

All too often such a sophisticated critical method demonstrates its own absurdity.

Of course I am in no way pleading for the adoption of the Midrashic exegetical method instead of the historical-critical one. But I do wish to point out that under certain aspects the weakness of the Midrashic exegesis could actually be its strength, in that it takes the Bible as it is, and asks about interrelationships between different texts without taking note of their probable age and prehistory. Needless to say we cannot and should not disregard the results of modern biblical studies in general. But perhaps the study of rabbinic literature particularly can help us to be aware of the completely hypothetical character of all our critical theories and keep our minds open for unexpected insights into the meaning of biblical texts.

In this way a highly fruitful interaction between modern biblical studies and rabbinic exegesis could come into being. I should like to use the opportunity provided by this symposium to stimulate a discussion among biblical scholars, Jews and non-Jews, about the possibility of establishing cooperation and an exchange of ideas and experiences in this field. As a utopian long-term project, I would suggest something akin to Strack-Billerbeck's renowned *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, although the two could not be comparable in a number of aspects.

But we would probably do better to leave ambitious projects of this kind to the next generation, and confine ourselves to some cautious first steps in the exploration of this almost unknown territory.

CHAPTER 3

Between Historical Criticism and Holistic Interpretation: New Trends in Old Testament Exegesis

Having been invited to speak about "Recent Trends and Major Developments in Modern Biblical Research," I asked myself how to understand the word "recent." Of course, many different definitions and delimitations are possible. Yet because the word appears in relation to the word "developments," I found it useful not to take it in too restricted a sense. Being no longer so young myself, I decided to choose as a starting point for my considerations the time, about forty years ago, when I began to study the Hebrew Bible.

In Old Testament scholarship the late 1940s and particularly the 1950s were the time of the great "schools": the two main schools, the Albright school and the Alt school, and in addition to them the British-Scandinavian cultic schools: the Myth and Ritual school and the Uppsala school. There is no need before this audience to go into details about these schools. Rather I want to focus on their respective relations to exegesis.

The Albright school wanted primarily to know what had happened. By means of the biblical texts, in whose historical truth they had confidence, they tried to reconstruct the history of biblical times. The historical reliability of the texts had to be proved by "external evidence," mainly

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by archaeology. One could say that they focused on something that lies behind the texts.

At first glance, the intention of the Alt school was entirely different or even contradictory. Their main concern was with the texts themselves. But they, too, had the intention of finding something behind the texts, in this case, the *traditions* which found expression in the texts. They also tried to reconstruct history, namely the history of traditions, their origins, their *Sitz im Leben* in certain institutions, mainly cultic ones, and the way these traditions reached written form. One could say that these scholars were primarily interested in the prehistory of the texts.

The cultic schools, finally, focused on the religious background of the Hebrew Bible, seeing Israel only in terms of the ancient Near Eastern world. In their search for religious and cultic patterns they took the biblical texts, so to speak, as pieces of a lost mosaic which they tried to reconstruct. Some of them did it explicitly *against* the given meaning of the texts, claiming that only a later theological redaction had changed the original meaning, which modern scholarship had to restore.

To be sure, this characterization is far too rough to do justice to the intentions of these schools, let alone of the individual scholars working within the framework of one of them. My point is that, in spite of the obvious fundamental divergences and even contradictions among the schools, they had in common a certain approach to the biblical texts, taking them, within the respective paradigms, mainly as a means, sometimes even as tools, for discovering something assumed to lie behind the texts.

With regard to the two main schools another common ground must be added: all these scholars were strict Wellhausenians. For them *Literarkritik* according to the rules of the "Newer Documentary Hypothesis" was self-evident. It belonged to the undisputed prerequisites of their scholarship as the larger, embracing paradigm within which both schools worked. Certainly, this approach to the biblical texts was not restricted to the Pentateuch or Hexateuch but was an overall attitude: not to take the given text as a starting point for interpretation and as a basis for the reconstruction of history, but first of all to analyze the text according to the rules of *Literarkritik*. For, according to the commonly accepted methodological principles, only the "original" text, freed from "redactional" additions and from "secondary" linking to other texts, could be used as a reliable means for reconstructing history or the history of traditions.

Thus within mainstream Old Testament scholarship of the period under discussion, *the given text* of the Hebrew Bible is rarely taken as the subject of interpretation or as material for historical exploration, and so

on. Instead, texts have been used that existed only as a result of critical destruction and reconstruction by modern scholars.

To repeat: the description is too rough. Many scholars, time and again, have dealt with certain biblical texts in their given form and have tried to interpret them in their own right and not simply as a means to something that lies behind the text. Actually there is, and always has been, a plurality of method. Nevertheless, my main point is a double one: (1) Old Testament scholarship in its various forms very often has used the biblical text for divergent purposes and, at the same time, has neglected the interpretation of the text itself. (2) Bible scholars often constructed their own texts and took those texts as a basis for interpretation and historical reconstruction.

Both of these aspects clearly show that the whole concept of exegesis was mainly diachronic.

I am far from denying the necessity and usefulness of efforts to reconstruct Israelite history, including the history of traditions and the history of religion. On the contrary, one has to appreciate all the work which has been done in this field, and one hopes that certain new fields such as, for example, social history, will make further progress. Yet one should distinguish those investigations from *exegesis* or *interpretation* of biblical texts themselves. I am, however, highly distrustful of the traditional *Literarkritik* so far as it leads to a production of texts. The subject of any interpretation has to be first and foremost the given text of the Hebrew Bible.

II

This brings me to the second part of my paper. In the last one or two decades the situation of Old Testament scholarship has changed remarkably. At the same time, it has become much more complicated. I dare not judge whether the "schools" still exist and to what extent scholars consider themselves associated with them. But there remain many who are still working along the lines described above, particularly in Europe.

There is, however, a growing number of scholars who question the exclusive validity of these rules, or even their usefulness at all; there are those who have already left the framework of these paradigms or never even entered it. Of course, their approaches and methods are quite different, and sometimes it seems almost impossible to relate them to one another. Nevertheless, I think they share a common denominator: they are interested in the text itself, and that implies: in the text as it stands.

This interest in the final form of the text reflects a fundamental shift

in priorities. In many handbooks and introductions to exegetical method, the student is told first of all to look for tensions and inconsistencies in the text and to analyze it accordingly. In contrast, the new approaches aim to understand the text as readers have it before them. Therefore, in spite of the differences in details and also in the underlying theoretical conceptions, one has to emphasize strongly the common interest in the given text in its integrity as opposed to the hitherto dominating analytical approach.

The limited scope of this paper does not allow a detailed description and analysis of the different approaches, nor is this necessary before this audience.¹ Instead, I want to focus on one aspect that to my mind is crucial: the question of continuity and discontinuity in Old Testament exegesis. For this purpose let me try a very rough grouping of the new methods.

Of course, the main impact comes from modern “literary criticism” and its predecessors in different kinds of *Literaturwissenschaft*.² The concepts of these new approaches are mainly synchronic. Their interest is directed to the *literary* aspects of the biblical text, to art, style, techniques, narrative strategies, and the like. In this field great progress has been achieved during the last ten years, and although many of the studies are still in an experimental stage, our understanding of the Hebrew Bible has been remarkably enriched by them. Among the practitioners of these new approaches one finds many scholars who obviously are not interested in the traditional methods of biblical studies. Some of them, coming themselves from literary studies, have probably never dealt with those methods; others turned to the new approaches leaving behind them not only the old methods but also the questions those methods tried to answer.

This seems to me to be a crucial point: the use of new methods does not make the old questions disappear. We have to ask whether or to what extent the questions posed by traditional Old Testament scholarship have been legitimate and of what relevance they are in a changed framework. This brings me to the other main approach that emphasizes the importance of the text as it stands: the canonical approach. Many similarities

1. A useful survey and critical evaluation of the new approaches is given by J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984).

2. It should be mentioned that there have been some important forerunners of these new developments, among them James Muilenburg, Meir Weiss, and Luis Alonso Schökel. There is also a strong influence by Hermann Gunkel and, last but not least, by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.

exist between the “literary” and the “canonical” approaches: both stress the primary importance of the text as it stands, denying the supremacy of analytical methods and historical questions.

Yet there is one basic difference. Scholars working in the framework of a canonical approach are fully aware of the fact that the text we have before us represents the final stage of what is sometimes a long historical process. They take into account the possibility of changes in the original narrative or poetic form; they recognize the “depth dimension” of the text before us and even think that to distinguish different sources or layers “often allows the interpreter to hear the combined texts with new precision.”³

Here the diachronic aspect belongs to the concept itself. The final form of the text is taken as something composed from different, and sometimes divergent, parts. Its unity is not primarily understood as a literary one, but as the deliberate result of a “canonical process” of composing and shaping according to certain theological guidelines.⁴ This does not diminish the significance of the final text. On the contrary, this text has its theological relevance for the “community of faith” for whom it possessed “divine authority.”⁵

This is not the place to enter into a theological discussion of the concept of canonicity. But I believe that there could be a fruitful interrelation between the different approaches of a renewed “close reading” of the biblical text in its now given form, whether one prefers to call it reading the Bible “as literature” or “as canon.” It seems to me to be the strength of the canonical approach that it is concerned with larger units, such as biblical books, and even with the canon as a whole. Thus the holistic reading of the Bible, which is often neglected when only smaller literary units are studied, receives the attention it deserves.⁶ None of the smaller units exists independently of the larger composition of which it is part, and an appropriate understanding of those larger compositions often demands an insight into diachronic developments.

One final word: there is much discussion about a “change of paradigm,” Certainly, the paradigm within which Old Testament scholarship

3. B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; London: SCM Press, 1979), 76.

4. For observations on “canon conscious redactions” see G. Sheppard, “Canonization: Hearing the Voice of the Same God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions,” *Int* 36 (1982): 21-33.

5. Childs, *Introduction*, 74.

6. For a holistic interpretation of a whole biblical book see M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, I-20*, AB 22 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983).

has worked for more than a century, namely the old German *Literarkritik*, has lost its general acceptance. It is no longer possible to maintain that serious Old Testament scholarship has to be indispensably tied to this set of methodological principles. So far there is no alternative concept that has been generally accepted. According to Thomas Kuhn, one could say that there are different models used by certain groups of scholars, but none of them has won general acceptance.⁷ Old Testament scholarship now is in a stage of transition, and we cannot know whether there will be a new paradigm or if the near future will be characterized by a plurality of approaches and methods.

Therefore, it makes no sense for some scholars or groups to claim that their own method, as time-honored or even brand-new, is the only correct one. At the same time, it would not be wise of those working with new approaches to ignore completely the questions posed by former generations of scholars without scrutinizing their legitimacy and their usefulness in highlighting certain aspects or solving certain problems in the given text. Surely, continuity as such is of no value. But a loss of communication among Old Testament scholars by mere discontinuity of approaches could do much harm to international and interreligious endeavors toward a mutual understanding of our common Hebrew Bible. That is the reason we need congresses like this one in order to reestablish and to strengthen the relationships among those committed to this task.⁸

7. T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962).

8. I am grateful to Cheryl Exum for improving my English.

CHAPTER 4

Toward a Common Jewish-Christian Reading of the Hebrew Bible

Recently, Jon D. Levenson published an article entitled “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology.”¹ Having read his article, one can only agree with him. If biblical theology really is as Levenson has portrayed it, there would indeed be no reason why Jews should be interested in it. And there can be no doubt that there is a lot of truth in his depiction of Christian biblical theology past and present. However, the reader is left with a question as to whether this could really be the last word on the issue. He or she wonders whether it would not be more apt to say that Jews are not interested in *Christian* (in particular Protestant) biblical theology because of its biases and because of “the failure of the biblical theologians to recognize the limitation of the context of their enterprise.”²

Levenson’s readers were soon rescued from uncertainty. Only one year after his article had appeared, he published a book that could hardly be deemed anything other than a piece of biblical theology--Jewish biblical theology, of course. The author states clearly in the preface that one of the main motivations for him to write this book was “the lack of sophisticated

Lecture delivered in English at the 1989 University of Notre Dame Conference on “Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity.” The text has undergone some stylistic revision.

1. J. D. Levenson, “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology,” in J. Neusner, B. A. Levine, and E. S. Frerichs, eds., *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 281-307.

2. *Ibid.*, 304.

theological reflection upon even such central and overworked aspects of the religion of Israel as creation and covenant,” and that the book is to be understood as “a theological study.”³ This teaches us that not being interested in biblical theology does not mean, or at least need not mean, not being interested in a theological interpretation of biblical texts.

So we can leave aside the question of biblical theology as an established theological discipline and turn to the more general and more fundamental question of a theological reading of the Hebrew Bible. Because our main topic is a common reading of the Bible, let us try to find out what the aim of such a venture could be, what possibilities and chances we can discover for carrying it out, what obstacles we shall have to face, and how we can hope to overcome them.

Before doing so it would be useful to realize that in many fields of Old Testament scholarship (and here I am deliberately using the internationally established term “Old Testament”) there is a seemingly unproblematic cooperation between Jewish and Christian scholars. The more remote the fields of research are from theological or even religious problems, the easier the cooperation seems to be. Yet it would be interesting to look more closely at the different fields of biblical research in order to find out how unproblematic the cooperation really is.

Let me give a few examples. Archaeology is one of the preferred fields of cooperation between Jews and Christians. The evolution of methods and techniques is to a high degree a common endeavor. Of course there is a certain competition and rivalry between different schools, but in many cases this is not mainly an issue between Christians and Jews; the division is rather between conservatives and liberals, for example—or however one wants to define the different groups or schools. Here the frontiers often cut across religious affiliations. To a certain degree this is also true with regard to the interpretation of the findings. But because this interpretation is linked with more general historical views, including the history of religion, at certain points specific Jewish interests are inevitably at stake. I need only mention the far-reaching problems we now face with regard to the early history of Israel: the questions of nomadism, conquest, social revolt; the question of the origins of Yahwistic monotheism, and the like. All these problems have their implications for Israelite—and that ultimately means Jewish—historical identity. Conversely, Christian identity is not directly affected by these problems. The question is: To

3. J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), xiv.

what degree are scholars conscious of these implications? Or are they motivated by more or less unconscious preconceived opinions?

Let me take another example from the field of philology or linguistics. Learned Jewish biblical scholars now utilize sophisticated means to try to prove that P, the so-called Priestly Code, is of preexilic origin.⁴ This would appear to be a purely linguistic question, or at most a historical one. But the discussion is obviously motivated by the old and still enduring fight against Julius Wellhausen’s notion of the decline of ancient Israelite culture marked by priestly leadership. The interesting fact is that Wellhausen openly and explicitly used his arguments as anti-Jewish weapons; the modern linguists, in contrast, allege—surely bona fide—purely scholarly interests. In my view it would be much more useful to discuss problems related to Wellhausen’s views (and those of his successors) on postexilic Israel in their complexity, and with an open and clear explanation of the interests involved.

The third field I should like to mention is the modern literary approach to the Hebrew Bible. Here we find Jewish and Christian biblical scholars working along the same lines, sometimes in explicit dissociation from the traditional *Literarkritik* (source criticism and the like), but mainly without mentioning those previously generally accepted methods at all. In my view, it is in this field that there are the fewest differences between Jewish and Christian scholars. But at the same time, many of those working in this field are not interested in theology, but explicitly claim their method of interpretation to be purely literary. I appreciate this seemingly unbiased cooperation, but I do not believe that it will be very helpful for a theological understanding of the Hebrew Bible.⁵

Finally, if one examines the programs of international Bible congresses, one finds very few contributions that could be deemed to be theological in a strict sense. There is evidently something like a “historicist evasion,” to use the term coined by Levenson.⁶

4. I am thinking especially of A. Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris, 1982), and a number of articles by the same author.

5. As regards the specific situation in North America, with its “recent emergence of scholars and academic departments that are not beholden to any religious perspective,” see J. D. Levenson, “The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism,” in R. E. Friedman and H. G. M. Williamson, eds., *The Future of Biblical Studies: The Hebrew Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 19-59, quotation from p. 52.

6. J. D. Levenson, “Theological Consensus or Historicist Evasion? Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies,” in R. Brooks and J. J. Collins, eds., *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

THE NEED FOR A COMMON BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Let me return to the question of the rationale behind the endeavor for a common theological reading of the Bible by Jews and Christians. My first step toward an answer is to declare that in my opinion a common reading is an irrefutable necessity. The simple fact is that for both Jews and Christians the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament is Holy Scripture. If each group lived separate from the other in a world without any relation to the world of the other, there would be no need to take note of divergent readings and interpretations of their respective Holy Scriptures. But this is not the case. On the contrary, ever since Christians and Jews began to have a separate history—that is, ever since Christianity emerged from Judaism—the two communities have been closely and, it seems, indissolubly linked with one another, for better or for worse. This makes it virtually impossible simply to ignore the use of the Bible made by the other religious community.

From the fourth century onward, the situation was determined by Christian dominance over the Jews. The Christian interpretation of what now came to be called the Old Testament was therefore the officially accepted one. There was no chance for a mutual exchange of views and opinions, and most Christians *never* heard about Jewish interpretation of the Bible except from polemics and the mostly incorrect details that were used for anti-Jewish purposes. I suspect that on the Jewish side, knowledge of Christian interpretation of the Bible was not much better and not unbiased. This situation did not change substantially until the last century when, after Enlightenment and emancipation, the Jews in Europe began to live under less oppression and to participate to some degree in the life of their Christian environment.

But even then there was no real exchange between Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Bible. The reasons are manifold. First, Jewish and Christian communities lived without any relationship to each other, and mainly without taking note of one another at all. Second, in the academic area Jews had no access to the field of biblical studies because it was the domain of Christian theological faculties.⁷ Third, theology as a discipline was generally understood as something particularly Christian, and this view was shared by many, if not most, Jews as well. Thus on both sides, even those who were interested in a certain exchange were convinced that no Jewish equivalent to Christian theology existed.⁸

7. See M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "Christianity, Judaism and Modern Bible Study," *VTSup* 28 (1975): 69-88.

8. Levenson tells the story of a European biblical scholar who in Israel was unable to

One could argue that this situation still exists even today, and generally speaking this might be true. But the mere fact of symposia and meetings, as well as a number of publications by Jewish and Christian authors within the last few years, indicates a change, or at least the beginning of something new.⁹ It is the first time in history that Jews and Christians have had the opportunity to meet on an equal level, without being dependent on any political or religious institution or authority, and to meet as individuals, each with his or her own commitment to a religious tradition and community. I have to add that, regrettably, this only became possible after the *Shoah* (the Holocaust), and only forty years after that event. (Perhaps this has something to do with the forty years several times mentioned in the Bible.)

THE RELEVANCE OF JEWISH INTERPRETATION

The immediate question is whether we are ready and able to begin a dialogue that should have begun almost two thousand years ago but is now starting under fundamentally different conditions. I believe that we have no alternative. As a Christian, I should like to say that it is high time for Christians to begin to appreciate the Jewish interpretation of our common Bible. The main precondition is, from the outset, to refrain from taking traditional Christian interpretation as a yardstick for the meaning and relevance of Jewish interpretation.

Let me try to analyze the implications of such a claim. With regard to the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, the first precondition is the theological acknowledgment of the fact that this book is the Holy Scripture of the Jews. Of course, historically speaking this is a mere truism. But as a Christian theological statement it is of fundamental importance. In Christian theological tradition, the Jews are usually talked about in the past tense, in relation to Old and New Testament times. Jews belonging to the present time are mainly subjects of political and social consideration. In the theological field, they appear first of all in the chapter on "mission." There is a wide variety of opinion as to whether the Jews are just to be deemed the same as any other non-Christians (in accordance with Paul's words that "there is neither Jew nor Greek" [Gal. 3:28]), or as

find anyone who was interested in Old Testament theology (see "Why Jews Are Not Interested," 28 1).

9. I may point here especially to a symposium held in Bern, Switzerland, in January 1985. The papers are published in M. Klopfenstein et al., eds., *Mitte der Schrift? Ein jüdisch-christliches Gespräch: Texte des Berner Symposions vom 6. -12. Januar 1985 (1987)*.

something special-perhaps still as God's chosen people (according to another statement of Paul's: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenant" [Rom. 9:4-5]). In any case, the common Christian view of the Jews is that they should have acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, and that there is still hope that one day they will do so (again according to a statement of Paul's that at the end "all Israel will be saved" [Rom. 11:26], which is interpreted-wrongly in my opinion-as the expectation of a final conversion of the Jewish people to Jesus Christ).

My claim that we should acknowledge without any qualification the fact that the Hebrew Bible is the Holy Scripture of the Jews presupposes acceptance of the dignity and the independent value of the Jewish religion. This has a whole series of implications; and ultimately what is at stake is the question about the Christian church's sole possession of the truth, or Christianity's claim to absoluteness. I am fully aware of that, but I feel obliged to make it quite clear that in my opinion the first and most important precondition for a serious and meaningful theological dialogue between Jewish and Christian biblical scholars is the theological acceptance of the Jewish religion on its own terms by its Christian partners.

In order not to be misunderstood, I have to add that this does not at all mean simply turning things upside down and claiming that Judaism is the only legitimate successor of biblical Israel. The fact is that both Judaism and Christianity are successor religions of biblical Israel. Our task will be to acknowledge this fact and to define sensitively and clearly the theological meaning of this "and." I believe that a responsible mutual discussion of our respective relations to the Hebrew Bible could be of great value for the definition of this theological problem as a whole.

THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE AND IN ITS SEPARATE PARTS

This leads to the problem of the canon. Since the emergence of a new debate about the significance of the canon of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament-a debate inaugurated particularly by Brevard Childs and James A. Sanders-a wealth of literature on this topic has appeared." I need not enter into this discussion here. I will confine myself to a few remarks. Whatever the history of the settling of the canon in its final form may have been, the fact is that both religious communities, Judaism and Christianity, have structured their religious traditions on the basis of the

canon in its given form, Hebrew or Greek. I do not believe it to be of great theological importance whether and when there was a decision by any authority with regard to the canon, its content, its religious status, and so forth. From a certain time onward, from the second or third century or whenever, both communities of faith took the collection of scriptures which we now know as the Hebrew or the Greek Bible as their Holy Scripture. This means that the number of books belonging to each collection, as well as the wording, was fixed at a certain time by decision or custom. (Of course I do not deny that the investigation of the history of the canonization can be a very interesting scholarly field, but I doubt whether the results will be able to contribute to the *theological* question of the canon.)

This actual definition of the Bible as Holy Scripture implied a clear-cut distinction between the Bible itself and any other religious tradition, be it written or otherwise. Jewish tradition established a distinction between *הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכַתָּב* and *הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל־פֶּה*. On the one hand this declares the Torah to be incomplete if not taken in both of its forms; on the other hand it does not allow us to mix the two up: *הַכְּתוּב* is only the Bible itself, and nothing else.

In Christianity's earliest stage we find the same language. The New Testament regularly speaks of "the Scripture" (*ἡ γραφή*) or "the Scriptures" (*αἱ γραφαί*) when referring to the Jewish Scripture(s), Hebrew or Greek (*which*, is itself a matter of dispute among scholars). Later, another collection of books was added, this eventually becoming the New Testament. So from a certain point of view the situation seems comparable with that in Judaism: the Bible, supplemented by other religious writings. But in fact the development unfolded very differently, in two respects especially. In the first place, Christians took both collections together to be the one Bible. The original distinction between the two sets of books was therefore abandoned, and with it the authoritative character of the original Scripture(s). The canon or Bible was the whole two-part collection of holy writings. Second, within this Bible virtually only the New Testament had theological authority. The Old Testament was interpreted as supporting the New Testament, or as pointing toward it, or as a mere forerunner that sometimes did not yet see and understand things clearly enough. Of course there were many *hermeneutical* variants in the course of the centuries; but what is important in our present context is the fact that in the Christian tradition the Old Testament lost its independent value and authority, if not its independent meaning altogether.

10. For the most recent discussion in Germany see I. Baldermann et al., "Zum Problem des biblischen Kanons," *JBTh* 3 (1988).

THE REFORMATION AND MODERN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

If this denigration of Old Testament authority were still the state of affairs today, we should have no reason and no basis for discussing the topic of a common biblical theology. But it is not. In the meantime two events have taken place that are related to each other in certain respects: the Reformation and the Enlightenment. It would go far beyond the scope of this paper to unfold the different aspects of these two fundamental events in their bearing on my topic, so I shall be very brief.

The Reformation brought to the consciousness of educated Christian people the existence of the Hebrew Old Testament as distinct from the Greek New Testament. At the same moment, at least at the margins of consciousness, the Jewish character of the Old Testament emerged. (Luther himself was fully aware of this, with all the uneasiness that the insight caused him.) But first of all, a new awareness of the distinction and difference between the two parts of the Christian Bible arose. It was therefore almost unavoidable that at the very moment when, two and a half centuries later, the theologians of the Enlightenment began to discover the Bible as something in its own right (and not only as a source of *dicta probantia-proof* texts for dogmatics) they should have made a distinction between the two parts of the Christian Bible. The day when biblical theology was born” was at the same time the birthday of Old Testament theology, as distinct from New Testament theology. At the same time scholars became conscious of the Jewish character of the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible. Georg Lorenz Bauer equated “biblical theology of the Old Testament” with “the theory of the religion of the ancient Hebrews,” which he also called “the history of Jewish dogmatics” (*jüdische Dogmengeschichte*).¹²

I think that this is the point in the history of the interpretation of the Bible at which our reflections should and could start. From then on, the Hebrew Bible became a distinct and more or less independent subject of theological research. I say “more or less independent” because on the one hand Old Testament theology was declared to be the first part of a complete biblical theology, but on the other hand hardly anyone actually wrote about both parts. The main interest was concentrated on the Old

11. I am referring here to Johann Philipp Gabler’s famous lecture: “Oratio de justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus” (1787).

12. G. L. Bauer, *Theologie des Alten Testaments oder Abriss der religiösen Begriffe der alten Hebräer: Von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf den Anfang der christlichen Epoche. Zum Gebrauch akademischer Vorlesungen* (Leipzig, 1796); Eng. trans., *The Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. P. Harwood (London: Charles Fox, 1838).

Testament, and it was only half a century later that the first elaborated New Testament theology appeared.¹³

Yet with regard to our topic, one fundamental point did not change: the study of the Old Testament continued to be part and parcel of Christian theology. It therefore shared the vicissitudes of theological trends and quarrels. During the nineteenth century Old Testament studies to a large extent lost their relationship to theology and turned toward becoming a purely historical and philological matter. But Old Testament studies always remained part of Christian tradition, even though disputed and denounced, until in 1921 Adolf von Hamack called for the elimination of the Old Testament from the Christian church.¹⁴ In any case, Christian theologians believed that *they* had to decide what to do with the Old Testament. And now I switch from the past tense to the present, because even today the situation is unchanged for the majority of Christian theologians, in particular for Old Testament scholars: the Old Testament is, at least theologically speaking, only relevant, if not even only existent, as a part of the Christian tradition.

In the decades after the Second World War, Old Testament scholarship in Germany underwent a fundamental change toward a more explicit theological commitment, mainly as a consequence of the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and others, and intensified by the challenge of Nazi ideology, which had compelled German theologians to defend the Old Testament as a legitimate component of Christian theology.” I believe that some of the present inconsistencies are based on the situation of the postwar years; since then, many Old Testament scholars have felt obliged to justify the use of the Old Testament within the Christian church and theology, but they have never been trained for that undertaking. They therefore try to carry it out with their own homemade theological and hermeneutical instruments. I shall come back to this later.

SOME PROPOSITIONS FOR A COMMON BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

I claimed above that Christians must acknowledge without any qualification the fact that the Hebrew Bible is the Holy Scripture of the Jews.

13. F. C. Baur, *Vorlesungen über neutestamentliche Theologie* (Leipzig, 1864).

14. A. von Harnack, *Marcion* (Leipzig, 1921, 2d ed. 1924).

15. For an insider it is therefore surprising to see Wellhausen (who explicitly denied being a theologian) depicted as being in the same boat as Eichrodt, von Rad, and others, who explicitly wrote as Christian theologians (see Levenson, “Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism”), but the parallelism is indeed striking. On the Nazi challenge to Christian use of the Old Testament, see chapter 8 below.

I added that this claim presupposes the acceptance of the dignity, independence, and value of the Jewish religion. I am convinced that it is both simple and evident that Christian biblical scholars must first of all realize and accept the fact that they are dealing with a book that is part and parcel of another living religious tradition as well, and that they must face the challenge to their traditional handling of the Old Testament.

Let me switch my usage once more, **this** time from the third person plural to the first person singular. From this point on, I wish neither to attack nor to defend anyone. In other words, I want to leave the field of the history of Old Testament interpretation and research, and enter **the** field of reflections about the possibilities and chances for a future common theological reading of our common Hebrew Bible. (I hope it will not merely remain a path to Utopia.)

At the outset, let me state some of my presuppositions for the following remarks (without discussing or justifying them):

1. The Hebrew Bible is a collection of Israelite (or Jewish) Scriptures which de facto acquired its final form before either rabbinic Judaism or Christianity came into being. Consequently neither a rabbinic nor a Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Bible can be historical.¹⁶
2. Both for (rabbinic) Jews and for Christians, the Hebrew Bible (or Greek Old Testament) is a fundamental basis for their religion, but not **the** only one; for both religious communities, postbiblical traditions are of essential importance.
3. In **both** traditions, methods of interpreting the Hebrew (or Greek) Bible have developed that are peculiar to that particular community, and therefore cannot claim acceptance by the other.
4. Theological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible is not dependent on the theological system of the religious tradition to which the particular interpreter belongs: the Hebrew Bible is a theological book in its own right, which can be, and must be, interpreted theologically from the inside.
5. In doing so, the interpreter's theological approach will unavoidably be influenced by his or her own religious tradition; interpreters should be conscious of this influence and should reflect on its hermeneutical consequences.
6. Taking this into consideration, Jewish and Christian biblical scholars can work together toward a theological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.

Let me try to unfold some of these postulates. One of the key points is the notion that the Hebrew Bible is itself a theological book. That means

that the Bible does not only become theological through interpretation by a later-elaborated theology, be it rabbinic or Christian; rather, it is possible and necessary to find the theological ideas and messages of the biblical texts themselves. At the same time, this implies that the authors **of the** biblical texts should be deemed to be in a certain sense theologians, who had theological ideas and purposes in mind when they spoke or wrote their texts, and even when they assembled the texts into larger units or books. This seems to be a truism. But if it is true, there would be no reason why Jewish and Christian scholars could not work together to explore the theological content of biblical texts.

Several objections might be raised against such a concept: What is theology? Does it not have to be defined by each particular religious and theological tradition? This is an interesting question because the answer turns out to be circular. Certainly, each religious community developed its own system of theological questions and answers. But they did **so**—and still do—on the basis of the traditions passed down to them, including first of all the Hebrew Bible. So it would be an important experiment to put certain present-day theological questions to the Hebrew Bible, and to see whether they prove to be appropriate.

This could be one of the great advantages of a common theological reading of the Hebrew Bible by Jewish and Christian scholars. In some cases, it would emerge that discussions among biblical scholars imply questions that also touch differences in the exegetical traditions of the two communities. Let me take one example. The identity of the Servant of the Lord, the עֶבֶד יְהוָה, in Isaiah 40-55 is disputed among Christian biblical scholars. Those who assume an individual understanding of the servant could be open in principle for a christological interpretation; those who make no such assumption will be unable to take the traditional Christian interpretation as being in accordance with the meaning of the text itself. On the other hand, those who are inclined to a collective or corporate understanding could be open for the dominant Jewish interpretation of the servant as representing Israel. In most cases the exegetical decision will be made, at least on the conscious level, independently of the Christian liturgical and dogmatic tradition. But it will have far-reaching consequences for the hermeneutical relations between the scholar's own exegetical-theological insights and the Christian tradition of interpretation. It would therefore be of great interest and value to discuss these different views with Jewish scholars committed to their own religious tradition.

Another example might be the traditional Christian notion that to speak theologically about creation can only mean creation through Jesus Christ.

16. See Levenson, "Why Jews Are Not Interested," 286.

One of the proof texts for such a dogmatic position is Col. 1:15-17, where it is said that Jesus Christ is “the firstborn of all creation,” and that “in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.” Another text is of course John 1:1-13: “In the beginning was the Word [d *λόγος*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”

It is obvious and well known that this text reflects certain Hellenistic Jewish speculations about the *הַכְּמָה* in Prov. 8:22-31, whose Greek equivalent is *σοφία*, which was then equated with *λόγος*. A dogmatic notion built on those extrabiblical speculations can scarcely serve as a hermeneutical key to a biblical text. Outside Protestant Old Testament scholarship, this dogmatic position is still widely held. But it is interesting to see that in von Rad’s commentary on Genesis there is no hint of this Christian tradition. Westermann speaks in more general terms about God’s history with humanity, which begins with creation and finally has its center in what happened in Jesus Christ; but he too does not mention the notion of creation through Jesus Christ.

Yet both commentators, and others as well (for example Waltber Zimmerli), mention the aspect of the seventh day of creation and point to its relevance for the biblical Sabbath, as well as to certain eschatological elements involved. But they do not mention the importance of the Sabbath in postbiblical and contemporary Judaism. Possibly they would argue that this would go beyond the scope of their task as commentators on a biblical text. But it would in any case be interesting and useful to discuss these things with Jewish biblical scholars. Then Christian scholars would have to ask themselves what consequences the shift from Sabbath to Sunday as the weekly Christian holy day must have for the Christian interpretation of Gen. 1:1—2:3, and whether it is possible at all to interpret the creation story without taking the Jewish tradition of the Sabbath into account.

At this point I should like to add a remark about the question: Why do Christian biblical scholars usually ignore or negate postbiblical Judaism? The answer seems to me to be simple: nobody told them that they should be interested in that tradition. There is no scholarly custom for dealing with Judaism; even now there is little literature by Jewish biblical scholars that would demonstrate the use of the postbiblical tradition; there is scant relevant scholarly literature that could introduce Christian scholars to the problems of dealing with Jewish exegetical tradition; we lack translations of great parts of rabbinic literature, and so on. I fully understand the critical attitude of some Jewish scholars with regard to

this deficiency among their Christian colleagues, and I do not want to defend it: but I feel that it is necessary to analyze the historical reasons carefully before blaming individual scholars.

THE FUTURE OF A COMMON BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The two arbitrarily chosen examples just cited show that Christian biblical scholars are in many cases not eager to see their exegetical results in relation to a particular Christian tradition. Indeed the contrary is often the case. I believe that in the main Levenson is correct when he says:

Most Christians involved in the historical criticism of the Hebrew Bible today seem to have ceased to want their work to be considered distinctively Christian. They do the essential philological, historical, and archeological work without concern for the larger constructive issues or for the theological implications of their labors. They are Christians everywhere except in the classroom and at the writing table, where they are simply honest historians striving for an unbiased view of the past.”

That is one side of the coin. The other side (castigated by Levenson very sharply as being inconsistent, if not insincere) is the attempt nevertheless to interpret the Old Testament as part of Christian theology. I have tried to explain some of the reasons for this attitude, and I have tried to formulate my own view of how to change this situation. I agree with Levenson that the crucial point is the theological acceptance or, first of all, even the awareness, of the existence of contemporary Judaism as a living religion which uses the Hebrew Bible as its Holy Scripture. Christian theologians, Old Testament scholars included, have never been taught to realize that. I myself during more than ten years of teaching Old Testament was never aware of this problem. It was only through several visits to Israel and through personal acquaintance with Jewish biblical scholars in Israel and the United States that I gradually began to understand the whole problem, and I still feel that I am only beginning to discern the consequences of these insights. As far as I can see, there are still very few Christian biblical scholars who are aware of all this.

One of the main obstacles to progress in this field is the fact that there is almost no exchange between Jewish and Christian biblical scholars on theological questions involved in the biblical texts. At the same time, there is an increasing debate about the so-called hermeneutical questions of how to understand the Old Testament within the framework

17. Levenson, “Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism,” 49.

of Christian theology, and whether and how to write a biblical theology embracing both parts of the Christian Bible. Levenson quoted from several books on Old Testament theology to demonstrate these obvious inconsistencies. The most remarkable fact is that this kind of Christianizing interpretation is mainly, if not almost exclusively, to be found in the genre of books that try to embrace the Old Testament as a whole,¹⁸ or in articles dealing with this problem, whereas in the commentaries on specific biblical books this kind of question is rarely raised at all.

What has to be done? In my view, the main point would be for Jewish and Christian scholars who feel challenged by the current situation to make efforts to bring to the awareness of Christian biblical scholars the crucial relevance of contemporary Judaism for any theological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. This needs to be presented, of course, not with an attitude of imposing an absolute alternative, as if Christian scholars had to give up their present exegetical methods and take over Jewish exegesis. What would be necessary is to overcome the dichotomy that even now is used by Christians only one-way. There are two traditions of reading and interpreting the Hebrew Bible. Neither has a monopoly; neither is to be neglected, let alone excluded.

In my view, the only promising way forward would be to work together on biblical texts or certain biblical topics or themes, instead of discussing general hermeneutical questions about how to relate Jewish and Christian views of the Hebrew Bible to each other. One day in the future it may be useful, and I hope possible, to do that as well, but in my view it would be a fundamental mistake to begin there. Working on texts means asking about their theological meaning and relevance; the same is true in dealing with certain topics or themes. In his characterization (quoted above) of the general attitude of Christian biblical scholars, Levenson says: "They do the essential philological, historical, and archeological work without concern for the larger constructive issues or for the theological implications of their labors." Let us try to add to the essentials of their work the word *theological*, because a biblical text is never adequately interpreted unless attention is paid to its theological relevance, including the theological context of the text itself, of the chapter or book, and finally of the Hebrew Bible as a whole (here the discussion about canon and canonization becomes relevant).

Let me conclude with a quotation from the New Testament that seems fitting for our situation:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:36-38)

¹⁸ Perhaps Levenson is right to characterize this kind of book as *Midrash* (see "Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism," 48).