

Preface to the CD-ROM Edition

I am delighted that Fortress Press will offer this paperback edition of my book, with CD-ROM. The new edition remains unchanged, but with an important supplement. Since its publication in 1997, my *Theology of the Old Testament* has been variously received, but mostly welcomed by those who care about interpretive issues in a context that has moved well and rapidly beyond the certitudes of an older venue. Of course I would articulate some things differently were I to rewrite, but the main pattern of dialogical, multi-voiced testimony continues to be, I am persuaded, exactly in the right direction.

It is now clear to me that a few major accent points in my argument might better have been the focus of my work; but what I wanted to say is all there in any case. These major accent points include:

1. A primary appeal to *testimony*, which consists in truth arising “from below.” Soon after I published the book, Rebecca Chopp presented a remarkable paper on “theory” and “testimony” as rival epistemological modes; Chopp’s argument in the direction of “testimony” is exactly in line with my own proposal. The more our knowledge of faith is democratized, the more testimony “from below” is a source of fidelity. Clearly the makers of these biblical texts understood that.

2. The scheme of *testimony and counter-testimony* seems to me to be exactly correct, a point developed in her study of the Psalms by Carleen Mandolfo. Such a construal of the text is of course contrary to some current so-called “canonical perspective” that continues to view the texts as a seamless whole. Neither the text itself nor our reading of it, it seems to me, allows for such an uninterrupted wholeness, when the primary mode of articulation is disputatious and permeated with contrariness. This is, no doubt, a point of dispute about which we will continue to wrestle.

3. My work on YHWH’s “partners” is, I think, of major importance and has not received due attention. I suspect that critical readers have, for the most part, not stayed with the argument long enough to see that dimension of my presentation. Specifically, I believe that “the human person as partner” is an important resource in current pastoral theology, and “the nations as partners” is crucial if we are to recover a biblically informed voice amid the mounting military imperialism of the United States government. These extrapolations from the character of God matter decisively to the Old Testament, and surely pose hard questions for those who want the text as a seamless whole.

4. The matter of Jewish-Christian reading, in concert and in tension, has developed at a rapid rate in a most welcome way. My own learning in this dimension continues with much more work to be done.

In addition to critique of my book from a so-called “canonical” perspective, the most dismissive and sometimes stridently dismissive responses to my book have come from unexamined modernist positions that clearly no longer pertain. Specifically the claim of “history” grows more and more problematic and a merely more loudly asserted claim of “historicity” in fact amounts to no argument at all. Thus my focus on rhetoric continues to bracket out historical questions but not to deny them. In current hermeneutical conversation, champions of old-line historical claims would do well to consider afresh the way in which I have made my argument.

Such categories aside, however, I am glad for the widespread positive reception and use of my book. My argument is of course not the last word, but it is an attempt to respond to current issues of faith that I think are not well or convincingly framed either in reductionist “canonical reading” or by wearying insistences upon “historicity.” We have, with reference to those issues, much to learn from our Jewish reading partners.

This CD-ROM edition is a good time for me to thank a nearly “apostolic” succession of Fortress Press editors who have cared for my work including Roland Sieboldt, Norman Hjelm, Hal Rast, Marshall Johnson, John Holler, Michael West, and K. C. Hanson, along with their associates whose names are not always visible among us. Beyond that I am grateful to readers—colleagues, students, fellow pastors—who continue to engage my work. And I am grateful for my prize student, Rebecca Gaudino, for her careful work on the CD-ROM supplement to this volume. As has become usual for me, the work of Tia Foley and Tim Simpson hover here as often in my effort. The outcomes of my book, *mutatis mutandi*, are not unlike the way I have concluded my study of Israel’s faith: “The jury only trickles in—here and there, now and then” (750).

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN
COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
MARCH 3, 2005