

Brueggemann, Walter. *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. xviii + 307 pp. \$16.95.

In this book, Walter Brueggemann, the well-known Old Testament commentator and theologian, has assembled fifteen of his essays (all but one of which have appeared previously in various journals and volumes) dealing with Old Testament theology. Along with other prominent scholars, such as Claus Westermann, Samuel Terrien, and Paul Hanson, the author thinks that Old Testament theology should be organized around a dialectic, two emphases that live in apparently irresolvable tension, rather than around a single theme or motif.

The first two chapters detail the primary dialectic around which Brueggemann feels an Old Testament theology should be formed. The author labels the dominant pole in his bipolar scheme common or contractual theology, a belief which was prevalent in other ancient Near Eastern societies. It assumes an ordered world under the governance of a sovereign God and is basically a theology of retribution, in which God rewards those who please Him and punishes those who don't. Expressed in the Sinai covenant, the Deuteronomic theology, the prophetic books, and the wisdom materials, this common theology legitimates current political authority because it is supportive of *status quo*.

However, according to the author, the Old Testament also contains a sustained critique of this contractual theology which constitutes the other pole in his dialectic. The main issue in this critique is the embrace of pain and is found in such places as the lament psalms and the confessions of Jeremiah. This embrace-of-pain theology protests the disorder and pain present in the world and disputes the thinking that life is essentially contractual and that all pain is punishment for disobeying God. Rather, pain is an essential part of Israel's experience, of its dialogue with God, and of God's own experience. Instead of legitimating structure and authority, this embrace-of-pain theology is capable of undermining and transforming them.

In subsequent chapters, Brueggemann demonstrates how such an approach is applied to Old Testament ethics (chaps. 3-4). He also speaks of a convergence in recent Old Testament theologies (chaps. 5-6) and elaborates on other dialectics present in the text (related to his primary dialectic), such as the tension between the aniconic and the iconic (chap. 7) and the presence and absence of God in Israel (chap. 8). Finally, in the last six chapters he demonstrates how to apply his methodology to a variety of passages.

There is much to commend about this work. The author's focus on various texts and their theological meaning is an effective reminder that the Old Testament is essentially a theological document. He makes use of

various tools, such as sociology and rhetorical criticism, but always as these serve to understand the theological message of the text.

Brueggemann is also to be applauded for his willingness to speak of the interconnectedness and theological relationship of the Old Testament with the New. Although many modern Old Testament theologians are reluctant to make such a move, Brueggeman's view that there is a close theological connection between these two portions of Scripture is consonant with that of the Christian church down through the centuries.

Also worthy of praise is the author's recognition of the Old Testament's relevance to modern life. Not content to allow the message of the Old Testament to be considered as ancient, therefore irrelevant, he gives examples of how to apply its theological message to contemporary life (148-149). According to Brueggeman, this message challenges the structure and dominant values of our time on behalf of the God who hears the cries of the oppressed and marginalized.

Notwithstanding the obvious strengths of this volume, several weaknesses are manifest. It seems that Brueggeman's understanding of contractual theology, the dominant pole in his dialectic as demanding blind, docile obedience (28), is at best an oversimplification. In light of the fact that one of the foundational commands in Deuteronomy is to love Yahweh with all the heart, soul, and might (Deut 6:5), is not this contractual theology asking for an intelligent obedience rendered because of love? Perhaps the chasm between the poles in the author's dialectic is narrower than he appears to suggest.

Further, is it really true that contractual theology always legitimates current structure and authority, thereby supporting *status quo*? What if the current powers are not abiding by the contract, as was the case with most of the kings of Israel and Judah? It seems that contractual theology could undermine secular authority and call for its overthrow in such situations.

Moreover, in the chapters treating various passages of the Old Testament, Brueggemann's interpolations seem tendentious. This is particularly apparent in his marshalling of evidence which attempts to demonstrate that 2 Sam 21-24 would be an attempt to deconstruct an exalted royal ideology (237-246). His assertion that the two poems in this section (2 Sam 22:2-51; 23:1-7) are a challenge to the royal ideology is dubious. Also, his declaration that the catalogue of warrior heroes in 2 Sam 23:8-39 shows a democratizing tendency which works against a high royal theology tends to overlook the significance of the programmatic statement that they were the warriors "whom David had" (2 Sam 23:8), a statement which clearly places them in a subordinate role and may in fact enhance David's status. While Brueggemann's overall point that 2 Sam 21-24 is an appendix of deconstruction may be true, one gains the impression that at times he adopts certain interpretations which seem to buttress his theological point, even if the interpretations are suspect.

But overall, the author has produced a lucid, well-reasoned presentation of his thinking on the enterprise of Old Testament theology and has effectively reminded us of the centrality of the text in this enterprise. This book is recommended for all who are interested in the current status and future directions of the field.

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Clouser, Roy A. *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Beliefs in Theories*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991. 330pp. \$39.95.

In his book, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, Roy A. Clouser (Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Trenton State College, Trenton, NJ) presents a "radical reinterpretation of the general relations of religion, science and philosophy" (xi). Such a correlation will be hereafter referred to as a religion-science-philosophy (RSP) correlation. In the four sections of his book Clouser gives definitions of religion, theory, supporting case studies, and finally, his "biblical" theory of reality.

Section One presents Clouser's definition of religion as belief in the divine category of self-existence. Religious belief perceives the divine either as part of one continuous reality or as discontinuous with creation. This definition encompasses unconsciously believing scientists, nonworshipping ancient Egyptians, amoral Epicureans, and Hindus without belief in a Supreme Being. All persons trust in the reliability of, and in some theoretical truth about, what is held as self-existent.

Section Two defines theories as explanations subject to justification. Clouser does not separate faith and reason; rather, he distinguishes justifiable theory from religious belief. While science explains aspects of experience, and philosophy explains their relation, religious belief regulates philosophy and science. There can be no justification of self-existence. Even the denial of a self-existent ground for the universe affirms the self-existence of the universe itself. *Faith* in the self-existent is essential to knowledge.

In *Section Three*, Clouser supports his definitions by case studies on the influence of belief in mathematics, physics, and psychology.

In *Section Four* Clouser discusses four concerns as he completes his proposal for RSP correlation: 1) On the basis of his understanding of religious language, Clouser critiques the reductionist identification of the nature of reality with some aspect(s) of reality, as incoherent and pantheistic or pagan. 2) He suggests that God is self-existent Creator and Sustainer, so that all created aspects are equally real, divinely caused, subject to a cosmic framework of laws, and understood only in connectedness. 3) He gives brief