

THE USE OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT
IN THE NEW AND
OTHER ESSAYS

STUDIES IN HONOR OF
WILLIAM FRANKLIN STINESPRING

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H. WHEELER ROBINSON AND THE PROBLEM OF ORGANIZING AN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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Old Testament theology is an historical discipline which arose from the need to show the relationship between history and revelation in the religion of Israel. Before the rise of historical criticism there was no biblical theology; the use of the Bible in precritical times was as a "proof-text" for orthodox doctrines. The study of biblical content was a part of the discipline called systematic theology rather than one aspect of biblical studies as it is today. The material of the Bible was therefore arranged under the headings that best suited the needs of the systematic theologian: God, man, and redemption. The Bible was seldom allowed to speak for itself; the theologian simply listened to the echo of his own voice.¹

With the rise of biblical criticism that was dedicated to a study of literary and historical problems of the Bible, there arose also the desire to study the religious thought of the Old Testament independent of dogmatic interests. The actual beginning of biblical theology is attributed to John Philipp Gabler in a lecture published in 1787 entitled "Oratio de iusto discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus."² In this lecture

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. William F. Stinespring for his continuous guidance in helping me analyze the contributions of H. Wheeler Robinson to Old Testament studies. My initial contact with Robinson's thought was in Dr. Stinespring's course in prophecy at the Duke Divinity School in 1953. My dissertation entitled "The Contribution of H. Wheeler Robinson to the Contemporary Rebirth of Old Testament Theology" (Duke University, 1957) was directed by him and with his aid and encouragement I have had two occasions (summer of 1959 and the academic year of 1964-65) to examine the private notes of Robinson while studying at Regent's Park College, Oxford University.

1. Robert C. Dentan, "The History, Nature and Method of Old Testament Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1946), pp. 6-7. A condensed form of this dissertation was published in a monograph entitled *Preface to Old Testament Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950). In 1963 a revised edition of this monograph was published in book form by The Seabury Press.

2. See C. T. Craig, "Biblical Theology and the Rise of Historicism," *JBL*, 62 (Dec., 1943), 281; Norman W. Porteous, "Old Testament Theology," *The Old Testament and Modern Study: A Generation of Discovery and Research*, ed. H. H. Rowley (Oxford:

Gabler made a distinction between dogmatic theology and biblical theology. Biblical theology, he maintained, is simply the religion of the Bible as held by its authors and as presented in their writings, while dogmatic theology proceeds to formulate the religion of the Bible in terms of Western philosophical concepts and ideas. Dogmatic theology always reflects the character and time of the theologian, while biblical theology reflects the ideas and age of the biblical personages themselves. Because biblical theology is concerned with what the sacred writers thought about divine matters, it is, necessarily, a historical discipline. If the thought of the biblical writer is to be understood, the historical environment of the writer must be carefully examined. The biblical theologian, therefore, must take three steps in the study of the biblical material: first, he must interpret each passage grammatically and historically; second, he must compare each passage with other biblical passages; third, with the use of the material he now possesses, he will formulate an Old Testament theology based upon certain recurring themes in the biblical passages.³

Gabler's analysis is astute. At the birth of a new discipline, he had focused the attention of scholars upon the major issue in writing an Old Testament theology, i. e., how to relate history and theology. Every biblical scholar who undertakes the task of writing an Old Testament theology must decide what organization of the material best relates theology and history. It is not surprising that throughout the history of the discipline there have been two basic ways of organizing the material: systematically (theology providing the categories of organization) and chronologically (the history of Israel being the basis of organization).

The vast majority of scholars have chosen to arrange the material topically, arguing that a theology requires systematic schematization. In most cases the organization was borrowed from systematic theology, the three most popular topics being theology, anthropology, and soteriology.⁴ Other scholars selected one basic theme

At the Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 312; Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), p. 56.

3. See Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology*, pp. 7-8.

4. Cf. J. C. F. Steudel's *Vorlesungen über die Theologie des alten Testaments* (1840) uses the themes God, man, and salvation; Heinrich Ewald's *Die Lehre der Bibel von Gott oder Theologie des alten und neuen Bundes* (1871-1876), is a four-volume work organ-

and attempted, through this theme, to give unity to the entire Old Testament.⁵ This latter group of scholars has defended this approach on the ground that the unifying principle they adopted was based not upon the categories of systematic theology but upon the biblical material itself.

Because Old Testament religion is an historical religion, another smaller group of scholars used history as the only basis of organization. The history of Israel is seen as *Heilsgeschichte*; Old Testament theology consists of a confessional recital of this history.⁶ Von Rad states the case for the confessional approach to an historical revelation most forcefully when he writes:

A theology which attempts to grasp the content of the Old Testament under the heading of various doctrines (the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, etc.) cannot do justice to these credal statements which are completely tied up with history, or to this grounding of Israel's faith upon a few divine acts of salvation and the effort to gain an ever new understanding of them.⁷

But in fact, both methods of organization have produced results that show that they are of value. The value of the systematic

ized around the themes: doctrine of the Word of God, doctrine of God and the universe, and doctrine of the life of man and the kingdom of God; A. B. Davidson's *The Theology of the Old Testament* (1904) is systematized around the headings God, man and salvation; Ernst Sellin's *Alttestamentliche Theologie auf religionsgeschichtlicher Grundlage*, vol. 2 (1933) uses the dogmatic categories of God, man, judgment and salvation; Paul Heinisch's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1940) is arranged into the divisions God, creation, the conduct of life, the world beyond and salvation; Theodor Christian Vriezen's *Hoofdlijnen der Theologie van het Oude Testament* (1949) adopts the themes God, man, intercourse between God and man, intercourse between man and man (ethics), and God, man, and the world in the present and the future. English trans. by S. Neuijen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960).

5. Cf. G. F. Oehler's *Prolegomena zur Theologie des alten Testaments* (1845) has its emphasis upon the Spirit of Christ; Hermann Schultz's *Alttestamentliche Theologie* (1869-1896) finds the unity of the Old Testament in the doctrine of the Kingdom of God on earth; the covenant concept is central in Walter Eichrodt's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1933-1939); in Ludwig Köhler's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1936) the unifying theme is God as Lord and man as servant. English trans. by A. S. Todd, *Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957).

6. Cf. J. C. K. von Hofmann's *Weissagung und Erfüllung im alten und im neuen Testament* (1841); Eduard Riehm's *Alttestamentliche Theologie* (1889); Gerhard von Rad's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1957-1960); G. Ernest Wright's *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952).

7. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), vol. 1: *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, p. vi.

approach is that it is able to free itself from the rigidly developmental method of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, enabling the Old Testament scholar to find mature religious conceptions in what was formerly regarded as primitive material. Furthermore, this approach also makes readily available to the systematic theologian the wealth of the biblical material in terms that he can understand and appreciate. The great weakness of such a topical arrangement is its artificiality, since the Old Testament, being a record of historical revelation, is not easily organized around doctrinal categories. On the other hand, this full awareness of the nature of historical revelation is the great virtue of the *Heilsgeschichte* method of exposition. The question is whether it can justifiably be called an Old Testament theology if: (1) it lacks topical arrangement and (2) it fails to include in its organization all the biblical material (e. g., the wisdom literature is difficult to include under this principle of organization). This approach also suffers because it is extremely difficult for the nonbiblical scholar to comprehend the position being expounded.

H. Wheeler Robinson⁸ throughout his scholarly career was concerned with the problem of the relationship between history and theology in organizing an Old Testament theology. The direction in which his thought was moving near the close of his life was an outgrowth from his intensive study of the nature of revelation. An analysis of Robinson's struggle with this problem and the extreme difficulty he had arriving at an acceptable solution will help direct us to the basic issues involved.

Early in his career Robinson raised objections to a systematic organization of the Old Testament. In discussing the nature of sin in *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, he avoided such categories as "universality of sin," "inborn sinfulness," and "origin of sin," "not only because of the undogmatic character of the Old Testament in general, but because incidental discussion of these points would have blurred the historical perspective of the development."⁹ In discussing the nature of man in the New Testament, he wrote:

8. H. Wheeler Robinson (1872-1945) was a Baptist Old Testament scholar and principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford University. He is most noted for his work on prophetic symbolism and corporate personality.

9. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 56.

In the New Testament we do not find dogmatic discussions of human nature and its problems, any more than in the Old; nor ought we to expect the unity and consistency rightly demanded of a formal system. What we do find is a new centre, around which the ideas of the Old Testament, as modified by the later Judaism, can arrange themselves in all their fluidity, the time of dogmatic crystallization not yet having come. This new centre is the personality of Jesus, around whom all the problems of God and man ultimately gather.¹⁰

In biblical studies he called for freedom from the systematic collecting and combining of the biblical content in favor of the historical approach.¹¹ It is only after a study of the history itself that any religious ideas will emerge.

According to Rabbinic legend, Moses saw from Pisgah not only Israel's future land, but also Israel's future history, unrolled in swift panorama before his eyes. Some such outline of events is necessary for us, in order that the characteristic features of the history may appear. The most remarkable of them all is the issue from that history of the religious ideas which will claim our attention.¹²

Thus, sin and suffering in Hebrew thought are not abstract problems upon which one speculates; they are part of the living and dynamic experience of the people.¹³ The use of abstract thinking and organization is foreign to the Hebrew people, for they always think and write in concrete and picturesque terms. "Fortunately, for us, they could not discuss sociological or historical or religious problems with our own wealth—or poverty—of long words; to utter a general truth at all, they had to use the particular image."¹⁴ The Bible is therefore not a system of doctrine but a divine drama acted out upon the arena of history.

To write an Old Testament theology one must be fully aware of historical development in Israel's religion. To abstract the ideas

10. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

11. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1952), p. 3.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

14. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Cross of the Servant," *The Cross in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 71.

from their historical setting is to make them lifeless. "It cannot too often be asserted that the revelation of Israel's living God is in the dynamic movement of history; from the beginning and throughout most of the course of that history the written record held a quite subsidiary place."¹⁵ History is the primary medium through which revelation comes and therefore must be an essential part of any Old Testament theology. It is revelation that makes history meaningful; it is history that makes revelation actual.

It is probable, judging from Robinson's writings, that had he written an Old Testament theology it would have been historically oriented. In 1913 his *Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* was published. In the first chapter Robinson consciously accepted the historical approach. He looked to history as the source of the basic ideas of the Old Testament. "For it is a history progressively creative of the great ideas which are the foundation of the Christian faith."¹⁶ Again, in the last chapter, in a discussion of "The Permanent Value of the Old Testament," he reemphasized history as divine revelation. "The Old Testament, interpreted in the light it throws on its own origin, testifies to the reality of a divine revelation in the *life* of Israel. God was revealed not simply in words, but in a series of acts extending over a thousand years."¹⁷ It was when Robinson pressed through this history to the ideas which it creates that the difficulty arose. He found four basic ideas emerging: the idea of God, the idea of man, the idea of suffering, and the idea of the kingdom. Each of these concepts was examined through its historical development. But because he chose to organize the material around these central concepts, he was not able to present the history as a true development. There are historical units interspersed throughout the book, but no sense of the dynamic movement of the history. Furthermore, the selection of these four ideas comes dangerously close to the organization he desired to avoid: theology, anthropology, and soteriology. What Robinson had done was to take the results of historical study and to arrange them systematically. Something much more than this was needed. That he had not actually united history and theology is apparent when,

15. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning* (London: University of London Press, 1953), p. 19.

16. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*, p. 24.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

in dealing with the idea of God, he mentioned the Exodus event only in passing.¹⁸ But this event, as he argued in subsequent works, is primary in revealing the nature of God in the history of Israel. Nor was Robinson able to cover all the biblical material in this way; the wisdom literature was scarcely mentioned.¹⁹

In 1932 Robinson's short essay entitled "The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament" was published in *The Teachers' Commentary*, and he used virtually the same organization as he had in his earlier work by the same title: God, man, sin, suffering, and death. In understanding the nature of God, Robinson referred once again to the history of Israel:

God is to be loved because he has shown himself to be so lovable. The great redeeming act to which prophets and psalmists point (as do the apostles and evangelists to the cross of Christ) is the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. This began (for the nation) the series of saving deeds which are the essence of Israel's religious history. The God of Israel is a living God; he does things, and he is known by what he does. Prophecy, on its higher levels, is the interpretation of Israel's history as controlled by God.²⁰

Robinson also included a section on the mediation of revelation through prophet, priest, and book, which eventually resulted in a separate work, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*. But this essay, like the earlier writing, lacked the real dynamic of history so vital to an Old Testament theology. History was acknowledged as important, but it was never actually united with theology.

By 1937, however, it would appear that Robinson's position as to the relation between history and theology in the organization of an Old Testament theology was beginning to take shape. In the concluding paragraph of an article, after surveying the best books on the Old Testament, he commented that there was no contem-

18. *Ibid.*, p. 107. The Exodus is also discussed in the section on history and the covenant.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 43. It should be noted, however, that Robinson did not intend this small book to be a complete Old Testament theology. The reason it is mentioned here is to analyze his earliest attempt to unite history and theology.

20. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Theology of the Old Testament," *The Teachers' Commentary*, ed. G. Henton Davies and Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 93.

porary English book that could be called a competent Old Testament theology. As to the nature of such a book, he wrote:

Such a book would be concerned with the history of the religion only so far as was necessary to bring out its true nature and permanent values. It would show the religion of Israel as the matrix of both Judaism and Christianity, but would distinguish it from both. It would penetrate beneath the naturally propagandist exegesis of the O. T. in the N. T., and those beliefs of the contemporary Judaism which have helped to shape the present form of the O. T. itself, such as the priority and extent of the Law given on Sinai. The enlightened Christian student would not need to fear the results of such an impartial study of the theology of the O. T., for it would surely reveal a spiritual continuity which is the true modern form of the old and now discredited 'argument from prophecy.'²¹

It is obvious that Robinson regarded the history of the religion of Israel of importance for the writing of an Old Testament theology. Yet just how important history is to be the words "only as far as was necessary" do not reveal. It is obvious, however, that he believed an Old Testament theology must penetrate through the history to the true nature of the religion. What form this theology would eventually take he did not make clear.

The following year Robinson stated his views on a theology of the Old Testament in two essays in *Record and Revelation*. It is significant that in the first essay he dealt with "The Philosophy of Revelation," which he believed formed a necessary introduction to an Old Testament theology. Here, through the category of revelation, was presented for the first time in Robinson's thought a synthesis of the historical approach with theological interpretation. Some years earlier, Otto Eissfeldt in an article entitled "Israelitisch-jüdische Religionsgeschichte und alttestamentliche Theologie," had registered his alarm at the increasing desire to unite theological and historical studies.²² He believed that both disci-

21. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Best Books on the Old Testament," *The Expository Times*, 48 (Jan., 1937), 154.

22. Otto Eissfeldt, "Israelitisch-jüdische Religionsgeschichte und alttestamentliche Theologie," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, n.s., 3 (1926), 1-12.

plines were necessary, but they were not to be confused by blending them. There should continue to be histories of the religion of Israel in which all scholars could objectively participate, but at the same time, there should be Old Testament theologies written by the confessional group with religious faith as a special instrument by which divine revelation could be comprehended. For Eissfeldt the contrast between faith and reason was to be carried over into a contrast between theology and history. A history of religion, approached by the faculty of knowledge which deals with the world of space and time, is not concerned with revelation; an Old Testament theology, approached through faith which deals with eternal truths, is not concerned with history. Robinson saw this as a false dichotomy and insisted that the uniqueness of Israel's religion rests upon the paradoxical fact that it is an "historical revelation." "The Philosophy of revelation is, for the Hebrews, primarily the philosophy of history."²³ Such a concept of revelation is not, however, without its difficulties.

We can gather them [the difficulties] up by saying that the very phrase 'a historical revelation' is a paradox, according to conventional ideas of revelation. History implies dynamic movement of some kind, whether or not it can be called progress; revelation implies static and permanent truth. How can absolute truth be relative to each of a series of generations? How can human transiency serve divine eternity? How can free human activity be made to serve fixed divine purpose? All such questions are different forms of the perennial problem of the philosophy of history, viz., the relation of time and eternity, of which perhaps, the only solution is a *solvitur vivendo*.²⁴

The solution to the intellectual paradox of the relationship of timeless revelation to changing history is found in the "actuality of living" where revelation and history form a blended unity. If revelation is historical, there was a time when revelation and history were united. What is called for is a reliving of the initial experience. Robinson believed that the proper approach to the

23. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Theology of the Old Testament," *Record and Revelation: Essays on the Old Testament by Members of the Society of Old Testament Study*, ed. H. Wheeler Robinson (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 304.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

Old Testament was to interpret it from within, being sensitive to its claim to be God's Word to man. He believed that this "subjective" approach can be realized best through a study of revelation as it occurs in the biblical material, taking seriously its claim to be God's encounter with man. It was partly with this in mind that he wrote *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*. While the major purpose of this volume was to provide an understanding of the form that revelation takes in the Old Testament, nevertheless a secondary purpose mentioned in the closing paragraphs of the book was to enable the reader to approach the biblical material from within. "Let us constantly remind ourselves that this religion, like any other, can be understood only from within, or through a sympathy that makes us its 'resident aliens' (*gerim*)."²⁵ Only by sharing the faith of biblical writers can one hope to unite again eternal revelation and temporal history.

Robinson proceeded to ground the possibility of revelation in the belief in an active God who takes the initiative in disclosing himself to man and in the kinship between God and man which makes such revelation possible. This led him to examine the variety of the media of revelation found in the Old Testament with special emphasis upon the prophetic consciousness through which history is interpreted as revelatory. Robinson concluded this first essay with a discussion of revelation as mediated through legal ordinances (the priestly material) and moral teachings (the wisdom literature). The central emphasis throughout the essay was upon God's activity and man's response, a union of the human and the divine.

Building upon this foundation of an analysis of historical revelation, Robinson proceeded in his second essay to discuss certain characteristic doctrines of the Old Testament under the four categories of God, man, sin and grace, and the judgment of history. Robinson apparently believed that an Old Testament theology necessitated the organization of the material topically, yet he continued to be acutely aware of the fact that revelation comes to Israel through history. In his discussion of the doctrine of God, for example, he does not present a lifeless analysis of the attributes of God, but rather allows the concept of God to emerge from the history through which it developed:

25. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, ed. L. H. Brockington and Ernest A. Payne (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 281-82.

God, as we have seen, is taken for granted in the Old Testament, though this is far from meaning that the conception of Him is a fixed quantity. The *growth* of the idea, bound up as it is with the history of the people, is a most significant feature of the revelation. But when we try to systematize the idea, this feature of it renders our task very difficult. At the beginning we see the emergence of Yahweh of Israel, as one god among other gods (for other peoples). He is localized at Sinai as a storm-god, and accompanies His people as a war-god in their desert-wanderings, whilst already He is concerned with the social life of His people. His jealousy (Exod. xx.5, xxxiv.14) is aroused only by the invasion of Israel's loyalty by other gods. At the end the God of the Psalmists is the only God of all the earth, all other gods being reduced to shadow-names, or absorbed into His angelic court, whilst the highest moral and spiritual attributes are now assigned to Him. It is the result of this development which chiefly concerns us, though we must remember throughout that any attempt to fix it in static form contradicts the essentially dynamic character of the God of Israel.²⁶

In the analysis of the various names of God which follows, Robinson was careful to point out the periods when these names were used and the significance of their development. This was also true of his discussion of God as "holy," "righteous," and "gracious," where these divine attributes are seen through the encounter between God and his people. "It will be seen that the divine righteousness is not abstract quality; it is the essence of His personal character as seen in the concrete experience of life under His control."²⁷ Robinson concluded his analysis of the doctrine of God with a discussion of the relation of God to Israel and the world, where his examination of election, the covenant, and miracles lent themselves naturally to a blending of theology and history.

While the doctrine of man is not so easily tied to historical development, still Robinson's discussion of both corporate personality and the future life was based upon the emergence of these concepts within the history of Israel. This emphasis upon

26. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Theology of the Old Testament," p. 321.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

historical development is even more obvious in the section on sin and grace, for after a brief discussion of the etymology of certain key Hebrew words, Robinson proceeded to trace the growth of the ideas of sin and grace from their primitive origins, through the period of prophetic moralization, to their postexilic interpretation by the cult.

It is significant that Robinson concluded this discussion of the characteristic doctrines of an Old Testament theology with a unit on "The Judgement of History." Here the intimate relationship between theology and history is disclosed in Israel's appeal to history for the vindication of her faith in a just and gracious God. The introductory paragraph to this section is worth quoting in full.

Emphasis on the fact and interrelation of sin and grace is, second only to monotheism, the outstanding theological contribution of Israel's religion. But this contribution is not made in the abstract terms of doctrine; it is evolved within the framework of a changing history, and it is largely derived from the interpretation of that history, in its social or individual features. Israel appealed unto history, and to this Caesar she had to go for the fuller vindication of her faith. It is always needful to remember that derivation of a doctrine from historical experience implies confidence that the judgement given by history will be the last and vindicating word. We can too easily forget that the familiar words of the religion of the Old Testament are the analysis or interpretation of an experience, by which they ultimately stand or fall. If we feel, on the one hand, the ceaseless marvel of this appeal to history by a politically insignificant people, often made in their periods of lowest depression, we must also recognize that, for such a faith as theirs, the world's history must at last be the world's judgement.²⁸

While the Hebrew is painfully aware that in the course of history God uses the nations of the world to punish his rebellious people, he also has an indestructible faith that ultimately God will redeem Israel. Robinson found that historical revelation reaches its culmination in the expectations of the apocalyptists "based on the super-

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 341-42.

natural intervention of God in human history, as a necessary intervention to bring it to its goal, since man had failed, even from the beginning, to actualize the divine purpose."²⁹

James Smart raises questions about this essay on the grounds that it is a "presentation in systematic form of the same materials which formerly were set in a historical continuity. It does not seem to be realized that the problem is much too complex for such a simple solution and that Old Testament theology must achieve something far beyond a mere rearrangement of the materials."³⁰ It is obvious that Robinson's two brief essays do not go far enough in presenting an Old Testament theology, a fact which he would have been the first to acknowledge; still what is presented is far more than a simple rearrangement of the materials. Robinson attempted in both essays to show the relationship between history and revelation; in the first essay the nature of historical revelation is analyzed, while in the second essay certain basic concepts that emerge from within this redemptive history are discussed. It was Robinson's mature position that only by such a synthesis could an Old Testament theology which is both fully historical and fully theological be written.

What Robinson presented in this short essay in *Record and Revelation* he was later to develop into the Speaker's Lectures of 1942-1945. To this work he devoted his last energy, and his death in 1945 occurred before the lectures could be published. Owing to the interest of two colleagues, the Reverend L. A. Brockington and the Reverend E. A. Payne, the work appeared posthumously under the title *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* as the first volume of an Old Testament theology. According to the editorial note, the volume "would have constituted the prolegomena, setting out in detail the *form* of the revelation whose *content* would have supplied the material for the theology."³¹ The main thesis of this volume is that the form which revelation takes in Israel's religion is determined by two factors, viz., the media through which God acts and the interpretative response of those who receive this revelation. Without an understanding of this two-fold

29. *Ibid.*, p. 346.

30. James Smart, "The Death and Rebirth of Old Testament Theology," *The Journal of Religion*, 23 (Apr., 1943), 133.

31. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation*, editorial note.

aspect of revelation, with all its diversity, the Old Testament will remain a mystery to the reader. The book consists of seven parts. The first three parts deal with the media through which revelation takes place, nature, man, and history. But in each case, revelation is not possible until there is a response on the part of man. "The divine revelation in Nature, Man, and History is through *acts*, which need to be interpreted through human agency to make them *words* in our ordinary sense."³² The last four parts deal with man's response to God's activity as seen in the faith of prophet, priest, sage, and psalmist. Revelation is found in the union of God's activity and man's response. Here theology and history are brought into a dynamic relationship; it is in the encounter between God and man that God reveals himself in the totality of life as man interprets the experiences of life as revelatory. A final chapter was to have been written on the growth of the canon and the nature of its authority, but death prevented its completion. It would appear, as Norman W. Porteous pointed out,³³ that this organization of an Old Testament theology was anticipated by A. B. Davidson in his *Theology of the Old Testament*. With respect to the division of an Old Testament theology, Davidson wrote:

In point of fact, the threefold theological division—Theology, or doctrine of God; Anthropology, or doctrine of man; and Soteriology, or doctrine of salvation—is somewhat too abstract for a subject like ours. What we meet with in the Old Testament are two concrete subjects and their relation. The two are: Jehovah, God of Israel, on the one hand, and Israel, the people of Jehovah, on the other; and the third point, which is given in the other two, is their relation to one another. And it is obvious that the dominating or creative factor in the relation is Jehovah.³⁴

Davidson then proceeded to discuss four avenues by which revelation is mediated to Israel, through prophets, priests, psalmists, and wisdom writers. However, Davidson did not follow these divisions

32. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

33. Norman W. Porteous, "Old Testament Theology," *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, pp. 315-16, 336.

34. A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. from the author's manuscripts by Seward D. F. Salmond (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904), pp. 12-15.

in writing his Old Testament theology but rather returned to the use of the traditional threefold categories of God, man, and salvation.³⁵ It was by Robinson that this division of the material was fully developed.

Robinson had presented in considerable detail the *form* revelation takes in Israel's history, that is God's acts and man's response. Certainly in this first volume of what was to be his Old Testament theology, he had successfully united history and theology. At every point in his analysis he was forced back to history itself as it was interpreted by the man of faith. It is in the last two paragraphs of this volume that Robinson suggested the way he would organize the second volume of his Old Testament theology which would constitute the *content* of the revelation.

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. Let us constantly remind ourselves that this religion, like any other, can be understood only from within, or through a sympathy that makes us its 'resident aliens' (*gerim*).

Such a theology naturally requires a volume to itself. It will have to be rewritten in each generation, for each has different needs and each will interpret the past in its own characteristic way. But 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 conceived as belonging

35. A. B. Davidson's *The Theology of the Old Testament* is a collection of his papers posthumously edited by Seward D. F. Salmond. It would seem that had Davidson written the book himself he would have written an Old Testament theology along the lines of a history of Israel's religion, in which case the emphasis would have been upon historical development rather than theological categories. On page 11 he wrote: "We do not find a *theology* in the Old Testament; we find a *religion*—religious conceptions and religious hopes and aspirations. It is we ourselves that create the theology when we give to these religious ideas and convictions a systematic or orderly form. Hence our subject really is the History of the Religion of Israel as presented in the Old Testament."

to the Kingdom—the active kingly rule—of God. The Jew will find the beginning of that Kingdom in the increasing obedience of man 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.³⁶

It is unfortunate that these paragraphs are so difficult to interpret. C. R. North, in a presidential address delivered to the Society of Old Testament Study in 1949, confessed that he found that the concluding paragraphs of Robinson's last book lacked clarity.³⁷ He thought Robinson was calling for an Old Testament theology organized around a series of propositions arranged in historical order and called a history of the religion of Israel, but he could not conceive how this would be accomplished. He noted, however, that Robinson finally adopted the traditional topical method of organizing the material, but not without an awareness that by so doing he was running the risk of separating theology from the dynamic of history.

On the other hand, Norman W. Porteous, in a review of Robinson's book written in 1947, maintained that Robinson thought the content of an Old Testament theology should be stated in a series of propositions arranged topically.³⁸ However, in an article on Old Testament theology Porteous held that Robinson could not decide whether the content of an Old Testament theology should be arranged historically as a history of the religion of Israel or topically in the form of a series of propositions.³⁹

It is clear that the paragraph under consideration is susceptible to variant interpretations. The present writer favors the view that Robinson conceived of organizing the content of an Old Testament theology around a series of propositions arranged topically. Such a position he fully realized is in danger of divorcing revelation and history, but he believed that none other than a topical ap-

36. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation*, pp. 281–82.

37. C. R. North, "Old Testament Theology and the History of Hebrew Religion" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 2 (June, 1949), 114–15.

38. Norman W. Porteous, review of Robinson's *Inspiration and Revelation in The Journal of Theological Studies*, 48 (1947), 77.

39. Norman W. Porteous, "Old Testament Theology," pp. 336–37.

proach could be properly called an Old Testament theology. This method he believed to be "inevitable" and "required." The phrase "even if they [the propositions] are arranged in historical order, and called a 'History of the Religion of Israel'" reveals Robinson's awareness of the close relationship between theology and history. But in fact, he believed these propositions must be stated not chronologically but topically, for this is the arrangement a "theology" requires.

Has Robinson, therefore, failed to unite history and theology? Has he decided in favor of a systematic approach and abandoned the attempt to relate these topics to history? It is true that he could not conceive of a strictly chronological approach doing justice to the subject of an Old Testament theology. On the other hand, it is unjustified to regard the topical arrangement as necessarily divorced from the history of Israel. As we have already seen in his two essays on Old Testament theology in *Record and Revelation*, both the first essay on "The Philosophy of Revelation" and the second essay on "Characteristic Doctrines" are rooted in history. The same thing would have applied to his two-volume Old Testament theology. The first volume, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, is a fully developed statement of the nature of historical revelation. The second volume would undoubtedly have contained a series of doctrines such as God, man, sin and grace, etc. so developed that they would have been wedded to the history from which they emerged. The "inevitable poles around which all else turns" would appear to be the activity of God and the response of man; all else could be related to these two major poles of God and man and their relationship to one another (cf. A. B. Davidson). We shall never know whether Robinson would have succeeded in relating these doctrines to history, but that this was his mature position on the organization of an Old Testament theology seems certain.

Robinson's statement that each generation will need to rewrite its own Old Testament theology is of interest. It reveals his own belief in the relevance of Old Testament theology to modern problems and shows that he believed man's needs will determine how he views God's Word in Scripture. But it also reveals his awareness that each generation has its own contribution to make to the writing of an Old Testament theology. The one prior to his

own was concerned with the historical development of Israel's religion, a necessary and important contribution. Robinson believed the present generation's concern with psychology would provide new light for the understanding of the Old Testament and consequently for the writing of an Old Testament theology.⁴⁰

Perhaps even more important than the actual organization of the material of an Old Testament theology, Robinson believed the content of the revelation must be approached through fellowship with God. In an earlier chapter in *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, Robinson, commenting on the faith of the Psalmist, wrote:

It will be seen that all these illustrations of response are equally illustrations of personal trust (*batāh*). It is this trust which is able (with the pioneer guidance of the prophets) to interpret the revelation of God in these various ways and to respond to it. Because of this comprehensive variety the book of Psalms is not only the living and passionate utterance of Israel's piety at its highest, but also supplies the data for an epitome of Old Testament theology.⁴¹

By regarding the Psalms as an epitome of Old Testament theology, it appears Robinson had two things in mind. First, that the Book of Psalms presents the results of the psalmists' response to God's revelation in nature, man, and history, thus offering the reader a comprehensive survey of the entire faith of Israel. But second, and equally important, through a study of the Book of Psalms the faith of the psalmists can become our faith so that we enter with them into the temple and there, before the divine presence, we are recreated. If Scripture is approached through such a living fellowship with God, then the actual writing of an Old Testament theology, regardless of the method of organization, will come close to conveying the dynamic faith of Israel which rested in the living God. This function of the Psalms was aptly expressed by Porteous

40. H. Wheeler Robinson, "Hebrew Psychology," *The People and the Book*, ed. A. S. Peake (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1925), pp. 353-82; 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. 1, in The Angus Library at Regent's Park College, Oxford University.

41. H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation*, p. 269.

when he concluded his review of Robinson's book with these words:

In the Psalms we are brought closer than anywhere else in Scripture to the piety of the ordinary Israelite to whom the prophet looked for a response to revelation like his own. The ideal theology of the Old Testament would not take us far from the concreteness of a community which, in obedience to the God who called it into being, embodied, however imperfectly, the human relationships, and made the response of spiritual worship, which we associate with the name Israel.⁴²

In conclusion, it might be helpful to clarify the exact relationship in Robinson's thought between Old Testament theology and the other biblical disciplines, viz., a literary introduction to the Old Testament, a history of Israel, and a history of the religion of Israel. For Robinson, an introduction to the Old Testament was primarily a critical literary analysis of the Old Testament, dealing with such subjects as literary sources, composition, literary style, authorship, date, and so on. A history of Israel was a thorough reconstruction of the history of the Hebrew people from the patriarchal period to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, based upon all available sources, such as the literature of Israel, the literature and history of surrounding nations, and archaeological discoveries. If the literature of Israel is interpreted from within, then the divine factor will be a part of the history. A history of the religion of Israel concentrates upon the religious development and the emergence of religious institutions in that history. All those historical facts which had a direct influence on the religion of Israel would be surveyed, while those facts which did not influence Israel's religion, even if they had international significance, would be omitted.⁴³ An Old Testament theology would be based upon all three disciplines. Literary criticism would be necessary to recover from the canonical literature the essence of Israel's faith in its proper chronological order. A history of Israel and a history of the religion of Israel would provide the basic historical framework through which revelation was mediated. The method

42. Norman W. Porteous, review of Robinson's *Inspiration and Revelation*, pp. 77-78.

43. H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Place of the Old Testament in Christian Education," *Religion in Education*, 2 (Apr., 1935), 75.

of approach to all these disciplines, however, was identical. Regardless of what aspect of biblical studies is investigated, the critic must approach the materials sympathetically, as one who has dwelt in their midst and shared their faith. No distinction was made between the method of approach used in historical-critical studies and in Old Testament theology. The literature and the history must be approached both critically and from within.⁴⁴ One must remain aware of the religious message of the literature while analyzing it; one must be open to the divine factor operative in the history while recording the data. In like manner, an Old Testament theology must embody the results of the literary and the historical approach while remaining sympathetic toward the biblical faith. The real distinction between these biblical disciplines is not in the method of approach but in the function they fulfill and in the arrangement of the material. A literary introduction provides a knowledge of the making and the essential meaning of the books of the Old Testament. A historical study provides the reader with a knowledge of the facts and the factors in the history of the Hebrew people. An Old Testament theology would reorganize the great religious truths of Scripture, as they are mediated through history, setting them forth in the form of a series of propositions arranged topically. But the main function

44. Compare and contrast Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *IDB*, 1: 418-32 where he advocates the use of a descriptive approach in writing an Old Testament theology. However, it should be noted that description includes, for Stendahl, a viewing of the faith and practice of the Old and New Testaments from within its 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 temptations, 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, he also denied the validity of reading into the texts one's own religious beliefs and practices. 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 Old Testament was affected by the age in which he lived; this was inevitable if the Old Testament was to speak to the needs of men in every age. He also held that an Old Testament theology written by a Jew would differ from one written by a Christian. On these two points Robinson contrasts sharply with Stendahl (see above, p. 164).

of all biblical studies is to bring the reader into a living contact with the God of Israel, who is seen in the record of the history of Israel but who must be encountered anew by each successive generation.⁴⁵

45. Robinson also used Old Testament theology as a basis for his writings in the field of Christian systematic theology. In the field of systematic theology he produced three memorable volumes: *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, and *Redemption and Revelation: In the Actuality of History*. In each case he used his understanding of the Old and New Testaments as a basis upon which his systematic theology was constructed and as a norm by which to judge whether or not his theological formulation was Christian. *The Christian Doctrine of Man* is the clearest example of his conception of the relationship of biblical theology to systematic theology. In the first chapter he discussed the Old Testament doctrine of man, including Hebrew psychology, the place of the individual in Hebrew thought, the conception of sin, and the relation of man to nature and God. The second chapter continues the development of the biblical view of man by presenting the New Testament doctrine of man. Here the positions of Jesus (as contained in the synoptic Gospels), Paul, and the Johannine literature are presented. Only after a sound biblical position had been expounded did Robinson turn to the field of systematic theology proper.