

STUDIES

The place of Henry Wheeler Robinson among Old Testament Scholars

H WHEELER ROBINSON'S career as a minister, teacher, scholar, and principal extended over a period of forty-five years. During this period he contributed to the scholarly world of theological and Old Testament studies fourteen books, one hundred and thirty articles, and one hundred and twenty-two reviews. The purpose of this article is to assess the place of Robinson among Biblical critics of his day through pointing out, by means of specific illustration, both the weaknesses and the strengths of his position.

Robinson studied at Regent's Park College, the University of Edinburgh, Mansfield College at Oxford University, and the Universities of Strassburg and Marburg under such Old Testament scholars as G. Buchanan Gray, G. W. Thatcher, S. R. Driver, Cheyne, Margoliouth, Budde, Nowack, and Nöldeke. The high regard his professors had for his scholarship is evidenced by his capturing every major prize in his field at Oxford University: Junior and Senior Septuagint Prize, Hall-Houghton Syriac Prize, and Junior and Senior Kennicott Hebrew Scholarship. He was tutor at Rawdon Baptist College (1906-1920) and principal of Regent's Park College, first in London (1920-1927) and then in Oxford (1927-1942). He held membership in such learned societies as the London Society for the Study of Religion (which included such notable scholars as H. B. Workman, R. N. Flew, Edwyn Bevan, C. H. Dodd, Baron von Hügel, and Claude G. Montefiore), the Baptist Historical Society, the Oxford Society of Historical Theology, and the British Society for Old Testament Study; he served as president of the last three of these societies.

But he had his limitations. One of the weaknesses of Robinson as an Old Testament scholar was that he often worked in fields which were not his specialty. Almost from the year 1911 with the publication of *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, and certainly since 1923, when he wrote "The Psychology and Metaphysics of 'Thus saith Yahweh,'" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Robinson's major specialties were Hebrew psychology and Old Testament theology. Had he concentrated his research in these areas, he would undoubtedly have developed more fully the implications of his understanding of the nature of man in Hebrew thought and possibly have completed the second volume of his projected "Theology of the Old Testament." But instead of making major contributions in limited areas, he wrote in many fields, realizing that he had the ability and

the obligation to communicate the results of Biblical scholarship to the non-specialist. It was also difficult for him to decide whether he should be a Biblical scholar or a systematic theologian. Because his earliest teaching responsibility was in the field of theology, he was constantly attracted to this discipline, producing such notable works as *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit* (1928) and *Redemption and Revelation in the Actuality of History* (1942). While both these volumes are competent works, they lack the originality that is found in certain of his Old Testament writings.

Another weakness of Robinson as a scholar was that, within the Old Testament field itself, he gave time and energy to tasks which did not involve original research. While he accurately recorded historical events in his *The History of Israel: Its Facts and Factors* (1938), he was not interested in the careful analysis of the archaeological data and the historical documents that is a hallmark of the historian. Robinson preferred to accept the theories of other historical critics, often without serious question, in order to proceed to a discussion of such theological topics as history as a medium of revelation, time and eternity, and the Hebrew philosophy of history. This same evaluation can be made of his *The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning* (1937) and *The Cross in the Old Testament* (1916-1926). In these books Robinson relied heavily upon work done by other scholars, accepting, with little reservation, the established Wellhausen position in literary analysis. He showed little interest in the detailed analysis of the literary sources themselves, but rather emphasized the religious message of the Bible which he believed the results of Biblical criticism enabled one the better to understand. These volumes are unimpressive as contributions to the field of higher criticism, but as theological treatises which convey the religious message of Scripture, they are excellent. Robinson was not, by choice or by inclination, a higher critic; he appreciated fully the painstaking work of the archaeologist, the careful analysis of ancient documents by the historical critic, and the analytic methods of the literary critic, but he was not interested in devoting his energies to these tasks. Yet what appears as a weakness in Robinson's writings is, in fact, a matter of emphasis; Biblical criticism was, for Robinson, a prolegomenon to the theological investigation of Scripture. His originality is found in his emphasis upon the deep religious message within Scripture, a dimension of Biblical studies often neglected by the higher critic.

Perhaps the most serious weakness of Robinson as an Old Testament scholar was his inability to modify his position in the light of new developments. Consistency of thought is a virtue, but his resistance to change led him to work out his position alone without engaging in serious dialogue with his colleagues. He refused, for example, to take seriously the Scandinavian School of Old Testament critics. Although he was sensitive to the theological limitations of the Wellhausen School, nowhere in his writings did he acknowledge the modifications of this theory as expounded by such scholars of

Johannes Pedersen and Ivan Engnell. The traditional Graf-Wellhausen dates for J, E, D, and P were accepted by Robinson, and he never entered into the controversy over "strata" and "document" found within the "Uppsala School." This resistance to the Scandinavian position is also seen in his rejection of the existence of cult prophets in the pre-exilic period, a position primarily associated with Sigmund Mowinckel. In an early work, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (1913), he contrasted priest and prophet, the former representing man's approach to God, the latter revealing God's approach to man (second edition, 1956, p. 141). In his latest book *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (published posthumously, 1946), this position is not seriously modified. While he does not in the later volume present prophet and priest in direct conflict, still the four pages in the chapter "Priest and Prophet" devoted to Mowinckel's argument for the existence of cult prophets fail to do justice to the Scandinavian position (pp. 222-225). Robinson's view of the role of the priest in Israel's religion also failed to appreciate fully the emphasis being placed by scholarship in his day upon the influence of Canaanite religious practices upon the pre-exilic priests of Israel. While Robinson rightly saw the priest as one who presented torah as an interpretation of revelation, his argument would have been strengthened had he acknowledged the debt Israel owed the Canaanite cult and then proceeded to explain wherein Israel's faith was distinctive.

To be aware of Robinson's limitations is not in anyway to minimize the significant contributions he made to Old Testament scholarship. To Robinson goes the honour of being one of the first Biblical scholars to explore in depth Hebrew psychology. Before the publication in Danish of Johannes Pedersen's *Israel: Its Life and Culture, I-II* (1920), Robinson had already broken ground in this field with his article "Hebrew Psychology in Relation to Pauline Anthropology" in *Mansfield College Essays* (1909) and his book *The Christian Doctrine of Man*. One year before Pedersen's book appeared in English, Robinson contributed an important article entitled "Hebrew Psychology" to *The People and the Book* (1925), edited by A. S. Peake. His major contribution in this field was the discovery that in Hebrew thought each organ of the human body possessed a physical-psychical-ethical life of its own; the "breath-soul" was thought to have entered the body and to have imparted to it a life which, in turn, permeated all the bodily organs enabling them to have independent physical and psychical functions. Robinson referred to this phenomenon as "a diffused consciousness," a view which has exerted considerable influence in the field of Hebrew psychology. This concept Robinson found especially helpful in understanding the prophets of Israel, for there he saw the revelation of God being received through the prophets' eyes and ears and, in turn, being conveyed to the people through the prophets' cleansed lips. It may be, however, that Robinson overstressed the independent psychical-

physical life of the bodily organs, taking too literally what is really a figure of speech. So argues A. R. Johnson in his book *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (first edition, 1949; second edition, 1964), where the individual bodily organs are interpreted as merely representing the whole rather than being "self-operative," i.e., having independent physical-psychical functions. Johnson criticizes Robinson for taking the text too literally when one reads of the flesh as longing, the eyes as bearing witness, etc., when what is found here is the use of synecdoche.

Perhaps the most distinctive contribution of Robinson was his understanding of the Hebrew conception of corporate personality ("The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality," in *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testament, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 66 (1936), pp. 49-62). Of all the research projects to which he directed his scholarly attention, this is the one which is most often associated with his name. Robinson acknowledged his indebtedness to the prior work of J. B. Mozley, who pointed out the defective sense of individuality in the Old Testament. Combining this with an emphasis upon the group found in primitive thought in general and Hebrew thought in particular, Robinson developed the corporate side of this concept. The Hebrew conception of personality discussed in the preceding paragraph provided the necessary clue to the Hebrew conception of community. As in the human body there is an interdependence of each of the parts upon the whole, so in the community the individual has meaning only as he is related to the group. Corporate personality means the treatment of the family, clan, city, and nation as the basic unit of society, rather than the individual. Whereas modern man thinks of society as made up of separate, isolated individuals, the Hebrew man thought the individual received his identity through the group to which he belonged; whereas modern man believes each person should be rewarded or punished for his own deeds, the Hebrew man believed the punishment or blessing due the individual was visited upon the entire society.

Robinson employed this concept extensively as an exegetical tool. He believed that it enabled the Hebrew, without any belief in a future existence beyond the grave, to transcend his limitations by extension into the past and into the future through participation in the group. The belief that the group is actualized in the individual also enabled the prophet, as an individual, to identify himself concretely with the group, Israel. This fluidity between the one and the many was used to explain the transitions in certain Psalms between the singular and the plural: the individual and the society are easily interchangeable because they are so realistically identified. Indeed, the majority of scholars today still accept Robinson's use of corporate personality to identify the Servant of the Lord in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah with the prophet himself as representative of the nation, with the nation whose proper mission is being fulfilled by the prophet,

and with the inner group of the prophet's followers. The prophet and Israel and the faithful disciples of the prophet form a "psychical whole"; they are one through corporate identification. Finally, we should note his use of this concept in New Testament studies to help explain the relationship of the corporate unity of the Church with Christ her Lord and the Pauline understanding of the relationship of Adam to all men and of Christ to the man of faith.

This concept of corporate personality was applied to the Hebrew conception of God in a monograph by A. R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (1942). But in recent years Robinson's position has come under attack, as in J. de Fraine's *Adam et son lignage; Etudes sur la notion de 'personnalité corporative' dans la Bible* (1959), in G. E. Mendenhall's "The Relation of the Individual to Political Society in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Studies in Memory of H. C. Allemann*, pp. 89-108, edited by Myers, Reimherr, and Bream (1960), in J. R. Porter's "The Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'corporate personality' in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum*, XV (1965), pp. 361-380, and in J. W. Rogerson's "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-examination," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series XXI (April, 1970), pp. 1-16.

Much of what Robinson contributed to the study of the Hebrew prophetic consciousness can be found in the writings of other scholars, but a unique contribution was made in his analysis of the prophetic use of specific acts to actualize the will of God in history. His personal notes indicate that his interest in this field of study began before 1926.

The "Symbolic Magic" of the Prophets. Need for a careful study, especially in the case of Ezekiel, of the extent to which the prophets actually did all the things they said they did. Gressman (in conversation) doubts this. I think that they usually did something typical or representative, though from the nature of the case they could not always do literally what they said they did. There may be, for example, a double symbolism in Jeremiah's reference to the linen girdle (xiii) hidden by Euphrates — see my note in Peake. Ezekiel is rich in these symbolisms — e.g. the two sticks in 37: 15 f. (Unpublished personal notes "The psychological terms of the Hebrews,' material collected and studies of special points for the Senior Kennicott Scholarship, October, 1901: The Hebrew Idea of Personality, vol. I," p. 141, in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.)

But there is no indication in his published works prior to 1927 ("Prophetic Symbolism," *Old Testament Essays*, edited by D. C. Simpson) that he interpreted the prophetic symbolic act as important in the actual fulfilment of God's purposes. In *The Religious Ideas*

of the *Old Testament*, he had occasion to refer to the strange behaviour of the prophets, but he related it to certain psychopathic features which he regarded as an aspect of the prophetic consciousness.

The act of Isaiah in "walking naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a portent" suggests a close parallel in the case of George Fox, who put off his shoes outside Lichfield at the Lord's command, and saw channels of blood in the streets through which he went to cry "Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield!" The abnormal psychosis is surely present in both cases. (p. 116.)

By the year 1926 he had changed his interpretation of these prophetic deeds, now maintaining that the prophets saw these acts as performed under the control of the Spirit in which the will of God was actualized in their lives. The prophets believed that their symbolic acts were partial realizations of what would come to pass and that by performing these deeds they actually affected the future course of events. In this way, through the life of the prophet, God was believed to exert his control over history. The amount of Biblical material Robinson was able to use to support his position is impressive. Yet, as one analyzes the prophetic act, it becomes clear that Robinson at times pressed the text into the service of his own position. For example, in the case of Jeremiah's breaking of the potter's flask to symbolize the destruction of Judah (Jer. xix), Robinson believed it is significant that Jeremiah broke the flask *before* he went to the temple to deliver his message of doom. For Robinson this clearly reveals that the broken vessel was not an act used to illustrate the message of destruction, but was an act performed by Jeremiah to set in motion the will of God. But is this the most likely interpretation of the text? Could it not, with greater validity, be argued that had the breaking of the flask been interpreted by Jeremiah as an actualization of the will of God, then there would have been no need to preach in the temple? While it may be that the Western interpreter often overstresses the subjective effect upon the hearer that the prophetic word and deed were to bring about, still it can be argued that Robinson's emphasis upon Hebrew "realism," where the word and deed of the prophet were believed to help achieve God's purpose in history, underestimates the prophetic call to repentance. Greater justice would have been done to the prophetic word and deed if a balanced emphasis had been placed upon both Hebrew "realism" and the effect of the word and act upon the listener. Clearly the public ministries of all the prophets indicate their great concern that the people of Israel hear their messages and respond with faithfulness.

It should also be noted that Robinson's interpretation of the prophetic act came near to regarding it as magic. This he recognized at the beginning of his investigation; in two places in his personal notes he referred to the prophetic act as symbolic magic. I have given

one of these references in the preceding paragraph; the other reference follows:

A useful study of prophetic symbolism might be made, starting with the conceptions of symbolic magic and showing how these were transfigured in the higher prophecy of Israel. The instances (e.g. Jeremiah's yoke, Isaiah's going "barefoot-naked") should be exhaustively collected and the exact degree of potency ascertained. Other cases of symbolism, such as trampling on the necks of prisoners (Josh.) should be cited in illustration. A practical application of these results might be made in regard to the conception of primitive Christian baptism, probably an effective symbolism of this kind. This might show that even in Paul the Hellenistic element is not so great as has been argued. (Unpublished personal notes "Hebrew Psychology; being notes of work subsequent to date of Kennicott Essay," p. 117, in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.)

Yet nowhere in his published material on this subject did he characterize prophetic symbolism as magic, nor did he discuss the issue at any length. The closest he came to recognizing the problem was when he wrote in "Prophetic Symbolism," *Old Testament Essays*, "The prophetic act is itself a part of the will of Yahweh, to whose complete fulfilment it points; it brings that will nearer to its completion, not only by declaring it, but in some small degree as affecting it." (p. 15). The phrase "in some small degree" reveals Robinson's reluctance to accept the full implication of his position. But in answer to the charge that this is magic, he would argue that in magic man attempts to control God, forcing him to act benevolently, while in prophetic symbolism is seen religion at its highest where the prophetic consciousness has translated the divine will into concrete acts; the prophet is not manipulating God but rather is yielding to the divine control.

Fifteen years later Robinson employed this "realistic" interpretation of prophetic word and deed to interpret Hebrew sacrifices ("Hebrew Sacrifice and Prophetic Symbolism," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XLIII (July-Oct., 1942), pp. 129-138). He argued that just as the prophetic word and act were efficacious in the accomplishment of God's purpose, so the sacrifice did something objective in regard to the relation of God to the offerer. The effects of the sacrifice cannot be explained solely in terms of the subjective effect upon the offerer; rather, the sacrifice was regarded as efficacious in accomplishing that relationship with God desired by the offerer. When the flesh of the sacrificial animal was eaten by the person who made the peace offering, he believed that the communion between man and God, to whom the animal was offered, was re-established. The person who sacrificed a burnt offering to God believed that if it was accepted God would bless the offerer. The

offering did not constrain God to bless him, but it was commanded by God and when accomplished God would not withhold his blessing. The person who offered unto God a sin offering believed realistically that the act of sacrifice annulled the effect of the act of sin he had committed and restored communion with his God. In each case, the sacrifice itself was an efficacious act which was significant in accomplishing the desired results. The use of the Psalms within the temple to create the right mood in the worshipper indicates that mere mechanical repetition of the sacrifice was not enough; the ritual must be performed in the right spirit. At the same time, the Hebrew regarded the right spirit as ineffectual if not also accompanied by the sacrifice. Just as the prophetic word and deed were effective in the fulfilment of God's purposes, so the sacrificial act was a causative factor in establishing communion between Israel and God.

A second contribution Robinson made to the study of the Hebrew prophetic consciousness was his insight into the "Council of Yahweh" ("The Council of Yahweh," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XLV (July-Oct., 1944), pp. 151-157). The Hebrews believed that just as an earthly king had his court of advisors, so their God was surrounded by heavenly spirits which offered him counsel and did his bidding. While this concept may be based upon an ancient primitive polytheism, it has been transformed by the Hebrew faith to convey the majesty and splendour of their God. The heavenly hosts do not challenge God's supremacy but reflect the grandeur of his court. Now the prophets believed that they were qualified to speak for God because they had access to the divine will by virtue of their admission to the council meeting. There is a tendency among Western interpreters of the Old Testament to take as mere metaphor what is actually realistic. Admission to the "Council of Yahweh" did not designate merely an intuitive awareness of the will of God, but conveyed the prophetic belief that they had stood before God much as a servant stands before his king. Robinson's insight has been influential in interpreting the use of the plurals in the creation story ("Let us create man in our image," Gen. i 26) and in the tower of Babel story ("Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language," Gen. xi 7), as well as in understanding the call of Isaiah (Isa. vi) and the Prologue to Job (Job i-ii).

A third contribution Robinson made to the study of Hebrew prophecy was his sensitivity to the prophetic moral consciousness as a primary medium of revelation. The Hebrews believed that the spirit of man is derived from and akin to the Spirit of God. If this is true, then anthropomorphic thought about God is the only valid approach to God. The prophets acknowledged the Transcendence of God, but they believed his Immanence in their own consciousness provided the best avenue to a knowledge of his attributes. They do not share with modern man the aversion to anthropomorphic thinking, for they believed that their own highest moral consciousness was analogous to the divine consciousness. The prophets believed God is kind, just,

and righteous for these were the virtues most honoured among men. The term Robinson coined to describe this use of human analogy to receive divine knowledge was "higher anthropomorphism," the belief that the gateway into the Holy of Holies where God dwells is the prophetic consciousness.

Robinson's ability to avoid extreme positions in Biblical interpretation led him to an understanding of revelation in the Old Testament equalled by few other scholars. Nowhere is his mature and balanced view better seen to advantage than in his examination of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the Biblical view of revelation. H. D. McDonald, in his *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study, 1860-1960* (1963), maintains that Robinson overstressed subjective interpretation and underemphasized the uniqueness of the event itself (pp. 113, 167, 244-247). But Robinson believed that no sharp distinction should be made between subjectivity and objectivity in the process of revelation. To overstress the Godward aspect of revelation would be to interpret it as a series of divine acts in history which remain largely unintelligible to the observer. On the other hand, to overemphasize the manward aspect is to rob it of its redemptive nature. If revelation is to be redemptive, and it must be redemptive or it is not revelation, it must involve both a Godward and manward dimension; God must disclose himself to man if man is to know the divine nature; man must interpret the events as God's self-disclosure if they are to be seen as revelatory. It is the blended unity of the divine and human factors that makes revelation possible.

Robinson often turned to the Exodus event as an illustration of the blending of objectivity and subjectivity. For the Exodus event to be revelatory there must be an objective event interpreted by a subjective prophetic faith. But Robinson then proceeded to point out that this combination of event and interpretation created a revelatory view of history which has entered into the actuality of history and possesses an objectivity of its own. For Robinson any attempt to divorce the interpretation from the event is useless, for the union of the two has had its permanent effect upon the history and revelation of Israel. Finally, he noted that the authority of the Exodus event rests upon its self-authentication, for the faith emerged in response to the event and the event validated the faith it created. With this thoughtful union of event and interpretation, Robinson offered Biblical scholarship a balanced approach which can still enrich the interpretation of many Biblical passages.

Robinson also contributed significantly to the understanding of the principle of authority in religion. After a careful examination of various exterior approaches to authority, such as the Church and the Bible, Robinson came to the position that religious authority must be based upon the inner experience of intrinsic validity. Once again, McDonald (pp. 295-297) criticizes Robinson's position for overstress-

ing the subjective experience of the Spirit and underemphasizing the place of Scripture. Robinson would reply that when the question of the authority of Scripture is examined carefully the only satisfying answer is to base its authority upon the individual response to the intrinsic worth of the books themselves. Such a position is not totally subjective for the reader's response is to the objective fact of the Scripture itself. However, the written word, without "the inner witness of the Holy Spirit," does not reveal God; on the other hand, the value judgment that Scripture is authoritative is obviously based upon a personal response to the Scripture itself. Robinson always maintained that ultimately all questions concerning authority, whether it be the authority of the canon, the church, or doctrine, lead eventually to the value-judgment of the individual and/or community. He saw that there is no escaping the human factor in the establishment of that which is authoritative. Yet, to take seriously the subjective factor is not to deny the divine aspect of the establishment of religious authority; it is merely to affirm that God encounters men upon the human level and without the human response to this divine initiative there can be no experience which is regarded as authoritative.

The field of study to which Robinson devoted most of his attention was Old Testament theology. Robinson's career spanned the periods known in Old Testament studies as "The Death and Rebirth of Old Testament Theology." He participated in its death inasmuch as he accepted fully the evolutionary, developmental reconstruction of the history of Israel's religion; but he also was instrumental in its rebirth by his sensitivity to certain issues that went beyond mere literary and historical analysis. The present writer has identified six themes in Robinson's writings which he believes characterize the rebirth of Old Testament theology in our present generation. These themes are: (1) the need to go beyond historical and literary criticism to the inner message of Scripture, (2) the unity of the Old and New Testaments, (3) the uniqueness of Israel's history, (4) the awareness of God's activity in Israel's history, (5) the authority of Scripture, and (6) approaching the Scripture from within. In a subsequent publication, I hope by developing these six themes to demonstrate Robinson's contribution to the re-emergence of Old Testament theology in the 1920s. Limitation of space permits us only to examine the last in the list, approaching the Bible sympathetically from within. With considerable academic skill and religious sensitivity, Robinson held firmly to the critico-historical approach developed by the Graf-Wellhausen position while at the same time he urged the Biblical scholar to be ever sensitive to the Bible's claim to be God's word to men. For Robinson this "subjective" approach to Scripture in which one must possess the "eyes of faith" with which properly to interpret the Old Testament is best acquired through a study of revelation. In the Speaker's Lectures contained in *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, Robinson stated that one reason he was lectur-

ing on this subject was to enable the listeners to approach the Biblical material sympathetically as its "resident aliens" (pp. 281-282). In these lectures he presented the form revelation takes in the Old Testament (i.e., the relationship between God's activities in nature, man, and history and man's response as prophet, priest, sage, and psalmist) in order that the interpreter might realize the importance of making a similar response to the Biblical material. If revelation is unintelligible apart from this blended unity of objective divine activity and subjective human response, then the interpreter who approaches the material purely "objectively" will have destroyed the very basis for understanding the Bible as the embodiment of revelation. For Robinson, to make a scholarly approach to Scripture demands that the interpreter approach it subjectively, taking seriously its claim to reveal the will of God to men.

There are many Old Testament critics today who would disagree with this approach to Scripture and maintain, rather, that objectivity is too essential an ingredient of scholarship to be relinquished in this manner. Such scholars do not simply reaffirm the old critico-historical position and thereby deny the possibility of writing an Old Testament theology, but they reinterpret the meaning of "objectivity." Krister Stendahl, in an important article "Biblical Theology, Contemporary" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, defines the initial task of Biblical theology to be an objective description of what the Biblical material meant in its original setting. This would appear to be in sharp contrast to Robinson's position. Yet for Stendahl description includes viewing the faith and practices of the Old and New Testaments from within their original presuppositions. He writes:

This descriptive task can be carried out by believer and agnostic alike. The believer has the advantage of automatic empathy with the believers in the text — but his faith constantly threatens to have him modernize the material, if he does not exercise the canons of descriptive scholarship rigorously. The agnostic has the advantage of feeling no such temptation, but his power of empathy must be considerable if he is to identify himself sufficiently with the believer of the first century. Yet both can work side by side, since no other tools are called for than those of description *in the terms indicated by the texts themselves*. (p. 422, italics mine.)

While Robinson advocated a faith approach to Scripture which would seem to contrast with Stendahl's descriptive task, still Robinson strongly objected to reading one's own religious beliefs and practices into the text. To carry out the task of an accurate description of Biblical revelation requires, for both Stendahl and Robinson, becoming a "resident alien" in this foreign land. However, Robinson did believe that a person's interpretation of the Bible was affected by the age in which he lived. How otherwise could Scripture be meaningful

in every age? This is what Stendahl labels a second hermeneutical task of Biblical theology, to determine what the Bible means for today. Stendahl would criticize Robinson for combining what ought to be kept separate, i.e., "What the Bible meant?" and "What the Bible means?" Robinson also held that an Old Testament theology written by a Jew would differ from one written by a Christian. On these two major issues, Robinson and Stendahl would be in significant disagreement.

Robinson struggled throughout his career with the problem of organizing an Old Testament theology. He was convinced that if it is to be a theology it must be systematically organized. Yet he was aware that such an organizational scheme often resulted in divorcing theology and history, separating theology from that dynamic historical revelation which gives it life. In *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, which Robinson regarded as a prolegomenon to an Old Testament theology, he presented the *form* revelation takes in Israel's history, i.e. God's acts in nature, man, and history and the response of the priests, prophets, sages, and psalmists. Certainly in the first volume he had successfully united history and theology. The second volume, which was never completed owing to Robinson's death, was to contain the *content* of the theology. In the last two paragraphs of *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* Robinson suggested the way he would organize his Old Testament theology proper.

As for the content of the revelation (in distinction from its form), it is inevitable that we should state this in a series of propositions to constitute a "Theology of the Old Testament", even if they are arranged in historical order, and called a "History of the Religion of Israel". If they are stated topically, and not chronologically, as a "theology" requires, they become still more abstract and remote from the once-living, vibrating, and dynamic religion of Israel . . .

. . . it will have its inevitable poles around which all else turns. Over against each other are God and man, and all that lies between can be concerned as belonging to the Kingdom—the active kingly rule—of God. The Jew will find the beginning of that Kingdom in the increasing obedience of men to the divine Torah. The Christian sees it as already begun in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. But both, in their different ways, depend on that religion of Israel which is neither Judaism nor Christianity but the mother of them both. (pp. 281-282.)

It is unfortunate that these paragraphs are so difficult to interpret. C. R. North confessed that they lack clarity, but he believed Robinson would adopt a traditional topical method of organization. In the opinion of Norman Porteous, Robinson could not decide whether the content should be arranged historically or topically in the form of a series of propositions. The present writer favours the view that Robin-

son would have organized his Old Testament theology around a series of propositions arranged topically. These propositions would consist of a series of doctrines such as God, man, sin, and grace developed around certain "inevitable poles" which reveal God's activity and man's response. Precisely how this would have been developed is impossible to determine. The strength of his position is not to be found in a definitive solution to the problem but rather in his constant reaffirmation of the need to relate theology and history.

It is interesting to speculate as to what Robinson's reaction would have been to the *Heilsgeschichte* approach as presented in the works of Gerhard von Rad and G. Ernest Wright. Krister Stendahl believes this emphasis upon the acts of God in history (Wright) or God's revelation through words and deeds in history (von Rad) is the natural result of the use of the descriptive approach. But it is highly doubtful that Robinson would have shared this evaluation. For Robinson the solution to the problem must be found in a union of theology (i.e., a systematic organization of the material around theological categories) and history (i.e., the sacred history of Israel where the nature of God has been revealed for man's redemption). That Robinson was unable to accomplish this task himself or even clearly to define for others how it is to be done must be admitted. But we cannot close this survey of Robinson's place among Old Testament scholars on a higher note than to share with him the vision of an Old Testament theology which combines creatively theology and history in order to convey to contemporary man the living God revealed in the pages of the Old Testament.

MAX E. POLLEY.