

Walter Brueggemann:  
*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*,  
 Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2005.

Robert Alter: *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Basic Books, 1983.

Walter Brueggemann has written an impressive Old Testament theology. His approach is provocative for the OT Theology and is quite different from the models of W. Eichrodt and G. von Rad, who had dominated the twentieth century.

Entering into discussion he summarize the study of the OT Theology from the Reformation, and in the same time he describes his perspective on the social and theological environment within which an Old Testament must be elaborated today. Brueggemann gives a critic of different approaches, starting from Luther and throw Wellhausen, Bart, Alt, Noth, Eichordt, von Rad he arrives to the "Contemporary Situation" (Childs, Barr, Clines, Alter, etc.) characterised by plurality. Brueggemann points out how recent trends in scholarship have led to a move away from the hegemonic classical critical approaches to the incorporation of contributions from sociological and rhetorical criticism.

Any interpretation now takes place within a pluralistic context, a reality, which for him is both challenging and enriching. There is no "interest-free interpretation, no interpretation that is not in the service of some interest and some sense advocacy". Brueggemann particularly champions what he calls the "efforts at the margins," those works arising from within the struggles of feminist, liberationist, and black theologies. But in the same manner he is criticising what he calls the "Centrist Enterprises"-Childs, Levenson, Barr and Rendtorff-. In his view primary attention must be given to the rhetoric and the rhetorical character of faith in the OT. Rhe-

torical criticism focuses on the final form of the biblical text (not on hypothetical earlier redactions) and explores the power of that text on the imagination. The three words in the subtitle suggest his development. "Testimony" – Israel's various witnesses; "Dispute" – A competing version of truth is given by other witnesses; "Advocacy" – The OT witnesses for Yahweh advocate a truth and a reality. The guiding metaphor for this theology is the courtroom. Basing his work on this metaphor, he allows for the plurality of voices seeking to testify and the plurality of interpretive communities. His question is: "How does ancient Israel speak about God?" God is the One about whom Israel speaks. He is not asking, as the historical criticism, "What happened?", but "What is said?" or "What is testified?". For the Old Testament faith, the utterance is everything. Israel's utterance about God is characteristically stated in full sentences, and that sentences are organized around an active verb that bespeaks an action that is transformative, intrusive, or inverting. This verbs describe Yahweh, as creator, as the God who makes promises, who delivers, who commands, who leads. But Yahweh in Israel's witness is described also with adjectives, and nouns (substantives and metaphors).

The testimony is neither reductionistic nor coercive. It is given in all its elusiveness and density, and then the witnesses await the decision of the court, while other testimony is given by other witnesses for other gods. The waiting is long and disconcerting, because witnesses to other gods are sometimes more formida-

ble. The biblical text contains *testimonies* and *countertestimonies* concerning the person and activities of God. That is, the Old Testament offers positive portrayals of who God is and what he does (“Israel’s core testimony”), but it also contains expressions of frustration at God’s hiddenness and the apparent contradictions of his person and actions. The idea is that the Old Testament does not have a seamless and totally coherent view of God.

The third part of the book deals with Israel’s unsolicited testimony. Brueggemann starts this part with the statement, that in a courtroom extra testimony, unsolicited by the attorney may be harmful to the case. It is evident that Israel gives a good deal of “unsolicited testimony”. As Yahweh’s partner Israel speaks about his relationship with Yahweh. In Israel’s unsolicited testimony, Israel becomes the key partner to Yahweh and the subject of the testimony. This testimony bespeaks the Yahweh originary love for Israel, Israel’s covenantal obligation, Israel being scattered, his repentance, Yahweh’s fresh turn toward Israel and Israel regathered.

Israel is partner to Yahweh not just as nation, community, but every person who belongs to Israel is partner to Yahweh. In the OT human persons are understood as situated in the same transactional process with the holiness of Yahweh as is Israel. The human person is a person in relation to Yahweh, who lives in an intense mutuality with Yahweh.

Israel did not live its life or practice of faith in a sociopolitical vacuum. Israel lived among the nations, and had to articulate how the nations were related to Yahweh. The nations belong also to Yahweh’s partnership. But not just human beings, but the whole creation.

The fourth part of the book deals with Israel’s embodied testimony. This part of the book steps away somewhat from the governing metaphor of testimony, and

deal with the mediation of Yahweh’s presence. In this mediation the Torah occupies the primary place of authority, significance and influence. The Torah as mediation includes an open-ended dynamic and an ongoing vitality that goes beyond Moses. The Torah as the most comprehensive mode of mediation between Yahweh and Israel pertains to every sphere of life.

Kingship, as a belatedly emerging mode of mediation in Israel, unlike Torah, pertains especially to public political life in which Israel thought, as best it could, about order, power and justice. The requirement of monarchy arose from practical sociopolitical, economic realities. But the dynasty in Jerusalem is to function not just for military success, but also for sacerdotal efficaciousness, that will assure the success and well being of the people. The kingship as mediator is to be understood as congruent with the kingship of Yahweh.

Prophecy as a mode of mediation begins in the inexplicable appearance of individual persons who claim to speak Yahweh’s revelatory word. Individuals who made “out of the ordinary” utterances, and who were understood as having a peculiarly intimate connection with Yahweh, which made them effective channels of communication between Yahweh and Israel.

In worship, Israel is dealing with the person, character, will, purpose, and presence of Yahweh. While this presence is mediated by ritual and sacramental practice, it is the real presence of Yahweh that is mediated (Cult as mediator).

In the last part of his Old Testament Theology, Walter Brueggemann gives his prospects for theological interpretation. What goes under the general term of post-modern signifies the break-up of any broad consensus about what we know or how we know what we know. In his

judgement this means, that no interpretive institution, ecclesial or academic, can any longer sustain a hegemonic mode of interpretation. Because different interpretation in different contexts- driven by different hopes, fears, and hurts- ask different questions from the ground up, it is clear that there will be no widely accepted “canon within the canon”, which is itself a function of hegemonic interpretation. As a consequence, we are now able to see, that every interpretation is context-driven and interest-driven. In his proposal, OT Theology in the future will be reflection on Israel’s disclosing speech that in a pluralistic context. OT Theology is not simply a detached analysis of an ancient practice of speech, but it is an engagement with those speech practices, in order to adjudicate what is and what is not true, that is, speech about the truth.

Brueggemanns approach assumes that speech is constitutive of reality, which words count, that the practitioners of

Yahweh are indeed ‘*homo rhetoricus*’. Yahweh lives in, with, and under this speech.

The ultimate goal of theology, Brueggemann believes, is to stimulate a new imagination, in other words, a new way of looking at God and life that, on the one hand, is faithful to the Christian community, tradition and the biblical text, and that, on the other hand, is willing to engage other competing versions of reality that might be destructive to humankind. No point of view, therefore, can be a final word, an absolute judgement on God and the world. In addition, while the author is very concerned to develop his theology for the Christian Church, at the same time he continually tries to enter into dialogue with the Jewish tradition. The Old Testament, Brueggemann says, is both a Jewish and a Christian book. He is striving to make his work relevant to the pressing issues of modern life.

**János Simon**