrating the Bible and faith. (In the context of the Jewish faith, the American scholar, J. D. Levenson is pursuing a similar approach.) (32)

Of course, one has always to be careful in the use of the term "theology": it needs careful definition. To give an example, in interpreting the Elijah narratives, Childs refers to the view held by some scholars that the Ugaritic parallels offer the key to interpreting these narratives. According to this view what appears to be a historical narrative is really nothing more than a construct of ancient mythological patterns transferred from one deity to another. Childs fundamentally questions this approach to the story. 'The initial problem is that it seriously threatens the integrity of the biblical story. The interpreter appears to know the purpose of the story without the need of closely studying it.' (33) In this study Childs goes on to offer an interpretation of the narrative and also investigates how his reading of I Kings is affected by being

placed within the larger context of the Book of Kings.

Barr concedes that some of Childs' examples of his approach show promise and insight. In particular, he recognizes that one of Childs' better examples of the canonical approach is his understanding of Deutero-Isaiah. But even here, perhaps alternative explanations are possible. If the historical tradents had wished to make Deutero-Isaiah into an eternal message, why not make it into a separate book? perhaps Deutero-Isaiah was detached from its original historical setting and raised to a new level of meaning, not simply because it was joined to First Isaiah but because this came about as a result of a general religious and interpretational change. The possibility of alternative explanations - and Barr gives many more examples - for the canonical phenomena he seeks to explain points to a weakness in Childs' proposals. When one postulates about the motives of the biblical tradents as to their hermeneutical concerns, especially bearing in mind the paucity of evidence, one cannot be sure of the issue. Certainly a passage such as Ecclesiastes 12: 9-14 displays a hermeneutical concern for the interpretation of Qoheleth by the community of faith, but this is an unusual example. Generally speaking, the Bible is silent on the processes which formed it. Childs' explanation is not entirely implausible but in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it must remain open to debate.

Barr's conclusion is that OT scholarship deserves to have a corrective along the lines suggested by Childs. The final form of the biblical texts needs more attention paid to it by scholars and the internal forces and relations of the material, as opposed to its connection with extrinsic forces, need more sharply focused scrutiny than they have received in the past. Thus far, Barr is in agreement with Childs. But a canonical reading of Holy Scripture goes much further than this. In the process of Barr's assessment of Childs' hermeneutical programme, profound epistemological methodologies in biblical interpretation emerge. The best that Barr can see in Childs' work is that scholars will find some of Childs' insights helpful, after they separate them from the framework of canonical interpretation. Hence, the value of a canonical reading will be assured when it combines with other modes of reading and, where appropriate, corrected by these other approaches. Barr offers the view that Childs'

IOTS could well count as a major landmark in modern OT study, but only after his proposals are reassessed and pressed farther. The suggestion might appeal to some scholars, but it is very unlikely to meet with Childs' approval!

John Barton's book, Reading the Old Testament introduces the reader to various methodologies employed in OT studies. (34) The book has three aims: (i) to survey current methods of biblical study, showing how they are related to one another and what goals they are meant to achieve; (ii) to set OT study against the background of non-biblical literary criticism to which it has always been related though with a time-lag; and (iii) to argue a case against the assumption that there is one 'correct' method of OT criticism which will lead to the true meaning of the text. Barton looks at several established methods of study, e.g., literary, form, and redaction criticism all of which he sees as aimed at achieving literary competence; but none of these methods is self-sufficient as he shows in a case study of Ecclesiastes.

In addressing the canonical approach of Childs, Barton first of all expounds his understanding of it in Ch. 6. According to Barton, Childs' primary thesis is that the historical critical methods that evolved from the Enlightenment of the 18th century are not satisfactory theologically when applied to the study of the biblical texts. These methods are principally concerned with what the text meant. Childs is certainly concerned with meaning in this sense, but he is also concerned with the question: what does the text mean today? Barton observes, 'Childs' canonical method begins with the datum that the Old Testament as we now have it is part of Scripture, and seeks to interpret it with that always in mind.' (35)

The crucial question, as Childs sees it, is: What does the text in its final form have to say to modern Christians? 'The meaning which is 'canonical' for the Christian is the meaning the text has when it is read as part of the canon with full allowance made for the other texts that also form part of the canon, in their overall, coherent pattern.' (36) Barton, thus far, demonstrates that he has sought to sympathetically understand the gist of Childs' concerns. He goes on to recognize that Childs' approach constitutes 'a new proposal as to how biblical texts ought to be read, as opposed to being interested in what authors meant by them.' (37) Barton contends that this



approach to reading the biblical text represents a decisive break with traditional methods of biblical criticism. It is at this point that I feel Barton's understanding of Childs is not correct. Childs is not abandoning critical methods nor has he cast them aside, or declared them redundant. Indeed, Childs sees it as a primary precondition that one must first have an adequate understanding of historical criticism before one does theological work. He does not advocate going back to pre-critical interpretation; quite simply, he wants to employ historical critical methods where they are appropriate to biblical interpretation."Let us put it this way; the historical and form critical methods set certain rules that determine what they can see. It's like a film, they can only see certain things." (Appendix Q1)

Barton states that Childs understands the canonical approach as 'different in kind from all previous methods.' (38), and confirms that 'I shall strongly support Childs' claim to be original, but shall argue that the most original parts of his thesis are also the most questionable.' (39) It is unfortunate that Barton often refers to the 'canonical approach' as the 'canonical *method*', or 'canonical criticism' because this is a description which Childs disavows, a fact which Barton openly acknowledges. (40) As we reported earlier, what Childs is trying to establish is not another critical method to add to the litany of those presently available, but the appropriate context in which interpretation can take place. Moreover, Childs nowhere in his writings claims that his proposals are original, as Barton asserts. In fact, what Childs is seeking to do is to recover something that is lost rather than advance something which is decisively new in biblical interpretation. More specifically, he is attempting to recover a more truly traditional Christian approach, which characterised both the early Church Fathers, the Reformers, and scholars like Kähler and Barth.

Childs' approach does not represent a step into the past; he is very conscious that in every period the questions, methods, and possibilities in which biblical study is cast arise from the sociointellectual climate in which the work is done. He comes to the biblical text as a Christian scholar who has been thoroughly trained in the critical historical methodologies. What he is attempting to do is nothing less than to maintain the integrity of the Bible for the Church in the light of historical criticism. Barton in

this respect does catch the central concern of Childs when he states that the canonical approach is conceived as a *theological* mode of study. 'It is an attempt to heal the breach between biblical criticism and theology, and it assumes (at least for the purpose of the method) that the interpreter is not a detached, neutral critic free from religious commitment, but a believer, trying to apply the biblical text to the contemporary life of the Church.' (41) This assessment is very close to the mark.

Barton, however, seeks to situate the canonical approach of Childs within the discipline of 'literary criticism' rather than relate it to the realm of the historical study of the text. But this is a suggestion which would be rejected by Childs, and Barton acknowledges this. (42) As Childs said recently, "Because this is material {biblical text} that has been lived by a community, I am very much concerned with this density behind the text. I am much concerned with the text itself. I mean, the text is not just a story. I want to know what the story tells us about God." (Appendix 9. 20) Barton goes further by suggesting that three hallmarks of the 'New Criticism' - (i) emphasis on the text itself rather than as a vehicle for expressing the author's ideas, (ii) indifference to authorial intention, and (iii) concern for the integration of individual texts into a literary canon, which contributes to their meaning, - stand very close to Childs' proposals. (43)

On the basis of this alleged correspondence between the canonical approach and the 'New Criticism', Barton pursues his case a step further. The above cited hallmarks of the 'New Criticism' are regarded by Barton as the three positive planks of the theory, but he finds them all shaky in their coherence. Consequently, '... biblical scholars would do well to avoid putting much weight on them.' (44) For Childs, the lesson to be learned is this: the 'New Criticism' has certain features - sensitive spots - which make it vulnerable to attack. Since the canonical approach shares these sensitive spots, analogically with the 'New Criticism', it too is vulnerable.

How can the canonical approach obviate these perceived difficulties? Barton writes, 'By pressing the canonical approach to its limits, we can start to see issues emerging which only structuralism, among existing biblical methods, makes any attempt to deal with.' (45). Later, in his chapter on "Biblical Structuralism", Barton

writes. ' . . . the 'canonical approach' of B. S. Childs ought logically to be seen as a form of structuralism, if it is to be more than merely redaction criticism in an advanced form. . . . Canon criticism, like structuralism, works with the very pregnant idea of 'reading as'; and to justify this, a theoretical foundation such as that on which structuralism rests is needed - theological appeals to 'canonicity' will not suffice.' (46)

This analysis is wide of the mark as far as Childs is concerned as it does not fully appreciate the nature of what he is actually proposing. In Childs' own words, 'The initial point to be made is that the canonical approach to OT theology is unequivocal in asserting that the object of theological reflection is the canonical writing of the OT, that is, the Hebrew scriptures which are the received traditions of Israel. The materials for theological reflection are not the events or experiences behind the text, or apart from the construal in scripture by a community of faith and practice. However, because the biblical text continually bears witness to events and reactions in the life of Israel, the literature cannot be isolated from its ostensive reference. In view of these factors alone it is a basic misunderstanding to try to describe a canonical approach simply as a form of structuralism (contra Barton).' (47)

Later in OTTCC Childs writes, ' . . . although I have been critical of a historical referential reading of the Old Testament in the preceding chapters, the reverse construal is just as unsatisfactory, namely to lay claim to a completely non-historical reading of the Bible. To identify the canonical approach with structuralism, as J. Barton suggests, is very far from the truth. The main hermeneutical point to stress is that the canon makes its theological witness in numerous ways in relation to historical referentiality. At times it forms a very loose connection, whereas at other times a genuinely historical component belongs to the heart of the witness.' (48) While there are clear differences between Childs and Barton, nevertheless, Barton is not entirely unsympathetic to Childs' canonical approach to the study of the Bible; he does not give it an instant death-wish dismissal. Barton states that Childs does not deny that the historical critical method may be able to help us acquire some real historical information from the text and discover what the original authors may have meant. What Childs does question is the historical critical method's claim to unique validity.

(49) Childs' concern is, according to Barton, with the canonical meaning of the text and hearing the text on its verbal level.

While Barton sees Childs' proposals containing an element of prescription, yet, ' . . . he [Childs] is right to say that the canonical level is at least one possible level of meaning in a text,' and, ' . . . the canonical approach extends the range of methods available to the student of the Bible and suggests new questions that we may ask of the text.' (50) Although, for Barton, the canonical approach has problems at the theological and literary levels, nonetheless, he states that the emphasis on 'a canonical dimension is a solid gain.' (51) What Barton is really doing is arguing against the assumption that there is one correct method of reading biblical texts which will lead the interpreter to the true meaning of the text. In this respect his case is incontrovertible, - and Childs would agree! But situating Childs' canonical approach, (not method) in the company of literary criticism, and specifically putting it in the same classroom as structuralism, is a conclusion which Childs would completely reject.

That there is more than one method of reading biblical texts is also the underlying conviction of a more recent assessment of the canonical approach. M. G. Brett in his Biblical Criticism in Crisis? (52) suggests that scholars should strengthen their link with neighbouring academic disciplines and utilise a variety of interpretative interests in biblical studies. Working from this hermeneutical pluralistic base, Brett holds that the canonical approach to biblical interpretation has a distinctive contribution to make without dislocating other traditions of historical and literary enquiry. And it is to this work that we now turn.

In the Introduction to Brett's book, he contends that there are, 'certain weaknesses in Childs' methodological reflections which can be charitably reconstructed by comparison with the influential works of Hans - Robert Jauss, Karl Popper, and Hans-Georg Gadamer.' (53) Brett identifies what he considers to be the central methodological problems of the canonical approach. In each case he offers a critical appreciation of the problems so identified and seeks to place the canonical approach as a more acceptable mode of biblical interpretation in a wider disciplinary

context.

Methodologically, Brett regards Childs' canonical approach as totalitarian in its tendencies. The discipline of biblical studies has a whole range of interpretative interests all of which are logically distinct. Childs is viewed by Brett as attempting to include too many different tasks under the label of the canonical approach and unnecessarily attacking other methodological approaches. The work of N. Gottwald is contrasted with that of Childs. Childs states that Gottwald destroys the need for closely hearing the text on its verbal level, as opposed to a materialist reading of the OT which places the text against a reconstructed background of environment, technology, economy and sociology. Brett sees the important issue here turning on the question: what is the appropriateness of each interpretative interest? Childs thinks that hearing the text on its verbal level is a superior goal to placing the text in a reconstructed social and material environment. Conversely, Gottwald would state that Childs does not take into account the sociological matrices within which all texts are shaped.

For Childs, however, the crux of the matter when reading the biblical text is theological, i.e., what does the text tell us about the reality and character of God. As far as Gottwald is concerned, Childs thinks that he is attempting to gain a privileged scientific access to the forces at work behind the text. On this topic Childs recently said, "The trouble with the sociological approach is that you cannot measure the miraculous and the wonder of what God has done in the world. You cannot put that within the laws of human cause and effect, as if you can explain everything by sociological means. The whole Bible bends over against that. Sure, we are shaped by our environment, but in spite of that there is the chance for change and transformation. What we object to is explaining God's activity and forcing it into the patterns of human experience as if there is no newness coming in." (Appendix G. 38) And as Childs states elsewhere, Gottwald holds to the view that religious beliefs and social realities cannot be distinguished. In so doing, ' . . . he is making enormous epistemological assumptions regarding the nature of reality.' (54) In a sentence, Childs sees Gottwald's position resulting in a massive theological reductionism.

Brett makes the point that the canonical approach should not be wedded to

any attack on critical historical reconstruction as it is not necessary to overwhelm alternative interests. 'It would be far better simply to articulate the distinctive goal of the canonical approach and allow other interpreters to pursue their own interests in relative isolation.' (55) But Brett does not declare what the precise nature of Childs' attack on historical reconstruction is. Childs, like other scholars in the field, is concerned to delineate the limitations of the historical critical model in biblical interpretation, not to jettison it altogether. Furthermore, for Brett to advocate that various interpreters could follow their own interests in isolation of each other is not going to strengthen the already fragmented state of the biblical guild. Most scholars, including Childs, would, I submit, prefer to see more cohesion in biblical studies rather than competing interests causing further fragmentation.

With reference to Brett's commitment to hermeneutical pluralism, and Childs' position relating to it, we have earlier enumerated a diverse range of methodological approaches to bible study. From this a vital question emerges: within pluralism is it possible to construct an hierarchy of interpretational techniques on a qualitative sliding scale? In other words, the real issue here is the question of truth. J. Barton in his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford, referred to pluralism, (in the context of evaluating trends in OT study) as an entity ' . . . which simply recognizes no criteria of truth, . . . ' (56) Childs is not making exclusive claims vis-à-vis hermeneutical pluralism; what he is setting out to achieve is to establish a context for interpretation in which all available critical tools can be appropriately employed. But the goal of interpretation for Childs is not historical reconstruction *per se*: 'Rather, the goal of the interpretation of Christian Scriptures is to understand both Testaments as witness to the self-same divine reality who is the God and Father of Jesus Christ.' (57)

Brett raises another perceived problem in Childs' work, namely, playing down the significance of historical background in the interpretation of ancient texts. Historical reconstruction always involves positing hypotheses some of which are more convincing than others. We should, as Brett points out, differentiate between better and worse hypotheses in the critical study of the ancient texts of Israel. One cannot dispose of all such hypotheses simply because they are hypotheses. This implies that

Childs does; this, however is not true. It has escaped Brett's notice that Childs never proposes to disregard hypotheses because they are hypotheses, as a fleeting glance at Childs' work as a critic shows.

Having analysed the problems inherent in Childs' all embracing exegetical approach to Holy Scripture, Brett unveils the essence of his positive proposals to remedy the perceived theoretical weaknesses of the canonical approach. The overarching solution to these weaknesses is, according to Brett, found in adopting a pluralistic approach to biblical hermeneutics as this is the one way to keep our horizons wide. Despite the use of such terms as "impatient", "totalitarian", "equivocation", and "schizophrenia" which Brett attributes to Childs' exegetical procedures, he goes on to advance the proposal that a more "charitable" view of the canonical approach can be achieved by utilising concepts and categories from philosophers such as Gadamer, Popper, and Jaus.

A central issue in the writings of Karl Popper is the philosophical analysis of the progress of science. One idea suggested by Popper is that objective knowledge exists independently of any particular knower. For instance, objective knowledge exists in texts rather than in human minds. Popper's argument rests on three "worlds", which are:-

1. the world of physical states,
2. the world of states of consciousness or mental states, and
3. the world of objective contents of thought, in particular, scientific, poetic, and works of art.

World three is, for Popper, relatively autonomous and is an essential ingredient in his defence of the objectivity of science. But not only has Popper argued for the relative autonomy of scientific facts, he has also discussed his theory in relation to the humanities and to hermeneutics. 'The activity of understanding consists in operating with world three objects.' (58)

Brett suggests that the discussion of a textual "world three" can throw much light on Childs' hermeneutical programme. The idea of the communicative intention of a text is made a good deal more plausible when the Popperian focus on texts, rather

than on individual minds, is employed. Thus, 'Not only does Childs think of biblical tradition as a story of progressive refinement, he also thinks of the biblical texts as a kind of "world three" which can yield implications unforeseen by individual authors'. (59) In this context it is very important to emphasise that Childs' exegetical procedures focus on the explicit and objective content of the biblical texts, rather than on the mental contents of authors and redactors. This does not mean, however, that Childs is disinterested in authorial intentions or original contexts as such. The investigation of these areas by historical means, i.e., diachronic analysis, is a necessary step in the process of biblical interpretation. As Childs would put it, it is useful in so far as it illuminates the final form of the text.

The relevance of Popper's "world three" category, as applied to both sciences and the humanities, is especially demonstrated in the work of Hans-Robert Jauss with its emphasis on the reception of literature. In the middle decades of the present century, formalist approaches to literary theory were in the ascendancy. The literary text itself was of prime concern and any information viewed as extraneous to the text (for example, authorial intention, and historical and social locations) was considered irrelevant to its interpretation. Jauss contributed to the decline of formalism by forcefully arguing that the study of literature needs to focus on the historical context of its reception. (60) Some literary works like the Bible have exerted powerful influences upon generations and cultures far removed from the work's origin. Jauss does not entirely reject the original audience's role in understanding the text; he simply denies its privilege. Thus, to construct the original "horizon of expectation" (i.e., the set of expectations the first audience could have brought to the work) is the first procedural step in a history of reception. This "horizon of expectation" is not simply an original and fixed frame of reference. Rather, it can develop and change as a result of literary innovation as well as by the literary work itself.

Brett notes that interpretation must finally become a genuine conversation between text and reader. If texts are to reform our horizon of meaning then the validity and truth of the text must survive contemporary questions which have emerged since the time of their production. Jauss speaks of a 'progressive



understanding which necessarily also includes criticising the tradition and forgetting it' (61) Brett draws attention to the fact that this is what Childs says about the canonical process before the Hebrew text was stabilized.

While the work of Popper and Jauss have some parallels with the canonical work of Childs, the more "charitable" reconstruction of Childs' proposals by Brett leans heavily on the work of the contemporary philosopher of language and hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer. According to Gadamer one must view history, art and the Bible from within a tradition; only in this way can true understanding take place. A tradition provides the individual with a conceptual framework needed for understanding, giving one a horizon of meaning. Between the reader and the text, meaningful interaction can take place thus allowing for one's horizon of meaning to alter. One must stand within a tradition (which would include one's language, culture, and community of faith) for understanding to take place.

On these general observations both Childs and Gadamer would find common ground. As one must stand within a tradition for understanding to take place, the question arises: What tradition does one stand in? This is a key question especially in the context of religious faith and confessional commitment. Childs is unequivocal on this matter. He places himself within the confession of faith affirming that the Bible literature constitutes the Holy Scriptures of the Christian church. Childs expresses the point thus, 'To speak of the Bible as canon is to emphasise its function as the Word of God in the context of the worshipping community of faith.' (62)

Another parallel between Gadamer and Childs is discernible when Gadamer asserts that an awareness of effective-history (an understanding of a text's impact in history) is a central concept of the hermeneutical task facing the exegete. When Childs states that, ' . . . it is a basic misunderstanding of the canonical approach to describe it as a non-historical reading of the Bible. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather, the issue at stake is the nature of the Bible's historicity and the search for a historic approach which is commensurate with it.' (63), he is concurring with Gadamer's view of effective-history. A clear example of Gadamer's effective-history would be Childs' interest in the history of the text's exegesis, that is, the history of its

reception.

Childs and Gadamer are also in agreement in their reception of the bifurcation of tradition and reason so characteristic of the 18th century Enlightenment. Every interpreter stands within a tradition; every interpreter comes to a text with some level of preunderstanding and in this respect the role of tradition is a fundamental ingredient in human understanding. Human understanding requires at least some "prejudice", so Gadamer observes, and the Enlightenment's rational ideal of being free from all prejudices is, in itself, founded on an illegitimate prejudice. Even when one is interpreting texts within a historical framework, one is coming to the text within a given tradition.

Brett also draws our attention to the Gadamerian account of classic and eminent texts which accords well with Childs' view of biblical tradition. The classic text is an exemplary written tradition which has demonstrated its validity throughout the centuries. Such a text has retrospectively demonstrated its truth value because it signifies and interprets itself. In other words, a classic text, ' . . . says something to the present as if it were said purposely to it.' (64) This self-interpreting characteristic of the classic text also applies to eminent texts, amongst which Gadamer includes the Bible. An eminent text stands written in its own right. The canonical approach in practice treats the text as if it can speak for itself to each generation with a truth value that continues to be demonstrated in the communities for whom the Bible is canonical.

Human life is never utterly bound to any one standpoint; hence, it can never have a truly closed horizon. Gadamer is not saying that intentionality does not exist; it is rather that the goal of historical understanding cannot be reduced to individual intentions. Consequently, authorial intention and historical particularity do not of themselves lead us to the truth in the study of classic and eminent text. 'We miss the whole truth of the phenomenon when we take its immediate appearance as a whole truth.' (65)

At this juncture, a critical question arises with regards to biblical hermeneutics. What is the nature of the relationship between text and commentary?

Gadamer argues that a literary text is relatively autonomous both in its production and in its preservation. The Bible has become "classic" by being preserved in a long history of effects. But the history of exegesis is always characterised by contingencies and is thus secondary to the classical text itself. Neither the effective-history of the biblical period or the history of exegesis after the stabilisation of the text can replace the Bible itself. These concerns of Gadamer are close parallels to several aspects of Childs' observations.

The comparison between Gadamer and Childs' approach to the interpretation of texts, Brett points out, provides the most charitable way of understanding the hermeneutical principles of the canonical approach. But are the resulting analogies and insights sufficient to salvage Childs' programme from its alleged theoretical weaknesses? Apparently not. There are some residual problems. Gadamer emphasises the truth value of classical traditions, and Childs also underscores the continuing truth claims of the text over against 'merely' historical exegesis. Gadamer allows that the truth claims of the text will be tested against all modern critical scrutiny. This possibility, Brett claims, does not occur in Childs' hermeneutical procedures. 'The classical text needs to demonstrate continually its truthfulness: its authority cannot be asserted dogmatically in the face of all reasoned critique.' (66)

It may be asked, how does one demonstrate the truthfulness of the biblical text by subjecting it to a reasoned critique? If the historical critical paradigm is to be employed, on what basis does it establish the text's truthfulness? This crucial question was put to Childs by the author: Do the historical critical methods deal with the issue of theological truth? For example, in the OT it states that "God is Holy". How do historical critical methods verify this? Childs responded: "No, that is what they cannot do. The historical critical methods do not raise this question. Ultimately, historical methodology is so inadequate. It has its limits. D. Steinmetz astutely observes that the historical critics share a proclivity to defer the question of truth endlessly." (TT, 1980, p38). (Appendix 9.2) Childs is not fighting against critical appraisal of his proposals; his deep concern is for critical appraisal which is appropriate to Christian theology. Consequently, the question of criteria is crucial in

this context, but these are issues which Brett does not investigate in dealing with the truth claims of the text as far as Childs' work is concerned.

The canonical approach is unequivocally a theological enterprise and therefore relevant to the truth claims of modern theology. There is, however, a problem in that there is a diversity of approaches to biblical interpretation. Brett's hope is that some plausibility has been given to the canonical approach as one valid kind of biblical study by drawing on the philosophies of hermeneutical theorists like Gadamer, and to a lesser degree, Jauss and Popper. But a simple paraphrase of Childs' work in Gadamerian terms will not do; the canonical approach needs a more thorough reconstruction, according to Brett, and it is to this purpose that he devotes his last chapter.

In Brett's opinion the essential issue is this: how can the biblical text continue to demonstrate its truthfulness if critical questions raised by later generations are excluded from the outset? In point of fact, Childs does not propose such a suggestion. Brett, however, is not persuaded by Childs' responses on this point. So for Brett a possible way forward is to follow Gadamer's response to the critics of his classicism. Both Gadamer and Childs agree that a classic text can exercise great influence long after the time of its production. They also agree that the passing of time can eliminate contingent factors that belong to a tradition's origin and that the bad prejudices of a tradition can be gradually filtered out. Childs maintains that the canonical approach to the reading of Holy Scripture focuses on the "intentionality" of the biblical texts. In his own words, 'The significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation. . . . It is in the final form of the biblical text in which the normative history has reached an end that the full effect of this revelatory history can be perceived.' (67)

Does it therefore follow that the biblical texts will continue to demonstrate their truthfulness in all subsequent contexts? What if modern critical study reveals that the communicative intention of the canonical texts has been consistently distorted by historical forces behind the text which the canonical approach excludes on methodological grounds? N. Gottwald has posed these kinds of questions in

relation to the canonical approach. (68) Both Gottwald and Childs agree that a canonical process is evident in Israel from the earliest times and that this process has blurred and obscured the sociological factors behind the development of biblical traditions. But there is disagreement between them as to the motives of the canonical editors. Human motives can be obscured, blurred and deliberately concealed. As Brett says, ' . . . there can be no primary sources for human motives.' (69) Brett concludes that canonical exegesis can tell us very little about the motives of the canonical shapers: ' . . . yet it is precisely Childs' theological understanding of the canonical editors which legitimates his focus on the received text. He recommends that we need not recover original socio-historical differences since these have been subordinated to theological concerns.' (70)

In response to these observations, Childs states, 'When critical exegesis is made to rest on the recovery of these very sociological distinctions which have been obscured, it runs directly in the face of the canon's intention.' (71) (Appendix 9.38 for a more recent statement). What Brett is saying, however, is that we really cannot be sure that this subordination took place on all and every occasion. The suggestion is made that Childs might be more amenable to the canonical criticism which has been developed by another American scholar, J. A Saunders who seeks to reconstruct the canonical process. Childs regards this project as a highly speculative enterprise simply because of the paucity of evidence for the history of canonization. (72)

A further suggestion is made by Brett regarding the way forward for the canonical approach. This time he advocates that a link could be made between Childs' canonical approach and the intratextual theology of Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and Ronald Thiemann. Intratextual theology sees the biblical text as a kind of framework, a universe of meaning for a tradition through which the Christian believer interprets the world. Reality is redescribed within this scriptural framework rather than by employing extra-scriptural categories. Given our contemporary pluralistic milieu the truth claims of Christianity cannot be secured by universal agreement. This does not mean that individual traditions are locked in static opposition to each other; when and where traditions change, such change will come through, 'concrete,

transformative conversation.' (73) In intratextual theology the Christian truth claims that are made are specifically applicable to that Christian community and tradition.

This school of thought calls into question the epistemology and the truth claims of universal reason of the 18th century Enlightenment. The internal focus of intratextual theology has been described by some critics as a new version of fideism. Brett sees intratextual theology needing a doctrine of revelation to support it. In this respect, Thiemann has given the most reflective treatment on the problem of revelation. (74) He thinks that revelation cannot be defended in the public domain on a universal basis, but he seeks to present an account which would be acceptable to Christian communities. Regarding the age-old problem between the divine initiative and human reception, he concludes that the human response is the only source of our Knowledge of God's initiative. The substance of Thiemann's argument runs as follows. Revelation is the continuing reality of God's active presence among his people. Since it is a reality 'not seen' and not fully experienced, it must be expressed by a confession of faith. . . .' (75) According to this view God's revelation is not located in history. It is a continuing reality with the beliefs and practices of a religious community. This account of revelation is not verifiable by a purely empirical historiography, but then neither were many of the central concerns of the OT. 'A decisive and universal valuation of Christian truth claims is simply not available within history.' (76)

Intratextualists, with Childs, are attracted to the final form of Scripture; but how does one square this with the necessity for a continuing interpretation of the significance of Jesus Christ? Thiemann's approach to revelation would seem to agree with the continuation of the canonical process, but it is not clear as to how he would respond to this possibility. Lindbeck has suggested that biblical conceptualities can be displaced through time but only if this is necessary for the sake of greater faithfulness, intelligibility or efficaciousness. (77) Brett views Lindbeck as being the closest ally of the canonical approach though Childs is reluctant to accept this. (78) Childs is more interested, according to Brett, in renewing a doctrine of biblical inspiration, but he believes that the canonical approach finds closer allies amongst intratextual theologians.

Brett is quick to point out that this does not equate the canonical approach with intratextual theology. He prefers the option where canonical exegesis gives up notions of revelation and turn their attention on the 'objective' content (re- Popper) of biblical tradition. This way forward would put the canonical approach closer to the 'literary' approaches which avoid historical reconstruction and read the text as it has been handed down. Relieving the canonical approach of excessive theological claims would render it as a more effective approach to biblical study, one approach among many, and thus ensure the widest possible discussion in theology. To adopt this strategy would be, in Brett's eyes, to promote pluralism in biblical studies and secure a more comprehensive approach to the continuing appeal of biblical interpretation. However, to suggest that Childs' should relieve his proposals of their theological nature is like asking him to saw the branch he is sitting on. Childs' did not propose and develop his understanding of the canonical approach in order to promote hermeneutical pluralism. Far from making the canonical approach a more effective approach to biblical study, to follow through what Brett suggests would be to deprive Childs' programme of its very oxygen. It is precisely with theological truth that Childs' is wrestling in the evolution of his thought.

Notwithstanding this, however, there can be no doubt that this study, derived from a doctoral thesis on the canonical approach, will be widely regarded as a thoughtful piece of work in the field of canonical study. But has Brett presented a convincing case in which he proposes to improve the canonical approach in order to make it more effective in the task of biblical interpretation? We will attempt to answer this question from two perspectives.

First of all, from the wider interpretational context of hermeneutics, it could be said that Brett puts forward a very acceptable case which gels well with contemporary hermeneutical theory. When the modern interpreter is confronted with a host of new attempts to approach the Bible, like literary, sociological, psychological, feminist, structuralist, and deconstructionalist perspectives, then the canonical approach to scripture as understood by Brett, becomes another aid to help us in our interpretational activity. As J. Barr has suggested, 'The values of canonical study can

best be obtained where they can be combined with other modes of reading and corrected by these other modes.' (79)

Modern hermeneutical thinking has put a serious question mark against the claims to objectivity, neutrality and autonomy of the modern reader; also, strong emphasis has been placed on the necessity to approach the scriptures from a variety of viewpoints. In this way perhaps the old dilemma in biblical interpretation, that theologians tend to distort the Bible by reading it dogmatically and biblical scholars tend to study the Bible as literature, will be overcome. W. Jeanrond puts it very lucidly. 'In the case of biblical interpretation, a pluralistic reading of the Bible and a rigorous examination both of the text and of particular acts of reading offer the best guarantee against renewed efforts to reduce the Bible to a mere collection of proof-texts for one theological argument or another.' (80)

An approach to biblical interpretation will result in a dynamic interaction between text and reader and no reading of the text can be described as appropriate which remains uninvolved with the text. The dynamic and interactive nature of interpretation does not necessarily establish the primacy of subjective readings. Indeed, the opposite could obtain. The interpreter can be helped in the search for perceptive insights into how objective one can consider an interpretation to be. Consequently, the assured results of historical critical exegesis, with all its objectivist tendencies, become less secure. Some observers would point out that the traditional historical critical method is flawed as it was neither sufficiently critical nor self-critical. (81)

The same observations can also be made about the results stemming from hermeneutically monistic readings of the biblical text whether they be theological, liberationist, feminist or whatever. Hermeneutical monism, in the words of Brett, cuts off the search for fresh approaches to the biblical text. Viewed from this standpoint of modern hermeneutical thinking, Brett has given us an additional approach to biblical interpretation in the form of a philosophically and hermeneutically treated canonical approach. As such, it will be welcomed by many who work in a wider interdisciplinary context. It is therefore not difficult to concede that, on this basis, Brett has made a positive contribution to the contemporary hermeneutical debate on biblical



interpretation.

Secondly, when we consider Brett's study in the light of Childs' untainted hermeneutical programme, I think we might reach a very different conclusion to the one noted above. Brett's advocacy of a reconstructed canonical approach as an additional aid to the interpretation of scripture implies that Childs' approach is too fixated on final form study and too all embracing in its theological pretensions. As we have already indicated, the canonical approach to the study of the Bible, as envisaged by Childs, is not however, another method to be set alongside the plethora of those already available. 'Rather, Childs is concerned to establish a context and perspective for interpretation, within which all existing methods and tools can be appropriately exercised.' (82) Childs comes to the Bible as a Christian theologian and scholar emphasising that it is a religious book, written by believers, and principally, written for believers. It is therefore within the context of the community of faith that the witness of the Bible's message is to be heard, interpreted and applied. At the very kernel of the canonical approach is this dynamic interactive relationship of the Bible with a community of faith.

It is this central concern of Childs that I feel is not sufficiently appreciated in Brett's writing. He does not give a comprehensive account of the background and setting against which Childs' hermeneutical concerns have emerged. In a review of Brett's book, J. Barr writes, 'His first few pages are too short and thin to give a proper picture of the background of the problem.' (83) Childs' work can only be properly appreciated when it is seen in the context of the history of biblical exegesis. He is very conscious of his place in the history of interpretation for the vast bulk of his literary output commences with a summary of the work which has preceded him. Contrary to what Brett suggests, Childs does accept the legitimacy of pluralism in biblical studies. Many approaches are possible when one engages in biblical interpretation, but Childs advances an approach which begins from within the community of faith from which one is more likely to access the subject matter of the biblical text, - the reality of God.

For Childs, there is always a dialectical tension between the reader and the

text, just as there is a dialectic tension between the Old and New Testaments, just as there is a dialectical tension between reading the Bible as God's word and interpreting it with the aid of historical critical tools. Childs recently said, "You cannot believe Aristotle and the Gospel. That is the dialectic. You have to know the form-critical, you have to be trained, if you do not do that, you are not going to make it. But if you believe all that stuff you are done for! I think that is the kind of dialectic that is always going to be there." (Appendix G.5; also Gs. 6&7) Childs does not therefore deny the use of a variety of critical methods; but he does modify their significance.

It cannot be doubted that Brett shows an appreciative understanding of the potential of the canonical approach, but in doing so he places it within a wider interpretational context. His analysis of the canonical approach does reveal discernible similarities and suggested trajectories of meaning in the light of recent hermeneutical theory, but these are largely from a non-theological context. Brett is conscious of this and seeks help from writers in the field of intratextual theology. But therein lies the difficulty. Childs has some positive observations to make about the work of Frei, Lindbeck, and Thiemann, but he is not convinced that an assimilation of their work with his, as Brett proposes, will strengthen his position. (84)

The sheet-anchor of Childs' canonical approach to the study of the Bible is not philosophical and hermeneutical theory, but springs from deep theological concerns. And theological concerns are a legitimate force in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. The vital question for Childs is not, must we interpret the Bible theologically, but rather, can we really claim to do justice to the semantic potential of the biblical texts when, and if, we disregard the theological nature of these texts? 'If the primary genre of the biblical texts is concerned to be theological because all of these texts reflect on the nature of God and on God's relationship with humankind, then these texts ultimately demand a theological reading.' (85)

It is exactly this perception about the biblical texts that Childs has brought, and continues to bring, to the fore with his emphasis on the canonical meaning of Holy Scripture within the context of a community of believers. Moreover, Childs is seeking to overcome the dichotomy between dogmatic theology and biblical theology

which has for so long characterised the theology of the Western Christian Church. Very specifically, what Childs is trying to maintain is the integrity of Biblical theology in the light of modern historical critical enquiry. Does Brett, therefore come successfully to the aid of Childs by postulating his reductionist version of the canonical approach to the Bible? The answer has to be no. In effect Brett detheologizes the essential theological nature of Childs' work by placing it in the setting of 'post-modern studies'. (Appendix 9.37) Perhaps what is needed is a conceptual framework of interpretation which will enable a new and viable approach to biblical theology to emerge. Perhaps this can be achieved by a recent contribution to the debate by C. J. Scalise.

Like Brett's study, Scalise's Hermeneutics as Theological Prolegomena (86) has its origin in a doctoral thesis, but unlike Brett's work, Scalise comes to the task with a clearly profiled theological agenda. As an ecumenical, evangelical theologian in the Baptist tradition, he sees his task as exploring and developing the thesis that 'canonical hermeneutics can provide broadly evangelical Christian communities with one useful approach for responding to the contemporary theological situation.' (87) His modest proposal is: 'A carefully nuanced understanding of canonical hermeneutics can serve as the central theme of prolegomena to a postcritical evangelical theology.' (88) In the contemporary pluralistic age, Scalise acknowledges the "shattered spectrum" of Christian theology. To combat the crisis he sets out to develop a theology that is faithful to the scriptures and the Christian community. His work proceeds on the assumption of the primacy of Scripture and moves from 'the Bible to doctrine in a way which makes sense to Christians living in a pluralistic postmodernity.' (89)

The central task which Scalise assigns himself in this book is to present an exposition of Childs' canonical approach to biblical interpretation in which he proposes a number of modifications in response to some criticisms it has received. Scalise pays particular attention to three issues which he finds in Childs' work.

- (i) Childs' definition of canon,
- (ii) the emphasis on the final form of the biblical text, and
- (iii) the concept of the canonical shape of Scripture.

Scalise takes Childs' definition of canon from his 1977 essay, "The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament" (90) and indicates that the development of canon was a historical process with an explicitly theological function. Childs' example of the last oracles in the book of Amos is cited as a case in point. Childs writes, 'The effect of the canonical shaping of Ch. 9 is to place Amos' words of judgment within a larger theological framework, which, on the one hand, confirms the truth of Amos' prophecy of doom, and on the other, encompasses it within the promise of God's will for hope and final redemption.' (91)

Scalise draws attention to the parallel of the Jewish scholar, Sid Z. Leiman's view of canon with that of Childs'. Leiman argues for an early fixing of the Hebrew canon, and this view sits well to Childs' position. Reference is next made to A. C. Sundberg, Jr. who distinguishes between "scripture" and "canon" using the term "canon" to refer only to the final stages of completion. Scalise cites the work of S.J.P. K. Riekert who challenges Sundberg's distinction between Scripture and canon on what he describes as dubious historical grounds.

Scalise follows Riekert's view that, 'Documentary evidence compels one to reject the sharp distinction between Scripture and canon.' (92) Childs' view on the relationship between Scripture and canon is more complex than that of Sundberg's, as Scalise indicates. For Childs, the term canon refers to the entire process whereby both Jewish and Christian communities recognise certain books as Scripture. Canon does not strictly refer to the final stages of the process, i.e. the canonization of Scripture. Scalise also alerts us to the fact that the historical evidence seems to suggest a more fluid relationship between Scripture and canonization. We have earlier referred to the concept of "canon" in Childs' thought as not being consistently clear. Consequently it need not be pursued further, save but to say that Scalise acknowledges the fact that Childs has responded to criticism on this point by assigning to it a broader usage.

Scalise next moves to consider Childs' emphasis on the final form of the text which has proved to be a highly contested facet of Childs' thought. We have already, outlined this aspect of Childs' work in Ch. 1, but to summarise, Childs attaches importance to the pre and posthistory of the text, but they are both subordinated to

the study of the final form of the text which has come down to us. Why? Because, 'The significance of the final form of the biblical literature is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation.' (93) There are historical and theological considerations at stake here, in Childs' view. Scalise takes up the issue and writes, 'The final forms of the biblical books are theologically those forms of the literature where the communities claim to find the normative witness to God's revelation.' (94) Scalise sees here that the hermeneutics of K. Barth form the appropriate backdrop against which Childs' emphasis on the text of the final form is to be understood. (95)

There is no doubt that Childs cites Barth in his work frequently, and this observation by Scalise is well made. It is also interesting to note that Scalise cites a quotation from J. Barr's Old and New in Interpretation (96) where Barr comments on Barth's exegesis. "He [Barth] is quite right in arguing, as he does, that theological exegesis should work from the text as it is. It is the given form of the text, rather than the historical reorganisation which we make by using the text as data, which provides the main content for our exegesis.'(97) Considering the heated exchanges between Childs and Barr in more recent times, not to mention Barr's critique of Barth in his Biblical Faith and Natural Theology (98), it is not surprising that Barr plays down this theme from his earlier work!

Scalise sees this focus on the final form of the text in Childs' thought as the basis for connecting the interpretation of the Bible with its theological use as canon by both historical and contemporary communities of faith. He views this construct as useful for his own agenda, 'Postcritical canonical hermeneutics seeks to maintain continuity with both "precritical" and critical traditions of exegesis.' (99) Scalise concludes his discussion of Childs' canonical approach by examining the canonical shape of Scripture and sees this as a theological *Gestalt*. As such the canon of scripture functions holistically as a written witness to the work and word of God. Childs writes, 'The concept of canon implies that the normative role of this Scripture functions through the shape which the church has given the tradition in its written form as a faithful witness to the redemptive work of God.' (100) Scalise correctly points out that for Childs the two testaments belong together if one is to be true to a

Christian confessional position, and he notes how Childs, starting from his early writing, came to emphasise a specifically christocentric focus in his work. In this respect the interpretation of Psalm 8 is a clear indicator of this move. However, the canonical shape of the text does not imply that there is only one decisive interpretation. Indeed, 'within the context of the canon there is a wide latitude for reader competence, reader response, or reader reception.' (101)

Criticism of the historical critical model in biblical interpretation has drawn attention to the fragmenting and atomisation of the canonical text, a tendency demonstrably made clear in Childs' work. In fact, it is precisely the canonical shape of Scripture which has, for Childs, been ignored by the historical critics. As Scalise observes, 'Little wonder that once the text has been anchored in the historical past by "decanonizing" it, the interpreter has difficulty applying it to a modern religious context! (102) It was Childs' work as a leading form and traditio-historical critic which led him to this conclusion. There was, as he states, ' . . . something fundamentally wrong with the foundations of the biblical discipline.' (103) In his article, "On Reading the Elijah Narratives", Childs couched a vital issue in the form of a question, 'How does one wisely use historical-critical tools in illuminating the canonical text? (104) Scalise does not tease out the implications of this question but proceeds to give an account of three examples of Childs' exegetical work. These are taken from Childs' Memory and Tradition in Israel (1962) which deals with Deuteronomy, his Exodus commentary (1974), and Ephesians, taken from his NTCI (1984).

Scalise is giving examples of Childs' approach to interpretation which are taken from a span in Childs' career of some 20 years, the purpose of which is to demonstrate the range of major themes and some of the diversity in Childs' exegetical work. The presentation is mainly descriptive and therefore does not impinge directly on Scalise's development of Childs' theory, and since Childs' practical exegesis will be a substantial concern later in this present study, it seems more germane to our present task to consider four main criticisms of Childs' proposals which Scalise highlights. These are: -

- (i) the deuterocanonical Books,
- (ii) the hermeneutical notion of tradition,

- (iii) the problem of canonical intentionality, and
- (iv) the incorporation of sociological and literary approaches.

Scalise notes that in Childs' IOTS he singles out the Masoretic text as, 'the vehicle both for recovering and for understanding the canonical text of the Old Testament.' (105) His argument is a pragmatic one, namely, that only the Jewish community that supported the MT had survived historically as the living vehicle of the whole canon of Hebrew scripture. Scalise sees the equation of the historical dominance with the theological determination of the boundaries of the whole canon as a weak argument. Applied to the history of the early church, it would seem to argue for the inclusion of the deuterocanonical books, rather than their exclusion. Scalise also sees the difficulty in arguing for a single received text which is held to be normative for both Jews and Christians. He concludes that, given problems over the exact boundaries of the canon, he cautions a more flexible approach. 'A less rigid specification of the exact boundaries of the canon would more accurately reflect the complex and diverse historical process of canon formation. Furthermore, acknowledgement of the legitimacy of claims of other Christians to include the deuterocanonical books would encourage less polemical disputation regarding their status and more critical examination regarding their usefulness.' (106)

To this area of criticism Childs has responded by accepting that there is a problem over what properly constitutes the Christian Bible. In his BTONT (1992) he now says, 'It is clear that two major attitudes towards the Jewish canon have prevailed in the Christian church throughout much of its history. The one approach opted for a narrow canon identified the Christian Old Testament in terms of the literary scope and textual form of the synagogue's Hebrew canon; the other chose a wider canon and supplemented the Hebrew canon with other books which had long been treasured by parts of the church. In sum, the exact nature of the Christian Bible both in respect to its scope and text remains undecided up to this day.' (107) Since BTONT, Childs has accepted the pertinence of Scalise's comments on the deuterocanonical books. He says, "I don't recognise myself as I am portrayed by Barr, whereas with Scalise, he points out that in my first books I have not dealt adequately with the larger canon,

i.e., with the Apocrapha. I take that as a just criticism since a large number of Christians have always accepted the Apocrapha. It is an issue I will have to deal with, and he correctly saw that; - I had assumed a Protestant canon." (Appendix 9. 36)

Under the heading, the hermeneutical notion of tradition, Scalise points to Childs' earlier training as a historical critical exegete. The main objective of such critical enquiry is to critically reconstruct behind the text. Scalise asserts that as Childs has developed his notion of canon, no corresponding movement is discernible in his idea of tradition since he is largely concerned with the reconstruction of the prehistory of the text. It is certainly true that Childs is considerably absorbed with the hermeneutical debate and historical critical reconstruction in his exegesis: this is an aspect which we shall examine later in this thesis as we consider his exegesis in practice.

In order to rectify this difficulty, Scalise suggests that an appropriation of Gadamer's hermeneutical notion of tradition would be found helpful. Gadamer's concept of tradition is a dialogical model which encompasses the entire history of the text and its effects upon its interpreters. The "classic" text, like the Bible, is, according to Gadamer, in an ever changing process (fusion of horizons) which bring together historical study of the prehistory of the text with its appropriation as a living tradition into the contemporary community of interpreters. But Gadamer's philosophical framework of idealistic ontology is not viewed by Scalise as being helpful to Childs' proposals. Hence, Gadamer is to be used selectively. 'It is precisely this selective nonfoundationalist appropriation of Gadamer's hermeneutical notion of tradition that I am advocating for canonical hermeneutics.' (108) Scalise sees two benefits accruing from this cross-fertilization of ideas, (i) Childs' inadequate concept of tradition is released from its historical critical limitations, which is bound to the prehistory of the text, and (ii) Gadamer's emphasis upon "communities" locks in well with Childs' theme of the Bible as Scripture by communities of faith. This also has the benefit of obviating individualistic notions of interpretation.

I find this critical perspective on Childs by Scalise less than convincing. To assert that Childs is at times preoccupied with the prehistory of the text is certainly a



correct observation. But that is not all that Childs is concerned with. He is concerned with authorial intention and original context where this can be determined; but he is also deeply concerned and interested in the history of the text's reception. A summary glance at his major works puts that beyond any doubt. And does this not indicate that Childs does see the biblical text as a living tradition which, in a contemporary context, constitutes a unique witness to God's reality and presence for Christian believers?

Scalise next moves on to consider the problem of canonical intentionality which has been sharply criticised as being too imprecise. The following passage is cited by Scalise. 'Regardless of the different levels of intentionality which were involved in the historical formulation of the material, the literature was received within a religious context and assigned an authoritative function by different communities of faith and practice. . . . a special level of intentionality was assigned to the literature as a whole by virtue of its role as Scripture.' (109) For Scalise this concept of canonical intentionality is a problem as it is not clear how this notion is related to the process of reading the biblical text as Scripture. Scalise calls upon Wittgenstein for help with his notion of intention being inextricably linked to a larger socio-linguistic context, and P. Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory is also pressed into service, especially his dialectical theory of reading and his mimetic view of historical intentionality. Scalise combines these features of Ricoeur's work to provide a way of tying canonical intentionality to the dynamics of the reading process itself. 'Ricoeur's understanding of a text as a "work" that results in "distantiation" from the author leads to a notion of textual intentionality.' (110)

Childs', however, distances himself from Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics as he judges this approach as showing little or no interest in the development of the canonical text. Scalise denies that Ricoeur has no interest in "historical context". 'Rather, Ricoeur's cross-disciplinary philosophical hermeneutics approaches the biblical text with a different set of questions concerning its historical context than those generally pursued by biblical scholarship.' (111) Scalise cites a quotation in which Childs describes the canonical process as often assigning a function to the literature as a whole which transcended its parts. Thus, a collection of

books acquired a theological role in instructing and edifying a community of faith, and that altered its original semantic level. A good example of this would be Child's treatment of Second-Isaiah. (112)

It is, however, a simple matter of fact that the more a text is used and interpreted, the further it moves from its possible original socio-historical context. Scalise understands Ricoeur's theory of reading as offering a detailed description of how a changed semantic level might occur. Each succeeding context for interpretation in a critical commentary, like Childs' Exodus, would therefore be situated along a hermeneutical spectrum of meaning. On this score, according to Scalise, canonical interpretation refers to the theological construed shape of the texts themselves. 'Thus, Childs' imprecise notion of canonical intentionality is clarified by locating it within Ricoeur's dialectical theory of reading and specifying its function using Ricoeur's mimetic view of historical intentionality.' (113)

Finally, Scalise accounts Childs' lack of openness to sociological and literary approaches to biblical interpretation as a weakness. Attention is drawn to the fact that Childs has intensively engaged with traditional historical critical methods but not with the more literary and sociological concerns. As Scalise suggests, this is possibly a reflection of Childs' early theological training, especially in Germany under his teachers Eichrodt, von Rad and Zimmerli and others. We have already noted Childs' views on anthropocentric techniques; he sees a hermeneutic informed by these approaches as leading to an inevitable theological reductionism.

Scalise draws on Ricoeur's hermeneutics to avoid this eventually. Thus oriented, 'Canonical hermeneutics would be able to exhibit greater openness to the insights of critical sociological and literary studies of the Bible without fear of succumbing to reductionistic perspectives on Scripture.' (114) This carefully modified version of canonical hermeneutics presents Scalise with his next move, which is to consider this remodelled Childsean programme as the central theme of prolegomena for a postcritical evangelical theology. In other words, these technical modifications of Childs' canonical approach are to be the foundation for some guidance in moving from biblical hermeneutics to a doctrine of Scripture. This is where Scalise moves more

overtly into following his own agenda. He concludes by speculating as to the ways in which a postcritical evangelical theology, shaped by canonical hermeneutics, might move from biblical interpretation to doctrinal exposition. Consequently, Scalise does not really engage with Childs' work thereafter.

In seeking to evaluate Scalise's understanding and modifications of Childs' programme, he is to be commended for clearly stating his confessional commitment and setting out his own theological agenda. He is not, however, seeking to develop and redefine Childs' programme *per se*; his purpose is to invoke Childs' proposals, to measure them against, and suitably modify them in the light of, a critical hermeneutical template, and finally, to proceed to establish ' a doctrinal construction in a postcritical evangelical theology.' (115) Scalise writes, 'The postcritical perspective of canonical hermeneutics incorporates insights from both traditional and historical critical exegesis into a larger theological framework.' (116) It is obvious from this statement that Scalise is pursuing an agenda which intends to be based on a well-informed understanding of the Bible from an evangelical position. Simply stated, Scalise is on a pilgrimage in which he hopes to move from biblical interpretation to doctrinal formulation, and his mode of transportation is "canonical hermeneutics" - courtesy of B. S. Childs' canonical approach to biblical interpretation.

This programme, thus conceived, is not on Childs' agenda; he would find the parameters which Scalise sets himself too theologically constricting. Childs is certainly concerned with the central significance of biblical studies and its vital relationship to theology, but his scholarship, spirit and learning are directed to a much wider vista than that which is envisioned by Scalise. In a recent interview, Childs was asked whether observers like Brett and Scalise understood his interpretational concerns. He said in response, "Not really. they are pursuing their own interests and questions. Scalise is following some kind of foundationalism. . . ." (Appendix 9.37) So from the point of view of redefining and developing Childs' concerns on his own terms, Scalise is not held by Childs as having succeeded.

One of the main difficulties of modifying any thinker's hermeneutical theory is that as one embarks on one's own journey, the original proposals (in this case Childs')

can get so modified and utilised in the pursuance of other scholarly concerns, that the ultimate goals of Childs' work are lost sight of. To some extent this happens with Scalise's work, and indeed, with the other writers above. He is not seeking to remodel Childs' work on its own terms. Like Brett and Barton, Scalise presses into service various hermeneutical theorists whose work may in some respects suggest certain parallels with facets of Childs' proposals, but which, in the end, do not really advance Childs' theological concerns to any significant degree.

There can be no doubt, however, that Scalise does have a close affinity with Childs' work, but seeks to take cognizance of the weaknesses which he feels need correction. His criticism of Childs' exclusion of the deuterocanonical books from the OT canonical text is now fully acknowledged as a just corrective by Childs. **(Appendix Q. 36)** Scalise has also drawn attention to Childs' attitude to sociological and literary concerns, though we have noted Childs' clear and incisive responses to these approaches when we assessed the work of Barton and Brett. The identification by Scalise of problems associated with the notion of "canonical intentionality" is certainly an important area of discussion in Childs' theory, one which has attracted critical scrutiny. We have touched on this issue earlier in our review of Brett's work on Childs, and it must be said that this is a weakness in Childs' theory which is difficult to see resolved to his entire satisfaction. What may be the hermeneutical concerns of the biblical tradents can only be established, if at all, by what is an historical judgment. To impute motives to individuals or groups of people, especially those who, in Childs' own words are largely unknown, is a procedure fraught with difficulty. While Childs would point to Ecclesiastes 12: 9 - 14 as a case which demonstrates hermeneutical activity on the part of the tradents, or "canonical shapers", this, nevertheless, is an exceptional example. Given the paucity of the evidence, we can only reasonably conclude that the exact nature of the motivation of the tradents must remain an open question.

Scalise's attempt to draw on the works of Wittgenstein and Ricoeur in order to provide hermeneutical tools to fine-tune Childs' work is a procedure which Childs does not find convincing. But Scalise is certainly correct when he suggests that Barth's

focus on (i) the text as it stands, (ii) postcritical perspectives on hermeneutics, and (iii) his emphasis on the theological nature of canon, provides the most appropriate theological background against which to understand Childs' work. (117)

It is true that in Childs' thought "canonical intentionality" has problematical aspects. Scalise states that Childs' advocacy of this concept is a move away from the idea of authorial intentionality towards a text grounded (autonomous text) hermeneutical construct. Now it might be thought that Childs wants to depart from the concept of authorial intentionality, perhaps even editorial intentionality, as the norm for interpretation and thus adopt a text-grounded hermeneutical construct. This is, however, not the case. In an article published by Childs since Scalise's work, he defends the necessity of a multi-level reading of Scripture according to different contexts. (118) He is not advocating a return to medieval exegesis though. 'Nevertheless, in spite of its shortcomings, traditional medieval exegesis correctly sensed the need of interpreting Scripture in ways which did justice to its richness and diversity in addressing different contexts and in performing a variety of functions when instructing the church in the ways of God.' (119)

Childs' understanding of a multi-level approach to Scripture takes seriously the different dimensions of the biblical text and the distinct contexts in which the text operates. 'The test of success lies in the ability of exegesis to illuminate the full range of the sense of the text while holding together witness and subject matter in unity commensurate with its canonical function.' (120) Childs distinguishes three main observations. Firstly, 'In order to hear the voice of the Old Testament's witness in its own right, it is essential to interpret each passage within its historical, literary, and canonical context.' (121) This means that the interpreter has to engage in a descriptive and a constructive task. Childs continues, ' . . . the serious interpreter is still constrained to relate the text's verbal sense to the theological reality which confronted historical Israel in evoking this witness.' (122)

Secondly, Childs' reading of the Christian Bible recognises a two part canon and seeks to delineate and analyse structural similarities and dissimilarities between the witnesses of both Testaments. This is not merely a descriptive history of exegesis.

'Rather, it is an exegetical and theological enterprise which seeks to pursue a relationship of content.' (123) This approach to the Bible does not in itself contradict the literal/historical reading, but rather extends it. It is clear from these remarks that Childs is concerned with authorial intention which is accessed by utilising historical critical tools. In this theological enterprise neither the Old is absorbed by the New, or the new by the Old, nor are the contents fused. The interpreter seeks to pursue a theological relationship between the textual witness and the subject matter of both collections.

Thirdly, the interpreter, in Childs' view, approaches the task of interpretation on the basis of the Christian affirmation that the church's Bible comprises a theological unity, though each Testament has its own unique voice. Childs writes, -  
' . . . I am suggesting that confronting the subject matter of the two discrete witnesses creates a necessity for the interpreter to encounter the biblical text from the full knowledge of the subject matter gained from hearing the voices of both Testaments.' (124) There cannot be any doubt about Childs' commitment the study of the prehistory and posthistory of the biblical text. Even back in 1980 he stated that, 'I have no desire to separate an author's so-called "real" intention from the meaning of the text.' (125) And it is also clear that Childs' priority in biblical interpretation is with the final form of the text. As he said in 1974, ' . . . a major purpose of biblical exegesis is the interpretation of the final form of the text, the study of the earlier dimensions of historical development should serve to bring the final stage of redaction into sharper focus.' (126)

Scalise has succeeded in understanding Childs' work with sympathy and measured critical perception. In response to Scalise's work Childs has conceded that some of his concepts need readjustment and development. But ultimately, Scalise does not seek to address the full gambit of Childs' concerns in the context of biblical theology on Childs' own terms. Scalise's interests lie in another direction.

If Childs' canonical approach to biblical interpretation is to be refined and developed further, then a much more comprehensive engagement with Childs will be required. What is now the most substantial contribution to the debate which Childs'

work has engendered is to be found in a recent study by P. R. Noble.<sup>(127)</sup> This is quite a formidable work. Like Brett's and Scalise's studies, it has its origins in a PhD thesis. As the title of the book explicitly states, Noble views Childs' canonical approach as having certain weaknesses; hence, there is a need for a critical reconstruction if Childs' programme is to be strengthened and made viable. It is clear that Noble's explication of Childs' proposals succeeds in understanding Childs in ways that Barr, Barton, and Brett do not. The reason for this is twofold. In the first instance, Noble comes to the task with considerable sympathy for Childs' deep concerns; he expresses his sympathy of Childs' approach at various points in the text of the book. This results in a level of understanding of Childs which is not evident in the other scholars noted above. Secondly, Noble's examination of Childs' work takes into account Childs' *magnum opus* BTONT (1992) which was not available to the other writers. Moreover, Noble examines more of the NT work done by Childs than any of the other writers; consequently, this account of the work of Childs is a very comprehensive treatment of Childs' canonical approach which runs to 370 pages, the contents of which are divided into 12 chapters. However, it is to be noted that Noble's obvious sympathy for Childs' hermeneutical programme does not screen off his critical discernment; in fact, Noble offers a sharp and perceptive critique of some aspects of Childs' work.

Noble's understanding of Childs' programme is set out in Chapters 2 and 3 and takes the form of a chronological sequential study of Childs' literary output. He first begins by unpacking Childs' programmatic essay, "Interpretation in Faith." [IF] <sup>(128)</sup> The rest of Chapter 2 is taken up with Childs' later writings, Biblical Theology in Crisis, [BTC] <sup>(129)</sup>, his Exodus commentary [EC] <sup>(130)</sup>, and another essay, "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem." <sup>(131)</sup> Chapter 3 examines IOTS (1979) <sup>(132)</sup>, OTTCC (1984) <sup>(133)</sup>, and BTONT. (1992) <sup>(134)</sup> Noble's objective is to delineate the various elements in Childs' theological programme and chart any developments in Childs' thought over a period of time in response to scholarly interaction.

We will not rehearse the contents of these chapters here as we have already touched on some of the main areas of criticisms of Childs' work in this chapter.

Rather, we shall draw together what Noble regards as the main weaknesses of Childs' programme. He detects the following problems in Childs' work.

(i) There is an obscurity as to the nature of Childs' third hermeneutical circle where the exegete passes from the biblical witness to divine reality.

(ii) An important question emerges from Childs' thought: Can a faith interpretation of the OT avoid degenerating into Christian eisegesis? This points to a further question as to what is the nature of the relation between the Old and the New Testaments?

(iii) Can Childs' commitment to historical critical research avoid fragmenting the OT thus driving a wedge between Old and New which would undermine Childs' claim that the combined witness of both Testaments bears testimony to the one God?

From these identified problems, Noble goes on to consider whether BTC (1970) reveals any areas of continuity with his IF essay. In fact, Noble sees Childs breaking new ground in BTC. First of all, Childs raises the question of the proper context for doing biblical theology. Interpretation can be carried on in many different kinds of contexts, but for Childs his distinctive thesis in BTC is that 'the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology.' (135) Noble observes that Childs is concerned with the original setting of the biblical witness, but at the same time he insists that the OT has a new meaning when placed in the context of the completed Christian canon. According to Childs, biblical theology is concerned with the meaning of the OT when placed in the light of the New. But how is 'original context' related to 'canonical context'? Noble views this as a problem, but he proceeds to examine Childs' IOTS in which he sees a significant modification in Childs' thought on this topic.

Secondly, Noble shows that Childs seeks to break new ground in giving a fuller account of how a new biblical theology should proceed. Methodological principles need to be supported by extended exegetical examples as to how the two Testaments can be brought together in an illuminating way. Noble cites Ps. 8 and Hebrews 2 as an example of Childs' approach, but he argues that Childs' procedures here raise some



problems. Can other OT texts be handled in this way? Is the writer of Heb. 2, who is seeking to resolve some christological problems, justified in rendering Ps. 8 in this way? In comparing Childs' rendering of Ps. 8 with his methodological statements, Noble thinks that Childs undertakes a "descriptive" and a "constructive" task. His "descriptive task" is close to Stendahl's advocacy, whereas, according to Noble, Childs' "constructive task" suffers from the problems of faith and reason. Noble concludes that Childs has not adequately shown that his treatment of Ps. 8 is a reasonable 'faith interpretation', rather than a christologically motivated misinterpretation. In sum, Nobles holds that Childs, in BTC, is setting out a conception of biblical theology in which there is a vital faith element but is unable to show how this functions in practice.

It is worth noting at this juncture that there is an amazing omission on Noble's part in that he fails to engage with a very insightful article by N. Lash entitled, "What Might Martyrdom Mean?" (136) Neither in this area of discussion of the Stendahlian dichotomy, or in his bibliography, does Noble show any knowledge of this important article. Had he consulted it, I would suggest that it could well have influenced his understanding between Childs and Stendahl.

In this stimulating article, Lash examines the Stendahlian distinction as to what the biblical text "meant" and what it "means" today. He finds the distinction of meaning into two senses as unhelpful. To distinguish between "description" and "hermeneutics" is for Lash, coming 'dangerously close to endorsing the positivist myth that exegesis is not yet interpretation.' (137)

Lash further observes a very important dimension to this topic. 'If the questions to which ancient authors sought to respond in terms available to them within their cultural horizons are to be 'heard' today with something like their original force and urgency, they have first to be 'heard' as questions that challenge us with comparable seriousness. And if they are to be heard, they must first be articulated in terms available to us within *our* cultural horizons. There is thus a sense in which the articulation of what the text might 'mean' today, is a necessary condition of hearing what that text 'originally meant'.' (138)

Noble, in Ch. 12, states that he believes that Stendahl's conception of the descriptive task is basically sound, though he is more guarded in accepting Stendahl's rendering of "What it means?"(139) But Lash shows that there is more to interpretation than Stendahl suggests. In biblical interpretation we are not only concerned with questions of "meaning", but also with the question of truth. (140) These insights from Lash therefore tend to lend support to Childs' interpretative goals rather than to Stendahl's.

Noble therefore sees Childs' canonical principle (i.e., that the meaning of each text should be found through interpreting it in the context of the completed canon) as equivalent to the Bible being divinely inspired. 'If the Old and New Testaments are both inspired by God then it follows immediately that the interpreter ought to read them as dual witnesses to the one divine reality, accept them as theologically normative, eschew searches for a 'positivity behind the text', etc., in other words, granted a suitable doctrine of inspiration, the rest of Childs' programme flows naturally from it.'(141) In Ch. 12, Noble seeks to develop a formal theory of inspiration (not a material-content related one as he is quick to point out) by positing an exegetical model which mirrors Childs' notion of canonical context. The thesis which Noble is presenting is that Childs' hermeneutical programme can be sustained only if it is supplemented or supported by some kind of doctrine of 'biblical inspiration'. This involves a belief in inspiration combined with an exegetical methodology which pays due regard to 'original meanings' and 'original contexts'. The question is, how is this principle to be applied? How is canonical context to be related to original context? Put another way, how is divine and human intentionality to be related? To clarify this matter, Noble proposes a formal model for the character of the Bible which develops the canonical principle in significant ways for biblical exegesis. Thus, the biblical canon can be construed as analogous to the collected works of a single author. 'This (divine) author wrote them (over a considerable period of time) by assuming a variety of authorial *personae*, each with its own distinctive character, historical situation, etc. As one moves, therefore, from one book to another one encounters a diversity of 'implied authors', each of whom must be understood on their own terms; yet behind

them all is a single, controlling intelligence, working to an overall plan. Because of this, these diverse works therefore can - and for a full understanding, must - be read together as a unified canon.' (142)

Noble emphasises that his proposal is a formal model which merely suggests how various interpretative procedures might be fruitful; it is not a material model, which means that it does not have any implications as to how the Bible was 'inspired'. This model, in Noble's terms, takes into account certain divine and human factors in biblical interpretation. Later in Ch. 12, Noble states that authors' intentions do not relate to textual meaning (as something behind or apart from the text) but functions as a regulative principle. In this model for canonical exegesis, Noble states that his starting point for all exegesis must be in its original historical context, and this seems to be a fair and sensible starting point. But what if this is very difficult to ascertain? Is it always necessary to establish authorial intention and original context?

Consider the prophets, Amos and Micah. We happen to know a good deal about the times in which they prophesied, and from their prophetic oracles we can learn something about the nature and character of God. Micah 6: 8 reads, 'He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' And in Amos 5: 15 we read, 'Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; . . .' We can justifiably deduce from these verses something about the character of God, namely, that he is just and good and demands justice and goodness from his people. But would our understanding of God's nature and character be reduced or impaired if we only had scant details of the times in which these prophets flourished? Of course, the knowledge that we now do possess of the contemporary world of Amos and Micah greatly sharpens the text in its cultural context; and we have this knowledge by employing the historical critical paradigm. However, the question still arises: to what extent are the theological insights of these and other prophets like Hosea and Isaiah, related to/dependent upon, historical referentiality? The answer to this question is similar to the question Noble poses when he considers whether the meaning of a text is semantically altered when it is read within the context of canon. Noble says that

this very much depends upon the details of individual cases. And this is what Childs is also saying with reference to historical referentiality in interpretation. (Appendix 9. 3)

If God is held to be the author of the books of the Bible, as Noble seeks to maintain, then such a statement cannot mean that God physically used a pen and wrote all the biblical books down. Since human authors, editors, tradents, canonical shapers were all involved in producing the Bible, and were, by Noble's definition, people who shared a common finitude, then it is safe to assume that we got our Bible through a wide range of human activity and reflection. Given our (albeit) limited knowledge of how the Bible has come down to us, this amounts to a reasonable statement of fact.

But Noble goes one stage further in that he proposes to argue that God is the divine author working through human authors. To describe this as 'the necessary epistemological underpinning' which will strengthen Childs' canonical approach is, to say the least, less than convincing. This argument is based on an analogy: the biblical canon is analogous to the collected works of a single author. Thus, an author like Shakespeare writes a diverse range of texts over a considerable period of time in various historical situations. While each constitute work of the Shakespearean canon can be read in its own right, nevertheless, all of his literary output, diverse though it may be, must be read together as a unified canon if a full understanding of Shakespeare is to be achieved.

Now there may be parallels to be drawn here with Childs' canonical approach, but that is all they are - parallels. More crucially, is Noble really comparing like with like? The Bible is a religious book which consists of many different books, written by many different human authors over a very long period of time. These books are of an essentially religious and theological nature. Critical study over the last two centuries has shown us that the compilation of the Bible literature, and its eventual stabilisation, came about as the result of a very long and complex process. Thus, if one is comparing the various Bible books by many diverse authors with the total number of books written by *one* author in *one* lifetime, can we convincingly draw the conclusions which Noble draws. I would submit that we cannot. He is simply not comparing like

with like.

One can never fully clinch an argument by using an analogy. At best, all that can be achieved by utilising analogies is that some correspondence may be noted between the analogy and what one is comparing it with; and from this procedure some suggestions or insights might be noted. But, analogies, *per se*, do not constitute valid proof. In the case of Noble's argument, he fails to take account of one vital difference between the Bible as a unified canon, and the collected works of an author like Shakespeare or Yeats. And that is, the *subject matter* of the Bible is not like the subject matter of the collected works of individual authors like Shakespeare. The Bible is read as Holy Scripture in the Christian church; other authors' works are not. And the reason for this is not hard to fathom. The Bible is a theologically informed work. It speaks to the reader about God, who God is, his being, his nature, his character, and his activity. Also, the Bible tells us about God and his relation to his creation and to human beings. But most significantly, the Bible shows God communicating with us supremely through Jesus Christ in redemptive grace. Of course, the Bible also tells us about human beings, their hopes, their fears, their exercise of power, their reflections on the absurdities of human life and much more. But quintessentially, the Bible is a theologically informed work.

In the history of Christian thought there has always been the belief that God works in and through human beings; this is a spiritual reality that is easily gleaned from both Testaments of the Christian canon. But it is not a reality that can be verified as an historical, empirical fact; when we speak of God working through human authors we are simply stating a widely held Christian *belief*. Moreover, it is not very clear as to what Noble means by the phrase the 'necessary epistemological underpinning.' This is a very loose phrase lacking in conceptual clarity. Noble holds it to refer to his proposal of positing God as the ultimate author of the canonical books. Such a proposal presupposes, as Noble asserts, a belief in the 'inspiration' of the canonical books. But what is the nature of this 'inspiration'? Are all books equally inspired? Can the concept of 'inspiration' be put on a methodological footing which will strengthen Childs' hermeneutical principles? Noble tries to slip out of these

difficulties by stating that what he is proposing is a *formal*, not a *material*, model. That is to say, Noble's formal model suggests fruitful areas of various interpretative procedures rather than being concerned with how the Bible was 'inspired'. But these questions must be faced if a creditable and suitable theory of inspiration is to be established. It is a fact that in all of Childs' scholarly writings there is not to be found an outline of a doctrine of inspiration. And the reason for this is not hard to discover, for the constant danger is that one can easily slip into a propositional account of inspiration which would put a stranglehold on creative interpretation. And that is an avenue Childs is not prepared to go down. Other more nuanced theories of inspiration may be possible, but such a task is still a formidable one.

Noble raises another difficulty in the work of Childs. He states that, 'at the heart of Childs' proposals lies a modern version of the age-old problem of Faith and Reason: If religion can be defended on rational grounds then there appears to be no place for faith; and conversely, if religion claims that faith is 'above' reason, or appeals to a special 'logic of faith', then faith seems to be in imminent danger of degenerating into irrationalism or subjectivism. In other words, is not the very notion of an 'Interpretation in Faith' inherently self-contradictory?' (143) Noble goes on to say that Childs' holds that both the descriptive and the normative tasks are to be faith informed, and because, 'they are both parts of the one project they must both be undertaken from the same methodological perspective: A faith-interpretation of the Scriptures that bear witness to God.' (144)

The exegete must pass beyond the witness of the Scriptures to the reality to which they point. 'The final task of exegesis is to seek to hear the Word of God, which means that the witness of Moses and Jeremiah, of Paul and John, must become a vehicle for another Word. The exegete must come to wrestle with the kerygmatic substance which brought into being the witness.' (145) Noble finds that the notion of passing from witness to divine reality is somewhat obscure, and that there is a danger of a faith interpretation degenerating into Christian eisegesis. Against this, one could argue that there is the opposite danger of assuming that one can achieve an objective interpretation. If modern hermeneutical theory has taught us anything, it is that there

is no such a thing as objective interpretation. Noble notes that Childs affirms the importance of faith throughout his subsequent writings, though in a more low-key way.

Since the publication of Noble's work, (1995) and Childs' BTONT(1992), Childs has written a number of articles, one in particular being, "Towards Recovering Theological Exegesis." (146) He writes, 'One comes to any text already with certain theological (ideological) assumptions and the task of good exegesis is to penetrate so deeply into the text that even these assumptions are called into question, tested, and revised by the subject matter itself.' (147) In the same article Childs affirms that, ' . . . the church's Bible comprises a theological unity, even though its form combines two distinct parts, each with a unique voice. The pursuit of the nature of this theological relationship provides the focus toward engaging critically this dimension of exegesis. A level of theological construction is brought together in rigorous reflection in which the full reality of the subject matter of Scripture, gained from a close hearing of each separate Testament, is explored.' (148) Childs categorically states that the exegesis which he has in mind is not to be thought of as one operating in a homiletical mode. 'Rather, I am suggesting that confronting the subject matter of the two discrete witnesses creates a necessity for the interpreter to encounter the biblical text from the full knowledge of the subject matter gained from hearing the voices of both Testaments. The interpreter now proceeds in a direction which moves from the reality itself back to the textual witness. The central point to emphasize is that the biblical text itself exerts theological pressure on the reader, demanding that the reality which undergirds the two witnesses not be held apart and left fragmented, but rather critically reunited.' (149) It should be clear from these statements that Childs does not conceive of biblical exegesis as sliding into uncontrolled subjectivism.

That there is a faith dimension in Childs' hermeneutical proposals is not in question. But what is in doubt is the nature of the problem which Noble poses. To present "faith" and "reason" in an exclusive disjunctive manner is reminiscent of the "faith" and "reason" juxtaposition of the 18th century Enlightenment, where reason ruled supreme. If one poses the issue in this way, then one will encounter problems.

But is the placement of "faith" and "reason" in the form of a dichotomy really necessary? Why should there be a division between "faith" and "reason"? Throughout the history of the Church, learned and memorable exegesis has not come from using human reason alone. The illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite to theological insight of substance. Can human reason alone give access to the knowledge of God? Not according to Paul in 1 Cor. 2: 10 - 14, especially, v. 14. I think it would be correct to say that theological insight in biblical exegesis is the result of the use of human reason enlightened by the Holy Spirit in faith. From this perspective, there is no dichotomy between "faith" and "reason". As far as Childs is concerned, it is a matter of 'faith seeking understanding' rather than 'understanding seeking faith' when he engages with the biblical text, which to him, is not simply a religious source, but a theological witness to God's reality.

Noble's research, on his own admission, does 'traverse a lot of difficult and diverse ground.' (150) His reconstruction of Childs' programme is an attempt to advance a taxonomy of hermeneutical principles based on a diverse range of theoretical data. Noble utilises modern hermeneutical theories from Schleiermacher, Bultmann and Gadamer. Pannenberg's historical methodology (which endorses R. G. Collingwood's conception of historical method) and Van Austin Harvey's historical epistemology, are also drawn on, though the Troeltschian analogy is rejected as an untenable methodological principle. Noble also thinks that reader-response theory has much to offer Childs in that his "interpretation in faith" can be explained as a kind of reading strategy. In this context the work of Stanley Fish is analysed and Noble feels that it appears particularly promising for Childs' work.

Apart from these discussions of literary theory and philosophical hermeneutics, Noble is concerned about the practical exegetical side and proposes a 'New Typology' for which he finds the work of H. Frei and R. Alter very helpful. We earlier showed how Noble was not convinced by Childs' christological rendering of Ps. 8. Generally speaking, Noble affirms that 'In practice, then, critical scholarship has been largely unsuccessful in reading the Old Testament as a witness to Christ.' (151) This might well be, but how does Childs succeed in revitalising OT theology and biblical theology



as Christian disciplines? Noble sees progress in this quarter in that Childs endorses Frei's notion of figural (typological) interpretation. Thus, Noble sets out to present a literal typology as one example of exegetical practice which establishes sound exegetical guidance in the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament.

Noble's starting point is Alter's work on biblical 'type-scenes.' (152) While Alter is not addressing theological issues, nonetheless, his ideas and principles can be redeployed for other ends. Noble takes Alter's paradigmatic examples of 'the encounter with the future betrothed at a well', in Gen. 24: 10 - 61; 29: 1 - 20; and Ex. 2: 15b - 21 as a template against which he compares an NT exemplar, John 4, where Jesus encountered the Samaritan women at a well. Noble's survey of this story brings out similarities and dissimilarities with the OT examples. The end result of this study for Noble is that in 'recognizing John 4 as a type-scene enables us to interpret it at a higher level than a semantic-grammatical, and thus to perceive significant theological themes which would otherwise pass unnoticed.' (153)

A second example of the NT's use of a type-scene centres on the concept of a Rejected Deliverer. OT examples of this include Joseph, Jephthah, and Samson. Noble's strategy is to enumerate a number of features which these stories have in common and then to pass over into the NT portrayal of Jesus which he believes is an illuminating example of this OT type-scene. He briefly refers to Mark's account of the passion narrative in which he highlights Jesus' betrayal of Jesus, the rejection of Jesus by his own people (all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes), and the rejection of Jesus by the official representative of the Roman Empire, the ruling world power.

Noble also draws out the theme of Jesus' isolation in a variety of ways and concludes that the Gospel writers wish to understand Jesus through the pattern of the OT Rejected Deliverer, i.e., Jesus is the antitypical fulfilment of the OT 'types'. All this has, for Noble, significant implications for how we understand the purpose of Jesus' career. Just as the OT deliverers were portrayed as saving those who rejected them from a devastating catastrophe, so also we are meant to understand what Jesus accomplished in commensurate terms. 'The Old Testament types did not merely set

good examples or offer wise counsel but actually *accomplished* something, namely, the deliverance of those who rejected them from a catastrophic situation. Again we see, then, that recognizing the appropriate type-scene has important theological consequences.' (154) As Noble reflects on this 'New Typology', he concludes that it 'apparently is possible to develop a form of typological interpretation which is both methodologically sound and theologically fruitful.' (155)

In fairness to Noble, he is not presenting this literary typology as theological exegesis *par excellence* which Childs could adopt or adapt to achieve his interpretational goals. Noble is conscious that there are many examples of the NT's use of the Old which cannot be explained in a figural way. He opines that this is an area where further research is required. This 'New Typology', as a hermeneutical device, has one key characteristic; a range of correspondences must exist between the Old and the New Testaments if it is to get off the ground. But it is not clear from Noble's exemplars just how Childs' hermeneutical programme will be helped by the operation of this device.

It is true that 'typology' as an interpretative tool can sometimes offer imaginative and theological insights of great depth, as Moberly has shown in his treatment of von Rad's handling of Genesis 22. (156) And the same can be said of typology's close relative, 'allegory', as D. Steinmetz has shown in a very thought-provoking article entitled, 'The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis.' (157) But Noble's examples of his 'New Typology' comes nowhere near the detailed exegesis which Moberly and Steinmetz have produced. Quite simply, Noble's use of this literary device does not yield the sustained theological reflection and insight as found in the work of these two exegetes. What Noble succeeds in doing is to show that when some passages in the OT are placed alongside some NT passages, on the basis of a 'type-scene', some structural parallels are discernible. One could go further and suggest that these parallels could form the basis for theological reflection of substance. But does the examples which Noble advance amount to being methodologically sound? As Noble himself observes, one can only employ this line of approach to the Bible with certain passages. It might work, it might not. As such, Noble's 'New Typology' cannot be

regarded as an intrinsically sound method of interpreting scripture, christologically speaking. It is also worth pointing out that when typology is effective in theological exegesis, it has to be under carefully nuanced control, as in the case of Moberly and Steinmetz. Operating outside such methodologically refined control, e.g., in some Christian traditions, the realms of fantasy can be very close to the horizon when 'typology' and 'allegory' are employed.

Moreover, if Noble proposes to regard the Old and the New Testaments as inspired, by which he means that the two Testaments have been brought together by a 'single controlling intelligence, working to an overall plan' (158), then one would expect the Bible to exhibit a coherence and unity whereby a 'New Typology' could effectively and consistently be used. But this is exactly where we will encounter some difficulty. How would Noble approach the problem of the great diversity of the biblical material with all its dissonance, variations and theologies, when he seeks to christologically interpret the OT armed with his 'New Typology'? More specifically, how would Noble suggest that we, in a contemporary context, interpret Judges 19; Ps. 137, especially vv. 7- 8; the herem in Numbers 21: 2- 3; the extreme cynicism of Qoheleth, and Jehu's purge in 2 Kgs. 9 - 11 (to name a few difficult areas of interpretation) in the light of Christ's ethical teaching concerning the kingdom of God? I would venture to suggest that to employ Noble's version of typology would be to encounter acute difficulty in interpreting these passages as Holy Scripture.

Noble sees Childs' "faith in interpretation" as having certain problems, but Noble's own proposals are also problematic. His notion of God working through human authors is not one that is deductible from the biblical evidence itself, but is, in fact, a viewpoint which emanates from a confessional commitment. Thus, if Childs' interpretation in faith is beset by problems of subjectivity and a lack of clarity, as Noble alleges, then the same criticism can be made of Noble's proposals. In sum, Noble's positive proposals highlight some of the issues which are at stake in biblical interpretation, namely, what precisely is meant by "faith", "history", "truth", "reason", "faith", and "theology". Noble seems to take the meaning of these terms as read, but these terms, and their definition, are integral to Childs' hermeneutical proposals.

Along with Scalise, Brett, Barr, and Barton, Noble concludes that Childs' canonical approach has weaknesses which, in one way or another, may be strengthened to make it an effective means of interpretation. Throughout Noble's book he constantly reiterates that one has to understand Childs "on his own terms". But, does Noble succeed in doing this? To some extent, as we have already indicated, Noble has tapped into Childs' mind more extensively than the other writers, and with considerable sympathy. Yet, he follows Brett and Scalise in attempting to push Childs' approach through the critical sieve of some modern intellectual theories in pursuit of an agenda which transcends Childs' main concerns. As Childs has recently stated, "Gadamer is not on my front burner." (**Appendix 9. 37 & 40**) In conclusion, if Noble would seek to strengthen Childs' hermeneutical programme, I think this would be better achieved by directly producing engaging theological exegesis of the biblical text. This, however, does not mean that Childs' canonical approach is not in need of refinement, development and further testing; no matter how convincing the hermeneutical principles might be, the fact remains that what matters most is whether the application of hermeneutical theory leads to sustained theological exegesis of the biblical text as the Scripture of the Church. Thus far, Childs has written one Bible commentary on Exodus where he seeks to implement his canonical approach, and in Ch. 4 we shall examine in detail his interpretation of Ex. 3 - 4. Latterly, in his BTONT (1992), he has presented two examples of exegesis in the context of biblical theology. It is to these that we now turn.

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**CHAPTER 3.**

**Canonical Interpretation:**

**Exegesis In the Context of**

**Biblical Theology.**

### CHAPTER 3.

## CANONICAL INTERPRETATION: EXEGESIS IN THE CONTEXT OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY.

When B. S. Childs published his monumental Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments (1), it was the fulfilment of his lifelong interest in biblical theology. This work is not, however, offered as a definitive statement on the subject. Rather, what we have here is, in the words of one commentator, ' . . . an attempt to do no less than reconceptualise the nature of the study of the Bible in relation to Christian theology,' (2) a view which is reflected in the book's sub-title, 'Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible.'

The material of the book is presented in seven sections, though these are very unequal in length. Part I, The Prolegomena, is a brief survey of current approaches to biblical theology which includes a summary of the work of Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. Part 2 is 'A Search for a New Approach' which outlines the principles of Childs' approach. In Part 3 Childs adumbrates the discrete witness of the Old Testament, while Part 4 deals with the discrete witness of the New Testament. Part 5 consists of an exegesis of Genesis 22: 1 - 19 and Matthew 21: 33 - 46; this part is the second shortest in the book, though by contrast, Part 6, entitled 'Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible' amounts to one half of the entire work. The book concludes with Part 7, which is a summary of Childs' proposals for 'A Holistic Reading of Christian Scripture.' Our present task is to concentrate on Part 5: Exegesis in the Context of Biblical Theology. (3)

### GENESIS CH. 22: 1-19. The Akedah.

Childs' treatment of the binding of Isaac is divided into four sub-sections, (1). The Old Testament Exegetical Debate, (2). The New Testament Witness, (3). History of Exegesis, and (4). Genesis 22 in the Context of Biblical Theology. A very brief survey is presented on the Old Testament exegetical debate including Gunkel's history-of-religions approach, of which Childs is negative, though he is more positive towards von Rad's avowedly theological approach which considers the issue of the divine

promise as being dominant in the narrative. It is, however, with Luther and Calvin that Childs stands in close affinity because of their deep interest in the theological dimensions of the text. Spiegel's study of the midrashic tradition of the Akedah (4) is also cited as is the substantive history of the exegesis of Genesis 22, 'Isaaks Opferung,' (5)

From the scholarly literature Childs makes several observations. He stresses that any modern exegesis of the narrative must take it seriously on its own terms and not make it the basis of 'dogmatic propositions.' It also must be acknowledged that the text shows evidence of growth and development and, therefore, has a multilayered quality. Thus, 'the diachronic and synchronic elements continue to remain in some tension'. (6) Childs takes cognizance of von Rad's appeal that the text has great potential in generating a wide variety of very different readings, but the use of Heilsgeschichtliche by von Rad to relate the two testaments is less than convincing for Childs.

In the modern debate, however, Childs sees little direction or concern as to how the whole Christian Bible is to be included in the exegesis of the text. Rather, this brings into play such responses as that of Kierkegaard's employment of existential categories, where a loose relationship between the Old and the New Testaments would obtain. Childs argues for 'more exegetical and theological precision' which will enable a biblical theology to develop into an actual discipline. It is Childs' contention that the multifaceted nature of Gen. 22 'has been shaped throughout its lengthy development in such a way as to provide important hermeneutical guidelines for its theological use by a community which treasured it as scripture.' (7)

Thereupon, Childs presents several observations about the Akedah. First, he highlights the fact that this chapter has been set within the larger narrative context of Genesis as a whole and therefore must be understood as such. In this light, the story of Genesis 22 sustains the theme of the promise Yahweh made to Abraham of a posterity (12. 1ff; 15. 1ff; 17. 15ff). The command by God to sacrifice Isaac, heir to the promise, sets the tone of the narrative. For Gunkel, verses 15 - 18 are secondary; but for Childs, these verses are of critical significance in developing the message of the divine promise.

Another canonical feature of the story is the way the superstructure of the story functions. 'After these things God tested Abraham .' The command which God gives to Abraham is, in Childs' estimation, of a unique and unrepeatable quality - a patriarchal temptation according to Luther - and for the reader a context has been given which allows for other continuing forms of application. Thirdly, a canonical clue is to be found in verse 14. 'Abraham named the place 'Yahweh sees' .' Despite Gunkel's view of the verse containing the place name for an aetiological saga, in the present narrative the verse has another function. The verb points back to the reply Abraham gave to Isaac - 'God will see to his own lamb' emphasising that God takes the initiative in providing his own sacrifice. It also points forward. The nihil of the verb 'to see' is found in Genesis 12. 7; 17. 1; 18. 1; Exodus 3. 2, 16. as a technical term for God's appearance in a theophany. From this Childs concludes that, 'The God who appeared in Abraham's unique history now continues to make himself known to Israel'. (8) Childs affirms that this story does not celebrate some ancient holy place; it rather points to the assurance that God will continually presence himself among his people.

Finally, drawing on the work of S. Walters (9) , Childs points to a canonical feature of the text which is indicated by the 'peculiar resonance within the larger canonical collection'. In Genesis 22 there are three key words, 'ram', 'burnt offering', and 'appear.' These three words are found in this cluster in Leviticus chapters 8, 9 and 16. in describing the first sacrifice in the tabernacle and the day of atonement. 'The effect for the informed reader is that the story of Abraham's uniquely private experience is thus linked to Israel's collective public worship and conversely Israel's sacrifice is drawn into the theological orbit of Abraham's offering: 'God will provide his own sacrifice'. ' (10)

Childs' treatment of the New Testament material is very brief. He states that the witness cannot be properly heard unless due attention is given to its Hellenistic milieu, and in particular, to the Jewish exegetical traditions in which it was formed. To what extent is the binding of Isaac used by the writers of the New Testament in relation to Jesus' atoning death? Childs acknowledges that the influence of the

Jewish exegetical tradition is difficult to correctly assess, but he finds little plausibility in Israel Levi's argument that Paul's doctrine of Christ's expiatory sacrifice came from the Jewish tradition of the binding of Isaac. As Childs puts it, 'The surprising fact is that one finds so few explicit references to Isaac's binding in connection with Jesus' death.' (11) Nevertheless, as Childs points out, we have a variety of echoes and allusions below the surface of the biblical text.

Childs briefly mentions a few of these allusions. In Mark 1. 9, for example, the word 'beloved', while not found in the Hebrew text of Psalm 2 or Isaiah 42, is found in the LXX of Genesis 22 v 2. In some New Testament writings, like Acts 3. 25f; Hebrews 6. 13f, Genesis 22 is cited with reference to the patriarchal promise. But the strongest evidence for a direct dependency on the Akedah tradition is found in Romans 8. 32 where Paul states that, 'God did not spare his own son', which is almost identical to the wording in the LXX of Genesis 22 v 16. According to Childs, this parallel relates to the conduct of Abraham and not to the suffering of Isaac.

As in his NTCI, where Childs often relies on the work of N. Dahl, so here too he cites Dahl's work 'The Atonement' with approval. Any correspondence between the binding of Isaac and the death of Jesus being of a typological nature is rejected by both Dahl and Childs. Dahl sees the correspondence of a different kind, that of act and reward. While a parallelism is drawn between Abraham's conduct and the conduct which is expected in return from God within a Jewish interpretational context, Dahl views this differently in the context of Paul's theology. Abraham was rewarded according to grace, not on his own merit. Christ's death, in Paul's thinking, was a fulfilment of what God had promised by an oath. Childs writes, 'The crucifixion of Jesus was thus explicated in the light of Genesis 22 as an adequate reward of the promise and not as a typology between Isaac and Christ.' (12)

In conclusion, Childs refers to Hebrews 11 v 17ff. which makes an explicit reference to Abraham's offering of Isaac and where Abraham is held to have believed in the resurrection of the dead ( v19). This latter point is missing in Genesis 22 and is a very unusual feature of the writer's interpretation of the Old Testament story. 'Abraham held on to the divine promise, even in the face of Isaac's death because of his

confidence in the creative power of God to overcome the humanly impossible.' (13)

Before Childs turns to consider Genesis 22 within the context of a biblical theology, he gives what could be regarded as his standard practice, a history of exegesis relevant to the passage or text at hand. This very brief survey includes a summary of the work of Philo, Melito and Origen but Childs' preference is for the work of Calvin and Luther because they raised new theological concerns. Both of these Reformers jettisoned the allegorical and typological approach to the biblical text which was so favoured by mediaeval exegesis. Regarding Calvin, Childs says that 'the Reformer's interest focussed on the nature of the trial as a theological issue of faith in relation to the promise of God.' (14) Luther emphasised the inner struggle of faith while Calvin stressed more the temptation as a threat to the salvation of the world through the seed of Isaac. Abraham was thus a Christian model because of his faith in God's promise which was instrumental in maintaining his confidence. For the Christian believer, the continuing significance of the story is that there is a tension between divine promise and command which is integral to the life of faith.

Finally, Childs considers this important chapter in the light of a biblical theology which seeks to move to theological reflection on both testaments. And here, as he admits, it is easier to pose questions than to answer them. Many scholars find any attempt to theologically relate the Old and New Testaments as uninteresting; it is mainly considered to be a homiletical issue for preachers. In Germany, the task of biblical theology is seen as an attempt to assess the effect of the Old Testament period through to the New Testament and into modern times where the critical implications are drawn. This attempt to treat the two testaments as sources for a historical trajectory from the past Childs finds quite inadequate. What biblical theology requires for Childs is not a historical or biblicist approach to the problem. Neither will a simple identification of theological reflection with the New Testament interpretation of the Old be convincing. 'The Christian church has two testaments of a Christian Bible which set modern theological reflection in a different context from the earliest Christian witness of the New Testament.' (15)

Childs goes on to look at Genesis 22 as a concrete example which could



possibly open up larger issues pertaining to biblical theology. The assumption is made that in this passage there is a theological substance which points to the reality beyond the witness. The concrete exegetical exercise of Genesis 22 does not get absorbed with such matters as the relation between the Old and the New Testaments, the role of the reader and the creative function of language. Nor does Childs give precedence to history-of-religion features, like the phenomenon of child sacrifice in an Ancient Near Eastern setting, or psychological or historical questions. These matters are to be held as subordinate to the theological dimensions of the text, otherwise they distract the exegete from the witness of the passage.

Central to the interpretation of this passage for Childs is the belief that its major focus is to be seen in its witness to the test of Abraham's faith. Yet, paradoxically, Abraham's faith in God's promise was, to all intents and purposes, contradicted by God's command to Abraham concerning Isaac. Theologically, the issue hinges on the nature of the relationship between God and Abraham. 'The theological issue at stake is that God's command to slay the heir stands in direct conflict with his promise of salvation through this very child, and therefore Abraham's relation to God is under attack.' (16) In response to Abraham's personal crisis, the passage emphasizes the radical nature of Abraham's faith in God.

The solidity of Abraham's faith is confirmed when God provided his own sacrifice at the decisive point in the narrative; as a result, God's promise to Abraham was honoured. Childs states that the editors, or as he calls them, the canonical shapers, did not allow this incident to be relegated to the historical past. The theological witness to which the text refers, is of continuing significance for succeeding generations. 'God not only saw his own sacrifice, rather he still 'sees' in the present and future. In Israel's public worship this same God 'lets himself be known' today.' (17)

Childs alludes to Calvin's emphasis on the theological significance of Abraham's obedience especially the interpretative importance of verses 15 - 18. Calvin links Abraham's reward with God's renewal of the promise of the blessing with the Pauline implication of this adequate reward. Despite the incompatibility of grace and reward, Childs points to the fact that the nature of divine grace is clearly presented in

Genesis 22. Of Abraham, God required a sacrifice, but in the end he provided his own. Yet, the full implications of this are not fully explicit in the text of Genesis 22. Childs sees the exegetical effect of this incident being enhanced in the larger Pentateuchal canon where a 'distant resonance' is set up between Genesis and Leviticus. While it is conceded that these two witnesses are not directly related, nonetheless, for Childs, 'Genesis 22 points in a direction which calls for fuller theological reflection on the whole sacrificial system of Leviticus in the light of God's gracious revelation of his will to Abraham.' (18)

**MATTHEW CH. 21: 33 - 46. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants.**

The material on this parable is spread over five sub-sections: (1) Synoptic Analysis, (2) The Demise of the Allegorical Interpretation, (3) A Traditio-Historical Trajectory, (4) The Role of the Old Testament, and (5) Theological Reflection in the Context of Biblical Theology. After citing the Synoptic parallels and the Gospel of Thomas, Childs offers a Synoptic analysis of this parable, though this amounts to barely one page. He follows this with a short survey on the demise of allegorical interpretation with references to Irenaeus (a lengthy sample of his work is given) and R. C. Trench. The importance of the new modern approach of Julicher, Dodd and Jeremias is briefly indicated as is the more sophisticated debate on the nature of allegory itself found in the work of scholars like Klauck, Crossan, Flusser and Weder. This leads on to a consideration of a traditio-historical trajectory in which Childs outlines the significance of the work of a variety of scholars including Kummel and Snodgrass. But Childs comes away from the scholarly debate with much exegetical frustration because the meaning of the parable and its interpretation are determined at the outset by employing modern literary and logical categories. If one is set to use historical parameters in interpreting the parables, then 'this rationalistic refocussing of the text also runs the risk of missing the parable's own point.' (19)

Childs recognises the fact that the Gospels are a multi-layered text and that the parables reveal oral, written and redactional development. This is confirmed in the texts by the various shifts in the addressee, subsequent editorial framework and interpolations, e.g. Matthew 21. 44. In this area, historical critical methods can prove

useful in identifying literary seams, but Childs asserts that there is a significant element of subjectivity in some scholars' approaches to the parable, especially that of Crossan's.

The real difficulty for Childs, as far as critical reconstructions are concerned, is that, 'no distinction is made between tracing the growth of the text's kerygmatic witness among the various Gospels, and reconstructing an allegedly non-kerygmatic, historical level apart from its reception in faith by the New Testament witnesses.' (20) For Childs the difficult issue is to determine the exact nature of the traditio-historical trajectory in interpreting the parable particularly with regards to understanding the growth of the text 'within the context of the church's kerygmatic understanding of the subject matter constituting the gospel.' (21)

Childs then follows this section by considering the role of the Old Testament in interpretation. The Old Testament is used explicitly as the introduction to the parable in Matthew's account, though all three Synoptic writers use the parable of Isaiah 5 in different ways. In the Septuagintal form of Isaiah 5: 1-2, both Mark and Luke make use of its imagery, though Luke greatly curtails the reference to Isaiah. The Gospel of Thomas makes no reference to the Old Testament and this, as Childs points out, is put down to a redactional move by the Gnostic author rather than assigning a secondary place to Isaiah 5 in the Synoptics.

To determine how the Old Testament was used in this parable is, in Childs' view, the more difficult question. One thing is clear, however, 'the New Testament's use of the parable no longer shares the original meaning of Isaiah's parable, but stands in considerable tension with the logic of the Old Testament story.' (22) While at the outset an analogy is made by using Isaiah's parable, the New Testament launches into a very different story. The vineyard in Matthew cannot be equated with the house of Israel because it will be taken away and given to another v 41. Verse 43 seemingly identifies the vineyard with the kingdom of God. The theme of the unproductivity is not an issue here; attention is directed instead on the evil actions of the tenants. The variety in the Synoptic accounts show a trajectory of an increasing allegorical approach to the story. An example of this interpretation process is readily

seen in Mark's account. Consequently, when Dodd and Jeremias seek to determine the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* free from any allegorical features, Childs maintains that they are in the area of speculation which is not conducive to understanding the witness of the canonical Gospels.

Matthew's redaction of the parable is not to be historicized by taking the words, 'the kingdom of God will be taken from you (the Pharisees) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.' (v 43), and interpreting them by replacing the synagogue with the church. (23) Childs states, 'Rather, the warning of v. 44 ('he who falls on this stone will be broken. . .'), further extends into the future the message of the parable and challenges another generation of Christians to produce fruits of righteousness.' (24) Hermeneutically, one has to recognize that the gospel parables, in all their variations, are all shaped from the perspective of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is not the interpreter's critical perceptions in assessing how much of the parable derives from Jesus, and how much from the needs of the early church that is really decisive, according to Childs. Only when critical construals enhance the trajectory of the church's kerygmatic witness will genuine exegetical contributions emerge.

In the final section on this parable, Childs addresses the topic, 'Theological Reflection in the Context of Biblical Theology' which essentially is concerned with the interpretation of the parable from within the theological dimensions of both testaments. A lengthy process was involved in the early church's reflection on the interpretation of this parable, a process which involved going back to its witness in the Old Testament, and also projecting forward to the resurrection of Jesus. By way of contrast, the Gospel of Thomas omits any reference to the Old Testament, a fact put down to the author's gnosticizing tendencies. (25) The difference which Childs sees between the handling of the tradition by the Synoptic writers and the author of the Gospel of Thomas is to be observed in quite different stances taken towards the Old Testament and the linking of the church's continuity with Israel.

Both Testaments start with a common text: a vineyard planted by God, but thereafter, the New Testament tells a quite different story. The link with the Old

Testament, however, is expanded in the growth of the tradition which would suggest that the Old Testament is more than a convenient backdrop for the story. Childs advances the view that the link is a vital theological one in that both testaments share a common theological reality. Theological reflection on the parable of the wicked tenants reveals an ontological relationship between the two events. The same disobedient and rebellious spirit of God's people in the Old Testament now comes to fruition in the rejection and death of God's Son. No allegorical correspondence between the two is countenanced here. 'The content with which both testaments wrestle is the selfsame divine commitment to his people and the unbelieving human response of rejection, the sin which climaxed in the slaying of God's Anointed One. In this sense, the two testaments are part of the same redemptive drama of election and rejection.' (26)

Childs cites another witness to the story of the vineyard in Isaiah 27. 2 - 6 which is set in an eschatological context. This points to the witness that God still protects his vineyard from his enemies. Israel is called by God to be reconciled to him which will lead to blessing, both for Israel and the whole world. Childs sees this as a further extension of the parable which goes beyond the destruction of the wicked tenants to a position where God's intention is seen in the restoration and reconciliation of his people. The function of Matthew's form of the parable is not to proclaim the triumph of Christianity over Judaism, but to keep open the possibility of reconciliation through the exalted Christ. Both the church and Israel have experienced God's miraculous intervention. Therefore, 'It is this decisive existential note which resists linking the testaments in a rigid, historicized sequence from the past, but which continues to call forth a living voice from the entire scriptures of the church.' (27)

In his NTCI Childs states that the interpretation of the parables plays a crucial role in determining how one understands the Gospels and the ministry of Jesus. He went on to say that, 'the intense modern debate in the parables provides an ideal area for testing the canonical approach and for shaping its profile in contrast to other hermeneutical options.' (28) But when we consider the concrete example of Childs's

canonical interpretation of this parable, he seems to be drawn more into the modern debate rather than with its theological dimensions. Of the five sections of this material, it is only in the last two - 'The Role of the Old Testament', and 'Theological Reflections in the Context of Biblical Theology' - that Childs turns explicitly from the theory of exegesis to its practice. (29) But even here, only just over four pages are devoted to the parable's exegesis. In the section, 'The Role of the Old Testament', there is no sustained engagement with the text in a thought-provoking way. Instead, Childs discusses how Isaiah 5 is used in Matthew 21 and in other New Testament texts; he states that, 'Although an initial analogy is made with Isaiah's parable, the New Testament parable launches into a very different story.' (30) It is difficult to see why Childs concentrates on this Old Testament reference to the extent that he does, for in so doing, discussion of the possible meaning(s) of this parable is consigned to the sidelines.

Childs continues on with the hermeneutical debate with reference to the work of Dodd and Jeremias, whose endeavours to find the real life setting of the parable allowed them to, 'speculate on a level which is not represented by the canonical Gospels and is no longer directly pertinent for understanding its witness.' (31) It is to the early church, according to Childs, where the key is to be found for the interpretation of the parable. But all Childs does is to quote a range of biblical references that contain some allusions to words and phrases in Matt 21. Even up to the end of this section, Childs is still concerned with the hermeneutical debate with no indication of an emerging incisive theological engagement with the parable.

The remaining two pages deal with theological reflection of the parable in the context of biblical theology. Childs extends his sights over both testaments and draws out some general observations. He states that when the Old Testament is read in the light of the full reality of the Gospel, this does not necessarily lead to an allegorical correspondence between them, but to the fact that both experience a shared reality. The important influence of the Old Testament in Jesus' parable is acknowledged. But what then is the effect on the Old Testament parable of Isaiah 5 when the New Testament takes over that parabolic tradition? The relationship is not allegorized,

according to Childs; neither does the New Testament provide a key to reinterpret the Old Testament text. Nor does the New Testament offer a midrashic rendering of Isaiah. 'Rather, it began with a common context, the carefully planted vineyard of God, and then told a very different story.' (32)

Childs goes on to link Isaiah 5 with Isaiah 27. 2 - 6, where God's vineyard is set within an eschatological context with the words, 'in that day'. God is still the guardian of the vineyard, protected as a pleasant planting from its enemies. Then a divine call is issued by God to his people Israel, 'let them make peace with me' (Isaiah 27 v 5) to be reconciled to him. In this way, the Old Testament has extended its vision beyond the destruction of the wicked tenants to the restored people of Israel. 'From the perspective of the two testaments a further typological analogy is formed which further confirms the writing of the one plan of God.' (33)

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Having outlined Childs' interpretation of these well - known passages, the crucial question is: are these examples of 'canonical' interpretation convincing exemplars of exegesis in the context of biblical theology? Childs' own words are pertinent in this respect. 'Whether or not the exegesis is successful cannot be judged on its theory of interpretation, but on the actual interpretation itself.' (34)

In evaluating Childs' exegesis let us first consider the amount of space allocated to these examples of exegesis. Out of a book of over 700 pages, he devotes about 20 pages to these very interesting passages. On the Akedah Childs does not turn to exegete the text of Genesis 22 until after nine pages of discussion, and when he does, he assigns three pages to it. On the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, there is less material included with just a little over 9 pages of commentary. The longest section is 'The Role of the Old Testament' (about two and a half pages), and less than two pages are given over to the interpretation of the parable from the perspective of theological reflection on both testaments. From these facts alone it would be natural to conclude that, while some of his comments on the above passages are helpful and perceptive, there is really no attempt to exegete the texts at a sustained level of



theological engagement.

At this juncture, it would be useful to consider a close reading of the Akedah by another scholar who is sympathetic to Childs' hermeneutical proposals. R.W.L. Moberly has recently presented a sharply focused exposition of Genesis 22. 1 - 19. (35) He fastens his attention on the significance of the much neglected verses 15 - 18, and argues that these verses, far from being a late editorial insertion of secondary importance, are in fact the earliest of all the recorded commentaries on verses 1 - 14, 19. It is evident that Moberly echoes the interpretational concerns of Childs. He states, 'Moreover, it seems that in many OT texts a hermeneutical process has been at work precisely to loosen the text from its original context, so that it can have meaning for readers within a wide ranges of different situations. . . .' (36) And regarding his own basic thesis, Moberly says, 'I propose that vv 15-18 should be described as the earliest and canonically recognized commentary on the story,' (37) After reviewing the scholarly debate on verses 15 - 18, both in relation to their alleged secondary nature and from the perspective that they are an integral part of the story, Moberly proceeds to build on the debate about the patriarchal promises in order 'to relate vv 15 - 18 both to their immediate and wider context in Genesis.' (38)

Moberly's detailed study offers a thought-provoking exegesis of this passage and while his main thrust in his interpretation is along literary and theological lines, historical concerns are firmly kept in view. What we have here is a thoroughly argued exegesis executed in a manner which offers stimulating observations to the reader. To take vv 15 - 18 as Moberly suggests, leads him to the conclusion that, 'A promise which previously was grounded solely in the will and purpose of Yahweh is transformed so that it is now grounded both in the will of Yahweh and in the obedience of Abraham. It is not that the divine purpose has become contingent upon Abraham's obedience, but that Abraham's obedience has been incorporated into the divine promise. Henceforth, Israel owes its existence not just to Yahweh but also to Abraham.' (39) This comment is an astute observation on the text which is based on a very close reading of the story. Moberly continues, 'Theologically this constitutes a profound understanding of the value of human obedience - it can be taken up by God



and become a motivating factor in his purposes towards man. Within the wider context of Hebrew theology I suggest that this is analogous to the assumptions underlying intercessory prayer. Here too faithful human response to God is taken up and incorporated within the purposes and activity of God.' (40) This treatment of Genesis 22. 1-19 is a perceptive and stimulating example of biblical interpretation.

Moberly has further considered Gen. 22 in an article in which he seeks to extend his earlier observations. (41) He sees two primary words in the story: "test" (22: 1) - the narrator's explicit guide to the story -, and "fear" (22:12) - the eliciting of Abraham's fear. On the basis that the language of divine testing and human obedience is most at home in the context of YHWH's dealings with Israel, Moberly believes that, 'It is likely, therefore, that the story of Abraham has been deliberately told in the language of Israel's obedience to Torah so that Abraham can be seen as a type or model of Israel.' (42) But there is another important emphasis in Gen. 22 in the use of the ambiguous, but significant verb 'seeing/providing' in 22: 8, 14. This concept of God is not only viewed as a general principle of providence, but is explicitly linked to a place which Moberly agrees is Jerusalem. He then explores the meaning of the term 'Moriah' which is grammatically linked to the verb 'to see'. 'The place Abraham goes to is called Moriah, which is only elsewhere referred to as a site of the Temple (2 Ch/ 3:1). The obedience which Abraham shows as he comes to sacrifice is what Israel should show when it comes to sacrifice in the Temple . . . . Thus, Abraham's sacrificial worship on Moriah is readily seen as the archetype of Israel's worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, and is presumably to be understood as ultimately the basis for it.' (43)

Moberly continues to reflect on the passage by suggesting that in this story the two central traditions of Sinai and Zion are brought together; Sinai with its concern for obedience to God based on Torah, and Jerusalem as the place where God has chosen to be present with his people as they worship God in the Temple. Paradigmatically, the story could also be seen as joining together morality and religion in that Abraham, in the context of offering sacrificial worship, displayed supreme obedience to God in the prescribed place. From this reading, the story can be seen as a kind of hermeneutical key to interpreting the rest of the Old Testament. For

Moberly, the crucial point is that, 'Genesis 22 is designed to function as a normative interpretation of Israel's traditions, certainly arising out of Israel's history, but in no way to be equated with it; rather, it is a way of seeing the deeper significance of Israel's traditions, so that they may be more effectively appropriated by ongoing generations of Abraham's descendants.' (44) While it is conceded that some might not be convinced of his interpretation of Sinai and Zion in the story, nevertheless, Moberly believes that there are hints and allusions in the text to support his view. 'Lack of direct evidence is consonant with Torah and Jerusalem not yet having the significance which they subsequently came to have; hints and allusions, for those who have ears to hear, may have been seen as the most appropriate way for the story in its Genesis context to anticipate and adumbrate the traditions of Israel.' (45)

While it is possible to interpret Genesis 22 without reference to Torah and Jerusalem, the story remains significant and meaningful in its own right especially the language of "testing" and "fearing". "Thus, the language of the story is such that it is open to have meaning in contexts other than that to which it is primarily related. It is this that helps make the story open to a Christological interpretation, insofar as a Christological interpretation engages with the kind of issues already discerned as present within the text.' (46)

Moberly then moves on to an evaluation of the great Christological reading of Gen. 22 by G. von Rad whose typological interpretation highlighted the notion of Abraham being on the road to Godforsakeness. This approach to the Akedah is 'magnificently powerful and theologically profound' (47), but for Moberly it raises difficulties of its own. He proposes to retain von Rad's typology of Abraham and Christ but suggests developing it differently. He calls for a renewed Christian engagement with the story of Abraham by first of all proposing that the best NT analogue to God's test of Abraham is not the crucifixion but the call to discipleship at Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16: 24 - 28, and the Synoptic parallels). Setting Gen. 22 alongside the Caesarean Philippi episode yields certain common concerns. Each passage sees 'the call of God as the supreme claim on a person's life beside which all other value is relativised.' (48) Thus the language about denying self and losing one's life to find it, finds its correlate with

God requiring Abraham to relinquish his longed for son who is most precious to him. Moberly also draws the reader's attention to the objective act of Abraham's obedient response. What counts each time in both passages is the actions of the individual, not the subjective state of their feelings.

Moberly observes that in the OT, God's gift of Torah to Israel is, at the same time, a test the purpose of which is to see Israel grow in moral stature. A choice is involved, and Israel may be rebellious. But, at the same time, it is evident from the text of Deuteronomy that obedience is a real possibility (30; 11, 14) . 'This possibility of obedience is what Abraham supremely exemplifies; obedience can be a reality even when it takes its most demanding form.' (49) In the NT Jesus like Abraham demonstrates total obedience to God's purposes which surpasses Abraham's example of obedience. Jesus' call to the disciples also assumes that it is possible to do what he says. But Moberly notes that the NT goes beyond the OT in two ways. First Jesus' call to discipleship is directly linked to his suffering and death. While 'losing one's life' is primarily a metaphor, it takes on a special meaning in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the OT the idea that obedience entails death is present, but 'the concept of death as the key to life acquires a centrality in the NT that is unparalleled in the Old.' (50) And second the passion narrative, which shows Jesus faithful unto death, is characterised by the unfaithfulness of all his disciples. ' It is only the forgiveness made possible by the resurrection that makes it possible for the disciples to be fully restored to their discipleship. Implicit in this story there appears to be an understanding not just of the capacity of human faithfulness to fail at the crucial moment but also the willingness of God to offer forgiveness and seek reconciliation in a way that entails transcending even the apparently final limit of death. Again, this pattern of death and resurrection as intrinsic to the call of God offers a witness to a reality towards which the Old Testament points more tentatively. (51)

On the NT passage it is interesting to note a relevant study by R. Dormandy entitled, "Hebrews 1: 1-2 and the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen" (52) which displays an intratextuality to a degree that sits well with Childs' canonical approach.

Dormandy regards the polemic nature of Hebrews as a controlling factor in the interpretation of the epistle. He argues that the polemic nature of the prologue, Heb: 1. 1-2, is linked to the same broad traditions as that discernible in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. Just as the author of Hebrews is aware of the shame of Jesus' rejection, so too is the author of this polemic parable who implicates Judaism in rejecting God's revelation to them in Jesus. It is Dormandy's contention that we need to understand these opening verses in the light of the tradition reflected in this parable.

While the *Sitz im Leben* of the Epistle and Gospel will not precisely coincide, and though there is a difference in genre between them, nonetheless, both share a background of conflict between the synagogue and the church, a conflict which is attested to, virtually universally, throughout the New Testament. Dormandy goes on to demonstrate that there is a possible link between Heb. 1.1-2 and the parable. 'To understand Hebrews as a polemical tract is also to see the first two verses as providing a most apt introduction. If they share a common mindset with the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, and if such a mindset was sufficiently widespread that it could have been recognized by the readers, then the offensive and polemical nature of these opening verses against the synagogue could hardly be missed.' (53)

According to Dormandy the parable reflects an old tradition, that of the rejected prophet as in Neh. 9:26, 2 Chron. 24 : 19 - 22, Jer. 7: 25 - 26, and Amos 2: 11 - 12, 3: 7. This theme is to be seen in the early church by the rejection of divine visitation as witnessed in Matt. 23: 37, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you', where Jesus is identified with the prophets. Dormandy also traces the quotation from Psalm 118: 22-23 (LXX) in various New Testament references, especially in Stephen's speech in Acts 7. Here the Jews have missed the provision of the 'new and living' way and are left with the prospect of the destruction of the old Temple system.

Both Matthew and Luke, against Mark, have the son first cast out of the vineyard and then killed. Dormandy draws attention to the striking link with Heb. 13: 12f. 'So Jesus suffered also outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his

own blood.' He concludes that there is a likely fund of common tradition here. Thus, coming to read Heb. 1: 1-2, Dormandy suggests that there was a matrix of common tradition which feeds into producing the parable, in all its forms known to us, and other New Testament references, in particular, Heb. 1: 1-2.

Finally, Dormandy seeks to draw out the corresponding features of the parable with Heb. 1: 1-2 and believes that in recognizing these links our understanding of the prologue will be enhanced, 'for it transforms the verses from being simply a theological statement about Jesus's fulfilment of the old to being a polemical broadside as well.' (54) Dormandy is principally concerned with the interpretational significance of the prologue to Hebrews in relation to the parable; during his presentation he writes, 'The care with which the gospel accounts have been pieced together suggests not only that the parable was generated by such tradition, but also that it generated its own traditions. The question of whether Mark or Thomas contains the earliest form is still unsettled, but either way, the fact that the parable has been worked and reworked is indicative of its importance in early Christian tradition. (55) This is a view which coheres well with Childs' canonical approach and although Childs makes no mention of this article in BTONT, it could be regarded as an example of the hermeneutical activity of the "canonical shapers" which Childs believes was of formative influence in producing the text in its final form.

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Comparing the work of Moberly and Dormandy with that of Childs, reveals the fact that Childs is mostly engrossed with the hermeneutical debate. Particularly in the work of Moberly we have a very close reading of this passage of scripture which respects the text as it stands, but is fully aware of historical critical methodology. Dormandy's work, though short by comparison with Moberly, is a highly suggestive interpretation of the parable in relation to the Hebrew's Prologue, but it is Moberly's theological exegesis of Gen. 22 as scripture which provides illuminating insights. Unfortunately, this kind of sustained theological illumination is not evident in the work of Childs.

In Childs' defence, however, it has to be noted that he was not seeking to offer in his BTONT a full-blooded canonical approach to these passages. This he makes quite clear from a recent interview. Childs clearly states that these examples of exegesis in a biblical theology context were not presented as definitive exemplars of canonical exegesis. In response to this issue he said, ". . . I was trying to work out some basic rules by which one could bring some control in relating Old and New Testaments, so I chose one passage in the Old which was obviously important to the New, and one in the New that was obviously important in the Old, and tried to see if that gave us any guidelines on how we proceed. . . . And ultimately what I am trying to suggest is that what controls it is the conviction that when you have content, or divine reality, that holds them together. It was answering a particular question that had arisen within the discipline rather than to do a full blown canonical approach. . . . And you see, ultimately, I decided that the way to do biblical theology best would be to do it topically because I was using categories that didn't arise out of the Bible. I felt that the categories allowed one at least access to the subject matter. I'm talking about the identity of God, etc, they are basic things. But the issue of how to deal with it exegetically remains a difficult problem." (See **Appendix Gs. 8, 9, & 10** for the full context of these remarks).

Childs is acutely aware that in presenting this monumental work he is not offering the last word on a reconstructed biblical theology, but rather a workable outline of, or a prolegomenon to, biblical theology. Seen in this light, his examples of canonical exegesis cannot be viewed as definitive in a biblical theological context. Childs obviously sees the acute problem of biblical exegesis and its relation to biblical theology. So it would be unfair to judge his examples of exegesis on the basis that they are a carefully fledged out approach in the immediate context of this work.

In comparing Childs' example of exegesis on Gen. 22 with Moberly's work, one also has to take cognizance of the fact that Moberly is not writing his articles on this famous chapter against the backdrop of a proposed reconstructed biblical theology. Rather he is engaged in a sustained study based on a close reading of the text without the massive restraints of writing a biblical theology. In that sense he has

more space and fewer overarching themes and issues to worry about. This does not imply that the less restrained context in which Moberly writes makes it any easier to produce stimulating theological reflection on the biblical text. But it does mean that one can have a single-minded purpose which is not possible when outlining a reconstructed biblical theology.

Notwithstanding these balancing considerations, however, one must assess biblical exegesis on its own merits. In this instance, Childs' examples are more concerned with the problem of methodology, the history of exegesis and the hermeneutical debate. His handling of these passages gets bogged down with critical debate to such an extent that no time is found to generate sustained and memorable exegesis. Moberly, however, does not allow historical critical material to dominate his exegesis. His main objective is to treat the passage theologically, i.e., in Childs' terminology, he is seeking to understand something of the subject matter to which the text points, namely, God's reality and nature.

It is also necessary to point out that Childs has been advocating a canonical approach to biblical interpretation for over 25 years. He has produced one major commentary on Exodus and a substantial literary output on his hermeneutical proposals regarding the interpretation of the Bible as holy scripture. His work undoubtedly contains many important insights which have generated a wide range of post-graduate research programmes, monographs and specialist studies. But in the final analysis, what matters most is the quality of the actual interpretation itself, not the theory of interpretation which underpins it. This is a view with which Childs readily concurs (cf. note 34 above).

In a very recent article, Childs has observed, 'True exegesis is basically dialectical in nature. One comes to any text already with certain theological (ideological) assumptions and the task of good exegesis is to penetrate so deeply into the text that even these assumptions are called into question, tested, and revised by the subject matter itself.' (56) Does this happen in Childs' exegesis of Gen.22 and Matt. 21? Notwithstanding our attempt to see Childs' work in a balanced and favourable light, it has to be said that while some stimulating observations are made

in BTONT, Childs has not delivered a sustained theological exegesis of the biblical passages which he has chosen. He is more inclined to be taken up with the exegetical debate and the history of exegesis rather than with a close reading of the text which then could form the basis on which to build memorable theological reflection.

Perhaps if Childs was operating in a less restricted field, as in writing a bible commentary, there might be greater opportunities to produce theological exegesis of substance. To date the only full-scale commentary which Childs has written is on the book of Exodus, though he is currently writing a commentary on Isaiah. (**Appendix 9.41**). Our next task is to consider Childs' interpretation of Ex. Chs. 3 - 4 which contains a unique self - disclosure of God to Moses in the theophany at the burning bush. This is a classic theological text which shall be the basis of a comparative study of Childs with three Christian exegetes who have written commentaries on Exodus between 1984 and 1994. And finally, we will examine the work of a Jewish commentator, N. Sarna, who has written two different kinds of commentary on Exodus.



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## **CHAPTER 4.**

**Canonical Interpretation:**

**Theological Approaches to the**

**Self-Disclosure of God to Moses in**

**Exodus Chs. 3 - 4.**

## CHAPTER 4.

### CANONICAL INTERPRETATION: THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE SELF-DISCLOSURE OF GOD TO MOSES IN EXODUS Chs. 3 - 4.

#### (a). An Examination of The Exegesis of B.S.Childs.

Two decades prior to Childs' publication of his BTONT (1992) he published a most substantial commentary on the book of Exodus. (1) This is the only example of a bible commentary which Childs has produced to date, though he is currently writing a commentary on the book of Isaiah (2). The appearance of this Exodus commentary was the fulfilment of a promise made in his well known article, "Interpretation in Faith"(3) and echoed in his Biblical Theology in Crisis in 1970.(4) But this commentary (completed in the autumn of 1971) was not written when Childs had a developed understanding of his 'canonical approach'; this was not presented until his IOTS (1979). Nonetheless, it is true to say that some basic ideas of a 'canonical reading' informed Childs' writing of this commentary. As such it will be very instructive to observe him working at full stretch on the classic text of the call of Moses in Exodus Chs. 3 - 4, a passage which has attracted and fascinated a wide range of scholarly activity.

Our preliminary task will be to outline Childs' exegesis of this passage and offer a critique in the light of his interpretational concerns as indicated in chapter one. Our next step will be to consider other interpretations of this revelatory passage by three other scholars, J.I. Durham, T. E. Fretheim and D. E. Gowan, all of whom have published commentaries on Exodus over the last decade. Our goal in this comparative study of biblical interpretation will be to consider to what extent Childs' work differs from, and is similar to, the exegesis of these writers. Do Childs' hermeneutical proposals cohere with his exegesis in practice? His own words are most apposite in this context. 'Whether or not the exegesis is successful cannot be judged on its theory of interpretation, but on the actual interpretation itself.' (5)

Before we move to Childs' interpretation of Exodus 3 - 4 a brief review of his two page Preface and his four page introduction to this commentary will be helpful because we will be better informed of the rationale behind it. In this respect Childs

loses no time in coming to the central point of his concern. The opening sentence of his Preface reads, 'The purpose of this commentary is unabashedly theological. Its concern is to understand Exodus as Scripture of the church.' (6) At the time this statement indicated a new approach to commentary writing in contrast to the more traditional commentary in the historical critical mode like that of J.P. Hyatt's Exodus (7) which had over 40 pages of Introduction out of a total of over 300 pages. Childs just took four pages of introduction to elucidate (a) the goal and (b) the format of the commentary. He writes, 'The aim of this commentary is to seek to interpret the book of Exodus as canonical scripture within the discipline of the Christian church.' (8) This statement accords well with his hermeneutical concerns which we noted in chapter one. The rigid separation between the descriptive and constructive tasks of understanding the Bible is, in the view of Childs, something which strikes at the foundation of the theological task (contra. Stendhal). Childs does not regard biblical exegesis as an objective, scientific enterprise, but he does not wish for a return to pre-critical interpretation. Rather, ' . . . it does belong to the task of the scholar in the church to deal seriously with the Old Testament text in its original setting within the history of Israel and to make use of research done by many whose understanding of the exegetical task differs widely from the one being suggested.' (9)

Childs, therefore, does not adopt a negative stance against the use of historical-critical methods in modern biblical interpretation, contrary to what critics like J. Barr would otherwise imply. But Childs' use of them is carefully circumscribed. They do not exist as criteria by which the interpreter can establish theological truth. The prehistory of the text is a legitimate area of concern for scholarly attention and this is one area where critical methods have been intensively applied. A cursory glance at this commentary by Childs quickly reveals his mastery of the tools of the biblical guild. It is certainly important to explore the early forces at work in shaping the text by employing critical methodology, but 'the study of the prehistory has its proper function within exegesis only in illuminating the final text.' (10) And the reason for emphasising final form study, as Childs consistently does, is a theological one. It is because both the synagogue and the church accepted the final form as canonical and

thus the vehicle for revelation and instruction.

In Section 2 of the Introduction Childs outlines his rationale for the format of the commentary. He divides Exodus into 24 thematic literary groups or units. Each of these units begins with a new translation of the Hebrew text and is followed by,

- (1) Textual and Philological Notes,
- (2) Literary and History of Traditions Problems,
- (3) Old Testament Context (OTC),
- (4) New Testament Context (NTC),
- (5) History of Exegesis (HE)
- (6) Theological Reflection (TR).

Not all of these headings appear under every literary unit, but there is a consistency in approach throughout the commentary. Childs expresses the view that the format is intended to make the commentary appeal to a wide audience. Sections (1) and (2) are pitched at the technical scholar; Section (5) HE is to be regarded as secondary to the exegesis. The heart of the commentary consists of Sections (3) OTC, (4) NTC and (6) TR and is addressed to both the professional and non-professional reader alike.

Section iv of Childs's commentary is entitled 'The call of Moses' and covers the literary unit, Ch. 3:1-4: 17. After a brief 'Textual and Philological Notes' section, Childs addresses literary and form-critical analysis which covers about twenty pages and is therefore the longest section in dealing with this pericope. The first concern of Childs is to fix the limits of this section. While he carefully notes the contribution of M. Noth in this respect, he concludes that the unit begins at Ch. 3: 1 not Ch. 2:1 as Noth has it, and agrees with Bächtli in ending the commission section at Ch. 4: 17. Sub-section (B) gives a brief survey of the sources of Exodus as expounded by various scholars.

It is generally agreed that the sources of Exodus are J E P with some evidence of redactional activity by D. Childs follows Habel and contends ' that in spite of the presence of literary sources, there is more unity in the present text than has been generally recognized.' (11) Childs proceeds to consider the *Sitz im Leben* for the call narrative. The question is: does the fixed form reflect the function of a particular institution or office which has shaped the material? Scholarly responses to this

question vary greatly. It is clear from the ongoing discussion, and, indeed, right throughout the commentary, that Childs is a master of form-critical techniques. He fairly presents the views of scholars like Gressmann, Plastaras and Habel and proceeds to give his own view. Childs favours the opinion that Chapter 3 is to be seen in the setting of the prophetic office. He rejects the view that the form of prophetism which developed in the monarchical period was read back into the Mosaic period. For Childs, the converse obtains: the tradition brought together the call of Moses as the Lord's messenger with the later classic prophetism. A new element had entered with Moses which was distinctive from the patriarchal period. At the same time, Childs acknowledges that the later prophetic office influenced the tradition of Moses' call especially in the expanded form of the present text.

Childs goes on to examine the problem of explaining the significance of the sign in Ch. 3: 12. Just what precisely is the nature of the sign and how does it function in the narrative? The basic question is: to what does the demonstrative 'this' (zeh) in verse 12 refer? In his customary methodical manner, Childs marshals the various attempts to solve this problem. Some have suggested that the antecedent is to be found in the preceding clause, but this is ruled out by the syntactical objections. There is also great grammatical difficulty in relating 'this' to the preceding assurance, "I will be with you". On the other hand, some scholars have sought to find the antecedent in what follows and while this proposal has grammatical consistency, it too, falls short on conviction in Childs's view. Ordinarily, a sign takes the form of a concrete guarantee which follows the promise and yet precedes the fulfilment. Finally, a number of commentators, including Gressmann and Noth, have argued that the original sign must have fallen out of the present text. But this, in the view of Childs, is an example of interpretational desperation.

By contrast, Childs offers 'a fresh form-critical study with the hope of shedding some new light on this vexing question.' (12) He suggests that there are two patterns of sign giving in the early tradition of the Old Testament having much in common but diverging at important points. The texts included in pattern A are, I Sam. 2: 34, the destruction promised against the house of Eli; I Kings 13:3, judgment on Jeroboam

delivered by a man of God; 2 Kings 19: 29; 20:9, an altercation between Isalah and Hezekiah, and Jeremiah 44:29, Jeremiah's threat made against the men of Judah who had escaped to Egypt. In all these instances a threat is made by a prophet; a sign is given to confirm the threat which precedes the fulfilment but which also participates already in the reality.

A second pattern (pattern B) of sign giving shares several features with pattern A, but is very distinctively different at key points. In both the anointing of Saul by Samuel ( I Sam. 10: 1 ) and the call of Gideon (Judges 6:12), along with Ex. 3:12, a sign is given to confirm the office but it is not directly related to the promise. Childs deduces that Ex. 3:12 does not fit smoothly into either of these patterns although his analysis does show that v 12 shares several features with pattern B. He concludes that the problem of the sign in Ex. 3:12 emerged because of its history of tradition. Once this is acknowledged, the final form of the text becomes transparent. Childs sees ' The point of the verse is as follows: this burning bush is a sign that it is I who send you, and it is your guarantee that when you have rescued the people from Egypt, you will worship God on this same mountain.' (19)

Childs next moves on to the problem of Ch. 3:14 and the divine name. This topic has proved to be a most contentious issue in Old Testament scholarship. First of all, Childs outlines the variety of questions which this issue throws to the surface. Why does Moses put the question in v 13 in this way? 'If I say the God of your fathers sent me to you, they will ask me, what is his name?' Was the God of the fathers nameless? Had the people forgotten the name of their God? Are we concerned here with factual information or the significance of the name? How does the giving of the name enable Moses to validate his claim to divine revelation? If the name were unknown, how could it count as evidence for adjudicating the claim? Questions also turn on the interpretation of verse 14. Does verse 14 constitute an answer or a refusal, or has the question really been answered? Is the response in verse 14a directed solely to Moses or to the people as well? And how is 'ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh' to be translated and what does it mean? How is 14a related to 14b, and what is the logical sequence of verse 14 to 15 and 13 to 15?



An outline is given by Childs in the form of reviewing the opinions of several scholars, both Jewish and Christian. In particular, he addresses the thesis of W. F. Albright who saw the name YHWH to be an abbreviated form of an original theophorous sentence name. This view was further refined by both D. N. Freedman and F. M. Cross whose views Childs represents with fairness and balance, but concludes that he finds their arguments unconvincing. Alternatively, Childs presents a form critical analysis of verses 13 - 15. He surveys four different groups of passages looking for recognisable stereotyped elements to enable one to sort out the complex interweavings which took place in Ex. 3. To the question posed in verse 13, Childs does not find a genuine antecedent in any of the four groups of passages studied. In this respect, the question which Moses advanced in verse 13 has a unique status in comparison with other divine call pericopae. A solution to this and related questions is therefore not to be found in traditional answers.

The solution which Childs posits to solve the problems of this verse highlights the dichotomy of false/true prophets in Israel. Both true and false prophets claimed the name of YHWH; in Israel's history the test for being a true messenger was linked to prophesying in the name of YHWH. According to the oral tradition preserved in E, the name of YHWH was first revealed to Israel in the Mosaic period. J identifies YHWH with the God of the Fathers, while the E tradition, followed by P, marks a discontinuity in the tradition. Childs argues that in the course of transmission the E tradition was influenced by the later question of the true and the false prophets. 'The E tradition has Moses approaching the people with the claim of being sent to them by the God of their fathers. The people inquire after the name of God. The problem has been how to explain this request. Had they forgotten God's name? How then could it be a test? The point of the inquiry is to elicit from Moses an answer which will serve as the ultimate test of his validity as a prophet. What is the name of the God who sent him? Verse 15 supplies the answer. Yahweh is the God of the fathers; this is his name forever!' (14) Furthermore, according to Childs, two purposes were served by E's using this form as a vehicle for his tradition, (1) it effectively signalled the introduction of the new name to Israel through Moses preserving the continuity of God's history of

revelation, and (2) it confirmed Moses' role as a true prophet in the light of the new circumstances which had arisen in Israel. The prophetic office of Moses is thus verified by the announcement of God's one true name.

How then is verse 14 to be explained? The parallel between verse 14 and 15 has long been acknowledged. Both sentences are introduced as God's response to the question posed in verse 13. Yet, the context of 14a is quite different from that of verse 15. The present form of the text, as Childs views it, reflects literary activity rather than a fusion of oral tradition: verse 14a appears as a parallel to v15, with 15b providing a literary bridge back to v13. 'In summary: vv13 - 15 reflect a history of tradition which extended from the oral to the literary level, and offers a series of witnesses to the questions of prophetic office and divine purpose.' (15)

This brings us to what Childs describes as the heart of the commentary, OTC, NTC and TR; and it is in these sections in particular, where Childs' wholly different approach to the discipline of writing a biblical commentary is to be distinguished. In no existing commentary on Exodus will one find such Section headings; they are not what we have come to expect in a major critical Old Testament commentary. But then, Childs' concept of writing such a commentary is emphatically theological, and the most appropriate context in which to engage in biblical interpretation is, for him, within the framework of a community of faith. 'The overall logic of this extraordinary format is that the exegete has reached the goal of Old Testament commentary, understood as a theological task, only when he has risked contemporary theological reflection in the light of this whole progression of studies.' (16)

More extensive comment is to be found in the section, 'Old Testament Context'. This passage is, in Childs's view, characterised by an interaction between the human and the divine, i.e. Moses and God, and with the intertwining of God's redemptive purpose for Israel, this forms the warp and woof of the call narrative. Within the chapter (3: 1-12) Childs sees an interplay of elements, but these are not the result of an artificial fusion of tradition: rather, they are the result of a skilful design which weaves together the elements of the divine and the human. The chapter shows that Moses' call, in the context of a prophetic experience, is a radical break

with the past initiated by God. But there also remains a human initiative as well to consider. 'The one called can drag his feet, even elicit a compromise in the divine plan (4:14) but finally he will speak for God in spite of himself (4:15ff). (17)

Childs rejects any notion that the divine element in the narrative is but a reflection of the psychological state of Moses; rather, the call of God which Moses encountered was initiated directly by God, and it was this divine call which invited a human response from Moses. The divine seeks to transform the human personality even after Moses has resisted God's call and it is this portrayal of resistance, in tandem with the other elements of the chapter, which, together make 'for a highly interesting narrative pattern.' (18) The remainder of this section is taken up by a consideration of the four main objections (in Chs. 3 and 4) made by Moses which were taken up by God with utmost seriousness. While this section is entitled 'Old Testament Context', Childs principally comments on the progress of the story in the narrative with a few allusions to call narrative texts in the Old Testament. In this respect, he does overlap with some of his comments made in the previous section, especially on 3:12. Thus, in the light of the previous sections, Childs now provides a commentary in which he seeks to explain what this pericope has to teach us about the nature, character and activity of God. But before we look at TR on this passage, 'the New Testament Context' will briefly command our attention.

In 'New Testament Context' Childs reflects on the New Testament use of the call of Moses. He isolates two main texts for consideration. Exodus 3:6 is cited in Matthew 22: 32 (and in the Synoptic parallels Mark 12:26 and Luke 20:37) and in Acts 7. The Matthean text refers to the encounter Jesus had with the Sadducees on the question relating to the resurrection of the dead. In the controversy Jesus' response to the Sadducees, advanced by Matthew, comes in the form of two points: (1) they (the Sadducees) did not know the Scriptures, and (2) they did not know the power of God. In Ch. 22: 31f Matthew has Jesus citing Exodus 3: 6 as a proof text for the resurrection of the dead, and in response to this move some scholars have described the author's handling of the text as midrashic. Childs holds (contra Nineham and Wellhausen) that the evidence is clear that the Gospel writers are

reflecting an exegetical tradition which shared many features of first century Judaism. Concurring with Schniewind's view that in the controversy with the Sadducees lies the key question about the reality of God, Childs sees that the revelation of God to Moses in the burning bush is a basic witness to this faith.

Reading through Stephen's speech in Acts ch. 7, the reader is impressed by the extensive reference which is accorded to the figure of Moses; indeed, it is a veritable historical conspectus of Moses in miniature. The call of Moses is referenced in verse 30. Childs makes no sustained attempt to derive decisive significance from this, having only one paragraph on the topic. Revelation 1:8 alludes to God as the 'one who is, and who was, and who is to come', a text highly suggestive of Ex. 3: 14, but Childs acknowledges the complexity of this topic and makes only a few cursory comments. Neither does he pursue the potential significance of the Johannine formula 'ego eimi' in John 8: 58. In his final paragraph in this section, Childs refers to the fact that the call of Moses plays a minor role in the New Testament literature, especially when one considers the basic theme of the call of God to both apostles and others. Any framework for New Testament references to a call from God is to be found in Isaiah and Jeremiah rather than in the book of Exodus.

The section, 'History of Exegesis' (HE) is vintage Childs. As he elucidates the history of interpretation of Exodus 3, the material falls into a predictable pattern of citing well known names e.g., Augustine, Eusebius, Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. The main focus is on points of interpretation specifically related to the identification of the angel with the Son, a view pursued by the early Fathers. While Augustine also identified the angel with Christ, he went on to develop a more sophisticated trinitarian interpretation in the context of the Arian controversy. Thereafter, the angel was only representing Christ and speaking in his name. Exodus 3 also became attracted to ontological philosophy, Eusebius maintaining that Plato borrowed the doctrine from Moses. This is a topic which has evoked intense and lasting interest as Gilson pointed out. 'Exodus lays down the principle from which henceforth the whole of Christian philosophy will be suspended. From this moment it is understood once and for all that the proper name of God is being, and that. . . this name denotes His

very essence.' (19)

As Childs indicates, Luther adopted an explicit allegorical interpretation of Exodus 3:14, though he sought to break with the past in his interpretation of the Bible. (20) His use of the device of allegory is here firmly anchored in a Christological understanding of the text, and it is this Christological emphasis which lies at the heart of Luther's hermeneutical theory. Luther's comment on the First Commandment resonates with the meaning which Childs elicits from Ex. 3: 14. 'I am God on whom you must fully rely and not trust on other creatures. Human reason cannot discover God. He alone makes his name known.' (21) Calvin, by contrast, offers a highly sophisticated exegesis of Exodus 3 where he moves towards an ontological interpretation of Christ's role in the Old Testament. He also focuses on God's divine glory, His self-existence and eternity, but he distances himself from a Platonic concept of divine being simply because he held Plato as not having done justice to God's power and governance in all things. 'All things in heaven and earth derive their essence from him who only truly is'. (22) Zwingli's contribution was to hold firmly together God's attributes of Being with his role of creator of life and new being. He cites Isaiah 40 as a commentary on Exodus 3, an interpretational move which Childs finds of special interest but does not develop further.

Childs refers to the modern critical period in which attempts have been made to move away from the ontological interest in Exodus 3. Plastaras states that, 'the name of Yahweh "defines" God in terms of active presence,' (23) but Childs would see God in terms of being and action. Oversimplification is to be avoided, and 'once the straight contrast between Greek and Hebrew mentality is called into question, then the task of seeing the whole range of interpretation throughout the history of exegesis takes on new significance.' (24)

We now come to the final section, 'Theological Reflection', which, according to the hermeneutical logic of Childs, ' . . . seeks to relate the various Old Testament and New Testament witnesses in the light of the history of exegesis to the theological issues which evoked the witness. It is an attempt to move from witness to substance. This reflection is not intended to be timeless or offer biblical truths for all ages, but

to present a model of how the Christian seeks to understand the testimony of the prophets and the apostles in his own time and situation.' (25) Theological reflection on the call of Moses in Exodus Ch. 3 consists of approximately one and a half out of a total of forty - one pages which are devoted to this pericope. Childs does indeed direct the reader to reflect on, and pursue further, the theological issues which are raised in this passage. He sees the major theological witness lying in the revelation by God himself to Moses as the divine reality which had already been made known to the patriarchs. So also with the New Testament witness; there is an attempt to understand the revelation of God in relation to the eschatological event of Jesus Christ. 'Both testaments reflect on the nature of God whose reality has not been discovered but revealed, and whose revelation of himself defines his being in terms of his redemptive work.' (26) The covenant God of the patriarchs is also the covenant God who appears to Moses and discloses himself as YHWH. This provides for a new orientation and relationship between God and his people.

In the history of Christian thought Exodus 3 has had a central place in discussion on the issue of ontology and divine reality during the middle ages right through to the more recent debate (at the time of Childs' writing) on revelation as history or history as revelation. The fact that this passage has had seminal influence for each new generation provides us with the foundation to go beyond the biblical witness and draw out the implications for the Christian Church in contemporary culture. For the biblical theologian, Childs suggests that one should move in this direction by considering the parameters of the two testaments. He enumerates three areas of interest here.

(1) Within the whole reality of the divine revelation the being and nature of God are not to be viewed in constant dialectical tension because God's nature is neither static being, nor eternal presence, nor simply dynamic activity. It is rather that the God of Israel reveals himself at key historic moments and this activity reveals his essential character as one who redeems his covenant people.

(2) God reveals himself in the arena of history and history receives its definition in terms of what God is doing. A philosophy of history is not the essential

basis for understanding God's redemptive purpose; both ontology and the concept of history can prove to be theological traps if they are 'divorced from the divine reality which appeared in its fullness in the incarnated Lord, who is both 'first and last'.' (27)

(3) Both Moses and the writers of the New Testament encountered God as divine reality in particular historical situations from which is evoked a response of obedience to God's purpose and will. Two vital ingredients - the act of God's divine disclosure and a call for commitment from its recipient - are characteristic of the biblical approach in the call of Moses in Ex. 3. The revelation of God is not solely information about God and who he is; it is all that plus an invitation to trust in one who is Lord over the past, the present and the future. 'The future for the community of faith is not an unknown leap into the dark because the Coming One accompanies the faithful toward the end'. (28)

When we consider the amount of material which Childs assigns to literary and form-critical analysis and the history of exegesis on this passage, it is important to remember his comments in NTCI (1984). 'The text's pre-history and post-history are both subordinate to the form deemed canonical.' (29) But in this example of canonical exegesis, the above two sections alone take up 23 out of a total of 38 pages of actual commentary material. Yet, the contents of the heart of this commentary - OTC, NTC, TR. - amount to little over 13 pages. Certainly as far as quantity is concerned, the contents of the heart of the commentary are overwhelmingly subordinate to the historical critical material.

In the Introduction to the Exodus commentary Childs writes, 'The section on the history of exegesis offers an analogy to the section on the pre-history of the text. The one deals with the period before the text's complete formation, the other with its interpretation after its formation. Both have a significant, albeit indirect, relationship to the major exegetical task of interpreting the canonical text.' (30) But is this borne out in Childs' exegesis of Ex. 3:1 - 4: 17? Let us consider "History of Exegesis" first. In this section there is a brief historical conspectus (just over 3 pages) of how interpreters of the past have understood and interpreted the revelation of the divine name. In effect only a thumb-nail sketch of the work of selected scholars is given.

Does any of this material find its way into OTC, NTC or TR? Reading through these sections, one can detect only a brief glimpse of one aspect of the History of Exegesis material which is alluded to in the TR section. Childs writes, 'In the history of Christian theology most of the major theological problems have entered into the discussion of Ex. 3. In the early and mediaeval periods the interest focused on the issue of ontology and divine reality; . . . ' (31). But no discussion is entered into. The material is purely descriptive and factual. In short, there is no real inter-relationship between the HE section and TR. Also, as one goes through the material in OTC and NTC, no clear correspondence can be found between them and the HE section. Indeed, if one were to omit altogether this HE material, it would make no tangible difference to Childs' exegesis in OTC, NTC, and TR. In this instance at least, the History of Exegesis does not have 'a significant relationship to the major exegetical task of interpreting the canonical text.' (Preface, p.xv)

So much for the post-history of the text. We shall now examine the historical-critical material which applies to the pre-history of the text. How does the very substantial section, 'Literary and Form-critical Analysis' inform the OTC, NTC, and TR sections? Is an inter-relationship between them discernible? The material under this heading is divided into several sub-headings. These are,

- A. The Scope of the Section.
- B. The Problem of Sources.
- C. Form-critical and Traditio-critical Analysis of 3. 1ff.
- D. A Form-critical study of Ex. 3. 12.
- E. The Problem of Ex. 3. 14 and the Divine Name.
- A. Form-critical analysis of Ex. 3. 13 - 15.  
(This heading 'A' is in the text but seems out of place in the series).
- F. Stylistic and Thematic Analysis.

The contents of sections A. The Scope of the Section, B and F are very brief and of a general nature; consequently, they do not affect the exegesis. This leaves four sections consisting of historical-critical material, and our objective is to see if there is any correspondence between this material and Childs' interpretation of the passage as found in OTC, NTC and TR. In the TR section one would naturally expect Childs to be more general in his comments and take a consensus view of the work previously done



and thus draw out significant features of theological importance from the call of Moses narrative. While one would not expect source critical, form-critical and tradition-critical issues to be specifically highlighted in this context, nevertheless, there would be an expectation that in any theological reflection on this passage the writer would consider the combined witness of both testaments. Thus Childs writes, 'The major witness of Ex. Ch. 3 lies in the revelation by God of himself to Moses as that divine reality who had already made himself known in the past to the Fathers and who promised to execute his redemptive will toward Israel and the future. The New Testament witness is an attempt to understand this same revelation of the divine reality in relation to the eschatological event of Jesus Christ. Both testaments reflect on the nature of God whose reality has not been discovered but revealed, and whose revelation of himself defines his being in terms of his redemptive work.' (32) This comment is certainly theologically foundational from a Christian perspective, but there is no trace of an interpretational relation between issues dealt with in historical-critical mode and Theological Reflection.

In the New Testament Context section Childs explores the echoes of Ex. 3: 6 in the polemic encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees on the question of the nature of the resurrection in Matt. 22: 32ff and its synoptic parallels. He also draws attention to Stephen's citation of Moses' call in Acts Ch. 7: 30 - 34, and notes the complex subject-matter of the New Testament's reference to the name formula of Ex. 3: 14 which leads him into a brief discussion of Rev. 1: 6. Finally, Childs acknowledges the surprisingly minor role that the call of Moses has in the New Testament generally. This section is about three and a half pages long so there is no time for extended discussion.

What amounts to a striking omission on Childs' part is the absence in this section of the important Johannine "I am" material in John Ch. 8: 12 - 59 where Jesus engages incisively with the Jews about his relationship with the Father and his mission to the world. Jesus makes the staggering claim to his listeners, 'Truly, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' v. 58. (RSV) This line of thought is continued in John 17: 5 where Jesus says, ' . . .and now, Father, glorify thou me in

thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.' (RSV) These statements have massive theological import Christologically and must be envisaged as coming to Jesus' Jewish contemporaries with all the force of a thunderbolt. Why Childs omitted such an important relevant area of study for his canonical exegesis is not apparent from the text of his commentary, but the absence of this Johannine 'ego eimi' dimension is an omission of major significance. So here too, there is no real inter-relation between literary critical material and the exegesis in the NTC section.

We have already given an outline of the section, Literary and Form- critical Analysis. Our task now is to see whether any aspect of this work exercises a controlling influence on the OTC section. The material in OTC on Ch. 3:1- 4:17 is presented in four sub-sections, 3: 1 -12; 3: 13-15; 3:16 - 4: 9; and 4: 10 - 17. In Childs' words, 'This section (i.e. OTC) attempts to deal seriously with the text in its final form, which is its canonical shape, while at the same time recognizing and profiting by the variety of historical forces which were at work in producing it.' (33) So whatever role is assigned to historical critical study in biblical interpretation by the biblical guild at large, for Childs, 'the study of the prehistory has its proper function within exegesis only in illuminating the final text.' (34) It is clear from Childs' programmatic essay that the exegete is to first of all interpret the single text or passage in the light of the Old Testament witness, and also to understand the whole of the Old Testament in the light of the single text. (35)

In the OTC of this passage, Childs adopts a traditional style narrative approach which is part of the descriptive task. There are several allusions to other Old Testament texts and personalities but these are sparsely referenced in this section. The bulk of the contents of OTC applies to the immediate literary context; as a consequence, Childs does not consider the meaning of this passage in the light of the rest of the Old Testament. Nor in the sub-section, 4: 10 - 17, is there any reference to historical- critical findings. He cites Ps. 94: 9, Jer. 1, Isaiah 28: 27ff and Deutero-Isaiah, but these texts only get a fleeting glance. The comments, in the main, follow the narrative flow of the text. Much the same can be said of the comments on 3:16 -

4: 9. There is no explicit or implicit reference to the contents of the form-critical section on this pericope, save at the end where Childs says that the first two signs in 4: 1 - 7 indicates a variety in the tradition. The section concludes with these words, 'However, the present writer has skilfully adapted his material within his own narrative, enriching the portrayal of prophetic resistance, and pointing the reader toward the plagues in which material these signs were originally at home.' (36) While these comments allude to the scholarly techniques of tradition history, there is no specific consideration given to this area of study in the literary and form critical analysis of this passage.

There remains to consider the comments on 3:1-12 and 3: 13 - 15. In these two sub-sections Childs' form-critical conclusions are somewhat more clearly visible. Regarding 3:13 -15, Childs observes in OTC that the question "What is his name?" is extremely difficult to hear any longer within its present context. He then explicitly refers to the literary and form-critical analysis in which he confirms the scholarly view that v13ff reflect the special tradition of one eye-witness which brought together the communication of the divine name to Moses' commission. Thereupon, Childs proceeds to hear this testimony as it found its place within Ch.3. He asks, 'What is the import of the question in its present context?' (37) Childs considers the implication of this question emphasising the view that the people want to know more about God's intention and to learn of his new relationship to them. To these and related questions, Childs says, 'In the answers which follow the major point of the original tradition which concerned the revelation of the divine name Yahweh has been modified by its new position within the larger narrative.' (38)

At this juncture, two points can be made. First, this is a clear reference to the work already done in the form-critical section which Childs utilises and builds on. And second, a distinctive feature of Childs' approach to interpretation is evident here: he acknowledges the importance of the pre-history of the text, a fact demonstrated by his extensive literary and form-critical work on the passage. Then he carefully delineates the main features of scholarly discussion pertaining to the pre-history of the text, before stating his own views. Finally, he goes on to engage with the final form

of the text on the basis of this work.

In the commentary on 3: 1-12 Childs refers to the description of the theophany and the call as having been explained historically as the fusion of two levels of tradition. But how does this move affect the interpretation? Childs sees an interplay of elements within the present text. He states, 'The diachronic dimension serves its function in illuminating the synchronistic, not in destroying its integrity.' (39) He also observes that different sets of questions by Moses reflect a history of tradition and in 'the context of the chapter as a whole form a highly interesting narrative pattern.' (40) With reference to his critical material on 3:12, Childs concludes that the problem of the sign in 3: 12 had its origins in the history of tradition, and in keeping with the above noted hermeneutical principle, he goes on to state that the final form of the text becomes transparent. 'The point of the verse is as follows: this burning bush is a sign that it is I who send you, and it is your guarantee that when you have rescued the people from Egypt, you will worship God on this same mountain.' (41)

In OTC Childs refers to the section on 3:12 and specifically maintains the historic dimension of the demonstrative adjective 'this' (zeh) in verse 12. Firstly, 'zeh' points to the theophany of the burning bush. And secondly, (a) it demonstrates God's power who commissions his prophet for a divine purpose, and (b) the sign points to the future promises of a redeemed people worshipping God in his sanctuary. Of Moses' commission Childs writes that it finds 'its ultimate meaning in the corporate life of the obedient people whom he is called to deliver in accordance with God's purpose.' (42)

We have noted that Childs' purpose is to write a commentary which is unabashedly theological. But to what extent does he succeed in achieving his interpretative goals in his exegesis of Ex. 3: 1 - 4:17? Right from the outset Childs faces a massive burden in writing a commentary on a major Old Testament book by employing his choice of format. Indeed, in the process he pursues an agenda which is virtually impossible to expedite with success. The question is well posed by James Wharton, 'Should an Old Testament commentary undertake to complete so large an agenda?' (43) In essentials, the problem is this. All 24 major thematic sections of the

commentary begin with Childs' own translation of each passage and is followed by textual and philological notes, though these are kept to a minimum. Thereafter follows a variety of several sections which we have enumerated above, all of which adds up to a vast amount of diverse material in a commentary of over 600 pages. In presenting this material in a section by section approach Childs was following the format adopted by the German commentary series *Biblischer Kommentar*; he now feels that the use of five or six different sections on each of the 24 major parts of the commentary was not a success. He comments that there was far too much material pressed into the commentary and consequently this does not give a unified view of Exodus. (**Appendix. Qs 7 and 8**).

Canonical exegesis is concerned with interpreting the biblical text in its final form. But in his handling of Ex. 3: 1 - 4:17 Childs does not present an engaging and sustained theological exegesis of God's self-revelation to Moses. Despite his laudable intention to write a theological commentary on this foundational OT book, most of the material is absorbed with the minutiae of historical-critical scholarship. Considering the enormous intellectual investment which Childs has put into this enterprise, one is left to conclude that there is a striking imbalance between the descriptive and the constructive tasks as undertaken here. In short, given the mastery of historical-critical techniques which Childs displays on every hand, there is not the corresponding mastery of canonical exegesis which yields theological output of substance.

Another aspect of Childs' exegesis as represented here invites attention and it is an issue of crucial importance. What is the nature of the relation between the Old and the New Testaments in Christian interpretation? This is a subject area which is too large for a full scale treatment here; we will confine ourselves to it insofar as it touches on Ex.3: 1 - 4:17. At this point it would be beneficial to briefly delineate Childs' view on this topic. A canonical approach to this problem affirms that the OT should be understood in its own right. In the first instance, the OT has its own Jewish voice, but this was not altered by the coming of the Christ event, in Childs' view. 'The crucial factor in a canonical approach lies in recognizing that the concept

of the Old Testament's own right has dramatically been altered because of its new context within the larger Christian Bible. The Old Testament's discrete voice is still to be heard, but in concert with that of the New. The two voices are neither to be fused nor separated, but heard together. The exegetical task thus becomes one of doing justice to the unique sounds of each witness within the context of the entirety of the Christian Scriptures.' (44) Childs has consistently held the view that in biblical exegesis justice must be done to the discrete voices of the two Testaments. But another step must be taken; the interpreter must address the (*res*) subject matter to which these two witnesses point. 'The goal of the interpretation of Christian Scriptures is to understand both Testaments as witness to the self-same divine reality who is the God and Father of Jesus Christ.' (45)

Enunciating general hermeneutical principles is one thing; but the critical issue turns on how those principles are applied in the practice of biblical interpretation. Does Childs' exegetical practice conform to the template of his interpretational principles? In Childs' presentation of his material on this key passage, which by any standards is a seminal benchmark in the ongoing self-disclosure of God to ancient Israel, we have shown that in the OTC section it is not demonstrably clear what theological significance this divine disclosure has in relation to the rest of the OT. In other words, Childs does not draw on any substantive intertextuality between Ex. 3: 1 - 4:17 and other related OT passages which would facilitate the reader in hearing the full OT voice in this context and thus advance and enrich one's understanding of the reality, nature and character of God.

Moving on to the NTC section, Childs' includes just over three pages of material in seeking to explore the NT witness in relation to the call of Moses. We have already indicated that Childs has not realised any progress here on two counts. First, he admits that the call of Moses plays a minor role in the NT witness, and where any reference to the call of Moses, or to God's name is cited, Childs' treatment is consequently thin and yields little insight. And second, the one passage where Childs could have engaged with some success, John 8: 12 - 59, does not merit even a single citation in the NTC section, an omission which is truly astonishing. This

passage has significant Christological import and in the framework of Childs' commentary it seems quite incredible that such a passage of unique theological potential not only is overlooked in the OTC section but does not emerge in the TR section either. In a very recent article Childs states, 'The central point to emphasise is that the biblical text itself asserts theological pressure on the reader, demanding that the reality which undergirds the two witnesses not be held apart and left fragmented, but rather critically reunited.' (46) Childs' treatment of Ex.3:1 - 4:17 in the NTC section will not fully confront the reader with any theological force for the very simple reason that the full potential of the NT witness of John 8: 12 - 59 is not even mentioned, never mind considered in depth.

Apart from this unusual omission, there is another critical aspect of this NTC section to consider. In relating the OT witness of God's self-disclosure in Ex. 3 - 4 to the witness of the NT, one would assume that in this hermeneutical move Childs would have proceeded beyond merely tracing a link between Ex. 3 - 4 and the NT documents. This movement from the OT witness to that of the NT is a vital step in Childs' hermeneutical proposals for it leads onto the crucial task of theologically reflecting on the divine reality to which the combined Old and New Testament witnesses point. But how does Childs' attempt to connect the call of Moses in Ex. 3 - 4 with possible NT echoes of that event succeed in contributing to our theological appreciation of its significance to-day? With limited success I would suggest. This is because in NTC Childs seeks to trace a link between the OT text and the NT exclusively by means of direct quotations; there is no critical reflection on the NT witness. So if the second dialectic of the hermeneutical circle is not successfully engaged, then the third and final step of this exegetical procedure - the movement from the level of the witness to the reality itself - can never be fully achieved. This last step, for Childs, is crucial. 'The theological task cannot be adequately done when the exegete is satisfied only to analyse the witness of Scripture and to trace its different levels within the tradition. The final task of exegesis is to seek to hear the Word of God, .....

(47) But this reflection does not take place. How the self-disclosure of God in Ex. 3 - 4, both in its OT and NT referentiality, is to be understood as God's Word for

the Christian believer today is a dynamic question which is not addressed in Childs' exegesis. Theologically speaking, his treatment is flawed.

We have indicated that one major hurdle facing Childs in writing a theological commentary is the sheer scale of the exercise. With the state of modern knowledge and the plethora of interpretational methodologies which are practised in the biblical guild, there is no one person who could be accomplished in every field. So to attempt to write a commentary of the kind envisioned by Childs would prove virtually impossible. This is a state of affairs with which Childs now concurs. **(Appendix 97)** In seeking to achieve his interpretational goals Childs was, at the time he wrote the Exodus commentary, heavily influenced by German scholarship and had to attain a certain credibility with his intended audience. Hence, the emphasis on literary and form-critical techniques in the body of the commentary.

In an essay entitled, "Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology" **(48)**, Childs recounts an incident in his teaching experience at Yale while viewing the book of Isaiah as Holy Scripture. He sought to trace the different levels of material within the Isaianic corpus, which was, he indicated to his students, a very complex issue. Then one student posed the question: 'Why go through all these scholarly contortions? Why not take the words of Isaiah's superscription literally: 'This is the vision of Isaiah?' ' **(49)** According to the student, God gave the prophet a divine unveiling of the future that could encompass the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian periods without a problem. Childs responded with the familiar historical-critical arguments. Prophets were more forthtellers than foretellers. Prophets addressed a contemporary concrete historical community and dealt with issues in their own time. And the prophetic literature reflects different genres and a whole variety of historical settings; finally, a very complex activity of editorial shaping took many years to achieve which produced the text as we now have it. On reflection, Childs conceded that he felt that he had not done justice to the theological dimensions of the student's questions; the historical-critical response he felt was sorely deficient in theological terms.

There is here, I would suggest, an analogy to be drawn between this experience and Childs' exegesis of Exodus 3:1 - 4: 17. The interpretation which Childs



delivers on this pivotal passage of God's self-disclosure to Moses is largely characterised by an historical-critical response. Of course there are moments when the descriptive task impinges on the constructive task, as we have shown. And there is no doubt that Childs comes to the text determined to engage with it theologically, but somehow the constructive theological task does not get very far off the ground. The danger with allowing diachronic procedures to be emphasised is that the final stage of the text can be marginalised, a point Childs originally made in his Biblical Theology in Crisis (1970). Consequently, it is easy to appreciate the student's concern that the minute details of scholarly dissection can be a potential obstacle in grappling with the text theologically.

Furthermore, there is another aspect to this possible analogy. On this occasion the student did not seem to appreciate the usefulness of historical-critical methods in biblical interpretation; in his own way he was advocating an acceptance of final form study, which is a key feature of Childs' canonical approach. Whatever the student's attitude was, or is, to historical-critical methods, Childs does hold to the view that historical-critical study has its place in biblical exegesis, a view he reiterates consistently. But what is not clear from his interpretation of Ex. 3: 1 - 4:17 is how his employment of diachronic study enlightens and advances theological exegesis. As one observer said of Childs' literary output, 'Only Exodus gets down to the kind of detail which will enable canonical criticism to prove itself; and even there what is most effective is detail of a traditional historical-critical kind.' (50)

If our observations and assessment of Childs' exegesis of Ex. 3: 1 - 4: 17 have any cogency and validity, then there are some areas of concern which would invite attention. Firstly, to what extent does the use of historical-critical methods contribute to establishing theological truth? This is a crucial question in hermeneutical epistemology. For example, in Leviticus 11: 44 God said to the Israelites, '..... and be holy, for I am holy.' In what ways can the theological truth of God's character, as revealed in this command, be proven or established by historical-critical methodologies? Not only does this question concerning the significance and use of historical-critical scholarship apply to the expansive work of Childs, it

permeates every dimension of biblical interpretation in both the Christian and Jewish traditions. Secondly, an important issue turns on the relation that obtains between the Old and the New Testaments in Christian interpretation. This has been a long standing problem in Christian thought and experience right from the emergence of the Christian church in the first century. How is one to understand the nature of God from his self-disclosure in Ex.3, in relation to the stupendous claims which the Johannine Jesus makes of himself in John 8: 12 - 59? Here we have a theological paradigm shift of monumental proportions. In this context, a Jewish interpretation of Exodus 3 would differ from that of a Christian believer. As R.W.L.Moberly has observed, 'For the Christian, by contrast, the primary and normative category of the religion is Christ, not Torah, which means that Christians necessarily stand in a position of discontinuity with regard to Hebrew scripture. For the Jew there is continuity where for the Christian there is discontinuity.' (51)

The coming of Jesus made a decisive difference in that it ushered in a new order, a new dispensation. Luke puts it like this, 'The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.' Luke 11: 31 (RSV) The superiority of Christ as the mediator of the new covenant over the old is a key concept in the epistle to the Hebrews. In Christian thought the NT documents proclaim the uniqueness of the coming of Christ as the fullest expression of God's self-revelation, a point well made in the Johannine Prologue. That being so, a problem will be encountered, as F. Watson has indicated, if one insists that 'the Old Testament requires a theological interpretation that maintains its relatively independent status.' (52) If Childs hermeneutical enterprise is to be strengthened, then these are two areas of concern which invite further elaboration.

Above all this, however, is the real crux of the matter. How are we to understand Ex. 3 - 4 as authoritative Scripture in the Church today in the light of the totality of God's self-revelation in the combined witnesses of the Old and New Testaments? This is the question that invites serious attention in any commentary

which purports to be theological. Unfortunately, this crucial question is not adequately addressed in Childs' commentary. Perhaps one reason for this is the very constricting parameters of traditional commentary writing. Of course, it would be unfair to suggest that Childs does not offer theological reflection on this key passage in his commentary. But such as it is, it does not amount to a breakthrough in theological understanding. The TR section on this passage is less than one and a half pages long. The result: very generalised and all-embracing statements and observations about God's revelation. In a word, Childs paints with a wide brush on a broad canvas. There is not a sustained engagement with the self-disclosure of God in Ex. 3 - 4 in all its canonical and theological dimensions. But can this be found in the works of Durham, Fretheim and Gowan? To their works we now turn.

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**(b). A Comparative study of the Exegesis of J. I. Durham, T. E. Fretheim, and D. E. Gowan with that of B. S. Childs.**

J. I. Durham's Exodus commentary was published over a decade after Childs'. (53) Before we consider Durham's treatment of Exodus 3: 1 - 4:17 we must first of all present a brief account of his interpretative approach. If Childs' exegesis of the passage is to be assessed in relation to his hermeneutical concerns, so too must we apply the same procedural propriety to Durham's work, and to the other authors to be presently considered.

Both Durham and Childs approach their work as Christian scholars. They are writing from a position of a personal faith which is exercised in a community of faith in the Protestant tradition. Consequently, they regard Exodus as part of the Holy Scriptures of the Christian church. They have a shared theological concern in that they believe that this book has something to say to contemporary believers about the nature, being and character of God. In the Editorial Preface of Durham's commentary the provenance and purpose of the Word Bible Commentary series is clearly stated: 'The broad stance of our contributors can rightly be called evangelical, and this term is to be understood in its positive, historic sense of a commitment to scripture as divine

revelation, and to the truth and power of the Christian gospel.' (54)

As a Christian exegete Durham holds that 'the primary burden of the book is theological.' (55) He continues, 'It is a book of faith, about faith, and directed primarily to those with faith. Those who read the Book of Exodus without faith, though they will inevitably profit from their reading, will not understand its message.' (56) He writes, 'For its ancient compilers the whole of Exodus was theological. Their purpose in the composition of both intermediary forms and the final form of the book was a theological one. Thus all other considerations are shifted to the background, and the only unity that is of any real importance in the Book of Exodus is theological unity - and that the book displays on every hand.' (57)

Unfortunately, Durham does not clearly define what is meant by the term theology/theological. In a Christian context we could take the term 'theology' to refer to the study of God: who God is, his character, being and activity. What is God's relation to the world? Can God be known today, and if so, how is this knowledge acquired? How can the study of God's self-revelation in Ex. 3 - 4 contribute to our understanding of God today in the light of the fullest expression of God as revealed in the Christ event? And is it true to say that Exodus does display a theological unity on every hand? What does such an assertion mean? These are critical questions to pose especially in view of Durham's stated aims.

Durham's commentary layout differs with that of Childs in that he divides Exodus into three main parts. Part One, Israel in Egypt, Ch. 1: 1 -13: 16; Part Two, Israel in the Wilderness, Ch: 13: 17 - 18: 27; and Part Three, Israel at Sinai, Ch. 19: 1 - 40: 38. Part 1 has three subsections comprising 34 different passages on each of which Durham offers, (a) Bibliography, (b) Translation (which he regards as foundational to everything else in the commentary, p. XXIX), (c) Notes = Textual Notes, (d) Form/Structure/ Setting (which equates to scholarly opinion on the passage), (e) Comment, (which attempts to discover what the text meant), and (f) Explanation (which seeks to consider the meaning of the passage in a contemporary Christian context.). Durham divides Part 1 into 11 distinct passages, while Part 3 has 4 sub-headings and a total of 39 passages. All of the above six division headings are

applied to every distinct passage so identified throughout the commentary. Sections like Notes and Bibliography vary according to the subject matter, as does the remaining sub-sections Form/Structure/Setting, Comment, and Explanation. The longest of these sections is Comment, F/S/S is shorter, and Explanation is consistently the shortest.

Exodus 3:1 - 12, which Durham entitles 'Theophany and Call', is, in F/S/S, immediately approached from a sources perspective, though with only slightly over one side given to this section, there is little time given to a sustained treatment. Durham quickly passes on to the question as to why theophany and call are brought together in this narrative. The amalgam of these two elements was effected, he thinks, for 'the same reason they are brought together in the narrative dealing with Israel at Sinai.' (58) The theophany for Durham describes the coming of God's presence, whereas the call points to the opportunity of response to that Presence. When there is a theophany, inexorably there is a choice to be made, and this will be either in the form of rejection or response. Durham goes on to see this pattern at various places in the Old Testament, citing relevant studies by Zimmerli, Habel and Richter. Following Zimmerli, all the narratives cited are in the form of the Jeremiah-Moses type where (1) the deity reveals himself to the recipient, (2) the person called is very reluctant to respond, and (3) a divine answer is given in terms of promises and signs. Then there is the Micaiah-Isaiah type of call narrative characterised by a vision of God enthroned announcing his word to his heavenly council. This approach was applied by Zimmerli to the call narrative of Saul/Paul in Acts 9: 22 and 26, which Durham confirms was achieved in a fascinating manner.

Habel's work analysed the call narrative in greater detail adapting component titles like, divine confrontation, introductory, commission, objection, reassurance and sign. Durham concedes that these studies are instructive, but too rigidly conceived regarding call and message components of the theophany - call sequence, and too closely paralleled with prophetic traditions. He seeks to move in a different direction by advocating that we take cognizance of a much broader Presence/ response pattern of which Exodus 3 - 4 and 19 - 24 are but basic manifestations. Moses' experience in

Ex.3: 1 - 12 is in Durham's view, an exact foreshadowing of the experience of Israel, initially in Egypt, then in the wilderness deprivation, and finally at Sinai. In all these narratives Durham views the Presence/response pattern as fundamental; in fact, he describes it as a shaping factor in Ch. 19: 1 - 20: 20 and in 24: 1 -11, and argues that it is possible to view this pattern as a seminal point of origin for the call narratives of the Old Testament. Thus, in both the Yahwist and Elohist narratives, Durham sees theophany and call present 'because each inevitably presupposes and suggests the other.' (59) Theophany and call surface in Moses' experience of Presence and response as a fundamental stratum as they do in every other narrative dealing with Moses and the Exodus. Durham believes that this is the result of the redactor who sought to produce a composite of the sources available to him. That is to say, it was the intention of the redactor to make this assertion that theophany and call in Moses' experience constituted a pivotal point of reference for the reader in understanding the nature of Presence and Response throughout the book.

The material under "Comment" takes the form of commentary on a verse by verse basis; the remarks made in the "Comment" section are, in the traditional sense, an explanation of the story as it unfolds in the narrative. Critical decisions have to be made here if the aim of the series is to be realised. Both these sections, according to the Editorial Preface, are to contribute to the passage's meaning and its relevance to the ongoing biblical revelation. In order for us to evaluate the success, or otherwise, of Durham's work, one will have to take the quality of the material in both "Comment" and "Explanation" together. It is, therefore, in these two sections, where one would expect to find the theological significance of the passage in question, which will open up our understanding as to the ongoing nature of God's revelation.

Commenting on verse 1 Durham states that 'the urgent point of this passage is theology and not geography is made clear by the fact that neither here nor anywhere else in the O.T. is the location of the mountain preserved or, for that matter, even considered important.....' (60) If theology is the urgent point of this passage it is not immediately obvious from the content of this "Comment" section. As one reads through Durham's comments on these verses the bulk of the material is taken up

with his own description of the narrative story and the state of scholarly opinion. There is scant evidence of theological insight in this section but perhaps we can look to "Explanation" for some theological engagement.

Durham says that Ch. 3: 1 - 12 anticipates the two most important sequences in Exodus. Firstly, there is an introduction to the context for the revelation of the divine name, YHWH. And secondly, this passage looks forward to the experience of Israel at Sinai. Durham sees a parallel between what Moses experiences to Israel's encounter with YHWH. He goes on to state that this passage establishes the certainty of the Presence of God in the theophany, which in turn confirms the word of God to Moses in the call, and certifies the place as holy since God appeared to Moses there. The practical outcome of this is that the authority for the call of Moses is firmly established. Just as God has drawn near to Moses in the theophany and call, so also is Moses assured of his presence in the mission he is to undertake. Durham continues, 'And the linking of this experience of Moses with the experience the sons of Israel are yet to have is cleverly made by the sign that is promised as the proof of God's Presence, namely, that the sons of Israel, along with Moses, shall worship God together at this very same mountain.' (61)

This section is concluded by Durham by stating that at an earlier development, the narrative was possibly much briefer, standing as a prelude to the revelation of the special name of God in the next section, verses, 13 - 22. For Durham, much of the narrative of Exodus 3, from 13 - 22, is in one way or another a proof of the claim of God's special name. 'This section, introducing that name, gives us a first glimpse, from several angles, of the essential point of that claim: He is here, really here'. (62) Despite the brevity of this section Durham certainly does offer some important observations in this passage. The concept of the presence of God, who is a known and a felt reality in human experience, is one which transcends the circumstantial particularity of Moses. The notion of a divine call to an individual as a prelude to a divine commission to fulfil God's purpose is also one which lies well to Christian theological reflection and practical Christian missionary endeavour. Moreover, the experience of Moses in Ch. 3: 1 - 11 as a foreshadowing of what Israel will later

encounter with Yahweh points in the direction of the importance of 'community' and 'worship', two related concepts that are of vital theological concern to Christian believers.

The potential of these concepts, theologically speaking, are not substantially realised in Durham's two sections, "Comment" and "Explanation". If a commentary purports to be principally theological in its direction and content, then it will require a commentator to engage at greater length with these vital theological issues than is offered here. In all fairness, however, this raises the important matter of what one might reasonably expect from a commentary of this kind. Perhaps we are expecting too much from the genre of bible commentary as traditionally conceived, which, from the very outset, has in-built limiting factors which we have alluded to earlier. This is a point we will consider later when we review the interpretations of Exodus presented by the other scholars cited earlier.

The encounter which Moses had with God as recorded in Exodus Ch. 3:13-22 has long attracted the attention of scholars throughout the ages. Under Form/Structure/Setting Durham proceeds in a predictable way by an opening reference to sources. He sees these verses as an amalgam of EJ material which yields a unity which supersedes that of either narrative in its original form. But any attempt to separate Exodus 3 into its constituent sources leads into many blind alleys. According to Durham, the composite account is, for the basis of exegesis, 'a far more significant key to the intention of the Book of Exodus than the separate sources could ever be, even if we could reconstruct them completely.' (63) In other words, the final form of the text is the starting point of interpretation for the Christian exegete, and this is a hermeneutical move which is emphatic in the work of Childs.

Durham believes that what determines the composite here is the motif of authority. Thus, the material in the revelation and explanation of God's special name has been combined with the material which describes Yahweh's commission to Moses. This in turn has been expanded to include the themes of exodus-deliverance, worship-service at Sinai, confrontation with Pharaoh, the great wonders which point to the supreme power of Yahweh, and Israel being enriched at the expense of the



Egyptians. Durham poses the question as to why this composite was made and what gives it its form. In a single word: authority. Durham sees the theophany and call as legitimising Moses' authority and so also with Israel; she too will encounter Yahweh in her own experience of theophany and invitation.

Following this section, Durham presents about three and a half pages of "Comment" on this crucial section. His verse by verse comments follow the usual pattern of taking the reader through the narrative story coupled with scholarly opinion where he thinks this appropriate. Historically, scholars have been attracted to the subject of the origins of Yahwism along with the study of the beliefs and practices of Israel in Egypt. Durham, however, sees this approach as missing the essence of the passage. He writes, 'This text is supremely a theological text, one of the most theological texts in the Bible. . . ' (64) Little importance is therefore attached to the long discourses on the relative influence of patriarchal faith or Kenite practices in this context. What matters for Durham is the fact that this theological text reveals God's special name and nature to Israel.

Durham, not surprisingly, deals with verses 13, 14 and 15 by assigning separate paragraphs to each of these verses. On verse 13 he keeps to comments which are directly applicable to the immediate context, though he does cite some O.T. references in relation to God's reputation (p.38). There is no wider discussion about the nature and character of God in his exegesis of these key verses. The divine answer in verse 14 given to Moses' question in verse 13, is one which has attracted a wide range of interpretation over the centuries, some of which Durham cites briefly in passing. He goes on to consider the answer and insists that it must not be read only in the context of verses 11- 15, but in the context of the remainder of Exodus 3 as well as the remainder of the narrative sequence of Exodus. In practice, however, there is no evidence of this being implemented. Unlike Childs, Durham does not consider the possibility of an O.T. and a N.T. dimension to these verses. Just how this vital theological passage might contribute to contemporary Christian debate on the nature, character and being of God (that is to say, the relevance to the ongoing biblical revelation) is not a subject tackled by Durham. He interprets the formula '*ehyeh*

'*aser 'ehyeh* as referring to active being, not conceptual being, for it is not fitting in Durham's view to refer to God as "was" or "will be". His active existence "always is" (p. 39).

The repetition of the declaration "I am" verbs four times, Durham concedes, appears awkward, but is nevertheless the intention of the redactor. Emphatically, for the redactor, 'Yahweh is.' At this juncture Durham brings into view his hermeneutical key to interpreting Exodus, the concept of 'Presence'. Yahweh's Is-ness means Presence not only in Ch. 3, but also in Chaps. 19 - 20 and 33 - 34 where the special name of Yahweh is mentioned. 'This God who is present, this God who Is, this Yahweh, is one and the same as the God of the fathers.' Hence, '... the name of Yahweh as defined in terms of active being or Presence is the name by which God is to be known henceforth forever'. (65) The contents of the remaining verses of this passage anticipate the future extraordinary deeds of Yahweh which confirm who he is to Moses and to his people.

In the section "Explanation" Durham indicates that vv. 13 - 22 follow on from the direction given in vv. 1 - 12 where the section closes with the promise to Moses of God's presence; so vv. 13 - 22 'stress the truth of this promise in the most fundamental way by tying it to the unique and special name of God, Yahweh.' (66) In Durham's view, the unique encounter between Moses and God raises the question of authority and with the name of "Yahweh" revealed and explained, Moses can have no further questions regarding God's authority. This notion of authority very naturally leads on to the next section, Ch. 4: 1 - 9, which deals with Moses' own authority and how this is to be clearly established before the sons of Israel.

This short passage of nine verses depicts Moses and God in dialogue and is a continuation of Moses' reticence to accept the practical implications of God's call. Two previous objections voiced by Moses to God are now further extended by two more, in 4: 1 and 4: 10. Durham attributes 4: 1 - 9 to J as an integral part of the section 3: 1 - 4: 17 and sees this passage as establishing Moses' authority. Moses' great fear is that he will not have credibility with the people of Israel. Verses 1 - 9 outline Moses' third objection and Yahweh's response to it. The translation of verse 1 given by Durham is,

"Look here, they won't trust me, and they won't pay attention to my report, for they will say, 'Yahweh has not appeared to you.'" In F/S/S Durham uses the phrase 'the first of the skeptics' as a description of Moses' response to God's call. It would be more correct to say that Moses was very reluctant to immediately accept this call from Yahweh with alacrity. And he was not the only person in the O.T. so to do. Moses' sense of inadequacy is paralleled in the life of Gideon, Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah when they, like Moses, were faced with the enormity of the task to which they were called.

Durham takes us through the details of this divine/human encounter and in his "Comment" section he says, ' . . . it is not by any authority of Moses that what is taking place will be made effective, but through the authority of God himself, an authority that Moses merely reports and represents. The real hero of this call and commission is not Moses, but God. And the trust that will produce belief must be placed not in Moses, but in God. Moses is but the medium of the message. . .' (67) Such an observation takes one out of the realm of descriptive narrative and into the realm of theological reflection as to the nature of God's purpose in calling Moses and presents us with valuable theological comment. To regard Moses as the medium of God's message is an authentic prophetic characteristic which places him in a formative position in the emergence of the prophetic movement in Israel. As such it lays the foundation for his authority, an authority recognised by both God and the people of Israel.

In the very short "Explanation" section to these verses, Durham offers the view that the real subject of the passage is God's authority, for what Moses is able to do, can only be effected by God. The great power of Yahweh now displayed before Moses, and to be decisively displayed presently before the Egyptians, is but a demonstration of the work of his power. Durham observes, ' Israel must believe Moses as Moses must believe Yahweh. As Moses is to be the medium of the message to Israel, so Israel is to be the medium of the message to the world (19:4 - 6). And the message? It is that God is, and so is actively present in a world that belongs to him.' (68)

From the immediate context, this is a theological observation which is well

made; but how are we to relate this theological insight to our understanding and experience of the ongoing revelation of God's nature, character and activity in today's world? This synchronic dimension of the scriptural passage in focus here is not treated by Durham's commentary; he does not push the theological issues raised in this passage out into a wider landscape in order to grapple with questions like, how can Exodus 3:1 - 4: 17 contribute to our knowledge of God in contemporary living? Or, how can God be known to-day? Or, how is this passage of scripture related to our understanding of God in the light of the NT revelation of Jesus? If Exodus is to be viewed as part of the Scriptures of the Christian church, these and related questions cannot be avoided.

The fourth and final objection of Moses to Yahweh's call is, "Pardon Lord, I am no man of words." verse 10 (Durham's translation), and brings this pericope to a satisfactory conclusion for Moses' confidence. Durham notes that there is not unanimity among scholars regarding the sources of these verses. The two answers given to Moses' sense of inadequacy as a speaker, (1) that Yahweh asserts the promise of his presence, and (2) that the introduction of Aaron as spokesman for Moses, do not complement each other in Durham's view. He thinks that (1) above is the oldest version of this protest of Moses and is the most likely reason why Moses acquiesced to Yahweh's call.

In the "Comment" section Durham gives many citations of persons who felt inadequate in relation to God's call, e.g. Judg. 6: 14 - 15; I Sam. 10: 20 - 24; I Kgs. 3: 5 - 9; Is. 6: 5 - 8; and Jer. 1: 4 - 10. He maintains that this claim of inadequacy is rooted in the OT as a pattern where the weak become strong, the least become great, the mean become mighty and the last become first. Where this pattern is found, Durham continues, its fundamental message is the same: 'God's word, God's rule, God's teaching, God's deliverance comes not from man, no matter who that man may be, but from God. Even the election of Israel makes this point. Indeed, that election is probably the most convincing of all the occurrences of the pattern.' (69) Durham shows his capacity to make pertinent theological comment but unfortunately the format of the bible commentary places great restrictions on developing such

perceptions in depth. Nevertheless, if a commentary states its intention to be theological in purpose, then it has to be judged on that basis. Finally, the "Explanation" section is very brief. Durham here reiterates his previous themes in this section. The subject of Ch. 3: 1 - 4: 17 is not Aaron or Moses. Rather, it is Yahweh and his presence. The 'I am' is with Moses and with Moses' mouth. And he will be with the sons of Israel in Egypt so that his purpose will be brought to a definitive conclusion.

In a comparative study of Childs' interpretation of Ex. 3 - 4 with that of Durham's, some similarities emerge. Both scholars offer their own translation and technical notes accompanied by full bibliographies in each of the sub-sections. It is also clear that both Childs and Durham adopt a format style, which to some degree, is similar, e.g. in dealing with scholarly concerns in separate sections as in Childs' *Literary and Form-critical Analysis* and Durham's *Form/Structure/Setting*. There is also a similarity between Childs' OTC and Durham's 'Comment' sections to the extent that the comments are offered on a verse by verse basis, though Childs' purports to see how Ex. 3 - 4 resonates throughout the OT literature, an objective missing in Durham. But Durham has nothing like Childs' HE and NTC sections, and while Childs' TR section may be paralleled with Durham's 'Explanation', nonetheless, Childs is attempting to work towards a different goal. Durham's 'Explanation' comments are mainly confined to the literary context of Exodus, whereas Childs' TR, in concept, endeavours to consider Ex. 3 - 4 in relation to the combined witnesses of both the Old and New Testaments. In fact, Childs' concept in his Exodus commentary is really on the grand scale; his exegesis may not have exhausted the theological potential of Ex. 3 - 4, but the depth and breadth of his vision in this commentary, along with the unique features of his format, put his work in a different league from that of Durham's. There is a consciousness in Childs of the wider hermeneutical debate with regards to interpreting Exodus as God's word for the Christian church today which is not present in Durham's work. This is the great strength of Childs' position, and it is a necessary one if a reconstituted biblical theology is to be realised, - a vital concern of Childs' scholarly activity.

A critical question turns on the way Durham employs historical-critical

techniques in his commentary. Indeed, from a theological standpoint, this is a vital issue. Durham frequently cites source-critical material. In the F/S/S section on Ch. 3:1 -12 we have an opening paragraph of eight lines on source criticism. Then Durham comments: "What is more important than the analysis of this section into its constituent sources, however, is an understanding of the text in its present sequence. Why was a composite made, and why does the section bring together theophany and call?" (70) He points out that theophany and call are brought together in the narrative dealing with Israel and Sinai. 'Theology describes the advent of God's presence: call describes the opportunity of response to that Presence.' (71) What then is the importance which Durham attaches to source-criticism in the process of interpretation?

Source-critical comments are usually found in the F/S/S sections where Durham consistently refers to terms like 'composite', 'amalgams', 'editor', 'compiler' and 'redactor'. But does Durham's source-critical comments on this Ch. 3: 1 - 4:17 enable the reader to perceive the theological significance of this crucial passage on the disclosure of God's name as YHWH? Based on the evidence of the comments presented, the answer must be in the negative. This is not surprising because Durham's commitment to source-criticism is not consistently clear. On Ch. 4: 10 - 17 he writes, 'The assignment of these verses to the usual sources offers no help, since the absence of clear source-critical clues further confuses the issue. (72) And again, 'What we have in spite of all these difficulties is the form of the text as it has come to us, and in a purposeful order that must be considered a part of the implication of this section as it stands. (73) In the F/S/S section on Ch. 3: 13 - 22, Durham states that these verses are an amalgam of EJ source material. He goes on, 'Despite the differing presuppositions of the two sources, the two have been forged into a single sequence with a theological point of its own. (74) He proceeds to explain that while the Elohist and Yahwist sources have their different perspectives which are not obscured in the composite of Exodus 3, yet he says 'the new narrative has an integrity all its own and an impact which since we do not have the original narratives, we may at least imagine, to surpass that of either source by itself. (75) Durham then summarises as

follows: ' For this reason, the complicated and subjective attempts to separate Exodus 3 into its constitutive sources, attempts that have been prodded by ingenious theories into many blind alleys, are best set aside in favour of the amalgam of the text at hand. This is especially important here because the composite account, by its synthetic form, is a far more significant key to the intention of the Book of Exodus than the separate sources could ever be, even if we could reconstruct them completely.' (76) Also in the Introduction to the commentary Durham writes, '.....despite the fact that it is a compilation whose layers are still at least partly visible and to a degree recoverable, the Book of Exodus must be considered as a whole piece of theological literature, quite deliberately put into the form in which we have it, for very specific purposes.' (77)

In the light of these observations, the question arises: what is the purpose and function of source-critical, and other critical procedures, since what only matters is the final form of Exodus which has come down to us? Why bother to expend so much intellectual energy in screening the text for sources when the vital interpretative task is to wrestle with the theological force of the text in the final form which we have before us? This is a question which can be posed about the historical-critical methods in the work of Childs also, a point to which we earlier alluded. Theological engagement with the biblical text is a constructive task; source criticism, as with all facets of historical-critical methodologies, is a purely explanatory task, a point expressed by C. Seitz in a very recent study thus, 'In my view, historical criticism plays no positive theological role whatsoever. Its only proper role is negative. It establishes the genre, form, possible setting, and historical and intellectual background of the individual biblical text. . .' (78)

When we consider the amount of material Durham has included in his commentary on Ex. 3:1 - 4: 17, especially in the F/S/S section, one would expect to have more theological engagement with this unique passage in his sections 'Comment' and 'Explanation'. The latter section is always the shortest right throughout the commentary. At its longest it is about 2/3 of a page as in Ch. 3: 13 - 22; at its shortest, 1/3 of a page, as in Ch. 4: 10 - 17. It is in both 'Comment' and

'Explanation' sections where we expect to have a clear exposition of the 'passage's meaning and its relevance to the ongoing biblical revelation' for they are 'designed expressly to meet that need.' (79). Durham's comments are kept well within the framework of the literary context of Exodus. In the main, he does not venture much into the wider context of the OT in relation to interpreting this classic revelatory text. In fact, the major limiting factor of Durham's work is that he never attempts to branch out from Exodus 3 - 4 into the rest of Scripture to engage the reader in theological reflection on the nature of God's self-disclosure. In other words, he does not attempt to place Ex. 3: 1 - 4: 17 within the wider context of the totality of Scripture, that is, within the context of the Old Testament and, in particular, within the environment of the New Testament writings. If one proposes, as Durham does, to write a commentary which seeks to explore the ongoing biblical revelation as to the reality of God in a contemporary Christian context, then the significance and meaning of Ex. 3 - 4 has to be the subject of further reflection especially as to how this important passage resonates throughout Scripture.

As a Christian commentator on Ex. 3 - 4, Durham does not consider the hermeneutical significance of the Christ event, especially the dominical 'I am' saying in John Ch. 8: 58. (Of course, Childs also omits to consider this text in his NT context section, a fact which we have already noted.) And this is a weakness in this commentary. Durham fails to extend the interpretational implications of God's self revelation in Ex. 3 - 4 to the fuller context of all Scripture. From a conceptual point of view, therein lies the weakness of Durham's commentary, and conversely, the strength of Childs'.

Another aspect of Durham's commentary on this key passage is his use of the indeterminate term, 'Presence'. In the commentary section under review, Durham uses this term about 34 times. It first appears in the author's Preface where he acknowledges his debt to his former teacher G. Henton Davies who taught him the importance of the theology of Yahweh's Presence in the Book of Exodus. Copious references to it can also be found in the four page Introduction to the Commentary. Durham states in the opening paragraphs of his Introduction section



that in 'the Book of Exodus, the people Israel is born, Torah is born, and with it the Bible; the theology of Presence and Response is born . . . .' (80) In normal usage one would assume that the term 'presence' refers to the Lord's presence as a known and a felt reality in the experience of God's people. But Durham uses it with a capital 'P' thus drawing the attention of the reader to its use as a proper noun. But Durham does not state precisely what he means by the term, yet at the same time, he attaches enormous importance to it. He states that the theology of Yahweh's presence acts as a kind of magnet for the earliest and formative versions, particularly with respect to the principle passages and themes of Exodus.

Durham states that Exodus has a theological unity which is displayed on every hand and the centrepiece of this unity is the theology of Yahweh present with and in the midst of his people.' (81) There can be little doubt that Moses and the Israelites were at times highly conscious of God's divine presence. But does this fact require the use of the term 'presence' prefixed with a capital 'p' in order to convey information to the reader not accessible by using the term 'presence' in its normal conventional meaning? For Durham, it seems that Yahweh's Presence is a controlling hermeneutical principle right throughout the commentary. As such it tends to skew the interpretation of the book in that Durham tends to see 'Presence' virtually everywhere in Exodus. Throughout Ex. 3:1 - 4: 17 there is a plethora of references to 'Presence', yet Durham does not manifestly show that this has theological significance particularly in the central section of 3: 13 - 22 where God discloses his special name, YHWH. For Durham the term appears to be purely descriptive with no particular theological import. At times he seems to use it as a synonym for 'Lord' as in Ch. 4: 1 - 9 in the F/S/S section. Since Durham fails to define what he means by the term, its use tends to obfuscate rather than enlighten.

In the final analysis it must be said that Durham's handling of this crucial example of God's revelation does not move much beyond the literary context of Exodus and into the constructive theological task of reflecting on the nature and reality of God today. In his 'Explanation' section on Ch. 4: 1 - 9, for example, Durham says that Israel is to be the medium of the message to the world. 'And the message? It

is that God is, and so is actively present in a world that belongs to him.' (82) But how does this comment enable the reader to understand how God is active in the world today? This question is not addressed. If a commentator envisages his task as writing a theological commentary, then this is a dimension to the text which needs to be considered otherwise the aim of the commentary series will not be realised. By comparison, Childs' hermeneutical and conceptual framework displays a commitment to wider theological concerns which are absent in Durham's work.

One cannot doubt that Durham has written a very comprehensive commentary on a book which is central in the OT canon, but as far as Ex. 3: 1 - 4:17 is concerned, his interpretation, as with Childs', exposes an acute problem: to what extent are historical-critical procedures and methods relevant to theological interpretation? Both Childs and Durham, notwithstanding their laudable aims of interpreting Exodus as part of the Scriptures of the Church, include a vast amount of scholarly content in their commentary on this passage in comparison with the material which seeks to grapple with the theological significance of the text: the former rarely influences and shapes the latter. Is the format and style of both these commentaries a serious constricting factor in realising theological insight of substance, or is a new commentary paradigm needed in order to open up new theological horizons? We shall now turn to the work of T. Fretheim to see if a different approach is evident there.

Exodus: Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching by Terence Fretheim (83) is a commentary designed to meet the needs of 'students, teachers, ministers, and priests for a contemporary expository commentary.' (84) It contrasts sharply with Childs' commentary in several ways. First, there is no English translation of the Hebrew text. The text adopted for the series is the RSV/NRSV. Second, the format is very different. According to the Editors, this commentary series is not designed to replace the historical commentary or homiletical aids to preaching. Its purpose is to provide a commentary 'which presents the integrated result of historical and theological work with the biblical text.' (Preface) Consequently,

historical-critical material is greatly minimised in the commentary. There are no section headings to be seen like, Form-critical Analysis, Form-critical problems, Traditio-critical, or Source-criticism. Instead, Fretheim divides the entire contents of the book into nine main parts. Part Two is entitled, 'MOSES and GOD: Call and Dialogue'. Ex. 3: 1 - 4: 17. For the passage under discussion, Ex. 3: 1 - 4: 17, he gives five sub-headings as follows:

- |                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Ch. 3: 1 - 6.   | Curiosity and Call.   |
| Ch. 3: 7- 12.   | The Sending Of Moses. |
| Ch. 3: 13 - 22. | What's in a Name?     |
| Ch. 4: 1 - 9.   | Moses and Magic.      |
| Ch. 4: 10 - 17. | Moses and His Mouth.  |

The only headings are those given at the commencement of each passage and the nature of the comments on each sub-section are in the form of expository essays. Fretheim's comment deals with the passage as a whole, rather than proceeding word by word, line by line, as in the more conventional commentary. From a practical viewpoint, the conceptual framework of the format of this commentary gives the commentator a much freer hand in that he has more space at his disposal in which to do justice to the theological dimensions of the text. It is therefore a very different commentary format style compared with Childs. The crucial question is though, does this distinctive format style ensure sustained and memorable theological exegesis?

Before turning to Fretheim's interpretation of Ex. 3: 1 - 4: 17 we shall briefly consider some observations found in the 22 page Introduction to the commentary for it is here where we shall find some clues as to his interpretative approach to Exodus. From the contents of this Introduction it is clear that Fretheim is well versed in historical-critical techniques. He sees Exodus as a patchwork quilt of tradition from various periods in Israel's life; yet, it is also a finished product. Fretheim distinguishes between the theology in the present (final) form of the text, and the theology of the sources which the redactor may have used. He states that in the commentary his concern is with the former, so to that extent his general approach is similar to Childs. The book of Exodus is not a historical narrative in the modern sense, according to

Fretheim. 'Its primary concern is with issues that are theological and kerygmatic. (85) He goes on to state that the theology of Exodus is carried by certain types of literature: story, law and liturgy. 'The primary approach of the commentary is to draw out the theology inherent within each text that is being considered and in such a way as to honour the type of literature and the concern of the text to address a word of God to its audience.' (86)

Certain special theological interests of the narrator provide, in Fretheim's view, some keys to the interpretation of Exodus. He records six leading theological issues in Exodus thus; (1) A theology of Creation; (2) The Knowledge of God; (3) Images of God; (4) The Meaning of Liberation and Exodus as Paradigm; (5) Israel's worship and Yahweh's Presence, and (6) Law, Covenant, and Israel's Identity. Fretheim presents many perceptive observations in these 22 pages. Indeed, the above six themes could form the basis of a major study in Exodus which might offer valuable theological potential in our understanding of Exodus, for in following a thematic approach the commentator is presented with a much freer open-ended approach than that offered in a traditional type commentary. These themes are not articulated in Childs' commentary because he was, at the time, wedded to a format style that decisively shaped the content of his commentary. In fact, Childs is so taken up with historical-critical concerns, along with his desire to be fair and even-handed to various viewpoints, that his interpretation gets bogged down. Does this happen to Fretheim in his handling of Ex. 3 - 4?

Each of the nine major parts of this commentary are prefaced by a short introduction prior to directly engaging with the passage at hand. In this instance, Fretheim briefly outlines what is to follow from Ex. Ch. 3:1 onwards by setting out in tabular form the list of objections Moses gave to God and the corresponding response of God to each of these objections. The reader is then taken through the story of Moses' call as it unfolds in the narrative, a procedure which is common to all commentaries. Any strengths in a commentary will therefore not be found in this a purely descriptive exercise, but in the nature/perception/insight which can be evinced from the comments on the theological significance of the dialogue between God and

Moses.

Reading through Childs' commentary on Ex. 3: 1 - 4:17 and comparing it with Fretheim's work, one obvious difference can be quickly detected. Fretheim makes only two references to historical-critical methods. On the section 3: 7 - 12, he says, 'Many suggest that this section consists of a composite of two sources the primary evidence for which is the apparent doublet in verses 7-8 and 9-10. While this is a possible explanation, the text is not only coherent in its present form, it is most appropriate theologically. . . .' (87) The other reference is in the section 3: 13- 22: 'The various repetitions of verses 14 - 17 suggests a composite text, yet a certain coherence exists.' (88) Such brief allusions to source critical material are hardly worth mentioning as they add nothing of substance to the interpretation. The emphasis on historical-critical material in Childs' commentary on this passage, and its virtual absence in Fretheim's could not be more striking.

In his three page introduction to this passage, Fretheim writes, 'This dialogue is theologically significant.' (89) He goes on to say, ' Indeed, it is Moses' persistence that occasions a greater fullness in the divine revelation. Human questions find an openness in God and lead to fuller knowledge. God thus reveals himself, not simply at the divine initiative, but in interaction with a questioning human party. Simple deference or passivity in the presence of God would close down the revelatory possibilities.' (90) But simple deference or passivity does not always close down the revelatory possibilities when God makes himself known to humans. For example, the passivity and deference of both Isaiah and Saul of Tarsus, coupled with their immediate willingness to respond to the divine presence, led to unprecedented salvific revelation on their part. Both men did not, like Moses, mount a series of objections to the implications of the divine call.

Fretheim divides the passage Ex. 3: 1 - 4: 17 into five sub-sections which we noted above. His presentation reveals a distinct absence of the section format approach which Childs employs. The section in Childs which is closest to Fretheim's expository essay style approach is the 'Old Testament Context' . We will not compare the contents of these two writers, line by line, as this would prove to be a rather

protracted affair. Instead, we will seek to draw out the nature and quality of the theological comments which Fretheim offers. And where better to begin than on the sub-section 3: 13 - 22, where God discloses himself as YHWH. Fretheim acknowledges that 3:14 is 'one of the most puzzled over verses in the entire Hebrew Bible.' (91) Translating 'ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh' he prefers the option - 'I will be who I am/ I am who I will be'. 'In essence: I will be God for you. The force is not simply that God is or that God is present but that God will be faithfully God for them.' (92) He suggests that the formulation points to a divine faithfulness to self. 'Wherever God is being God, God will be the kind of God God is.' (93) Unfortunately, this does not tell us very much about the nature and character of God.

In his introductory paragraphs to the passage, Fretheim writes, 'God's way into the future is thus not dictated solely by the divine word and will.' (94) He further says that God places the divine word and will into the hands of Moses to do what he will. 'That is for God a risky venture, fraught with negative possibilities as well as strengths. This will mean something less than what would have been possible had God acted alone; God is not in total control of the ensuing events.' (95) To speak of God being outside the control of historical events due to Moses' persistent reluctance to freely accept God's call, is to put a question mark over God's sovereign power in the process of the redemption of Israel from the bondage and slavery of Egypt. The subject of God's sovereign power - (Fretheim talks about divine agency) is a topic of immense importance right throughout scripture, and it merits more nuanced understanding and reflection than Fretheim assigns to it here.

The very nature of Fretheim's expository style approach to writing a commentary on Exodus as a whole, precludes him from moving the discussion on Ex. 3 - 4 to the wider remit of the totality of scripture. This is a most valuable feature of Childs' canonical approach. His comments on this passage in the section Theological Reflection are worthy of note. 'The major witness of Ex. 3 lies in the revelation by God of himself to Moses as that divine reality who had already made himself known in the past to the Fathers and who promised to execute his redemptive will toward Israel in the future. The New Testament witness is an attempt to understand this same

revelation of the divine reality in relation to the eschatological event of Jesus Christ. Both testaments reflect on the nature of God whose reality has not been discovered but revealed, and whose revelation of himself defines his being in terms of his redemptive work.' (96) By comparison, Fretheim's work lacks this wider hermeneutical dimension.

Fretheim points to the affirmation of divine sovereignty in the narrative but still adds a further qualification by his use of the concept of a suffering God. 'Whatever will be said later in Exodus about the means of God's delivering activity, before it all stands this word about a suffering God. This is an important qualification of one's affirmation of divine sovereignty in the narrative.' (97) That God identifies with the sufferings of his people is clear from the text, 3: 7ff, but what does Fretheim mean when he says , 'God knows it (suffering) from the inside. God is internally related to the suffering, entering fully into the oppressive situation and making it God's own.' (98) Does God know what slavery and oppression mean from experience, from the inside? It is very difficult to grasp what Fretheim means by this notion of God as sufferer. There is no clear exposition of this concept in the present context in relation to the ongoing revelation of God; perhaps the preponderance of this concept in Fretheim's commentary has more to do with citing his work, 'The Suffering God' (99) than expounding the text as it stands. In fact, Fretheim specifically cites this work four times in this section of Exodus. Consequently, the impression is given that what is driving the exposition is this concept rather than keeping to the main theological issue of God's unprecedented self disclosure to Moses. It would have been much more profitable for Fretheim to concentrate on the fact that God specifically revealed himself to Moses as YHWH.

Of course, Fretheim is conscious of this fact and he does indicate that the translation 'Lord' is 'something of a problem in this day of feminist concerns and rightfully so.' (100) He states that the term 'Lord' wrongfully suggests that the name has a masculine identification. But that is as far as Fretheim goes on this topic. The allusion to feminine hermeneutics is but a passing concession to modernity!

There is no real engagement with a feminist agenda here. He immediately

proceeds to consider the giving of the name and discusses the view that God's response to Moses constitutes a refusal to give the name. He concludes that this is a counsel of despair in interpretation. Fretheim observes that it is God who gives the name, and while the name is not fully revealing (what name would fully reveal the nature and character of God?) the name nevertheless does give us some insight into God.

In the first instance, the giving of the name, Fretheim maintains, is a revelatory act. This is an obvious but important point to emphasise for at the heart of the Christian bible lies the claim that God has revealed himself to specific individuals, and corporately to his people. Sometimes this revelation is dramatic in its form as at Mt. Sinai, Ex. 19 - 20, and on the Damascus Road. At other times, God's revelation can take the form of the silence of a hushed stillness, i.e. the still small voice of the Lord coming to Elijah, 1 Kings 19; very significantly, this incident also occurred at Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. Secondly, Fretheim makes another significant observation: the giving of God's name implies a certain kind of relationship; it opens up a certain intimacy in a relationship whereby divine-human communication and worship can take place. This is a feature of Christian thought that is of immense importance. 'By giving the name, God becomes accessible to people.' (101) But just as Fretheim gets into drawing out valuable features of this passage, he reverts back to his theme of divine suffering. 'For God to give the name is to open himself up to hurt. Naming entails the likelihood of divine suffering. . . . ' (102) What does it mean to say that God can be hurt? Fretheim does not draw out the implications of this question. His reference to the giving of the name as implying a relationship, however, does not automatically give open and free access to God. When one compares the worship of God by Israel under the OT economy, particularly with respect to the priesthood and the concomitant sacrificial system, with the New Covenant initiated by the totality of the Christ event, the changes are truly revolutionary. Paul put it like this: 'Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.' Romans 5: 1 - 2. And



this is reinforced in a unique way by the writer to the Hebrews, especially in Chapter 10.

Unfortunately, Fretheim does not sustain his exegesis by drawing out the theological significance of the text. The commentary format which is at his disposal gives him great freedom from the strictures of accommodating a plethora of critical methodologies in the traditional type of bible commentary. Yet Fretheim's content on this passage consists of the unfolding nature of the call of God to Moses in his own words, and his own observations which are of a reflective religious nature. There is, however, a very strong emphasis on the human side of the narrative. The title of his Part 2 is revealing in this respect: 'Moses and God: Call and Dialogue.' It is not 'God and Moses' as one might expect since, as Fretheim points out, between Ex. 3: 4 - 4: 17, God speaks to Moses thirteen times. (103) It is therefore not Moses who takes the initiative in the theophany; it is God who reveals his power and presence in an unprecedented way by the name of YHWH. Fretheim seems to lose sight of this fact in his writing. What is needed here is a more balanced understanding between the divine initiative and human response.

On 3: 13 - 22 Fretheim writes, 'When Moses continues to object to the divine commissioning, God adjusts to new developments .....' (104) Also, 'Future events may necessitate a change in the divine way into the future.' (105) On his comments on 4: 1 - 9, entitled 'Moses and Magic', he states, 'There will be no surprises for God in the sense of not anticipating what might happen. (106) He later writes, 'God's stooping to engage in this kind of magical activity has been troublesome to some commentators, leading even to a denial that this is magic. But it is magic, pure and simple.' (107) On 4: 10 - 17 Fretheim says that God has been involved in the physical development of Moses' speech problem. (108) 'God's best option in this situation is the choice of Moses alone to carry out that task.' (109)

From these comments it is apparent that the Lord God of Israel is limited in that: he cannot control various situations, he employs magic, he is prone to change his plans, and adjusts to changing circumstances. The reader can easily forget, in the light of these descriptions, that Moses was standing on holy ground when he

encountered this unique divine disclosure, and that it was God who broke into Moses' life to call and commission him for a noble task. On the one hand, Fretheim's expository essay approach to commentary writing releases more space and freedom to explore the theological dimensions of the text, a point recognised by Childs. (110) But, on the other hand, Fretheim's content does not display a sustained theological exegesis of this important passage, especially on 3: 13 - 22. Compared with Childs' commentary, Fretheim's is certainly less cluttered with the minutiae of scholarly techniques, but he does not enter into the contemporary hermeneutical debate as to the theological significance of this revelatory passage. His central concern seems to be to interpret the biblical witness to God in terms of a kind of "process theology" which employs the category of divine suffering but rejects traditions of divine sovereignty. That this is the case is not surprising given his earlier work, The Suffering of God (1984).

Is there another way to write about Exodus from a sustained theological perspective without writing a commentary on the whole book? Could a commentator approach Exodus by simply asking the question: What does this book say about God? This is exactly the question which D. E. Gowan has attempted to answer in his 'Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary.' (111) Gowan's book is very different from the three previously considered. He divides Exodus into eight major sections. No translation of the text is given nor is there any bibliography, though extensive notes to each chapter are appended at the end of the book. Quotations are from the NRSV. The concept of the format layout is very different in this work from those found in Childs, Durham and Fretheim. These authors follow the course of the narrative as it unfolds from Ch. 1 through to Ch. 40, chapter by chapter, section by section, verse by verse. Gowan's list of contents covers the book as follows:

- |    |                                |                           |
|----|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | The Absence of God.            | Exodus 1 - 2.             |
| 2. | The Numinous.                  | Exodus 3 - 4.             |
| 3. | "I Will Be With You".          | Exodus 3 - 4 (Continued). |
| 4. | The Name.                      | Exodus 3 - 4 (Continued). |
| 5. | Promise.                       | Exodus 3 - 4 (Continued). |
| 6. | The Divine Destroyer.          | Exodus 5:1 - 15: 21.      |
| 7. | God of Grace and God of Glory. | Exodus 15b - 31; 35 - 40. |

Gowan's approach to the book of Exodus is outlined in an 18 page Introduction and it will be important to briefly consider this in relation to the above structured format. He poses only one question in relation to Exodus: What does the book of Exodus say about God? He goes on to state that his commentary, 'does far more than any other commentary on or exposition of Exodus has done. It takes each of the major affirmations about God found in Exodus and traces it through the rest of scripture and on into the theologies of Judaism and Christianity.' (112) This sounds like an attenuated version of Childs' 'History of Exegesis' but Gowan suggests that his distinctive approach represents a new way of expounding a book and a new way of writing theology. Hence, the title of the Introduction, 'Biblical Theology in the Form of Commentary' which he then proceeds to explain.

Theology is, for Gowan, discourse about God. Consequently, the title of his commentary is 'Theology in Exodus' rather than 'Theology of Exodus'. He clearly states that this is a study of what Exodus teaches about God, not an exposition of the whole message of the book. Gowan therefore sees his commentary as making a contribution to Biblical Theology but only in the limited way that he draws out those aspects of the Old Testament's teaching about God as found in Exodus.

While Gowan acknowledges that two of the most prominent themes of the Old Testament are the exodus from Egypt and the making of the covenant at Mt. Sinai, more important for him are the "classic texts" concerning the nature of God in Ex. 3: 13 - 16; 6: 2 - 3; the first three of the Ten Commandments, and the divine self-affirmation in Ch. 34: 6 - 7, among others. Gowan does not deny the validity of historical criticism in commentary writing. Though he does not offer a pre-critical approach to the text, nevertheless, he does endeavour to follow early interpreters in drawing theology from consideration of a consecutive sequence of texts. He writes. 'My work with Exodus will follow Childs' approach more closely than I might be inclined to do in dealing with other books or subjects, for although I believe the book is composed of earlier sources, I have not found that they represent significantly different views about God. On this topic the book may be read as a whole without

paying too much attention to sources.' (113)

Gowan follows Childs in that he states that the entire canon becomes a necessary part of the context in which Exodus must be interpreted. This context is, however, not simply a matter of identifying Exodus themes in the rest of the Old Testament and tracing relevant passages in the New. These broader contexts are certainly envisioned by Gowan. But he goes further. The real context for interpretation he sees as including the Apocrypha and the Intertestamental literature which provides the historical connection between the Old and the New Testaments. So for Gowan the fuller context for interpretation must also include the continuation of the tradition through the history of the synagogue and the church. Thus, in each of the sections of the commentary Gowan adopts a three part structure: (1) what the book of Exodus says about God, (2) what comparable materials in Scripture (and Intertestamental literature) add to this aspect, and (3) tracing through the identified aspect of God in postbiblical history as a foundation to reflect on its contemporary significance. Gowan is therefore going well beyond the boundaries which Childs has set for the context of interpretation. He also differs from him in another respect. The term 'history of tradition' is used by Gowan to include how the major themes of the Bible were reaffirmed and modified by generation after generation of believers. He goes on to state that his study is, 'a fully historical treatment of the material, in contrast to the strictly canonical approach advocated by Brevard Childs, in that it does not omit the history of the believing community's faith contained in the extracanonical Jewish literature produced during the Intertestamental period.'

(114)

A list of contents records that four of the book's eight chapters are devoted to Ex. 3 - 4, which amounts to 40% of the book's total material. This would indicate that Gowan assigns great importance to this divine-human encounter. He states: 'This book claims to be theology - writing rather than exegesis, since the reflection that begins with the texts in Exodus does not end there or satisfy itself with reference to related passages (as standard commentaries do), but includes extended discussion of what all of scripture says on the subject, and then moves to consideration of its

contemporary significance.' (p.x) This statement seems fine as a general aim in writing, but how does Gowan propose to engage in theology-writing, which on his own admission is biblical theology, without any serious attempt to exegete the biblical text in the first instance? He does not say.

The first chapter on Exodus 3 - 4 is entitled, 'The Numinous', a title which immediately suggests that R. Otto's The Idea of the Holy is to be utilised as an interpretative aid to Moses' encounter with God. Gowan introduces this chapter with two pages of writing in which he says, 'There is much theology here that I have devoted four chapters of this book to this section.'(115) But on the same page he notes that God taught Moses a couple of "tricks" to get the attention of the Pharaoh and then he tried to kill Moses. Also, he writes, 'Previously, we have been in a world where people live by their wits without any direct interference from God. But now we enter a world most of us do not know, where strange events occur in nature, and where a man actually talks (debates!) with God.'(116) Gowan seems to have forgotten that the patriarchs, notably, Abraham and Jacob had deep personal encounters with God. In Genesis 18 Abraham pleaded with God to spare destroying Sodom for 10 souls, and Jacob wrestled with the reality of God at Jabbok; his memorable words were, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' Gen. 32: 26, and especially verses 29-30. The kind of statements which Gowan presents at the outset of his commentary are not to be found in Childs' work; in the latter we have more of a sense of decorum, theologically and stylistically, as to the way God's activity and character are described.

Very soon it is clear to the reader that in this chapter of the book Gowan is more interested in expounding the virtues of Otto's concept of the 'Numinous' as an interpretational key to Exodus 3: 2 - 6, than with an explicitly theological reading of the text. After a few descriptive references to Ex. 3 - 4 and Chs. 19 - 20, he moves onto what really concerns him: an attempt to defend Otto's book and its central concepts of *mysterium*, *tremendum*, and *fascinans*. He explains each of these concepts and laces his writing with references found in the rest of O.T. literature. Gowan then proceeds to consider the numinous in Judaism, the N.T., and in Christianity. With reference to the latter, he says that no adequate survey of the numinous in Christian

experience can be provided in the present context. Only one page is offered in which he references hymns and prayers as evidence of the numinous in Christianity. Finally, Gowan rounds off with a three page section entitled: 'Loss and Retention of the Numinous in the Modern World', which really adds nothing of significance to the theology of Ex. 3: 2-6.

Gowan's agenda is not concerned with theology in Exodus at least at this juncture; his main preoccupation is to pursue an excursion into phenomenology. And this has one decisive consequence: the interest of the reader of Exodus is hijacked from the biblical text to another text of the early 20th century which, in point of fact, is not an acknowledged venture into biblical theology at all. This lateral shift on Gowan's part from the immediate text of Ex. 3 as the medium of God's unique self-revelation to Moses to an excursion into early 20th century phenomenology is one which would be resisted by Childs at all costs. For Childs, the text of Exodus is part of the scriptures of the Christian church and, as such, constitutes an indispensable witness to the Christian faith. Gowan's attempt to use Otto's, The Idea of the Holy as a template against which to measure Ex. 3: 2 - 6 is not a convincing attempt to engage in meaningful theological reflection.

The next chapter is entitled, 'I will be with you', which is based on God's answer to Moses' first objection: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh. . . ?" Ex. 3: 11. God's answer was, "But I will be with. . . ." 3:12. Gowan first traces this formulaic promise in Exodus but concludes that it is only in Ch. 3- 4 that it draws any significance. But to properly understand what this promise means in this context, he attempts to evaluate the promise elsewhere in the O.T. Gowan enumerates a wide range of incidents where this formula is used, but this procedure is largely a descriptive affair. And the same can be said of the other sections: Judaism, the N.T., and Christianity. This is an example of what Gowan calls his new understanding of the history of tradition, which he adumbrates in the Introduction section, p. xiii - xviii. Tracing the promise, 'But I will be with you' throughout the book of Exodus, the O.T., the N.T., rabbinic Judaism, and Christianity, is in itself a daunting task which no one author could master, a point which Gowan himself concedes. (117) One can

easily appreciate the potential of engaging in a study of this formulaic promise in the spiritual history of either Judaism or Christianity. However conceived, such a study would, in the main, be an investigative venture, essentially descriptive in nature, and thus well outside the boundaries of theology in Exodus.

The scope of Gowan's theological writing as expressed in this commentary, particularly in this section, raises questions about the concept of his entire interpretational enterprise. The contribution he makes in the sub-sections Judaism and Christianity is of a very elementary nature and fails to raise questions regarding vital theological issues in Ex. 3 - 4 with reference to contemporary Christian concerns about knowing God's nature, character and activity. Perhaps Ch. 4 of Gowan's study entitled, 'The Name', will be more promising as he concentrates on Ch.3: 13 - 16. These verses, as we have seen previously, are vital in this pericope as they form the climax of God's self disclosure to Moses with the name YHWH. In a four page introduction to his comments on these verses, Gowan explores the contemporary uses of personal names. His aim is, 'to eliminate some of the strangeness we feel when we see how strongly the O.T. emphasises the name of God.' (118) But such 'fairly lengthy preliminary observations' are not really necessary as a feature of theological commentary on these important verses. It is difficult to detect how these remarks contribute to our understanding of God in Exodus. Gowan then considers the name of God in Exodus citing 3: 14 -16, 6: 2-8, and 34: 6-7 as the main areas of interest. We shall confine our attention to 3: 13 - 16.

Gowan views the promise, "But I will be with you" (3:12) as somewhat overlooked in the past, whereas the name "I am who I am" in biblical scholarship has been greatly overworked. Interestingly, he writes, 'Fortunately, the theological discussion of the passage does not have to get involved with all of the philological, historical, and literary debates, most of which have led to no consensus as yet.' (119) However, it is not apparent from Gowan's book just what this hermeneutical observation means. Certainly he does not offer a form-critical, source-critical approach. He does reference some source analysis comments but concludes, regarding J and E sources, 'it seems safer not to try to distinguish two sources in Exodus 3.'

(120) Instead, he prefers to accept the text as it is combined in its present form as the JE account. (121) Gowan highlights six questions surrounding the name, YHWH, which he regards as of no theological significance, hence his very brief discussion of questions like: Was the name known prior to the time of Moses? What was the original form of YHWH and how was it pronounced? Did Moses and the slaves in Egypt know the name YHWH before God spoke to Moses? Are Chs. 3 and 6 parallel versions of the same event. What does the name YHWH mean? These questions are summarily dealt with; then Gowan writes: 'Now we can turn to the questions that will produce some theological results.' (122)

A range of questions are presented under seven headings. What was Moses really asking for? Did he know the name YHWH already, and ask for its meaning? The rabbis pondered the 'why' question and this, Gowan observes, led them to opt for meaning as the nature of Moses' enquiry. But God responds with a name. Moses is being sent to Egypt as a messenger, and every message must bear the name of its sender, an observation which accords well with the typical messenger in the Near East which began, 'Thus says. . . .'. Accordingly, Moses is given a name by God, 3: 15. Gowan ponders on the use of the consonants 'HYH' instead of YHWH in a comparable sentence: 'This you shall say to the Israelites, 'HYH has sent me to you.' Ch. 6:6. He points to the expected source critical comment that this suggests two different sources. 'There may very well be two different sources here, but it is not good to assume that they have been carelessly combined.' (123) But how does Gowan reach this conclusion? On what basis does he make this assumption? Gowan offers no reasons for this comment; instead he states that a detailed examination of verse 14 is called for.

The words '*ehyeh* *asher* *ehyeh*' have attracted several interpretations; these include the concepts of 'Being' / 'Active Presence' / 'Causative activity' / 'Certainty or emotional intensity', and 'a refusal to commit himself', i.e., God refused to answer Moses. Brief notes accompany each of these responses but there is no theological significance drawn from them. Next, the verb '*ehyeh*' is considered. Various citations of its application are presented. Gowan regards the evidence as suggesting a future



tense meaning. Thus, "I am" is "I will be". He notes that the verb is used frequently throughout the O.T. literature to indicate some sort of becoming or happening. In relation to the *idem per idem* form, Gowan, with Childs, agrees that there is no clear form-critical parallel to this passage, though he suggests texts which he finds helpful, namely, Ex. 33:19; Ezek. 12: 25; 1 Sam. 23: 13; 2 Kings 8: 1; 2 Sam. 15; 20, and Ex. 16: 23. Some of these texts suggest indeterminacy, e.g. the 1 & 2 Sam. and Kings references, but this, Gowan asserts, would not be true of the first two references. 'With this we have almost reached an understanding of the cryptic sentence in its context. God will do as Moses asks. He intends to reveal his name, but first he reserves his freedom not in any sense to be defined by a name. Israel will be able to address him, but not possess him. I believe the best translation of the three words is, "I will be whoever I will be." ' (124)

Finally, Gowan poses the question on *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* with reference to the difference in spelling, and the first person/third person difference of the two verbs. The explanation offered is that it is a word play based on the etymology of YHWH. 'I am' ('ehyeh) is the first common singular imperfect of the root 'HYH ("to be"). Yahweh appears to be the third masculine singular imperfect of the same root, but with its archaic spelling HWH. As for the difference in subject matter regarding the word play, Gowan cites the example of Isaac's name (meaning "he laughs") which is explained three times in Genesis. There the difference in subject matter was of no account. So here in Ex. 3:14 - 16 Gowan sees the same kind of etymologizing word play. The name of Israel's God was YHWH with no definition, contra other gods like Baal (master) and Anu (sky). Gowan explains that with the verb "to be" there seemed an evident relationship. God's special revelation of his name to Moses provided a useful etymology in this *idem per idem* form, which effectively emphasises the human inability to know God's being. Gowan rounds off the discussion with a quotation from W. Zimmerli on Ex.33: 19. 'In this figure of speech resounds the sovereign freedom of Yahweh, who, even at the moment he reveals himself in his name, refuses to put himself at the disposal of humanity or to allow humanity to comprehend him.' (125 )

Gowan continues his study of the name of God in (1) the Old Testament, (2)

Judaism, (3) the New Testament, and (4) Christianity. Material in the Christianity section is brief consisting mainly of references to the name of God in the writings of E. Lohmeyer, P. Tillich and K. Barth. Gowan writes, 'The Old Testament has little comfort to offer to contemporary advocates of religious pluralism ..... All that it has to say about other deities is to deny first their legitimacy as objects of worship and finally to deny their existence. Christianity stands in the same tradition, although it complicated matters with its doctrines of incarnation and the Trinity.' (126) Gowan's final comment in this section is to hope for dialogue between the three historically related religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. He opines, '... the challenges scripture presents to other religions (outside the above three) can by no means be resolved so easily as the declaration "God has many Names" would suggest.' (127)

The nature of these comments in this brief section are descriptive and superficial. Gowan does not really come to terms with the issues he indicates in relation to the Name of God. Including a few references to various authors does little to focus attention on the Name of Yahweh in the Christian faith. Philosophically and theologically, there is no real engagement with contemporary issues surrounding the nature of the Name and the reality to which it points.

In the New Testament section, Gowan notes that there is no interest in the Tetragrammaton in the N.T. writings but the term 'name' is used frequently. Generally the N.T. speaks of God (theos), Lord (Kurlos), Father (Pater - or the Aramaic 'Abba), while Matthew substitutes "Heaven" for God's name. But, as Gowan notes, the most prominent use of the name of God appears in John's Gospel. Here it plays an important role in John's explanation of Jesus' relationship with God, - John 5: 49; 10: 25; 17: 11b - 12a; and 17: 26. It is in the famous *ego etmi* passage in John 8: 58, however, where there is a clear echo of the explanation of the divine name in Ex. 3:14. Gowan seeks to explain its significance, but because he attempts to cite a wide range of NT references to the divine name in three pages, the reader is not treated to a sustained exegesis of this vital passage. What Gowan offers is a citation of references the exegetical significance of which is not fully explored. This is unfortunate because Gowan has touched on a wide range of material which could have proved

theologically fruitful had he taken the time and space in the commentary to engage in a detailed treatment. Undoubtedly the subject of God's name in the NT is a huge area of theological study. But it is in this field of study where sustained engagement could have proved to be theologically valuable, especially with John Ch. 8: 58.

Under the heading 'Judaism' Gowan traces the name of God in that faith. It contains brief descriptions of various aspects of Judaism but the material does not really contribute anything significant to Christian theological reflection on the divine name in Ex. 3. The remaining section, 'The Name of God in the Old Testament' is slightly longer. Gowan surveys the use of the name Yahweh and *shem* in worship, in prophetic speech, in conveying God's authority and power, in its associative use with verbs of human emotion/intellect, e.g. like 'fear', 'know', and 'remember', and in the use of God as subject, i.e. God's activity. Gowan says that, 'The Old Testament's use of "Yahweh" as the personal name of God thus falls between two extremes to be found in religion and philosophy.' (128) Throughout this section Gowan stresses the personal nature of God's name. He explains that a 'name' begins with a word in a specific language. Once it is applied to a person it takes on the qualities and connotations distinct from other words. Gowan points out that a name is not merely symbolic: 'it is assumed by the person as part of the self. And personhood seems to require a name.' (129)

The content of this section has interesting material in relation to the name of Yahweh and could form the basis of an investigative O.T. study of the name "Yahweh". But the question is: how does such a survey of O.T. texts, as advanced here, enhance our theological understanding of God's unique revelation of himself as Yahweh in Ex. 3? With so much of the material in all of these sections, Gowan is engaged primarily in a descriptive exercise in which he seeks to unearth textual evidence which has some valid association with God's special name. Unfortunately, a constructive theological hermeneutic is not fully entered into.

Gowan concludes his work on Ex. 3 - 4 in chapter 5 which is entitled 'Promise'. He takes the reference in Ex. 3:8, where God seeks to fulfil the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 15: 18-21, and tells Moses of his intention to take the

initiative to deliver his people Israel from slavery and oppression. The concept of promise is one of the distinctive characteristics of God nature and character, for by making promises he enters into a relationship with a person, or with his chosen people. Gowan relates the notion of 'promise' to covenant. He begins by outlining the promises of God to the ancestors in Genesis, which is the basis for God's action in Ex. 3. 'Promise' in Exodus is briefly considered in Ch. 3:7-10 and Ex. 6:2-8, and this forms the foundation on which God acts in the ensuing chapters. The promise of immediate deliverance comes to fruition in Chs. 7 - 14. Gowan also sees the promise of 6: 7 as fulfilled at Sinai, Ex. 19 - 31, but notes the conditional nature of this covenant unlike those connected with the names of Noah, Abraham and David. However, Israel's rebellious nature gives cause for serious reflection in Ex. 32 - 34. Moses appeals to God on Israel's behalf and cites the unconditional covenant made with the ancestors. Ex. 32:13.

Gowan then follows the trail of 'promise' in the rest of the OT working his way through references to some Psalms, notably Psalms 77 & 89. Lamentations and Second Isaiah are also prominent in his discussion. He thinks that the exilic period was a time for the offering of new divine promises. With specific reference to Is. 4:2-4; Micah 4:3; Is. 35: 5-6a; Ez.36:30; Jer. 33:8 and Is. 11: 9a, Gowan sees these passages in continuity with the Exodus promises in that, 'they speak of God's intention to deal with what is wrong with the world and with humanity. . . .' (130) But there is here a sense of radical wrongness according to Gowan. These texts confront the evil in the world; ' they struggle with evil in the world in a way that does not appear in the promises of the Abrahamic or Sinai or Davidic covenants, for those were promises that did not confront an insoluble problem; they assume that God can work with what presently exists to make it better.' (131) In this sense these texts have, in Gowan's opinion, something in common with later apocalyptic thought.

Gowan moves on to trace the concept of "promise" in both Judaism and in the New Testament. He gives a brief survey of the way Judaism deals with the promises of God in a post 587 B.C.E. setting. From a Christological perspective the concept of "promise" assumes importance when it is juxtaposed with "fulfilment". These twin

concepts have long attracted the minds of scholars since the beginning of the Christian church and have been regarded as a hermeneutical key to explain the nature of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Needless to say, Gowan could not do justice to this topic in 6 - 7 pages. His work in this N.T. section deals with matters relating to the significance of the covenant with Abraham, David, the Sinai covenant, and Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant. He ends his work on Ex. 3 - 4 with a short section on "Promise" in Christian, with an Epilogue on Ex. 3 - 4 entitled, 'The Kindness and Severity of God'. The title is taken from Romans 11:22 and Gowan sees it as an apt title, not only for Exodus but for the whole Bible. He rounds off the Epilogue with a reference to Otto's numinous as *tremendum* and *fascinans*; for him this would be a good starting point from which to work on the Exodus texts vis- à-vis the kindness and severity of God.

In assessing Gowan's work we must first of all go back to the beginning of his commentary. He states that the focus of his work will be sharply defined; 'It asks only one question of Exodus: What does this book say about God?' (Intro. p.ix). But his brief is more expansive than this. He goes on to claim that his commentary does more than any other commentary, or exposition of Exodus has done. By that he means that his commentary 'takes each of the major affirmations about God found in Exodus and traces it through the rest of scripture, and on into the theologies of Judaism and Christianity.' (Intro. p. ix). So, for example, in the ordering of his material on 'The Name' (Ch. 4) Gowan has sections on Ex.3:13 - 16; Ex.6: 2 - 8; The Name of God in the Old Testament; the Name of God in Judaism and Christianity, and in the New Testament. But it is one thing to claim a unique status for one's commentary in relation to these section headings, it is quite another to actualise one's stated objectives in writing such a commentary.

No sooner does Gowan set off in his commentary on Ex. 3 - 4 than he completely becomes absorbed with R. Otto's work, The Idea of the Holy. His exposition of Otto with reference to the theophany of Ex. 3. dominates the whole of his Ch. 2, a fact clearly sign-posted by the chapter title, 'The Numinous'. To take this direction in a commentary which purports to be a commentary on the theology of

Exodus is tantamount to going off on a tangent and thereby relegating the biblical text to a secondary position. This is a move which, I submit, is flawed. By so doing, Gowan not only guides the attention of the reader to another subject altogether, he consequently does not have the time to engage with this classic text on a sustained theological level.

We earlier raised questions over the scope of Childs' work on Exodus; the same critique can be made of Gowan's work. The definition of Gowan's 'history of tradition' is what is here in question. If he had strictly kept the declaration of God's new name in Ex. 3 as a pivotal focused point in his various sections, then that in itself would have been a tall order for any commentator. Is it possible in biblical scholarship today for one writer to take on so large an agenda? Gowan acknowledges that he is not an expert on Rabbinic Judaism, (Intro. p. xv). But even if he were, how would such material be of decisive importance to a Christian commentator and a Christian audience? As Gowan himself admits, ' . . . some may be surprised to note that a biblical theology written from an acknowledged Christian point of view includes not only extracanonical material from the Intertestamental period (Pseudepigrapha and Qumran literature), but also traces the Old Testament themes into rabbinic Judaism.' (132) For a Christian commentator to be aware of the nature and character of rabbinic Judaism would undoubtedly be of some value especially in exegeting the New Testament books in relation to the Old Testament. Does Gowan's work in this field add to our Christian understanding of God in Ex. 3? On the vital verses 3: 13 -16, he has two pages on Judaism the contents of which are merely descriptive. In the 'Christianity' section there is even less material, and such as there is consists mainly of citing writers like E. Lohmeyer, P. Tillich and K. Barth. There is no move from descriptive to constructive theological reflection.

In comparison with Childs, Gowan's approach to interpreting Exodus is much more flexible. Unlike Childs he does not have to face the rigour of explaining the text as it unfolds in every chapter and verse. But this flexibility of approach in the hands of Gowan is not altogether a positive benefit. There is always the danger that a flexible approach could become too flexible. And this is what happens with Gowan.

He gets diverted from his central task of discovering what Exodus says about God. This is what occurs when he devotes a chapter to "The Numinous"; the centre stage is not now the revelation of God as Yahweh, but the thought of R. Otto. Also in Chapter 3, 'I will be with you', Gowan traces this statement through Exodus, in Judaism, in Christianity and then in the New Testament. A large part of this material does not impinge on Ex. 3 - 4. Yahweh's promise in Ex. 3: 12 is but a springboard for Gowan to pursue trajectories well outside the orbit of this classic text of God's self-disclosure. His Chapter 4 could have been the most promising if Gowan had narrowed his concentration on key Old and New Testament texts which resonated from Ex. 3. But these were not fully explored. The title of his last chapter on Ex. 3 - 4, "Promise", is a concept which has very wide horizons throughout the bible. In explaining the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, the concept of "promise" is usually coupled with "fulfilment". Taken together they have been seen as important ingredients in interpreting the Christian scriptures in all their totality. But in the context of a theological commentary on Exodus, Gowan sets out on a course which leaves Ex. 3 - 4 in the shade.

Reading through all the material which Gowan has included in these four chapters leaves one with the distinct feeling that the question posed at the outset of this commentary - What does this book say about God? - gets somewhat submerged in waves of side-issues. In this respect it is the least satisfying of the four commentaries here considered. Gowan's commentary lacks precision in achieving what he sets out to achieve; yet given his more flexible format for a commentary one would have expected him to engage with the theological importance of the immediate text of Ex. 3 - 4 with more precision, depth and reflection. This is particularly the case with his aim of tracing a theme through postbiblical history 'as a basis for reflection in the contemporary significance of this aspect of God. . .' (Intro. p. xii). To what extent does the self declaration of God as Yahweh in Ex. 3 help modern Christians to understand the nature and character of God in the light of Christ? Gowan presents a wide range of descriptive material, but this question is not convincingly addressed. Had Gowan restricted his aims to theology in Exodus in certain specified passages, he

would have had greater opportunity to treat this and other related questions. In this area, his commentary represents an opportunity lost.

Our aim in this chapter has been to consider the interpretation of Ex. 3 - 4 (which is universally acknowledged to be a "classic" theological text) by four commentators whose works have been published in the period 1974 - 1994. Childs' work on this passage is our primary concern in that we have sought to understand the nature of his hermeneutical proposals in practice. Considering the nature of Childs' work in relation to that of Durham, Fretheim and Gowan has proved helpful in seeing how each writer approaches his task as a theological commentary writer.

Any bible commentary will have its strengths and weaknesses. With the vast increase in human knowledge and the plethora of interpretational techniques available to the biblical guild - not to mention the prevailing mood of hermeneutical pluralism - no one single individual could master all the specialisms in order to write a comprehensive commentary as it is now understood. Of the scholars reviewed here, Childs stands out as a master of historical critical techniques in combination with his commitment to interpreting Exodus as holy scripture. His work displays a breadth of vision which is not evident in the work of the other scholars. There is in Childs' commentary a consciousness of the wider hermeneutical debate, both historic and contemporary, in which Exodus is to be set. This breadth and depth of Childs' approach to biblical interpretation is not discernible in the other authors' commentaries.

Gowan's work is the least satisfying, yet his chosen format is the most flexible. He takes an extended understanding of the 'history of tradition' which is far too broad and inclusive; the result is that the reader's attention is carried away from the main task which Gowan has set himself, which is to answer the question: What does Exodus say about God? He seems to be more interested in using the theophany of Exodus 3 as a springboard from which to launch an exposition of some of Otto's concepts in The Idea of the Holy. This is a diversion from the main agenda. And the same can be said of his sections on 'The Name' and 'Promise'. These chapters do contain useful material but Gowan fails to maximise the potential as he gets diverted



into areas which take the reader far away from the interpretational concerns of Ex. 3 - 4. If Gowan had confined himself to the theological interpretation of this classic text with precision and consistency, perhaps there would have been insights of a sustained nature. Ironically, he adopted a different approach to commentary writing which gave him greater freedom in presenting his material. Yet, despite his more flexible approach he does not produce memorable exegesis of this vital classic passage.

It could be argued that all good interpretation depends on the categories of thought and the kind of questions which one brings to the biblical text. These observations seem to be sensible and coherent. For Gowan to utilise Otto's categories is not in itself a procedural error in the act of biblical interpretation. Moreover, Gowan does pose a crucial question: what does Exodus teach us about God? Childs would agree that this is a profoundly important question, though I would suggest that we need to extend the question in Childsean terms as follows. What does Exodus teach us about God, i.e. , what does Exodus in the context of the OT canon teach us about God, and what does Exodus teach us about God in the context of the combined witnesses of the two testaments which comprise the Christian Scriptures? Gowan in my judgement has not succeeded in theologically illuminating Exodus for he does not incisively exegete this foundational passage of God's self-disclosure at close quarters. His use of Otto's concepts in handling the theophany of God to Moses does not open up the drama of the narrative in a theologically enriching way.

Fretheim's adopted format in the form of a single essay type approach is also less constricting than the formats found in Childs and Durham, but not as flexible as that found in Gowan. The objective of Fretheim's commentary is still to write on the whole book of Exodus, not just selected passages. In this respect, Childs concedes that this approach to commentary writing gives Fretheim's book a coherence which his does not have. (**Appendix 9. 15.**) While the format in Fretheim's commentary is free from the minutiae of critical scholarship, nevertheless, to write such a commentary on a book of 40 chapters, which contains crucial foundational events in the history of Israel, is a very tall order indeed. Fretheim sees Exodus as primarily about theological and kerygmatic issues, but he does not succeed in giving the reader

sustained theological exegesis of Ex. 3 - 4 which is applied to a contemporary setting. This observation is undoubtedly related to the herculean challenge of writing a commentary on the entire contents of this crucial OT book. In this respect the three authors, Fretheim, Childs and Durham, face a commonly shared problem.

At times the quality of Fretheim's remarks on the nature of God's character and activity lacks nuanced sensitivity. It does not seem appropriate to refer to God as a being who performs tricks, or as one who is fickle without seeking to further clarify such a conceptual framework of reference - at least from a Christian standpoint. If one reads the biblical text with the express purpose of knowing who God is, then one will need a more circumscribed presentation of his character and being in a contemporary Christian setting. Yet we have noticed that Fretheim does from time to time indicate that he is capable of shrewd theological comment. In comparison with Childs' work, however, Fretheim does not display an awareness of interpreting Exodus in a wider scriptural setting. Nor is there a consciousness of the wider hermeneutical debate so evident in Childs. Unlike Childs, Fretheim has to work within the guidelines of commentary writing as laid down by the editors of this series. As this commentary was written for teachers, students and ministers in a Christian setting today, Fretheim has to cover the broad sweep of the book's contents all within a limited space. But then, that is an occupational hazard in writing a bible commentary.

Durham's Exodus is more in the traditional mould of commentary writing. But unlike commentators such as J.P. Hyatt, Durham wishes to consider the specific theological significance of Exodus in a contemporary setting. In relation to Childs' mastery of historical critical procedures, Durham's contribution in these areas is brief by comparison. In keeping with the policy of the series' editors Durham follows a section by section approach to interpreting the text. The reader may refer to scholarly concerns if so desired; the sections 'Explanation' and 'Comment' aim to give an explanation of the text's meaning and its contemporary application to the ongoing biblical revelation. But contemporary application of the contents of Ex. 3 - 4 is rarely on offer. We would expect to find in the 'Explanation' sections a contemporary

application of the text, but these sections are invariably the shortest in length compared with the contents of 'Form/Structure/Setting' and 'Comment'. Inevitably, theological comment of substance is not forthcoming. So with Childs, as with Durham, the sheer amount of material to be covered in this commentary inhibits serious theological reflection of a sustained quality.

Childs' Exodus is certainly the most comprehensive in its conceptual format and content. We have seen that he is seeking to follow a very large agenda in the genre of commentary writing and now acknowledges that the format and content have weaknesses. (Appendix Gs. 15 & 17.) But the strength of his work is in the conception of the task of the biblical interpreter. In interpreting the text of Exodus Childs is acutely aware of the wider hermeneutical issues at stake when the exegete regards the book as the scripture of the Christian church. Over the past quarter of a century Childs has not been idle. In pursuance of his hermeneutical concerns he has produced a substantial body of writing. In 1979 he published his influential IOTS, which was followed in 1984 by his NTCI. One year later saw the emergence of his less technical OTTCC, while in 1992 his monumental BTONT was published. Since then he has written various articles in a variety of journals and is currently writing a commentary on Isaiah. He has sought to review and assess his proposals in the light of scholarly scrutiny on an ongoing basis. We have highlighted some of the strengths and weaknesses of his commentary on Exodus 3 - 4 but perhaps the difficulties which have been encountered might, at least in part, stem from the fact that the historic concept of commentary writing has intrinsic demerits.

(c). **Ex.3: 2 and Ex. 3:12. as Interpretational Cruxes.**

**Exodus 3: 2.** "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed." (R.S.V.)

This verse has attracted widespread scholarly attention. Childs specifically references it in the section "Textual and Philological Notes" by observing that, ' . . . v 2a

functions as a superscription to the story (cf. Ex 18:1), whereas 2b describes the chronological sequence.' (133) The tension Childs sees in these verses is attributable to these different perspectives rather than an indication of sources. He notes that the term "bush" *seneh* is a rare word appearing elsewhere only in Deut. 33:16. Finally, a philological reference is made to the term *labbat* with comments from BDB and Gesenius - Kautzsch. In the following section, 'Literary and Form-critical Analysis:' Ch. 3: 1 - 4:17, Childs engages with scholarly opinion on source, form-critical and traditio-critical analysis. The result is that the contents of 3:2 are not singled out for attention.

In the section OTC Childs surveys Ex. 3:1 - 4:17 in four sub-sections, 3: 1 - 12; 3: 13 - 15; 3: 16 - 4: 9 and 4: 10 - 17. The observations on 3: 1 - 12 do not access v 2 for special treatment. Childs describes the initial encounter between God and Moses in narrative style. In a search for fresh pasture Moses comes to Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God. His attention is caught by the strange sight of a common bush on fire but not consumed. 'This is the 'great wonder' which causes Moses to turn aside. What began as just another day doing the same old thing, turned out to be an absolutely new experience for Moses. The old life of shepherding was ended; the new life of deliverer was beginning. The transformation is recorded in the interaction of God with Moses. The initiative is shifted from Moses to God. The ordinary experiences emerge as extraordinary. The old has been transformed into the new.' (134) These comments on Ex. 3: 1ff, are a combination of a narrative paraphrase and a few theological reflections on the divine human encounter. Verse 2 is not viewed as a crucial interpretative concern *per se*. What comments there are, are of a very general nature. A much more detailed examination of verse 2 would be necessary if an enriching exegesis is to be assured. But this objective is thwarted because this OTC section covers the entire pericope, Ch.3:1 - 4: 17. The only remaining section where Childs cites verse 2 is in HE where he opens the section by referring to early Jewish exegesis which saw the burning bush incident as an allegory on the life of Israel. Childs continues in customary fashion by recounting how Ex. 3 was understood by the church Fathers who understood the 'angel' in the bush as a reference to Christ.

The views of Augustine and Eusebius are cited and this is followed by a summary of the Reformers' views. All this material is of a very descriptive nature with no attempt made to engage in a constructive theological exegesis.

The significance of the word "fire" 'esh in verse 2 is worthy of note. Childs does not show any interest in this potential dimension to the text as he is mostly engaged with historical critical matters; in OTC, HE and TR - where we might expect some consideration of the symbolic significance of the fire to be given - there is only a brief allusion to it. The term does not appear in TR, but it gets a passing mention in OTC as details of the story of the theophany are unfolded. In the HE section, Childs cites the Reformers stating that often the burning bush is seen as an allegory on the church under fire. This is the sum total of his comments on "fire". Theophanic fire is therefore not seen as having intrinsic significance as a symbol of God's presence in Ex. 3: 2. At least its potential significance is not examined.

It is also interesting that Childs does not focus in on the rationalising approaches which seek to ask historical questions like: How can one explain the phenomenon of the burning bush? To a certain extent this is something of a paradox in Childs' case because this commentary does not fight shy of employing historical critical techniques in an extensive way. Despite what some of his critics say, Childs' commitment to the historical critical paradigm has never been in doubt. What is in question is, in Childs' mind, the role and status one assigns to historical critical questions in biblical interpretation. Be that as it may, the fact is that in his handling of this section of Exodus, he employs literary, form-critical, and traditio - history analyses on a consistent basis, and these methods have their own built-in rationalistic procedures and conventions which are based on an historical consciousness. Yet in his interpretation of Exodus 3: 1 - 4: 17 Childs shows no appetite for posing historical questions of the kind cited above. If one is to explain the seams in this literature then inevitably one is going to delve into the historical critical tool box and employ the appropriate tools. But why exclude historical questions like: How can a bush burn constantly without it being burned up? Did this incident actually take place as stated in the text? How did the fire start? How

significant is it to pose these questions in one's reading of Exodus?

All these questions point to the more general question about biblical interpretation and the whole issue of historical referentiality. As Childs has pointed out, "There are different relations of referentiality. At times, historical referentiality is absolutely important, at other times it is minor. And in any case, what does historical referentiality mean?" (Appendix. 93.) He goes on to say that, "There is a difference between the reconstructed historical referentiality and the referentiality that the biblical narrative possesses. . . . I guess what I am saying is that there are different levels of referentiality: . . ." (Appendix. 94.) There is a parallel here between what Childs sees as a dialectical tension between the Old and New Testaments, and the tension between the historical critical paradigm in interpreting the Bible and the theological role and function of the Holy Scriptures vis-à-vis the community of faith. How this tension can be resolved between reading the Bible as the Scriptures of the church and interpreting the Bible by using historical critical techniques is one which will not be easy to solve. The danger is that the use of historically related questions could be arbitrarily brought into play in one's interpretation of the biblical text which would have no methodological coherence, i.e. in accordance with one's own whim and fancy. This is an important issue to which we will later return, as to consider it further in this context would be to unduly deflect us from our present task.

Moving onto Durham's commentary, of his three sections on Ex.3: 1 - 12, "F/S/S", "Comment", and "Explanation", verse 2 is only expressly mentioned in 'Comment.' Regarding *Malak Yahweh* Durham states that the "angel" is not an "angel" in the sense in which it is generally understood. He continues, 'As often in the OT (Gen. 18, Judges 6), there is in this passage a fluid interchange between symbol, representative, and God himself.' (135) In the composite text, as we have it, Moses sees the symbol of fire and hears Yahweh, but Yahweh's messenger appears to him. The bush is not consumed as this is a theophanic fire which often symbolizes God's advent in the OT. Durham concludes his comments on verses 2 - 3 by noting that the fire is mentioned no less than five times in these two verses alone. In the very short "Explanation" section on Ch. 3: 1 - 12 Durham states that 'the section

establishes first of all the certainty of the Presence of God in the fire in the theophany.' (136) But no detailed exegesis of verse 2 is forthcoming from this or any other section on this pericope. Durham is more readily disposed to detect a Presence - response pattern, not only in Ch. 3, but throughout Exodus. Yet here was a golden opportunity for Durham to advance a sustained exegesis of the concept of Yahweh's presence from a classic divine human encounter, for in this unique experience in the life of Moses, God was a known and deeply felt reality to him. That this is demonstrably evident can be seen from the poignancy of Ch. 3: 6b, 'And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.' As it stands, all that Durham presents on this verse is but a passing reference.

On the subject of "fire", Durham does bring out the connection between the theophanic fire as a symbol of God's presence but he does not reflect on the subject in a sustained manner. He writes: 'The bush is not consumed because the theophanic fire is one of the recurring symbols of God's advent in the OT (Ex. 19, Ps. 18).' (137) Durham, like Childs, does not enter into any rationalising discussion regarding the nature of the burning bush. In fact, the subject gets a hasty dismissal. 'The endless conjectures about the nature of the bush are pointless.' (138) While he confirms the certainty of God's presence in relation to the fire in the theophany, Durham does not pursue the connection any further.

Fretheim, however, advances more comment and reflection on verse 2, though not in express terms by treating it separately for special attention. The contents of 3: 2 are seen in the context of his sub-section vv. 1 - 6. Fretheim says that, 'The shift in point of view among narrator, Moses, and God helps resolve some of the tensions in the narrative.' (139) In this extended quotation Fretheim explains: 'The narrator informs the reader of Moses' initial perception: a bush burning but not consumed (v. 2b). This is different from the reader's knowledge: not a burning bush but a flame of fire from the midst of a bush that was not consuming it (2a; cf. the distinction in Gen. 18: 1-2). The narrator then gives Moses' personal response to this sight (v. 3 is interior monologue): he turns aside to see why the bush was not consumed. He was not frightened or repelled by the sight but drawn toward it, though not for religious

reasons; Moses is simply curious. But God makes use of human curiosity for his own purposes. *Curiosity leads to call.* It is only when God sees (v.4 is God's point of view) that Moses actually moves to satisfy his curiosity that God calls to him; it is only as Moses allows himself to be drawn into the sphere of the unusual sight that communication takes place. The narrator, in turn, refines the nature of the sight for the reader; the messenger is now called Yahweh and God.' (140)

Fretheim views the seeing and hearing of Moses as significant in the story. 'Appearance makes a difference to words. For God to assume the form of a messenger renders the personal element in the divine address more apparent.' (141) These "visible words" for Fretheim indicate that the word of God is not simply for minds and spirits. Moses is called upon to act and be part of God's redemption of Israel. The burning bush is not merely a divine attention-seeking device; indeed, what is unique here is the association of the divine appearance with fire in a bush. Furthermore, Fretheim notes that this divine disclosure anticipates God's appearance to Moses "in fire" at Sinai ( 19:18) where God spoke "out of the midst of the fire". (Deut. 4:12) He also says that the word for bush *seneh* is a verbal link to Sinai. 'As with other theophanies, God uses nature as a vehicle for "clothing" that which is not natural. The natural does not stand over against the divine but serves as an instrument for the purposes of God, evoking both holiness, passion, and mystery (fire) and down-to-earthness (bush). The word comes "out of the bush," from God and from within the world.' (142)

There is a very distinct difference shown here between Fretheim's approach to this verse and that of both Childs and Durham. Childs' handling of this section gets bogged down with historical critical matters and scholarly opinion, and the result is that no time for sustained theological reflection on this important verse is available. Durham's treatment is all too brief to do any justice to this classic text. Verse 2 is not individually expounded, and the comments that are presented are taken up with several scholarly references. Though Fretheim does not explicitly single out verse 2 for individual treatment, his comments on this verse are woven into his material on vv 1 - 6. He tenders a range of reflections on the text which attempt to exegete the



significance of Moses' unique encounter with God. Fretheim's comments on 3: 2 are in this respect more satisfying than the work of both Childs and Durham as he obviates becoming absorbed with historical critical material. His essay type approach to the text therefore places less restrictions on his work; consequently, he can take the opportunity to write in a reflective way and is thus more theologically effective.

Fretheim also has more to say about fire. In particular, he highlights a very important effect of fire, namely, that it attracts Moses' curiosity. He also draws attention to the mystery of fire, and sees it as a symbol which evokes God's holiness. Some useful observations are offered by Fretheim in this context, but rather disappointingly, he does not continue in this vein. But what he does write is theologically suggestive. Of the writers so far considered, Fretheim is the most convincing in terms of theological commentary. However, there is not the slightest trace of historical/rational type questions in this section, though this is not surprising given Fretheim's comments on historical matters in his Introduction section, which we have quoted from earlier (See notes 83 & 84).

Finally, turning to Gowan's work, one would expect some explication of Ex. 3:2 in a commentary which devotes four chapters to Ex. 3 - 4. Reference to v 2 occurs in Ch. 2 which is entitled "The Numinous". Gowan, like all the other authors, does not deal specifically with v 2 as an exegetical crux in the divine human encounter; he appears to be more interested in pursuing the concepts of R. Otto's The Idea of the Holy. What Gowan says about v 2 is very brief indeed. He indicates that Moses encounters a strange natural phenomenon of a bush burning but not consumed. He states that neither the location of the mountain or the explanation of the phenomenon will be his concern. He writes, 'The key elements in Moses' experience, because of the way they point us to the Bible's language about God, are the flame, the warning that this is "holy ground", and Moses' hiding his face when he realizes he is in the presence of God (3:5-6). Fire is regularly associated with God, and we shall need to consider the value of that imagery. "Holiness" has been identified as the quality of divinity itself, as the term is used in scripture, and so it seems that Exodus begins talking about God where we ought to begin. Moses first encounters

holiness as fire and as a warning ("Come no closer"), leading him to protect himself from it, but the one who speaks to him at that dangerous place is a God who is about to save his people.' (143)

Gowan's approach to the phenomenon of "fire" initially looks promising but this is all the material which he writes on these few verses but had he continued to exegete this theophany perhaps further illumination might have been forthcoming. For example, had he examined the notion of God's holiness (a key concept in this passage) this could very well have lead to a fruitful engagement with the text. But Gowan pursues a trajectory which leads him into the terrain of phenomenology with specific reference to Otto's concepts of the numinous, tremendum, mysterium, and fascinans. The rest of Gowan's work on this section is taken up with tracing the concept of the numinous in the Old and New Testaments, in Judaism, and in Christianity. He brings the chapter to a close with a section called "Loss and Retention of the Numinous in the Modern World", which in reality takes the reader far away from the text of Ex. 3: 2. The material on the numinous gets 27 pages of text; Ex. 3: 2 gets only a partial mention in less than half a page. In short, Gowan's interest in Otto's phenomenology dominates the chapter. In Gowan's reckoning, verse 2 of this crucial chapter is not regarded as a theological crux. Yet one senses that had he continued in the vein which we noted above, some useful exegesis could have been achieved.

It is evident from Gowan's comments that he is not interested in pursuing historically related questions. Consequently, one will look in vain for possible rational responses to this phenomenon of the burning bush. Historical questions apart, however, Gowan loses sight of his primary objective which he states in the first page of his Introduction. His Exodus commentary purports to ask one question: What does this book say about God? (p. ix) But his comprehensive interests as outlined in his Introduction regarding the format of the commentary constitutes too large an agenda to follow within the confines of approximately 260 pages. It is not that utilising R. Otto's descriptive concepts is intrinsically wrong. Indeed, Gowan states his aim thus; 'Our task in this chapter, then, will be to show how Otto's work illuminates for us

what the Old Testament says about God, and to trace the continuing evidence for the numinous qualities of human encounters with God, as the most elemental aspects of such experiences.' (144) In the light of this, the key question is: Does Gowan's employment of R. Otto's categories of thought help illuminate the biblical text of Ex. 3: 2 in line with his desire to know what Exodus teaches about God? I would submit that it does not. The amount of energy and space which Gowan has assigned to describing Otto's work under the various section headings is disproportionate to the theological result gained. At least as far as the theophany of verse 2 is concerned, there is no sustained theological exegesis of this seminal event in the life of Moses. It can be said that Otto's concepts can be helpful in understanding the general nature of religious experience, but in this instance their employment in "Biblical Theology in the Form of Commentary" is not wholly convincing.

The theophany of God to Moses in Exodus 3 is a pivotal event in Old Testament literature and its theological importance would be difficult to over-emphasise. All of the authors claim that they are writing commentaries in which they are principally concerned with theological understanding of the text as their goal. In Childsean terms, they are coming to their tasks as Christian exegetes and interpreting Exodus as part of the Holy Scriptures of the church. In this review of their work on this classic theophany, however, it has been shown that their respective approaches have strengths and weaknesses.

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**EXODUS 3: 12. "He said, "But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain." " (R.S.V.)**

The interpretation of this verse has long been a bone of contention among scholars. Not surprisingly, Childs devotes a special section to it entitled: "A Form-critical Study of Ex.3:12." The core interpretative issue, as Childs sees it, centres on the meaning of the sign *zeh*, the real difficulty being to determine the precise nature of the sign, and how it functions in the narrative. Briefly stated, Childs puts forward the work of other scholars in a fair and balanced way but he is not satisfied with the

various contributions that are offered. He proceeds to offer a fresh form-critical study in order to shed new light on the problem. Childs traces two patterns of sign giving in the early traditions of the O.T. and then proceeds to interpret this difficult verse in that light. But he concludes that the sign does not function consistently when compared with these two main patterns of sign giving. For Childs, the problem of the sign is related to the history of tradition. All commentators see the difficulty in treating *zeh* as referring to the following clause as this would require an understanding that the worship of God in freedom at Sinai would retroactively legitimate Moses' role. According to Childs the demonstrative adjective in v.12 normally refers to what follows, but because of the history of tradition, it was forced to find its antecedent in what preceded, i.e. in the burning bush. Thus, the theophany to Moses was read in the light of later events at Sinai when 'a typological relation between the burning bush on the holy mountain, and the devouring fire at Sinai was recognized.' (145) The sign to Moses was therefore seen as a pre-figuration of Israel's experience. Childs concludes; 'The point of the verse is as follows: this burning bush is a sign that it is I who send you, and it is your guarantee that when you have rescued the people from Egypt, you will worship God on this same mountain.' (146) No other aspects of the verse command Childs' attention; he is expressly dealing with this problem as a form-critical issue, so no theological exposition of the verse is forthcoming at this juncture.

In the OTC section material dealing with 3: 1 - 12 Childs explicitly references v. 12 and its problematic nature. He alludes to the previous form-critical work done earlier where he 'argued for the need of a historical dimension in understanding the text.' (147) He continues: 'The demonstrative adjective in v. 12 refers, first of all, to the theophany of the burning. Here is a visible sign of God's power which breaks through the limits of human experience. Every one knows that bushes burn and are soon consumed. But here is one which burns and is not consumed. It is a great wonder reflecting the holiness of God which no man dare transgress.' (148) Childs believes that the sign functions in two different ways: (a) it demonstrates God's enabling power as one who commissions and equips his prophets for a divine

purpose, and (b) it participates in the future promise of a redeemed people worshipping God in his sanctuary. 'It functions as a foretaste of the future promise, the reality of which has already emerged in the call of Moses. His commission finds its ultimate meaning in the corporate life of the obedient people whom he is called to deliver in accordance with God's purpose.' (149)

Childs' handling of this verse in the OTC section is a hermeneutical move which is based on his form-critical study, and this approach is worth considering for a moment. The procedure is a good exemplar of biblical interpretation in which Childs, first of all, displays a positive role for historical critical techniques in unravelling the problems of the pre-history of the text under discussion. Then, in the ensuing OTC section, he goes on to put this verse, so understood in the light of his form-critical proposals, in the wider context of chapter 3 and offers theological comments accordingly. In this instance, Childs' own words are most appropriate, 'The diachronic dimension serves its function in illuminating the synchronic, not in destroying its integrity.' (150)

Childs' handling of this verse is an example of canonical interpretation which would add weight to his proposals if it could be sustained throughout the commentary. At times, however, we have observed that the diachronic dimension of his interpretation does not affect Childs' synchronic interpretation. Moreover, to sustain theological comment in a consistent manner on a definitive OT book of 40 chapters is an acutely difficult assignment irrespective of the hermeneutical tools employed. On the theophany to Moses Childs writes, 'It is a great wonder reflecting the holiness of God which no man dare transgress.' (151) This comment regarding the revealed holiness of God on this momentous occasion could well form the basis for further theological reflection, for it is an aspect of God's nature of the first magnitude. But is this attainable within the conceptual format of a commentary which deals with every chapter of this extensive book? Unfortunately, given the scale of the agenda format of the commentary, Childs is prevented from doing so.

By contrast, Durham does not specially deal with v. 12 at all. In his F/S/S section he relates scholarly opinion in general terms with no reference to v. 12 save

but to suggest that in narrative 3: 1 - 12, the Presence - response pattern is fundamental. In the longer "Comment" section Durham deals with vv. 11 - 12 in the space of half a page. He cites H. D. Preuss' assessment of the formula, 'I am with you' as an important and perhaps original one arising from early Israelite thought and religious devotion. 'If Preuss is correct, God's answer to Moses here reflects an extensive and widespread pattern of theological rhetoric, since this phrase, in some form, occurs almost a hundred times in the OT.' (152) Finally in the "Explanation" section, Durham brings the contents of v. 12 closer to the surface. He believes that this section indicates the certainty of the Presence of God in the form of theophany, Moses' call, and in the place as being holy, as God appeared to Moses there. The certainty of this Presence also establishes the authority of Moses for God assures him of his divine presence. 'And the linking of this experience of Moses with the experience the sons of Israel are yet to have is cleverly made by the sign that is promised as the proof of God's Presence, namely, that the sons of Israel, along with Moses, shall worship God together at this very same mountain.' (153)

In comparison with Childs' work on this verse, Durham's treatment is rather sparse. He does not see it as a theological crux in the unfolding story of God's unique revelation to Moses. As Durham does not specifically address the interpretational problems of *zeh* in this verse he does not consider the wide range of questions which one finds in Childs' treatment.

Fretheim divides the section 3: 1 - 12 into two parts: (a) 3: 1 - 6 and (b) 3: 6 - 12. On these verses he writes almost 10 pages of essay type commentary. Like Durham, Fretheim does not single out v. 12 as a difficult text which merits special attention. However, the verse is referenced in the process of describing the first objection by Moses to God's call (v 11) "Who am I that I should . . . ." Fretheim writes, 'God replies (v. 12) in language that is both clear and enigmatic'. (154) The clarity of v. 12, for Fretheim, centres on Moses' knowledge that God will be with him in all his deliberations. 'What is clear is that God will be with Moses in all that he undertakes. Moses is assured of a constant divine presence; in all that he does he will not be left to his own resources. His "I" will be accompanied by the divine "I"; his

"Who am I?" will be undergirded by the God who knows who he is. This gives Moses possibilities he would not have in himself.' (155) The meaning of the sign is an enigma for it is not at all clear what sort of happening will assure Moses. 'The apparent meaning is that a future event, namely, Israel's worship of God at Mt. Sinai, will provide Moses with this assurance. What has puzzled interpreters is how an event so far in the future, indeed on the far side of what Moses is asked to do, can function as a sign for Moses.' (156) Fretheim concludes by saying that it will become clear to Moses when he stands with all Israel to serve God at this place of theophany and commission, that it was the Lord who was behind the call to action. 'But when these events have taken place, God's presence will be seen to have been effective and Moses will know that it is indeed God who stands behind the commission.' (157)

Fretheim's treatment of v. 12 is insubstantial. He really does not come to grips with the problems of the meaning of the sign and how it functions in the narrative, though he does make some useful theological observations. One feels that a full discussion on v. 12 would benefit from some historical critical work, but, by and large, Fretheim brackets this out of the commentary. Childs, by contrast, makes v.12, in particular, the meaning and function of *zeh*, as the core interpretative issue, and, as we have already pointed out, he engages in diachronic interpretation which acts as a basis for constructive theological reflection. In this example of biblical interpretation, Childs confirms that he sees both diachronic and synchronic dimensions as integral to the whole process of interpretation. In comparison with Fretheim's work, Childs' handling of the text is more comprehensive in that he brings more breadth and depth to the exegesis of this difficult verse. Fretheim's comments on the verse are given in passing; his narrative, essay - type approach must proceed apace, so much so that he cannot devote the consideration to it that Childs has done. The logistical problem which any author faces when writing a commentary on the contents of an entire book, particularly one of this substance, precludes him from engaging in sustained exegesis of a difficult text like 3: 2 or 3: 12. Fretheim has to strike a balance between his duty to cover the entire contents of the book in a prescribed format, and at the same time, to give careful thought to texts that can be

theologically enriching. And all this is to be achieved within a strictly narrative - style format. A balance is required here which is virtually impossible to maintain and it reveals the real difficulty of commentary writing in a contemporary setting. On this showing, Fretheim does not offer a fully convincing treatment of an important verse in the narrative. Childs' work in this instance, will attract more credibility within the biblical guild because, (i) he shows his mastery of form-critical methodology, (ii) advances his own critical solution to the problem, and (iii) seeks to offer reflective theological comments. He brings out the importance of the holiness of God in his comments on 3: 1 - 12, whereas Fretheim still continues to expound his theme of a suffering God.

The approach to Ex. 3: 12 in Gowan's commentary is very clearly stated in the heading of Ch. 3, "I will be with you." Whereas Childs fastens his mind on the interpretation of the term *zeh*, Gowan takes God's immediate promise, "I will be with you;" and makes this the basis of the entire chapter. While Gowan is mainly pre-occupied with the formula "I will be with you", he does mention the problem of the meaning of the "sign" in the short section. " "I Will Be With You" in Exodus." Of 3: 12 he says that, ' . . . God's answer, "But I will be with you," should have been reassurance enough. That Moses should not need anything more is also indicated by the "sign" that God immediately offers. It is not some additional, present - tense proof that God really means it, or of his ability to enable Moses to complete the task. Much of the scholarly discussion of the nature of the sign has resulted from questions of this type.' (158) Gowan cites word studies of the term *'oth* which tend to acknowledge its confirmatory nature. In fact, only one reference is quoted in the footnotes (TDOT, 1974) to support this view. Gowan continues, 'After all has been accomplished in Egypt, Moses will find himself back at this same mountain with the liberated people, worshipping the same God who addresses him now. In the meantime, it should be enough to know that this God will be with him.' (159)

These are the only comments which Gowan offers on 3: 12. He rounds off this very brief section by referring to the formula thus, ' . . . it will be necessary to find the best way to evaluate its use elsewhere in the Old Testament in order to be sure we



properly understand it in Ex. 3 - 4 and recognize how that use contributes to this aspect of Israel's concept of God.' (160) There follows some 18 pages of material in which Gowan traces the use of this formula of promise in the OT, Judaism, Christianity, and the NT. From the quotation just cited, one would have expected Gowan to consider the formula in the light of his investigative study in the rest of the OT. But somehow, he has allowed this objective to slip from his view. The significance of the formula in Ex. 3 - 4 is not considered again in this chapter; consequently, he fails to deliver on his stated objective.

As far as verse 12 is concerned, Gowan does not see it as significant in relation to the immediate literary context of 3: 1- 12. While one must remember that Gowan does not purport to give an exposition of the whole message of the book (161), nevertheless, if he is going to claim that this commentary is expressly dealing with what Exodus says about God, then one would expect specific attention to be focused on the text of Exodus throughout his writing. But this is not so. To consider the formula "I will be with you" in Judaism, and how it may be traced in some Christian hymns, is a long way from wrestling with the theological force of the text of Ex. 3: 12.

**(c) A Jewish Contribution. N. M. Sarna.**

We shall now consider the work of a Jewish scholar, N. M. Sarna who has written two commentaries on Exodus. One is called Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Israel. (162) As the title suggests, this is not a verse by verse commentary on Exodus but an attempt to highlight the salient episodes of the book which are deemed to be of major significance. This style of narrative commentary is in some ways analogous to the commentaries of Fretheim and Gowan but not to Childs' and Durham's. Sarna's other commentary, Exodus: JPS Torah Commentary, is of a more traditional type format. (163) This commentary gives the traditional Hebrew text with an English translation. Sarna then goes directly into a verse by verse commentary on the text. There is no section by section approach such as is found in Childs and Durham, nor is there any prominence given to historical critical methodologies. For our purpose, however, we shall examine Sarna's treatment of the call of Moses in his Exploring Exodus as it offers a more distinctive contrast to Childs' format.

Earlier we noted that the section by section format which Childs used in his commentary was somewhat restricting in preventing the commentator from engaging in sustained theological reflection on important areas (like Ex. 3 - 4) of the text. Childs' handling of the text got bogged down with historical critical concerns and the nature of the hermeneutical debate that sustained and memorable exegesis was not achieved. This view is confirmed by Childs' more recent assessment of his commentary. (Appendix Gs. 14, 15, 17.) It will be interesting to see whether Sarna's preferred narrative type format, in relation to Childs' more traditional section by section approach, yields any opportunity for theological insight into this classic text of God's self-disclosure.

We shall first of all try to draw out the main strands of Sarna's approach from the Introduction section. He states that biblical religion revolves around two themes, Creation and the Exodus. 'The former asserts God's sovereignty over nature, the latter His absolute hegemony over history.' (164) He views Exodus as the pivotal book in the Bible because of the key experiences which it contains, - the slavery of the Israelites and their liberation from Egypt, the covenant between God and his people at Sinai, and the journey into the wilderness toward the promised land. Sarna addresses historical questions - (Can all these events be placed within the framework of recorded and detailed history?) - by saying that both the slavery and the liberation are perceived as events of profound religious significance. 'The emphasis is on the theological interpretation, not on historical detail. The biblical narratives are essentially documents of faith, not records of the past, that is to say, the verities of faith are communicated through the forms of history, but these latter are not presented for their own sake. They are employed only insofar as they serve the purposes of the former. (165)

Sarna's purpose is to offer a 'mature understanding of this seminal biblical book.' (166) His intention is to integrate "the assured results of scholarship" into the biblical narrative. He continues: 'Since the Torah is not a book of history, but one that makes use of historical data for didactic purposes, that is, for the inculcation of spiritual values and moral and ethical imperatives, Exploring Exodus consistently

stresses these aspects of the narratives.' (167) As Childs' concern is for the interpretation of Holy Scripture within the context of the Christian community of faith, so also Sarna is also addressing the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible within the Jewish community of faith. Not insignificantly, Childs' appreciation of Sarna's work in this commentary is cited on the back cover of the paperback edition.

Of the 220 pages of the commentary, 24 are assigned to the narrative of Moses' commissioning. Sarna's presentation is not laden with historical critical concerns as is Childs'; scholarly issues do not get in the way of reflecting theologically on the story in all its unfolding drama. The book displays a very informed understanding of everyday life in the Ancient Near Eastern world which adds a certain vividness to the narrative. Sarna treats the material of Chs. 3-4 under several headings like, 'The Burning Bush', 'The "God of the Fathers"', 'A land flowing with milk and honey', and 'The Divine Name.' Our immediate task will be to concentrate on topic areas where Sarna offers insightful observations.

In the section 'The Burning Bush' it is noted that the Hebrew word for bush = *seneh*, only appears in Deuteronomy 33: 16, where God is referred to as 'the Presence in the Bush.' Sarna sees the term *seneh* as a possible word play on Sinai which he regards as an augur of things to come. As with the Christian commentators, Sarna relates the burning bush (which he speculates is *Rubus sanctus*) to Moses' curiosity and the concept of holy ground. Though the site is described as "holy ground", Moses is unaware of this. Sarna draws attention to a parallel in Joshua 5:15 where Joshua is suddenly confronted by the captain of the Lord's host; in this divine human encounter he hears words similar to what Moses heard: "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy." From this observation Sarna picks up on the concept of holiness which he sees presupposed in these two parallel accounts of encountering God.

'Holiness' in these texts, according to Sarna, represents a radical breach with accepted pagan notions. Paganism views holiness on the basis of its intrinsic "natural" mysterious quality of the revered place or object. 'In Israelite monotheism, with its fundamental insistence on a God who is outside of and wholly apart from

nature, who created nature and who is sovereign over it, there is no room for any possibility of an independent, immutable, and inherent holiness. That which is holy, be it temporal or spatial, possesses that quality solely by divine will. It is no coincidence that in Israel the holiness of a place lies in historic experience, not in mythological justification.' (168) A polar contrast is noted between Israelite and pagan concepts relating to creation. The creation epic *Enuma Elish* closes with the building of a temple to the god Marduk, i.e., with the sanctification of space. For Sarna, the creation story celebrates the sanctity of time - the Sabbath, whereas, in Exodus, the sanctity of space explicitly appears for the first time.

Sarna states that the burning bush is understood in two different ways. First, the fire is seen by some commentators as self-sufficient, self-perpetuating, a symbol of the awesome and unapproachable Divine Presence. Several scriptural references are cited to expand on this, Gen. 15:17; Ex. 19: 18; Ex. 24: 17 and Deut. 4: 11-12. And second, some see the lowly bush as a symbol of the people of Israel in Egyptian bondage while the fire represents the forces of persecution. Israel, despite the fires of persecution, will, like the bush, be unconsumed. (This line of interpretation has been perpetuated by the Presbyterian Church in the form of their symbolic representation of the burning bush and the words 'Ardens Sed Virens' = 'burning but not consumed.') Sarna does not regard these interpretational moves as mutually exclusive, for 'the biblical text can simultaneously accommodate multiple levels of meaning'. (169) However, he does not elaborate on the implications of the phrase 'multiple levels of meaning' which could raise a variety of interesting hermeneutical questions.

Sarna next moves to consider the phrase, 'The God of the Fathers'. He indicates the significance of the three patriarchs in Genesis by which 'God implicitly evokes the promises of redemption He has made to them.' (170) Quoting from the evidence in Gen. 17: 7, 35: 11 and 28: 13, he delineates the various modes of introducing a solemn declaration against the backdrop of corroborating evidence cited from relevant studies in archaeology. On this basis, Sarna regards the scene of the burning bush as establishing an unbroken historic continuity between the present experience of Moses and the revelation of God to the patriarchs beginning

with Abraham. With Moses' experience, something new has come into focus. The change from the singular "God of the father" epithet to the plural "God of the Fathers" 'constitutes tacit but irrefutable evidence that a new stage in the history of Israelite religion commences with the commissioning of Moses.' (171)

Moses' immediate response was to hide his face because ' he was afraid to look at God' (v. 6). This profound experience of encountering trauma and dread in God's presence, is to be seen in the lives of men like Jacob in Gen. 32: 30, Gideon in Judges 6: 22 -23, and Manoah, the father of Samson, in Judges 13: 22. 'Always, the unique, transcendent, supernal holiness of the Divine Presence is an experience felt to be almost beyond the human capacity to endure.' (172)

Under the section heading "The Divine Name" Sarna explores the complexities of Moses' question in 3: 13 and relates this question- "What is his name?"- to the Tetragrammaton in Gen. 4: 26 and Exodus 6: 2 - 3. Unlike Childs, however, Sarna does not pursue the type of scholarly questions which Childs does in his special sections on Ex. 3: 12, Ex. 3: 14 and the Form-critical analysis of 3: 13 - 15. Sarna's main interest is to follow the text as it stands and offer grammatical and scholarly opinions when these are called for. His *modus vivendi* as a commentator is not dependent on the historical critical paradigm; here, a clear contrast with Childs' handling of Ex. 3 - 4 is evident. Sarna acknowledges that the true etymology of YHWH is problematical, but he believes that the name is intended to connote the character and nature of the whole personality of the bearer of the name. God's reply to Moses means that the name YHWH expresses the quality of Being. 'However, it is not Being as opposed to nonbeing, not Being as an abstract, philosophical notion, but Being in the sense of the reality of God's active, dynamic Presence.' (173)

Whatever YHWH means, 'God's pronouncement of his own name indicates that the Divine Personality can be known only to the extent that God chooses to reveal His Self...' (174) These comments are theologically perceptive and are the basis for further reflection. 'This is the articulated counterpart of the spectacle of fire at the Burning Bush, fire that is self-generating and self-sustaining. Furthermore, since in the ancient world there existed the notion that name-giving communicates superiority

and power over the recipient of the name, it is self-evident that God's name must proceed from Himself, and cannot be conferred by man.' (175) At the end of this section Sarna concludes, 'The character of God as explained to Moses is absolute and unchanging. This immutability provides inflexible reliability that the promise of redemption will be realised.' (176) Instead of being sucked into the vortex of historical critical methodology and hermeneutical debate, Sarna, with carefully measured reflection, brings a theological depth to the reader's attention that is both insightful and impressive.

Sarna continues to describe the divine human encounter of God and Moses in the sections "Hebrews", "Worship in the Wilderness", "Stripping the Egyptians", "Signs and Wonders", and "Moses' Continued Resistance", in which he proffers illuminating comment at different points. 'No snake holder would pick up a reptile by its tail, but Moses does so at the divine behest, an act that expresses that unquestioned faith and perfect confidence in God.' (177) On the subject of Moses' continued resistance he observes, 'Prophetic eloquence is not a matter of native talent, but of revelation that derives from the supreme Source of truth that is external to the speaker. . . . Prophetic eloquence is a divine gift bestowed for the purpose on him who is elected, often against his will, to be the messenger. In these circumstances, experience and talent are irrelevant qualities.' (178)

Sarna's treatment of Ex. 3 - 4 is couched in a narrative style approach which contains a substantial descriptive element. But he advances an incisive exploration of this dramatic event which at times sparkles with imaginative theological comment. He refuses to get bogged down with scholarly concerns and seeks to reflect on the significant features of the text. Nor does Sarna busy himself with a rationalizing of the burning bush phenomenon by considering naturalistic explanations. Within the confines of the Hebrew Scriptures, Sarna does pick up on the key elements of the story which resonate throughout the Jewish Bible. This dimension to his work corresponds, at least to some degree, with Childs' approach in Old Testament Context. Of course, Childs' canvas portrays a wider landscape than Sarna's for he is working from a Christological centre to interpret the Christian Bible. Sarna's work reflects a

deep knowledge and understanding of life in the ancient world and this is very much in evidence throughout the entire book. His scholarship, however, does not display the literary, form-critical dimensions so demonstrable in Childs' work; it is not that Sarna is unaware of these techniques in Bible study, they are simply not his concern in this commentary.

There is one unusual facet about all the commentators' work on Ex. 3 - 4 under review which might be useful to examine. What is striking about all the above interpreters is the fact that they do not probe into the symbolic significance of "fire" (*'esh*) as a medium of divine presence. All commentators refer to "fire" as an essential element of the theophany and some of them do elicit concepts like "holiness" and "curiosity" from the story, but they are not utilised in theological reflective mode to any great degree.

In the Bible the term "fire" has a wide semantic usage. It provides warmth, light, and heat for cooking but it causes physical injury and destroys cities and idols. Fire was used to burn to death culprits in cases of sexual misconduct, while "passing through the fire" was the practice of offering children for burnt offerings. With specific reference to God the term "fire" is used of the Holy Spirit in Matt. 3:11 and Acts 2: 3. It is also seen as an agent for divine judgment (2 Thess. 1: 8; Rev. 20: 9) and a symbol of righteousness and purity (Rev. 1: 14ff). In Ez. 1: 4,13 the image of fire is used to symbolise God's glory, and in 2 Kings 6: 17, and Ex. 13: 21 - 22, fire symbolises the Lord's protective presence. In the worship of ancient Israel fire was an integral element in the Temple and the Tabernacle where it was constantly used on the altars of incense and of burnt offering.

But what stands out as a unique text on "fire" is Elijah's encounter with YHWH in I Kings 19: 1 - 18. Here, Horeb is explicitly mentioned (v.8), and the theophany of God to Elijah is also accompanied by fire. 'And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.' 1 Kings 19: 11-12.

Significantly, the fire in this theophany, while part of the general phenomenon of the theophany, is not expressly linked to God's presence. Of all the writers in our comparative study, only Gowan devotes attention to this remarkable story in a paragraph in his Ch. 3 "The Numinous". But he does not relate this to Ex. 3 and his comments are mainly descriptive.

From a Christian standpoint, there is a connection made between God and fire in Hebrews 12 which is worth examining. From v.18 the author is writing against the backdrop of Mt. Sinai as he refers to "the blazing fire". Then in v. 21 he cites Moses as saying, "I tremble with fear" as he experienced the Sinai theophany. Towards the end of the chapter the author writes, 'Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.' (vv. 28, 29) We would not expect Sarna, as a Jewish commentator to interpret Ex. 3 from a Christological position; but one would have expected Childs, as a Christian exegete, to have considered these three major texts - Ex. 3, I Kings 19 and Hebrews 12 - in his OTC, NTC and TR sections. I would submit that the intertextuality of these passages offers a distinct opportunity for the exegete to reflect on the nature of God's presence that would prove theologically enriching and insightful. As it stands, Childs does not cite either the Elijah experience in OTC, nor Hebrews 12 in NTC. This is surely a major omission.

As one reflects on the polychromatic phenomenon of "fire", we are immediately attracted to it. Fire is also a mystery and heightens our curiosity levels. It represents danger and destructive power. It refines, purifies, and induces fear and dread. Fire also repels us as we approach its ferocious heat. We are forced to keep our distance. Yet, fire is essential for our life on earth: it warms and comforts us; it can protect us in danger and is vital for the preparation of food. Mystery, power, fear, dread, curiosity, purity, repulsion, and attraction, - these are some of the connotations of "fire". Yet "fire" was a means whereby God chose in the theophany of Ex. 3: 1ff, to freely disclose himself to Moses as YHWH.

The mystery that fire undoubtedly represents suggests that there is a mystery about God. One never knows quite how to explain the phenomenon of fire; so it is



with God. Some speak of the 'otherness' of God, or the 'hiddenness' of God. Others talk of God's absence. Yet, Moses approached the fire, with all its potential danger and mystery, and encountered God in a never to be forgotten way. As we have shown, the author of Hebrews, convinced of the superiority of the new covenant, cites the image of God as a consuming fire in the context of approaching God in Christian worship. God is 'wholly other', yet he is approachable. And this was Moses' experience.

Perhaps if this concept of fire as a symbol of God's presence had been the subject of sustained reflection in relation to Ex. 3 on the part of Childs, then memorable exegesis might have been achieved. It is the absence of sustained theological exegesis in Childs' handling of Exodus 3 - 4 that fails to confirm the value of his canonical approach to biblical interpretation. Hermeneutical theory must somehow be turned into convincing exegetical practice. Sarna by contrast, while not exhausting the possibilities of Exodus 3 - 4, nonetheless has produced a commentary which stays close to the text and from time to time demonstrates informed theological insight. In Exploring Exodus Sarna manifests an impressive coherence in interpreting this substantial book which is lacking in Childs. (**Appendix G. 15.**)

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## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.**



## Summary and Conclusion.

At the commencement of this investigative study into the canonical approach of B. S. Childs, it was shown that what he is proposing is nothing short of a thoroughgoing theological programme for biblical interpretation. Childs' deep concern is to unite the work of biblical scholarship and the Church. He therefore stands in continuity with the classic Christian stance of men like Irenaeus and Athanasius who insisted that Holy Scripture has to be interpreted from the perspective of the "rule of faith". In our modern context, Childs is seeking to establish an informed and proper relationship between history and theology in order to bridge the gap which Gabler outlined in the late 18th century. In other words, Childs is attempting to delineate the proper relationship between diachronic and synchronic procedures in biblical interpretation whereby the integrity of historical and theological study are accorded their legitimate place.

We have also noted that for Childs there is a critical distinction between the Bible as a *source* (the approach of the religious historian) and as a *witness* (the approach of the Christian theologian). As he stated recently, ". . . the text is not just a story. I want to know what the story tells us about God." (**Appendix G. 20**) Another vital aspect of Childs' thought was highlighted: the centrality of the community of faith vis-à-vis biblical interpretation. Thus, what Childs is seeking to establish is a context and perspective for interpretation in which all scholarly methods and approaches can be properly employed. Essentially, this appropriate context is one of faith, i.e., within the corporate life and witness of the Christian church in which the Bible is recognized and used as Holy Scripture. It was also observed that while one can be frustrated by the diverse ways which Childs uses the terms "canon" and "canonical", what is really crucial in the hermeneutical debate is that attention should be sharply focused on the substantive issues which are raised by defining the relationship of the Bible to a community of faith.

Furthermore, we also drew attention to the fact that throughout Childs' main publications, culminating in his BTONT (1992), he was moving towards proposing a new biblical theology which has been for him a life-long interest. There cannot be any

doubt that such an audacious project is a herculean task given the fragmented state of the biblical scholarly guild at present. In this monumental work, Childs does not claim to present a definitive biblical theology, rather, aware of the immensity of the task, he claims that he is advancing a few of the broad lines that can be sketched which he hopes could form the basis for future work in the field.

It is clearly evident that any attempt to reconceptualize the nature of the Bible in relation to Christian theology, is going to be controversial, so not unexpectedly, Childs' canonical approach to the interpretation of the Bible has aroused a great deal of critical discernment, some negative, some positive. In this area we considered the work of five scholars, Barr, Barton, Brett, Scalise, and Noble. In various ways these critiques reveal perceptive analyses of Childs' hermeneutical proposals. But do these scholars take on board all of the major concerns which we delineated above? It is widely acknowledged that J. Barr is a sharp observer on biblical matters, but his work on Childs sometimes descends to the level of caricature, and at other times, his comments amount to little more than tendentious rhetoric. Barton, on the other hand, is more moderate in his criticisms. He views the concept of canon as being an important development in biblical interpretation but only as an extension of redaction criticism and closely allied to structuralism. Notwithstanding Barton's more balanced and urbane scholarship, he has not fully grasped the nature of Childs' proposals; consequently, he relegates the canonical approach to the status of a another critical method alongside the many readily available.

Regarding Brett, Scalise, and Noble, we concluded that they were pursuing their own agendas. While influenced and energised by Childs' work, their research programmes, did not really develop and advance Childs' canonical approach "on its own terms." These scholars do exhibit a sympathy with Childs which enables them, to varying degrees, to penetrate more deeply to the central concerns of Childs. This particularly applies to Noble who has written a very comprehensive study on all the major publications of Childs up to and including his BTONT (1992). But somehow they all have faltered when it matters most. Because they were working to their own game-plan, they have not probed Childs' theological concerns in depth; Brett is more

interested in post-modern studies, Scalise is taken up with moving from exegesis to doctrinal formulation in the interests of an evangelical theological foundationalism, and Noble's work - which is a combination of literary theory and philosophical hermeneutics - concludes by making proposals which symbolise the nature of the problems which have to be addressed. While these scholars have produced valuable studies in their own right, their work has not really incisively cut to the core of Childs' canonical approach in all its dimensions and potential.

Brett, Scalise and Noble, delve deeply into modern hermeneutical theory, and while it is important to formulate clear methodological principles in biblical interpretation, yet the fact still remains that the final test of biblical interpretation is the concrete one of its application to the exegesis of the biblical text. If Childs' canonical approach could be shown to yield sustained theological exegesis with imagination and illumination, then his proposals would be greatly strengthened. It was at this point that we moved on to the central concern of this study, namely, to examine Childs' exegesis in practice.

In the first instance, we looked at Childs' exegesis in the context of his proposals for a biblical theology in his BTONT where we considered his handling of Genesis 22: 1- 19, The Akedah, and Matt. 21: 33- 46, the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. Our findings on Childs' interpretation of these passages concluded with the view that he was mostly engrossed with the hermeneutical debate to such a degree that no thought provoking exegesis was rendered. By comparison, we cited Moberly's treatment of Gen. 22 which was a stimulating theological exegesis of this unique story, characterised by a very close reading of the final form of the text. In fairness to Childs, however, we did indicate that his intention in presenting these two examples was not to be taken as definitive, but rather to sketch out some parameters of such an approach. (Appendix Gs. 8,9, &10)

We then moved from the demanding challenge of exegesis in the setting of a reconstructed biblical theology to examine the canonical approach in operation in the context of a biblical commentary. Our specific task was to look at Childs' interpretation of a classic text of God's self-revelation in Exodus 3-4. This exercise

took the form of a comparative study in which we explored the work of three other Christian scholars, J. I. Durham, T. E. Fretheim and D. E. Gowan. We concluded our study by considering the narrative-style commentary, Exploring Exodus, by N. M. Sarna. In this case study of Childs' work on Ex. 3 we found that his exegesis got bogged down with the hermeneutical debate and the minutiae of historical critical scholarship. The result was that sustained theological exegesis was not in evidence. Childs' mastery of critical scholarship is demonstrated for all to see right throughout this commentary, but he has not convincingly shown how diachronic procedures advance theological exegesis. To use his own terminology, Childs' handling of the prehistory of the text does not appear to bring the final form into sharper focus. It was noticed, however, that in his treatment of the interpretational crux, Ex. 3: 12, his form-critical treatment formed the basis for understanding the text in the OTC section. But this hermeneutical move was not consistently evident throughout his interpretation of Ex. 3 -4 as a whole.

The work of Durham, Fretheim, and Gowan, varied a great deal in its theological dimensions. Durham's adoption of the section by section approach shared the same fate as Childs' format: the historical model occupies so much of his time that sustained theological reflection on this classic passage of God's self-disclosure has little chance to emerge. Fretheim's format is less cluttered with historical critical material and is basically narrative in style. This brings the text more to the surface as it stands enabling Fretheim to offer some perceptive theological comments. But, here also, one feels that a close reading of the text with accompanying sustained theological reflection is not possible within the constraints of writing a commentary on the whole of Exodus. Gowan employs a more open format with a particular understanding of the history of tradition which spreads Exodus across both Christianity and Judaism. What looks a promising prospect from Gowan's stated intentions in the early pages of this commentary, is unfortunately not realised to any great degree. It was shown that some of Gowan's comments were theologically suggestive but it was found that these were not sustained and consistent. In assessing the work of these three Christian scholars, it was felt that the commentary format and

the large agenda which they had to pursue in interpreting this comprehensive book, constituted very considerable obstacles on the way to achieving their interpretational goals.

The work of the Jewish commentator, N. M. Sarna, proved to be a very interesting comparator with Childs' interpretation. His measured and concise prose written in a format uncluttered by historical critical tools is in bold contrast to Childs' absorption with the history of the hermeneutical debate and the detailed interest in historical critical matters. This does not imply that Sarna's interests are not inclusive of critical scholarship; indeed, he is well informed on such matters. He simply takes the text as it stands, refuses to be side-tracked into other pastures, and delivers his observations and comments, all of which are directed to the community of faith from which he comes. Sarna's writing is from time to time pregnant with theological comments of quality. His adoption of a narrative style format with his attention firmly focused on the biblical text in its final form, coupled with his deep insights into the story, leaves the reader with the clear impression that here is a commentator who wishes to convey to his readers something of the divine reality of which the text speaks, and he does so in a commanding and illuminating way. We did however, draw attention to the fact that in examining the interpretational crux, Ex. 3: 2, none of the commentators sought to explore the significance of "fire" at the burning bush as a symbol of the divine presence. It was felt, after reviewing various occurrences of "fire" throughout the Biblical text, that all the commentators missed a fruitful opportunity to theologically explore at length this dimension of the story.

One very important observation was drawn with reference to the particular format used by Childs in this commentary. Given the theological emphasis of Childs in his hermeneutical proposals, the commentary, as a vehicle for delivering Childs' interpretational concerns, was felt to be inadequate for the purpose, a view with which Childs has readily concurred. To write a theological commentary envisaged by Childs' canonical approach to interpretation is, in the current state of the biblical guild, a virtually impossible enterprise. One is now faced with a vast array of interpretational interests in biblical study that no one individual could develop an expertise in all of

them. Hence, it is widely felt that the interpreter is now faced with an increasingly complex task in writing a Bible commentary. Logistically speaking, it would be impossible to write a Bible commentary today in which all interpretative interests were accommodated. On a practical note, in view of Childs' stated interpretational goals, I would advance the following proposal.

Instead of attempting to write a Bible commentary replete with the section by section approach and dominated by historical critical concerns, as we saw in Childs' Exodus, I propose that in writing a theological commentary, the exegete should adopt a simple division of labour. The first task for the commentator would be to address the theological dimensions of the book in question. The key question is: What does the text tell us about God - his nature, reality, character and activity. To use Childs' own words, this would be a commentary which would be 'unabashedly theological.' For this purpose it is felt that a narrative-style format after the manner of Sarna's Exploring Exodus would be most beneficial because it would have the immediate effect of freeing the text from the clutter of historical critical concerns and the plethora of recent trends in methodology. In this work, the Christian interpreter would come to the text expressly to address its theological referentiality, and the desired end would be to produce sustained theological exegesis. Would diachronic procedures be excluded from this enterprise? No. Where the diachronistic dimension serves its function in illuminating the synchronistic, then it is important to bring the diachronic dimension to the task of theological interpretation. This would avoid the difficulties which Stendahl's dichotomy encounters and is in keeping with Childs' view on the nature of the descriptive and constructive tasks.

Secondly, all matters of discussion relating to the text, such as those critical scholarly concerns which we found curbed Childs' freedom to engage in sustained theological exegesis, would be consigned to the contents of an accompanying volume. This could be consulted by scholars and interested parties who wished to pursue the more technical side of interpreting the text. Undoubtedly, this would be a demanding enterprise for any biblical scholar to tackle, but he/she could invite other similarly minded scholars to contribute to some areas where it was felt such expertise was

called for.

The benefits of this proposal, I would submit, could be worthwhile. If Childs were to write such a commentary on Exodus, then he would enjoy considerable latitude to engage with issues that face Christians in contemporary living. He could, for example, bring into view feminist concerns, and liberation hermeneutics as applied to Exodus, to name only two issues, which he did not deal with in his 1974 Exodus commentary. This suggested interpretational project would be a distinctively Christian one, designed so that the book of Exodus (or whatever book is in question) is regarded as the scripture of the Church through which the voice of the living God is sought and heard.

What is not suggested here is that this is the definitive way to interpret the Bible. This enterprise fully accords freedom to other hermeneutical interests to pursue their own questions in their own way and recognizes the hermeneutical pluralism in which all interpretation today takes place. In this way further study and creative research could raise questions of the text which have yet not come to the fore. In the final analysis, however, this proposal is based on the assumption that the biblical books are theologically informed, and to interpret them with sensitivity and integrity the interpreter must come to them with a theologically informed mind and spirit. The real strength of this proposal would best be realised, not necessarily in the realms of philosophical hermeneutics, but in the quality of the theological interpretation which would be delivered by the exegete.

As we bring this study of Childs' canonical approach to the interpretation of the Bible as Holy Scripture to a conclusion one might well ask: how is Childs' work to be evaluated? Our principle aim in this study has been to examine the canonical approach in both its theoretical formulation and practical application. On the positive side, any student who has been trained in the historical critical methods of Bible study, and who wishes to regard the Bible as the Holy Scriptures of the Church, will welcome Childs' stress on the theological dimension in biblical interpretation as a breath of fresh air. In his hermeneutical proposals we have a distinctive emphasis on the concept of canon which delineates the area in which the church hears the Word of

God. A vital tenet of this approach (one not always fully appreciated by Childs' critics) is that biblical interpretation must reflect the function of the canon within the community of faith. While there is a variety of legitimate methods available to Bible study today, Childs argues that this approach to biblical interpretation within a community of faith should have normative status. For too long the sometimes arid nature of historical critical study has been far removed from the interpretation of the Bible in the context of the church community. Principally concerned with the prehistory of the biblical text, historical critical study has been instrumental in fragmenting the final form of the text with the result that a holistic view of the book was lost. Moreover, to assign "meaning" of the biblical text to diachronic concerns such as authorial intentions and original contexts is now rightly regarded as being too limited and limiting in the process of biblical interpretation. It can therefore be claimed that Childs' singular achievement has been to bring to our attention the hermeneutical significance of the canon.

On the debit side, however, as one probes into the development of Childs' canonical approach, it is evident that he has not consistently employed historical critical methods. To put the matter differently, the tension discernible between the diachronic and synchronic procedures has not been resolved. For example, in Childs' *IOTS* (1979) he endeavours to find a positive role for the results of historical critical research in biblical interpretation, and he freely acknowledges the achievements of critical scholarship (127). Yet in his *OTTCC* (1985) the diachronic dimension is virtually eliminated. Methodologically, Childs' work here is based on the canonical form of the OT texts where the synchronic dominates the diachronic dimension. In the more recent *BTONT* (1992) historical methods are more to the fore as in his early chapter on creation, and in his final chapter, "A Holistic Reading of Christian Scripture", Childs states that he previously regarded the diachronic legacy of the 19th century as the major antagonist to biblical interpretation. This implies that there is more to be said for the historical critical model after all. Childs has, since *BTONT*, in the context of currently writing a commentary on Isaiah, convincingly stated that historical questions are not to be ignored. **(Appendix G. 4)**



The issue then is how may historical critical questions be related to a theological reading of the Bible as Holy Scripture. It is one thing to confirm the legitimacy of historical critical concerns, but it is another to implement these consistently in theological exegesis. In Childs' Exodus commentary, form-critical, source-critical, and traditio-historical issues are well to the fore, but historical questions are not. To date there has not been a consistency in Childs' work in this department. Perhaps he is right when he says that sometimes historical referentiality is important and at other times it is not. (Appendix G. 3) But on what basis can we say this? More research in this area might unveil some procedural principles that could be to our methodological advantage. Briefly stated, biblical scholarship needs clarification on the vexed problem of the diachronic synchronic dichotomy.

There is also another problem which can be detected in Childs' work which is the perennial one of the nature of the relation between the Old and the New Testaments. Of course this is not a problem specifically created by Childs as it came into being as soon as the Christian church was born; but he correctly sees that this is a crucial question in his attempt to reclaim the Bible for Christian theology. We have seen that Childs' advocacy for final form study and the Masoretic text has occasioned some criticism. So the first problem to address is the practical one of what constitutes the exact boundaries of the Christian Old Testament. In his BTONT he admits that there is a difficulty here (63,67). The Protestant Churches have accepted the narrower Jewish canon, though many other Christians include the deuterocanonical books as well. This problem cannot be solved here, but let us for the sake of argument accept that the Protestant canon is the text which has to be interpreted. Throughout his writings, Childs again and again states that the OT must be understood/interpreted "on its own terms." The exact meaning of this phrase, however, is not clearly and fully explained. Despite the fact that we have cited a variety of quotations from Childs on this subject, one nevertheless, remains uncertain as to its precise meaning.

When a Christian interpreter approaches the OT as Christian Scripture, its interpretation can never be in isolation from the NT. It is not a question of accepting that there is a close proximity between Old and New; rather, it is a fact that in

Christian thought both the Old and New Testaments are inextricably linked as Christian Scripture. The following example helps to illustrate the point.

As a Jewish believer reads "The Lord is my Shepherd . . ." in Ps. 23: 1, his understanding of the name YHWH will have been shaped by his own traditions, and especially the revelation of God in the Torah. The unique self-disclosure of God as YHWH in Ex. 3, and the Shema in Deut. 6: 4 which states, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; . . ." (RSV), are especially significant in defining the term "Lord" for Jewish sensitivities. Conversely, when a Christian believer reads these same words, "The Lord is my Shepherd . . ." , his understanding of the term "Lord" is formed by a different context. While the Christian interpreter takes cognizance of the name "Lord" as situated in the Hebrew Bible, his understanding of the "Lord" is no longer solely shaped by the theological parameters of the Hebrew Bible. The Christian interprets the term "Lord" in the light of the early Christian understanding of Jesus as God's definitive self-disclosure. This move represents a massive hermeneutical shift in meaning which lies at the heart of the self-definition of the Christian faith. So from the oneness, and the unitary understanding of God in Judaism, we move to a new and fuller understanding of God in Christ which can be found in the classic trinitarian prayer of Paul in 2 Cor. 13: 14. In this important area of knowing who God is, from a Christian perspective, the OT is preparation for the New. The appropriation of the Hebrew Scriptures by the early Christians led to a seminal development in understanding the newness that Jesus brought to the world and in comprehending new dimensions of the nature and reality of God.

From this example, it is clear that interpreting the OT on these grounds is understanding it in a distinctively Christian way, that is, reading it in the light of the Christ event. Certainly, Childs would endorse this approach to OT interpretation, a fact demonstrably in evidence throughout his writings. But is christological readings of the OT to be solely equated with interpreting the OT "on its own terms"? What else might be involved in interpreting the OT "on its own terms"? Could it mean that it is equivalent to maintaining that the OT has an independent status in relation to the NT? If this is so, then such a view directly affects our understanding of the authority of

the Christian Scriptures. Or again, if Christians were to interpret the OT "on its own terms", this could lead to a radical judaizing of the Christian faith. Christians would then worship on Saturday (following Seventh Day Adventists), practice male circumcision, introduce bigamy (as the early Mormons did), establish animal sacrifice, and revert to establishing a more thoroughgoing patriarchal society.

Furthermore, one might reasonably assume that the phrase "on its own terms" could be taken to mean that the OT as the OT must stand on its own feet and have its own integrity. In Christian terms, however, the Hebrew Bible has become the OT only because of its placement in relation to the NT. Indeed, the term "Old Testament" is a specifically Christian designation assigned to this literature. Clearly, to accept the OT as Christian Scripture is only viable in relation to the new covenant forged by the Christ event. On these grounds one can conclude with the author of Hebrews that with the OT economy we have the shadow, in the christological phenomenon of the NT, we have the substance.

Undoubtedly, as Childs has clearly shown, the canonical shapers subjected the preserved traditions of Israel to continual reinterpretation and recontextualization. And when the early Christians incorporated these same scriptures into their authoritative canon, they too, subjected the traditions of Israel (now viewed in the light of the new age which Jesus inaugurated) to a reinterpretation and recontextualization of radical proportions. Whatever else is included in the meaning of the phrase "on its own terms", as far as Childs is concerned, it certainly includes this dimension that the nature and reality of God has now been fundamentally redefined in "the light of the glory of Christ." According to Childs, in the interpretation of the Old and the New Testaments there will always be something of a dialectical tension. But the implications of this tension between the Old and the New need further elaboration by Childs so that the phrase "on its own terms" is more lucid and less problematic.

Finally, to the most crucial aspect of Childs' work: the end result, that is, his theological exegesis. However one assesses the hermeneutical significance of the canonical approach, what really matters in biblical interpretation is the quality of the

theological exegesis of the text itself. Our examination of this vital dimension to Childs' work showed that sustained and memorable theological exegesis was not convincingly achieved in both his BTONT and his Exodus commentary. Consider the facts. Childs commenced his work in developing the canonical approach in the 1960s. His IF essay (1964) was an important marker in this period. A decade later his Exodus commentary was published (1974). Since that time no biblical exegesis in the form of a commentary has been forthcoming, though Childs has been far from idle. He has written numerous articles and reviews and further developed his canonical approach in four substantial volumes covering the subject matter of both Testaments. His command of a vast range of literature is plain for all to see. The title of his 1997 Pro Ecclesia essay is most apposite, "Towards Recovering Theological Exegesis" as it perfectly captures his scholarly aspirations. But, unfortunately, in his exegesis of the biblical text to date, this recovery is far from being fully assured.

It must be said in fairness, however, that all the great interpreters of the Bible in the history of the Christian church have not consistently produced theological exegesis of the highest quality either. And that includes Luther, Calvin and Barth who are cited frequently in Childs' work with approval. But even when we take cognizance of this fact, there is still too much of a gap between Childs' hermeneutical theory and exegetical practice. True, Childs has initiated a massive undertaking in seeking to reconceptualize the nature of the study of the Bible vis-à-vis Christian theology. Yet his most substantial volume of over 700 pages, BTONT (1992), can best be described as prolegomena to the subject matter of biblical theology.

Earlier in this study, we looked at the nature of Childs' canonical approach to biblical interpretation and examined some of the main responses to Childs' proposals. It has been shown by some that modern hermeneutical theory may help Childs to develop and strengthen his interpretational ideas. That may be so. But the greatest asset which would assist and consolidate Childs' work is not more refinement and reshaping of his hermeneutical theory, *per se*, though that might be valuable in its own right; rather, it is by the most compelling asset of all, - sustained and memorable exegesis of the combined witness the Old and New Testaments which addresses the

subject matter of the Bible, the *res*, - the reality of God. More specifically, and to put it in Childsean terms, true biblical interpretation involves a *Sachkritik*, one in which the *Sache* is defined in terms of the reality of Jesus Christ.

We look forward with avid anticipation to B. S. Childs' forthcoming commentary on the book of Isaiah!

**APPENDIX.**

**Interview with Professor B. S. Childs**

**at Yale University, New Haven, U. S. A.**

**during May and December, 1997.**

## APPENDIX

### Interview with Prof. B. S. Childs at Yale University, May 1997 and December 1997.

**Q.1. Historical-critical methodology now incorporates a vast range of approaches to biblical interpretation which are at the disposal of the scholarly guild. To what extent can these be employed in the study of the Bible as Holy Scripture? What is their role and function?**

That is a real crucial question, of course. In the Reformation, Calvin would want to say that to study the Scriptures we have to know its grammar; that is part of God's mercy that he reveals himself in a way that can be grasped by the human mind. So the church always felt the need for a careful scrutiny of its Scriptures by the best means possible, i.e. languages and all that. In the 19th century it was just perfected more; we had not just an understanding of language, but of sociology, history and all these things, that made the questions more complicated. That is the issue, and one can debate whether historical-critical methodology has built into it certain assumptions that determine from the outset what the reality is. That is the danger, of course, and what I was trying to say was that if the use of the historical critical method is restricted, and its use is understood for what it can do, then it can be a useful tool. But you have to keep it under theological controls. Let us put it this way, the historical and form-critical methods set certain rules that determine what they can see. It's like a film, they can only see certain things.

The problem comes about when one says what the critical method sees is the only reality, so, I think our historical method can help us in understanding historical questions. It is a very useful tool. It's when one brings the dogma in, i.e. there is no reality apart from that which this tool can measure. That is the problem. (The measuring is often quite helpful). It is when one adds, if we cannot see it in our method it is not there; it is the arrogance of the historical critical method claiming it is the only way to understand that causes problems. All the new literary approaches, the aesthetic, etc, have challenged the rigid qualities of this whole method. In that sense they are allies, they recognize the aesthetic and other dimensions that obviously were missed in 19th century critical research.

**Q.2. Do the historical-critical methods deal with the issue of theological truth? For example, in the Old Testament, it states that 'God is Holy'. How can historical methods prove or disprove this statement?**

No, that is what they cannot do. The historical critical methods do not raise this question. Ultimately, historical methodology is so inadequate. It has its limits. As

David Steinmetz astutely observes, '..... the historical critics share a proclivity to defer the question of truth endlessly'. (Theology Today, 1980, p. 38).

**Q.3. R. W. L. Moberly has written an article on your work, in which he concludes, 'Childs's work is directed to one specific modern form of the perennial problem of the use of the Bible, that is, the problem of maintaining the Bible's theological integrity for the church in the light of historical criticism. It is by his success or failure here that his work must be judged.' (E.T. Jan. 1988) Do you think there has been any progress in solving this problem?**

It's such a complicated problem that, in a sense, I don't think that the scholarly guild are convinced. They feel threatened by it. I think the book on the O. T. (IOTS) had an impact on the O.T. group because I was in the field and recognised. Absolutely, this was not the case with the N.T. book. No one in the New Testament group took it seriously. I was not in the guild and the book was simply not read. In the O.T. guild many didn't like it but it still had an impact. But in the N.T., I mean they just closed off. It is only very recently from Germany that I have gotten a few positive responses for the New Testament book. By and large in N. America and in Britain the N.T. book has had no impact. It hasn't even been read.

The opposition from the evangelicals is just as strong from the liberals, that is the strange thing. People like Tom Wright and others have really no interest in it. An evangelical position would be represented by someone like Scalise who finds there can be no theological use of the Bible unless the tension between the Bible and its historical referentiality has been made to cohere. At that point it is much more complicated. At times you cannot have a witness to the resurrection and then say Christ is still in the grave. This is an historical referentiality, and Paul makes this clear. But in other places, . . . . I don't think that the witness of Genesis to the creation is depending upon the age of the earth, whether it is 6000 or 6,000,000 years old. There are different relations of referentiality. At times, historical referentiality is absolutely important, at other times it is minor. And in any case, what does historical referentiality mean?

**Q.4. Brett and Noble say that in your work there is a difficulty with your approach to historical questions. As they see it, the problem has not been solved in your work.**

Well, we cannot go back to the pre-critical period. I'm not sure there is a solution. I've been working on Second Isaiah. Now with our critical tools, you can show Babylonian influence, and you can reconstruct all sorts of 6th century settings in that. My point is



this: there are different kinds of historical referentiality. The critical historical referentiality lies somehow behind the text. Historical referentiality does play a role when Cyrus was to come to free the people; that is important for Second Isaiah; there is no doubt. But in Second Isaiah there is no setting in which the prophet addresses certain groups, like in Amos. It is either the word of YHWH, or the word of a prophet or the word of a servant. So I am making a difference between reconstructing historical referentiality which sometimes coheres with the biblical material. There is a difference between the reconstructed historical referentiality and the referentiality that the biblical narrative possesses; - we want to know that Abraham was the father of Isaac and Jacob. That is important. I guess what I am saying is that there are different levels of referentiality; there are some elements of referentiality you don't need faith in.

**Q.5. At one point, you say that the historical-critical methods are important in relation to the pre-history of the text when they show up the final form in sharp focus. What exactly do you mean?**

Yes, that is one point I would make. All this information can at times be very helpful in sharpening the text. I also argue another point that it is a dialectical relationship. Luther and Melanchthon said to their students that if you want to be a Biblical scholar you have to read Aristotle. You have to be trained by the master. He will teach you logic, he will tell you how to use language: so you have to be trained by Aristotle. But if you believe Aristotle you are done for. You cannot believe Aristotle and the Gospel. That is the dialectic. You have to know the form-critical, you have to be trained, if you do not do that, you are not going to make it. But if you believe all that stuff you are done for! I think that is that kind of dialectic that is always going to be there.

**Q.6. I can see a correspondence between learning from Aristotle in matters of logic and language, and the use of historical critical tools in biblical interpretation. To follow Aristotle, as you suggest, would not open up access to theological truth; but can we learn about the character of God when we employ critical methods?**

I think there is a parallel there. These are tools which help us to understand, as it were, the texture of the text, just as you study the kinds of brushes artists use, the paint quality and so on. But it doesn't actually tell you ultimately about the subject matter. At times form-criticism helped. I think that at times von Rad broke open and destroyed the reliance on source criticism, but very soon it gave limited help, and then it became a hindrance. What form-criticism was saying was that the material was not cast along as archival material, but liturgically, these were fixed conventions, and that

Israel's understanding of God was shaped by their worship. Form-criticism was attempting to see how that worked, but in the liturgical responses; form-criticism was really saying, lets look at the liturgical forms. And for a while it was helpful, but the formal side took over. Instead of opening up the material, it closed the material. So I think every method has that problem.

In my early years, I was under the influence of von Rad in form-criticism since he had been helpful. Von Rad learned form-criticism from Gunkel, but he said that Gunkel was only interested in the aesthetic side of scripture and not the content. So von Rad made a big step forward, but now, 50 years later, von Rad seems rather thin himself. I think one has to realise that the readership changes over the years.

When we first discovered rhetorical criticism, a sort of reading the whole, it seemed to be a fine help which got us away from fragmenting the text. But before long it started seeing the whole of the text as an entity in itself, a narrative without the concern for the subject matter, God. So you had everyone talking about the story, but never asked about the truth of the story.

**Q.7. To what extent are historical critical questions important in understanding the character of God in Ps. 23, and I Cor. 13. It seems to me that these scriptures cross the boundaries of time and directly interface with our Christian life and experience in a profound and challenging way. Yet, if we turn to the Gospels, historical critical questions will be, at times, crucial, in determining what Jesus said and did. Do you agree?**

Yes, that is true. You talk of Ps. 23. This is going to the heart of the Bible, but then we have Chronicles. One doesn't want to use the clear passages to denigrate the others. We have in the NT the glorious Gospels, but we also have 2 Peter. Luther had trouble with James because it seemed to him that it was less kerygmatic than Galatians. I think he was too radical there, but he did feel that it had a central role within the community of faith: it corrected misunderstandings of Paul. It is not as if every word in Scripture has the same closeness to the centre.

**Q.8. In your BTONT you gave two examples of exegesis - Genesis 22 and Matthew 21: 33 - 46 - in which you employed a canonical approach. Some observers have found these not to be convincing examples of memorable and sustained exegesis. How would you respond to this?**

My major question for dealing with that was to address those who said that we know the rules of O.T. exegesis, and we know the rules of N.T. exegesis, but to interpret the Old and New Testament together, there are no rules, it is completely charismatic, - that

is von Rad. I was trying to work out some basic rules by which one could bring some control in relating Old and New Testaments, so I chose one passage in the Old which was obviously important to the New, and one in the New that was obviously important in the Old and tried to see if that gave us some guidelines on how we proceed. I was really addressing a question of the guild. We have all these books on interpretation - the O.T. is done separately, the N.T. is done separately. In B.T. one uses systematic categories, etc, and there really are problems with that. What I was trying to say was that there are other ways of doing it. And ultimately what I am trying to suggest is that what controls it is the conviction that when you have content, or divine reality, that holds them together. It was answering a particular question that had arisen within the discipline rather than to do a full blown canonical approach.

**Q.9. In other words, you were not giving examples of canonical exegesis as it should be done. You were trying to put forward ideas that there were new dimensions which could be explored.**

I was trying to explore one dimension of BT which had not really been handled before. In the new German periodical, The Annual of Biblical Theology, what they do is to take a topic and assign O.T. people to the O.T. and N.T. people to the N.T. and when they relate it, it's on a high something like ethics, what are the ethics of this and that? But where does one find biblical exegesis that is related to BT, where does one find that? G. von Rad tries with the last four chapters of his O.T.T. but it is totally ad hoc, charismatic, he does not give any rules or anything. So that is what I was trying to address; whether it was successful or not, I don't know.

**Q.10. You were not presenting these as definitive canonical exegesis?**

No, no, it was not. Certainly not. It was exploring it. And you see, ultimately, I decided that the way to do BT best would be to do it topically because I was using categories that didn't arise out of the Bible. I felt that the categories allowed one at least access to the subject matter. I'm talking about the identity of God, etc, they are basic things. But the issue of how to deal with it exegetically remains a difficult problem.

**Q.11. So is the whole business of doing Biblical Theology getting to grips with the reality and nature of God?**

Yes that's right. That's what I wanted to do. And I felt that when you have a literature, like the O.T. which is going one way, and the Gospels - they are so different. We know that the Gospels started not by exegeting the O.T; they started by the explosion of the resurrection and the impact that Christ had. And then the church began to see that

Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth, but Jesus the Christ. So they begin to work. Some think like Stuhlmacher and others that there was one unbroken line from the Old to the New in terms of tradition. We know that is not the case. That is not the way the N.T. started; it was not a lot of rabbis sitting around Jesus and educating the people. So these examples of exegeting Gen. 22 and Matt. 21, they were a very limited probe. I took the easiest texts, two that resonated in both Testaments. I could imagine one could take, say, Ps. 22 and work it in some way, exegetically. There are ways of doing that.

**Q.12. Has any progress been made in establishing a coherent and convincing Biblical Theology since 1970?**

I doubt in our lifetime that there will be a real consensus. My concern was to get a serious alternative, so that the historical critical, liberal position was not the only alternative. I do not think for a moment that I will convince many within the guild that this is the heart of the Bible. What would we have done if there hadn't been people who kept prodding like the Bonhoeffers and others who showed us dimensions we had not seen? I have no illusions that I will suddenly convince the guild that this is the way to do it. I think we are getting more and more fragmented but I just know for myself when I read books like Martin Kähler's, 'The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ,' how grateful I was for someone to have sounded a note that I could not have expressed at that time. I just had a feeling and he was able to express what I was incoherent in saying.

**Q.13 What do you mean by the term 'theology' in the context of your commentary on Exodus?**

By 'theology' I mean an interpretation that does justice to the subject matter, in Latin, the 'res'; not just the content but the kerygmatic witness of the community to the substance who is God. You have to know what the text is pointing to; that is why the early church always said you look for the scope which is Jesus Christ. It is a circle; you have to know what you are looking for in order to find it. And when you find it, then you know what you are looking for in a better way.

**Q.14. Your Exodus commentary was published in 1974 and was regarded at the time as a pioneering approach to commentary writing. Some scholars noted that perhaps you were taking on too much in one commentary. Each passage, or pericope, was analysed at several different levels. How would you approach producing a revised edition of this work?**

Well, I think it was a bit arrogant for one to cover so much. What I would have liked to have had would be a whole team. But where could one find scholars of a close enough understanding that would enable them to work together? Really, one needed someone who was an expert in this and that. To cover that scope well, no one person can do it. So I felt it was a contribution, a kind of staking out the area; some of it was done without the knowledge needed. It really does need a whole team working in this together.

**Q.15. I was particularly thinking about the different sections in the commentary - Textual and Philological Notes, Literary and Form-Critical Analysis, O.T. Context, N.T. Context, History of Exegesis and Theological Reflection. What function do all these different sections have in a theological commentary?**

I am worried about all that kind of section by section approach, though I think that was necessary in that given context. But it is far from ideal. I don't particularly agree with the content of Fretheim's commentary on Exodus, but the strength of that book is that it has a coherence that mine doesn't have because he has a single essay type approach. And I think that is the strength of it. All these different kinds of levels or sections in mine are not ideal. The fact that the discipline is so shattered and fragmented, one has to speak to different groups, but that is a concession; it is not ideal. At that time I was not as critical of German scholarship as I am now. I am uneasy about the different levels or categories applied to each section in the commentary. But I was restricted by my audience. I had to have a certain credibility in writing it. The splitting up into different sections was taken from the German series, *Biblischer Kommentar* and that's not a successful series. Westermann writes three whole volumes, huge volumes on Genesis. In 1946 von Rad wrote a commentary, and despite its problems or disagreements one may have with it, one feels there is something very impressive about it: it has a unity. I felt to get all my stuff across I had to split it up like having textual, literary and so on. I am worried about that: having 5 or 6 sections on each section does not give a unified view of the book. Something is not quite right there.

From the Renaissance onwards there has been an explosion of knowledge. There was a period of about 100 years in which the commentators wrote commentaries on the first three chapters of Genesis and tried to put all that new knowledge into the creation account. What happened was you got folio volumes of 3000 pages - the whole thing collapsed by its sheer weight and you could not hear the message and that is what is happening now. We have so much now about textual criticism, literary-form criticism

and so on. I would just pose the question because of the great increase of knowledge whether we have to have a new form of commentary or whether something has to happen. We cannot continue to force all this stuff into a commentary.

**Q.16. When you wrote your Exodus commentary you were at the early stages of developing the canonical approach to biblical exegesis. Has it developed and been refined since 1974?**

A lot of water has gone under the bridge since then and I hope it has grown and developed. W. Brueggemann has just come out with a huge book of some 900 pages on OT Theology, and he is very critical of my work. The question one has to be looking at is that, for Brueggemann, any attempt to read the OT through the eyes of the New, or any ecclesiastical 'rule of faith', is for him rejected. He says you read the OT on its own, totally without a 'rule of faith', totally without kerygma; and you find that when you ask, "Who is God?," God is totally dependable and yet undependable. He has unlimited power, yet sometimes is impotent. In other words, what you get is such a confusion; it's gnostic almost. Irenaeus would have said, "No, you can't make God an unstable entity of some sort." When one comes to the book of Exodus and asks: "How can I understand this as Holy Scripture?" then this is a crucial question. But Brueggemann does not want to pose the question that way. He wants to have another access to God apart from Scripture.

**Q.17. So, how does one write a theological commentary on Exodus now?**

I'm not fully sure. The force of the commentary in that it follows through section by section, chapter by chapter, seriatim, that is a tremendous force that you lose if you were just writing essays on the doctrine of God, or the doctrine of this and that. There is something about following the biblical text; that is the great strength of it. The problem is the way the discipline has so expanded our knowledge that the commentary shows more and more signs of its inabilities with the complexities of the problems. Commentaries have to be restricted to certain kinds of questions and for theological reflection you have to stay with sermons. I am not sure what the answer is on that, but I would certainly admit that there are basic problems with trying to include the full richness of BT within a commentary. No one has dealt with the concept of 'costly grace' and 'cheap grace' in such a powerful way as D. Bonhoeffer in his book, 'The Cost of Discipleship'. This would be lost if it was put into a commentary form.

**Q.18. In Exodus we have examples of the application of personal and social moral laws where women are treated worse than men. How do we address this area of**

**ethics particularly as one seeks to regard Exodus as part of Holy Scripture?**

There is no question, there is a double standard. You can see within the O.T. itself a correction of much of this thing as in the way Malachi corrects any attempt that they can divorce their earlier wives, and the way which Deuteronomy humanises some of the laws in Exodus. So already there was a coercion from the subject matter, but I think that it took much more time until the full impact of the liberating God penetrated to the heart. There was that movement in the O.T.

**Q.19. In his essay on the Ten Commandments, "Interested Parties," S.A.P. 1995, D.J.A. Clines poses the question, "In whose interests are these commandments?" The assumption here is that these commandments are mere human constructs. How would you respond to this interpretational approach?**

This approach is not a witness to God's reality. It is quite hopeless at that point. These commandments were given to Israel in a certain context. And yet the way they were given, they were given in such a way not to be tied specifically to certain periods in Israel's life. They were seen as a fundamental description truthfully of God's demands on his people to be faithful. It is not just a kind of abstract ethic, the way that Kant wanted it, but as Christ said, there was always Israel's ability to take the edge of the commandments. When Jesus was asked about the commandments, he radicalised them, e.g. Thou shalt not kill, or Thou shalt not commit adultery - where a man looks on a woman to love her. He radicalised it; even the seventh commandment had the potential of losing its power, becoming a casuistic device. Jesus put away all that to show that the real force of that commandment was to confront you with the demands of God.

**Q.20. A feature of your hermeneutical concerns is the primacy of the final form of the text as it has come down to us. This implies that the pre-history of the text is of secondary importance in the interpretative task. There has been some criticism of this emphasis of the final form. Do you think this emphasis is sustainable in the light of these criticisms?**

Yes I feel on this point that they misunderstood that. When I talk about the final form, it is not as if one had no interest in the early form. It is just that at times as it has grown in places, the earlier form has been corrected and broadened by a deeper understanding. Frequently, the final form has picked up the earlier forms. In other words, they did not create it out of whole-cloth. In the original story of the Passover, they have trouble separating that from what the original story meant to later generations that keep celebrating it. So if you just reconstruct the earlier form, you

miss how Israel appropriated and how they understood it which is part of the message now. But I would not play final form over against that. What these critics don't understand really is what I am against is not the earlier forms of the tradition as it developed; it is reconstructing forms which are in a form that is not kerygmatic.

For example, when I deal with the parables, one can see how one form was used originally, and then, Luke adds it and puts it in another framework, and that shows there is a growth. What I don't agree with would be someone like Jeremias who wants to know what was the parable like when it first came out of Jesus' mouth. So the critics reconstruct it. That is not allowed. Brett just thinks that a text is flat, without any earlier forms, and is normative. Because this is material that has been lived by a community, I am much concerned with this density behind the text. I am much concerned with the various forms of the text that bear witness to a divine reality. I am not concerned with the text in itself. I mean, the text is not just a story. I want to know what the story tells us about God.

**Q.21. From your canonical perspective, is determining authorship a critical factor in interpreting the Pastoral Letters as Holy Scripture?**

I think one has to take seriously the author to whom the material is attributed. Still, we have to use flexibility in the sense that the ancient world had a different understanding of authorship. We know, for example, that Paul used an amanuensis. There was no question of plagiarism or something like that. Perhaps he said at one point to his amanuensis, "You know the people I know at Philippi, greet them all for me." So, in other words, you want to be sure you don't apply a modern view of authorship. When we get to the Pastorals, all sorts of problems arise. I mean, Galatians has a different history from the Pastorals where one can see Paul in real hot anger writing that. In the Pastorals we, at least, get the feeling that Paul has grown older; somebody might have had a role in it, but it is still Paul's word.

**Q.22. Do the Pastorals contain Pauline fragments then?**

It is not a question of the Pastorals being written some 50 years later about Paul. Paul is still the active voice. If you say this is a pseudepigraphical work written in the name of Paul falsely 50 years later, that destroys the thing. One would have to say that with the Pastorals the picture of Paul that emerges is not the feisty person of Galatians, but is someone who is the standard for sound doctrine. I take seriously the designated writer in the Bible. But we have a little more flexibility in understanding what is meant.

**Q.23. To accept Galatians as giving Paul's definitive understanding of the role**



**of the law in Christian thought and life would be unwise especially in relation to his more sustained and measured exegesis of the law in Romans. So, would interpreting Galatians in the broader context of the N.T. i.e. Romans, be a clear example of 'canonical context' as you understand it?**

Exactly. In Galatians Paul was addressing , with great fury, a particular situation and that has to be balanced by Romans which gives a broader context.

**Q.24. Do James and Matthew hold to a more Jewish profile of the law? Is there a contradiction between James and Paul?**

What I am doing with the canonical is, . . . if you set Paul and James, i.e. if you juxtapose them, its very hard not to see a contradiction. But if you see this as a circle setting parameters, that is what a rule of faith is. Within this circle - with the ability of various formulations together, it makes a coherent rule of faith. They mark boundaries. If you were to eliminate James from the canon then you would have real problems, that is if you make everything Pauline. When we talk about a rule of faith we are realising that the Church allowed much more of an area in which the Word of God, rather than a dogmatic formulation, would operate. Within the Church the early Christians were able to tolerate as true expressions of Christianity the faith that was formulated by John - by lovable John - and by the somewhat, at times, crotchety Paul! But they could not stand Philo and all those others. They were outside the parameters. It allows that variety which is the reason for genuine ecumenicity; but not everything goes with the apostolic faith. The 'rule of faith' concept allows for a variety of different formulations. Yes, there is diversity, but yet unity. And that is a very different thing from pluralism.

There is a genuine inner confessional in which we can learn from each other. I do think that Protestants can learn that dimension of catholicity which if you read the early church Fathers was basic there. This is an element of catholicity that Presbyterians have lost and I think the Free Church in general. But one has to be sure you understand that there is genuine dialogue and one can learn. To say that anything goes, that is pluralism, that is going nowhere.

**Q.25. In the act of interpreting the Christian Bible as Holy Scripture, what significance would you attach to Calvin's teaching of the illumination of the Holy Spirit?**

That is absolutely crucial. Regarding the role of the text, - the text does not save us. We are saved by the death and resurrection of Christ. The text has to point to that and the text, as Paul said, can become letter without Spirit; in other words, the Spirit is

that which keeps the text always tied to its subject matter that confronts us. We read about Abraham, et. al, but soon that history is in the background and the text is addressing the reader directly. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Q.26 In his book, Paul Noble poses the question: how would such an approach avoid the charge of fideism, or uncontrolled subjectivity?**

Yes, you see, that is the whole Enlightenment view. Whenever we talk about the spirit, you talk about the human spirit. Whereas from the trinitarian point of view that is not subjective, that is the third person of the trinity, God. The Holy Spirit is just as objective as the first and second persons of the trinity. The liberals took the Holy Spirit to be a projection of human spirit and subjective, whereas, for Calvin, God was the creator, Christ the Redeemer, the Holy Spirit was the one who constantly renewed the person hearing the Spirit of Christ. At that point the Spirit is absolutely crucial.

**Q.27. But would this not open up one to the charge of subjectivism?**

You see, they could not understand when Calvin said, how do we know the truth of the Bible other than by the witness of the Holy Spirit. That's totally subjective, according to the liberals. They do not understand the nature of what the Spirit does.

**Q.28. You speak of interpreting the O.T. on its own terms. What does this mean? Would you say that while the O.T. bears witness to Christ, it does so precisely as the Old Testament?**

A Christian reads the O.T. from a N.T. perspective; the larger context shapes the interpretation. I still think that for a Christian the O.T. makes a great contribution, and its witness on its own terms is part of the Gospel. Ecclesiastes shares the threat of death, and the Psalmist contemplates suffering. There is a sense in which the Christian life shares in this and other things like human suffering. What the Christian church saw in the O.T. e.g. the Jews were redeemed from Egypt, and yet they were waiting. In the N.T. the church began to realise that that same pattern was there. They had confessed that the New had come - and yet, they were waiting for this full coming; the pattern of 'already, but not yet' was already there. So that 'not yet' is still part of the Christian faith and Christians can pray with the Psalmist, who is in great suffering, and wonder what God's plan is.

We don't live with everything being fulfilled. In this sense you can read the O.T. When the Gnostics cut off the Christian faith from the humanity of the O.T. and from the life of Israel, - then they lost something. By its own voice we are saying that part of being a

Christian is to understand that side of that. Christ entered our world as a human, as a Jew, as an Israelite, and somehow that is part of the Gospel. The threat is that we either lose the newness of the Gospel or we are so overwhelmed with the newness. This was Paul's problem. The old Adam is still with us, in every person, and I think that is where the O.T. is so helpful. It reminds us that we have not been transformed yet.

**Q.29. In your essay, "Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology", you say one of the most difficult but crucial questions for any attempt at reclaiming the Bible for Christian theology turns on the way by which one understands the relation between the two Testaments. Given the fact that scholarship has shown the great diversity of material in both Testaments, what is the way forward?**

I think it is very important to reclaim the concept of a Christian Bible. It is a Christian Bible out of two Testaments. What I am arguing against in America is that the Presbyterian Church no longer speaks, because of political correctness, of the Christian Bible but of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. That to me has really lost something fundamental. To talk of the 'Christian Bible' is not to be dismissed as Christian chauvinism. It's something basic to the Christian faith, that the two Testaments, together have a unified witness. The reason the O.T. is in our canon is not just for historical background. It was incorporated because the early church confessed that in the O.T. they heard a testimony to their living Lord Jesus Christ, and that is why the O.T. is there. Never did the Church spell out in detail what the relation was other than to say it is a Christian Bible, unified in a common testimony of Old and New Testaments; but exactly how they are related, none of the creeds ever tell us. That is why it is an ongoing problem.

**Q.30. It is difficult to see how the two Testaments can be united in any kind of coherent way to attract universal credence in the scholarly guild.**

It has got to be theological. You cannot do it in terms of story, or even in terms of Heilsgeschichte; it doesn't work. Sometimes juxtapositions of law and grace, promise and fulfilment are helpful. It is a very complicated thing and sometimes aspects are picked up. I would not reject law and Gospel, but there is no overarching solution.

In one of the sections in Calvin's Institutes (Bk. 2) he has chapters on the similarities of the Testaments and the differences. They are very important chapters. I think that is one of the first attempts systematically to set out the continuity and the discontinuity.

In the Gospels I was trying to look at the various approaches to explaining the

differences. Conservatives sought to harmonise them by saying the authors were speaking of different events, or other techniques of that sort. On the other hand, the liberal view held there are just lots of different mistakes, and you don't even attempt to do that, they are just the writer's perception. I was trying to show that there is a way in which one could recognise genuine differences, but nevertheless there was a theological integrity that incorporated the differences and that you did not harmonise in terms of referentiality either the way the conservatives or the liberals did. There was a way of using the differences, but no one took that up at all. I thought that was a problem the church has wrestled with a long time, more that 1500 years, on what to do with the differences in the Gospels. I was trying to set up different ways in which the integrity of the text in their different quality could be recognised.

**Q.31. One of the most difficult areas between the two Testaments would, I suspect, be the ban in Numbers - the concept of Holy War, the Conquest etc, in relation to the ethics of the kingdom of God found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. Ch: 5 - 7). How is this problem to be resolved?**

Even in that case, Paul is attempting to calm down these wild Corinthians and he appeals to their ethical sense in terms of the O.T., in other words, 'How can you do this, justice is mine, I will avenge.'" So in a sense, even there, it is not between primitive O.T. and the Christian N. T., but it is much more complicated than that. Even in the imprecatory Psalms, how that is used in the N. T. and in the O. T. is a very interesting ethical question. So I guess what I'm saying, I do think these ethical questions are very important. Seldom do I find, though, that the fault line is between the Old and the New. It is much more complicated than that.

Regarding the killing of the Canaanites, one has to realise that even the way the O. T. is made up and composed, you never had the conquest of Canaan as an ongoing possibility for celebration. You don't celebrate that in the way you celebrate Passover. The conquest of Canaan was an event in Israel's history that was once and for all and never repeated. So there were things in the O. T. that were either condemned or rendered to the past. It was part of the background. When the Puritans and the Israelis used the conquest as a warrant for killing their enemies, that is a hopeless misuse of the O. T. itself.

**Q.32. When one talks about diversity in the Old and New Testaments, how does this affect one's understanding of Scripture? Are not some parts of Scripture more authoritative than others? I take it you would not be in favour of a 'canon within a canon,' but would there not be different levels of authority in Scripture?**

I think so, and I think that is what one sees within the old dispensation. What happens when you have O. T. law within the context of a theocracy? What happens when you no longer have a people of God identified with the Israelites? There were all kinds of other changes that had to be made, and much of that was made in the N. T. by pulling out certain features. For example, over against the nationalism and the racism - focussing on Israel, the N. T. talks about all peoples, and yet the N. T. writers used as their proof texts the prophets. If you look at the message of Isaiah that was addressed to the chosen people, ultimately the distinction was not between Jews and Gentiles, but between the righteous and obedient servants, and the disobedient people. Already within the O. T. you have the roots of overcoming the time conditionality of Israel's original situation. So, already that force was there, and that often when the N. T. supports the fact that with God there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, then they cite O. T. passages above all things. There is in a sense, - the Germans call it *Sachkritik*, - that the text is rendered and informed, not by a universal canon within a canon, but that the subject matter continues to control the understanding.

I think the authority of Scripture is ultimately the authority of Christ. By that I mean, I think the reality of Christ is the authority by which we judge both the Old and New Testaments. What I am saying here is that as Christians, it is Christ who is the authority. It is not as if the Old Testament has to be corrected by the New, and the New is the means of understanding the Old. But both are seen in the light of the living reality of Christ. So it is not as if the O.T. is thought of as sub-Christian and has to be brought up to an ethical standard in the New. That is the liberal way of seeing it.

We say that both Testaments are true witnesses, but because we are human, and the writers were human, both Old and New Testaments can be misunderstood; and it is the living Christ that keeps the Church truthful. That is where the real authority lies. But there is no principle by which the Old Testament always stands corrected by the New because sometimes a N.T. interpretation is misunderstood unless it is seen in the light of the Old and the other way round. So I would keep very much the fact that it is Jesus Christ, who is not a figure of the past, but our modern living Lord who ultimately is the source of our authority.

**Q.33. If one were to investigate the status and authority of the Bible in the work of B.S. Childs, would there be a coherent theory?**

I think that could be explored. There are certain basic concerns that extend throughout all the works. For example, in the Exodus commentary, even though I had

not formulated this canonical approach, there were many of the themes that I later picked up and put within that category that were already there. So there is a continuity; it is just that I have sharpened up. I think my chapter on textual criticism is much better in the N.T. than in the OT. book. So I have learned in that way. But the same general themes underlie pretty much the whole work. The early works like 'Myth and Reality', I have moved away from that stuff, but basically I think there are certain themes which I think are consistent.

**Q.34. So, could it be said that underpinning your concern for treating the Old and New Testaments as Holy Scripture, you are informed as to some understanding of the authority of Scripture?**

To interpret a N.T. or O.T. passage in the light of its canonical context implies that the Bible has a coherence which suggests that it has a single author. The term 'canon' means that the text is not just a story, but it is an authoritative written standard of church authority. Canon means authority. On one level, God is the author of Scripture, and in another, we know that one book is by Isaiah, one is by Jeremiah, John, Matthew and so on. Ultimately, the Bible has God as its author. And that is why the footprints of the human authors are sometimes not visible, the writer does not feel that his identity has any significance at all. At other places, the time conditionality is apparent, but yet in a given sense the Word of God came through the writer. So it depends on what level you are speaking.

**Q.35. In the Patriarchal narratives, there is a given understanding of God, and how the individual communes with God, while with Isaiah we move onto a lofty, higher ethical understanding of God. And with the Christ event, a new dimension is reached in God's revelation of himself. Is there such a phenomenon as 'progressive revelation'?**

Oh, I think there is, but the term is used in different ways. It was correctly used by Irenaeus to talk about God's unfolding, the revelation of his being, his plans and purpose, and in that sense there was a growth in the knowledge of God. The problem with the term is that once you have Hegel there, and it's read in the context of idealistic philosophy, that is anathema to the OT. That is not what is meant in Christian theology. And I think that is why people have backed off "progressive revelation' because it is so Hegelian. But if one makes the distinction, quite clearly there is growth, there is no question about that.

**Q.36. Various monographs, dissertations and essays have mushroomed from your interpretative proposals, e.g., Brett, Barton, Noble, Scalise and Morgan. Have these writers convinced you that your approach to interpreting the Christian Bible as Holy Scripture has been correctly understood and strengthened?**

One always learns when you see how you are being heard. And so you try to see whether its something you had not thought about and so correct your position, or whether you should redefine it, or whether it is so different you don't even recognise yourself. I don't recognise myself as I am portrayed by Barr, whereas with Scalise, he points out that in my first books I have not dealt adequately with the larger canon, i.e., with the Apocrapha. I take that as a just criticism since a large number of Christians have always accepted the Apocrapha. It is an issue I will have to deal with, and he correctly saw that. I had assumed a Protestant canon. So, some I have learned from, others, I don't recognize myself. One learns, and one despairs!

**Q.37. But, have these writers correctly understood your concerns?**

Not really. They are all pursuing their own interests and questions. Scalise is following some kind of foundationalism, Brett is pursuing post- modern studies and Barr , he follows his own agenda. With Barr, one of his criticisms was that I was lending support to Fundamentalists. My response was that that had not really happened. I have gotten no support from conservative groups. They hold me in great suspicion. So that is Barr's problem, and not theirs. I would be happy to get more positive support from the various sides. I do not regard that as a serious charge. Barr just didn't do his homework there. In terms of information he was wrong.

I was surprised that I got a much more positive response from German Catholics than from American Catholics. And that is a complicated thing. American Catholics were under the heavy hand of dogmatics. For them, the historical-critical method is liberation and anything that attacks it they see as an enemy; whereas in Germany, Catholics are not under that feeling, so they are happy to have tradition, etc. There is a very different response from the American Catholic as compared with the German Catholic. In America, they think it is a step backwards, they don't want to hear about the rule of faith, that's what they are running away from. The future of the American Catholic Church is to embrace modernity and it is true that they have struggled to get their own freedom. But it is the German Catholics who have translated my Biblical Theology; it was not the Protestants. So it is quite surprising who your friends are.

**Q.38. How do you evaluate sociological methodology in the study of the Bible?**

The way I see it is that ultimately, in a sense, it is a Christological problem. How could someone like Jesus of Nazareth, who was born at a particular time, and a Jew with limited circumstances and language, ever be the fullness of God? That is a mystery. What the church has said is that, even though the Bible was written by humans, and in different forms, etc, the miracle is that, in that time-conditioned form, God speaks truthfully. As the Christian Church has said, even though Jesus was a time-conditioned man, the reality of the one true God was not distorted but seen in its clarity. How can eternity be represented in one individual? That is a logical question to pose. But that is what the church proclaims.

All that the historical critical methods have shown is the different aspects of the humanity and the language; the ultimate paradox that God could communicate truthfully through human language, that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. We do not believe that the language is such a barrier. Kant felt that God was a mystery and everything was filtered through human mentalities; there was no way to discover God himself. But that the Christian Church says this is not the case. That transcendent God did enter into our experience, and we felt and tasted and saw. So at that point, its a major paradox.

The trouble with the sociological approach is that you cannot measure the miraculous and the wonder of what God has done in the world. You cannot put that within the laws of human cause and effect, as if you can explain everything by sociological means. The whole Bible bends over against that. Sure, we are all shaped by our environment and all that, but in spite of that, there is the chance for change and transformation. What we object to is explaining God's activity and forcing it into the patterns of human experience as if there is no newness coming in.

The whole change between Saul and Paul can be explained, like, he had a bad conscience, and he had a bad night, he wasn't sleeping well and he was feeling guilty and all that. But that is not the way the N.T. sees it. I have pin-pointed with my colleague W. A. Meeks that when one reads a Bible passage like Romans where Paul deals with justification by faith and a new life, how is this to be understood? This is rendered by Meeks by the categories of friendship and resocialization. He is forcing patterns of human experience that flattens completely the force of the N. T.



**Q.39. How do the words of men become the Word of God?**

Luther saw that every time the minister stood up and said, "Hear the word of the Lord". All you hear is his voice. And the miracle is that out of the spoken words of the minister, God is actually speaking. Luther has this wonderful story of a man who died and went to enter heaven. At the judgement Peter said, "You are condemned to hell"

"But that is not fair, I never heard the word of the Lord", he protested.

Peter interjected, " But you did hear it every Sunday morning".

"No! No!", the man said, "All I heard was that ignorant Pastor mouthing off nothings. "

And Peter said, "Exactly, that was God speaking to you!".

The whole paradox of the sermon as the extension of human words is really the vehicle for God's word.

**Q.40. In his article, "The Canonical approach of B. Childs" (E.T. Mar. 1995), S. Fowl drew parallels between your work and that of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Do you think this was helpful?**

I feel he saw some insights. I have read a little Gadamer, but it is second-hand information; Gadamer is not on my front burner. I may have been indirectly influenced. Von Rad lived next door to Gadamer so he was influenced by him and so maybe I heard some Gadamer through von Rad, but he was not a direct influence.

**Q.41. You are currently writing a commentary on Isaiah. Are you employing the same type of format headings which you used in Exodus, or are you coming to the task with a different conceptual framework?**

No, I am not using any of these division/section headings, as in Exodus. I am not doing sections in that way; basically it is a much more unified approach. I was never happy with the section by section approach, especially the last section; it was totally inadequate. I have forgotten all that stuff now, and I am really going right to the text itself.

**Q.42. How much critical study are you bringing into this work?**

I am using some of the methods in a minor kind of way, to see whether it helps or not. What I am seeing in Isaiah as the main force is that, as the book grows, the later parts of the book have picked up, intertextually, the first parts of the book and used them again, so the whole reverberates and that is what brings the book together. Just today I was reading Is. Ch. 65 and when the author is talking about the new heaven and the earth, suddenly he cites the Messianic passage verbatim. And that ties Ch.6 to the end of the book; so I am trying to show how the development of the book consciously took

different parts and brought them together to make one unified message.

**Q.43. Is it the case that your understanding of Isaiah in this ongoing development is but another confirmation of the canonical process?**

Yes, no question about it. The major problem with von Rad was that he did not realise that as scripture grew, it increasingly took the role of written authoritative scripture and therefore everything that was happening to the Jewish community they tried to relate to something that had been said earlier.

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