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In Search of Solid Ground

Understanding the Epistemology, Hermeneutics, and Theology in Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament, Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*

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Master in Theology, one year, in Lund University, 2003

PhD-dissertation in Old Testament Theology defended at Åbo Akademi Unversity, 2019

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PREFACE

This project began during my final theological studies at Lund University way back in 2003. It was suggested that I read the American theologian Walter Brueggemann. Reading his *Theology of The Old Testament* was an overwhelming experience. I was then - and continue to be - formed both by a *passionat*e love of the Bible as *Scripture,* but also by the sovereign majesty of the historical-critical method passed on to me by my professors Tryggve Mettinger, Sten Hidal, and Fredrik Lindström. There is, however, often quite a tension between passion and sovereignty and the two readings of Scripture mentioned above do not always converge. The groundwork leading to my way of reaching towards a harmonious balance between academic scholarship and a passionate love for the Scripture was laid by the academic student society Theofil, a student Centre for theological studies, situated in the heart of Lund. This house has helped to shape many priests within Church of Sweden and continues to be a source of inspiration and academic education. My thanks go to Henrik Gustavsson, who supported me to combine reason and faith and to love the Bible with my whole heart, soul, and mind.

My reading of Brueggemann has positively challenged my theological thinking. I finished my masters program in 2003 and after ordination in the Church of Sweden, (the Diocese of Växjö and the Parish in Älmhult) in 2006 I became acquainted with the Swedish speaking university in Finland, Åbo Akademi University Finland and subsequently began my doctoral studies there in 2007. It was and still is wonderful to take the overnight ferry from Stockholm and wake up in the morning in Åbo/Turku. The education program in Finland, the excellence of performance at the Åbo Akademi University under the charge of Professor Antti Laato has been a blessing. As a priest in the Church of Sweden, I have related Brueggemann to my pastoral reality. This reality is often marked by exile and amnesia, but, by help of a prophetic imagination, latent in the Catholic Church, a transformation of the word of God can change reality so

that new horizons can be caught on the holy pilgrimage of the church to the new Jerusalem.

ABSTRACT

Every theological expression of the Old Testament stands in a search for an epistemology and hermeneutical approach that can match the feature of the Old Testament. In this study, Walter Brueggemann's epistemology, hermeneutics, and theological conclusions are analyzed with specific attention paid to his *Theology of the Old Testament, Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy,* published in 1997. The title of this study, *In Search of Solid Ground,* came as a conclusion of this study. Walter Brueggemann, since the beginning of his academical career, has been in search for a new solid ground after the collapse of history and ontology. The hymn that was sang at his inauguration as professor of the Old Testament, "The Church's one Foundation Is Jesus Christ her Lord…" reflects that for a Christian professor the foundation is in Christ alone.[1] Nevertheless, Brueggemann challenged the academical guild and the pastoral society when he presented a concept of the God of the Old Testament that involves a tension The rhetorical tension in the text, according to him, also has a theological correspondence, so that God in the Old Testament, YHWH, cannot easily be described in classical dogmatic terms.[2] In light of his position as a role model for the discipline of the Old Testament, his approach merits specific interest. Brueggemann's theology as described in *Theology of the Old Testament* concerns the way in which the backbone in his theology – i.e. his epistemology and hermeneutics – paves the way for his theology. In this study I describe his epistemology as testimonial foundationalism which means that I argue that he has a weak foundational standpoint. His hermeneutics, based on the metaphor of the testimony, imagination and the Jewish traditions, is best described as simultaneously non-referential and extra-referential. His theology is based on the fact that there is no convergences between the various testimonies within

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 22, Folder 163.
[2] The Tetragrammaton is in this study transliterated as YHWH. When I quote from *ToT* I follow Brueggemann's use of the Tetragrammaton, i.e. "Yahweh". I use the name YHWH as refering to the God of Israel. Sometimes the term God is used in a more general sense.

the Old Testament. In the end, Brueggemann concludes that the rhetorical tension also becomes a theological tension.

Prior to *Theology of the Old Testament* Brueggemann presented a theological distinction between God above the fray and God in the fray where *above* stands for *transcendence* and *in* stands for *immanence*. In *Theology of the Old Testament* there is an obvious shift towards stressing YHWH as distinctively in the fray. This study argues that Brueggemann's tension between Soverginity and passion within YHWH could rather be formulated as God above the fray and Israel in the fray. This means that the God of Israel, YHWH, is immanent, in the fray through his chosen people. This theological conclusion emerges from encounters with the obvious counter-testimonies in the Old Testament, as formulated by Brueggemann, and the presupposition that the Rule of Faith comes prior to the encounter with the biblical text.

CONTENTS

Abbreviations

AAR	American Academy of Religion
ATJ	Ashland Theological Journal
BA	The Biblical Archaeologist
BDB	Based on *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs.
Bibleb	Biblical Interpretation
BthM	Biblical Theology Movement
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CTJ	Calvin Theological Journal
CF	Classical Foundationalism
HTR	The Harvard Theological Review
HBT	Horizons in Biblical Theology
NF	Non-Foundationalism
INT	Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament
JR	Journal of Religion
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
SEÅ	Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok
ToT	Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy
TS	Theological Studies
TT	Theology Today
Tynbul	Tyndale Bulletin
WF	Weak foundationalism
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal
USQR	Union Seminary Quarterly Review
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE STUDY

The task of this study is to analyze Brueggemann's Old Testament theology as presented in *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (published in 1997, hereinafter abbreviated as *ToT*). This study then, conforms to what John Barton concludes in his study of James Barr's (1924–2006) *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Approach* (published in 1996). According to Barton, Barr's contribution to the field of Old Testament Theology was that he could ask questions such as: "What are we doing when we are doing biblical theology?"[3] In a similar way this study aims at analyzing what Brueggemann is doing when he presents his theology in *ToT*. This study will deal especially with the question of how God is presented in his theological system. A purpose of this study is then firstly, *descriptive:* to depict as clearly as possible how Brueggemann reaches forward to his concept of God. Secondly, this study has an *analytical purpose* which can be formulated as a question: what is Brueggemann actually doing when he concludes his concept of God in *ToT* on the basis of the Old Testament text.

Relating this study to Rolf Knierim, who addresses some problems for the discipline of Old Testament theology, Knierim first of all points out that the task for an Old Testament theology must be related to - and simultaneously distinguished from - exegetical, epistemological, and hermeneutical questions. This study aims at understanding how Brueggemann's epistemology and hermeneutics underpin his concept of God. Secondly, Knierim situates the discipline of Old Testament theology within the "eternal" question of the relationship between the Old and the New Testament, and because Brueggemann stands in a pastoral reality the issue of a search for a Christian reading becomes apparent in his approach. This study of Brueggemann's pastoral and theologi-

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[3] John Barton, "James Barr and the Future of Biblical Theology," *Int* 70 (2016): 264–74.

cal approach serves as an evaluation of how a postmodern Old Testament theology has been accomplished. Thirdly and finally, according to Knierim, the discipline of Old Testament theology must apply the ethical question of social justice and Brueggemann strongly emphasizes justice as the normative goal for a postmodern Old Testament theology.[4] In sum, Knierim's analysis of the task for the discipline of the Old Testament emphasizes that understanding Brueggemann's theology becomes a study of how a role model theologian searches for a solid ground for understanding God in the Old Testament, YHWH.

1.2 WHY IS BRUEGGEMANN'S THEOLOGY CONTROVERSIAL?

Brueggemann was born March 11, 1933 in Tilden, Nebraska. His father, Rev. August L. Brueggemann, was a German evangelical pastor of the *United Church of Christ.* Brueggemann´s theological education began at *Elmhurst College*, Illinois 1951–55. He then went to *Eden Theological Seminary*, St Louis 1955–58 where he took a B. A (equivalent to today's M. Div.). He continued for his Th.D. at *Union Seminary*, New York 1958–61, and undertook his Ph.D. at *St. Louis University*, 1970–71.[5] His doctoral dissertation (Ph.D.) was entitled *A Form of Critical Analysis of the Cultic Traditions of Israel's Early Worship.* While teaching at Eden, in 1974, he also earned a Ph.D. in education at St. Louis University. He worked at the faculty of Eden Theological Seminary 1961–1986 (as Dean 1968–1982). In 1986, he was inaugurated as *William Marcellus McPheeters* professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary, and held this position until his retirement in 2003.[6] Brueggemann is a believing Christian. His reading of the Old Testament is

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[4] See Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament theology: Substance, Method and Case* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 1-145.

[5] Walter Brueggemann, Unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 25, 387.

[6] See http://www.walterbrueggemann.com/ last accessed 10 June 2018.

always open to the presence of God.[7] The portrait of him in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Literature*, Volume 2 (2010), presents his broad authorship:

> Through his teaching, lecturing, and writing, Brueggemann has made an attempt at integrating academic studies with the life of the church and the work for the ministry, and as a result, he has produced work on religious education, preaching, prayer, missions, evangelism, discipleship, worship, and urban renewal. As an exegete, Brueggemann has written commentaries on a number of books of the Scripture.[8]

With regard to Brueggemann it is important to see that he started his scholarly career in the early 70s at a time when Brevard Childs (1923–2007) and Barr were raising critical questions towards the discipline of Old Testament theology. Brueggemann was influenced by them, and has emphasized that the discipline should apply methods that are applicable to the postmodern context as well as to the text itself. That he has lived in the interface between academy and Church is significant when it comes to describing his enterprise in general.[9] He argues that neither the historical-critical method nor classical church theology has been able to comprehend the theological density that is inherent in the text of the Old Testament. His approach is then distanced from, on the one hand, the fideism of "scholastic conservatism" and church theology, and, on the other hand, the skepticism of "liberal rationalism" and the historical-critical

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[7] See Bruce C. Birch et al., eds., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 2: "To read the Old Testament theologically is to seek in its texts wisdom on the ways of God that allows us to submit ourselves and our actions to the same God in the effort to be faithful communities in the world." See also Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms, A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 171. See also; Brevard Childs, "Some Reflections on the Search for a Biblical Theology," *HBT* 4 (1982): 1-12. According to Childs, Brueggemann "has powerfully made the case that the believing community is an important and indispensable reference for doing biblical theology. He does not suggest this to the neglect or disregard of the academy, nor do I."
[8] Claude Mariottini, "Walter Brueggemann," in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Literature,* Vol 2. (ed. G.T. Kurian and J.D. III Smith. Scarecrow Press, 2010), 226.
[9] According to Brueggemann, the term *church theology* is a reading of the Old Testament through a dogmatic, classical, and conservative Christian perspective, either Catholic or Lutheran/Reformed.

method.[10] If these methods are allowed to prevail within Church and academy, YHWH, the central character in the Old Testament, will not appear properly. Instead, Brueggemann argues that "theological interpretation must be done in the faithful articulation of the character and agency of God, who authorizes and summons to an alternative."[11]

In order to understand why *ToT* has caused such a lively debate among scholars, it is important to mention some of the controversial ideas which Brueggemann presents in his work. These ideas would hardly have caused so much discussion had fewer scholars regarded his enterprise as being successful. He is widely considered as "one of the foremost Old Testament scholars of the last several decades", and "perhaps the most widely-known Old Testament specialist" among pastors.[12] In a broad sense, therefore, ToT is a theological presentation of the Old Testament with the purpose of describing God in the Old Testament, YHWH, on the solid basis of four different testimonies. The book is framed by a masterly introduction wherein Brueggemann describes the theological discipline of the Old Testament from its dawn with Johan Philip Gabler in the 1830s to the contemporary era. A retrospect section ends the book, wherein Brueggemann justifies his approach and argues for the necessity of an Old Testament theological discipline in a postmodern context. The main body of the book is devoted to a characterization of YHWH in the Old Testament. By means of a courtroom metaphor, used in a unique way, he has created a tool to incorporate various testimonies of YHWH; in sum, the four testimonies, the core-, the counter-, the embodied- and the unsolicited-testimonies, describe YHWH from different contexts, genres, aspects, using different words and emphases. His main emphasis is that all four testimonies share the same story, with different versions, and thus together they present the

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[10] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament, Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 747: "Neither liberal rationalism nor scholastic conservatism will yield any energy or freedom for serious, sustained obedience or for buoyant elemental trust."

[11] Brueggemann, Unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 37, 1315.

[12] James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 541.

true characterization of YHWH. These truth must be held together, but according to Brueggemann, there is no easily convergence. There are two ditches for those who searches to describe the God in the bible; either God becomes a platonic, non-emotional God, or the same God becomes the suffering God, who falls short on the idea of sovereignty. Brueggemann's characterization of the God of the Old Testament is a challenge because he stresses a sovereign God who encompasses passion, but passion in an uncontrolled way.

If Brueggemann's *ToT* is a challenge for the discipline of Old Testament theology it has to be mentioned that the discipline itself is somewhat controversial. Most apparent is that the discipline has never reached a methodological consensus. Barr stresses the fact that there is no objective method:

> The question, often posed, of 'methodology' in writing a work on biblical theology is thus a relatively unimportant one. There is no such thing as a 'right' methodology for carrying out such a task.[13]

This fact has even led scholars to argue for the impossibility of undertaking Old Testament theology.[14] Leo Perdue describes the situation within the discipline of Old Testament theology at the end of the 20th century as a methodological crisis. There is, he argues, a *historical collapse* which means that…

> … for a quarter of a century at least, there has been an active revolt against the domination of history (particularly in its positivistic expression) and historical method in accessing the meaning of the Hebrew Bible and the birthing of Old Testament theology.[15]

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[13] James Barr, "'Real' Theology in Biblica Theology," in Ben C. Ollenburger, *Old Testament Theology: Flowering and Future* (Wiona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 449-62.

[14] E.g. Rainer Albertz, "Religionsgeschichte Israels Oder Theologie des Alten Testaments? Plädoyer für eine forschungsgeschichtliche Umorientierung, Theologie des Alten Testaments oder Religionsgeschichte Israels?" *JBTh* 10 (1995): 3-24.

[15] Leo Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2005), 4.

I would argue that this collapse functions as a larger motivation for Brueggemann's search for a new methodological approach in *ToT*, beyond historical and ontological discussions. His attempt, Jill Middlemas writes, is to start with the testimony as the basis for his theology:

> Brueggemann sets forth his accumulated knowledge and assessment of the current state of Old Testament theology as well as his understanding of how to do Old Testament theology on the basis of the witness of the rhetorics of the biblical text.[16]

There is then no doubt that his approach is controversial because it yields a concept of God with a profound tension within YHWH. However, the same could be said concerning his most important source of inspiration and simultaneously his antipole, Childs. At least Brueggemann argues that Childs' approach is disputative, because he actually seems to present a concept of God that is determined prior to any encounter with Scripture, the ultimate source for describing God.

The critical question arises: how should a theological interpretation of the Old Testament be properly described? Brueggemann stands in a pastoral reality wherein every instance of preaching in a congregation formulates that "God is love" as explicitly set down in 1 John 4:16. For him, God's love could be described as Israel's core-testimony. Such a testimony is indisputable for almost every Christian. At least, everyone wants to believe in a God of love. However, a mutual pastoral experience is the existence of a so called counter-testimony, i.e. according to Brueggemann, a testimony visible in the Old Testament which expresses a serious challenge to the proposed core-testimony of a loving God. Even a revised Sunday-school Bible reveals a biblical history of brutal violence and human testimonies that call a compassionate God into question. The God

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[16] Jill Middlemas, "Introduction," in *The Centre and the Periphery—A European Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. J. Middlemas et al. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 1-6.

in the Old Testament stands in close proximity to wrath and furious anger.[17] Brueggemann suggests that there is no possible convergence between God's love and God's wrath. Instead, the visible tensions in the Old Testament text have a corresponding theological tension within God, YHWH. What he means is that any serious theological attempt to interpret the Old Testament text must pay attention to this double feature in the testimonies, the final result of which is a theological tension. Brueggemann cannot accept any presentation of the core-testimony at the expense of the counter-testimony, and therefore, his concept of God diverges from previous attempts in that he describes a tension at the core of the concept of God. In 1997, he published *ToT* wherein he suggests that in order to describe the God of Israel, YHWH in the Old Testament, it must be done without reference to historical and ontological claims prior to the text. For him, this means that God—the central character of the Old Testament—should be understood solely on the basis of the text, without any, or at least with as few claims of God prior to the text as possible. Historical and ontological propositions of God are not made prior to the text, but subsequently in the hermeneutical process of interpretation. The character of God, in his view, involves an unresolved tension. As a major contribution to the field of Old Testament theology, Brueggemann's approach warrants investigation.

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[17] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 244: "It is likely that the violence assigned to Yahweh is to be understood as counterviolence, which functions primarily as a critical principle in order to undermine and destabilize other violence."

THE RESPONSE FROM ACADEMY AND CHURCH

Brueggemann's approach has received an impressive response[18] from both the academic guild and the churches, from Catholics[19] as well as Protestants, and has germinated many questions. In the following, I will present some of these responses. Moreover, I will relate this study to central hermeneutical and epistemological questions raised and discussed in the response. Gilbert L. Bartholomew, in *Homiletic* (1998), states that in *ToT* Brueggemann presents a complementary view of God: "Through the method and the metaphor, a complementary image of God has now become more clearly visible, an image that has often been refused through church history."[20] Timothy F. Simpson, in *Journal for Preachers* (1997), regards *ToT* as "the benchmark by which all future rhetorically-based theologies will be judged."[21] On the other hand, the criticism of *ToT* is serious. Paul D. Hanson criticizes Brueggemann's concept of God.[22]

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[18] See e.g. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 541-62; John Bergsma, "Useful for the Church? A Critique of Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*," *CTJ* 35 (2000): 105-35; Brevard Childs, "Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*", *SJT* 53 (2000): 228-33; followed by Walter Brueggemann, "A response to Professor Childs," *SJT* 53 (2000): 228-33; Joep Dubbink, "Reality is Highly Overrated, God in Language and Reality in Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*," *Communio viatorum* 51 (2009): 240-49; Terence Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," in *God in The Fray: festschrift W. Brueggemann* (ed. T. Linafelt and T. K. Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 24-37; Norman T. Gottwald, "Rhetorical, Historical, and Ontological Counterpoints in Doing Old Testament Theology", in *God in the Fray: festschrift W. Brueggemann* (ed. T. Linafelt and T. K. Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 11-23; Donald E. Gowan, review of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, *HBT* 20 (1998): 89-98; J. S. Kaminsky - M. S. Odell - R. Rendtorff, reviews of W. *Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament*, *RBL* 1 (1999) 1-21 [Kaminsky 1-6; Odell 6-11; Rendtorff 11-17. Response by Brueggemann 17-21]; Jon D. Levenson, "Is Really Brueggemann a Pluralist," *HTR* Vol. 93, No. 3 (2000): 265-94, Gordon Wenham, "Walter Brueggemann - An Old Testament Theology for the New Millennium?" 169-76.

[19] The archbishop of Milwaukee, Richard J Sklba, review of Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament, TS 59* (1998): 722: "This volume is enjoyable reading and very valuable. I recommend it wholeheartedly."

[20] Craig Bartholomew, review of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament, Homiletic* 23 1 (1998): 26.

[21] Simpson, review of Brueggemann, 45.

[22] Paul D. Hanson, "A New Challenge to Biblical Theology,*" JAAR* 67 (1999): 451-52: "Brueggemann's model of the religious community preserving its traditional language as a discrete system and hence calling for no effort on the part of the modern interpreter to engage in historical criticism, comparative studies, or ontological! reflection, seems quite incongruent with biblical Israel, a community open to the religious metaphors and insights of other cultures as a part of an ongoing, dynamic process of spiritual discovery." See also same article, 453-54: "How can one claim that the very God presented by the testimony of Israel is self-conflicted when the

Childs was also very critical of *ToT* and argued that Brueggemann presented a theology based on a gnostic foundation.[23] Even eleven years after its publication, in 2008 at the SBL annual meeting in Boston, *ToT* was intensely debated. Bruce K. Waltke considered Brueggemann's theological conclusions to be blasphemous and heretical.[24] In sum, Brueggemann highlights many theological problems, and challenges many previous approaches, interpretations and theological systematizations of God in the Old Testament, above all within classical, conservative communities but also within academic circles fostered by the historical-critical method.

THREE MODELS THAT DOMINATE THE DISCIPLINE

The Swedish Old Testament scholar, LarsOlov Eriksson, when sketching three different theological models dominating the discipline of Old Testament theology during the 20th century, highlights Brueggemann's approach together with those of Walther Eichrodt (1890–1978) and Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971).[25] According to Eriksson, the first theological model is closely connected with Eichrodt's. This model pays attention to common ideas and themes in the texts of the Old Testament. The main point here is the God *who makes covenants*. The second model, represented by von Rad, examines how the theology of the Old Testament is formed throughout the history of Israel. The focus here is on the God *who acts*. The third model pays attention to the rhetorical feature of the text, as a source for describing the concept of God, i.e. *the God who*

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canonical shape of the Torah, the Psalms, and the prophets give ample evidence of the efforts of Israel's tradents to present a morally consistent view of God?"

[23] Childs, "Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy," 229-33. See also the response by Walter Brueggemann, "A Response to Professor Childs by Walter Brueggemann," in Brueggemann, *The Book that Breathes New Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2005), 175-79.
Brueggemann, *The Book that Breathes New Life,* 174-75.

[24] Bruce Waltke with Charles Yun, *An Old Testament Theology, An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 71. Reprinted in Bruce Waltke, review of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament, CRUX: Vol. 41*, No. 2 (2005): 44.

[25] See LarsOlov Eriksson & Åke Viberg, *Gud och det Utvalda Folket, Inledning till Gamla Testamentet* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2009), 212. For an introduction to the methodological problem of the discipline of Old Testament theology, see e.g. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Fourth Editions, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1991); John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology, A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 29-36.

speaks. According to Eriksson, Brueggemann, in the same way as Eichrodt and von Rad, stands as a role model for this rhetorical approach.[26] This model could also be labeled postmodern, referring to – among others – Childs, who links this term to Brueggemann's approach.[27] The Norwegian theologian Halvar Hagelia has paid attention to Brueggemann specifically from the backdrop of the impressive response to *ToT*.[28] According to Hagelia, the response proves that Brueggemann's theology stands as a kind of role model within the discipline of Old Testament theology.

1.3 BIBLICAL REFERENTIALITY

The following important hermeneutical question must be analyzed in order to understand Brueggemann's concept of God:

- Does Brueggemann's interpretation of YHWH in the Old Testament intend to refer to YHWH as an ontological proposition (*extra-referential*) or does his interpretation of YHWH intend to refer to a narrative or drama for the ecclesial community (non-referential)? The term *non-referential* is equivalent to *immanent, intrasemiotic*, *intratextual* or *textual ontology.*

If we can affirm that Brueggemann intends to refer to YHWH as an ontological proposition a theological problem arises, the problem of a tension within YHWH. To illustrate the difference between an *extra-referential* and *non-referential* understanding of Brueggemann's interpretation, the difference between a religious painting and a Greek orthodox icon is a good example. Each painting refers to the observer in different ways, i.e. they differ with regard to referentiality. A religious painting intends to refer meaning to the observer

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[26] Eriksson & Viberg, *Gud och det Utvalda Folket*, 213.

[27] Brevard Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 292.

[28] See Halvar Hagelia, *Three Old Testament Theologies for Today: Helge S. Kvanvig, Walter Brueggemann and Erhard Gerstenberger* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 183: "The investigation of the scholars presented in this book has demonstrated that it is Brueggemann, of the three, who has generated most debate. The series of reviews and other responses to Brueggemann's *Theology* is imposing."

without claiming to refer to God in an ontological sense. A Greek orthodox icon however, as used in the liturgy, is intended by the ecclesial community to refer to God as a window to heaven. In an analogical way, the question in this study is whether Brueggemann intends to describe YHWH in the Old Testament as a painting or as an icon. In the introduction to *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* Childs thoroughly discusses how words refer to the ontological reality and describes it as a fundamental problem that there is often "an assumed hermeneutics" at work behind the discipline:

> First of all, the proposal to raise these issues brings into the foreground of the discussion a fundamental problem which has either been pushed into the background or consigned to an interpreter's hidden agenda. Seldom has the issue of the substance of the witness, that is, its reality, been dealt with above board and clearly, but rather some sort of assumed hermeneutic has been silently operative.[29]

Childs also lists five examples of this "assumed hermeneutics" which – according to him, in different ways – unsuccessfully try to solve how various witnesses in the Old Testament refer to the reality outside the text: 1) Von Rad's *Heilsgeschicte,* 2) Rudolf Bultmann's existentialist approach, 3) various narrative theologies e.g. George Lindbeck's linguistic approach, 4) some imaginative construals, and 5) Gerhard Ebeling's contrast between *substance* and *accident* in Old Testament theology. These five models seem to indicate that Brueggemann's theological approach also tries to solve the same problem.[30] The question is if he succeeds. Another interesting part of Brueggemann's approach that indirectly is related to the above discussion of biblical referentiality is that Brueggemann wants to apply the same theological value to seemingly

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[29] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 80.
[30] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 117: "The primal subject of an Old Testament theology is of course God."

contradictory passages in the Old Testament and treat every sentence as specifically theological testimony. Exemplifying a seemingly conflicting passage, Psalm 44:22 and Psalm 92:15b is illuminative. In Psalm 92:15b it is written:

> He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

This verse states that YHWH is completely steadfast. As a consequence of this fact, the author praises YHWH. However, in sharp contrast, Psalm 44:22 reads:

> Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted
> as sheep for the slaughter.

In Psalm 44:22 YHWH seems to be like a butcher who slaughters his chosen people. The interesting thing with Brueggemann is that he stresses that these two verses must be treated as equally important theological testimonies concerning who YHWH is. In making such a claim, his approach becomes involved in difficult epistemological and hermeneutical questions. He is aware of this fact and in *ToT:* He explains it well:

> It belongs to the nature of Old Testament theological interpretation that we are not permitted to be so sure as we once thought we were about such critical matters. This unsettlement is in part a result of our so-called postmodern epistemological situation. Underneath that reality, however, the unsettlement is a reflection of the nature of the Old Testament text itself and, speaking theologically, of the unsettled Character who stands at the center of the text. Thus the unsettlement is not simply a cultural or epistemological one, but in the end it is a theological one.[31]

This quotation signals that Brueggemann traces a nexus between *epistemology* (the postmodern epistemological situation), *hermeneutics* (the unsettlement as part of the reflection of the nature of the Old Testament text itself) and *theology* (speaking theologically, of the unsettled Character who stands at the center of

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[31] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, xv.

the Old Testament text). His approach, in the new postmodern context, searches to detect God on the agenda again. In this study I argue that in order to understand the backbone of Brueggemann's theological enterprise, one has to comprehend his epistemology and hermeneutics that stand prior to the encounter with the text—the primary source of his theology.

1.4 METHOD OF THE STUDY

In order to clarify Brueggemann's method in this study, I follow a five-stage methodology labeled as follows: I. *Concept,* II. *Presupposition,* III. *Proposition,* IV. *Argumentation,* and V. *Structure.* This five-stage methodology has not been adapted to structure the disposition of this study, but I have based my observation on *ToT* around these terms. These five terms have functioned as tools for analyzing Brueggemann's approach, and by using them I have been able to suggest a coherent analysis of *ToT.* A detailed presentation of these five terms is necessary:

CONCEPT

Every theological approach to the Old Testament is based on various concepts that both inform and control the conclusions. For example, it is obvious that the concept "testimony" functions as a basic concept for Brueggemann in *ToT.* Moreover, this term is closely related to the courtroom metaphor. The metaphor of the court is comparable with corresponding concepts used by e.g. Eichrodt (the Covenant), von Rad (the Creed) and Childs (the Canon). The search for a unifying concept is a common feature within the discipline of Old Testament theology and various attempts have been presented.[32] Brueggemann's unifying concept deserves to be analyzed. Moreover, it is also important to note that a *concept* is always related to *content* so that the search for a concept of an Old Testament theology is connected to the content of the Old Testament. This connection between *content* and *concept* is stressed in Barr's book *The Concept of Biblical Theology* and this study searches to understand how

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[32] See Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate,* 163.

Brueggemann's concept, i.e. the courtroom metaphor, relates to the content of the Old Testament.

Around the primary concept of the courtroom metaphor other important concepts must also be analyzed in order to present a coherent picture of *ToT*. In sum, his approach will be related to each of the following concepts underpinning the basic concept of courtroom metaphor:

Postmodernism: Brueggemann uses this term quite frequently in *ToT*. He is fostered within an American context, and can be designated as a postmodern scholar for those supporting a theological interpretation of the Old Testament in the 20th century. The term postmodernism and its further meaning and Brueggemann's position are analyzed more closely in Chapter 3.

Foundationalism: This term is an important epistemological concept which is discussed in *ToT*. I will analyze it more closely in Chapter 4.

The Rule of Faith. Brueggemann relates his own approach to that of Childs. The understanding of *the Rule of Faith* as a lens or as result in the hermeneutical process is the focus in Chapter 6.

Finally, *God above and in the fray* is a theological concept. This is demonstrated in Chapter 7.

PRESUPPOSITION

With the term "presupposition" I mean the philosophical, idea-historical, cultural, and contextual factors which are behind *ToT*. Many of these factors are not obvious in *ToT* or discussed in detail but nonetheless form Brueggemann's thinking. In chapter 3 I have understood that e.g. the postmodern situation and foundationalism are crucial in order to understand *ToT*. More specially, we have to understand in what ways a postmodern paradigm affects Brueggemann's epistemology and subsequently his biblical interpretation? Concerning postmodernism, Perdue writes that…

> … postmodernism understands epistemology as the process by
> which the knower and the known are together involved in human

understanding. Thus, the position is false that argues for the ob-
jectivity of the interpreter.[33]

Perdue's definition of postmodernism stresses a change of epistemology, her-
meneutics, and theology. A relevant question then, is the following: in what
way is Brueggemann formed by the postmodern hallmarks of interpretation
and how does his approach relate to the text and the community that interprets
the text. The metaphor of testimony is, moreover, related to the courtroom met-
aphor, wherein many witnesses present their testimony. For him, the courtroom
metaphor functions as a concept for evaluating biblical texts and putting them
into different categories of testimonies. This means, finally, that there is a sub-
jective element which determines the definition of the testimony.

PROPOSITION

I use this term to clarify how to understand those important statements that
Brueggemann presents in *ToT*. The most important proposition from
Brueggemann is that the rhetorical tension in the text has a corresponding the-
ological tension. Another proposition is that speech and reality coexist (see
chapter 5). This means that God is revealed to the community only in, with,
and under the biblical text. Nevertheless, Brueggemann reaches outside of the
drama of the text, especially in the so-called embodied testimony, and in this
way, his proposal for an Old Testament theology evokes the question: Does
God exist only within the texts or also outside them? This evokes further im-
portant questions: can visible textual tensions in the Old Testament be inter-

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[33] Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History,* 242. Perdue
writes that in contrast to historical research, postmodernism argues that there are many more
important contexts than the historical context to consider.
See also Hagelia, *Three Old Testament Theologies for Today,* 187: "Nevertheless, postmodern-
ism is here, with postmodernists claiming their rights and 'preserve', also within biblical schol-
arship and Old Testament theology, with all its implications. Will postmodernism result in a de-
historicized Old Testament theology? At least Brueggemann demonstrates a lack of interest in
'what happened', as frequently noticed."

preted univocally? Are there hermeneutic tools for bringing seemingly dispu-
tative texts into a theological consistency? Is Brueggemann's proposition of a
corresponding rhetorical and theological tension a justified proposition?

ARGUMENTATION

Brueggemann relates the discipline of Old Testament theology closely to epis-
temological and hermeneutical questions because the discipline intends to
summarize, structuralize, and conceptualize the content of the Old Testament.
Therefore, in order to understand how his various propositions become justi-
fied, his epistemology and hermeneutics must be analyzed. Specifically, this
means that I want to understand how Brueggemann argues for his use of *testi-
mony* as an epistemological foundation. Moreover, I want to understand his
hermeneutics that is based on his epistemology and finally, how his theology
should be analyzed in relation to important themes such as the Rule of Faith
and biblical referentiality.

STRUCTURE

Finally, this study aims to describe the structured backbone of *ToT*. I here pre-
suppose that there is an important connection between Brueggemann's episte-
mology and hermeneutics that affects his theology. This means taking an X-
ray analysis of *ToT,* where the whole skeleton is made visible by describing
these basic ideas, i.e. his epistemology and hermeneutics, which have struc-
tured his Old Testament theology.

1.5 GOD *ABOVE* AND *IN* THE FRAY

Brueggemann stresses the importance of embracing all texts in the Old Testa-
ment as *specifically* theological testimonies. This theological intention is sum-
marized in the distinction between *God above the fray* and *God in the fray*.
Fray is in Brueggemann's theology best translated as *battle* and is used as the
theological distinction that concludes his dialectic between core and counter-
testimonies, where core-testimonies are equivalent to *God above the fray* and

counter-testimony refers to *God in the fray*.[34] More precisely, according to him, *God above the fray* refers to texts in the Old Testament that support order and structure in the creation and in society—God as transcendent and above human battle and suffering. *God in the fray*, on the other hand, refers to texts that embrace pain and suffering—God as immanent and in the battle of suffering with and for mankind.[35] As already noted, in *ToT* Brueggemann argues, on the basis of the existence of a counter-testimony, that there is a tension in the concept of God: "Israel had to reckon with a theological discernment that consists in a profound disjunction that is not only a matter of lived experience but also a crucial theological datum."[36] This conclusion, that there is a profound disjunction, is not necessary to accept. However, it is understandable that Brueggemann draws the conclusion that his understanding of God in the fray leads to the existential question of theodicy:

> The dialogical-dialectical quality of the text that keeps God "in the fray" brings one inevitably to the question of theodicy.[37]

When God is in the fray, the question arises: is God in the Old Testament, YHWH, unfair? In this study I argue that it is possible to solve "the profound disjunction" within YHWH by using a modified version of Brueggemann's theological distinction. I suggest that God in the fray could be reformulated and given the term *Israel in the fray*. In this way, YHWH becomes incarnated in his chosen people—Israel, the people who is in the fray with God.[38] This means that the theological relationship between God and Israel reveals a God who always stands in relation to someone. More precisely, YHWH stands in a

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[34] See Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, l: Structure Legitimation," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 28-46; and idem, "A Shape for *Old Testament Theology*, II: Embrace of Pain," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 395-415. These two articles are reprinted in *Old Testament Theology*: *Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (ed. Patrick D. Miller: Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[35] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 23: "Although this theology (the common theology of the ancient Near East, my emphasis) speaks of God's rule as settled and 'above the fray,' this theology is always worked out and concerned with being 'in the fray': that is, this constructual theology is never disinterested, detached, objectively clear, or perfectly obvious."

[36] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 310.

[37] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 83.

[38] For this distinction I am indebted to Johannes P. E. Börjesson.

close relationship to Israel. It is YHWH who identifies himself with the suffering of the persecuted Israel.

1.6 SOURCES

OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES OF BRUEGGEMANN AND ToT

Some comments on the sources used in this study will now be presented. Academic reflection on Brueggemann's approach is ongoing, and some sources are mentioned here because they refer specifically to the topic of this study. To date, no study has focused attention on his concept of God in relation to his epistemology and hermeneutics. In 1998, a festschrift entitled *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy Beal) was published. In this book, many of his colleagues and students contributed important articles to his theology. Concerning Brueggemann's concept of God and specifically his argument that there is a tension within YHWH, Nathan Tiessen has published the article "A Theology of Ruth: The Dialectic of Countertestimony and Core Testimony" in *Direction* 39/2 (2010). In this article, Tiessen applies Brueggemann's core and counter-testimony as a hermeneutical tool to the book of Ruth. Mattew R Schlimm published an important article that specifically concerns Brueggemann's concept of God: "Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos: An Examination of Hermeneutics in Biblical Theology." (*CBQ* 69, 2007). Finally, I want to mention Carey Walsh's article "The Wisdom in Rupture, Brueggemann's Notion of Countertestimony for Postmodern Biblical Theology" because it stands out in the argumentation that Brueggemann's hermeneutics should be understood as extra-referential. [39] In 2010, a European festschrift to Brueggemann entitled *The Centre and the Periphery: A European Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Jill Middlemas, David J.A. Clines, and Else K. Holt) was published. This book was a European tribute to Brueggemann and many of the contributors themselves inspired him in his work with *ToT*. The festschrift pays attention to the fact that he has

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[39] See Carey Walsh "The Wisdom in Rupture, Brueggemann's Notion of Countertestimony for Postmodern Biblical Theology." in *Biblical Theology: Past, Present, and Future*, (ed. Carey Walsh, and Mark W. Elliott: Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 167-76.

worked in the interface between central methods and methods in the margin, i.e. on the periphery. Finally, in 2015, another dedication to him, the book *Imagination, Ideology and Inspiration, Echoes of Brueggemann in a New Generation* (ed. by Jonathan Kaplan and Robert Williamson) was published. This work pays attention to the transmission of Brueggemann's approach within both the academic guild and pastoral communities. These works are referred to in this study because they specifically or partly relate to Brueggemann's concept of God. There are also other books that have made important contributions to other areas within his vast and impressive publications. To deserve mentioning: firstly, in 2001, Vaughn S Thompson published a dissertation on Brueggemann's work with imagination. *Reading with Imagination: A Study of the Imagination in the Work of Walter Brueggemann with Special Reference to Amos 9:11–15* (published at Denver Seminary, US, Carey S Thomas Library, Littleton). Secondly, in 2012, Hagelia published the volume *Three Old Testament Theologies for Today: Helge S. Kvanvig, Walter Brueggemann and Erhard Gerstenberger* (Hebrew Scripture Monographs, 44; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012). This impressive study by Hagelia pays attention to three different conceptions of how an Old Testament theology can be arranged, where Brueggemann functions as a model for a rhetorical approach.

PRIMARY PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED BOOKS

This present study could be defined as a *meta-study*. I use the term *meta* because the current project does not primarily focus on a specific biblical text or book, but is rather a study of how one scholar interprets the Old Testament text. Within Brueggemann's broad authorship, as presented here, *ToT* functions as the most relevant source for an understanding of his theological thinking. Understanding Brueggemann's theology in this study therefore converges in many ways in understanding *ToT*. Other sources have, however, been consulted as well. Important sources in this regard are those who respond to *ToT* in articles, reviews, debates and letters. In addition to these sources, Brueggemann has written over 100 books (2017: 117) and numerous articles

and reviews. All of them are important contributions to the academy as well as to the Church. However, with regard to his epistemological, hermeneutical and theological thinking, some books, commentaries, and articles have been especially important.[40] The first book in this regard is *The Land – Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* published in 1977.[41] This book makes the motif of the *land* the theological prism for interpreting the Old Testament and in this way demarcates against a historical approach and orients towards the text as the primary source for Old Testament theology. For Brueggemann, the hermeneutical conclusion at the end of this book functions as an interesting alternative to a historical-theological approach as formulated by Von Rad and George E. Wright (1909–1974). A second important book is *The Prophetic Imagination,* published in 1978.[42] In this work, Brueggemann describes imagination as a hermeneutical tool for Old Testament theology. He describes imagination, partly as an immanent aspect visible in the final form of the text, and partly as a way of thinking for the interpreter or the preacher of the biblical text. Imagination in this twofold sense, together with a rhetorical concern, forms much of his further thinking and has made his theological approach so interesting. A third important book is *Texts under Negotiation*: *The Scripture and Postmodern Imagination* (1993), in which his interpretative program is presented. This book marks the intensive process four years prior to *ToT*. In addition to these three books, briefly described here, Brueggemann also wrote some important commentaries, such as *Genesis* (1982), *I Kings and II Kings* (1982), *Message of the Psalms, A Theological commentary* (1984),

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[40] Charles Conroy, Professor of Old Testament at Gregorian University, Rome, has published a very helpful homepage of the most important books, articles, and reviews on Walter Brueggemann and his theology, see http://www.cjconroy.net/bib/ott-bruegg.htm#one (accessed March 13, 2017). Other important books by Brueggemann for the formation of *ToT*, see e.g. Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); *David's Truth: In Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985); *Hopeful Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986); *Interpretation and Obedience, From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

[41] A second edition was published in 2003.

[42] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination, Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

First and Second Samuel – A Scripture Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (1990) and *To Build, to Plant: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 26-52* (1991). In these commentaries, despite important internal variations—e.g. the Psalms commentary is a thematic commentary, whereas the Genesis commentary is a chapter to chapter commentary—he consistently highlights the final form of the text as the primary source for Old Testament theology. These commentaries can then be seen in the process towards *ToT* as implanting a textual theological thinking, and as a theological thematization of various Old Testament books. One year after *ToT* was published, in 1998, Brueggemann published his two commentaries on Isaiah (*Commentary of Isaiah Vol. 1: Chapters 1-39* and *Commentary of Isaiah Vol. 2 40-66*). He is deeply influenced by this biblical book, especially when it comes to his use of the courtroom metaphor as a tool for biblical interpretation.

With regard to articles by Brueggemann, many share a common focus on methodological issues. Some have been collected and edited by Patrick D. Miller in three volumes: *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (1992); *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (1994) and *The Psalms and The Life of Faith* (1995). The articles in these three volumes have paved the way and functioned as precursors for *ToT* in various ways. Brueggemann here traces the roots of the discipline and suggests new trajectories for it. He also argues for a new method for the discipline: one that pays attention to both the historical and cultural structures of the ancient world and, simultaneously, embraces the pain that surrounds human life.[43] In 1997, he crowned his productive career with *ToT*. *ToT* was translated into German in 2004. Apparently the translation of the German *ToT* is so ambiguous that it includes sixteen essays that relate to *ToT*, providing a background for understanding the methodological difficulties that surround

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[43] Walter Brueggemann, "A Convergence in Recent Old Testament Theologies," *JSOT* 18 (1980): 2-18; "Futures in Old Testament Theology," *HBT* 6 (1984): 1-11; "A Shape for Old Testament Theology I: Structure Legitimation," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 28-46 (Reprinted in Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 1-21); "A Shape for Old Testament Theology II: Embrace of Pain," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 395-415 (Reprinted in Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 22-44).

ToT.[44] *ToT* has also been translated into Hungarian with an introduction by Brueggemann wherein he responds and defends his methodological approach.[45] *ToT* was also translated into Spanish in 2007.[46] This overview of sources for this study shows that *ToT* was anticipated in many ways. It began in the 70s and then, in a process of continuity, came to a theological conclusion in 1997. In this study I have also used some unpublished letters and lecture notes with permission from Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives, Jon Bulow Campbell Library, Columbia Theological Seminary. I will refer to these sources throughout this study.

1.7 THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study has three main parts, each divided into two chapters. The first part, chapters 2 and 3, is entitled *TOT* AND ITS CONTEXTS. In Chapter 2, *ToT* is described with special attention to the counter-testimony and its response from the scholarly guild. Chapter 3 deals with Brueggemann's theology, within the broader context of the history of the discipline of Old Testament theology, as I highlight seven important contexts that demarcate and characterize Brueggemann and *ToT* within the discipline. These seven contexts also provide insight into his development as a theologian, from his early studies at Elmhurst in 1955 to his publication of *ToT* in 1997. I argue that his theological profile has developed in a process of continuity described as imaginative and rhetorical.

The second part, chapters 4 and 5, is entitled BRUEGGEMANN'S FOUNDATIONS. Chapter 4 concentrates on whether his epistemology should be defined

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[44] Walter Brueggemann, *Polyphonie und Einbildungskraft: zur Theologie des Alten Testaments, Wiener Alttestamentliche Studien, 4* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004).

[45] Walter Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy Revisited," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 28-38. *Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy. Encountering the Theology of Walter Brueggemann.* (ed. Csaba Balogh // In Hungarian: *Tanúságtétel, vita, pártfogás. Találkozások Walter Brueggemann teológiájával.* Kolozsvár: Exit 2014. 214 pages of *ToT* has been translated into Hungarian.

[46] Walter Brueggemann, *Teologia del Antiguo Testamento* (Biblioteca De Estudios Biblicos, 2007).

as non-foundational or as weak foundational. I argue that his focus on the testimony as a ground of certitude indicates an epistemology that could be defined as a variant of weak foundationalism. In chapter 5, Brueggemann's hermeneutical approach is examined. In the first part (5.2–5.4) the focus is on depicting his hermeneutics around three elements: *the written testimony* within an ecclesial community, *imagination* and *the Jewish tradition.* These elements constitute Brueggemann's hermeneutics. The second part of the chapter (5.5–5.6) relates his hermeneutics to the topic of biblical referentiality, and as noted above, the problem how Brueggemann refers to YHWH; in an extra-referential or an immanent way, or both. The third part, chapters 6 and 7, is entitled A THEOLOGY OF THE FRAY. Brueggemann's theological interpretation of YHWH is analyzed here. I demonstrate and analyze his theological conclusions. Interaction with previous epistemological and hermeneutical conclusions is made. In chapter 6, his method is compared with that of Childs. Similarities as well as differences are presented and special emphasis is given to the function of the Rule of Faith within biblical theology. In chapter 7 I pay attention to his theology with the help of an analysis of Psalm 44.

In chapter 8 the main conclusions are presented and a suggestion how the counter-testimony could be understood; as a theological testimony without claiming a tension within YHWH, a testimony where God above the fray has an unconditional relationship to Israel in the fray.

PART I *TOT* AND ITS CONTEXTS

In this part, I will describe *ToT* from the angle of its most essential ideas. It will be a descriptive part for the coming analysis in what follows. In *chapter* 2 I will present a critical summary of *ToT* and pay special attention to the counter-testimony. In Chapter 3 I will pay attention to those contexts that embrace Brueggemann as a theologian. These seven contexts present a historical perspective on his development as a theologian where *ToT* functions as theological conclusion of his thinking. In sum, these two chapters present the necessary background for the two more analytical parts of the study which follow.

CHAPTER 2 A SUMMARY OF *TOT*

2.1 POLYPHONIC NORMATIVE THEOLOGY

According to Brueggemann, there are four major testimonies in the Old Testament that present different versions of YHWH, and all are true—they describe complementary testimonies that function as sources for composing a rendering of whom YHWH is. His theology could be described as a polyphonic normative theology, where *polyphonic* refers to the four testimonies within the courtroom metaphor and *normative* refers to the fact that he wants to present a normative rendering of God for the church. In Brueggemann's thinking the testimonies are transformed to present YHWH as a theological agent. Describing YHWH as agent is crucial for Brueggemann. I would argue that this is the most essential aspect for understanding him. When it comes to describe YHWH as agent, we can take as a point of departure, Brueggemann's suggestion how God's anger in the Old Testament can be understood:

- God's anger can be legitimized as an act of vengeance.
- God's anger can be seen as an act in favor of Israel where God's anger is performed for Israel's wellbeing.
- God's anger can be defined as rather marginal within Israel's testimonies of God.

He rejects all three and argues instead that God's anger must be understood as a kind of *self-expression*, i.e. as a realistic description of who God in the Old Testament, YHWH, really is:

> There is, in addition to legitimated sovereignty and determined fidelity, an element of Yahweh's power that seems occasionally, in the imaginative testimony of Israel, to spill over into Yahweh's rather self-indulgent self-expression. I do not wish to overstate this element in the rhetoric,

but I also do not want to ignore the remarkable assertions in the mouth of Yahweh.[47]

The phrase "in the mouth of Yahweh" clearly intends that Brueggemann wants to stress the theological aspect of the testimonies. On another place he writes: "I fully recognize that to claim 'Yahweh as agent' is enormously problematic."[48] In the footnote to this quotation he writes: "To refer to 'Yahweh as agent' reintroduces the whole vexed issue of the theology of 'God who acts.'"[49] The theology of "God who acts" was first initiated by George E. Wright in his book *God Who Acts; Biblical Theology as Recital* (1952). This work was a conservative response to both liberal theology and its counterpart in America at that time, fundamentalism.[50] Wright belonged to the Biblical Theology Movement (hereinafter abbreviated as BThM) which Brueggemann was also fostered. Despite many differences, Brueggemann and Wright then share a common feature; to present a theology of the Old Testament and when in *ToT* Brueggemann introduces the term "Yahweh as agent" he intends to present YHWH, not from a historical perspective, as Wright proposes,[51] but from a postmodern perspective. A postmodern perspective means treating YHWH as both "agent and subject of contestation as the testimony of Israel attempts to articulate this character who defies every easy articulation."[52]

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[47] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 276.
[48] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 727.
[49] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 727, note 5.
[50] See James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1981).
[51] George E. Wright, *God Who Acts, Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 57.
[52] Walter Brueggemann, "Testimony That Breaks the Silence of Totalism," *Int* 70 (2016): 275.

2.2 THE COURTROOM METAPHOR

Brueggemann builds his theology solely on the final text of the Old Testament and it is for this reason he introduces the courtroom metaphor:

> We are now able to see why Paul Ricoeur's metaphor of trial is such a suggestive perspective from which to begin our exposition of Old Testament theology.[53]

This courtroom metaphor should be seen as a hermeneutical tool in his theology. For the use of this metaphor he is inspired by Ricoeur and second part of Isaiah (40–66).[54] Some reviewers of *ToT* critically argue that the courtroom metaphor is imposed onto the biblical text material, because the metaphor collects testimonies from different genres and contexts and forces them into a new context.[55] This critique, I would argue, is only partially true, because it is no doubt that the courtroom metaphor is essentially biblical, clearly visible in particular Isaiah who uses the courtroom, the Hebrew verb ריב (riv), as a metaphor to describe the confrontation between YHWH and Israel. The main reason for Brueggemann to use this metaphor is that it functions as a shield against any kind of theological reduction. The metaphor also protects the testimonies from historical and ontological questions prior to the text:

> … This means that theological interpretation does not go behind the witness with questions of history, wondering 'what happened.'[56]

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[53] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 134, 119-20.

[54] The book of Isaiah occupies a privileged place in Brueggemann's theology. See e.g. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 120: "Specifically, the disputation speech is a dominant form of witness in Second Isaiah, precisely in the exile when truth is in crisis and evidence is uncertain."

[55] See Stordalen, "Gammaltestamentlig Teologi anno 2002," 18. See also Hanson "A New Challenge to Biblical Theology," 452.

[56] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 206.

> ... Old Testament theology is endlessly seduced by the ancient
> Hellenistic lust for Being, for establishing ontological reference
> behind the text.[57]

In the Hungarian introduction to *ToT*, he admits that his use of the courtroom metaphor could have been more carefully formulated. However, he adamantly refuses to change it. He explains that his starting point was chosen both for practical reasons, to clear the way for the testimony, and for theological reasons, to let the texts explain God in the Old Testament as clearly as possible:

> The point of keeping the God of Israel [and subsequently of the Church]
> deeply linked to the text is to assure that God may continue to practice
> the radical disjunction and hyperbolic freedom and transformative new-
> ness that lead domesticated rationalists and fideists to talk about 'anthro-
> pomorphisms.' It is of course a danger to confine God to the pages of
> this testimony. I knew that when I wrote it. In my judgment, however, it
> is a greater danger to reduce this peculiar God to the commonplace and
> the generic.[58]

With the help of the courtroom metaphor, Brueggemann creates a theological basic structure for the testimonies. The courtroom metaphor is of course closely connected to another important metaphor, *the testimony*. It is important to comment that in contrast to modernists, with their negative understanding of this term, Brueggemann uses the term in a very positive sense. It is worth noting that the English philosopher David Hume, (1711–1776), founder of classical, empirical, and foundational epistemology, had a very critical understanding of *testimony*.[59] Craig Keener, in his analysis of Hume, writes that "Hume's intellectual context forced him to challenge the reliability of testimony, because it was the primary basis on which the early empirics argued for

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[57] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 714.
[58] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 9.
[59] See Craig S. Keener, *Miracles, The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts Vol. 1* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), 143-50.

miracles."[60] In sharp contrast to a critical modern understanding of testimony, Brueggemann writes:

In the work offered here, I have attempted to fashion an approach that honors precisely the variegated nature of the texts themselves. The hallmark of this approach is the governing metaphor of *testimony*.[61]

> I suggest that the largest rubric under which we can consider Israel's speech about God is that of testimony. Appeal to testimony as a mode of knowledge, and inevitably as a mode of certainty that is accepted as revelatory, requires a wholesale break with all positivistic epistemology in the ancient world or in the contemporary world. In an appeal to testimony, one must begin at a different place and so end up with a different sort of certitude.[62]

Paying attention to the metaphor of the testimony, Brueggemann focuses attention on *the sentences* and not individual *words* as the substance for theological information about God: "It is Barr's now well-established urging that words can only be understood in the context of their usage in sentences."[63] Testimony functions as Brueggemann's theological foundation and, as noted in the quotation above, this "appeal" gives a "different sort of certitude." For him, the theological reality comes to life in, with, and under the metaphor of the testimony.[64]

2.3 MILITARY CONSUMERISM

Another important term to understand in Brueggemann's thinking is *military consumerism*. This term is best understood in relation to the meaning of *metanarrative*.[65] He refers to Jean-François Lyotard for the use and definition

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[60] See Keener, *Miracles vol. 1,* 143.
[61] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 713.
[62] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 119.
[63] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 123, note 14.
[64] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 715.
[65] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 558-59. The term *metanarrative* plays an important role for Brueggemann. He refers to Jean-Francois Lyotard for the use of the term. See *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

of this latter term. A metanarrative is equal to a certain ideology or epistemology which dominates within a specific community and culture. Brueggemann believes that the dominant metanarratives in western society have lost their authority. Instead, many different metanarratives compete against each other and this constitutes one feature of the postmodern situation. His intention with *ToT* can be described as a basic material for a new metanarrative, a narrative that stands in sharp contrast to other metanarratives, and especially the metanarrative of *military consumerism.* He defines this term as follows:

> By "military consumerism" I refer to a construal of the world in which individual persons are reckoned as the primary units of meaning and reference, and individual persons, in unfettered freedom, are authorized (self-authorized) to pursue well-being, security, and happiness as they choose.[66]

Brueggemann's normative intention for his theology should be understood primarily in relation to military consumerism, or more precisely, his theology presents as a sharp contrast to the worldview of military consumerism. The undergirding epistemology of military consumerism is a secular world, a world without God, based on human authority. This epistemology funds the thinking behind the historical-critical method and also partly church theology, even though in one sense the latter precedes the historical-critical method. Brueggemann dismisses both these methods as incompatible with the text itself and also, even though these methods also are incompatible with each other, as methodological foundations for constructing the worldview that can challenge *military consumerism.* He argues that both the historical-critical method and church theology prevent the reader from grasping the text and, consequently, "the rendering of God." To conclude, it is therefore logical to presume that

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Press, 1984). According to Brueggemann, the term refers to the fact that there is no longer a given or common metanarrative that creates identity within the western society. Instead there are competing metanarratives. Brueggemann's intention with *ToT* is to present material for a postmodern metanarrative for the discipline of Old Testament theology.

[66] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 718.

Brueggemann as an Old Testament theologian also raises positive energy to form an alternative epistemology and hermeneutics in order to present the basic theological material for a new meta narrative. In contrast to the historical-critical method, he does not focus on historical questions, such as "what happened?" In contrast to church theology, he does not ask ontological questions, such as "what exists?" Instead, he chooses a rhetorical point of departure for his theology. He concentrates exclusively on "what is written" about God. With this background, he wants to present a new theology. Let us now study how he arranges his various testimonies.

2.4 THE CORE-TESTIMONY

The core-testimony is Israel's standard testimony and is one of thanksgiving, *todah*, uttered by Israel as worship.[67] An example of a core-testimony is Psalm 9:1-2:

> I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders.
> I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.

The core-testimony is not equal to the earliest historical testimony. Instead, according to him, a core-testimony is in accordance with Israel's most common speech about YHWH:

> Rather, by *characteristic*, I mean the most usual modes of speech, so that one test is the quantity of use. Beyond quantity, I mean by *characteristic* the way Israel spoke in its most freighted, exalted, or exposed situations. Israel's most characteristic testimony is the speech to which Israel reverted when circumstances required its most habituated speech.[68]

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[67] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 128: "I propose that the *tôdah* (a public act of thanksgiving) is the context in which the grammar of Israel's faith (that is, the verb of transformation, Yahweh as the active subject, and the direct object who is acted on) is fully uttered."
[68] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 122.

Therefore, Brueggemann can characterize Psalm 22:27, a Psalm of complaint/accusation, as a core-testimony:

> All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, And
> all the families of the nations will worship before You.[69]

Israel's core-testimony is recognized as a sentence wherein YHWH is characteristically the subject of an active verb, usually in hiph'il stem whose object often is Israel.[70] Brueggemann also enumerates various *verbs* (chapter 4, *Testimony in Verbal Sentences*, pp. 145–213) *adjectives* (chapter 5, *Yahweh with Characteristic Markings* pp. 213–28) and *nouns* (chapter 6, *Yahweh as Constant*, pp. 229–66) as belonging to the genre of the core-testimony. Together these verbs, adjectives and nouns provide the material for a thematization of YHWH (chapter 7, *Yahweh Fully Uttered*, pp. 267–316). His theological conclusion of the core-testimony is that YHWH is incomparable.[71] This incomparable description is a theological conclusion that is based on a thematization wherein the rhetorical tension has a corresponding theological tension within YHWH and this tension is apparent already in the core testimony. This tension is "most crucial and decisive and peculiar for Israel's life with Yahweh."[72] Brueggemann bases this conclusion on four observations. Firstly, Exodus 34:6–7 plays an important role:

> 6 The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed,
> "The LORD, the LORD,
> A God merciful and gracious,

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[69] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 128.

[70] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 144: "Thus we have attempted to define the grammar of Israel (full sentences, governed by strong verbs, dominated by the subject of the verbs who is an active agent, effecting changes in various direct objects), and we have considered the extreme and most sweeping testimony given to Yahweh, namely incomparability."

[71] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 206: "In all of this variegated, rather disordered picture, this jumble of testimonies, we arrive at the conclusion already considered above, the conclusion that is Israel's characteristic theological intention: Yahweh is incomparable!" See also 228: "It is no wonder that Israel's ultimate testimony to Yahweh concerns Yahweh's incomparability." See also 266: "The noun-metaphors for Yahweh are an enactment of Israel's testimony of Yahweh as incomparable."

[72] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 275: "Thus I propose that in the full utterance of Yahweh, the thematization of Yahweh is as the powerful governor and orderer of life who is capable of generous and gracious concern, but this same Yahweh has a potential for extraordinary destructiveness."

Slow to anger,
And abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
7 keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,
Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
Yet by no means clearing the guilty,
But visiting the iniquity of the parents
Upon the children
And the children's children,
To the third and the fourth generation."

The tension starts in 7b, with "yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished". Brueggemann offers this comment on the verse:

> I can find no evident way in which the two parts of this formulation can be readily and fully harmonized. The faithful God who forgives [*ns'*] iniquity is the same God who visits [*pqd*] offenders for their iniquity.[73]

His conclusion is therefore that there is a disjunction within YHWH:

> My thesis for thematization of Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh is this: Yahweh is a Character and Agent who is evidenced in the life of Israel as an Actor marked by unlimited sovereignty and risky solidarity, in whom this sovereignty and solidarity often converge, but for whom, on occasion, sovereignty and solidarity are shown to be in an unsettled tension or in an acute imbalance. The substance of Israel's testimony concerning Yahweh, I propose, yields a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core of the Subject's life.[74]

Secondly, Brueggemann also finds a tension in the metaphors. The metaphors in the Old Testament are *dynamic* by nature, i.e. they have different connotations at different times in the texts. Examples of such *dynamic* metaphors are YHWH as artist, doctor, mother or shepherd.[75] These metaphors can describe

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[73] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 270.
[74] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 268.
[75] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 277 ff.

YHWH in a personal way but can also express a change in YHWH which means that YHWH becomes what he had not been before because of the action of the object, mostly Israel. These metaphors imply that YHWH has expectations towards Israel. YHWH is a mighty judge, the preserver of life, generous and open-handed, but at the same time a God who can perform acts that lead to extraordinary destructiveness. The conclusion Brueggemann draws is that the dynamic feature in these metaphors yields a theological tension, in the character of YHWH:

> The tension, oddness, incongruity, contradiction, and lack of settlement are to be understood, not in terms of literature or history, but as the central data of the character of Yahweh.[76]

Thirdly, he highlights a tension in Israel's history, more precisely in the exile. A number of exile texts describe what Brueggemann calls a *two-stage sequence*. In the first stage of the sequence, YHWH acts in a way that is destructive for Israel. In the second sequence, YHWH shows his mercy upon Israel by maintaining the covenant (Isaiah 47:6; Jeremiah 31:28).[77] The urgent question, based upon the two-stage sequence, is if during the exile period YHWH continues to be faithful to the covenantal obligations to Israel and to practice love towards Israel? There are textual evidences that move in this direction (see Isaiah 49:11), but there are other texts that indicate that YHWH abandoned Israel during the exile (Isaiah 54:7-8). For Brueggemann, this means that there is a tension between YHWH's sovereignty and his mercy and Israel must learn to live with this problematic tension:

> Israel had to reckon with a theological discernment that consists in a profound disjunction that is not only a matter of lived experience but also a crucial theological datum. Thus, in my judgment, serious theological interpretation must reckon not only

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[76] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 282.
[77] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 308.

with evidence of the convergence of Yahweh's sovereignty and Yahweh's covenantal fidelity, but also with the tension between these inclinations, tension that on occasion becomes unbearable and unmanageable for Israel.[78]

Fourthly and finally, Brueggemann pays attention to the theme of *passion,* e.g. Lamentations 5:20–22, Isaiah 54:7–8, Hosea 2:10–13 and Hosea 11:8–9. The theme of passion stands in close correspondence with *solidarity*. YHWH is a God of solidarity who deliberately moves in the direction of passion with and for his people. Brueggemann cannot find proofs in the Old Testament that there is a convergence between HHWH's sovereignty and passion. He writes:

> But Israel´s text and Israel's lived experience keep facing the reality that Yahweh's self-regard keeps surfacing in demanding ways… It is this propensity in Yahweh, Yahweh's determination to be taken seriously on Yahweh's own terms, that precludes any final equation of sovereignty with covenantal love or with pathos.[79]

In sum, throughout *ToT* Brueggemann maintains that YHWH encompasses solidarity and sovereignty, but conversely he also emphasizes, already within the core-testimony, a theological tension located in the very character of YHWH that is a distinct feature of the core-testimony.[80]

2.5 THE COUNTER-TESTIMONY AND ITS EVALUATION

Because Brueggemann stresses a rhetorical tension between core and counter-testimony and because he also argues that this tension must be described as a theological tension, the counter-testimony and its evaluation is important to

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[78] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 310.
[79] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 303.
[80] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 271: "…what is most crucial, I submit, is that Yahweh's capacity for solidarity and for sovereignty is the primary reality that Israel finds in the character of Yahweh." See also 143: "*What is most important is the recognition that for Israel, power and solidarity are held together, and that both are crucial for Israel's normative utterance about Yahweh.*"

understand. We shall firstly describe the counter-testimony as described by Brueggemann. Secondly, we shall study part of the response from the academical guild. Thirdly, we shall understand how Brueggemann motivates a cross-examination of the core and counter-testimony which, fourthly, lead forward to his concept of God as a God in the fray.

WHAT IS A COUNTER-TESTIMONY?

According to Brueggemann, the counter-testimony constitutes an indispensable part of Israel's testimonies of YHWH in the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes, Job and the Psalms of accusation provide the primary biblical evidence for the counter-testimony.[81] Historically, Brueggemann places the exile as the historical place of Israel's counter-testimony. The following verses are examples of counter-testimonies:

Psalm 6:3   And my soul is greatly dismayed; But You, O LORD—how long?

Psalm 35:11   Malicious witnesses rise up; They ask me of things that I do not know. 12 They repay me evil for good, To the bereavement of my soul.

Psalm 39:5   Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah.

Psalm 42:3   My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Isaiah 63:17-19 Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways And harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage. Your holy people possessed Your sanctuary for a little while, Our adversaries have trodden it down. We have become like those over whom You have never ruled, Like those who were not called by Your name.

Ezekiel 16:32 You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!

Ezekiel 16:38 Thus I will judge you like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy.

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[81] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 325, note 5: "Perhaps the culminating example of this disputatious quality is in Job 42:7-8…"

According to Brueggemann, an important task for the counter-testimony is to perform a cross-examination of the core-testimony, i.e. it argues, mostly in situations of lament, that YHWH does not help when help is expected:

> … when Israel faces situations of desperate need, as in the case of *unbearable injustice.* Israel's characteristic assumption is that if Yahweh's power and fidelity are operative, as the core witness asserts, there would be no such desperate need and no unbearable injustice. Yahweh makes all the difference, and when Yahweh is not present and engaged on behalf of Israel, things go awry.[82]

The counter-testimony stands both in a dialectical and a theological relationship to the core-testimony. According to Brueggemann, the presupposition for Israel is that YHWH's power and faithfulness will save Israel. Yet, Israel encounters suffering and injustice and does so out of all proportion. Therefore, the counter-testimony argues that from time to time YHWH is ambivalent and unjust. The counter-testimony, however, does not always argue against YHWH. It can also describe YHWH as hidden in a more neutral sense, as part of God's providence. This form of counter-testimony, e.g. in the wisdom literature, expresses that YHWH does not always actively intervene but acts through natural moral laws. When a person violates the will of YHWH, the act itself leads to misery. Returning to the more problematic feature within the counter-testimony, this testimony frankly argues that YHWH is unreliable. Israel's counter-testimony poses questions which YHWH answers:

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[82] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 321. Fredrik Lindström presents the idea that evil forces prevail when YHWH is absent, see Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 159: "Fredrik Lindström has shown, moreover, how in many psalms such deathliness makes headway in the midst of Israel only when and where Yahweh is absent, neglectful, or inattentive." See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 375: "Israel is helpless against those enemies, and so must count on Yahweh to cope with them on its behalf. When Yahweh does not do so, as Yahweh has pledged to do, the enemies will prevail." Brueggemann positively affirms Lindström's conclusion in *ToT.* This seems contradictive because Brueggemann, as a reformed theologian stresses God's sovereignty, see e.g. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 220: The God of steadfast love is no wimp, but will act in the service of God's own sovereignty, which in this case is to the enormous benefit of Israel."

> How long? Yahweh answers: Until I am ready.
> Why have you forsaken me? My reasons are my own and will
> not be given to you.
> Is Yahweh among us? Yes, in decisive ways, but not in ways that
> will suit you.
> However, there are also times in the Old Testament when Israel
> seems to be alone, totally alone.[83]

However, there are also times when Israel receives no answer and therefore feels "totally alone." The counter-testimony "experiences the negativity of Yahweh in seemingly great disproportion to disobedience, affront, or mocking."[84] The counter-testimony accuses YHWH of not holding to and thus not honoring the covenant. YHWH is unfair and the suffering of the people is too great.[85] Evidence emerges from Israel's history, e.g. the narrative of Samuel, David and Saul. Brueggemann argues that Saul is being unfairly treated by YHWH. Saul seeks forgiveness in vain from Samuel for a sin (1 Samuel 15:24–25). David, however, is forgiven (2 Samuel 12:13). YHWH abandons Saul because of his passivity against the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:18–21), but David's similar action is ignored by YHWH (1 Samuel 30:19–20). To sum up, according to Brueggemann, the counter-testimony does not actually contradict the core-testimony, but more correctly, disputes the core-testimony, and in this way presents the complete and essential truth about YHWH.

THE ACADEMICAL RESPONSE TO THE COUNTER-TESTIMONY

The response from other theologians is impressive, as already noted. I will in this part pay special attention to the response that have observed how the concept of God should be understood in light of Brueggemann's counter-testimony. Concerning Job, Mark Gray argues that it is necessary to incorporate "Job's suffering as part God's responsibility."[86] This means that Gray argues that Job's suffering must be related to YHWH. Carey Walsh also comments

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[83] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 357.
[84] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 373.
[85] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 378: "Yahweh is not faithful or reliable, and the dysfunction that has come into Israel's life is indeed Yahweh's failure."
[86] Mark Gray, "Justice with Reconciliation: A Text for our Times. The Rhetoric of Isaiah 58:6-10," in *The Centre and the Periphery—A European Tribute to Brueggemann Walter* (ed. J. Middlemas et al. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 172.

on this idea in his analysis of the counter-testimony. This testimony, as described by Brueggemann, highlights the problematic aspect of being Israel in relation to YHWH:

> A chief benefit to biblical theology of countertestimony, then, is
> its realism; it speaks to a dynamic, living relationship that allows
> for the expression of difficulties.[87]

Walsh argues that the function of the counter-testimony is to be understood as a realistic source on behalf of the community of Israel used to understand that Israel's God, YHWH, stands in total freedom and is impossible to comprehend in Western philosophical terms of omnipotence:

> Negativity in texts, then, can serve a vital function by protecting
> divine freedom to exist and flourish beyond the conceptual cate-
> gories enlisted by biblical writers and theologians alike. This em-
> phasis on uncertainty in knowledge, and the limits and even de-
> constructive quality of language finds a receptive audience in
> postmodern theological discourse.[88]

Notably, Brent A. Strawn comments on the fact that there are no references in *ToT* "from Ruth, Ester or Obadiah; but one passing reference to the Song of Songs; and only three references to Jonah, Joel and Ezra."[89] Also important to highlight is theologians such as Blumenthal and Fredrik Lindström who provide much material for Brueggemann's characterization of the counter-testimony.[90]

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[87] Walsh, "The Wisdom in Rupture," 167.
[88] Walsh, "The Wisdom in Rupture," 167.
[89] See Brent Strawn, "On Brueggemann. (A Personal) Testimony, (Three) Dispute(s), (and on) Advocacy," in *Imagination, Ideology & Inspiration Echoes of Brueggemann in a New Generation* (ed. J. Kaplan, and R. Jr. Williamson. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 49. See Strawn, "On Walter Brueggemann," 25.
[90] See David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusive God, A Theology of Protest* (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). See also Fredrik Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (Lund: Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series 37, 1994).

Of special interest is the debate that took place in 1999 and began in 1999 where Professor Hanson responded critically on *ToT* in AAR (*American Academy of Religion*). Hanson was serving as professor at Harvard University at the time *ToT* was published and Brueggemann refers positively to him in *ToT*.[91] This article started a debate wherein Hanson accused Brueggemann of turning the discipline of the Old Testament into a new and negative direction. The focus in Hanson's article was to understand if the counter-testimony claimed to present an extra-referential description of YHWH. Hanson suggests that Brueggemann's counter-testimony should be understood as a human testimony that refers to YHWH in a figurative way, i.e. in a non-referential way. Hanson's critique is that Brueggemann has made an interpretation of YHWH that yields a gnostic God:

> … his description of God could reinforce a tendency deeply rooted in Christendom of contrasting an Old Testament God of wrath with a New Testament God of love. First, a brief description of Brueggemann's treatment. Yahweh has two sides. A careful syntactical analysis of wide-ranging texts presents a God who creates, lives true to promises, delivers, and sustains, a God in whom Israel can trust. But that trust is undermined by another side of Yahweh: one has the sense that all of these qualities of Yahweh are pervaded by a hovering danger in which Yahweh's self-regard finally will not be limited, even by the reality of Israel. One never knows whether Yahweh will turn out to be a loose cannon, or whether Yahweh's commitment to Israel will make a difference.[92]

Hanson argues that the biblical texts highlighted by Brueggemann must be interpreted as figurative testimonies coming from different groups in different times and circumstances in the history of Israel. Brueggemann should also

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[91] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 50, 52, 98, 172, 306, 444, 638, 693.
[92] Hanson, "A New Challenge to Biblical Theology," 454-55.

have made a more specific distinction between "human descriptions of God and the "real" God:

> A major qualifier is built into Israel's understanding of divinity that seems compatible with the distinction in modern theology between human descriptions of God and 'real' God. If instead of viewing the speech forms of the Scripture as the rhetoric of an ahistorical meta-court in which the pro's and con's regarding God's character are presented, one rather interprets texts within their concrete settings within the life of Israel, the conflicting views of God will be traced to the struggling efforts of finite humans to understand the Infinite in their midst and to inevitably ensuing phenomena like controversies between different religious and political parties, priestly families, and regional representatives.[93]

Hanson highlights Ezekiel 7:2–4 to show that it is possible to present a complete balance between the core and the counter-testimony. In Ezekiel 7:2–4, it is stated that the presence of YHWH is leaving the temple because of the heavy sin of the people:

> You, O mortal, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel:
> An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land.
> Now the end is upon you,
> I will let loose my anger upon you;
> I will judge you according to your ways,
> I will punish you for all your abominations.
> My eye will not spare you, I will have no pity.
> I will punish you for your ways,
> while your abominations are among you.
> Then you shall know that I am the LORD.

Hanson asks whether Ezekiel 7 really questions the mercy of God. The answer is no. This text expresses a clear biblical thought; without judgment that leads to repentance, YHWH's promise later in Ezekiel 36:33 will be unthinkable. In sum, Hanson argues that even though the Old Testament texts are complex

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[93] Hanson, "A New Challenge to Biblical Theology," 455.

they must be understood in the light of God as "the mysterious Otherness."[94] Another scholar, Donald Gowan also favors a figurative interpretation of the counter-testimony. In contrast to Hanson, however, he refers positively to Brueggemann's conclusions. According to Gowan, Brueggemann does "not make the direct claim that the God represented by the text is really *God.*" Brueggemann's portrayal of God should be understood positively as a figurative interpretation. Gowan describes Brueggemann's concept of God as a…

> … great strength with the book. Brueggemann shows that the diversity in The Old Testament must not be tamed, solved or ignored, but should be seen as an accurate reflection of what life in this world is really like and a reflection of a God who is both daunting and intensely fascinating.[95]

Another understanding of the counter-testimony comes from Brian R. McCarthy. He argues that it should be understood as a theological testimony. He defends Brueggemann's approach against Hanson's criticism and writes: "Why does Hanson fall back to read the divine wrath as figurative expressions of God's righteousness?"[96] McCarthy gives several examples of God as agent of disaster in the Old Testament (the flood, Sodom and Gomorra, Exodus, Job, Saul and the Amalekites):

> After the Holocaust only scholars who are blinded by theological prejudice, or who have become pure technicians who put aside their conscience and ethical sensibilities when they work professionally, can pass over such passages with indifference.[97]

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[94] Hanson, "A New Challenge to Biblical Theology," 459.
[95] Gowan, review of Brueggemann, 96.
[96] Brian R. McCarthy, "Response, Brueggemann and Hanson on God in the Hebrew Scriptures," *JAAR* 68 (2000): 615-20.
[97] McCarthy, "Response, Brueggemann and Hanson on God in the Hebrew Scriptures," 618.

In a letter to McCarthy, Brueggemann thanks him for his approval of *ToT* and his defense against Hanson's criticism.[98] McCarthy's conclusion is an intermediate position between Hanson and Brueggemann. He argues that Brueggemann is correct in stressing the dark side of God. However, McCarthy finds it difficult to motivate believers to accept God's dark side as an ontological reality. Brueggemann "cannot justify his position that believers must simply learn to live with this dark side and accept this incoherence."[99] On the other hand, McCarthy argues that Hanson fails to explain away God's dark side merely as figurative expressions. His own solution is that human reason must value and "discern and to accept and reject:"

> a) engage biblical texts in their specificity with a maximum of imaginative availability to their challenge, as Brueggemann urges, but b) then in a second moment go on, as Brueggemann refuses to do, i) to bring the texts into contestation with one another, with all the theo-ethical sensitivity and intellectual alertness and integrity that the texts themselves and their vigorous comparison call forth, and ii) to exercise their inescapable responsibility to discern and to accept and reject.[100]

To sum up, the AAR debate points to an important question. Should the counter-testimony be understood as a human figurative testimony, or as an ontological extra-referential testimony?

A TENSION WITHIN YHWH

According to Brueggemann, a cross-examination means that the core and counter-testimonies are heard without being interrupted, and the outcome of

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98 In a personal letter to Brian R. McCarthy, see Brueggemann, Letter to McCarthy, 2000, Brueggemann compares Hanson with William F. Albright (1891- 1971), and the Albright school, an American archaeologist and a front figure within the BThM. According to Brueggemann, Hanson falls into the category of scholars who represents 'the Old Albright line' and his criticism must be seen, Brueggemann comments, as a "cover up in the name of orthodoxy."
99 McCarthy, "Response, Brueggemann and Hanson on God in the Hebrew Scriptures," 619.
100 McCarthy, "Response, Brueggemann and Hanson on God in the Hebrew Scriptures," 619.

this examination constitutes the theological foundation for a concept of God.[101] Such an approach, i.e. paying attention to the discrepancies in the text created by the cross-examination, shares an affinity with a Jewish reading of the text.[102] Brueggemann's interpretation of Amos 9:8, together with Exodus 34:6–7 is a good example of how his theology takes form:[103] In Amos 9:8 it is written:

> The eyes of the Lord God are
> Upon the sinful kingdom,
> And I will destroy it
> From the face of the earth…

YHWH declares a radical judgment in the verse. However, the verse continues:

> …expect that I will not utterly
> Destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord.

Brueggemann argues that the first and second parts of verse 8 form a literal unit, and contain intrinsic theological information about YHWH. In sum, for him the theological message of verse 8 functions as a strong argument for a "revised narrative about Yahweh."[104] He draws the following conclusion:

> On many occasions in its canonized testimony, Israel asserts that the sustainer is not always reliable and the transformer is sometimes ineffective. In many texts, but in exemplar fashion in Exodus 34:6-7, we have seen that, if the text is to be taken as 'witnesses to the real,' the ground of dispute is not to be found simply in modern, undisciplined pluralism or in Israel's ancient disputatiousness, but in the very character of Yahweh.[105]

Brueggemann argues that the interpretation of the cross-examination presents a problematic theological conclusion for Israel:

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[101] E.g. Bergsma, "Useful for the Church?" 110: "The core- and countertestimony divisions of Brueggemann's theology really constitute the center of his theological argument and the scope of his theology proper, i.e., his doctrine of God."
[102] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 325.
[103] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 326.
[104] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 324.
[105] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 715.

> If we take such textual matters as theological data about the Character in the narrative who has continuity and constancy, then we may rightly wonder about the ongoing significance of this remembered violence in Yahweh's life and character.[106]

BRUEGGEMANN'S CONCEPT OF GOD: GOD IN THE FRAY

Brueggemann's concept of God in *ToT* does not fit into classical systematic categories. According to him, Israel describes YHWH as a God who is in the midst of human suffering—a *God in the fray* who embraces pain.[107] The term *God in the fray* is used by him as early as 1979 to describe a concept of God that is dialectic—YHWH is both a God of order and a God that embraces pain.[108] In 1985, he wrote: "Old Testament theology must be bipolar. It is not only about structure legitimacy but also about *the embrace of pain* that changes the calculus."[109] Inspired by Childs, he emphasizes that Israel's God stands for transcendence, control, and order. This is God *above* the fray. Inspired by Norman Gottwald, he also emphasizes a theology that pays attention to the social structures of power and struggle. This is God *in* the fray.[110] His thesis is that Israel tries to become liberated from the God above the fray by embracing pain and in this way Israel argues that God becomes in the fray for the oppressed and suffering Israel. Herein lies the dynamics of Old Testament theology—the tension between the God above the fray and the God in the fray. Brueggemann argues that Israel's capacity to embrace pain in her testimony constitutes the

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[106] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 328.

[107] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 83: "By this I mean that the God of Israel is characteristically 'in the fray' and at risk in the ongoing life with Israel." The term *in the Fray* Brueggemann uses to argue that an authentic Old Testament theology must be dialectical and not transcendental. Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida are important philosophers that Brueggemann positively refers to. Concerning Bakhtin, Brueggemann writes, see *Theology of the Old Testament,* 83: "Bakhtin's attentiveness to multi-voiced possibility and dialogic interaction within the text gives the lie to any single, settled meaning." See also Brueggemann, "Testimony that Breaks the Silence of Totalism," 280.

[108] Walter Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 98 (1979): 161-85.

[109] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 25.

[110] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 3. See also Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," 27. According to Fretheim, God *above the fray* expresses God's transcendence and God in the fray God's immanence.

wedge that cuts through the common theology and reveals its shortcomings.[111] What is important to note is that the distinction between God above and in the fray in *ToT* is partly lost. God is apparently in the fray at the expense of God above the fray.

2.6 THE UNSOLICITED AND THE EMBODIED TESTIMONIES

There are two more testimonies in *ToT*. These two differ somewhat from the core and counter-testimony because they do not stand in tension or in a dialectical relationship to the others. These testimonies are instead centered on how YHWH becomes present within the community of Israel. *The unsolicited testimony* is best described as a complementary testimony to the core and counter-testimonies. Brueggemann writes: "Israel wants to be helpful, to be sure that the court has the full picture."[112] Israel's unsolicited testimony is built around the idea that the God of Israel, YHWH, always stands in relation to someone.[113] YHWH has different relationships, different partners. YHWH's partners are *Israel, Humans*, *Nations* and *the Creation*. Examples of unsolicited testimonies in the Old Testament are:

| Jeremiah 31:3 | The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. |
| Deuteronomy 10:15 | Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. |

The embodied testimony is also centered on the partners, but here the partners are described as mediators. The embodied testimony makes YHWH present to Israel. These mediators are *the Torah, the King, the*

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[111] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 20.
[112] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 408.
[113] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 409: "Thus Rolf Knierim rightly asserts: 'The Old Testament, strictly speaking, does not speak about Yahweh. It speaks about the relationship between Yahweh or God and reality.'"

Prophet, the Cult, and *the Wisdom.*[114] Brueggemann also describes them as sacramental mediators.[115] Central biblical passages that describe YHWH as King are e.g. Deuteronomy 17:14–20, 1 Kings 9:4–8, 1 Kings 11:9–11, Psalms 2, 89, 101,110, 132, Jeremiah 22:2–5). 2 Samuel 7 is also of importance in this regard.[116] This text functions as "the beginning point for graciousness without qualification."[117] Another interesting assertion connected to kingship comes from Jeremiah 22:15–16. Here the prophet Jeremiah "equates judging the cause of the poor and needy with 'knowing' Yahweh." Brueggemann argues that "when the king engages in these practices in the administration of public power, knowledge of Yahweh is indeed mediated in the community of Israel."[118] The Torah, King, Prophet and Cult are all - in different ways - mediators of YHWH which makes YHWH accessible in the community of Israel. As already mention in chapter 1 in this study, Brueggemann argues that YHWH is revealed in, with, and under the text and nowhere else. It is, however, evident in the embodied testimony that there is a kind of sacramental force apparent which makes his theology reach outside the text:

> It has been my wont to say that Yahweh's 'natural habitat' is the text of the Old Testament, and there is no Yahweh outside this text. Now I intend to push behind that textual-rhetorical claim, to say that Yahweh's habitat is *in these practices.* Where Israel engages in these practices, Yahweh is connected to Israel.[119]

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[114] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 698.
[115] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 576: "Said another way, these modes of mediation have a sacramental force. As my childhood Eucharistic liturgy affirmed: 'We have to do here not merely with these signs, but with the realities that these signs represent.'"
[116] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 604.
[117] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament.* 605. See also 2 Sam. 7:13: "When he [the King my emphasis] commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him…"
[118] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 613.
[119] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 576-77.

In this case Israel, as the community, forms a proper context in which Brueggemann can situate the text. For him, the text is in, with, and under the context of the community and the reader-response between the text and the community reveals YHWH reaching outside the text. A minority of scholars have focused attention on *the unsolicited* and *the embodied testimony*. R. E Clements characterizes these two testimonies as pastoral testimonies.[120] Mark Hahlen appreciates how Brueggemann treats the drama of YHWH's partnership with Israel, the human person, the nations and creation.[121] Strawn is of the opinion that the embodied testimony does not fit within the courtroom metaphor.[122] Thomas B. Dozeman critically points out that Israel's unsolicited testimony actually calls into question the very foundations upon which the truth claims of the core-testimony depend.[123] In the core-testimony God is working in free ways to fulfill his will, but in the unsolicited testimony God uses partners to exercise his will. According to Dozeman, this would actually result in an unsolved tension between the two testimonies; the two are not only in tension with each other but they are incompatible, as described by Brueggemann in *ToT*. My own comment is firstly, that the embodied testimony relates to one of Knierim's tasks of determining how an Old Testament theology could be constructed. According to Knierim, the discipline should "examine the semantic structure of the relationship between Yahweh and his world."[124] Brueggemann has fulfilled such a task here and has shown that YHWH always stands in relation to his creation and likewise often works through different kinds of mediators. Secondly, this relational concept of YHWH in

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[120] Clements thinks that the cult, which forms part of the embodied testimony, should have come earlier in the presentation of *ToT*: "To a reviewer convinced that the cult was essentially the cradle of theology, this appears to relegate it to a less than formative role both in the overall development of ideas, but more importantly, in the shaping of communities and community-consciousness." See Clements, review of Brueggemann, 180.

[121] Mark Hahlen, review of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, *SCJ 2* (fall, 1999): 282: "This metanarrative offers God's limitless generosity versus a theory of scarcity."

[122] See Strawn, "On Walter Brueggemann," 23, note 48.

[123] Tomas Dozeman, review of Walter Brueggemann, *JR* 79 (1999): 484-87.

[124] Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament theology,* 16.

Brueggemann's theology has an interesting connection to the orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, and his book *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (1985), which Brueggemann refers positively to.[125] We will come back to Zizioulas in chapter 7.

2.7 CONCLUSIONS

Brueggemann presents a theology that is based on the final text of the Old Testament. He stresses a tension in the text that corresponds to a theological tension in YHWH. He describes YHWH as incomparable, with the application that there is a problematic tension within YHWH that is impossible to resolve. When suffering stands in unjust proportion to the covenants between YHWH and Israel, this tension becomes problematic for Israel. The critical question from the response of the counter-testimony is how this testimony should be understood. Does Brueggemann really claim that YHWH has an ontological tension? Is this tension necessary to accept? This question is central in this study. I will suggest (see chapter 7) that it is possible to give credit to both the visible textual tension at hand but, at the same time, avoiding to relate this tension within the concept of God.

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[125] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 118: "John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1985), resists the monistic, closed ontology of the ancient Greeks and insists that the early church fathers broke with Hellenistic ontology in seeing that the personal, communal propensities of God, who acts as a person in freedom, are prior to any substance or being. Jean-Luc Marion, God without Being, Hors-Texte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), follows Martin Heidegger in liberating God from the question of being, for the question of being is restrictive of God's freedom and of itself ends in idolatry."

CHAPTER 3 HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF *ToT*

In this chapter I will argue that Brueggemann in many ways has a postmodern epistemology, hermeneutics, and theology. My argumentation is based on various contexts that Brueggemann interacts with. According to Erhard S. Gerstenberger, in his book *Theologies of the Old Testament,* every theologian must consider how "our theological understanding is conditioned by our time and our society."[126] Every theologian, including Brueggemann, is formed by various contexts and interacts and reacts both in alignment and against them. The purpose of this chapter is to describe precisely those contexts that surround his theology. I presuppose that these contexts provide an important historical background for understanding *ToT* and additionally help locate his approach within the discipline of Old Testament theology. Brueggemann writes: "My effort at OT theology needs to be understood in the context of U.S. scholarship and U.S. culture."[127] This context is of course quite obvious, but there are more contexts in which he writes, and these seven that I provide in this chapter give important historical, theological and philosophical information for understanding *ToT*.

3.1 CONTEXT I) *SOLA SCRIPTURA*

The first context is described well by Joep Dubbink. Brueggemann's approach is a "…radical version of *sola scriptura* of the Reformation."[128] Dubbink emphasizes that Brueggemann specifies the Reformation as the natural starting point for a theological articulation of the Old Testament. Brueggemann refers

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[126] Erhard Gerstenberger, *Theologies of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 6. Gerstenberger concludes that "the question of the author's own position is usually criminally ignored in exegetical and theological work".

[127] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 28.

[128] Dubbink, "Reality is Highly Overrated," 243: "Now I propose we have to see this as a radical version of the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation. The Reformers argued, against the mainstream theology of their days: knowledge of God is only to be found in the Scriptures. But even among the Reformers this was not undisputed, if we think of the way John Calvin takes his starting point from a *duplex cognitio Dei*. Brueggemann radicalizes this principle by not only stating that *knowledge of God* is not to be found outside the Scriptures but adding that *God himself* is only to be found *in* the text, and nowhere else." See also Dennis T. Olson, "Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization: A Dialogue with *Childs, Brueggemann* and Bakhtin," *BibLeb* 6, No. 2 (1998): 175: "Ironically, Brueggemann appeals to the Protestant doctrine or tradition of *sola scriptura* in order to argue that Christian doctrine or tradition has no role to play in biblical theology!"

to Luther as "first of all a biblical interpreter" as opposed to the "*reductionist reading of church theology that made God simply an integral part of a church-administered system of salvation.*"[129] Brueggemann's overview of the history of the discipline of Old Testament theology ("Retrospect 1, From the Beginning to the End of a Generative Period") is impressive; he begins in the Reformation, and ends with a description of the rhetorical-critical method in the early 1950s.[130] This retrospectively shows that Luther stands as a key representative for defending Scripture's own voice. In this way "Luther's intellectual, interpretative courage set the work of biblical theology in a wholly new direction."[131] Brueggemann's emphasis on *sola scriptura* has an important implication; to actualize the indissoluble difference between an *honest* reading of the Old Testament and a reading that is formed by church theology. *Sola scriptura* functions in this regard as the first theological context for understanding his approach:

> It is the work of a serious theological interpreter of the Scripture to pay close and careful attention to what is in the text, regardless of how it coheres with the theological habit of the church. This is particularly true of the churches of the Reformation that stand roughly in the tradition of *sola scriptura.* The truth of the matter, on any careful reading and without any tendentiousness, is that *Old Testament theological articulation does not conform to established church faith,* either in its official declaration or in its more popular propensities.[132]

Simultaneously, however, the principal of *sola scriptura* raises a hermeneutical problem within Old Testament Theology. For example, Scott Hafemann argues that Childs, Brueggemann's primary counterpart, actually dismisses the

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[129] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2.
[130] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1-60.
[131] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 3.
[132] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 107.

possibility of a unity in the Old Testament: "And at the heart of Childs's attempt to create a unity out of diversity remains the theological polarity inherited from the Reformation."[133] Hafemann argues that Childs stresses a diversity that stands at the center of describing the Old Testament: "In the end, the emphasis of Childs's work is not on the unity of the Bible, but on its diversity."[134] In many ways, Childs and Brueggemann seems to agree at this point. In contrast, however, Brueggemann describes the Reformation as the beginning point for a fresh theological interpretation of the Old Testament, whereas Hafemann and Childs suggest a re-orientation of the discipline of Biblical theology towards a pre-reformational focus. Hafemann's conclusion is that the principle of *sola scriptura* creates a difficult problem: namely how the ecclesial community and the biblical text should be related to each other. Hafemann writes that there is a "difficult relationship between the Scripture and Church theology; in other words, between text and reading community."[135]

Brueggemann is, however, well aware that the Scripture must be understood within an interpretative community. The problem with church theology[136] is that this approach of interpreting the Old Testament has made the Scripture captive under a dogmatic reading. I argue that Brueggemann's critique against church theology is based on the presupposition of the results of the Reformation. As Konrad Schmid describes very well, there was a hermeneutical change through the arrival of the Reformation and, moreover, there was a change of meaning with regard to understanding the concept *theology*:

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[133] Scott Hafemann, "What´s the Point of Biblical Theology? Reflections prompted by Brevard Childs," In *Biblical Theology: Past, Present, and Future* (ed. Carey Walsh, and Mark W. Elliott, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

[134] Hafemann, "What´s the Point of Biblical Theology?" 110.

[135] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 5.

[136] Brueggemann is critical towards both church theology and the historical-critical method. See chapter 4 in this study for his critic of the historical-critical method. See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 105: "In my judgment, in contrast to that of Childs, the relation of Old Testament theology to church doctrine is proximately as problematic as is the relation to historical criticism." See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 107: "Neither is an enemy of Old Testament Theology, but in quite parallel ways, neither is a permanent partner nor an easy ally of Old Testament Theology."

Die reformatorische Neudefinition von Theologie hat eine ihrer Ursachen in einer neuen Wahrnehmung der Bibel, die einer neuen Lektüre als Zeugnis von Glaubenserfahrungen zugeführt wurde. Es oblag nicht mehr der Bibel, die bereits gesetzte Richtigkeit der Dogmatik nur mehr zu illustrieren, sondern umgekehrt hatte die Dogmatik Sich an der Bibel messen zu lassen—nicht zuletzt im Blick darauf, wie die christliche Lehre insgesamt zu verstehen ist.[137]

Regarding Schmid's observation of *Neudefinition* and Hafemann's observation pertaining to *sola scriptura*, I would argue that Brueggemann stands in conformity with this *Neudefinition*, because he argues that biblical doctrines should be defined in accordance with Scripture and not the other way around. Moreover, I would argue that Brueggemann bases his theology on the principle of *sola scriptura* while simultaneously stressing a close relationship between the text and community. For him, the Old Testament text is situated within the context of an ecclesial community and thus can only be understood within an ecclesial community.[138] Even though he highlights the start of the Reformation as being highly positive for biblical studies, it must also be said that he hesitates to claim too much in terms of its normative results. This is because its further development took a negative direction in the post-reformation era. With the settlement of the Lutheran orthodoxy there came a new dogmatic Church theological reading of the Bible.[139]

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[137] Konrad Schmid, *Gibt es Theologie im Alten Testament?* (Zürich: Theologische Studien, TVZ, 2013), 17.

[138] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 746: "I suggest that Old Testament theology in an ecclesial community of interpretation is interpretation done in an idiom that is congruent with the life setting of the community, but that is drawn from, informed by, and authorized by the idiom of the testimony of the text."

[139] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 4.

3.2 CONTEXT II) THE STARTING POINT OF THE DISCIPLINE

The modern founder of the discipline of Old Testament theology is Johann Philipp Gabler (1753–1826). Knierim writes concerning Gabler: "If philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato, then Old Testament theology is a series of very expansive footnotes to Gabler."[140] Brueggemann stresses that Gabler searched for a new epistemological foundation and did so through reason alone.[141] While Luther and the Reformation understood theology as inseparable from biblical history, Gabler's new epistemological foundation had one important effect; it separated biblical studies into two disciplines; historical theology and dogmatic theology.[142] Brueggemann is critical towards Gabler's separation in this regard. In an unpublished lecture, he defines Gabler's famous lecture in 1787 as "the date when scholars quit doing OT theology."[143] In contrast to Gabler, who stressed the historical dimension as primary for a correct theological interpretation, Brueggemann argues that a theological interpretation must focus on the rhetorical aspects in the text.[144] Despite his comment in

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[140] Ben C. Ollenburger, *Old Testament Theology*, *Flowering and Future* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 489: "The methodological discussion within the discipline of Old Testament traces its root back to Gabler's famous inaugural lecture as professor of theology at the University of Altdorf, Switzerland in March 1787. The lecture where the title *Oratio de justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utroisque finibus* [trans. *On the Correct Distinction between Dogmatic and Biblical Theology and the Right Definition of Their Goals*]. The lecture by Gabler is published in English in the above quoted volume at pages 493-502."

[141] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 13: "The approach championed by Gabler, which reflected the spirit of the age with its unfettered, emancipated objective knowledge did indeed seek to establish what was normative. It did so, however, not on the basis of established church authority and interpretation, but by an appeal to emancipated reason that could produce 'universal' norms."

[142] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 8: "It was Descartes´ achievement to provide an alternative epistemology to that which appealed to the interpretative authority of the church and its claim of revelation. The alternative epistemology focused on the human agent as the unfettered, unencumbered doubter and knower who could by objective reason come to know what is true and reliable."

[143] Brueggemann, Unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 37, 1315.

[144] See Gabler "On the Correct Distinction between Dogmatic and Biblical Theology and the Right Definition of Their Goals," in *Old Testament Theology: Flowering and Future* (ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 499: "Given this agreement of all these religious opinions, why then do these points of contention arise? Why these fatal discords of the various sects? Doubtless this dissension originates in part from the occasional obscurity of the sacred Scriptures themselves; in part from that depraved custom of reading one's own opinions and judgments into the Scripture, or from a servile manner of interpreting it. Doubtless the dissension also arises from the neglected distinction between religion and theology; and finally it

this regard on Gabler, there is a broad consensus within the discipline that since Gabler theologians have been standing without methodological consensus and struggling with various methodological attempts.[145] Phyllis Trible and Childs summarize the situation well. Trible first: "Biblical theologians... ...have never agreed on the definition, method, organization, subject matter, point of view, or purpose of their enterprise."[146] Childs shares the same analysis:

> From its inception, it was characteristic of Old Testament theology that it always had to contend with serious methodological uncertainties. Although it was often called the crowning achievement of the whole discipline, it appeared as though its leading practitioners were always glancing warily about at other sub-disciplines, full of concern that some new literary, historical, or philological discovery might threaten the enterprise.... Not only was the discipline loosely defined and constantly shifting, but certain fundamental tensions continue to pose questions as to what form an Old Testament theology should take. Is this academic discipline only descriptive, or does it necessarily include an element of constructive theology? What is the relation between an Old Testament theology and a history of Israel? Are its structuring principles historical, systematic, or an eclectic combination of both? And finally: what is the relation between Jewish and Christian theological interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures?[147]

In the light of this inherent methodological confusion within the discipline, it is understandable that Brueggemann pays close attention to methodological

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arises from an inappropriate combination of the simplicity and ease of biblical theology with the subtlety and difficulty of dogmatic theology."

[145] See Rolf Rendtorff, "Approaches to the Old Testament" in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. Henry T. C. Sun, Keith L. Eades. Eerdmans, 1997), 13-27; Andreas Köstenberger, "Editorial," *JETS* 55/1: (2012): 1-5; Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 555: "One natural development after Gabler was that the discipline was divided into Old and New Testament theology."

[146] Phillis Trible, "Five Loaves and Two Fishes: Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," *JTS* 50 (1989): 282.

[147] Brevard Childs, "Die Bedeutung des jüdischen Kanons in der alttestamentlichen Theologie," in *Mitte der Schrift: Ein jüdisch-christliches Gespräch— Texte des Berner Symposions vom 6– 12 Januar 1985* (ed. M. Klopfenstein et al; trans. U. Luz and E. Ringler; Judaica et Christiana 11; Frankfurt: Lang, 1987), 271-72.

matters in *ToT*. His introduction, 117 pages, could be seen as apologetics for his own approach; to present an Old Testament theology that is aware of the historical situation within the discipline and continues on a search for a new foundation.

3.3 CONTEXT III) INFLUENTIAL THEOLOGIANS

Brueggemann's positive affirmation of *sola scriptura* and his analysis of Gabler provide important attributes for understanding *ToT*. However, it has to be emphasized that his theological approach is, foremost, formulated in relation to the contemporary theological communities of the 20th century. These theologians form the third context for understanding *ToT*, and have influenced him in different ways, forming and determining his method in a significant way.

BARTH AND TESTIMONY

Karl Barth, founder of neo-orthodox theology, gave a renewed priority to the concept of revelation.[148] Columbia theological seminary, the seminary where Brueggemann served as professor for 20 years, was, and continues to be, highly influenced by Barth. Brueggemann writes that Barth was "front and center at the seminar where I taught in Atlanta."[149] There is no doubt that he was very much affected by him.[150] Brueggemann recognizes Barth's influence on Old Testament theology in the mid-20th century as crucial for the whole discipline. Especially important for him is Barth's break with 19th century evolutionary liberal theology and especially its epistemology. Brueggemann writes:

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[148] Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament. Including a Comprehensive Review of Old Testament Studies and a Special Supplement on the Apocrypha* (Eerdmans: Hendriksson Publishing, 2004), 462.

[149] See Odell, reviews of Brueggemann, 7. See also email correspondence with Walter Brueggemann. From: Karl-Henrik Wallerstein Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2015 2:34 PM To: Walter Brueggemann Subject: SV: SV: Walter Brueggemann and Karl Barth. "Columbia Theological seminary is a Presbyterian seminary, educating pastors from all over US. Us such the theology of Barth plays a predominant role within the seminary."

[150] In ToT, Brueggemann pays special attention to Barth's Church Dogmatics, Der Römerbrief and Anselm: Fides quaerens Intellectum. See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 16-20.

Thus Barth created the rhetoric and the space in which normative [that is, 'true'] statements about biblical faith can be made, not to be adjudicated on the basis of the naturalistic epistemology of autonomy.[151]

Brueggemann also declares that Barth, together with Ricoeur, is the primary source for his understanding of the term testimony:

In appealing to the categories of testimony I have, of course, been influenced by Karl Barth, an influence that pervades my work and that is to some extent mediated for me by Paul Ricoeur.[152]

As I will argue in the next chapter, the combination of Barth and testimony is crucial for understanding the formation of Brueggemann's epistemology. Moreover, Like Barth, who argued that the Bible is a "human witness to revelation", Brueggemann argues that testimony becomes revelation.[153] A crucial point to consider is on which grounds precisely do the testimony become revelation.

HISTORICAL THEOLOGIANS

Brueggemann partly draws on and is partly critical towards those European theologians, e.g. Albrecht Alt (1883–1956) and Martin Noth (1902–1968), and American theologians, e.g. William Albright (1891–1971), G. Ernest Wright, and George Mendenhall (1916–2016), who in various ways, stressed the importance of a theological interpretation of the Old Testament:

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[151] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 18.

[152] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 30, note 4: "Specifically Paul Ricoeur's notion of 'second naiveté' is crucial to what I have attempted. On the concept, see Mark I. Wallace, *The Second Naiveté: Barth, Ricoeur, and the New Yale School* [Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 6; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990]."

[153] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 121. Compare with John Webster, *Karl Barth 2nd Edition Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London: Continium, 2000), 83. Barth argued that the testimony should be read "as what it is, it must be read with an eye to its function of testifying to revelation."

> For purposes of our subsequent reflection, it is important to recognize that these several scholars understood themselves to be historians. That is, they assumed they were investigating 'how it was' and 'what had happened.' In their investigation, the biblical text itself was important, *but the Scripture was not important on its own terms and for its own sake.* It was important as a comment on or a clue to what was true 'on the ground'—that is, logically and empirically. A kind of innocent realism is at work here…[154]

Brueggemann is of course positive towards their theological intention. However, they based their theology on a historical foundation, focusing on the biblical text as a reliable source of the real historical event, while neglecting to see the text itself as theologically interesting. According to Brueggemann, the problem with various historical-critical tools has been that students have not read the text because they have been…

> …believing that matters of real interest lay behind the text, to which the text only referred or to which it bore remote witness. This inattentiveness to the text is evident in the characteristic way that historical questions have been posed in Scripture study… Thus in both historical investigation and in theological interpretation, reality was assumed to be elsewhere than in the text.[155]

Even though Brueggemann often argues that a historical approach cannot solve the methodological problem within the discipline, he shows appreciation for Alt's historical studies, e.g. "the God of the fathers" which had "enormous theological implications, first in the work of Gerhard von Rad, and eventually in the *Theology of Hope* by Jürgen Moltmann."[156] He also affirms Noth's idea of YHWH as a warrior God. Noth also made the case that there is distinctive-

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[154] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 26-27.
[155] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 53.
[156] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 22.

ness about Israel that is "rooted in the peculiar character of Yahweh, the putative God of the federation."[157] Brueggemann critically comments that Albright's work on archeology functioned as an apologetic work in order to prove the reliability of the Old Testament. More positively, Brueggemann affirms Albright's idea that Israel's theological self-understanding was not a late phenomenon, but present already in Moses. It is important to emphasize this conclusion; every description of history presupposes a specific perspective and he writes:

> There is no innocent 'history'; all 'history' carries with it some theological intentionality. This is equally true for those scholars who now expose the ideology operative in the Albrightian synthesis.[158]

Wright and Mendenhall, theologians in the aftermath of Albright's approach, argued against the liberal theology and defended the notion that monotheism was peculiar to Israel's faith. Concerning Mendenhall, Brueggemann gives prominence to his theory that Moses' covenant had nothing in common with the Canaanite religion. Instead, he agrees with Mendenhall that "Israel's covenant was a political theory of justice."[159]

EICHRODT AND VON RAD

Previous theologians stand in the shadow of the two giants within the field of Old Testament Theology in the 20th century. It is therefore impossible to characterize the modern history of the discipline without relating Brueggemann to Walter Eichrodt (1890–1978) and Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971). Brueggemann devotes pp. 27–49 to describing them, and refers frequently to them throughout *ToT*. Brueggemann's analysis of Eichrodt is that his method

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[157] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 23.
[158] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 24.
[159] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 25: "Mendelhall proposed that the Mosaic covenant was patterned on international political treaties of the fourteenth century B.C.E., so that the idiom and intent of Moses´ covenant at Sinai had nothing in common with Canaanite religion. From its beginning, Israel's covenant was a political theory of justice."

is a kind of theological *eisegesis* wherein he incorporates theological insights into a coherent system through the use of the covenants in the Old Testament. Brueggemann points out that other attempts to find a center like Eichrodt's have failed, e.g. those of Edmond Jakob and Th.C. Vrizen. His conclusion is that there is no fundamental principle which is able to support the entire Old Testament belief.[160] With regard to von Rad, Brueggemann believes that his method is not a genuine theological one but rather a historical one. In his view, von Rad also failed to bridge the gap between confessed history and secular history in a satisfactory way. Von Rad emphasizes that the theological reality is tied up with history. Brueggemann believes that this approach has led some to conclude that it is impossible to present Old Testament theology.[161] There is, he argues, a "great tension in von Rad's work between historical and sapiential materials, a tension that reflects a foundational detector of Old Testament faith."[162] He also stresses how important it is to underline the internal difference between Eichrodt and von Rad. While Eichrodt in his model searches "to overcome the developmentalism fostered by historical criticism" von Rad "seeks to underscore the *dynamic* of Israel's faith that is constantly being articulated in new versions of the ancient creedal formulation."[163]

Brueggemann urges to focus attention, not on the method used by Eichrodt and von Rad, but rather on the results achieved by them and he draws two important conclusions; firstly, that the *pluralism* that von Rad emphasized, and the *coherence* that Eichrodt rightly stressed, together formulate the major problems and the challenges for the discipline.[164] Stated as a question, one has to ask how it is possible to formulate a theology that incorporates the pluralism of testimonies into a coherent system. Brueggemann concludes that there is a new

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[160] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 38-42.
[161] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 40: "This is why many scholars have concluded that Old Testament Theology is at the outset an impossibility, because the material referred to as Old Testament refuses casting as theology."
[162] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 38.
[163] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 39.
[164] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 41: "… it is the matter of pluralism and coherence that poses the most difficult issue for the ongoing work of Old Testament theology."

opportunity for fresh approaches through the gateway of postmodernism. It is, however, impossible to use the approaches of either Eichrodt or von Rad:

> In the face of such a new interpretative situation, it is evident that matters must be conducted differently from the dominant models available to us from Eichrodt and von Rad.[165]

This means that Eichrodt and Von Rad are not theological pathfinders for a future approach for the discipline of Old Testament theology. They offer great inspiration, however, because of what they have achieved. In an article "Futures in Old Testament Theology", Brueggemann suggests that the discipline should move on from the methods of Eichrodt and von Rad.[166] His methodological alternative is to focus on the text:

> The restless character of the text that refuses excessive closure, which von Rad understood so well, is reflective of the One who is its main Character, who also refuses tameness or systematization. *Thus it is the very God uttered in these texts who lies behind the problems of perspective and method.*[167]

MUILENBURG AND RHETORIC

Among influential theologians, James Muilenburg (1896–1974) is Brueggemann's *Doctorvater*, and therefore fills a most prominent role.[168]

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[165] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, xvi.

[166] Brueggemann, "Futures in Old Testament Theology," 1-11.

[167] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 42.

[168] Walter Brueggemann, "James Muilenburg as Theologian," *USQR 50* (1997): 72. See also Timothy F. Simpson, *Not "Who Is on the Lord's Side?" But "Whose Side Is the Lord On?" Contesting Claims and Divine Inscrutability in 2 Samuel 16:5-14* (New York, NY, USA: Peter Lang AG, 2014): 49: "Brueggemann was trained at a time when the historical-critical method was at its zenith among biblical scholars, but he had the good fortune to do his Ph.D. at Union Theological Seminary in New York under the direction of James Muilenburg. His teacher's path-breaking commentary on Isaiah, using rhetorical analysis, in The Interpreter's Scripture, was one of the first attempts to, as Muilenburg understood things, to take the Old Testament on its own terms by classifying its own rhetorical features and making this the goal of interpretation, rather than finding history. Brueggemann, over time, has come to be, for his generation of scholars, the champion of that approach."

Muilenburg introduced and trained Brueggemann in rhetorical-critical think-
ing. Brueggemann defines his mentor as the primary founder of rhetorical crit-
icism:

> Muilenburg almost single-handedly made credible the practice
> of close reading, whereby one notices the detail of the text, such
> as word patterns and arrangements, the use of key words in rep-
> etition, the careful placement of prepositions and conjunctions,
> and the reiteration of sounds of certain consonants.[169]

Muilenburg explains the main idea of the rhetorical approach in the article
"Form Criticism and Beyond":

> What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature
> of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural pat-
> terns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit,
> whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and
> various devices by which the predications are formulated and or-
> dered into a unified whole.[170]

This quotation could just as well have been formulated by Brueggemann.
When Muilenburg argues that the form-critical method has hermeneutical and
theological implications he predicted a theological use for the rhetorical
method.[171] This prediction is fulfilled through Brueggemann who developed
the rhetorical-critical method as the key tool to serve theological interpreta-
tion. Brueggemann argues that *how* something is said in the Old Testament is
important for *what* is said.[172] This means that, for him, rhetorical aspects in the

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[169] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 55.
[170] James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* Vol. 88, No. 1 (1969): 8.
[171] Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 3: "Equally significant is the important role that form criticism has played in hermeneutics. In theology, too, it has influenced not only the form and structure of the exposition, but also the understanding of the nature of biblical theology, as in the work of Gerhard von Rad, which is based upon form-critical presuppositions."
[172] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 54: "Rhetorical criticism is a method that insists that *how* what is said is crucial and definitive for *what* is said." See also 55: "In terms of theological interpretation, because the *what* is linked to the *how,* one cannot generalize or sum-marize but must pay attention to the detail." This standpoint is supported by Knierim, see *The*

texts are sustainers of theological information. Muilenburg also inspired Brueggemann to interact with the Jewish tradition and we can see in *ToT* how the Jewish tradition forms one of the three basic elements in his hermeneutics (see chapter 5).[173] Brueggemann could as well be described as a Christian Midrash theologian. In sum, in 1996, one year before the publication of *ToT*, and in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Muilenburg´s birth, Brueggemann presented a paper at SBL entitled "James Muilenburg as Theologian." His characterization of Muilenburg serves as a self-description of his own approach:

> This man, believer and lover of words, never separated *theos* from *logos*, in *theo-logy*. He had no meanness of spirit for heresy. The closest he could come to spotting heresy was to comment on an interpretation: ʹl do not find it felicitous.ʹ Heresy as infelicity makes clear that the *what* of truth is linked to the *how* of speech. He understood that both are one.[174]

RICOEUR: IMAGINATION AND TESTIMONY

Paul Ricoeur is considered one of the most influential philosopher in the 20th century and his impact is evident upon Brueggemann's thinking, especially when it comes to two terms: *imagination* and *testimony*.[175] In the Introduction

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Task of Old Testament Theology, 9: "The criteria for discerning the theologically legitimate priorities must obviously be found in primary substansive aspects. They depend on what is said…"

[173] Brueggemann, "James Muilenburg as Theologian," 79: "It is my judgment that the practice Muilenburg embodied—*attentiveness to speech, openness to Jewishness, full personal engagement*—are the marks of Old Testament theology most to be celebrated and now much needed in our common work."

[174] Brueggemann, "James Muilenburg as Theologian," 81.

[175] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 120, note 7. He refers specifically to Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Mudge Lewis. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 119-54. As will be shown, there are important similarities between Brueggemann and Ricoeur. It is notable that they criticize, using Ricoeur's word, the Western search for the absolute. See also Brueggemann's appreciation of Ricoeur in Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms & the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick. D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 7, note 16: "The works of Ricoeur that I have found especially helpful are *Freud and Philosophy* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970], *Interpretation Theory* [Forth Worth: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1976]; *The Conflict of Interpretations* [Evanston, Ill: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974]; and "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975): 29-128."

I referred to Jeanrond's distinction between theological hermeneutics and hermeneutical theology. We can now see that Ricoeur in a broad sense stands at one end of a development towards a hermeneutical theology that started with Schleiermacher.[176] Ricoeur's hermeneutics is a practice of hermeneutical theology that has influenced Brueggemann to a large extent. In this reflection on the nature of hermeneutics, the term *imagination* becomes crucial, and Brueggemann develops the use of imagination in a unique way. He writes that "… a student of Old Testament theology will do well to attend to Ricoeur's work on time, narrative and imagination."[177] What he particularly embraces concerning Ricoeur's theory of imagination is the formulation "the world in the text."[178] This phrase stands in contrast to "the world behind the text", which forms the primary focus within the historical-critical method. For Brueggemann, relying on Ricoeur, "the world in the text" does not depend on "the world behind the text".[179] This means that the text is not primarily intended to describe a reality, but rather to generate a new reality, and by way of imagination the text becomes interpreted as a new reality. Concerning the

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[176] See Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics,* 50: "By submitting biblical/theological hermeneutics to the principles of general hermeneutics, Schleiermacher diversified the study of hermeneutics. From now on a still uninterrupted tradition of philosophical hermeneutics has emerged. On the one hand, this tradition has been viewed with great suspicion by those biblical hermeneutist who refused to agree with Schleiermacher's acceptance of the validity of general hermeneutics even for biblical exegesis. On the other hand, those interpreters of the Bible who could agree with Schleiermacher have felt very positively influenced by the now emerging tradition of philosophical hermeneutics." See also Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics,* 77: "Our narrative of the history of philosophical hermeneutics began with a theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who discovered that theological interpretation need a thorough foundation in philosophical hermeneutics. Now the development of philosophical hermeneutics by Ricoeur has revealed the need to include the interpretation of religious texts in an adequate human existential reflection. The symmetry between the theological endeavors of Schleiermacher and the philosophical enterprise of Ricoeur is striking."

[177] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 57, note 167.

[178] See Kevin J. *Vanhoozer, Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990),* 88: "To be precise, texts offer to the reader a possible way of being -in-the-world, a new way of living in the world." See also *ibid* 110, note 15: "Ricoeur's hermeneutic is reminiscent of Heidegger. Ricoeur, on the textual level has recreated the whole process of Heideggerian interpretation, i.e., understanding by projecting possibilities."

[179] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 57: "Ricoeur has given us phrasing for two alternative ways in which to consider the relation of text to 'world'. First, he speaks about 'the world in the text.'…58/ Second, Ricoeur speaks of 'the world in *front* of the text'".

method that has dominated the Old Testament discipline i.e. the historical-critical method, Brueggemann argues that the real world is not given by this method but is created. A direct encounter with the text and its world changes the "given" reality, as presented by the historical-critical method. If the priority is on "the world in the text" and not "the world behind the text", the world behind the text becomes deabsolutized:

> The ultimate consequence of this generative sense of rhetoric is the deabsolutizing of 'the world behind the text' that historical criticism takes as normative, and that the hegemonic authority of the high critical period has had no intention of challenging. Thus when the imaginative forays of a generative text are measured by the assumed world behind the text, the outcome is that the text is measured by the status quo, which comes to be valued as a given beyond criticism. Ricoeur's programmatic statement suggests that such generative literature as we have in the Scripture in the end destabilizes 'the given' and lets us entertain the thought that long-honored givens may turn out to be only avidly accepted imaginative construals of reality.[180]

Brueggemann suggests that Ricoeur's hermeneutics creates an alternative reality, without deciding whether the biblical world could be defined as reasonable or not: "… the text may indeed subvert, offering an alternative version of reality that creates new perspective, new possibility, and new activity well beyond the assumed world behind the text."[181] Concerning *testimony,* we have already confirmed Barth's influence in this regard. Notable is that Brueggemann, in two unpublished lectures 2/22/90 and 2/26/90, presents an analysis of Ricoeur's use of testimony. These lectures emphasize the importance of understanding Ricoeur's view of testimony. Brueggemann de-

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[180] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 58.
[181] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 58.

scribes testimony as a *sentence* and not a *word.* Moreover he writes: "It is impossible to go behind it. It generates a new reality."[182] He also writes that this claim is based on a very odd epistemology. According to Mudge Lewis, who wrote the introduction to Ricoeur's essays on testimony, Ricoeur describes the term testimony as generating revelation.[183] In *ToT* Brueggemann has come to the same conclusion: "If we describe this process theologically – or, more specifically, in the practice of the Old Testament – we may say that testimony becomes revelation."[184] We will come back to Ricoeur's influence on Brueggemann in this regard, but already now we can conclude that Brueggemann's new postmodern epistemology is - to a large extent - influenced by Ricoeur.

GOTTWALD AND SOCIOLOGY

Another important scholar, previously referred to in relation to Brueggemann's terminology of the concept of God as specifically *in the fray*, is Norman K. Gottwald (1926–), who is also a student of Muilenburg.[185] In his most famous book, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E,* published in 1979, Gottwald presents the theory that Israel came to existence, not primarily as a result of an immigration around 1200 B.C.E, but rather as a result of struggles between Canaanite tribes.[186] Gottwald formed this argument partly on a presupposition in Mendenhall's conclusions in "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine."[187] Together with influences from Karl Marx, Gottwald concludes that Israel's faith is - to a larger extent than many have previously understood - shaped by sociological factors, such as landscape, population growth, political parties and food availability.

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[182] Brueggemann, Unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 37, 1315.
[183] See Mudge, "Introduction," *in Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (ed. L Mudge. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 27. Mudge writes that Ricoeur defines testimony as generating revelation: "testimony generates forms of discourse which can be called revelatory."
[184] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 121.
[185] Phyllis Trible (1932-) is also a student of Muilenburg and has influenced Brueggemann, see e.g. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 55f, 99ff, 216, 259, 452.
[186] See Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Orbis Books: Sheffield Academic Press, 1979), 5-17.
[187] George Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25 (1962): 66-87.

Gottwald's influence on Brueggemann is visible in some articles prior to *ToT*, redacted by Miller and published in 1993 under the title *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*. In this volume, Miller comments that Brueggemann stresses the "the social character of our theology …"[188] Miller also describes Brueggemann's social attention as an intention to acknowledge the social systems and ideologies visible in the Old Testament. In addition to referring to Gottwald for his theological articulation of God as in the fray, Gottwald is also important for Brueggemann's argument that normative statements are statements formed in a conflict situation serving various interests. Brueggemann argues that normative statements must be related to justice.[189] In light of Gottwald's method, Brueggemann concludes:

> This means that the Old Testament contains no innocent, one-dimensional, or disembodied theological statements, but that every theological articulation in the text is, in important ways, intimately and inexorably linked to lived reality.[190]

In sum, we can say that the sociological approach stands as an alternative for Brueggemann in relation to the historical-critical method when he wants to articulate an Old Testament theology that shall focus on the text. This means that the text becomes *linked* through the sociological perspective to "lived reality" and God becomes connected to the fray of human struggle.

CENTRIST THEOLOGIANS

In *ToT* Brueggemann characterizes some theologians as *centrist theologians* because they have been "enormously influential scholars at major research institutions, thus representing the best of scholarship in the classical tradition."[191]

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[188] Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).
[189] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 53: "Rather normativeness is that on which one will stake one's life."
[190] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 51.
[191] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 89.

These centrist theologians are Brevard Childs, James Barr, Jon Levenson, and Rolf Rentdorff. Brueggemann has been inspired by them but also marks a distance towards them. Moreover, all of them have responded to *ToT* in articles, reviews and personal letters.

The first centrist theologian is Childs. His importance cannot be underestimated. Childs, together with Rendtorff, Goldingay and Brueggemann, shares a common focus on the canonical text as the basis for Old Testament theology. In this regard, Childs stands out as the front figure within the discipline throughout the 20th century,[192] in his emphasis of the canonical text as the proper context for interpreting Scripture theologically:

> As a fresh alternative, we would like to defend the thesis that the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do Biblical Theology.[193]

Together with Barr, Childs argued that there was a theological crisis within the discipline of biblical theology and also stresses that Scripture must "be interpreted within the community of faith that treasured them."[194] According to Childs, biblical scholars have been more focused on historical, literal and philological problems than on presenting a theology for the purpose of serving the Church. Here the problem with the historical-critical method becomes crucial. Childs defines the problem with the historical-critical method as follows; it is…

> … an inadequate method for studying the Scripture as the Scriptures of the church because it does not work from the needed context. This is not

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[192] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 90: "Childs's alternative to theological exposition informed by historical criticism is to work at what he terms a canonical perspective." See also Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 401-38.

[193] Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis, 99.

[194] Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis,* 99. See also Christopher R. Seitz, and Kent H. Richards, *The Bible As Christian Scripture: The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (Society of Biblical Literature 2014), 158: "In Childs's way of thinking, therefore, reading canonically is not a general "solve-all-problems" exegetical program, or a simple application of one type of literary criticism, or a new critical methodology."

to say for a moment that the critical method is incompatible with the Christian faith – we regard the fundamentalist position as indefensible – but rather that the critical method, when operating from its own chosen context, is incapable of either raising or answering the full range of questions which the church is constrained to direct to its Scripture.[195]

Brueggemann appreciates Childs for his boldness in moving out from the theological exile created by the historical-critical method, and honors Childs in a review of *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (1993):

> With almost no conversation partners in the twentieth century whom he regards as consistently reliable or worthy of consideration (with the decisive exception of Barth), Childs has staked out a position and vocation for biblical theology that is sure to reshape our common work and that will require intense engagement by any who dare take up the task.[196]

My conclusion is that when Brueggemann entered the academic scene at the beginning of the 1960s, the acceptance for trying new trajectories within Old Testament Theology was dawning simultaneously with the demise of the BThM. There was now a new way of writing theology because of the work of Childs.

The second centrist theologian is Barr. A specific concern in his methodology is how semantic rules could be used within biblical interpretation. In the book *The Semantics of Biblical Language* 1961, he stresses *the sentence* as carrier of theological information in opposition to *words*.[197] Brueggemann makes considerable use of this insight and argues "that it is not a word but a sentence—words in context—that has theological significance."[198] In sharp contrast to Childs, Barr defends the use of the historical-critical method within the discipline of Old Testament theology. In *ToT* Brueggemann anticipates that Barr's

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[195] Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis,* 141.
[196] Brueggemann, review of Childs, 279.
[197] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).
[198] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 45.

forthcoming theology (*The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective,* 1999) would avoid connecting Old Testament theology to the dogmatic tradition, but would instead focus on the results of the historical-critical method and "exposit textual claims as much as possible on their own terms."[199] If Brueggemann was polite in his judgment of Barr's book, the opposite opinion was not. According to Barr, Brueggemann has completely misunderstood the age of Enlightenment.[200] Barr even defends Childs, who he otherwise criticizes, and concludes that Brueggemann is "the greater hater of the Enlightenment and should win the prize."[201] Barr also critically compares Brueggemann with Childs on various topics and conclude that both ignore the historical question *what happened?*[202] Another difference is their use of *ideology* and how they understand *Judaism.* Barr agrees with Brueggemann that the Old Testament does not *univocally* point to Jesus, but when Brueggemann criticizes Childs' canonical approach, Barr surprisingly comes to the rescue and argues that…

> … Childs's insistence that Old Testament theology was a 'Christian theological' operation was intended not so much to exclude Jews but to exclude the supposedly 'secular' investigations of (mainly Christian) historical and sociological critics.[203]

Finally, Barr describes the courtroom metaphor as an absurd idea and believes that no ordinary court is forced to accept a testimony without a thorough examination of the witness who presents the testimony.[204]

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[199] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 97.
[200] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 559-61. See also James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55: "It is interesting, however, to note that the anti-Enlightenment arguments now take two forms. In Old Testament theology they are well represented by the contrary positions of Childs and Brueggemann."
[201] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 553.
[202] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 548-49.
[203] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 552.
[204] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 548.

The third centrist theologian is Levenson, described in *ToT* as one of "the most serious and imaginative Jewish theological interpreters of the Scripture, with whom Christian interpreters can expect to have serious interaction".[205] Brueggemann pays special attention to Levenson's book *The Hebrew Scripture, the Old Testament and Historical Criticism* (1993). Here Levenson argues that…

1) …there is a theological problem with the historical-critical method.

2) …Jews and Christians do not read the same Scripture.

3) …each particular text must be read in the light of the whole.

According to Brueggemann, Levenson and Childs preempt the text. Levenson preempts the text in favor of a Jewish reading, whereas Childs preempts it in favor of a Christian reading. Brueggemann defines himself and his method as the middle way.[206] In response to *ToT*, Levenson writes the article "Is Brueggemann really a pluralist?" According to Levenson, Childs is not critical of the historical-critical method in general, but reluctant to read the Old Testament merely through the eyes of the historical-critical method. Brueggemann, Levenson writes, believes that "Childs regards historical criticism in principle as a distorting enterprise that casts the Scripture in categories alien to its own intention."[207] However, according to Levenson, Childs stands independent in relation to the Christian tradition:

> One should also note that the order of discussion of the books in Childs's *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* is that of the [Jewish] Tanakh and not that of the [Christian] Old Testament. The conclusion is inescapable: Childs acts deliberately in opposition to some aspects of his own Christian tradition in order to preserve the very possibility of a 'shared reading' of the

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[205] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 93-95.

[206] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 95: "This text simply will not be contained in any such vested reading, which is what makes the text both compelling and subversive."

[207] Levenson, "Is Brueggemann really a Pluralist?" 273.

Tanakh/Old Testament by Jews and Christians that Brueggemann thinks he destroys.[208]

Levenson also dislikes Brueggemann's seemingly neutral point of departure. For him, Childs's approach is more honest and easier to grasp:

> Unlike Brueggemann, Childs's respect for Judaism is rooted in his Christian faith and not in some hypothetical vantage point that is neutral as between the two traditions and therefore able to pronounce them of equal worth. By forthrightly owning his particularism as a Christian, Childs is able to respect and learn from the particular tradition that is Judaism.[209]

The fourth centrist theologian is Rendtorff. Brueggemann defines him as the mediating theologian between himself and Childs. Both Rendtorff and Brueggemann argue that a theological interpretation must be done in relation to Jewish readers and the tremendous disaster of the Holocaust as a theological measure.[210] In some way, Rendtorff anticipates *ToT* in the article "The Paradigm is Changing" wherein he argues for a change in perspective for the discipline of Old Testament text, away from history towards the text itself.[211] Rendtorff is very impressed with *ToT* but poses two important and critical questions to Brueggemann:

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[208] Levenson, "Is Brueggemann really a Pluralist?" 275.
[209] Levenson, "Is Brueggemann really a Pluralist?" 279.
[210] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 97-98.
[211] Rolf Rendtorff, "The Paradigm is Changing," *Biblical Interpretation* 1/1 (1993): 52: "What will continue, I hope, is the attitude of taking the text seriously in its given form, in its final shape. In this respect there are close connections between some of the new literary approaches and so-called canon criticism. It would require another paper to explain in detail how I see the similarities as well as the differences between these approaches. But, firstly, I want to stress that taking a synchronic approach to the text in its given shape is a task Old Testament scholarship has neglected too long and too intentionally."

Aber wer ist der 'Gerichtshof' [*court of law*], der eine Entschei-
dung, einen 'Spruch' fällt, durch den 'das Zeugnis in Realität
verwandelt' wird.[212]

Nur selten wird mehr als ein Vers oder einige wenige Verse
zitiert, ganze Kapitel oder größere Kompositionen kommen
nicht zur Sprache. Die Bibel als Buch oder als eine Sammlung
von Büchern kommt nicht in Blick.[213]

Both questions are hermeneutical and deserve attention. The first question concerns biblical referentiality, i.e. how Brueggemann in *ToT* refers the biblical text to God. This question have been asked by others previously and raises an interesting problem in his theology and will be saved to further discussion in chapter 5. The second question refers to the importance of relating the testimony to its context in order to achieve a correct interpretation. Brueggemann responds and argues that characteristic speech is not limited to specific contexts or genres. According to Brueggemann, *Israel's most characteristic speech* is "the sort of utterances that recur in many genres and many circumstances… This specific utterance can be traced across genres and contexts."[214] In sum, with regard to Childs, the important question is to understand in what ways they differ. With regard to Barr, the important question is epistemological—are there epistemological problems with the historical-critical method as a tool for a theological interpretation of the Old Testament? With regard to Levenson, an important question is the relationship to the Jewish traditions and if a middle way between a Jewish and Church theological interpretation is possible or not. Finally, Rendtorff raises important questions concerning biblical referentiality. Brueggemann's dialogue with the centrist theologians are addressed in the chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

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[212] Rendtorff, reviews of Brueggemann, 15-16.
[213] Rendtorff, reviews of Brueggemann, 16.
[214] See Walter Brueggemann, "Response by Brueggemann," *RBL* 1 (1999): 22.

3.4 CONTEXT IV) THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY MOVEMENT

The fourth context for understanding *ToT* is to situate Brueggemann within the crisis of the BThM.[215] This movement had two roots, one European, with von Rad as its prominent representative,[216] and one American, mostly connected with the Niebuhr brothers (Reinold (1892–1971) and H. Richard (1894–1962). According to Brueggemann, the European movement could not bridge the gap between salvation history and secular history, which alludes to von Rad's own unresolved problem as mentioned previously. Understanding the American BThM is most important here. It traces its history and identity back to the 1930s' controversy between the fundamentalists and liberals, mostly within academic circles.[217] The outcome of this controversy forged the BThM into becoming a movement that was influential across all theological disciplines.[218] Muilenburg, Albright, Wright, and Mendenhall were all important second generation representatives of BThM.[219] Margaret S. Odell writes that Brueggemann, at the beginning of his academic career, was fostered within this movement:

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[215] See Walter Brueggemann, "The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation," in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clement* (ed. E. Ball. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 74: "It is now common to cite 1970 as the break point of what came to be called (pejoratively) 'the Biblical Theology Movement,' that interpretive enterprise propelled by Barth and especially voiced by von Rad and Wright."

[216] See "Biblical Theology Movement." BELIEVE Religious Information Source web-site. 2012. A Christ Walk Church Public Service. (2018 8th November) http://mb-soft.com/believe/indexaz.html: "It has been shown by James Barr and James D. Smart that the biblical theology movement is not a uniquely American phenomenon (so Childs). In Great Britain and on the European continent the same tendencies inherent in the American aspect of the movement were present, although the setting in Europe was different." See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 43: "The general approach that he (von Rad) represented came to be called the biblical theology movement."

[217] See Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 31.

[218] Hasel, *Old Testament Theology Basic Issues in the Current Debate,* 27: "B.S. Childs provides a valuable survey of the 'Biblical Theology Movement' in America which, although derivative of European Biblical theology, is primarily an outgrowth of the polarity of the battle over the Scripture in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy fought from 1910 to the 1930s in the USA."

[219] See Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 21. "...very shortly all the major Protestant denominations were influenced and many contributed their own first-rate scholars (Paul Minear, James Muilenburg, Bernhard Andersson)."

Brueggemann began his career at the height of the biblical theology movement. He has also weathered its demise and kept abreast of the enormous changes in the field since then. One can hardly think of a less coherent period of biblical scholarship; yet Brueggemann has energetically embraced these new approaches.[220]

The crisis within BThM motivated Childs to reclaim Scripture back to its original context, i.e. to the Church.[221] Brueggemann comments:

In any case, for Childs, von Rad's entire program was a betrayal of the larger canonical intention, of 'the final form of the text,' an abandonment of too much that responsible Christian theology has valued and must value.[222]

Childs started, together with Barr, what Ollenburger coined as *the third wave* of Old Testament theologies.[223] This wave opened up a scholarly shift in North America towards social and rhetorical methods and it is within this context that Brueggemann is situated. He reacted against the strong emphasis within the BThM on history and archaeology as tools for theological interpretation. In this respect his reaction is not unique. Previously, Childs and Barr, and also Langdon B. Gilkey (1919–2004), had raised critical questions about BThM's epistemology.[224] Waltke summarizes Childs's critique very well. BThM combined "a liberal critical methodology with normative biblical theology."[225] Brueggemann's negative reaction to BThM can be seen in the foreword of the

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[220] Odell, reviews of Brueggemann, 7.

[221] Xun Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context: Brevard Springs Childs's Methodology of Biblical Theology* (New York: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 79.

[222] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 45.

[223] Ollenburger, *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, 406: "The first wave in the 1930s and the second wave in the 1950s."

[224] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 43.

[225] See Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology,* 45: "In his view, the biblical theology movement tried to combine a liberal critical methodology with normative biblical theology but could not bridge the gap between exegesis based on historical criticism and theology. Childs feels the gap between exegesis and theology can be bridged only by viewing the texts in the context of their own literature, namely, the canon of Scripture."

second edition of *The Land*. This book, published in 1977, is the first book in the series *Overtures to Biblical Theology* of which he was one of two editors for many years.[226] The purpose of this series is to "articulate the main theological claims and resources in the text."[227] Brueggemann refers to the situation in the 1970s in the preface to the *Land* and writes:

> It was in that context that I begin to see that the Old Testament,
> in its theological articulation was not all about 'deeds,' but was
> concerned with *place*, specific real estate that was invested with
> powerful *promises* and with strategic arrangements for presence
> in the place as well.[228]

To sum up, Brueggemann was formed within BThM but reacted against its strong emphasis on history. Instead he continued with a focus on social and rhetorical issues on the basis of the canonical text.

3.5 CONTEXT V) POSTMODERNISM

The fifth context for understanding *ToT* is the postmodern situation.[229] Almost everyone who has given a response to *ToT* describes Brueggemann as a post-modern scholar, but there are some who question this epithet. Before commenting on this fact, A.K. M Adam summarizes postmodernism with particular attention to biblical criticism:

> Postmodernism is antifoundational in that it resolutely refuses to
> posit any one premise as the privileged and unassailable starting
> point for establishing claims of truth. It is anti-totalizing because

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[226] Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History*, 46: "The series Overtures to Biblical Theology, which began in the late 1970s and has recently passed its thirtieth year, is still edited by one of its founders, Walter Brueggemann, who eschewed doctrinaire approaches and a primary focus on methodology, in order to obtain theological insights into the biblical texts."
[227] See Brueggemann's foreword to Terence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), xi.
[228] Brueggemann, *The Land,* xi.
[229] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 61: "As yet no consensus exists about how to characterize the new sociopolitical -interpretative situation, but here I shall use the term *post-modern."*

postmodern discourse suspects that any theory that claims to account everything is suppressing counterexamples... Postmodernism is also demystifying: it attends to claims that certain assumptions are 'natural' and tries to show that these are in fact ideological projections.[230]

Adam also defines Brueggemann's *Texts under Negotiation* as an appropriate introduction to a postmodern reading of Scripture.[231] Perdue describes Brueggemann as a postmodern theologian, even though "he does not embrace other rather significant ones."[232] Collins argues that Brueggemann is a postmodern theologian because firstly, he stresses pluralism within the interpretative communities. Secondly, he pays attention to rhetoric as a tool for biblical interpretation. Thirdly, because Brueggemann's use of the courtroom metaphor is a typical postmodern feature.[233] Forth and finally, Paul R. House defines Brueggemann as a postmodern scholar.[234] Levenson however, does raise doubt as to whether Brueggemann really is a postmodern scholar, arguing critically that Brueggemann has misunderstood Lyotard's definition of postmodernism:

Indeed, if we take as definitional Jean-François Lyotard's influential characterization of postmodern thought as the suspicion of metanarratives, Brueggemann, for all his invocation of postmodernist terminology, would not qualify as postmodern at all. For he rejects the claim that Lyotard's definition is characteristic of

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[230] Andrew K.M Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 5. Childs refers to Adam as an authority of postmodern hermeneutics. See Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture,* 291: "A.K.M Adam trying to chart the beginning of the cycle of postmodernism in biblical studies…"

[231] Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* 25.

[232] Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History,* 251.

[233] Collins, *The Scripture after Babel,* 143-45.

[234] See House, *Old Testament in the Life of God's People,* 35: "It is difficult to overstate Walter Brueggemann's prominence in American OT studies over the past three decades. He has authored and edited dozens of books, and his works are cited extensively in the discipline."

our age and maintains instead that our situation is one of conflict and competition between deeply held metanarratives.[235]

In this regard, Collins agrees with Levenson; and argues that whereas Brueggemann's understanding of postmodernism stresses a conflict between various metanarratives, Lyotard actually stresses the loss of confidence in metanarratives. Collins concludes that Brueggemann's appropriation of postmodernism is "partial, and has a familiar Protestant, Barthian, look."[236]

My own conclusion is that Brueggemann is a postmodern theologian and as such, suits perfectly within the stretchable context that embraces postmodernism. To deny him this epithet is to define postmodernism within too narrow boundaries. As Levenson also points out, Brueggemann describes postmodernism in *ToT* as a situation without any "universal assumption at the outset of reading."[237] In this way, Brueggemann first of all works from the supposition that postmodernism is a "breakup of any broad consensus about what we know or how we know what we know".[238] This fact motivates him to present a new approach that differs from both church theology and the historical-critical method.

Also important to emphasize is that *postmodernism* is a very complex term, with vast and different connotations. Brueggemann is *postmodern* in the sense that he also presupposes pluralism within the interpretative community and the biblical text. For him, the postmodern situation is a context that is marked by various different approaches within the discipline of Old Testament theology, such as canonical theology (e.g. Childs), Jewish theology (e.g. Levenson) historical-critical theology (e.g. Barr), feminist theology (e.g. Phyllis Trible), liberation theology (e.g. George Pixel), and black theology (e.g. Itumeleng

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[235] Levenson, "Is Brueggemann Really a Pluralist?" 266.
[236] Collins, *The Scripture after Babel,* 145.
[237] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 62.
[238] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 709.

Mosala).[239] This situation, Brueggemann argues, constitutes the postmodern situation and "cuts off the core of the matter of interpretation."[240]

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Brueggemann refers positively to Albertz' interpretative reflection of a "no agreed-on consensus point, but the canon itself is an exercise in adjudication."[241] *Adjudication* for both Brueggemann and Albertz means that the biblical text itself contains a pluralistic character. He refers to Albertz for this conclusion as a presupposition for doing Old Testament theology. There is no doubt that Brueggemann is a postmodern theologian because he presupposes a shift within the interpretative communities, from a modern epistemology and hermeneutics that believed in the possibility of an objective interpretation towards the use of many different approaches that partly stand as competing and partly as complementary approaches.

3.6 CONTEXT VI) IMAGINATION

> Imagination, too, belongs no less legitimately to the human possibility of knowing. A man without an imagination is more of an invalid than one who lacks a leg.[242]

Pointing to one feature as being the most significant for characterizing Brueggemann's hermeneutical thinking, many would probably suggest *imagination*. This term has been traced back to his influence from Ricoeur and has, at least since the late 1970s, been the driving force in his theology, because, by use of imagination, he has been able to go beyond church theology and the historical-critical methods. Perdue writes that Brueggemann, more than any other Old Testament scholar, "has articulated a theology of imagination as a

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[239] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 89-102.
[240] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 62.
[241] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 64. See also xvi: "a pluralism of faith affirmations and articulations of Yahweh in the text itself, a pluralism that von Rad had begun to see in his break with unilateral developmentalism and which Rainer Albertz has more fully explicated;…"

[242] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 91. *Karl Barth— Studies of His Theological Method* (ed. S. W. Sykes; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 69.

way of approaching, understanding and appropriating Old Testament texts."[243]
His use of imagination in the interpretation of the Old Testament then forms
the sixth context for understanding *ToT*. It is important to stress that for
Brueggemann imagination is not equal to fantasy.[244] He uses the term as anal-
ogous with Garett Green's term "realistic imagination."[245] Brueggemann ex-
presses his meaning of imagination in *An Introduction to the Old Testament:
The Canon and Christian Imagination*:

> It is, moreover, clear that an accent upon imagination may sound
> like an invitation to wild fantasy in any direction. There is, how-
> ever, an important and extensive literature on imagination as
> faithful interpretation that sharply distinguishes imagination
> from undisciplined, uncritical fantasy.[246]

Imagination is crucial to understand in Brueggemann's thinking because it
opens up for an extra-referential reality that I will come back to in chapter 5. I
proceed and describe how he uses imagination in books prior to *ToT* as well as
one book of imagination coming after *ToT*. The purpose is to see how he de-
fines imagination prior to *ToT* and see if this term stands in a process of conti-
nuity towards *ToT* or if there is signal of the reverse. I will then come back to
this topic in chapter 5 where Brueggemann's hermeneutical use of imagination
in *ToT* will be examined.

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[243] Leo Perdue, *The Collapse of History, Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 286.
[244] Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster Jon Knox Press, 2003), 396-97: "It is moreover; clear that an accent upon imagination may sound like an invitation to wild fantasy. There is however, an important and extensive literature on imagination as faithful interpretation that sharply distinguishes imagination from undisciplined, uncritical fantasy."
[245] Garrett Green, *Imagining God, Theology and the religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 64.
[246] Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* 397.

IMAGINATION AND PROPHECY

The Prophetic Imagination, first published in 1978,[247] *forms the logical* starting point for a study of Brueggemann's understanding of imagination. Ricoeur, as noted previously, has been important for him. He explains:

> Eventually Ricoeur permitted me to think again about imagination, though I had already written *Prophetic Imagination* before I happened onto Ricoeur. Since then I have, for a very long time, worked on understanding imagination as a practice of interpretation that required me to move out beyond the methods in which I had been inducted.[248]

The Prophetic Imagination starts a development in Brueggemann's thinking that in many ways finds a logical end in ToT.[249] The book was published during his time at Eden Theological seminary and was written for both the academic guild and pastoral ministry. In the book, Brueggemann argues that American society could be described by two words: consumerism and amnesia. Consumerism leads to amnesia, with the result that society forgets its deepest identity, i.e. that "we are really made in the image of some God."[250] In this situation, the Church has the calling to act in prophetic ministry, to imagine an alternative, i.e. to perceive an alternative consciousness.[251] Brueggemann takes his position between liberals, who define prophetic ministry in terms of "social action" and conservatives, who tend to see the prophets only as "future tellers." He does not deny either of these definitions but nonetheless develops his own perspective:

> The hypothesis I will explore here is this: the task of prophetic
> ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and

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[247] I use the *new revised edition that was published in 2000.*

[248] Brueggemann, "A Pathway of Interpretation," XX. Brueggemann informs the reader in a note to pay special attention to *Texts under Negotiation* for his understanding of the word *imagination.*

[249] C.f. Izaak J Hulster, "Imagination: A Hermeneutical Tool for the Study of the Hebrew Scripture," *Biblical Interpretation 18* (2010): 124 ff.

[250] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination,* 8.

[251] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination,* 1-2.

perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.[252]

According to Brueggemann, the perception of an alternative ultimately has God as its source. He writes: "Prophecy begins in discerning how genuinely alternative He is."[253] For him the Church is the context wherein this *alternative* can be created:

> In any case, my governing hypothesis is that the alternative prophetic community is concerned both with criticizing and energizing. On the one hand to show that the dominant, royal consciousness (which I have termed 'royal') will indeed end and that it has no final claim upon us. On the other hand, it is the task of the alternative prophetic community to present an alternative consciousness that can energize the community.[254]

Brueggemann shows that the biblical text itself presents a conflict between two systems of thoughts and ideologies, visible in contemporary society as well.[255] *T*he community that is fostered by the prophetic imagination becomes an alternative community that can challenge the religion of static triumphalism. This religion is marked by a structure and order without the necessity of imagining an alternative. However, in Egypt, Moses imagined an alternative for the twelve tribes of Israel. From the beginning of the Solomonic kingdom to the last King of Judah, the prophets of Israel imagined an alternative for the people. In the Babylonian empire the prophets imagined an alternative to the empire and freedom for the exiled people. For Brueggemann, the royal consciousness creates amnesia. Only by remembering the traditions of God and reestablishing

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[252] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 3.
[253] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 1-2, 7.
[254] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 59.
[255] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 7: "We will not understand the meaning of prophetic imagination unless we see the connection between the religion of static triumphalism and the politics of oppression and exploration."

God as the center—through the act of imagination— can one can withstand the ideology from Egypt, Babylon and secular society. Brueggemann writes:

> So, this is the paradigm I suggest for prophetic imagination: a royal consciousness committed to achievable satiation. An alternative prophetic consciousness devoted to the pathos and passion of covenanting. The royal consciousness with its program of achievable satisfaction has redefined our notions of humanness, and it had one that to all of us. It has created a subjective consciousness concerned only with self-satisfaction. It has denied us the legitimacy of tradition that requires us to remember, of authority that expects us to answer, and of community that calls us to care.[256]

The prophetic community returns to the memories from earlier history and by use of symbols and metaphors this community then creates a hope for another world. Brueggemann's use of memory at this point closely associates him with von Rad's understanding of the prophet's reuse of the great traditions in the history of Israel. Like von Rad, Brueggemann argues that by memorizing the traditions and using this material in new situations it becomes possible for the prophets to find energy. It is by returning to memory that energizing is made possible.[257]

IMAGINATION **AND** *RHETORICAL CRITICISM*

In 1981, in the article "Vine and Fig Tree: A Case study in Imagination and Criticism," Brueggemann highlights the imaginative nature that he believes is inherent in the biblical text. He does so in a case study of Micah 4:1–5 and 1 Kings 4:20–28 by use of the rhetorical-critical approach with an imaginative

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[256] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination,* 37.
[257] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 64: "In offering symbols the prophet has two tasks. One is to mine the memory of this people and educate them to use the tools of hope. The other is to recognize how singularly words, speech, language, and phrase shape consciousness and define reality." Brueggemann's understanding is here reminiscent of von Rad, see Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Part II, *Introduced by Walter Brueggemann* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001).

perspective.[258] A main argument in the article is that because the metaphor of the Vine and Fig Tree is used in both texts, the act of imagining becomes crucial in order to interpret them. In the first text, Micah 4:1-5 it is written:

> In days to come the mountain of the LORD'S house
> shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
> and shall be raised up above the hills.
> Peoples shall stream to it,
> and many nations shall come and say:
> "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
> to the house of the God of Jacob;
> that he may teach us his ways
> and that we may walk in his paths."
> For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
> and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
> He shall judge between many peoples,
> and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
> they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
> and their spears into pruning hooks;
> nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> neither shall they learn war any more;
> but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own
> fig trees,
> and no one shall make them afraid;
> for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.
> For all the peoples walk,
> each in the name of its god,
> but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God
> forever and ever.

For Brueggemann, the metaphor of wine and the fig tree in Micah is used in an eschatological sense to present "an alternative world".[259] The text, he argues, can be seen as poetry with the intention to "lead Israel to an alternative reality":

> That hope is not simply for a disarmed world. It is much more
> personal. What one wishes for is to be secure enough to produce

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[258] See Walter Brueggemann, *"Vine and Fig Tree: A Case Study in Imagination and Criticism,"* *CBQ* 43 (1981): 188-204. This article is reprinted in Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament*, 245-62. In the foreword to this book, Miller writes that this article is… "…a prime example of Brueggemann's approach. It is textual and exegetical, giving attention to important features in the text—in this case, irony—for their interpretative significance."

[259] Brueggemann, "Vine and Fig Tree," 189: "THE POEM OF Mic 4:1-5 is an example of imaginative use of concrete and anticipatory metaphor to evoke an alternative world in the consciousness of Israel."

and enjoy produce unmolested, either by lawlessness or the usurpation of the state.[260]

Brueggemann then compares the metaphor of the vine and fig tree in Micah with the same metaphor, but now in another context, in 1 Kings 4:20–28:

> Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. [21] Solomon was sovereign over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of choice flour, and sixty cors of meal, [23] ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl. [24] For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphsah to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates; and he had peace on all sides. [25] During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees. [26] Solomon also had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. [27] Those officials supplied provisions for King Solomon and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each one in his month; they let nothing be lacking. [28] They also brought to the required place barley and straw for the horses and swift steeds, each according to his charge.

Because the contexts of Micah 4:1-5 and 1 Kings 4.20–28 are so different, Brueggemann draws the conclusion that the metaphor of vine and fig tree is used in 1 Kings with an ironical intention. The text of 1 Kings 4:20–28 is "an example of ironic criticism, designed to show that the present royal order, absolute and comprehensive in its claims, cannot keep its promises."[261] Even though his argument as such could be questioned, e.g. it could be argued that the state system in 1 Kings was actually good for Israel, the major point to draw is that he combines imagination with rhetorical criticism and argues that this feature belongs to the text itself so that imagination is a visible sign in the final text.

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[260] Brueggemann, "Vine and Fig Tree," 192.
[261] Brueggemann, "Vine and Fig Tree," 199. See also 198: *"The formal construction of the ironic statement is evident. It consists in taking this statement about 'vines and fig trees' (which I judge to be old and familiar) and setting it in the utterly incongruous context of Solomonic arms and oppression… The state system is organized against the fundamental dream of Mic. 4:4."*

IMAGINATION **AND THE** *CONCEPT* **OF** *TRUTH*

Early in his career, Brueggemann wrote an article that was finally transmitted into the book *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination* (1985).[262] In this book he again stresses how rhetorical criticism is closely related to imagination in a way that…

> … texts are acts of imaginative construal of a world that the characters of the text inhabit. This means that rhetorical methods of interpretation, well-honed by Phyllis Trible, pay primary attention to the act of *imagination.*[263]

In the foreword to the second edition of this book (2002), Brueggemann describes *David's Truth* as a beginning point for an "interaction between" core and counter-testimonies:

> In retrospect, I think I can legitimately say that in *David's Truth* I offered an inchoate tracing of what I later fleshed out in *Theology of the Old Testament* [1997], namely, that Israel's textual testimony is an ongoing interaction between 'core testimony' and testimony that critiques core testimony, which I have termed 'counter-testimony.'[264]

The main point in *David's Truth* is that the concept of truth, within human limitations, must be seen from many perspectives and contexts.[265] David has many faces, and in order to reach the true David one has to discern them all. According to Brueggemann, there are at least four different portraits to be seen: 1) David as young, 2) the painful truth of David, e.g. the Bathsheba incident (2 Samuel 8–20 and 1 Kings 1–2), 3) David as king (2 Samuel 5:6–

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[262] Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory, Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
[263] Brueggemann, *David's Truth,* xiii.
[264] Brueggemann, *David's Truth,* xiv.
[265] Brueggemann, *David's Truth,* ix: "The main point was to see that the David narratives were neither reportage of historical reality nor descriptions of what had transpired. They were, rather, artistic construal's and imaginative reconstructions; consequently, the whole notion of 'truth' in the book is used playfully if not ironically."

8:18) and 4) David from a theological perspective (e.g. Psalm 89). Brueggemann's conclusion is that the narrative of David has four versions of David and all are true.[266] In these different portraits there are different modes of truth and every concept of truth is surrounded by both ideology and advocacy.[267] In order to arrive at the truth, one has to go beyond and behind these ideologies.

IMAGINATION AND MEMORY

Brueggemann continues to develop his ideas of imagination in *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). In this book he argues that the biblical exile has a contemporary exile for the American churches:

> If the church is in fact in exile, as I believe it to be, then to try to do ministry as if we are practicing imperial religion robs us of energy. My own judgment is that honestly facing exile as our real situation generates energy for imaginative and faithful living.[268]

In this situation of exile, the task of the Church is "*to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.*"[269] He discerns a hopeful practice of imagination in Second Isaiah. The prophet makes use of Israel's older memories in order to create a prophetic alternative. In this situation of exile, the pain and the use of memory creates a speech of hope:

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[266] See Brueggemann, *David's Truth,* 7.

[267] See Brueggemann, *David's Truth,* 118: "Truth of a Davidic kind is always at the dangerous edge of deception or ideology, always remarkably free, yet always open to risk and in jeopardy. A flatter truth than that could not attest to this restless man. A surer truth than that would deny this man his eagerness for what is yet promised."

[268] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 93. See also Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope,* 1: "There was a time, when the assumption of God completely dominated Western imagination, and the holy Catholic Church roughly uttered the shared consensus of all parties. That consensus was rough and perhaps not very healthy, but at least the preacher could work from it."

[269] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 3.

> The poetry is not aimed first of all at external conduct, as though the poet expected people immediately to start packing for travel. Rather, the poetry cuts underneath behavior to begin to transform the self-image, communal image, and image of historical possibility.[270]

> Imagination is not a freelance, ad hoc operation that spins out novelty. Imagination, of the kind we are speaking, is a fresh, liberated return to the memory.[271]

From Isaiah 54:1–10 he suggests that biblical imagination can recall the memories of the past in order to evoke new hope for a new reality. The task of the prophet is to "announce the possibility of homecoming even though the empire declared it impossible."[272] In Isaiah 54:1-4 there are some imperatives that are followed by motivations which together create the structure of hymn. [273] All these imperatives "play upon the theme of barrenness and appeal to the memory of mother Sarah." The poem inspires the listener to remember the "former things" and see that "this same God who caused birth in the midst of barrenness is about to act again in transformative ways."[274] The text is as follows:

> Sing, O barren one who did not bear;
> burst into song and shout,
> you who have not been in labor!
> For the children of the desolate woman will be more
> than the children of her that is married, says the LORD.
> Enlarge the site of your tent,
> and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
> do not hold back; lengthen your cords
> and strengthen your stakes.
> For you will spread out to the right and to the left,
> and your descendants will possess the nations
> and will settle the desolate towns.

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[270] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 96-97.
[271] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 102.
[272] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 115.
[273] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 117. Verses 1-4 have three sets of imperatives: in v. 1a (shout), v. 2 (enlarge), and v. 4a (fear not), with a corresponding set of motivations v. 1b (for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous), v. 3 (For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left), and v. 4b (for you will not be disregarded)
[274] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 118.

Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no
more.

Verses 5-9 are modeled on the theme of divorce-remarriage. These verses, especially 6-8, later play an important theological role for his concept of YHWH in *ToT* (see chapter 1 and chapter 5):

For your Maker is your husband,
the LORD of hosts is his name;
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.
For the LORD has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off,
says your God.
For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the LORD, your Redeemer.
This is like the days of Noah to me:
Just as I swore that the waters of Noah
would never again go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.

Brueggemann uses the theme of divorce-remarriage to articulate the idea that even though the exile causes abandonment (cf. v. 7) the important thing for the community to remember is God's enduring love. He writes:

If possibility can come from other than memory, then memory need not finally be bothered with. But we argued that it is *only memory* that allows possibility—nothing else.[275]

He maintains that memory is the only foundation that can create an imagination that will lead to homecoming: "It is nothing other than the memory that permits the poet to articulate new possibility, out beyond the empire."[276]

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[275] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 133.
[276] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 121.

In sum, this book emphasizes imagination as the memorizing tool to foster a biblical worldview that with the help of imagination can stand up against the royal, static consciousness.

IMAGINATION AND ESCHATOLOGY

Brueggemann also includes eschatology in relation to his use of imagination. In the article "Convergence in recent OT theologies", first published in 1980, later republished in 1992, he makes a distinction between an *anticipatory epistemology*[277]*,* equivalent to a foreseeing epistemology, and a *hermeneutical epistemology*. The problem with a hermeneutical epistemology is that it pays too much attention to the presuppositions of the interpreter which renders it impossible to reach forward to a truth. He writes:

> The hermeneutical enterprise by itself may lead to a relativizing,
>
> so that we end up being unable to say anything because we are
>
> so aware of our own relative vantage points.[278]

In contrast to a hermeneutical epistemology, an anticipatory epistemology is open to imagination and focuses attention on the future as the verification of truth. Such an epistemology hopes and longs for the future to begin. The anticipation of the coming future for the people of God is the convergence point that unites all the different theologies within the Old Testament. Brueggemann's verification of truth is thus placed in an eschatological future.[279]

IMAGINATION AND INTERPRETATION

In *Texts under Negotiation: the Scripture and Postmodern Imagination* (1993), Brueggemann presents an interpretative program for *ToT*. He argues that the

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[277] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 116. He refers to Jürgen Habermas as inspiratory source for this term.
[278] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 117.
[279] This view has some similarities with Wolfhart Pannenberg's eschatological verification theory of truth. This theory means that the truth is revealed within the secular history, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology.* vol. I (trans. George H. Kehm. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1970), 12.

new "postmodern climate" points to a changed epistemological context that justifies a new approach for biblical interpretation.[280] The use of imagination then becomes central for him in order to prepare for this change of epistemology. This book is therefore especially important and he describes it as the methodological book for *ToT*,[281] and imagination becomes a vehicle for him to take the step from a modern world into the postmodern one. A dominant thought for him is that modernity is a constructed imagination that is now displaced by a postmodern imagination of the world:

> A postmodern climate recognizes that there is no given definition and that the rival claims must simply be argued out.[282]

> The *formal premise* I urge is that our knowing is essentially imaginative, that is, an act of organizing social reality around dominant, authoritative images. This means that the assumptions that have long had unexamined privilege among us are now seen to be sturdy, powerful acts of imagination, reinforced, imposed, and legitimated by power.[283]

Brueggemann supports the idea that modernity is a constructed imagination and not a given, objective reality. He refers to an analysis of the epistemology of the Enlightenment through the eyes of two authors, Stephen Toulmin and Susan Bordo.[284] According to Toulmin and Bordo, the collapse of modernism

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[280] Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation: The Scripture and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), vii: "This book has an eminently practical concern, the liberation of the biblical text for the church in a new situation, for interpretation, proclamation, teaching, and practice. There can be little doubt that we are in a wholly new interpretative situation. While this new pluralistic, postmodern situation is perceived by many as a threat to 'mainline' churches and to the long-settled claims of conventional text-reading, it is my judgment and my urging that the new situation is in fact a positive opportunity to which church interpreters of the Scripture may attend with considerable eagerness."

[281] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, with CD-ROM. At the back of the book *Texts under Negotiation* is described as Brueggemann's interpretative program for *ToT*.

[282] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 15.

[283] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 18.

[284] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 3-5. See S. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis, The Hidden Agenda of Modernity.* (New York: Free Press, 1990), and S. Bordo, *Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and* Culture (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1987).

is analogous to another, earlier, collapse; namely, the collapse of the medieval world. At that time it was Descartes, Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau among others who, while facing the collapse of the medieval synthesis, were searching for new solid ground for their thinking.[285] Bordo's interpretation of Descartes is especially important for Brueggemann. According to Bordo, Descartes' search for a new epistemological foundation should be seen as a way to save the world in light of the downfall of the medieval world. Bordo's analysis is that Descartes' epistemological solution - linking objectivity to the self - has two, mainly negative, results. Firstly, "a new separated individual consciousness that in fact has no reference point outside itself" and secondly, an epistemology which created an objectivity that confirmed much too masculine power.[286] Real knowledge, since Descartes, has been grounded in terms of…

> … rational, logical coherence, discerned by a detached, disinterested, disembodied mind. … Real knowledge is written, universal, general and timeless.[287]

According to Brueggemann, the historical-critical method is based on Enlightenment epistemology. For a long time this method has been the only valid theological interpretation tool for discerning objective knowledge. However, a postmodern situation includes skepticism towards this objective certitude and also suggests an alternative. Brueggemann writes:

> Less important but worth noting, the end of modernity requires a critique of method in scripture study. It is clear to me that conventional historical criticism is, in scripture study, our particular practice of modernity, whereby the text was made to fit our modes of knowledge and control. As we stand before the text, no

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[285] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 2-3.
[286] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 4.
[287] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 5.

longer as its master but as its advocate, we will have to find new methods of reading.[288]

The postmodern shift asks for new criteria for a justified knowledge, and he finds them by help of imagination:

> By imagination, I mean very simply the human capacity to picture, portray, receive and practice the world in ways other than it appears to be at first glance when seen through a dominant, habitual, unexamined lens.[289]

According to Brueggemann, a postmodern epistemology is then based upon a new imagination—an imagination where knowing consists of a dynamic thinking where reality is birthed into existence by a combination of former memories in a new situations, with imagination providing the dynamic energy.[290] He argues, in *Texts under Negotiation*, that human knowing is "essentially imaginative" which means that human thinking is constructed upon dominant images that are legitimated by various hegemonic powers. This is his formal premise for an imaginative thinking:

> On the basis of this formal premise, I assert the *substantive claim*
> that the practice of modernity, of which we are all children, since
> the seventeenth century has given us a world imagined through
> the privilege of white, male, Western, colonial hegemony, with
> all its pluses and minuses.[291]

Concerning hermeneutics, Brueggemann's emphasis is that the biblical text should transform the community, i.e. reshape the mind of the community.[292]

[288] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 11.
[289] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 13.
[290] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 13: "knowing consists not in settled certitudes but in the actual work of Imagination."
[291] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 18.
[292] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 24: "…the preacher must take care not to compromise but to stay very close to the odd text that is the source of this proposed alternative."

He argues that the Church must leave the boundaries of a modern epistemology otherwise she will disappear with the rest of modernity. On the other hand, if the Church has the courage to enter into postmodernity, the result will be transformation, i.e. "the slow, steady process of inviting each other into a counter story about God, world, neighbor, and self."[293] A transformative preaching is then evidenced in the way the interpreter dares to take an examining attitude to the text, following its message wherever it takes him or her. As for the Church in the postmodern context, the pastor must have a method that can correspond to both the biblical worldview and to the postmodern worldview and for different reasons the historical-critical method does not match these criteria. He draws parallels between the therapist and the pastor. Like the therapist, a pastor does not need to know everything in advance:

> In parallel fashion, the pastor does not see and know everything
> in advance, but lives patiently and faithfully while the new pieces
> of disclosure surface and do their work.[294]

In the encounter with the text the reader is able to see the world as God imagines it. According to Brueggemann, in a postmodern context it is necessary to unlearn what has formerly been learned in theological education, whether it comes from the historical-critical paradigm or church theology. Brueggemann wants to save the biblical message from, on the one hand, liberal questions, asking whether this really could happen, and on the other hand, conservatism marked by stereotyped doctrinal statements. His proposal for scriptural interpretation is to use the metaphor of the drama as a suitable alternative:

> Thus I propose, as a way of moving beyond eighteenth-century
> absolutism and beyond nineteenth–century developmentalism,
> that biblical faith as drama for our time and place is a way of
> reading that respects and takes full account of the text.[295]

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[293] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 25.
[294] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 21.
[295] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 67.

According to Brueggemann, a biblical hermeneutics enters into the "zone of imagination." This zone stands between the reader and the text and is situated in the mind of the reader. The text enters the reader through this zone and "no one, not the preacher or the interpreter has any access to this zone of imagination or control over the outcome."[296] In practice, this means that the goal for the preacher is to support the zone of imagination for the listener. The purpose for the preacher is to "make sure the text is offered as input in the liveliest way as possible. Beyond that, the subjects themselves must answer for the process."[297]

To conclude, imagination takes its form in the mind but is fostered by the biblical text. This text is in turn formed by God. A pastor's purpose is to help the listener to enter into the text by creating a dialogue between the listener and the text, after which transformation can take place.

IMAGINATION AND TESTIMONY

In the foreword to *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post – Christian World* (2000)*,* the redactor Miller writes: "In various ways, they lay the groundwork for Brueggemann's magisterial Theology of the Old Testament."[298] An important theme in these articles is Brueggemann's combination of *imagination* with *testimony.* In short, he argues that understanding the Old Testament text as a *testimony* is congruent with a *faithful imagination.* This means, first of all, that there is a *thickness* or density in the biblical testimony that is only possible to enter through the act of imagination: "The thickness requires many readings, many hearings, many interpretations, and many

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[296] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 63.
[297] Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation,* 68-69: "The minister enacts the drama and invites members of the listening, participating congregation to come be in the drama as he or she chooses and is able. That is, preaching in frame of reference is not for instruction [doctrinal or moral] or even for advocacy, but it is for one more re-enactment of the drama of the text."
[298] Patrick D Miller, Foreword to Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a post–Christian World* (ed. Patrick D. Miller: Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), viii: "Here the reader will encounter Brueggemann's development of the image of the courtroom and of the Old Testament as various forms of *testimony,* a way of approaching the Scriptures that points to the centrality of rhetoric and speech and suggests the character of the Scripture as requiring decision."

acts of faithful imagination…"[299] Secondly, the theological foundation for an old testament theology should be done on the foundation of *the testimony.* However, the Church, for too long a time, has interpreted this testimony through the imagination of rationalism and logic. Rationalism is not the biblical imaginative mode.[300] Rationalism is "Latin-like" imagination. In contrast, he wants to stress a far more biblical alternative: "the clearest evidence for this process of testimony, I take it, is the poetry of 2 Isaiah [40–55]."[301] By using testimony in an imaginative way the reader observes how another "world is possible."[302]

IMAGINATION IN PROCESS OF CONTINUITY BEFORE AND AFTER TOT

In the final study of imagination we take a closer look at how Brueggemann describes imagination after *ToT*. Such a comparison makes it possible to conclude as to whether there is continuity in his use of imagination both prior to and after *ToT*. It is also possible to suggest a continuity that embraces *ToT* as well. The book *An Introduction to the Old Testament - the Canon and Christian Imagination,* published in 2003, is suitable for this purpose. Here, Brueggemann interprets all the Old Testament books by way of an *imaginative approach,* stressing the combination of *imagination* and *memory*:

> This act of *imaginative remembering,* I believe, is the clue to valuing the Scripture as a trustworthy voice of faith while still taking seriously our best critical learning.[303]

The act of imagining creates the possibility of going beyond the historical question *what happened?* and stepping into what Brueggemann calls *beyond*

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[299] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope,* 22.
[300] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope,* 3: "For those of us who left the Latin liturgy in the sixteenth century, our alternative strategy has been *historical criticism,* another 'Latin-like' attempt to control and reduce and tame and understand and reduce and control and reduce."
[301] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope*, 22.
[302] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope,* 17.
[303] Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* 8.

the given. Translating *beyond the given* is for him equal to discerning the reality from YHWH's perspective.[304] He discusses the historical books of Judges, Samuels and Kings and argues that these books are actually prophetical in the sense they present history from YHWH's perspective. The historical reportage is filled with sociological and rhetorical aspects.[305] "What we have is a *text* that stands some distance removed from whatever historical encounter *might* have happened."[306] So, the text in our hand does not give the *objective* information concerning what really happened, but rather the real historical encounter is transposed through the act of imagination. The text is a "stylized, artistic act of imagination" and this act has also "transposed history into artistry." [307] He develops his hermeneutical thinking from this in three interpretative stages:

- The first stage means simply that there is a story that is constructed from the eyes of YHWH, i.e. an act of *imagination remembering*.
- The second stage is the story retold, i.e., re-imagined in other sources in the Old Testament.
- The third stage is when the story becomes a metaphor whereby the old imagined event becomes a "type whereby new experiences are imagined differently in the light of the older extant types."[308]

Consequently for him, the Old Testament texts are filled with many possible readings because there is more than one stage in the text:

> In a quite similar way, it is clear that interpretation of Scripture
> [that is, readings beyond the final form of the text] continues in

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[304] Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 263: "…the category of 'prophet' indicates that a more or less 'historical' narrative is 'prophetic' in the sense that it retells or re imagines the past from a quite particular perspective, namely, the rule of YHWH…."

[305] Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 7: "One may assume that what is remembered is rooted in some occurrence. Thus, for example, the great Exod narrative surely has behind it some defining emancipatory happening."

[306] Walter Brueggemann, *Inscribing the Text, Sermons and prayers by Walter Brueggemann* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2004), 12.

[307] Brueggemann, *Inscribing the Text,* 12.

[308] Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* 396.

faithful church practice to be an act of imagination congruent
with the imaginative character of the text itself.[309]

Faithful imagination becomes a hermeneutical act that is performed by the modern interpreter of the Old Testament and done within the confessing Church. Finally, imagination is related to truth, and while we do not have direct access to the real object, which is the history of Israel, the use of imagination does enter into the truth:

> The Scripture is never simply reportage and description, but is always interpretative commentary that pushes upon the observable to the constructed, that is, *imagination,* beyond the 'given.' We may think of imagination as the generation of images that lie beyond the socially acceptable consensus guaranteed: …[310]

Brueggemann stresses that the text has its own voice, regardless of whether it suits the reality outside the text or not. In sum, this last book on a series of imaginative books, shares the same context as the others, i.e. understanding the reality of YHWH by memorizing the history of Israel, and in such a way an alternative consciousness takes form. For Brueggemann, the testimony of the Old Testament must be understood on its own premises, and this is possible with the help of imagination.

CONCLUSION ON IMAGINATION

A summary of the books on *imagination* gives the handle that Brueggemann uses the term to describe imagination as the source to present the alternative, i.e. God's agenda against the royal consciousness in *The Prophetic Imagination*. The article "Wine and Fig Tree" is an example of how he combines imagination with rhetorical criticism. This combination forms the argument that the metaphor of the wine and fig tree is used in an ironic sense in 1 Kings 4. Another combination, in *Hopeful Imagination,* is that of imagination and

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[309] Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* 396
[310] Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* 395.

memory. According to him, a hopeful imagination becomes visible when imaginative remembering of the past is presented in a new context. In one of his most important books on imagination, *Texts under Negotiation,* he presents his interpretative program: with the use of imagination a new epistemology and hermeneutics can take form. In *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope,* he argues that the correct way of understanding Scripture is to approach the biblical text specifically as a testimony. In *An Introduction to the Old Testament-the Canon and Christian Imagination,* published after *ToT*, again stresses the importance of connecting imagination with memory. This combination, he argues, forms the key to interpreting Scripture in a faithful way.

My conclusion is that in Brueggemann's theological work, imagination has been developed in a process of continuity. For Brueggemann *Imagination* primarily means creating *an alternative.* The German equivalent of *imagination* is *Vorstellung.* Imagination also means the alternative as a prophetic vision for the future. His rhetorical and imaginative interpretation creates an alternative consciousness which opens up new ways of understanding the Old Testament. Imagination is, for Brueggemann, a hermeneutical act that is visible both in the biblical text itself as well in the text's interpreter. He is not a relativistic postmodern scholar because he argues that every theology of the Old Testament becomes verified in the eschatology.

3.7 CONTEXT VII) RENAISSANCE, CRISIS AND CONFLICT

The seventh and final context for understanding *ToT* is to situate the discipline of Old Testament theology in the period of the 1980s and 1990s, which was simultaneously a period of Renaissance,[311] with many new publications of Old Testament theology, and a period of crisis and conflict. Rendtorff aptly describes the crisis in his article "The Paradigm is Changing:"

> Old Testament scholarship at present is in crisis. The Wellhausen paradigm no longer functions as a commonly accepted presupposition for Old Testament exegesis. And at present, no other concept is visible that could replace such a widely accepted position.[312]

Rendtorff argues for a change of perspective—from defining the discipline as a historical discipline to defining it as a textual discipline.[313] This change was

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[311] See Henning Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 4: From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 408: "The period following World War I also brought about a reawakening of Old and New Testament theology [we have already mentioned the works of Bultmann and von Rad], which in the course of the nineteenth century had begun entirely as a history of religion. Walter Eichrodt (1890– 1978) offered a systematically constructed *Theology of the Old Testament* (1933– 1939) as did Ludwig Köhler (1880– 1956). Since then, increasing numbers of new studies have appeared."
See also Stordalen, "Gammaltestamentlig Teologi anno 2002," 8ff. See also Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 3: "Five new OT theologies have appeared within a four-year period, a record never before achieved and not easily duplicated in the future."
[312] Rendtorff, "The Paradigm is Changing," 44. See also Rendtorff, "Approaches to the Old Testament," 19. See also Craig G. Bartholomew, "Reading the OT in Postmodern Times," *TynBul* 49.1 (1998): 91-114. In this article, Bartholomew refers to Rendtorff's analysis as pivotal when it comes to define the new paradigm for the discipline of Old Testament theology.
[313] Rendtorff, "The Paradigm is Changing," 52-53: "Moreover, the consequences for reading the book of Genesis as a whole, the Pentateuch as a whole, and the canon of the Hebrew Scripture as a whole will be more fascinating if we go beyond the diachronic observation of diversity to the search for the inner, or even overarching unity. Such a unity in some cases might appear to be full of tensions. But even this tension was surely not hidden from the later writers, so that we can try to follow their guidance in reading their texts. I believe it has changed already. But the field is open. Many new and fruitful approaches are visible that will lead Old Testament scholarship into the twenty-first century. At the moment there is no new model that could be expected to achieve common acceptance as a paradigm, and there will probably be none in the near future. This will give considerable freedom to those who are looking for new approaches and who are ready to move ahead. They are many, and therefore there will be hope."

also greatly approved by Perdue in *the Collapse of History* (1994).[314] Perdue argues that the methodological crisis within the discipline is a result of the collapse of the historical-critical method as the common and approved method for the discipline. An important hypostasis in Perdue's book is that it is difficult to apply the term *history*, when used in our secular meaning, to the Old Testament. The problem for the discipline of Old Testament theology has been the "tyranny of positivistic history":

> Certainly, the tyranny of positivistic history is now at an end, and its domination of the theological enterprise among Old Testament scholarship has been questioned sufficiently enough to allow, not only for other philosophies of history [e.g., feminism or neo — Marxism] to make their contributions, but also for quite different methodologies to develop and be applied.[315]

Brueggemann writes in his review of Perdue's book: "I am enormously positive about this book and intend to use it as a required text."[316] Brueggemann concludes: "The work of Perdue is a most important effort to redefine and rehabilitate the task of theological interpretation that has recently languished."[317] As Rendtorff and Perdue have shown, there was a crisis during this period, but also an apparent conflict—between the discipline of Old Testament theology and the discipline of the religious–historical approach—concerning which one should perform the final thematization of the Old Testament. Perdue describes an important difference between the two disciplines: Old Testament theology relates primarily to the Church, whereas the religious-historical approach relates primarily to the academy. The purpose of Old Testament theology is to shape doctrines, whereas the purpose of the religious-historical approach is to

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[314] The series *Overtures to Biblical Theology* started in 1978 and from its start Brueggemann was one of two redactors. Perdue has published two books for the series: *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (1994) and *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History* (2005).

[315] Perdue, *The Collapse of History, Reconstructing Old Testament Theology*, 104.

[316] Walter Brueggemann, review of L. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology, JOR* (1996): 352.

[317] Perdue, *The Collapse of History, Reconstructing Old Testament Theology,* xii.

describe the religion of ancient Israel.[318] The fact that no methodological consensus within the discipline of Old Testament theology exists caused Albertz in 1995 to declare the death of the discipline of Old Testament theology.[319] It is important to highlight Albertz' criticism because he plays an important role in *ToT*.[320] We can say that Albertz and Brueggemann draw diametrically different conclusions from the same basic assumption, namely, the notion of a pluralistic character within the Old Testament text. While Brueggemann argues for the possibility of describing God, and asserts that the pluralistic feature of the Old Testament yields a contradictive concept of YHWH, Albertz argues that a scientific method cannot describe God but is limited to describing only the rites and their function within a religious community.[321] Moreover, Albertz argues that it is unclear which contexts should be assumed whenever making an interpretation. Does the correct context correspond with the author's historical context or should the canon determine the interpretation?[322] Finally, Albertz argues that the discipline of Old Testament theology, because of its theological claims, risks becoming an apologetic discipline, while stressing Israel's distinctiveness in relation to the surrounding cultures. Albertz argues for a religious-historical basis as the proper approach for a study of the Old Testament text material. The discipline then has a clearly defined task: to understand the historical world of the Old Testament writers. Even though the relationship between God and mankind is impossible to define scientifically, it is possible to present Israel's religious history in a descriptive way:

> A) Religion ist ein Wechselgeschehen zwischen Gott und Mensch. Dieses ist für de wissenschaftliche Betrachtung allerdings nicht direct greifbar, sondern nur indirect in der sprachlichen Äusserungen von Menschen und Ihren Handlungen B)

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[318] Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History*, 47-48.
[319] Albertz, R., "Religionsgeschichte Israels statt Theologie des Alten Testaments?" 7ff.
[320] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 64, 710.
[321] Albertz, "Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?" 18.
[322] Albertz, "Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?" 22.

Religion steht in einem the functional Wechselverhältnis zur Ge-
sellsschaft: gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse, die in den Menschen
leben, Wirken auf ihre Religion ein, und diese wirkt auf ihre ge-
sellschaftlichen Verhältnisse zurück.[323]

The task of a religious-historical approach is to re-translate "the frozen" dia-
logue and portray different groups and describe their different descriptions of
God.[324] Hagelia suggests that there is neither a Christian Old Testament nor a
Jewish Hebrew Bible.[325] The watershed between a Christian and a Jewish read-
ing of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible is also the question whether Jesus from
Nazareth is Messiah or not. Hagelia seems to argue that the postmodern context
opens up new interesting perspectives for the discipline:

> Every *Theology* should open with a discussion of questions that
> are basic for the whole discipline: epistemological questions,
> how it should be edited or redacted, including how it should re-
> late to its New Testament reception. This is the place to take up
> methodological and hermeneutical questions, such as the value
> and/or limitations of the historical-critical method and the value
> of and/or limitations of postmodern ways of thinking.[326]

Hagelia suggests that Brueggemann's approach could be seen as a "supple-
ment" to modern approaches within the field of the discipline of Old Testament
theology. Another perspective on the conflict is given by Barr. He favors a
theological study of the Old Testament, but in contrast to Brueggemann, he
supports a descriptive theological approach to the Old Testament. He strives to
achieve this purpose by use of natural theology.[327] The discipline describes the
various theologies that exist in the Old Testament. According to Barr, it is nec-
essary for the discipline to live in close relationship with a religious-historical

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[323] Albertz, "Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?" 18.
[324] Albertz, "Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?" 23.
[325] Se Hagelia, *Three Old Testament Theologies for Today*, 180-181.
[326] Hagelia, *Three Old Testament theologies for Today,* 192.
[327] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 138-39. See also Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament
Theology*, 54.

approach. Old Testament theology cannot exist if it stands apart from the historical, socio-political and religious context.[328] For Barr, the difference between the disciplines lies in the fact that Old Testament theology emphasizes the intellectual aspect of religion; ideas, arguments, concepts and theological developments, whereas a religious-historical approach emphasizes rituals, sacred objects, iconography, architecture, and psychology.[329]

Finally, the Old Testament theologian Terje Stordalen argues that both disciplines share the same kind of requirements and accountabilities. A religious-historical approach to Israel also has indirect normative claims, e.g. the point of departure for the discipline is writings that are treated as sacred Scriptures in the current culture. The aim for the discipline is then to describe the religion in this text and describe how the religion should be practiced, which then opens up for normative questions.[330] According to Stordalen, one difference is that *theology* is primarily a linguistic and textual phenomenon whereas *religion*, besides embracing this phenomenon, also has a non-linguistic dimension which means that the discipline must be based on sources outside the Old Testament. It thus becomes dependent upon models which reconstruct the historical realities. This circumstance makes the discipline as problematic as Old Testament theology.

In sum, Rendtorff and Perdue point to the fact that the historical approach to the Old Testament has failed. A textual approach is what is now needed. This makes the whole situation both interesting and unpredictable. Albertz's criticism of the impossibility of the discipline of Old Testament theology affects Brueggemann. Barr and Stordalen argue that Old Testament theology should exist, not as a normative discipline as Brueggemann suggests, but rather as a descriptive discipline. The search for solid ground is a quest indeed, but the question of how to find it awaits answers.

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[328] Stordalen, "Gammaltestamentlig Teologi anno 2002," 30.
[329] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 101-38.
[330] Stordalen, "Gammaltestamentlig Teologi anno 2002," 26.

3.8 CONCLUSIONS

Concluding this chapter, Brueggemann is first of all formed by a *Protestant context*. This means that for him, the message of the Scripture stands in quite sharp contrast to church theology. He is specifically inspired by theologians such as Barth, Muilenburg, Gottwald, Childs, Levenson, Barr, and Rentdorff and philosophers such as Ricoeur and partly Derrida. The above mentioned have both influenced his thinking but also demarcated his approach against others. He works within a *dissolutive context.* The BThM, within which he was fostered, underwent a crisis at the end of the 1950s. The conundrum was to combine a historical approach with a theological concern. This led Brueggemann to focus on *rhetorical criticism*. The rhetorical and imaginative concern together forms much of his theological approach and could be labeled postmodern—he is a *postmodern theologian* because he uses imaginative and rhetorical insights in biblical interpretation of the canonical texts—and this combination makes him conclude that there is an inherent discrepancy in the text. During the 1990s, there was a new unrelated crisis within the discipline of Old Testament theology. This paved the way for a renaissance of many new Old Testament theologies. Among them, *ToT* was published in 1997. There are at least two important problems that Brueggemann faced at the time of publishing *ToT*; firstly, how could the discipline of Old Testament theology establish criteria by which biblical truths can be presented? Secondly, was it possible from an epistemological point of view to present normative theology for the Church at the end of the 20th Century? Brueggemann's normative claim challenges previous attempts and particularly those metanarratives that were dominant during this period, i.e. the historical-critical method and church theology. At the end of the 20th century, Brueggemann stands as a representative of a totally new approach, one which challenges both a historical-critical approach and a pre-modern church theology approach. *ToT* presents an alternative to these two metanarratives. This alternative is based upon a new epistemological and hermeneutical situation. Both Rendtorff and Perdue await and

anticipate the consequences of such a new attempt to interpret the Old Testament theologically, and *ToT* can definitely be seen as an answer to this calling; a theology that performs a great epistemological move away from both the historical-critical method and church theology and moves towards a rhetorical-theological interpretation of the Old Testament.

PART II BRUEGGEMANN'S FOUNDATION

> Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth. (Archimedes)

Epistemological, hermeneutical, and theological issues embrace this study and the quotation from Archimedes summarizes an epistemological discussion that relates to the title of this study; how can Brueggemann acquire a new epistemological foundation for a justified belief when neither the liberal nor the conservative approaches have a satisfactory foundation. His epistemology is paradigmatic in the sense that it breaks with previous church theology and the historical-critical method. This is a turning point and supported by e.g. Perdue who argues that it is critical to embrace the postmodern understanding of epistemology and hermeneutics in order to develop the discipline of Old Testament study.[331]

A question that stands at the center of chapter 4 is also if Brueggemann's epistemology should be defined as non-foundational or as weak foundational. If it is non-foundational, then his hermeneutics from necessity would be non-referential. This means that a question in chapter 5 must be to understand if his hermeneutics refers to a presupposed reality outside the text or not. What we do know is that Brueggemann locates meaning primarily within the testimony and the community that reads the text. But his use of imagination creates a possibility of entering outside the text and the community. However, if his hermeneutics is extra-referential, another interesting problem arises, should the rhetorical tension be understood also as an ontological tension?

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[331] See Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History,* 1-76. Perdue explains in the introduction how a new approach can be formulated in light of the collapse of the historical-critical method. He argues that the present status of Old Testament Theology must take into account the postmodern situation, i.e. the crisis in epistemology and the requirements of hermeneutics.

CHAPTER 4 EPISTEMOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

Three things have to be clarified concerning Brueggemann's epistemology.[332]

Firstly, we have to find out if his epistemology is non-foundational or weak

foundational. This topic then concerns an epistemological discussion, at a cer-

tain distance from biblical theology, but nonetheless very much related to it.

Christian faith has always stood in close relationship to knowledge, meaning

and faith.[333] The clarification of Brueggemann's epistemology is central for the

discipline of Old Testament theology because the epistemology paves the way

for the hermeneutics and, thus, the theology. We have so far concluded that

Brueggemann's theological basis for the possibility of knowing the God of Is-

rael in the Old Testament is on the basis of the *testimony*.[334] I will in this chap-

ter argue that these testimonies function as his epistemological foundation. His

epistemology is then *weak foundational* and not non-foundational.[335] A main

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[332] Brueggemann does not present his epistemology in *ToT* in a separate chapter but reflects on this issue especially in the first and final parts of *ToT*, i.e. "Retrospect I & II" (pp. 1–116) and "Prospects for Biblical Interpretation" (pp. 707–70). Epistemology is the study of the structure of justification of knowledge. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There A Meaning in This Text? The Scripture, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 19: "Whether there is something to be known in texts is a question of the 'epistemology' of meaning."

[333] James Barr describes in *The Concept of Biblical Theology* those various epistemological theories that occur within the discipline of the Old Testament and how important it is for a scholar to be aware of these epistemological issues in order to comprehend the discipline of Old Testament theology. The Norwegian Old Testament theologian Terje Stordalen stresses the same, i.e. that epistemological and hermeneutical questions are key topics within the discipline. Stordalen also argues that each of these terms carry the potential to change the direction of the discipline. See Terje Stordalen, "Gammaltestamentlig Teologi anno 2002," *SEÅ* 68, Uppsala, (2003): 8.

[334] Cf. Walter Brueggemann, "*Theology of the Old Testament*: A Prompt Retrospect," Pages 307-21 in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Brueggemann Walter* (ed. T. Linafelt and T. Beal. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1998), 310: "More specifically, it is the focus upon juridical language of *testimony* that I hope will be the major gain of my work."

[335] It is necessary to explain the term foundationalism because Brueggemann critically refers to some foundational epistemologies. Moreover, within the discipline of Old Testament theology there is a certain kind of ambiguity involved, which motivates a clarification, e.g. weak foundationalism is also defined as *Reformed Epistemology* or *Theo-Foundationalism*. Foundationalism can also be formulated as an *internalist* or an *externalist* view. An internalist holds that basic beliefs are justified by mental events or states, such as experiences that do not constitute beliefs. An externalist, by contrast, denies that one can always have this sort of access to the basis for one's knowledge and justified belief. Instead, this form argues that external (outside the mental belief) serve as the justification for a belief.

argument for describing his epistemology as weak foundational is the combination of Brueggemann's "appeal to testimony as a mode of knowledge"[336] with Ricoeur's understanding of the function of a testimony within the hermeneutical process of interpretation:

> A hermeneutic without testimony is condemned to an infinite regress in a perspectivism with neither beginning nor end.[337]

What Ricoeur argues for is that a testimony delivers knowledge that can be described as basic, i.e. foundational. This means that, according to Ricoeur, a *testimony* constitutes a solid foundation.

Secondly, the clarification of Brueggemann's epistemology is related to the question of legitimacy.[338] This study is concerned with whether or not Brueggemann is justified or has warrant for his epistemology. He eagerly opposes attempts to dismiss a theological method. Rainer Albertz (1943-), much appreciated by Brueggemann in *ToT*, argues that a scientific method cannot describe God but merely the rites and how these rites function within a religious community. The question of legitimacy then relates to the question of primacy—whether the discipline of Old Testament theology or a religious historical approach should perform the final systematization of the Old Testament.

Thirdly, a clarification of Brueggemann's epistemology is related to explaining the consequences of Brueggemann's epistemology for his hermeneutics and theology. Barr, Waltke and John Collins argue that his epistemology limits the reality inside a web of beliefs with no logical references to a reality outside the text.[339] This would mean that Brueggemann only describes YHWH inside the

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[336] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 119.

[337] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* 144.

[338] Perdue relates *postmodernism* to an epistemological discussion. See Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology after the Collapse of History*, 240: "Postmodern approaches, in essence, possess the common feature of deconstructing the epistemologies of the Enlightenment and any theory based on them."

[339] See Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology,* 561 ff. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology,* 70: "In his epistemology we can be sure only that I AM exists in the text, not in his existence and historicity outside the text." John Collins, *The Scripture after Babel: Historical Criticism in a*

text with no reference to an outside reality. On this particular point, it will be obvious that I disagree with Barr, Waltke, and Collins and argue that Brueggemann's epistemology reaches out to an ontological reality. My argument for this conclusion is based upon his affinity with Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), two very important sources for his epistemology. In order to accomplish a satisfactory description of Brueggemann's epistemology, the structure of this chapter is as follows; firstly, *foundationalism* is explained, followed secondly, by the term *non-foundationalism* (hereinafter abbreviated as NF). Thirdly, Brueggemann will be related to Barth and Ricoeur. It would be beyond the scope of this study to perform a self-sufficient analysis of Barth's epistemology and then compare it with Brueggemann's. Instead, I will rely in this study specifically upon Kevin Diller's analysis of Barth's epistemology, I will demonstrate that Brueggemann's epistemology shares similarities with that of Barth.[340] I will also show that Brueggemann, like Ricoeur, defines the term testimony as delivering *non-inferential* knowledge. Fourthly and finally, I will offer the suggestion that Brueggemann's epistemology could be defined as a kind of weak foundationalism, which I term *testimonial foundationalism.* This epistemology can also be termed as fallibilism.

4.2 DEFINING FOUNDATIONALISM

According to Richard Fumerton and Ali Hassan, there is no standard terminology that defines foundationalism in detail.[341] What can be confirmed, however,

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Postmodern Age (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 145: "Like most non-foundationalist theologians, Brueggemann wants to exempt the sacred text from the suspicion to which all other metanarratives are subjected…"

[340] Kevin Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma, How Karl Barth and Alvin Plantinga Provide a Unified Response* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014). There is a similarity between Childs and Barth, see Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context,* 225: "Among biblical scholars, there seems to be common agreement that Childs's canonical theological exegesis in general assimilates John Calvin, Walter Zimmerli, and Karl Barth."

[341] Cf. the term *foundationalism* in Ali Hasan and Richard Fumerton, "Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/justep-foundational/>. Non-inferential knowledge is the same as basic knowledge. Inferential knowledge is the same as derived knowledge. The ambiguity might be caused by an undifferentiated use of the term within theological circles.

is that "for literally thousands of years foundationalism was taken to be almost trivially true."[342] Randalf Rauser writes that if there were one "single epistemological issue" that could define the shift from modernism to postmodernism, it would be …

> …the topic of foundationalism, for this brings us to the heart of a nexus of shifting views concerning the nature of justification, knowledge, truth, and reality.[343]

Rauser also emphasizes *foundationalism* when he explains the shift from modernism to postmodernism. His analysis relates closely to Brueggemann's, who wants to see a shift from a modern epistemology towards a postmodern alternative. The epistemological term *foundationalism* can be defined by way of three examples.

Firstly, the term *foundationalism* entails an epistemological discussion about the justification of belief. A foundationalist epistemology implies that all knowledge ultimately rests on a foundation of non-inferential knowledge or basic knowledge.

Secondly, foundationalism can be explained by relating it to the so called *regress problem*, which concerns how propositions are to be justified epistemologically. The premise in the regress problem is that any justification itself requires support. This means that any proposition can be regressed, i.e. going back endlessly by asking the simple question "Why" again and again, until the foundationalist finally reaches a non-inferential foundation. This is also called a basic belief and this is a belief which is not based on other knowledge but is solid ground in itself. Other forms of knowledge are derived from this non-inferential foundation, i.e. they are inferential or non-basic. An inferential knowledge is a derived knowledge and is dependent on non-inferential knowledge.

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[342] See Hasan and Fumerton, "Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification."
[343] Randalf Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations* (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 3.

Thirdly and finally, the term foundationalism could also be defined by use of the metaphor of a foundation that supports a building. The building consists of various materials that are placed on the foundation of the house.

The critical question within foundationalism is what kind of knowledge that can be defined as non-inferential. *Classical foundationalism* (hereinafter abbreviated as CF) argues that non-inferential knowledge must be infallible or inerrant. René Descartes (1596–1650) is often regarded as a typical representant of CF. His search for non-inferential knowledge through the use of skepticism ended in his famous non-inferential thought: *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). CF can also be based on empiricism or idealism. Together with rationalism these two are the three major philosophical directions that in many ways form what we term modernism.[344]

OTHER MODELS OF FOUNDATIONALISM

There are other models of foundationalism although all share the same epistemological structure. A special model of foundationalism is *weak foundationalism*. *Weak* is not equivalent with *faint,* but stands as a soft alternative to a strong foundation that is presented within CF, wherein the foundation must be infallible. A prominent supporter of a weak foundationalism is Alvin Plantinga (1932–) who argues that one is justified in having a religious experience as a non-inferential foundation.[345] This is particularly interesting since this is exactly what Brueggemann writes in *ToT*. Within their different disciplines it must be stressed that both refer to Barth as an important source of inspiration.

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[344] See Nancy Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism, How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy set the Theological Agenda* (Trinity Press: Pennsylvania, 2007), 15-28. She argues that liberal theology and its counterpart fundamentalism, even though their conclusions stand in sharp opposition, are united in the same epistemology, i.e. CF. Both opposite theologies are based on unchallengeable foundations; in the case of fundamentalism, the inerrant Scripture, in the case of liberal theology, experience.

[345] See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1999), 188: "On the other hand, if theistic belief is true, then it seems likely that it does have warrant. If it is true, then there is, indeed, such a person as God, a person who has created us in his image [so that we resemble him, among other things, in having the capacity for knowledge], who loves us, who desires that we know and love him, and who is such that it is our end and good to know and love him." See also Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma*, 42, 46-47, 64, 73, 85-88.

Concerning Plantinga, Diller argues that Plantinga's weak foundationalism shares many similarities with Barth's theology of revelation, and this argument is also accepted by Plantinga.[346] As I have already demonstrated in chapter 3, Brueggemann has to a large extent based his theology on Barth's understanding of the term testimony. I will argue, by use of Diller that Barth's theology of revelation is comparable to Brueggemann's epistemology based on testimony in *ToT*. In this way, we can see that Brueggemann's epistemology is weak foundational. To exemplify, a weak foundational belief means that one has a justified belief e.g. Saul was the first King in Israel based solely on the argument that it is written in the book of 1 Samuel. In this way the text—specifically described as a testimony— is the foundation that delivers non-inferential knowledge. Of course many would argue that this kind of epistemology is incoherent, i.e. not justified. At this point, however, it is unnecessary to enter this debate. What has been shown is that his epistemological foundation is based on the term *testimony,* and this kind of epistemology share many features with Barth, and to some extent Plantinga too.

4.3 HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

For Brueggemann, the emergence of the rhetorical critical method is a search for a new solid ground after the collapse of the historical-critical method. He does not explicitly write in *ToT* that the historical-critical method is based on

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[346] See Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma*, foreword by Alvin Plantinga: "Barth rejects the fundamental claims of the Enlightenment; I agree. Barth rejects any attempt to come to knowledge of God 'from below'; I agree. Barth argues that serious Christian believers should not be apologetic [they have nothing for which to apologize]; again, I agree." See also Rauser for the same conclusion, *Theology in Search of Foundations,* 244.

CF.[347] However, he describes the method as "something like foundational-ism"[348] and he also writes in *ToT* that this method is "congruent with moder-nity" and equal to modern assumptions such as "*objectivity, scientific,* and *pos-itivistic*":

> …Historical criticism is reflective of a certain set of epistemo-
> logical assumptions that go under the general terms *objective,*
> *scientific*, and *positivistic*, assumptions that sought to overcome
> the temptations of fideism.[349]

Moreover, in his description of modernism during the 18th and 19th centuries, it is obvious that he presupposes a close relationship between the historical-critical method and the epistemology of CF:

> By the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth cen-
> tury, history had acquired a very different dimension and signif-
> icance from all previous understandings. First, history had taken
> on a positivistic character, so that events came to be regarded as
> completely decipherable, to the exclusion of an inscrutable den-
> sity.[350]

Brueggemann presents three problems with the historical-critical method.[351] Firstly, a consequence of this method is that generations of students have ig-nored the text because they have believed that non-inferential knowledge lies behind the text:

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[347] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 84. Brueggemann defines Friedrisch Schlei-ermacher (1768-1834) as a foundationalist. Schleiermacher is a foundationalist who wanted to make the faith "available for the cultured despises of religion."

[348] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 84: "Not many Old Testament scholars are drawn to foundationalism, for our proper work is exactly to take up the oddity of this peculiarity Jewish text, which in any case will not be accommodated to the dominant reason of culture. And yet much of what passes for historical criticism is in fact in the service of something like foun-dationalism."

[349] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 103.

[350] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 11.

[351] Brueggemann does not deny that the historical-critical method is a crucial tool for Old Tes-tament theology, see e.g. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 726: "No doubt Brevard Childs is correct in his contention that the relationship between Old Testament theology and

> The student of Old Testament theology will not appreciate what
> is given and demanded in the rise of criticism unless the emer-
> gence of historical criticism is seen as a part of this greatly shift-
> ing sensibility away from authority and tradition and toward con-
> fidence in objective, dethatched scholarship.[352]

Brueggemann argues that in contrast to the historical-critical method *the real* is *in* the text, not *behind* the text.

Secondly, a problem with the historical-critical method is the illusion of an objective interpreter.[353] The historical-critical method presupposes that a human person is capable of performing an objective interpretation of the text. However, according to Brueggemann, the historical-critical method cannot tolerate an objectivity that runs against the rules that guard the historical-critical method.[354] His analysis is that the method has been developed into fideism: "*… the Cartesian program of autonomous reason, which issued in historical criticism, is also an act of philosophical fideism.*"[355] According to

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historical criticism is of crucial importance to any advance in Old Testament theology. Equally, there is no doubt that historical criticism, broadly constructed, is crucial for responsible biblical theology …" See also Anderson's interesting analysis of Brueggemann's relationship to the historical-critical method. Anderson, W, Bernhard, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 23: "…despite his criticisms of historical criticism, as a child of the Enlightenment he is profoundly under its influence when he concentrates on the 'multiplicity' and 'density' of the Old Testament texts." Brueggemann responds positively to Anderson's article in "ABC's of Old Testament Theology in the US*,"* 429-430. Also important, as noted earlier, Brueggemann regards church theology as problematic as the historical-critical method. See e.g. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 105. Brueggemann comments in *ToT* on Childs, the most prominent defender of church theology, and argues that he wants to "align Old Testament theology completely with the doctrinal clams of the church [Calvinism in his case, but the particular tradition of church theology to which the principle is applied is a matter of indifference in this regard]."

[352] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 9. See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament.* 53: "Conservatives have characteristically been intensely interested in whether something reported in the biblical text 'actually happened,'…liberals have been endlessly interested in explanatory, comparative material outside the text….Thus in both historical investigation and in theological investigation, reality was assumed to be elsewhere than in the text."

[353] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 13: "…an epistemology of the human knower as an unencumbered objective interpreter who was understood to be a nonpartian, uninvolved reader of the data."

[354] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 14. The historical-critical method cannot "tolerate intellectual or theological claims and affirmations that run against its thin objectivism, which is itself an acknowledged intellectual, theological claim."

[355] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 17.

Brueggemann, the epistemology of the historical-critical method is neither objective nor innocent. As Barth argued, faith is not based on a number of conclusions that emerged from a theological reflection, but on non-negotiable premises. The same goes for the historical-critical method. This method is not based on a number of conclusions, such as archeological excavations, but rather on non-negotiable naturalistic presuppositions.

Thirdly, the most serious problem with the historical-critical method is that it is unable to give access to the main theological message of the text. Brueggemann writes:

> In my judgment, historical criticism [by which I shall refer to the entire Enlightenment enterprise that came to be associated with Julius Wellhausen and that now seems to reappear as neo-Wellhausianism] was committed to a Cartesian program that was hostile [in effect if not in intention] to the main theological claims of the text.[356]

The method has become a purely historical product that refuses to discuss God as an agent in Israel's life. The discipline of Old Testament theology has, in its encounter with the historical-critical method, "ceased to be a part of Scripture with any authoritative claim for the church."[357] According to Brueggemann, the fundamental beliefs of modernism, devised by "Baconian *science*, of Cartesian *rationalism*, of Lockean *empiricism*, and eventually of Hegelian *history*,"[358] are neither basic nor infallible and the critical response of postmodernism is a reminder of that.

Brueggemann has been heavily criticized for his negative attitude towards the historical-critical method. Barr, for example, argues that "the main impact of historical criticism, as felt by the earlier twentieth century, has been to emphasize the strangeness of the biblical world, its *distance* from the world of modern

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[356] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 727.
[357] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 14-15.
[358] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 12.

rationality."[359] Brueggemann's response is that Barr, as a foundationalist, cannot tolerate an anti-foundational epistemology.[360] Other scholars such as Hanson and Dozeman argue that it is impossible to ignore the historical questions in the way Brueggemann suggests. Hanson argues that history as such belongs to the identity of Israel's faith. Israel claimed that their God acted in "human history, e.g., an Exodus from enslavement" while Babylon made "absolute truth claims without reference to mundane realities."[361] Brueggemann, in a response to Hanson's criticism, answers that history is presented as testimonies:

> But what we have is the recount [account] in utterance, and what counts as history is given us only in the recount- ing. It is the recounting that lets history count, and my attempt is to pay attention to the recounting [testimony] which is what we have in hand.[362]

Dozeman admits that Brueggemann is correct in his criticism of the historical-critical method in many ways. For example, the method is obsessed with the world behind the text. However, "the rise of historical criticism is certainly more complex, requiring a more nuanced assessment of its positive and negative impact on Old Testament theology" than Brueggemann seems to believe.[363] Finally, it is worth mention Goldingay, who refers both positively and critically to Brueggemann's criticism of the historical-critical method. Goldingay can be placed between Barr and Brueggemann. Goldingay argues for a position that begins in the final text, focusing on the narrative "rather than on the putative historical context" and in this sense stands close to Brueggemann. However, at the same time Goldingay presupposes that the historical events

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[359] Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 554.
[360] Brueggemann, "ABC's of Old Testament Theology in the US," 430: "I have taken an anti-foundational posture. Barr is unembarrassedly a foundationalist, and such anti-foundationalism as mine strikes him as flimsy on the one hand and as absolutist and authoritarian on the other, because it attempts to make authoritative claims outside the domain of consensus reason."
[361] Hanson, "A New Challenge to Biblical Theology," 449.
[362] Brueggemann, "ABC's of Old Testament Theology in the US," 429.
[363] Dozeman, review of Brueggemann, 486.

actually happened "without having the historical information we would like to have."[364]

In sum, Brueggemann's criticism of the historical-critical method primarily concerns epistemological matters and not its results. The historical-critical method is based on the epistemology of CF. He points to three major problems with the historical-critical method that cannot be ignored: 1) the method has ignored the text. 2) It is an illusion that the method is objective. 3) The method is unsuitable for a theological approach to the Old Testament.

4.4 CLARIFYING BRUEGGEMANN'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Clarifying Brueggemann's own epistemology is the next step in order to understand his approach in ToT. It is notable that Brueggemann argues that an appropriate method for the discipline of Old Testament theology must be in accordance with the text and the intellectual environment in which it is presented.[365] Every scientist, he argues, has to be accepted in the environment in which he or she belongs and has to live in close dialogue with its philosophical and methodological issues. In this way, all research is "a child of its time." This means that the Old Testament research in the 20th century must be different from the methodological starting points that prevailed during the 18th and early 19th century.[366] He specifies his own epistemological point of departure in *ToT* as follows. It is…

> …postliberal, or nonfoundational, as this approach is variously articulated by Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas. I understand this approach to refer to an attempt to exposit the theological perspectives and claims of the text itself, in all its

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[364] Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, 867. He quotes Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 75.

[365] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 727: "I insist that what is appropriate as criticism in relation to Old Testament theology is to be measured by two criteria: (a) an approach that is congruent with the material of the text itself, and (b) an approach that is congruent with the intellectual environment in which exposition is to be done."

[366] The matrix period for the historical-critical method is around 1814-1914.

odd particularity, without any attempt to accommodate to a large

rationality, either of modernity or of classical Christianity.[367]

The quotation is a clear expression of his own position. It is a non-foundational approach and he refers to important authorities of this epistemology, e.g. George Lindbeck (1923-2018), and Stanley Hauerwas (1940-) and the Yale school. In a lecture he writes the following concerning Yale: "Our work as biblical theologians is in the Yale camp because the other doesn´t claim anything. Postmodernity is our cultural climate."[368] Moreover, a non-foundational epistemology is a "resistance to any appeal to universal warrants beyond the specificities of the text."[369] In a response to *ToT*, he describes his epistemology as non-foundational:

> 1. *A non-foundationalist perspective.* There is now available a
> huge literature moving in this direction. But no one in the biblical
> field known to me has tried to make the case as directly as have
> I. Thus, my formulation of the matter leaves me with some con-
> siderable uneasiness.[370]

It is also important to emphasize that he is skeptical of inserting a dualism between the text and the reality that the text refers to:

> It is a great problem for Old Testament scholars who, for reasons
> of their own, are resistant to what they regard as theological in-
> terpretation, to imagine that the character of God lives 'outside
> the text,' that is, has metaphysical substance. But that objection
> in principle imposes a dualism of text/nontext that passionate tes-
> timony never entertains. Thus I am content to have theological
> interpretation stay inside the text-to refrain from either historical

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[367] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 86. See also his foreword to *Theology of the Old Testament,* xi: "In my recent work, I have sought to be as deeply and consistently antifoundational as I am able to be." See also Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope,* xi. "In my recent work, I have sought to be as deeply and consistently antifoundational as I am able to be."
[368] Brueggemann, W. *Preaching as Testimony.* Unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 37, folder 1298.
[369] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope,* xi.
[370] Linafelt & Beal, *God in the Fray,* 314.

or ontological claim extrinsic to the text-but take the text seriously as testimony and to let it have its say alongside other testimonies,…[371]

Brueggemann, in the quotation above, describes an epistemology that is inside the text. His alternative to church theology and the historical-critical methods is to base his theology on the testimonies alone. This way of approaching the Old Testament reminds one of a spider web, a metaphor often used to define NF. There is then no basic belief that supports the building but many testimonies that describe God and which- in this sense - create a coherent web of beliefs. However, as noted in the above quotation, Brueggemann admits that he uses the term non-foundational with "considerable uneasiness." He seems to be aware of the various definitions that surround the term. Rosalind M. Selby questions the presupposition that a non-foundational epistemology really can manage to avoid all kinds of foundations.[372] She argues that NF operates with some kind of presuppositions. Following Selby, the question is not whether Brueggemann has presuppositions for his theology but whether they are non-foundational or not. There are two objections against defining his epistemology as non-foundational. Firstly, the discipline has many understandings of NF. For example, Collins defines both Brueggemann and Childs as non-foundational theologians. Because these two otherwise sharply disagree on many topics, whether they really seem to stand together when it comes to defining their epistemology must also be questioned.[373] Notably, Childs was professor of Old Testament at Yale (1958-1999), a university where many prominent non-foundational theologians and philosophers worked. Collins notices a distinction between Brueggemann and Childs; whereas Childs bases his non-

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[371] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 718.
[372] Selby, *The Comical Doctrine,* 49.
[373] Collins, *The Scripture after Babel,* 142: "In the field of Old Testament theology, the most influential non-foundationalist approach [in the theological sense] is undoubtedly that of Brevard Childs." See also 145: "Like most non-foundationalist theologians, Brueggemann wants to exempt the sacred text from the suspicion to which all other metanarratives are subjected…" See also 145-46: "And, in good antifoundational fashion, he insists that 'what 'happened' [whatever it may mean] depends on testimony and tradition that will not submit to any other warrant.'" Collins quotes from Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 714.

foundational epistemology on the Rule of Faith, Brueggemann bases his epistemology on the existence of postmodernity, i.e. that there is no epistemological consensus within the academic community. Collins also writes that Brueggemann is the "only scholar who has attempted to formulate a theology of the Old Testament that is explicitly postmodern."[374]

Secondly, according to Waltke, Brueggemann intends to present a concept of God where God is an agent only within the text and not outside it.[375] Collins critically argues that Brueggemann ignores building his epistemology on a foundation outside the text stating that he is then incoherent because at the same time he accepts an ontological reality. Hagelia, however, argues that Brueggemann uses the concept of the court metaphor as a foundation that comes from outside the text.[376] For Collins, a NF epistemology, by necessity, ignores questions of realism and extra referential references. According to Collins, NF is equal to a closed universe.[377] Thirdly, and finally, it is also interesting to comment that the American philosopher Clarence I. Lewis argued that NF, loyal to his own premises, can only present isolated testimonies without connection to the world outside.[378]

In sum, there are arguments that makes me hesitant in determining Brueggemann's epistemology as non-foundational. There is an apparent confusion, namely that Brueggemann is inconsistent in claiming an ontological

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[374] Collins, *The Scripture after Babel,* 143: "To my knowledge, the only scholar who has attempted to formulate a *Theology of the Old Testament* that is explicitly postmodern is Walter Brueggemann."

[375] Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology,* 70 ff. See also Dubbink, "Reality is Highly Overrated," 241.

[376] See Hagelia, *Three Old Testament Theologies for Today,* 183: "These [i.e. Helge Kvanvig, Walter Brueggemann and Erhard Gerstenberger, my emphasis] theological presentations have in common that they borrow a frame of presentation from outside of the Old Testament itself, using this as the frame around which their respective *theologies are built.*"

[377] See Collins, *The Scripture after Babel,* 147: "In short, there is a reality of God behind or beyond the text, but it is known *sola fide, sola scriptura.*"

[378] Clarence Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1946), 346: "...on any other hypothesis than that of truth-telling, this agreement is highly unlikely; the story any one false witness might tell being one out of so very large a number of equally possible choices. [It is comparable to the improbability that successive drawings of one marble out of a very large number will each result in the one white marble in the lot.] And the one hypothesis which itself is congruent with this agreement becomes thereby commensurably well established."

reality and at the same time basing this reference on a non-foundational epistemology. However, in the light of Childs' strong emphasis on the reality outside the text, it is strange that Collins can claim that Childs and Brueggemann are non-foundational theologians. Finally, Hagelia points to the court metaphor as a foundation from outside the text and I suggest that Hagelia's analysis is correct, because even though the metaphor is biblical, the court functions as a community outside the text that discuss the testimonies and must have the willingness to believe them.

4.5 DEFINING NON-FOUNDATIONALISM

It is now necessary to accomplish a kind of independent description of the term NF. Richard Pruitt traces the emergence of NF back to the 1970s and 1980s and associates it with scholars from Yale University.[379] Prominent predecessors of this epistemology are Hans Frei (1922-1988), Lindbeck and Hauerwas. These three developed an epistemological, hermeneutical and theological reaction against classical liberalism. They described themselves as post liberalists or/and nonfoundationalists. A NF epistemology, in its various forms, entails a common criticism of modern and premodern epistemologies. Consequently many relate the term closely to postmodernism.[380] Rauser defines NF in the following way:

> The flexibility of the term non-foundationalism becomes evident
> when one considers the broad range of philosophers who have
> been identified as non-foundationalist, including Charles Peirce,
> John Dewey, William James, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin
> Heidegger, Wilfred Sellars, W. V. O. Quine, Donald Davidson,
> Jacques Derrida, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty. In order to
> work toward an understanding of non-foundationalism we will
> begin by exploring how it relates to post-modernism.[381]

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[379] Richard Pruitt, "Rethinking Postliberal Theology: Comparing and Contrasting Lindbeck and Vanhoozer," *Evangelical Review of Theology.* Vol. 36, No. 2 (Apr 2012): 161-75.
[380] Collins, *The Scripture after Babel*, 138.
[381] Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations*, 108.

It is interesting that Rauser describes Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) as a NF philosopher. It will be shown in the next chapter that there is an important connection between Brueggemann's idea that reality coexists through speech and Wittgenstein's language theory mediated through Lindbeck.[382] Whereas *foundationalism*, both classical and weak, argues that a justified belief is rooted in some kind of non-inferential or basic belief, NF means that someone's belief is true if - and only if - it is *coherent* with other beliefs. A significant argument among proponents of NF is that their approach has the capacity to tame "the Enlightenment primacy of science and focuses on lived truth in marked contrast to the cognitive-propositionalism that tends to go with foundationalism."[383] Many advocates of NF also argue that foundationalism leads to skepticism; a skepticism due to the fact that foundationalism inserts a dualism between the world and our knowledge, whereas NF allows for a "method that grounds epistemological analysis in paradigmatic instances of rational belief and/or knowledge, thereby ensuring the accessibility of knowledge."[384] Rauser also states that some versions of NF reject metaphysical realism.[385] Metaphysical realism is the hypothesis that the objects, properties and relations to the world exist independently of our thoughts or perceptions of them.[386] Against

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[382] Neil MacDonald, "Language – Game," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Scripture* (General Editor K. J. Vanhoozer. Associate Editors, C. Bartholomew D. J. Treier and N.T Wright., Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 436: "In common with Phillips's 'internalist' approach, George Lindbeck's 'intratextual' interpretation of Wittgenstein in *The Nature of Doctrine* advocates a Wittgenstein who is maintained that philosophy was limited to describing the grammar of each individual 'language-game' or 'form of life.' In this context 'grammar' coincide with rules of truth, intelligibility, reality, and rationality, whose final court of appeal was how these rules were used in each [communal] language-game…."

[383] Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations*, 110: "While the core non-foundationalist thesis concerns a denial of epistemic foundations, token versions of non-foundationalism also frequently include other post-modern elements, especially a rejection of (1), metaphysical realism, (2), the correspondence theory of truth, and (6), the primacy of thought over language."

[384] Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations,* 111.

[385] Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations,* 110.

[386] See Selby, *The Comical Doctrine,* 11: "Theological realism is an enormous topic in itself but a short comment must be made here which, at the same time, provides an honest statement of my own presuppositions. The linguistic issues which are raised, how our speech may refer to the reality of God without postulating direct correspondence, are central to chapter 2. The ontological dimension is presupposed—that nothing short of realism is adequate in Christian theology and idealism can only arrogate to the human mind decisions which it is not entitled nor qualified to make. The independent reality of God is so basic a presupposition that one might

metaphysical realism stands *anti-realism* which doubts or denies the existence of the entities outside our reality. The term anti-realism is derived from the Sophists in ancient Greece and in modern times from Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1808) and his famous distinction *Das Ding an Sich, Das Ding für Mich*.[387] Brueggemann frequently defends Sophism against Platonism:

> …, I mention in this connection the role of the Sophists in ancient Greece, practitioners of the public activity of rhetorical persuasion. The entire story of realist philosophy has tended to silence and discredit the Sophists, for their appeal to rhetoric continually subverted the would-be settled claims of the Platonic realist.[388]

In sum, there are indeed many good arguments that point in the direction of defining Brueggemann's epistemology as NF, as he also expresses himself in *ToT*. However, the reason for my doubts is the criterion for defining an epistemology as foundational is whether or not it refers to a reality outside the text. There are more observations that contribute to my reluctance to explain Brueggemann's epistemology as NF and this includes his close connection with Barth and Ricoeur

4.6 BARTH AND RICOEUR—WEAK FOUNDATIONALISM

In what follows, Barth and Ricoeur's understanding of the term testimony will be examined.[389] Concerning Barth, we have already seen that his understanding of testimony in *Church Dogmatics* inspired Brueggemann's understanding of

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ask, does this function as a foundation, an *a priori* which is untestable and upon which all else is built?"

[387] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (German: Kritik der reinen Vernunft, KrV) first published in 1781, second edition 1787, is one of the most influential works in the history of philosophy.

[388] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 119, note 6. (c). Brueggemann constantly supports the Sophists against Platonism, see *Theology of the Old Testament,* 54, 64, 119, 330, 714.

[389] See Blundell, Boyd. *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Indiana University Press, 2010), 46: "I attempt to cash in the wager I made in the introduction, that Barth's theology and Ricoeur's philosophy will prove compatible. In one sense, this is a natural pairing because of their similarities: they share not only a Christian faith, but also a background in the Reformed tradition, a dialectical method, an appreciation of narrative, and a concern for the integrity of both philosophy and theology."

the word testimony.[390] Firstly Brueggemann, describes Barth in *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope* as non-foundational.[391] Jon Thiel also makes that conclusion.[392] Notable is that Brueggemann refers to Thiel for his conclusion.[393] However, Collins, Diller, and Murphy argue that Barth is a foundationalist, even though Murphy describes Barth as a key figure for the further development of the origin of NF. Murphy asks: "An important question that needs to be settled in order to give an account of the historical origins of nonfoundational theology is how to understand Barth."[394] Collins, Diller, and Murphy all agree that Barth has a foundation in his epistemology. Murphy suggests defining Barth as a scriptural foundationalist, [395]whereas Diller defines Barth as a Theo-foundationalist.[396] Collins writes: "To affirm that the church has one foundation, whether Christ or the Scriptures, is quite incompatible with philosophical non-foundationalism." [397] To sum up, all three argue that Barth has a foundation in his epistemology:

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[390] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 119, note 6 (a): "The appeal to testimony as a ground of certitude has particular and peculiar importance for the thought of Karl Barth. [I am grateful to Mark D. J. Smith for specific references.] See *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975) 98- 124; *Church Dogmatics* 1/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956) 457- 740, especially 457- 72, 514- 26. See also Martin Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 29- 53, especially 45- 47. For efforts to understand Barth's peculiar assumptions, see David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); David Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of Scripture,' *Karl Barth— Studies of His Theological Method* (ed. S. W. Sykes; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); and *Ford, Barth and God's Story* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981)." See also *Theology of the Old Testament*, 18, note 47: "My own beginning point concerning testimony is resonant with what I understand to be Barth's point." See also *Theology of the Old Testament* 714, note 20. Brueggemann here stresses that Paul's argumentation in 1 Cor. 15 is based on testimony "and no other mode of certainty or evidence. Certitude arises in the process of testimony, and not in 'objective' recovery of data."
[391] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope,* xi. Brueggemann here argues that Barth's use of the phrase "The strange new world of the Scripture" is an antifoundational sign.
[392] Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 95, note 19.
[393] Brueggemann, "*Theology of the Old Testament* A Prompt Retrospect," 314.
[394] Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 95.
[395] Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, 95, note 20. Murphy quotes from Thiel's book *Non-foundationalism*, 50. Thiel in turn quotes from Barth, but as Murphy comments, "unfortunately without citing the location in Church Dogmatics."
[396] I.e. WF.
[397] Collins, *The Scripture after Babel*, 140: "But in any case, non-foundational or antifoundational theology is indebted far more to Karl Barth than to Rorty or Ludwig Wittgenstein…The affinity between Barthian theology and philosophical non-foundationalism is superficial. To affirm that the church has one foundation, whether Christ or the Scriptures, is quite incompatible with philosophical non-foundationalism, which rejects any foundation at all."

- Barth's epistemological foundation is based on *Scripture* (Murphy and Brueggemann).

- Barth's epistemological foundation is based on *God* (Diller).

- Barth's epistemological foundation is based on *Church* (Collins).

In what follows I interact with Diller's conclusions and compare those with Brueggemann.

THEO-FOUNDATIONALISM

According to Diller, Barth does not hold to a CF but is a theo-foundationalist:

> We should resist, nevertheless, referring to Barth's position as 'non-foundational,' as if it lacked grounding altogether. Barth is a foundationalist—not a classical foundationalist but a theo-foundationalist.[398]

According to Diller, a theo-foundationalist has an ontological foundation, i.e. God as the primary foundation.[399] This means that God's supreme initiative functions as the foundation:

> The initiating move in Barth's theological epistemology is not the claim that the Scripture by itself, or the Scripture read in the light of human reason, is the foundation or source of knowledge. Barth believes that the real initiating move is not a claim we make but a claim made on us. The initial move is made by God himself.[400]

Relating Diller's analysis of Barth to Brueggemann, a minor difference arises. Whereas Diller argues that Barth starts with God, Brueggemann and Murphy argue that Barth starts with Scripture.[401] Irrespective of this, the important thing

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[398] Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma*, 85.
[399] Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma*, 85: "Theological knowing does not require human access or defense in order to be considered legitimate knowing, primarily because it is self-grounded by its object-God."
[400] Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma*, 45.
[401] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 17.

to emphasize is that Brueggemann describes Barth's starting point as an "enormous epistemological manoeuver" that reaches behind Descartes' skepticism and back to a classical position, …

> [back]…to Anselm's notion of 'faith seeking understanding.'
> That is, faith is not a conclusion that may or may not result from
> reflection. It is, rather, a nonnegotiable premise and assumption.
> In this enormous epistemological manoeuver, Barth placed in
> question the entire enterprise of modern criticism, which sought
> to conform the text to the canon of modern reason.[402]

Barth does not require "human access or defense" as necessary "in order to be considered legitimate knowing."[403] In a similar way, Brueggemann builds his epistemological foundation *from above*. This way stands in contrast to a *below perspective,* which begins with natural revelation. An *above perspective* has a revelational source as its starting point. In Brueggemann's case, he starts with the presupposition that the testimonies function as a foundation of certitude for delivering knowledge. This means that he has no apologetic interest of going behind the testimonies, either historically or ontologically, in order to argue for their reliability. Instead he presupposes that the testimonies are the foundation for delivering theological information. In this way, his foundation upon the testimonies distances him from the historical-critical method and church theology:

> This means that theological interpretation does not go behind the
> witness with questions of history, wondering 'what happened.'
> What happened, so our 'verdict' is, is what these witnesses said
> happened. In complementary fashion, this means that theological
> interpretation does not go behind this witness with questions of
> ontology, wondering 'what is real.' What is real, so our 'verdict'
> is, is what these witnesses say is real. Nothing more historical or

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[402] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 17.
[403] Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma*, 85.

ontological is available. But this mode of 'knowing' finds such

a claim to be adequate.[404]

Whereas CF starts from below, with reason or natural revelation as the way of building a solid ground, Barth and Brueggemann start from above, from the inside, with an ontological foundation. In Barth's case the foundation is God, in Brueggemann's case, the foundation is the testimonies. Brueggemann admits that Barth seems to define *being* as more than speech.[405] In contrast, Brueggemann argues that *being* and *speech* coincide:

> In making this claim, it is important to recognize that there is, outside speech, no objectively given world that stands as a measuring rod of reality whereby one can test to see if Israel is 'realistic.'[406]

In Barth's theology of revelation everything starts with God. In Brueggemann's *ToT*, everything starts with the testimony. Clearly there are diversities here. Nevertheless, they both start from above. Clearly both have an epistemological foundation in their theology.

According to Brueggemann, the problem for the historical-critical method as a theological tool is the *a priori* exclusion of the testimonies in the Old Testament as a solid ground for presenting theology. In his theology, using his own description of Barth, "the reality of God is asserted first, not as an afterthought after one asserts the 'possibility of God' established in modernist categories."[407] Brueggemann's epistemological alternative to modernism is the use of

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[404] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 120-21: "The actual event, however, is enormously supple and elusive and admits of many retellings, some of which are only shaded differently, but some of which are drastically different. The court, however, has no access to the 'actual event' besides the testimony."

[405] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 721, note 2: "Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975] focuses on the word as testimony in a way congruent with what I am suggesting. Barth could not finally let the word as utterance [proclamation] stand apart from a threefold notion of word [Jesus, Scripture, proclamation] which for him in the end is more 'being than speech.'"

[406] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 723.

[407] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 17. See also 18, note 46. Here he refers to Barth's *Church Dogmatics,* 1-44 for the argumentation of a theology from above in contrast to modernist questions of "the possibility."

testimony as a ground of certitude. He writes: "Barth saw that, despite all appearances, Enlightenment modernism begins with its 'own ungrounded ontological assumption.'"[408] Brueggemann also concludes that Barth's theological thoughts "resist an ontological reductionism that tends to eliminate most about the biblical God that is crucial and interesting."[409] The *testimony* in Brueggemann's theology functions as a foundation that "brackets out historical judgments of positivism and brackets out the ontological claims which may yield a platonic God but not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."[410]

In sum, there are striking similarities between Brueggemann and Barth's epistemology. Both share an ontological foundation using epistemological terms, but Brueggemann bases everything upon the testimony. The testimony in the Old Testament, using epistemological terms, delivers non-inferential knowledge.

RESPONSE TO BRUEGGEMANN'S UNDERSTANDING OF BARTH

Odell argues that Brueggemann has misunderstood Barth.[411] In her opinion Brueggemann reads Barth through the eyes of Lindbeck. The correct understanding of Barth is not, as Brueggemann argues, to say that the biblical worldview creates a new world, but instead it is the testimonies in Scripture that refer to a reality outside the text, i.e. to God. In response to Odell, Brueggemann admits that his discussion about speech has "many unresolved questions."[412] However, he stresses that "we are at a beginning point of a relatively new venture, informed by the past but moving into issues and categories not yet fully clear; the offer of unfinished business is unavoidable."[413] Childs also argues that Brueggemann has interpreted Barth through the eyes of

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[408] Diller, *Theology's Epistemological Dilemma*, 75.
[409] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 19.
[410] Brueggemann, Unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 38, folder 1340.
[411] Odell, reviews of Brueggemann, 8; "One can certainly ask whether Brueggemann would see himself as a Barthian. The answers is, I think, a qualified yes."
[412] Odell reviews of Brueggemann, response by Brueggemann, 21.
[413] Odell reviews of Brueggemann, response by Brueggemann, 21.

Lindbeck.[414] It seems that Childs and Odell are correct in their analysis that Brueggemann read Barth through the eyes of Lindbeck. I will come back to this topic in chapter 5. At this point, however, I want to stress that this does not affect the similarity between Brueggemann and Barth with regard to epistemological issues. What I have shown is that both have an epistemological foundation even though the foundation itself differs, an above perspective with God/testimony as its epistemological foundation.

RICOERUR—TESTIMONY AS NON-INFERENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

According to Jeanrond, Ricoeur has moved a step away from the goal of achieving an ontological approach. This means that, according to Jeanrond, Ricoeur does not believe in the possibility for mankind to reach forward to an ontology "in our human existence. An always 'broken ontology' is therefore all we can hope to achieve."[415] Ricoeur argues that there is always a circular argumentation in hermeneutics between the *sense* of the text and the *reference* of the text. In short, this means that Ricoeur introduces a kind of suspicion in his hermeneutical theory, where the goal for the interpreter is to distinguish properly between the sense of the text and the reference of the text, i.e. one has to distinguish between what the text says (sense) and what the text talks about (reference). For Ricoeur, the only way to reach a meaning in the text is by returning, not to the mind as Schleiermacher suggested, but to the signs, i.e. the text. Therefore, Ricoeur has been interested in religious texts and what they say, as well as the possible world these texts refer to. It is only by reading (sense) that one can enter into the reference zone. Whereas Schleiermacher argued that biblical texts could be understood plainly through philosophical

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[414] See Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 22. See also Odell, reviews of Brueggemann, 11-12. She writes that Brueggemann has "fused cultural-linguistic analysis or religious language with a Barthian understanding of the living Word of God." See also Dubbink, "Reality is highly overrated," 245: "But Barth's theology is confirming everywhere that God's reality is more real than ours. In his view, the problem of speaking about God is not the fact that God is problematic but that theologians are human. It might be different for the older Barth. It is possible that he would appreciate the way Brueggemann describes the *Theology of the Old Testament* as 'an enterprise of counter-reality.'" Dubbink refers to Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* VI (München: Chr.Kaiser, 1932), § 3, p. 47.

[415] Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics,* 75.

hermeneutics, Ricoeur argues that in order to understand human existence, one has to introduce religious texts "in an adequate human existential reflection."[416] In a comparison between Brueggemann and Ricoeur, Brueggemann's appeal to testimony as a way to receive knowledge, has an important reference point with Ricoeur, and especially his essay "The Hermeneutics of Testimony". Brueggemann writes:

> Appeal to testimony as a mode of knowledge, and inevitably as a mode of certainty that is accepted as revelatory, requires a wholesale break with all positivistic epistemology in the ancient world or in the contemporary world. In an appeal to testimony, one must begin at a different place and so end up with a different sort of certitude. Here I am much informed by an essay of Paul Ricoeur.[417]

For Brueggemann this article emphasizes the essence and meaning of the term testimony. A summary of the article gives the following; according to Ricoeur, a testimony is not based upon perception but on *report*. For Ricoeur, "there is the one who testifies and the one who hears the testimony."[418] The primary context for a testimony is in a dispute, in court. In this context, all testimonies are "directed towards a judgment."[419] The testimony is therefore never neutral or innocent. A testimony has a "quasi-empirical meaning."[420] This means that a witness has seen or understood something and then delivers a testimony. Ricoeur refers to Acts 4:20 where it is written: "for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." Moreover, according to Ricoeur a testi-

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[416] Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics,* 77.
[417] Brueggemann argues that the testimonies should be "accepted as revelatory." See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 119. See also 134, note 26: "In effect Ricoeur accepts all genre in biblical rhetoric as testimony that becomes revelation."
[418] Ricoeur, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation,* 123.
[419] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 127.
[420] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 123.

mony presents a knowledge that is probable but not certain: "Thus the episte-mological level proper is recognized to which judicial proofs belong: not the necessary but the probable."[421]

The most interesting thing in this article comes when Ricoeur writes that a testimony is an "action itself as it attests outside himself, to the interior man, to his conviction, to his faith."[422] An "action itself" means that the testimony is the starting point for presenting knowledge. Ricoeur defines testimony as presenting non-inferential knowledge. Ricoeur argues that a testimony is not "an interpretation of interpretation" because the testimony is based upon a fixed entity. He also writes that "a hermeneutic without testimony is con-demned to an infinite regress in perspectivism with neither beginning nor end."[423] The term *regress* alludes to the regress problem within foundational-ism. According to Ricoeur, a testimony as such ends the regression because it is a fixed entity. There is dialectic between a historical and a confessional event. A testimony is...

> … an act of consciousness of itself and an act of historical un-derstanding based on the signs that the absolute gives of itself. The signs of the absolute's self-disclosure are at the same time signs in which consciousness recognizes itself.' The witness tes-tifies about something or someone which goes beyond him.[424]

In sum, Ricoeur's definition of testimony presents the term as an absolute en-tity which delivers non-inferential knowledge, and I would argue that Brueggemann strictly follows Ricoeur's definition of the term *testimony* and conclude that his epistemology is weak foundational.

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[421] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 126.
[422] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 130.
[423] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 144.
[424] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* 146.

DOES BRUEGGEMANN DIVERGE FROM RICOEUR?

However, a relevant question arises: does Brueggemann understand and apply Ricoeur correctly? Juno Ryan argues that he does not. At least Brueggemann diverges from important facets in Ricoeur's understanding of the term testimony. According to Ryan, Ricoeur stresses the important relationship between *the witness* and *the testimony* and Brueggemann has neglected this relationship in his approach. Ryan also argues that Brueggemann should have stressed that the final source in Christian theology is YHWH:

> Yahweh is presupposed *in the testifying,* the initiator and substance of Israel's testimony. Yahweh's ability in the world is not dependent on Israel's testimony; rather, Israel's *ability to testify* is dependent on Yahweh in the world.[425]

Ryan argues that Brueggemann correctly maintains that Israel's utterance is "all we have" for creating Old Testament theology, but he has neglected to observe the witnesses who must have had an encounter with the transcendent world. Similarly, Scott Ellington argues that Brueggemann has presented a limited understanding of how a testimony functions. Ellington sketches the contours for a "testimony-based hermeneutics in a Pentecostal context" and suggests that the core foundation of a testimony consists of three elements. These are: "… one's personal experience, a divine encounter, and a faith community…"[426] According to Ellington, Brueggemann has ignored Ricoeur's distinction between a religious testimony and a court testimony. Brueggemann only points to the "purely past, while a religious testimony speaks of that which also intrudes on the present experience of the community."[427] In response to

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[425] Juno Ryan, "Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament.* An Unsettled Testimony?" *CRUX 43*, No 2 (Summer 2007): 26.

[426] See Scott Ellington, "Finding a Place in the Story," in *Imagination, Ideology & Inspiration Echoes of Brueggemann in a New Generation* (ed. J Kaplan et al. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 215.

[427] See Ellington, "Finding a Place in the Story," 217. See also Carolyn Sharp's response to Ellington's article on p. 285. She comments that Ellington "makes good use of Ricoeur to nuance Brueggemann's framing of Israel's testimony via the courtroom metaphor."

his critics, Brueggemann affirms that the testimony as such traces its roots from witnesses, more precisely eyewitnesses:

> That is, it is an act of interpretative imagination done variously with some degree of artistic success. There is no doubt that biblical 'faith' is constituted by a chain of witnesses that go clear back to what are purported to be eyewitnesses, but a chain that is hard to trace or rely on.[428]

My own response is that Brueggemann indeed pays attention to the role of the witness in *ToT*. Firstly, in relation to the testimonies in the courtroom metaphor he writes:

> The proper setting of testimony is a court of law, in which various and diverse witnesses are called to 'tell what happened,' … Working with the metaphor of trial, we consider first the peculiar phenomenon of a witness.[429]

Secondly, he argues that the witness has to be patient because the witness does not have the full picture:

> Like every witness who provides testimony, the witness of Israel to Yahweh must proceed slowly, patiently, one detail at a time.[430]

Thirdly, Brueggemann stresses that the testimony is the fixed formulation that comes from the witness. The witness could have "had other options and could have spoken differently, could have chosen other words and images to portray reality with another nuance."[431]

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[428] See Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 33. Brueggemann refers to Richard Baukham: "See the remarkable book of Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), who proposes that the Gospel narratives can be traced back to eyewitnesses."
[429] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 120.
[430] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 267.
[431] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 121.

Fourth finally, Brueggemann writes that the judgment of the testimony "depends on the compelling case made regularly by the witnesses."[432]

Despite these four points, which together prove that in no way does Brueggemann ignore the witnesses, it is also clear that he hesitates to base his epistemology on the foundation of the witness. He argues that it is impossible to reach behind the testimony in order to arrive at solid epistemological ground:

> The actual event, however, is enormously supple and elusive and admits of many retellings, some of which are only shaded differently, but some of which are drastically different. The court, however, has no access to the 'actual event' besides the testimony. It cannot go behind the testimony to the event, but must take the testimony as the 'real portrayal.' Indeed, it is futile for the court to speculate behind the testimony.[433]

In this way, he gives priority to the testimony at the expense of the witness:

> This means that theological interpretation does not go behind the witness with questions of history, wondering 'what happened.' What happened, so our 'verdict' is, is what these witnesses said happened.[434]

In sum, describing the process from witness to testimony, there is then a difference between Brueggemann and Ricoeur. Whereas Ricoeur has the following process: Witness—Testimony—Court—Revelation, Brueggemann has the following: Imagination/Testimony—Court—Revelation. I think that if Brueggemann had incorporated the dual relationship between the witness and the testimony, his epistemology would have been slightly different, in a positive way. He would then have had a natural connection to an ontology and history before the testimony, and he would be justified in combining of the

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[432] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 575.
[433] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 120-121.
[434] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 206.

witness with imagination and this link, i.e. between *witness-imagination-testimony* would have retrieved and rehabilitated his epistemology. There is a close connection between *testimony* and *imagination* in Brueggemann's approach and imagination presupposes a reality before the testimony. Imagining the alternative is impossible unless one has seen the alternative world that YHWH wants to realize. Taking testimony and imagination together then creates an epistemology that logically reaches outside the text, and in this sense, his epistemology ceases to be NF. As Ricoeur also stresses, there has to be a witness for a testimony and a witness implies a historical reality. Despite this difference between them Brueggemann does not diverge to the extent that his understanding of testimony separates him from Ricoeur's understanding. I therefore conclude that his epistemology must be termed weak foundational.

4.7 TESTIMONIAL FOUNDATIONALISM

The final conclusion concerning Brueggemann's epistemology is that this testimonial foundationalism can be defined as *fallibilism.* This is a variant of weak foundationalism that argues that non-inferential knowledge does not strive for certainty but for probability. [435] Brueggemann is a fallibilist because he argues that the authority of the testimony is based on a willingness to believe it. He explains:

> The truth of the matter, as far as Israel is concerned, is that if one believes the testimony, one is near to reality. And if not, one is not near reality, for the Real is indeed uttered. Such a construal will not satisfy modernist historicism nor the philosophically minded.[436]

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[435] See Scott. Davidson and Marc-AntoineVallée, (editors), *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur: Between Text and Phenomenon* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 210.
[436] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 714.

The witnesses sometimes claim to be eyewitnesses, but often no such claim is made. Even where it is not made, however, the authority of the witness is grounded in nothing more and nothing less than the willingness of the text community to credit, believe, trust, and take seriously this testimony.[437]

In these quotations, he stresses the willingness in the *text community* to believe the testimony. Moberly criticizes Brueggemann in this regard.[438] According to Moberly "there is more to God than the biblical religious language, ancient history, and contemporary human actions."[439] In response to Moberly's criticism, Brueggemann emphasizes two things; firstly, that in his epistemology speech and reality coexist: "reality is deeply grounded in speech" and secondly, that when the testimonies are told, reality is delivered: "After testimony, the Old Testament provides a rich statement on ontology."[440] In response to Moberly's criticism, Brueggemann could also argue that his epistemology was justified according to the fallibilistic assumption, as Ricoeur does: The testimony is probable but not certain. One has to believe the testimony:

The court must then determine, with no other data except testimony, which version is reality. It is on the basis of *testimony* court reaches what is *real.*[441]

4.8 CONCLUSIONS

Two epistemological theories, foundationalism and its counterpart NF have been studied in this chapter. Using metaphors to describe these epistemologies, CF is like the foundation of a building and NF as a web of beliefs. The major

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[437] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 206.
[438] Walter Moberly, review of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament, ATJ* 32 (2000): 93: "Do not Eastern Orthodox theologians, for whom a critique of facile ontology is basic to their apophatic Trinitarianism, have something to teach us? Are Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Barth really such men of straw [l am sure that Brueggemann does not think so, but his book gives the impression]."
[439] Moberly, review of Brueggemann, 92.
[440] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 118, note 4.
[441] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 120.

difference between these two epistemological constructions is that foundationalism is based on a non-inferential knowledge, whereas a non-foundational epistemology is based upon many ideas and concepts with no non-inferential knowledge. In this chapter, I have shown that CF undergirds the historical-critical method. According to Brueggemann, this epistemology leads the discipline in the wrong direction. His epistemological alternative is to highlight the term testimony as an alternative to the historical and/or ontological questions prior to the text. Brueggemann presupposes, using epistemological terms that the testimonies deliver non-inferential knowledge to the reader. His epistemology is best described as a variant of weak foundationalism. In his theology, the testimonies function as a gateway to knowing God in the Old Testament—and believing these testimonies makes a new reality come alive. The testimonies become a way to the outside world. Despite differences, e.g. Barth presupposes God as the foundation and his theology of revelation, whereas Brueggemann presupposes the testimony, and Ricoeur stresses both the witness and the testimony in his thinking, whereas Brueggemann at least partly neglects the witness in this regard, Brueggemann is influenced by Barth's theology of revelation and Ricoeur's non-inferential understanding of the term testimony. Brueggemann clearly shares an affinity with a weak foundational epistemology. This chapter has also shown that an important criterion of a foundational epistemology is its capability of reaching outside the text to a historical and/or an ontological reality. It seems that Brueggemann has a NF epistemology because he in relation to Ricoeur, has neglected to incorporate the *dual relation* between the testimony and the witness in his theology. However, Brueggemann's attention to imagination actually presupposes a witness. The witness has been in contact with an ontological reality prior to the testimony and through imagination the witness has presented a testimony. The witness has seen and encountered God and thereafter presented testimony through his personal imagination. A religious testimony is then partly a product of historical factors, imaginative factors and ontological factors. Despite the fact that Brueggemann neglects the witness in his epistemological theory, it is evident

that he has created an epistemology that actually breaks through the gates of positivistic epistemology. Moreover—and this has a bearing on his epistemology—in the same way as Ricoeur defines the term testimony as delivering non inferential knowledge, Brueggemann, in his formulation that the testimony is a ground of certitude, clearly stresses that the testimony should be understood as an epistemological foundation in his theology. He has created an epistemology that is capable of passing through the skepticism of the historical-critical method and the foreclosing tendencies of church theology. This makes his epistemology unique and certainly worth more study. I define his epistemology as weak foundational and term it *Testimonial Foundationalism.*

CHAPTER 5 HERMENEUTICS

> There is none like Yahweh, who lives inside a rich, open, generative rhetoric…[442] (Brueggemann)

> The relation between writing and the word and between the word and the event and its meaning is the crux of the hermeneutic problem.[443] (Ricoeur)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND FOR THIS CHAPTER

Concerning Brueggemann's hermeneutics, it is obvious that he is influenced by postmodern hallmarks of interpretation. Within this vast and disparate context termed *postmodernism*, intrinsically, extensive of various beliefs, a hermeneutical change is apparent well-formulated by Kevin Vanhoozer (1957-). Instead of defining exegesis and philology as the primary tools for interpreting the text, the postmodern context has turned the focus towards a more philosophical reflection of what it means to understand and interpret a biblical text. Vanhoozer writes:

> Traditionally, hermeneutics – the reflection on the principles that undergird correct textual interpretation – was a matter for exegetes and philologists. More recently, however, hermeneutics has become the concern of philosophers, who wish to know not what such and such a text means, but what it means to understand.[444]

Vanhoozer's observation clearly applies to Brueggemann who is well aware of the various philosophical traditions that have influenced the discipline of Old Testament theology, and use this awareness within a postmodern context. It is

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[442] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 266.
[443] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 49.
[444] Vanhoozer, *Is There A Meaning in This Text?* 19.

also important to note that Brueggemann presupposes the Bible as *Holy Scripture*: "The Scripture is to be understood 'as Scripture' in the community that gathers in response to the claim that here God is decisively disclosed."[445] This quotation stresses the fact that he, despite his emphasis on the final text of the Old Testament as a norm for the discipline of Old Testament theology, also argues that every interpretation is situated within an ecclesial community, so that in sum, the text and the community together forms the meaning of the text:

> By insisting that Old Testament theology requires a certain form of life, I am, in the end, accepting that Old Testament theology is an enterprise that belongs properly to an ecclesial community...[446]

The German hermeneutist Werner Jeanrond makes an important distinction that relates to Brueggemann's standpoint of an ecclesial community as the natural habitat for an Old Testament theology. Jeanrond distinguishes between *theological hermeneutics* and *hermeneutical theology* where theological hermeneutics focus on the text and claims that a text has theological motives, whereas hermeneutical theology focus on the ecclesial community and claims that hermeneutics is by its nature a theological exercise.[447] In Brueggemann's thinking, we could say that both theological hermeneutics and hermeneutical theology appear simultaneously. For example, Brueggemann pays special attention to theological motives in the Old Testament. He argues that the specific motive of Exodus 34:6–7 is to show that YHWH is incomparable.[448] This is *theological hermeneutics*. At the same time it is evident that in *ToT* Brueggemann is involved in the exercise of *hermeneutical theology,* because

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[445] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 3. See also same page, note 5: "In contemporary discussion, it is Brevard S. Childs, above all, who has insisted on and helped recover the canonical, theological understanding of the Scripture as Scripture."

[446] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 744.

[447] Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics, Development and Significance* (London: SCM Press 1994), 11.

[448] Exod 34:6-7 is the most quoted verse in *ToT*, see Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 753.

he presupposes that every interpretation takes place within a community and that every community has certain kinds of epistemological and hermeneutical perspectives that affect the reading of the text. There is then an interesting hermeneutical-ecclesial angle in Brueggemann's Old Testament theology between the presupposition of understanding the Bible as Scripture for the church, and a hermeneutical theology that reflects on the postmodern situation as the context for doing Old Testament theology. In sum, Brueggemann is involved in a hermeneutical reflection that embraces both exegetical and philosophical questions that forms a foundation for his undertaking of describing YHWH.[449]

PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

With this broad background of Brueggemann's hermeneutics, the main purpose of this chapter is to analyze how he interprets the non-inferential testimonies that his epistemology has concluded. This is done by paying attention to three minor purposes.

The first purpose (5.2) is to introduce his hermeneutics within the overall context of postmodern hermeneutics. Brueggemann frequently refers to Derrida, Ricoeur, and Lindbeck, three postmodern representatives. Vanhoozer refers to precisely these three and this fact, and a comparison between Brueggemann and Vanhoozer will therefore highlight Brueggemann as a postmodern hermeneutic.

The second purpose (5.3-5.5) is to describe his hermeneutics.[450] This is arranged around three specific elements; *the written testimony within an ecclesial community, imagination* and *the Jewish tradition*.

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[449] See Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics,* 6-11.

[450] I comprehend *hermeneutics* as being equal to *interpretation*, see Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics, Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 556 ff. See also Anthony Thiselton, "Hermeneutical Circle," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Scripture* (General Editor K. J. Vanhoozer. Associate Editors, C. Bartholomew D. J. Treier and N.T Wright., Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 281-82.

The third purpose (5.6-5.7) refers to the above quotation from Ricoeur i.e. that interpreting Scripture includes a reflection on how religious language and biblical referentiality is used. This third purpose is indeed complicated. Notable, is that Ryan writes that Brueggemann's use of religious language is the "most problematic issue for Brueggemann's project."[451] Brueggemann himself also admits this.[452] Moberly welcomes Brueggemann's approach precisely because he uses religious language in such a unique way.[453] The interesting question to answer is precisely how Brueggemann intends to refer to God in *ToT*. If it is true that he only refers to YHWH in a *non-referential* way, his epistemology could be described as non-foundational if I am correct in my analysis in chapter 4. If he refers to YHWH in an *extra-referential* way another problem arises; the tension that he concludes is within YHWH and thus becomes ontological.

5.2 DECONSTRUCTION, TESTIMONY, AND LANGUAGE

As previously shown, Brueggemann often refers to Derrida, Ricoeur, and Lindbeck, three prominent philosophers who in different ways characterize a postmodern approach. Because these three are so central in order to understand his hermeneutics, it could be interesting to use a theologian or philosopher who had analyzed the same sources of inspiration as Brueggemann himself. Such a comparison might deepen an understanding of Brueggemann's hermeneutics even more. For such a purpose Vanhoozer suits very well, because he makes considerable use of Ricoeur and Lindbeck and formulates his own hermeneutics in sharp contrast to Derrida, whereas Brueggemann, as has been shown already, is inspired by Ricoeur and Lindbeck, and according to Linafelt and

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[451] Ryan, "An Unsettled Testimony?" 25.
[452] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 65 note 11: "I have found the issue of speech/reality among the most problematic for my current study."
[453] See Walter Moberly, "God Is Not a Human That He Should Repent." in *God in the Fray: festschrift W. Brueggemann* (ed. T. Linafelt and T. K. Beal. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 112-24. At p. 112 Moberly defines Brueggemann's focus on religious language as "one of many strengths of his work."

Beal, share striking similarities between him and Derrida.[454] Vanhoozer's hermeneutics is a middle way between Derrida, who argues that the human mind is structured by language, and Descartes, who argues that humans can treat language in a totally objective way.[455] Vanhoozer understands Derrida's famous sentence "There is nothing outside of the text"[456] so that words only have meaning in relation to other words. When Derrida wants to describe a car, for example, he always defines it in relation to other cars, but not in its essence as a specific car. A Ford is a word in a sentence and the car only receives its meaning when the word is set in relation to other cars. Without other cars, Ford is not a car. Vanhoozer's hermeneutics, in contrast to Derrida's, emphasizes that a Ford is a car, independently of the existence of other cars. The corporate intention of a human and language serves as a medium for Vanhoozer's theory:

> The design plan of language is to serve as the medium of covenantal relations with God, with others, with the world.[457]

According to Vanhoozer, there is always a specific meaning in a text and he uses three terms to explain the author's intention in the hermeneutical process. Firstly, he makes an important distinction between *brute fact, institutional fact* and *corporate intention.* A *brute fact* could be 10 cm tall, a weight of 50 grammes and steel. Meaning is not the same as a brute fact. This is not, however, the same as arguing that there is no meaning in this object. The object could be a knife. If the brute fact is a knife, then there is a reshaping of the

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[454] Timothy Beal and Tod Linafelt, "This Particular Manifestation of Holiness," in *Imagination, Ideology & Inspiration: Echoes of Brueggemann in a New Generation.* (ed. J. Kaplan and R. Williamson; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 83-97. Here 86: "The late philosopher Jacques Derrida—who, like Brueggemann, was interested in rehabilitating sophistic rhetoric against Platonic being—famously declared, 'il n'y a pas de hors-text', 'there is nothing outside of the text' or, perhaps better, 'there is no outside to the text'. That is, there is nothing that is not contextual, not embedded in relations of signification and meaning. There is no 'transcendental signified.' Brueggemann is saying as much vis-`a-vis biblical theology: there is no biblical God outside the biblical text. Nowhere else."

[455] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text,* 207: "Cartesian certainty, an absolute knowledge grounded in the knowing subject, is neither possible nor Christian."

[456] Leslie Hill, *The Cambridge introduction to Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: University Press. 2007), 45-46. From French "Ilný a pas de hors-texte´." According to Hill it can also mean "text knows no bounds."

[457] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 206.

object and the brute fact becomes an *institutional fact.* The difference between a *brute fact* and an *institutional fact* is that a brute fact exists independently of human institutions while an institutional fact can only exist via the medium of human institutions. In order to proceed from a brute fact to an institutional fact we need *corporate intention.* This last term is the human intention that transforms the steel to change into becoming a knife. According Vanhoozer, the same relation is at hand in the process of interpreting a text.[458] The paper, the pen, the alphabet, the words, the sentences become institutional through human corporate intention. A brute fact only becomes an institutional fact through a human being. The author's intention constitutes the organizing and unifying factor that gives meaning to a linguistic system.[459] Without the author's intention, words become characters that can be interpreted by the reader's pleasure.[460] In comparison with Vanhoozer, Brueggemann does not search for the author's intention. However he stresses *the testimony* as the foundation and, I would add, that there could also be a similar relationship between a testimony and a witness because a testimony only becomes a testimony through a witness. Moreover, Brueggemann stresses *the sentence* and not *the word* as the constitutive basic element for biblical interpretation: "my consideration of verbs, adjectives, and nouns that speak of Yahweh is an effort to treat Israel's characteristic terms in context."[461] In stressing the sentence and not the word as the smallest testimonial foundation, Brueggemann differs from e.g. Derrida. Vanhoozer argues that a specific sign of a postmodern hermeneutics is the view

[458] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 244-45.
[459] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 230: "What does authorship mean? The short answer, to be explained, is that the author is the one whose action determines the meaning of the text-its subject matter, its literary form, and its communicative energy."
[460] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 234: "There is meaning in the text because it is the product of communicative agency."
[461] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 123, note 14: "It is Barr's now well-established urging that words can only be understood in the context of their usage in sentences."

that *the word,* not *the sentence,* is the basic fundament in biblical interpretation.[462] Brueggemann is however influenced by Derrida's famous deconstruction theory. For Brueggemann deconstruction functions as a way to stop "all false starts".[463] Israel is the agent that refuses to leave YHWH alone. In order to describe God properly, "Israel as the witness knows that if Yahweh is not endlessly criticized and subverted, Yahweh will also become an absolute, absolutizing idol."[464] This is a deconstructive feature in his hermeneutics and he refers to Derrida for this conclusion:

> So yes, my claim, after Derrida, is hyperbolic. It is, however, a necessary hyperbole that echoes the larger intention of the program of deconstruction. It is the text—on the lips of Israel—that precludes the reduction of YHWH to an irrelevant, boring idol.[465]

According to Brueggemann, reading the text in a deconstructive way means to understand the texts not as reports but as portraits. Notable is that Brueggemann's use of Derrida is criticized by Ryan:

> A Derridean reading of the Old Testament would suggest that Yahweh is not deconstructed *by,* but rather *deconstructs* human formulations as observed (in different terms) by Brueggemann elsewhere: 'it is the very God uttered in these texts who lies behind the problems of perspective and method'[466]

Ryan - in opposition to Brueggemann - stresses that it is God who is the deconstructor and not the witnesses. Ryan also points out that Derrida is closely connected with apophatic theology, a theology that refers to silence as a gateway to knowing God. Whereas Brueggemann argues that YHWH only comes

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[462] Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in this Text?* 204: "Postmodern views of language are concerned more with semiotics [the science of signs] than with semantics [the science of sentences]."
[463] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 331.
[464] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 329-32.
[465] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony: Revisited," 37.
[466] Ryan, "An Unsettled Testimony?" 25.

to existence through speech, Ryan argues that Derrida makes use of silence as a way to understand YHWH:

> For this reason, Derrida is often likened to the apophatic, with the assertion that despite our best efforts to speak of God, there is always a 'remainder.' Aspects of God's character remain perennially beyond our grasp, beyond our ability to enunciate, things about which we must pass over in silence. Such an observance can be suggested in Israel's solemn treatment of the Name of God. In his meticulous attention to Israel's things *spoken,* has Brueggemann neglected the possibility of that which is *left unspoken*?[467]

In contrast to Ryan's reflection, Jonathan Hill argues that the correct understanding of deconstruction is that "everything in the world is mediated through words, and therefore, whether we like it or not, the only access to so-called reality is by way of the textual archive."[468] Hill's conclusion is interesting and consolidates Brueggemann and Derrida.[469] This means that both Brueggemann and Derrida have observed that each word and sentence, i.e. every piece of writing, forms the reality. Derrida describes this process as *différance.* The term applies to Brueggemann who raises critical assessments towards the modern presuppositions of objective knowledge. *Différance* moves on to explain that there is no pure presence but everything is contextualized. Brueggemann, following Derrida, then argues for a meaning of the text by way of deconstructing it in order to reach forward to *the revolutionary propensity* that is the basic emphasis in the Old Testament. This so called revolutionary propensity will be described later in this chapter.

The second person that Brueggemann often refers to in *ToT* is Ricoeur. Whereas Vanhoozer uses Ricoeur to argue that it is possible to find a meaning

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[467] Ryan, "An Unsettled Testimony?" 27.
[468] Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida,* 46.
[469] See Collins, *The Scripture after Babel,* 146: "The most radical part of Brueggemann's proposal is undoubtedly his insistence that 'speech is constitutive of reality.'"

in the text, Brueggemann uses Ricoeur to argue that a testimony is the proper foundation for a theological approach.[470] Vanhoozer's conclusion is as follows:

> To inquire into what the text means is to ask what the author has done, in, with, and through the text. *The goal of understanding is to grasp what has been done, together with its effects; the possibility of attaining such understanding is the presupposition of communicative action.*[471]

In order to find the meaning of the text, Vanhoozer relates meaning, not within the author's mind as Descartes argues, nor within the structure of the words as Derrida argues, but to a human act, as is posited by Ricoeur. Meaning is located in the communicative act. Meaning is a verb:

> A word or text only has meaning [noun] if some person means [verb] something by it. 'Meaning,' like the word 'act,' refers not only to *what* is done but to the *process* of doing it. We can then say of meaning what has been said of guns: words don´t kill [or state, or question, or promise, etc.]; *people* do.[472]

This means that Vanhoozer describes meaning as a communicative action in the past that is fixed not only in text, but also in history. It is the event that should be interpreted, not the mind of the author. If a person builds a house, it can be observed by other people, even several years afterwards. The same situation prevails when interpreting texts. To understand a text means to interpret human actions and not human thoughts. If an action can be interpreted, it follows logically that texts can be interpreted too. Historical information helps us to understand the environment in which the author lived. A text is a communicative action, fixed in writing and with a purpose.[473] It is important to comment

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[470] In addition to using Ricoeur, Vanhoozer also incorporates John Searle's "speech act theory" and Jürgen Habermas's social theory, and on the basis of these three he formulates meaning as a three-dimensional communicating action.

[471] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 218.

[472] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 202.

[473] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 228: "My thesis is twofold: that texts have determinate natures, and that authors determine what these are. A text is a story [or a history, or

on two things here. Firstly, in Ricoeur's hermeneutics it is the text and not the author(s) behind the text that is the foundation.[474] In this way, Brueggemann stands closer to Ricoeur than Vanhoozer because Brueggemann and Ricoeur stress the testimony as the basic principle for locating the meaning of the text. [475] As we have seen, Brueggemann never mentions the historical author as being important for understanding the text in *ToT*. Instead, his epistemological foundation is based upon the written testimony. Secondly, as was shown in the previous chapter, Ricoeur stresses a link between the testimony and the witness.[476] This feature is important for Vanhoozer—the testimony is a communicative action performed by the witness, and then fixed in writing as testimony. This means that every testimony has a specific purpose. Even though there is a kind of independence between the testimony and the witness, Vanhoozer stresses that the witness and the testimony must be placed together in order to arrive at a justified interpretation. As shown in the previous chapter, this is partly absent in Brueggemann's hermeneutics.

The third person Brueggemann often refers to in *ToT* is the Yale theologian Lindbeck.[477] Vanhoozer also pays attention to him, especially his cultural-linguistic approach.[478] With regard to Lindbeck it is important to stress that his cultural-linguistic approach is a criticism of both classical liberal theology and

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a poem, or a parable] just because of what the author has done, just because of what the author has wrought in words."

[474] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* 100: "I mean that what is finally to be understood in a text is not the author or his presumed intention, but rather the sort of world intended beyond the text as its reference."

[475] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 221: "Actions are thus like texts because they have a fixed propositional content, an illocutionary force, and a relevance that goes beyond what the agent could have foreseen. My point in drawing out this connection is, however, the opposite of Ricoeur's. Whereas he invokes the comparison to show that human action needs to be interpreted, I argue that understanding texts is ultimately a matter of interpreting human action."

[476] See Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 134: "Therefore no witness of the absolute who is not a witness of historic signs …"

[477] See Brueggemann's references to Lindbeck in *Theology of the Old Testament,* 79, 86f, 559, 574, 596, 653, 747.

[478] Tim Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 90: "The Evangelical Kevin Vanhoozer critiques Lindbeck, and the Post-liberal Yale School connection generally, for using Wittgenstein to locate meaning in the community rather than some other reference."

conservative theology.[479] Lindbeck describes his own approach as a contrasting position to both the conservative propositional or doctrinal model of revelation and also to the liberal or experiential expressivist approach to revelation.[480] Brueggemann, as we have seen, is also opposed to these two positions and in this regard, he shares a similarity with Lindbeck.[481] Lindbeck's model emphasizes language as a symbol for constructing reality. For him, language functions as an authoritative rule within a specific community.[482] He also argues that the function of doctrines is their use in their social engagement within a community and not specifically their truth claims. Lindbeck writes:

> We cannot identify, describe, or recognize experience qua experience without the use of signs and symbols… In short, it is necessary to have the means for expressing an experience in order to have it, and the richer our expressive or linguistic system, the more subtle, varied, and differentiated can be our experience.[483]

Lindbeck's conclusion is that without a language it is impossible to refer to a religious reality. Moreover, he concludes that the richer our expressive or linguistic system is the greater is our experience. Lindbeck also states that "it is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text."[484] This means that he argues for a non-referential interpretation:

> …for cultural-linguists the meaning is immanent. Meaning is constituted by the uses of a specific language rather than being

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[479] See Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 10.

[480] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine; Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 99.

[481] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 53: "Conservatives have characteristically been intensely interested in whether something reported in the biblical text 'actually happened,' and to determine that one had to go behind the texts, perhaps by means of archaeology. Conversely, liberals have been endlessly interested in explanatory, comparative material outside the text. The case was similar in the posing of theological questions. The text was thought only to point to the God who is ontologically situated somewhere else 'in reality,' but certainly not in the text as such."

[482] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* 17-18.

[483] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* 22-23.

[484] Pruitt, "Rethinking Postliberal Theology: Comparing and Contrasting Lindbeck and Vanhoozer," 161.

distinguishable from it. Thus the proper way to determine what ʹʹGod' signifies, for example, is by examining meaning and re-interpreting or reformulating its uses accordingly. It is in this sense that theological description in the cultural –linguistic mode is intrasemiotic or intratextual.[485]

Lindbeck is in turn inspired by Barth. According to Lindbeck, the reality in Barth's theology does not originate in doctrines that are above, behind, beneath, or in front of the text. Instead, the reality is within the Scripture itself. Lindbeck argues, moreover, that Barth's intention was to discover the new world in Scripture and not to argue that there was a reality outside Scripture.[486] These thoughts from Lindbeck are echoed in Brueggemann's theology. Like Lindbeck, Brueggemann also proposes a theology that focuses on speech, more specifically Israel's speech about God:

> I have proposed that Old Testament Theology focus on Israel's speech about God. The positive warrant for this proposal is that what we have in the Old Testament is speech, nothing else.[487]

Relating Vanhoozer to Lindbeck, we can see that Vanhoozer is - to some extent - inspired by Lindbeck but also somewhat critical.[488] Vanhoozer criticizes

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[485] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 100.
[486] George Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality." *ThTo 3* (1986): 368: "The difficulty is that—at least to the unwary reader—Barth seems to think his doctrine of revelation is read off from the biblical world rather than baptized into it. Thus, those who find the doctrine nonsensical are disbarred from reading farther. Unable to make sense of what appears to be the foundation of the whole *Church Dogmatics,* they stop in mid-course. They do not realize that the heart of the enterprise is a retrieval of the Reformation version of the way of reading the Scripture which already begins in New Testament writers with their typological and Christological appropriation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and that this hermeneutics is logically independent of the apparent starting point. They never discover the strange new world of the Scripture as Barth describes it."
[487] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 713.
[488] Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology,* 92: "The difference between Vanhoozer and Lindbeck is similar to that between the Alexandrians and Antiochians—they see the other through their own apologetic lens. The Alexandrians accuse the Antiochians of emphasizing the human nature too greatly, and the Antiochians accuse the Alexandrians of emphasizing the divine nature too greatly."

Lindbeck's idea that the normative sense of a doctrine is defined by the interpretative context of the community and not by the biblical text as such.[489] In this respect, Vanhoozer stands closer to Childs. Both Childs and Vanhoozer argue that the literal sense of the text is the primary foundation for a canonical approach, not the community that keeps them.[490] However, Vanhoozer, like Brueggemann, presupposes that every interpreter is formed by a religious community. He expresses this presupposition:

> It is Andersons's argument, informed by Clifford Geertz's notion of 'thick description' and George Lindbeck's proposal for theological authority as 'cultural-linguistic,' that religious ideas are embedded in religious experience and practice, and that religious reality is constituted and generated by actual, sustained, concrete, communal practice.[491]

Whereas Vanhoozer stresses primarily the *text* as the source of locating the meaning of the text, Brueggemann stresses the *community* as the source of locating meaning in the text. Brueggemann is influenced by Lindbeck's view concerning the community as the necessary context for the interpretation of the text. I also would argue that Brueggemann's idea about speech and reality has a similarity with Wittgenstein's language theory. I partially base this argument on Labron's conclusion that Wittgenstein has influenced Lindbeck:

> Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in particular has fueled the work of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei as they move away from liberal theology. Lindbeck makes good use of Wittgenstein's insights through his study of culture and language, but he uses Wittgenstein more to shed light on aspects of his theory than in a holistic manner.[492]

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[489] See Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 16.
[490] See Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine,* 12, 88.
[491] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 574.
[492] Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology*, 95.

Brueggemann and Wittgenstein closely concur concerning language as the medium for reality and I will develop this further in 5.3.4.

In sum, Brueggemann and Vanhoozer are united in their critical assessment of modernism and its epistemology of autonomous reason. They relate to some of the same philosophers from this critical standpoint but draw different conclusions. Both are influenced by Ricoeur's hermeneutics, especially his understanding of testimony as a fixed entity. However, they emphasize different aspects of Ricoeur. Vanhoozer uses him to show that the intention of the author is found within the event, whereas Brueggemann bases hermeneutics upon Ricoeur's idea that the testimony stands in an independent relationship to the witness. Brueggemann and Vanhoozer differ totally regarding Derrida. Derrida's deconstruction program is an important key for Brueggemann to discern the hidden facets of the text, whereas Derrida for Vanhoozer is the way to lose the intention of the text. Brueggemann and Vanhoozer converge, from different positions, in their treatment of Lindbeck. Like Lindbeck, Brueggemann locates meaning primarily within the testimony and the community which reads the text. It is the interpreter of the text and not the text itself that is carrier of meaning. Vanhoozer, on the opposing side, argues against this and argues that the text itself is carrier of meaning—and thus locates meaning in the text as a human act and in this way reaches forward for the possibility of understanding the author's intention. As will be shown in the next chapter, Childs also holds this position.

5.3 THE TESTIMONY WITHIN AN ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY

We will now continue and demarcate those three elements that together sums up Brueggemann's hermeneutics. Basing his hermeneutics on the written testimony, the central question that Brueggemann asks is as follows: "How does ancient Israel, in this text, speak about God?"[493] This question is his gateway to access theological knowledge. He answers this question with the help of the five distinctive presuppositions he places on the testimonies. These are:

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[493] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 117.

- No interpretation is neutral.

- Old Testament theology is normative.

- Rhetorical criticism is the theological tool.

- Speech and reality coexist.

- There is a reader-response in every interpretation.

NO INTERPRETATION IS NEUTRAL

Brueggemann firstly presupposes that every interpretation of a testimony advocates a certain point of view. A neutral interpretation, i.e. an objective interpretation is, for him, an illusion.[494] This presupposition emerges in *ToT* and stands as the alternative towards the well-established distinction between *meant* and *means*.[495] Grant R. Osborne, a representative of this kind hermeneutics describes this distinction:

> The hermeneutical enterprise has three levels. I will discuss them from the standpoint of the personal pronoun that defines the thrust. We begin with a third-person approach, asking 'what *it* meant' [exegesis], then passing to a first-person approach, querying 'what it means for *me*' [devotional] and finally taking a second-person approach, seeking 'how to share with *you* what it means for me' [sermonic].[496]

According to Osborne, what a specific text *means* today (the normative sense), is achieved by finding what the original text *meant* (the descriptive sense). In order to understand why Brueggemann dismisses this distinction we have to understand Christer Stendahl.[497] Stendahl argues that the proper perspective

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[494] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 63: "*We now recognize that there is no interest-free interpretation, no interpretation that is not in the service and in some sense advocacy.* Indeed, it is an illusion of the Enlightenment that advocacy-free interpretation can exist."

[495] This distinction means that historical *meant* has to be defined in order to explain the *meaning* of today.

[496] Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral,* 6.

[497] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 731. See also Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 30: "The distinction between what a text meant and what a text means is at the core of the most fundamental problem of OT theology, because 'what is meant' is not simply discovering the meaning of the Biblical text within its own canonical Biblical context; it is historical reconstruction."

for biblical theology must be descriptive, i.e. the purpose of the discipline should be to describe what the text *meant* and not what it *means.* In a critical response to Stendahl, Ben Ollenburger argues that Stendahl's proposal has created a problematic hermeneutical gap (Ollenburger uses the term *chasm*) between *meant* and *means.* Ollenburger specifically criticizes that Stendahl has defined the *historical meant* in a way that negatively distinguishes it from the normative *theological means*. Ollenburger writes:

> If descriptions of texts are to be sharply differentiated from their normative appropriation, and if what texts meant is to be distinguished from what they mean, then it seems a chasm has been created between historical and theological study. Some biblical theologians have been troubled by the existence of this kind of chasm and have wondered how it might be bridged.[498]

Ollenburger also criticizes that Stendahl implies that only the historical-critical method is the correct tool to define what the text *meant.*[499] Brueggemann embraces Ollenburger's criticism of Stendahl in *ToT* and argues that there is no visible or "recoverable 'meant' prior to all interpretative imaginative 'means.'"[500] Instead Brueggemann, influenced by Gottwald's sociological approach, develops a hermeneutics that is based on the argument that no interpretation is objective but rather it is always advocating a specific point of perspective. This goes down to the very first written testimony:

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[498] Ben C. Ollenburger, "'What Christer Stendahl meant'—A Normative Critique of 'Descriptive Biblical Theology,'" *HBT* 8 (1986): 62.

[499] Ollenburger, "What Christer Stendahl meant," 90: "Had Stendahl claimed this much, and not more, there would be nothing controversial about his argument. But Stendahl goes on to make the much stronger claim, without sufficient argument, that historical-critical descriptions exhaust the work of biblical theology. Stendahl's claim rests ultimately on his assumptions that with respect to the Scripture, i.e., the canonical text of a religious community, there is only historical criticism and 'theology per se,' with nothing in between — and that theology operates by using the meta-physical tools of hermeneutics to do normative work on biblical texts." See also Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 35. Hasel refers to Anderson's critic of Stendahl's distinction and sums up that "there are two differencing epistemologies at work and two differing hermeneutics." These two positions are between a *descriptive meant-means approach* and a *normative* "Gadamer-Ricoeur hermeneutic."

[500] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 731.

> If Gottwald is correct about the material dimension of text and reading, as I believe he is, then there is no innocent or objective reading. Every reading in important ways is fideistic and confessional, including those readings that reject the theological claim of the text.[501]

According to Brueggemann, Scripture is written within a reality of social conflicts. Even the final text of the Old Testament must be seen in light of this circumstance. Every text in the Old Testament is then performed by an author or a group of authors within a religious community who operate with and for a specific purpose. Not even the historical-critical method is objective but rather is a reading that is guided by presuppositions which are neither neutral nor innocent but serve, consciously or not, a specific normative reading of the Old Testament. Brueggemann writes:

> *Indeed, we are now able to see that what has passed for objective reading (and still does in some quarters) is often the work of a privileged elite who agreed upon methods of reading that kept the text in the sphere of ideas where it did not come into contact with material advantage and disadvantage.*[502]

Gottwald admits that sometimes a sociological method has to hypothesize the textual information. This might create a speculative problem.[503] However, a sociological approach is capable of explaining the "public and communal character of biblical texts as intelligible creations of people working out their social conflicts and contradictions in changing systemic contexts."[504] According to Brueggemann, Gottwald…

> insists that texts are to be understood within the density of social interaction and social conflict, bespeaking vested interest and

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[501] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 52.
[502] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 52.
[503] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Scripture, A Socio-literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 33.
[504] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Scripture,* 32.

ideological cunning. If that density is neglected, it becomes too
easy to take the text as innocent.[505]

It is important to stress that Brueggemann uses Gottwald's sociological approach for a theological purpose. This means that Brueggemann wants to relate the sociological facts, such as environmental factors, landscape, population growth and food availability, to a theological reality. This makes him conclude that the rendering of God in the Old Testament is a God who is consistently in the fray, i.e. in the battle of social conflicts. When God is in the fray, i.e. involved in Israel in a specific way, Brueggemann, despite his presupposition that every interpretation advocates a certain point of view, nonetheless seems to advocate an objective standpoint. What he argues for is that every interpretation of the Old Testament stands in a process of judgment which finally goes back to a "revolutionary propensity" that is inherent in the final text:

.. the reader should understand that the present writer is unflagging in his empathy toward that revolutionary propensity in the text. This is a long-term interpretive judgment, rooted perhaps in history and personal inclination as well as in more informed critical judgment.[506]

This so called *revolutionary propensity* means that the Old Testament in its final form actually has an objective reading; a revolutionary energy for freedom that streams as an underground force beneath the text.[507] This revolutionary propensity converge, I would argue, with the term *God in the fray*. This revolutionary propensity in his hermeneutics is also reminiscent of Derrida's famous sentence that the end of "deconstruction is justice." In the same way Brueggemann seems to argue that the end of biblical hermeneutics coincides with a *revolutionary propensity*. The fact that simultaneously he both criticizes

[505] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 59.
[506] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 74.
[507] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 735: "This Mosaic revolution has political, economic, moral, and ethnic connotations, but its main force, I suggest, is to establish justice as the core focus of Yahweh's life in the world and Israel's life with Yahweh."

an objective reading and presents an objective reading of the text may appear contradictory. However, this could also be seen as an example of an honest search for truth. Step by step, Brueggemann goes behind various epistemologies and hermeneutics that hold the text captive from a theological reading of the text and presents a new approach that reaches forward to the text where the theological content is visible.

COMMUNITY AND THEOLOGY BECOMES NORMATIVE THEOLOGY

The second presupposition in Brueggemann's focus on the written testimony is his standpoint that Old Testament theology should be normative.[508] He bases his opinion on four remarks. Firstly, the fact that the final form of the Old Testament is "a product of and a response to the Babylonian exile"[509] has normative implications:

> Whatever older materials may have been utilized (and the use of older materials can hardly be doubted), the exilic and/ or postexilic location of the final form of the text suggests that the Old Testament materials, understood normatively, are to be taken precisely in an acute crisis of displacement,… Indeed, the crisis of displacement looms as definitive in the self-understanding of Judaism that emerged in the exile and thereafter. With the failure of long-trusted institutions, the faith community that generated the final form of the text, and that was generated by it, was thrown back in a singular way on the textual-rhetorical possibility for life-space. In acute dislocation when appeal could no longer be made to city, king, or temple, it was to this text that Israel increasingly had to look.[510]

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[508] See also Bergsma, "Useful for the Church?" 105: "Does Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* provide a basis for doing normative theology from the OT?"
[509] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 74.
[510] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 74-75.

The exile is the *acute dislocation* and in this situation the text becomes Israel's *sanctuary*. The final form of the text, understood as a response to the exile, is the new normative foundation for Israel.

Secondly, he defines normativeness in close relation to justice. A normative statement for him is equal to "*that on which one will stake one's life.*"[511] This means that normative statements are testimonies made in situations where the witness has to declare an opinion that stands against oppression and urges for justice:

> Theological interpreters of the Old Testament at the end of the twentieth century must, in my judgment, pay primal attention to this irreducible claim of justice, which is, in the most abrasive parts of the testimony, a demanding summons even to Yah-weh.[512]

This feature in his hermeneutics shares striking similarities with the way Ricoeur understands testimony.[513] Brueggemann develops his understanding of biblical justice specifically as *distributive justice*.[514] Distributive justice means that the rich should give to the poor and thus common wealth is distributed to everyone. His notion of distributive justice stands in opposition to the ideology of *military consumerism*.

Thirdly, Brueggemann argues that the purpose of the discipline of Old Testament theology is not primarily to perform an analysis of the biblical text, but rather to define the truth.[515] The truth, moreover, stands in a close relation to an ecclesial community because such a community "is unembarrassed about commitments that, in the parlance of 'objective rationality' may be categorized

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[511] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 53. Brueggemann adds to this quotation, see note 153: "*Risk* is crucial for his definition of normativeness."
[512] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 740.
[513] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* 129.
[514] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 736.
[515] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 743: "I mean by this that Old Testament theology is not simply a detached *analysis* of ancient practice of speech, but it is *an engagement with those speech practices*, in order to adjudicate what is and what is not 'true speech,' that is, speech about the truth."

as bias or ideology".[516] In chapter 3 I argued that the principal of *sola scriptura* is a context that defines Brueggemann's theological program. Following this principal, we have here a tension in his theology between community and text that is interesting to comment on. Even though Brueggemann is loyal to the principal of *sola scriptura* he also argues that the ecclesial community is the sustainer of normative statements. This focus on the community is a postmodern sign because, as Najeeb G. Awad shows, within postmodern hermeneutics a normative statement is based upon the question: "how does the church use Scripture to reflect the central claims of its *lived* or *practiced* faith?"[517] Brueggemann has shown how important it is to stay within an ecclesial community in order to interpret Scripture in a normative sense.[518] His hermeneutics suits well within a postmodern context because he argues that normative statements are created within the community:

> By insisting that Old Testament theology requires a certain form of life, I am, in the end, accepting that Old Testament theology is an enterprise that belongs properly to an ecclesial community…[519]

Fourthly, even though he defines normativeness in close relation to the ecclesial community, there is an interactive process between the ecclesial community and the biblical text:

> … responsible Old Testament Theology in an ecclesial community of interpretation is interpretation done in an idiom that is congruent with the life setting of the community, but that is

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[516] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 743.

[517] Najeeb G. Awad, "Should we Dispense with Sola Scriptura? Scripture, Tradition and Postmodern Theology," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47:1 (2008): 64-79. Awad also refers to Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 175.

[518] Moreover, Daniel Brown presents a good argument that actually supports Brueggemann's position, i.e. that the ecclesial community is necessary for interpreting a text. Brown argues that if a person unfamiliar with Christianity starts reading the Old Testament on his own, reading through to the book of Joshua, he would probably conclude that Christianity is a morbid sacrificing religion that kills everyone who does not believe in God. See Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, Second Edition, 2009), 75.

[519] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 743.

drawn from, informed by, and authorized by the idiom of the testimony of the text.[520]

The specific idiom of the testimony is to pay attention to the normative *shape* and the normative *substance* of the testimony.[521] The normative *shape* of Israel's testimony is an active verb with YHWH as agent and Israel as object and the normative *substance* is a sentence that articulates a testimony of thanksgiving. Brueggemann concludes that a theological description of YHWH is best defined, not as being or substance, but as "forceful activity", i.e. as a verb.[522]

In sum, Brueggemann stresses that even though the testimony is the basis in his theology, this testimony is always situated within an ecclesial community that interprets the testimony and that is not embarrassed by putting God on the agenda. With Awad's comments on the importance of a community as a frame for a biblical interpretation, it is difficult to agree with e.g. Olson who criticizes Brueggemann for ignoring the religious communities in the hermeneutical process.[523]

RHETORICAL CRITICISM AS A THEOLOGICAL TOOL

The third presupposition of Brueggemann's focus on the written testimony is his use of the rhetorical critical method as a tool for theological interpretation. He writes in *ToT*:

> The dramatic, courtroom location of Israel proceeds with a recognition that 'what is' (*reality*) effectively derives from 'what

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[520] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 746.

[521] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 122 and 126. The normative shape is equal to the specific or the characteristic shape of Israel's testimony.

[522] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 126. The nominal sentences (sentences without a verb) describe YHWH as "… presence rather than action." See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 123, note 17.

[523] See also Olson, "Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization," 176: "First of all, Brueggemann seems to assume that the Christian and Jewish traditions are entirely alien imports onto the biblical text. But these venerable traditions are products of centuries of human and community struggles in their multiple particular contexts which have arisen as readings of Scripture."

is said' (*testimony*). Testimony leads reality and makes a deci-
sion for a certain kind of reality both possible and inescapable.[524]

In the above quotation Brueggemann argues that reality (being, ontology, es-
sence) derives from testimony. He admits, as shown in the previous chapter,
that the relationship between being and utterance is "exceedingly difficult" but
he is sure that the two hegemonic voices, i.e. church theology and the histori-
cal-critical method, have not solved this complicated matter in a satisfactory
way. For him the key to defining God is through the use of rhetorical tools:

> *I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of Old Testa-
> ment theology as such lives in, with, and under the rhetorical
> enterprise of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way.*[525]

> … primarily attention must be given to the rhetoric and rhetorical
> character of faith in the Old Testament.[526]

> Testimony leads reality and makes a decision for certain kind of
> reality both possible and inescapable.[527]

The first quotation, no doubt, signals a non-foundational approach because
Brueggemann stresses a description of God that is situated only within the text
and not outside of it. For Brueggemann, reality is mediated; formed in, with,
and under the testimonies. The phrase *in, with, and under* originates from a
controversy between Lutherans and reformed theologians where the Lutherans
formulated the view that Jesus Christ *is in, with, and under the elements* of
bread and wine.[528] In the same way as the Lutheran reformers argued that Jesus

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[524] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 750.
[525] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 66, see also 703.
[526] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 64.
[527] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 750.
[528] "In, with, and under" originally comes from Martin Chemnitz's work *Formula of the Con-
cord,* see http://bookofconcord.org/sd-supper.php?setSidebar=min October 15, 2017: "For the
reason why, in addition to the expressions of Christ and St. Paul [the bread in the Supper is the
body of Christ or the communion of the body of Christ], also the forms: **under** the bread, **with**
the bread, **in** the bread [the body of Christ is present and offered], are employed, is that by means
of them the papistical transubstantiation may be rejected and the sacramental union of the un-
changed essence of the bread and of the body of Christ indicated." (Italics mine).

Christ was present in, with, and under the elements, Brueggemann argues that YHWH in the Old Testament is present in, with, and under the text and in no other way. In this way *the Real* becomes present.

SPEECH AND REALITY COINCIDE

The fourth presupposition is closely related to the third feature described above. This presupposition pays attention to the fact that in Brueggemann's hermeneutics speech and reality coincide.[529] This fourth feature can in turn be presented around three important topics. Firstly, he argues in *ToT* that religious language is specifically performative, i.e. the testimony does what it says, and evocative, i.e. imaginative.[530] The latter term can be traced back to Brueggemann's book *The Psalms & and the Life of Faith,* wherein he refers to Ricoeur's use of religious Language. Brueggemann writes:

> The use and function of this language are *not descriptive but evocative.* Its knowing use can receive new worlds for the community given by God.[531]

The terms *performative* and *evocative* are not synonymous but closely related to each other. Brueggemann uses them in order to distance his hermeneutical thinking from a *descriptive* understanding of language towards a more imaginative and transformative understanding. His understanding of religious language is analyzed more fully in the second part of this chapter, but already here we can say that for him, in, with, and under the rules of the language, either used performativity or evocatively, the reality of God is present.

Secondly, Brueggemann admits that his discussion about speech, text and reality has many unresolved questions.[532] It is here possible to discern a change

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[529] See Brueggemann, "The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation*,"* 76: "Emphasis upon the power of rhetoric, when considered in the context of pluralism and ideology, makes clear that speech about God is not simply reportage on 'what happened' in history or 'what is' in ontology, but the speech itself is powerfully constitutive of theological claim as it is of 'historical' past."

[530] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 703.

[531] Brueggemann, *The Psalms & and the Life of Faith,* 30.

[532] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 36: "Of course it would have been better not to say that in that blatant way, because in an appeal to ontol-ogy, we [all of us!]

or development in this regard. Before *ToT*, Brueggemann clearly believes that there is a reality outside the text, i.e. he had a *realist* position. However, in *ToT*, while still presupposing a reality outside the text, his position has changed as shown in the following quotation from *ToT*:

> While there is assumed reality outside the text (God) that assumed reality depends on utterance for force, authority, and availability in the community. God in the Old Testament is not a mere rhetorical construct, but is endlessly in the process of being rhetorically reconstructed.[533]

Brueggemann stresses that *the Real* is dependent on speech:

> Thus it appears to me that in a practical way, speech leads reality in the Old Testament. Speech constitutes reality and who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterance of the Israelites or, derivatively, the utterance of the text.[534]

For him, utterance is everything.[535] Speech and reality coincide. Brueggemann has changed from locating reality prior to the text, to arguing in *ToT* that speech and reality coincide. He writes in *ToT* that he finds it difficult to locate God prior to the testimony having been uttered.[536] His answer to those who criticize him is to respond with questions: if reality is not formed by words, where else

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are schooled to think or believe or imagine that God dwells elsewhere—in heaven or in the temple or in the world. And of course that is what the text itself says—but it is the text that says it!"

[533] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 65, note 11.

[534] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 65.

[535] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 122.

[536] See Brueggemann's response to Kaminsky in J. S. Kaminsky, reviews of Brueggemann, 23: "The strategic decision to bracket out ontology is not to be taken as a great philosophical maneuver, but as a characterization of pastoral activity. That is the testimony of the Scripture when taken as true [in the metaphor, when found as reliable witness] yield ample ontology that is offered to those who come without any such assurance. That is surely what people hear from the text, something deeply new given nowhere else, certainly not in any prior ontology. Conversely, if one refuses the claims of these witnesses, one is left, so I suggest, without ontology. But if one argues that ontology is given to Israel prior to the text or outside of the text, then one is at pains to say from where that ontology comes, and if from elsewhere, how does it qualify for Israel's faith. I do not doubt that one may arrive at 'the being of God' apart from this text. Is it then, the God of Abraham, Jacob, or the God of the philosophers?"

is it formed? He concludes that 'nowhere else' other than in speech is ontology capable of coming to life for the community:

> Thus, I concede that 'nowhere else' is an unfortunate way to put it. It continues to be, however, close to what I intended. And I continue to be haunted, as I hope the reader is haunted, by the durable question, where else?'[537]

Thirdly, as I argued in the previous part of this chapter, when comparing Brueggemann and Lindbeck, a probable link between Brueggemann and Wittgenstein, mediated through Lindbeck, is visible. Notable is that Brueggemann never refers to Wittgenstein in *ToT*. However, as Labron shows, as also noted earlier in this chapter, Lindbeck is influenced by Wittgenstein. Concerning Wittgenstein, Selby points out that "without question it is through the later work of Wittgenstein that we come to see our knowledge of our world as irrevocably linked with our language."[538] In a comparison with Brueggemann and the later Wittgenstein striking similarities emerge.[539] The later Wittgenstein neither favors reality before language nor language before reality but argues that they coincide. Labron defines Wittgenstein's thinking as "Hebraic":

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[537] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 37.

[538] Selby, *The Comical Doctrine*, 14, 24.

[539] "The later Wittgenstein" is Wittgenstein's self expression of his development, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophiche Untersuchung* (Herausgegeben von Eike von Savigny Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), X: "Vor vier Jahren aber hatte ich Veranlassungen, mein erstes Buch [*die Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*] wider zu lessen unde seine Gedanken erklären. Da schien es mir plötzlisch, dass ich jene alten Gedanken und die neuen zu Samemen veröffentlischen sollten… Seit ich nämlich vor 16 Jahren mich wieder mit Philosophie zu beschäftigen anfing, musste ich schwere irrtümer in dem erkennen, was ich in jenem ersten Buche niedergelegt hatte." As Wittgenstein comments, he changed his mind dramatically after 1945. Before 1945 he is defined as the *early Wittgenstein* and after 1945 he is defined as the *later Wittgenstein.* See also MacDonald, "language-Game," 435, who describes the later Wittgenstein in a clear sense: "The term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of form of life." See also 436: "the emphasis on meaning as *use*—and the correlative concept of teachability and learning—is central to Wittgenstein's understanding of language-games." The conclusion to make is that for Wittgenstein there is a close link between *meaning* and *activity*, and *meaning* and *use.*

The Later Wittgenstein, however, takes one more step away from the Greek conception and shows that logic is revealed in language…Theologically speaking this is like a turn from the unseen Greek Forms and symbolic world, to the Hebraic God working in the visible and non-symbolic world, culminating in the Christian revealed God.[540]

…the result, I suggest, is that we can see how Wittgenstein's thought moves from holding some aspects of Platonic realism in the Tractatus, to a more worldly and concrete Hebraic point of view, and ultimately his conception of logic shows similarities with the Word revealed.[541]

When Brueggemann stresses that "what we have in the Old Testament is speech, nothing else", it is clearly reminiscent of Wittgenstein's idea that the word revealed is the only gateway to defining reality. In this way, there is in Brueggemann's thinking an allusion to Wittgenstein's famous sentence "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."[542] According to Brueggemann, Israel must speak of YHWH. Failing to do so will lead to idolatry:

> *Israel as witness knows that if Yahweh is not endlessly criticized and subverted, Yahweh will also become an absolute, absolutizing idol,* the very kind about which Moses aimed his protesting, deconstructive work at Sinai. Thus the deconstructive program in all of these dimensions is a characteristically Jewish enterprise of 'smashing the idols.'[543]

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[540] Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology,* 68.
[541] Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology,* 56.
[542] See Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology*, 36: "What is shown, in contrast to what can be said, is beyond propositions and is transcendental." From Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value,* 34e.
[543] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 332.

READER-RESPONSE

The fifth presupposition of Brueggemann's focus on the testimony is the dialectic between the reader and the text. He does not explicitly use the term reader-response in *ToT* but he writes: "there are no innocent texts, so there are no innocent readers."[544] The reader-response dialectic stresses a dialogue between the text and the reader in *ToT* through the courtroom metaphor.[545] The courtroom metaphor can be understood as a hermeneutical tool that creates a reader-response hermeneutics. In an unpublished lecture entitled "Preaching as Testimony: the Testimonial Risk of Preaching," he develops his thinking concerning this topic:

> By using the category of testimony, I mean to imagine a court-
> room metaphor and suggest that Christian truth now is not judge
> and jury, but is one among many witnesses, each of whom tells
> the court a different tale of reality...[546]

The use of the courtroom metaphor implies at least three agents that either present testimonies or listen to testimonies. These agents play different roles in the courtroom metaphor. The first agent is the court. The court is the creator of a portrayal of YHWH: "That is the business of the court and not of the witness."[547] As creator of this portrayal, the court must listen to the testimonies that come from the witnesses. The second agent then consists of those witnesses who testify to the court. They tell the court what they have seen and what they have heard. In his comparison of Joshua 24:23 with Isaiah 43:8-9 Brueggemann pays attention to advocacy; whether YHWH is the true God or the gods from Babylon. He here stresses a close connection between "the role of the witnesses and the singular theological claims of Yahweh." For

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[544] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 52.
[545] As mentioned earlier, the inspirational sources for the courtroom metaphor come from Ricoeur. However, Isaiah 40-55 is also important for him as a source. See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*. 120, note 7 and 8.
[546] Brueggemann, Unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 37, Folder 1298.
[547] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 267.

Brueggemann, the main point is that there is a choice to be made: "Which witnesses are believed – concerning Yahweh or the gods of the empire – will determine the shape of the world."[548]

The third and final agent is the community that hears the testimonies and believes them. With regard to the third agent, in addition to being Israel, the community is also the reader of the testimonies, i.e. the Jewish and Christian communities. In this way, the metaphor - with Israel as court, as witness, and as community in the courtroom metaphor - functions as a hermeneutical tool that creates a reader and a response. According to Brueggemann, the reader of the final text is involved in a process which stretches from the past to the present day; the revelation continues, generation after generation. This is for Brueggemann *intertextuality:*

> Intertextuality is a process of conversation by which the entire
> past and memory of the textual community is kept available and
> present in concrete and detailed ways.[549]

CONCLUSIONS

When describing Brueggemann's focus on the written testimony, five presuppositions sum up his hermeneutics. Firstly, *no interpretation is neutral* which means that every interpretation advocates a certain point of view. Behind the text Brueggemann discerns a *revolutionary propensity* that could be described as his Rule of Faith. Secondly, *Old Testament theology is normative* and the discipline should work in close relationship with an ecclesial community. Thirdly, he uses *rhetorical criticism as a theological tool* and finds a tension in the text that corresponds to a tension within God. Fourthly, *speech and reality coexist.* He searches for the real but in order to reveal the real, speech must be used. Fifthly and finally, Brueggemann creates a reader and a response between the court and the witness where the court responds to the testimony from the witness. The rhetorical critical tool combined with the idea that

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[548] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 750.
[549] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 79.

speech and reality coexist is his *theological hermeneutics* and his *hermeneutical theology* is based on the fact that no interpretation is neutral. Therefore it seems that he actually presupposes that every theology has a normative intention, unconsciously or consciously.

5.4 IMAGINATION IN *ToT*

The second significant element in Brueggemann's hermeneutics is his use of imagination as a source in his hermeneutical enterprise. As shown in chapter 3, imagination has played a decisive role in his theological approach throughout his career and characterizes him among other scholars. In chapter 3 I concluded that his understanding of imagination prior to and after *ToT* stands in a process of continuity. In this part I will pay attention to firstly, a summary of how he defines imagination in *ToT* and compare. Secondly, some examples of how he uses imagination as an interpretative tool on specific passages in the Old Testament; and thirdly and finally, his use of imagination in relation to *revelation.*

IMAGINATION AS FORCE

Imagination is the force that is capable of changing reality. Brueggemann gives the following definition of imagination in *ToT*:

> Without a precise definition of imagination, we may characterize its work as the capacity to generate, evoke, and articulate alternative images of reality, images that counter what hegemonic power and knowledge have declared to be impossible. This counterversion (sub-version) of reality thereby deabsolutizes and destabilizes what 'the world' regards as given, and invites the hearers of the text to recharacterize what is given or taken as real.[550]

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[550] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 68.

It is obvious that he wants to present a counter-version.[551] The goal for him is to foster the ecclesial community to work for a vision that will change the world, and work towards a vision wherein distributive justice is at work.[552] He presupposes that our world is constructed, not given, and that there is a competition between various other imaginative constructions of the world. The world, imagined through the eyes of YHWH, is a metanarrative wherein the imaginative force of the text in the Old Testament is capable of transforming a new reality. He defines imagination as the "crucial ingredient in Israel's rendering of reality."[553] In order to render this reality, the prophets use imagination as the tool to reshape the reality of YHWH. The narratives in Israel's final text are also eschatological, i.e. they anticipate a future and are open to an imaginative perception of reality that is not bound to "sober reality"…"Israel's rhetoric notices and bears witness to what the world judges to be impossible."[554]

IMAGINATION AS INTERPRETATIVE TOOL

Some examples from *ToT* how Brueggemann uses imagination in his interpretation now follow. Firstly, there is an example in his interpretation of Genesis 1-2. These chapters function as a liturgical narrative. The purpose of the narrative is to present a "contrast-world" to the exile world in Babylon: "The effect of the liturgy is to create an alternative world of ordered life, made possible by Yahweh's powerful word and will."[555] Another example is the Exodus story (Exodus 12-14). According to Brueggemann, this narrative is reused so that "wilderness is regularly reciphered as 'exile.'"[556] In this way, imagination

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[551] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 76: "At the outset, then, it is important for a student of Old Testament theology to recognize that *this material is an enterprise of counter-reality."*

[552] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 745: "Ecclesial communities of interpretation that attend in serious ways to this text may focus intentionally on what I have identified as four enduring issues intrinsic to Old Testament theology….746), …4. Awareness that at the core of this construed world is a claim of *distributive justice* that is concrete, material, revolutionary, subversive, and uncompromising."
Brueggemann, Walter. Theology of the Old Testament (p. 745). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition."

[553] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 68.

[554] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 68.

[555] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 153.

[556] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 75. See also 263: "Israel, in its appropriation of nouns for Yahweh, never simply takes over and uses available nouns, but always reuses them,

functions as the tool for reusing material in new situations. Secondly, imagination plays an important role in theology of the nouns.[557] Brueggemann suggests that the noun metaphors provide a way in which the oddity of YHWH can be expressed. This oddity is created by the use of imagination, not in the sense of reusing biblical materials but in the sense of explaining the incomparability of YHWH. He refers to e.g. Isaiah 40:10-11:

> 10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. 11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

He highlights that YHWH is described as both warrior and nursemaid.[558] This is an example of an imaginative playfulness with nouns, where different noun metaphors are set side by side, with no attempt at harmonization.[559] Brueggemann also gives a hint of how the interpretations of the metaphors have theological implications:

> *If we push underneath this rationalizing justification for Yahweh's severity, however, we are bound to say that each of these metaphors contains an unresolved tension. This tension may be understood as a contradiction within the very character of Yahweh.[560]*

My conclusion is that Brueggemann interprets the metaphors literally, and therefore he concludes that these metaphors reveal a contradiction within YHWH. What I suggest is that Brueggemann argues that the character of YHWH must be understood on the premise of the theological agenda that the

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so that they participate in the density of Israel's rhetoric and Israel's imaginative construal of its life in relation to Yahweh."
[557] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 230-66.
[558] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 233. YHWH as Judge, King, Warrior, Father, Artist, Healer, Gardener, Mother and Shepherd.
[559] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 230.
[560] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 249.

community of Israel share on the basis of the imaginative testimony in the Old Testament:

> Or one could say that there is some development in Yahweh from wild destructiveness to compassion as Israel's religion matures, and so we may credit this oddness to the history of religion. No doubt there is something in this as well. But here the issue that concerns us is not exhausted with imaginative literature nor with developmental history, for we intend to be asking about the God given us in the speech of Israel; that is, we have a theological agenda.[561]

IMAGINATION AS REVELATION

Imagination also plays an important role for Brueggemann whereby Israel transforms her testimony to become revelation:

> That is, the testimony that Israel bears to the character of God is taken by the ecclesial community of the text as a reliable disclosure about the true character of God. Here we touch on the difficulty of the authority of the Scripture, which has usually been articulated in the scholastic categories of inspiration and revelation.[562]

He expresses this in terms of "revelation-as-human imagination."[563] What Brueggemann wants to achieve in his hermeneutics is to emphasize the imaginative force that human beings have in their imagination of God. The process from human testimony to revelation can be explained as follows: the testimonies are the fixed sentences of a human witness who has seen God. Brueggemann argues that it is quite uncertain how the process from testimony

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[561] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 281.
[562] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 121.
[563] Walter Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 16: "What is *revealed* here is a Holy One who is undomesticated available for dialogic transaction; p. 17: Beyond its own performance, moreover, it also imagined [was led by the spirit to imagine] that all other creatures are also partners of the same God and so recruited into the same dialogic transaction."

to revelation actually takes place.[564] In this sense, imagination is a crucial element that convinces the court to make a positive decision: "when utterance in the Scripture is taken as truthful, human testimony is taken as revelation that discloses the true reality of God."[565] He is skeptical about using classical formulations to describe revelation:

> Having said that the Scripture is taken as revelation, it is nonetheless important and difficult to specify what is referenced by the term *revelation*. The term may refer to the inscrutable disclosure of the mystery of God, but it easily slides into scholastic assumption that revelation is settled package of propositions.[566]

When Brueggemann discusses the complicated relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, he describes the Christian interpretation as an "imaginative construal of the Old Testament", one which it is possible to perform but which, nonetheless, is not the only possible alternative to make.[567] A characteristic Christian imagination of the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments is a "transposition of 'messiah' to '*the* messiah' and identification of the Church with 'the Israel of God.'"[568] This means that he defines imagination as a source that performs a Christian interpretation. The Christian interpretation is then not inherent in the text as such, but instead is formed through the interpreter within the ecclesial community. This standpoint stands in sharp contrast to Childs' hermeneutical program, which argues that the text itself is the carrier of the Christian interpretation (see chapter 6).

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[564] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 122: "It is by no means clear how this transposition from testimony to revelation is accomplished, though we assume it all the time in our theological treatment of the Scripture."

[565] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 121.

[566] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 3, note 6.

[567] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 732: "That is, Old Testament theology, in my judgment, must prepare the material and fully respect the interpretative connections made in the New Testament and the subsequent church, but it must not make those connections, precisely because the connections are not to be found in the testimony of ancient Israel, but in the subsequent work of imaginative construal that lies beyond the text of the Old Testament."

[568] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 733.

CONCLUSION: IMAGINATION AS SOURCE FOR KNOWING GOD

Brueggemann seems to use imagination as a primary tool to create the alternative. This makes imagination a sources for knowing God. According to Green, an author that Brueggemann refers to, "Imagination is the faculty of representing in intuition an object that is not itself present."[569] This view of imagination is a human capacity for understanding reality from the biblical point of view and it creates an alternative. For Brueggemann to imagine is to read the biblical text before in this sense. The encounter with the world and the encounter with the biblical text reinforce the society of military consumerism—in this way that creates a revolutionary force to change so that the society becomes part of the kingdom of God. Brueggemann, by the use of imagination, connects the witness with God; and even though he hardly connects imagination with the Holy Spirit, he links the witness to a sociological context and community, so that the community forms a vision of God that becomes fixed in testimony and uttered in the ecclesial community. Imagination is therefore far removed from fantasy, but is rooted in the memories of the past and forms its future around earlier experiences of God. Imagination becomes for Brueggemann the link between the text and the reality that the text refers to. By use of imagination in his hermeneutics Brueggemann, even though he seems to be satisfied to stay inside the drama of the text, relates the text to the reality outside the text.

5.5 JEWISH TRADITION: READING BEYOND THE VISIBLE

The third and final element in Brueggemann's hermeneutics is his inspiration from the Jewish tradition. In two chapters, "The Jewishness of the Old Testament" (pp. 107-112) and "Old Testament Theology in Relation to Jewish Tradition and the Jewish Community" (pp. 733-735) he develops the Jewish tradition as an element for interpreting the Old Testament. It is important to emphasize that Brueggemann defines himself as a Christian interpreter as the use of the term Old Testament clearly indicates.[570] Nevertheless, as we have al-

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[569] Green, *Imagine God,* 62.

[570] The use of *Old* and *New* defines a specifically Christian hermeneutical perspective on the Scripture. Some use the term *First* instead of *Old,* to identify the continuity with the Jewish canon. Levenson uses the term *Hebrew Scripture*. Brueggemann comments in *ToT* on the issue of proper terminology as follows, see Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 1: "I am

ready seen in the comparison with Wittgenstein, his thinking could be described as *Hebraic*. Likewise, his hermeneutics entails a clear skepticism towards Christian theology, either formulated conservative or liberal. Instead his approach favors the Jewish traditions. J.S Bergsma summarizes Brueggemann's opinion on this concisely:

> The Christian tradition: totalizing, absolutizing, generalizing, schematizing, Hellenistic, Platonic, body-denying, reductionistic, supersessionist, transcendental, hegemonic, moves to closure and (2) the Jewish tradition: specific, immanent, disputatious, dialectical, dialogical, Hebraic, playful, concrete, body affirming, dense, ambiguous, resistant to closure.[571]

Brueggemann's influence from the Jewish traditions does not mean that he honors a special "Jewish spirit or a Jewish genius, nor do I suggest that there is something given as ethnic about Jewish modes of discourse."[572] His interest in the Jewish tradition is based on two *"resiliently Jewish"* aspects.[573] Firstly, the text is written for the Jewish community. Secondly, the Jewish tradition highlights many different readings. This reading then stands in sharp contrast to that of western Christendom which has been influenced too much by "Aristotelian logic that could not countenance the existence of opposites at the same time."[574] In this way, Brueggemann appreciates a reading that favors a reading beyond the visible, beyond the logic towards the Hebraic and Jewish sense of the Old Testament text.

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not unaware of the problematic nature of the phrase *Old Testament.* I use the term with diffidence, but use it nonetheless, because I write and exposit as a Christian interpreter. At the same time it will be clear that I am acutely aware of and concerned about the destructiveness implicit in every form of supersessionism."
[571] Bergsma, "Useful for the Church?" 121.
[572] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 81.
[573] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 80.
[574] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 82.

DISCERNING DISRUPTIONS IN THE TEXT

According to Brueggemann, a Jewish reading focuses on the disruptions that are visible in the text. There are four ways that demarcates this disruption. The first way that presents this disruption is the *Midrashic interpretation* of the Old Testament. This ancient way of interpreting the text is not a theological interpretation in a Christian sense.[575] However, such a reading makes it possible to pay attention to and "expose what is hidden in the text, which might be an embarrassment to the main claim of the text."[576] Brueggemann's interpretation of Amos 9:8 (see chapter 2) functions as a good example of influence from a *Midrashic reading.*

The second way that highlights a disruption in the text is by paying attention to Freud's psychoanalysis. Brueggemann is influenced by Susan Handelman, who has demonstrated a link between Freud and Midrashic interpretation. Interpreting texts by use of Freud's psychoanalysis means "listening and watching for the incongruity between what is said and what is hidden but signaled."[577] Brueggemann does not suggest a psychological analysis of YHWH but rather a cross-examination that is motivated by Freud's psychoanalysis. The cross-examination pays specific interest to those texts that give attention to "Yahweh's history of violence and absence". For him, such texts are not only historical portraits but…

> …theological data about the Character in the narrative who has
> continuity and constancy, then we may rightly wonder about the

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[575] Benjamin Sommer stresses that the primary focus within Judaism is to write commentaries and not theologies, even though both kinds of literature are well known within Judaism. See Benjamin Sommer, "Scriptures in Jewish Tradition, and Traditions as Jewish Scripture," pages 1-15 in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture,* (ed. B. Sommer et. al. New York, NYU Press, 2012), 9: "The discipline of Theology does not have the same place within Judaism as it has in Christianity." Brueggemann's intention is to combine Jewish Midrashic interpretation within a Christian Theology of the Old Testament.

[576] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 326: "James Kugel has shown how Midrash works to express dissonance, which he characterizes as 'surface irregularities' in the text."

[577] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 327.

ongoing significance of this remembered violence in Yahweh's life and character.[578]

The third way in which Brueggemann demarcates a disruption in the text is the tremendous problem of the Holocaust. The discipline of "Old Testament theology cannot proceed" without taking notice of this catastrophe in the history of mankind.[579] In the next chapter this disruption will be explored by Blumenthal's argument that YHWH is abusive. At this point, it is suffice to state that Brueggemann is very influenced by Blumenthal's theological proposal that YHWH is abusive, and moreover, that Blumenthal draws such a controversial conclusion in light of the holocaust. Blumenthal's conclusion is indeed controversial and it is important to comment that Brueggemann hesitates to go as far as Blumenthal does.[580]

Finally, the fourth way that discern disruptions in the text is by paying attention to Derrida's deconstruction theory. Brueggemann writes that deconstruction is…

> … an important payout in which we can see coming together (a) the affinity of disruption in *midrash,* (b) the 'slips' of *Freudian* discernment that are clues to emancipatory truth, and (c) the sociopolitical –moral-intellectual disruption that is the *Holocaust.*[581]

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[578] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 328.

[579] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 328-29.

[580] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 329: "Or we may, with David Blumenthal, hold the God of the Holocaust to the covenantal categories of the Old Testament, and conclude that the God of Israel is 'abusive…but not always.'" Weinandy, in his argumentation that YHWH does not suffer fears that a concept of God without the possibility of suffering would lack emotions, see Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 2000), viii: "With the Holocaust and similar events of horrendous human suffering as the existential backdrop, how could I write a book in which I would argue that God is impassible and so does not suffer?"

[581] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 330.

I conclude that for Brueggemann, a Jewish reading is - to a large extent - equivalent to a deconstructive reading and shares many similarities with Derrida.[582]

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO TESTAMENTS

Brueggemann has an understanding of the relationship between the Old and the New Testament that could be described as a middle way between a Christian perspective and a Jewish perspective. I comment in more detail on this issue in chapter 7. At this point, it is suffice to highlight that M. Gershom, a Jewish scholar, describes this middle way of Brueggemann as particularly interesting.[583] Brueggemann argues that traditional theological categories such as "promise-fulfillment, law-gospel, salvation history and topology" do not catch the importance of the Old Testament for the New Testament and for Christian faith.[584] Moreover, whereas Von Rad argues that the Old Testament has a continuing story which finds its logical end in the New Testament,[585] Brueggemann argues that the relationship between the two testaments is based on the fulfillment of the promise in the Old Testament but the Old Testament is not exclusively aimed at the New Testament.[586] Instead, he argues that the interpreter of the Old Testament should articulate the theology of the Old Testament in all its various nuances and then…"offer it to the church for its continuing work of construal toward Jesus."[587] In sum, this imaginative and rhetorically playful Old Testament testimonies make room for at least two readings of the Old Testament, a Jewish and a Christian reading. Brueggemann hesitates to read the Old Testament from the point of New Testament, even though he in no way ignores such a reading. His approach favors a reading that

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[582] See also Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida,* 49 ff. Hill writes that Derrida is influenced by Freud (compare Brueggemann's influence of Freud).
[583] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 69, 206. Gershom M. H. Ratheiser, *Mitzvoth Ethics and the Jewish Scripture* (ed. Gershom M. H. Ratheiser, Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2007), 89 ff. According to Gershom, Brueggemann presents, together with Childs, the most important Christian approach to the Hebrew Scripture: "For now, then, there are two more major works that deserve attention: the study of B. S. Childs and that of W. Brueggemann."
[584] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 730.
[585] David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Scripture: The Theological Relationship Between the Old and the New Testament.* Third Edition (Downers Groove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 305.
[586] Baker, *Two Testaments, One Scripture*, 305.
[587] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 732.

takes the Old Testament as a text in itself into account. This text should be read in its own context, i.e. the Jewish context, in order to be understood correctly.

CONCLUSION: GOD IN THE FRAY

In sum, by using the Jewish tradition Brueggemann pays attention to the visible tension and diversity that exist in the text. As Jewish sources he refers to Midrashic interpretation, Freudian reading, the tremendous problem of the Holocaust and Derrida's deconstruction. These sources, are crucial for his theological conclusion about YHWH, as a God who is in the fray. This concept of God stands in close parallel to the dialectic between passion and sovereignty, which often converges but which sometimes stands in sharp tension and precludes a scholastic conclusion. Brueggemann's previous distinction between *God above the fray* and *God in the fray*, visible in articles before *ToT*, has changed, and in *ToT* he stresses that God is specifically *in the fray.* On the basis of his influence from the Jewish tradition, Brueggemann presents a dialectical concept of God in *ToT*:

> *The Old Testament in its theological articulation is characteristically dialectical and dialogical, and not transcendentalist…*
> And because the God of Israel lives in Israel's rhetoric, we may say finally that Israel's God also partakes of this provisional way in the world.[588]

> In stating this dialectic, which therefore requires both centrist and marginated interpreters, I have tried to stay within the bounds of the Old Testament itself and to heed its unmistakably Jewish propensity.[589]

Brueggemann argues that this dialectic concept of God is both Jewish but also typically Christian. He refers to Jürgen Moltmann, among others, for this standpoint:

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[588] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 83.
[589] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 401.

> Jürgen Moltmann has seen that crucifixion and resurrection in
> Christian theological interpretation are not, together, a once –
> for-all sequenced event. They are together, rather, a 'dialectic of
> reconciliation,' in which both sides of the dialectic are still ur-
> gent.[590]

His theological conclusion of a dialectical concept of God is based on his the-
ological interpretation of the Old Testament. He pays attention to texts that
present both a convergence and a tension between God's love and God's anger.
The convergence is visible in texts such as Psalm 115:1:

> Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,
> for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

Here in Psalm 115:1 YHWH is described as righteous because he shows grace
and covenantal fidelity.[591] However, there are also texts in which there is a
visible tension between YHWH's righteousness and fidelity, e.g. Numbers 14
and Ezekiel 36:22-32. These texts clearly show that YHWH will "hold count-
able and destroy all of those who have 'not listened.'"[592] Brueggemann's con-
clusion is that there is no final convergence between fidelity and mercy. There
is a limit for YHWH's fidelity towards Israel, "a limit already anticipated in
Exodus 34:7b." This limit is located within YHWH and stands in tension to-
wards YHWH's compassion. In Ezekiel 36:22-32 the tension within YHWH
means that YHWH will act in a passionate way, but without Israel. It seems
that YHWH acts in a way that "is fully, without reservation, for the enhance-
ment of Yahweh." Brueggemann then argues that the texts above create a dia-
lectic that is present within the Jewish tradition but is more absent within the
tradition of the Church. Speaking theologically, this dialectic finally goes back
to God, i.e. there is a dialectic between God above the fray and God in the fray
but there is no convergence between them. In the end, in *ToT*, this dialectic

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[590] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 401. See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implication of Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
[591] Also in Deuteronomy 10:12-22 and Isaiah 45:21-25 Brueggemann finds textual evidence for a convergence between YHWH's righteousness and his fidelity towards the covenants.
[592] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 307-308.

then tilts towards becoming God in the fray at the expense of God above the fray.

5.6 HISTORICAL OR THEOLOGICAL APPROACH?

The important question that this study asks in this chapter is how Brueggemann intends to use religious language in *ToT*. To recall chapter 2, and the introduction of this chapter, there was a critical assessment from Hanson, Albertz, and Ryan concerning how to use religious language. What I will show is that Brueggemann actually intends to use religious language in a specific theological sense. This is an important topic because Hanson's proposal of a figurative understanding actually omits a theological interpretation and also Albertz argued for the impossibility of a theological approach.

THE UGLY DITCH

Before God has given language to mankind in order to communicate. It is equally clear that all religious language implies a gap between human beings and God. Brueggemann refers to this gap as the "the ugly ditch".[593] The ugly ditch is a "language vacuum" between the biblical text and its primary reference, God.[594] An interpreter of the biblical text is automatically involved in bridging the space between the text and the reality that the text refers to. A passage from Hebrews 8:5 expresses the content of the problem. The author of the Hebrews refers to the priests who offer in the temple:

> They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of
> the heavenly one; for Moses, when he was about to erect the tent,
> was warned: 'See that you make everything according to the pat-
> tern that was shown you on the mountain.'

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[593] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 33: "The first of these problems is the historicity of the claims of OT traditions. This is a very old problem. On the one hand, there is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's famous 'ugly ditch' in which the crossing from 'history' to 'meaning' is difficult if not impossible. On the other hand, there is the endless sorting out of *Historie* and *Geschichte*. I have concluded that a theological interpreter can go only so far with 'history,' in fact not very far at all."

[594] See Rosalind Selby, *The Comical Doctrine: An Epistemology of New Testament Hermeneutics* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 9, 53. Selby argues that the fact that some deny God, some are resistant to defining God, and some believe in God proves the apparent problem of meaning and reference.

According to the author of the Hebrews, Moses had a blueprint from YHWH that should become visible in the community of Israel. The passage from Hebrews introduces in a good sense the question how theological words, metaphors and stories in Scripture refer to God. A theory of religious language normally refers meaning to God in at least three ways: in a *univocal, analogical* and/or *equivocal* sense.[595] For example, understanding love *univocally* assumes that God's love is equal to human love and vice versa. Understanding love *equivocally* assumes that religious language is incapable of properly defining love because God's love is totally different from the human perception of love. An equivocal understanding of language means moreover, that the only way of referring to love is through metaphors that can describe *das Ding für mich* but not *an sich.* This way of using religious language has been dominant within modernism. The third alternative is that religious language can be used in an *analogical* sense so that human love corresponds to God's love. God's love is not the same as human love but nonetheless is of a *simila*r kind.[596] It is important to stress that religious language also can be used in all three senses. Childs, quoting an old hymn, catches this sense and something of the rich dynamic that religious language is capable of performing within an ecclesial community:

> My *God*, my *God*, Thou are a *direct God*, may I not say a *literall*
> *God*, a *God* that wouldest be understood *literally*, and according
> to the *plaine sense* of all that thou saidest? But thou are also
> [*Lord* I intend it to thy glory…] thou art a *figurative*, a *metaphor-*
> *icall God too*: A *God* in whose words there is such a height of
> *figures,* such *voyages,* such *peregrinations,* to fetch remot and

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[595] Alan Torrance, "Analogy," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Scripture* (General Editor K. J. Vanhoozer. Associate Editors, C. Bartholomew D. J. Treier and N.T Wright., Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 39.
[596] Torrance, "Analogy," 39.

precious *metaphors,* such *extensions…* such *Curtaines* of *Alle-gories…* O what words but thine, can expressed the inexpressible *texture,* and composition of thy *Word.*[597]

GILKEY´S CRITERIA FOR A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

We now proceed and pay attention to Gilkey's criticism of how religious language was used within the BThM. At that time, in 1961, Gilkey wrote the article "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language."[598] As shown in chapter 3, Brueggemann was fostered within BThM and Gilkey's critique relates to Brueggemann in this way. In turn, Gilkey's analysis of BThM is shared by Frei, whom Brueggemann mentions as an important source of inspiration.[599] Brueggemann refers to Gilkey in *ToT*:

> Already in 1961, Langdon Gilkey had identified the problem covered over by language, and since that time a great deal of energy has been devoted to the question of what might be meant by the phrase 'act of God.''[600]

A main point in the above-mentioned article by Gilkey is that BThM presented normative biblical theology based on a modern epistemology.

> The nub of this problem is the fact that, while the object of biblical recital is God's acts, the object of biblical theological inquiry is biblical faith—that is to say, biblical theology is, like

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[597] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 382. Childs quotes from Donne, Devotions upon Emergent Occassions, XIX Expostulation.

[598] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 43, 124, 163, 528.

[599] Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative, Selected Essays.* (ed. G. Hussinger and W. C. Placher, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 118ff.

[600] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 43. See also Brueggemann, "ABC's of Old Testament Theology in the US," 415: "As Brevard Childs and Langdon Gilkey came to see that »his- tory« as an interpretive category is deeply problematic, we may notice the rapid disintegration of the consensus claims of »history«." See also Leonard Finn who argues that Frei shares Gilkey's criticism (L.G Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," *Biblical Scholarship in North America, Volume 25: Scripture as Christian Scripture : The Work of Brevard S. Childs* (ed. Christopher R Seitz and Kent H. Richards, Atlanta, GA, USA: Society of Biblical Literature), 222-23: "Hans Frei's analysis of the breakdown of the literal sense of the scriptures—or rather, the breakdown of western Christendom's ability to read them according to the literal sense— remains the classic exposition of what was lost and what has been made to serve in its place."

liberalism, a study of Hebrew religion. Thus while the language
of biblical theology is God-centered, the whole is included
within gigantic parentheses marked 'human religion.'[601]

According to Gilkey, the problem of theology is related to change of meaning of religious language within the epistemology of modernism. Within the pre-modern world, Scripture was understood as presenting the world in an accurate way. The entrance of modernism radically challenged that confidence. Gilkey's conclusion is that normative theology based on a modern epistemology is impossible due to fact that this epistemology, by its own presuppositions, does not discuss YHWH as agent. The interesting conclusion of Gilkey's article is that the meaning of religious language changes from referring to YHWH in a univocal sense to referring to YHWH only in an equivocal sense. Verbs and nouns lose their literal meaning as observable actions in space and time:

> Our problem is, therefore, twofold: (a) We have not realized that
> this crucial shift has taken place, and so we think we are merely
> speaking the biblical language because we use the same words.
> We do use these words, but we use them analogically rather than
> univocally, and these are vastly different usages. (b) Unless one
> knows in some sense what the analogy means, how the analogy
> is being used, and what it points to, an analogy is empty and un-
> intelligible; that is, it becomes equivocal language. This is the
> crux of our present difficulty; …[602]

Gilkey also argues that there is a huge difference between a theological proposition that claims that "the God of Israel is merciful" and a religious historical proposition that claims that "ancient Israel defines God as merciful." Gilkey explains the difference:

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[601] Langdon B. Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *JR*: 41:3, (1961): 197.
[602] Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," 196.

> For, as biblical scholars have reminded us, a religious confession that is biblical is a direct recital of God's acts, not a recital of someone else's belief, even if it be a recital of a Hebrew recitation. If, therefore, Christian theology is to be the recitation in faith of God's mighty acts, it must be composed of confessional and systematic statements of the form: 'We believe that God did so and so,' and not composed of statements of biblical the- ology of the form: 'The Hebrews be- lieved that God did so and so.'[603]

Relating first Gilkey's criticism to Brueggemann, he is aware of the problem that Gilkey presents:

> In addition to Israel's speech about God, much in the Old Testament is *spoken by God* to Israel. For our purposes, I do not make a distinction between the two modes of speech, because even where God speaks, the text is *Israel's testimony* that God has spoken so.[604]

The critical question to ask is as follows: could it be that Brueggemann actually uses a historical approach in *ToT* and not a theological one because his guiding questions is: "How does ancient Israel, in this text, speak about God?" Following Gilkey's reasoning, this is a historical question and not a theological question. Brueggemann is aware that "there are many scholars who discount the God-speech of Israel in the name of 'disinterested' scholarship, who refuse theological questions on the ground of 'history…'"[605] Moreover, he also admits that his theology comes from the lips of Israel, i.e. it is specifically testimony.[606] However, we have to accept that if he had followed Gilkey's criteria, he would have asked: "how does God speak in this text to Israel?"[607] However,

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[603] Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," 198.
[604] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 117.
[605] Brueggemann, "The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation," 80.
[606] Brueggemann, "The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation*,*" 78: "More specifically, we may say that intentional human speech about God is testimony, an attempt to give a particular account of reality with this God as agent and as character at its center."
[607] In a response to *ToT*, see Childs, "A Review by Brevard Childs and a Response," 172-73. Childs argues that Brueggemann "initially stands on the side of those scholars who view the Hebrew Scripture simply as a record of the religion of Israel to be studied phenomenologically,

I would argue that an important remark has to be made which changes the calculations. Whereas Gilkey's criticism focuses attention on a modern epistemology, Brueggemann's epistemology, as shown in chapter 4, is not modern, but postmodern. I therefore argue that this circumstance escapes Gilkey's critical assessments. A modern epistemology is preoccupied with answering the historical question: "what happened?" Brueggemann however, ignores this question and instead presupposes that the testimonies contain theological information:

> To take Israel's God-speech as revelatory means that it is utterance that seeks to speak about a mystery that attends to and indwells the world in which Israel lives. That mystery, according to Israel's utterance, is on the loose, wild and dangerous, often crude, inaccessible, unattractive, capable of violence, equally capable of positive transformation.[608]

Additionally, Brueggemann also involves faith as a basic presupposition in his approach. Believing the testimonies, he argues, means that if they are accepted as real within the ecclesial community, there is a gateway into a theological reality. The epistemological foundation based on the testimonies is here combined with a faith assertion within the ecclesial community—an assertion that Plantinga supported as a justified belief (see chapter 4). If we continue this reasoning, we can say that Brueggemann's faith assertion incorporated into his imaginative thinking, and even further developed by Vanhoozer's understanding of Ricoeur's understanding of the witness, creates a theological mode of knowledge that makes it possible to describe his approach as theological. The

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and thus he *recognizes* in the biblical text the confessional element of Israel's voice offering a witness to its experience with its God. But now the crucial hermeneutical issue turns on how one evaluates Israel's own testimony." Brueggemann argues that there is no need to make a distinction between Israel's speech about God and God's speech. See *Theology of the Old Testament,* 117: "In addition to Israel's speech about God, much in the Old Testament is *spoken by God* to Israel. For our purposes, I do not make a distinction between the two modes of speech, because even where God speaks, the text is *Israel's testimony* that God has spoken so." See also Gershom, *Mitzvoth Ethics and the Jewish Scripture*, 93, who argues that Brueggemann presents a description of what Israel says about God: "In other words: Brueggemann's subject is the ancient Jews' speech about God."

[608] Brueggemann, "The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation," 79.

witness has an ontological contact with God and the testimonies that are presented, formed by human imagination, contain theological testimonies.

5.7 NON-REFERENTIAL OR EXTRA-REFERENTIAL?

As noted in the introduction and chapter 3, Rendtorff asked an important question how Brueggemann refers to God in *ToT*. The first answer to this question is that Brueggemann seems to suggest a non-referential hermeneutics in *ToT*. In the Hungarian introduction to *ToT* he advocates the formulation that God "only exists in, with, and, under the text and nowhere else":

> It is of course a danger to confine God to the pages of this testimony. I knew that when I wrote it. In my judgment, however, it is a greater danger to reduce this peculiar God to the commonplace and the generic.[609]

He makes an even more obvious non-referential assertion in *ToT*:

> …others are making a positive effort to reach outside the text to get at the 'really real'– at the God who is outside and beyond the text, so that the text references beyond itself. This push, it appears to me, is pursued in the conviction that the utterance-becomes-text itself is not adequate,[610]

Moreover, according to George Aichele, a specific postmodern feature is the denial of an extra-referential perspective.[611] Moberly explicitly argues that Brueggemann is a representative of a non-referential or postmodern approach,

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[609] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 37.
[610] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 721: "Conversely, in a reaction against such debunking historicism, others are making a positive effort to reach outside the text to get at the 'really real'—at the God who is outside and beyond the text, so that the text references beyond itself." He refers at p. 721 note 2 to Childs as representive of an extra - referential perspective. In this note he also argues that his opinion is similar to that of Barth's.
[611] See Georg Aichele, *The Control of Biblical Meaning, Canon as Semiotic Mechanism* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 2001), 100: "Language no longer denotes extra textual truth, but instead language is an exercise of power…."

because he does not intend to refer to God outside the text.[612] Tod Linafelt and Timothy Beal, former students of Brueggemann, also argue that he is representative of a non-referential hermeneutics.[613] However, in contrast to Moberly, Linafelt and Beal, Strawn argues that Brueggemann presents an ontology that refers to a reality outside the text.[614] Strawn asks the rhetorical question:

> If there is no God beyond the text, there is, ultimately, no real [or ultimate] reason for Brueggemann to pay such urgent attention to the texts, nor to call *from* them *beyond* them—as he so often and consistently does—to urgent contemporary matters including everything from religious affect to social policy.[615]

Strawn refers back to Brueggemann's earlier books as proof of an extra-referential hermeneutics in his theology.[616] Brueggemann, in a response to Strawn, Linafelt and Beal, sums up the discussion with the following words: "more work to do on that!"[617] My own conclusion is that Strawn, even though stand-

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[612] See Moberly, review of Brueggemann, 102: "At the risk of oversimplifying, it seems to me that there are two basic options in Old Testament theology. One is to hold that although we have no access to God except via the language of scripture and appropriate ways of living, such language and living are media of engagement with a reality beyond themselves [a 'classic' position]. The other is to hold that the language and living themselves constitute the reality of God, and there is no 'further reality' beyond them [a 'postmodern' position]. Brueggemann, as far as I can see [unless I misunderstand him] has opted for the latter, and in so doing has surrendered something that Jews and Christians alike down the ages [*mutatis mutandis*] have believed to be integral to their faiths."

[613] See Beal and Linafelt, "This Particular Manifestation of Holiness," 85-86.

[614] Strawn, "On Walter Brueggemann," 26-31.

[615] See Strawn, "On Walter Brueggemann," 29 ff.

[616] Strawn, "On Walter Brueggemann," 30, note 82 and 31, note 87. In these notes, Strawn refers to quotations from *ToT*, books and articles wherein he finds proofs that Brueggemann expresses an extra-referential position.

[617] See also Brueggemann, Walter. "A Response," in *Imagination, Ideology & Inspiration Echoes of Brueggemann in a New Generation.* (ed. J. Kaplan and R. Jr Williamson; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 294: "I have no doubt that the key issue Strawn raises is about 'ontology' and more specifically my costly phrase 'nowhere else and in no other way.' I might have said that better and differently and saved myself a lot of trouble, though I do not know how to say it better, even while I recognize how problematic that is. I do not believe that saying 'God' more insistently or more loudly [as Strawn does not propose] makes ontology any more compelling. I am appreciative of the way in which Timothy Beal and Tod Linafelt have paid attention to my intention in that phrase, which led me yet again to judge my confession about 'nowhere else and in no other way' is not so easily dismissed. More work to do on that!"

ing alone, is standing firm in his analysis. There are more precisely five compelling arguments which demonstrate that Brueggemann intends to refer to YHWH in an extra-referential way.

Firstly, as referred to by Strawn, there are books prior to *ToT*, e.g. an article in 1985, later published in *Old Testament Theology, Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (1992), where Brueggemann argues that the theological discipline presupposes a reality outside the text:

> Old Testament theology, as distinct from sociological, literary, or historical analysis, must assume some kind of *realism* in the text—that the poets and narrators in Israel do, in fact, speak the mind of God...
>
> …In claiming this realism, I mean to reject the notion that these texts are simply human probings or imagination as Israel discovers more of God and finds, in fact that the stern God is gracious.[618]

He stresses that the reader cannot read the biblical text only from a sociological point of view. He claims the same option in his article "Futures in Old Testament Theology":

> In some ways, the practice of Old Testament theology is continuous with and builds upon other methods and disciplines in the field. In some other ways, however, it is distinctive, distinctive because the word 'theology' makes a claim. Old Testament theology is not simply a synonym for 'value' or 'meaning,' but it has implicit within it a substantive acknowledgement. Or to say it another way, Old Testament theology is not free to handle the

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[618] I have quoted from Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 19. First published in Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation", *CBQ* 47 (1985): 28-46. Reprinted [Same title] in Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 1-21.

text only in relation to its 'sense' but also must attend to its 'reference.'[619]

In sum, prior to *ToT*, there is no doubt that Brueggemann argues that the text refers to God outside the text.

Secondly, he writes in *ToT* that Old Testament theology is not "the same enterprise as commenting on one text at the same time. Its work is to construe out of the texts a rendering of God."[620] In the introduction to *A Social Reading of the Old Testament* Miller writes that the phrase *a rendering of God* is a "favorite term" for Brueggemann.[621] I argue that this phrase alludes to a theological intention which, at the very least, implies an extra-referential position.

Thirdly, as we concluded in the first part of this chapter, for him reality and speech coincide. This means for him in *ToT* that the biblical text "operates with ontological assumptions …"[622] Moreover, he explains his own point of view on ontology as follows; the biblical texts are "constitutive of reality…" In this sense, he seems to presuppose a reality outside the text, not without the text, but a reality that coincides *in*, *with*, and *under* the text:

> It is my judgment that as far as Israel is concerned, 'being' is established in and through speech and not behind it. It is not my intention to be anti-ontological. It is rather to insist that whatever might be claimed for ontology in the purview of Israel's speech can be claimed only in and through testimonial utterance. That is, once the testimony of Israel is accepted as true – once one believes what it claims – one has ontology, one has reality of Yahweh. [623]

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[619] I have quoted from Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 112. First published in Walter Brueggemann, "Futures in Old Testament Theology," *HBT* 6 (1984): 1-11.

[620] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 267.

[621] See Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament,* 2. According to Miller, "…our reading of the presentation, or 'rendering'—to use a favorite term Brueggemann borrows from Dale Patrick—of God in the Scripture is very much shaped by our social situation, and one of Brueggemann's aims is to shatter our *picture* of the biblical God by the *reality* of the biblical God."

[622] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 66.

[623] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 713. See also 714 note 21.

This quotation clearly implies an ontology that is accessible "in and through testimonial utterance." Believing in these testimonies is the gateway to the reality of YHWH. As already demonstrated, Brueggemann stresses that the rhetorical character of the text defines the ontology in his theology:

> I do not which to claim that these textual utterances make no assumptions about being, but I do wish to recognize that such assumptions depend on speech for their establishment as viable, credible claims. While there is assumed reality outside the text [God], that assumed reality depends on utterance for force, authority, and availability in the community. God in the Old Testament is not a mere rhetorical product, but is endlessly in the process of being rhetorically reconstructed.[624]

Fourthly, when he presents theological arguments that there is a tension within God, it seems that he wants to present a normative description of how the God of Israel, YHWH, actually should be understood. The tension in the texts, he writes, must be defined as a theological tension:

> In many texts, but in exemplar fashion in Exodus 34:6-7, we have seen that, if the text is to be taken as 'witnesses to the real,' the ground of dispute is not to be found simply in modern, undisciplined pluralism or in Israel's ancient disputatiousness, but in the very character of Yahweh.[625]

The rhetorical tension has a corresponding theological tension: "Israel pushed the tension theologically and rhetorically, until it had pushed it into the very life, character, and person of Yahweh."[626] The witnesses present evidence of a theological tension:

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[624] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 65, note 11.
[625] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 715.
[626] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 272.

Old Testament theology must recognize that certain texts celebrate the convergence of sovereignty and pathos. Perhaps these texts should be regarded as normative for theological interpretation and allowed to govern other texts. Nonetheless, the witnesses of Yahweh also give powerful evidence that things are not so coherent for Yahweh.[627]

Fifth and finally, at the beginning of *ToT* Brueggemann reflects that …

…the restless character of the text that refuses excessive closure, which von Rad understood so well, is reflective of the One who is its main Character, who also refuses tameness or systematization. *Thus it is the very God uttered in these texts who lies behind the problem of perspective and method.*[628]

Brueggemann criticizes those who understand the "Violence of God" as only "human projections" and not as theological data, and writes that such a conclusion is a form of *contemporary Marcionism* "in which we simply choose the 'best parts' of the text as reliable."[629] Instead he argues that "Israel had to reckon with a theological discernment that consists in a profound disjunction that is not only a matter of lived experience but also a crucial theological datum."[630]

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[627] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 309.
[628] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 42.
[629] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament: Revisited," 30: "Since the publication of my book, we have, in U.S. scholarship of late, given much attention to 'the violence of God' in the text, both in the war narratives of the Book of Joshua and in the savage rhetoric of the prophets. It is usual now to conclude that such 'texts of violence' are ideological human projections and are not to be taken seriously as theological data. But that finesse strikes me as a contemporary form of Marcionism, in which we simply choose the 'best parts' of the text as reliable." See also Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God,* 238 who argues in a similar way: "Second, there are ways of disposing of those parts of the tradition with which one does not agree… This is a very seductive method…"
[630] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 309-310.

5.8 CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 5 consisted of two main parts. In the first part, Brueggemann was compared by help of Vanhoozer with three important role models for a postmodern hermeneutic; Ricoeur, Derrida, and Lindbeck. Three elements were suggested to describe the structure in his hermeneutics. Brueggemann pays special attention to *the written testimony, imagination* and *the Jewish traditions*. In the second part his use of religious language was analyzed and the way biblical texts refer to a possible reality outside the text was examined. The study of Gilkey concludes that Brueggemann's approach shares a similarity with a history of religious approach because he actually asks the historical question "how does Israel in this text describe God" in *ToT* and not the theological question "how does God speak in this text?" However, in his epistemology we have concluded that he avoids the predetermined question that surrounds a modern reading, i.e. "what really happened?" This fact makes his epistemology becoming theological; it is faith in the testimonies of Israel that is required. Concerning biblical referentiality, I suggested five arguments that support Strawn's opinion that Brueggemann has an extra-referential hermeneutics. He emphasizes a theological conviction that there is a possible ontological reality mediated in, with, and under the text. In a similar way as Christ is present *in, with, and under* the bread and wine, Brueggemann seems to argue that YHWH lives *in, with, and under* the text. Brueggemann's hermeneutics then must conclude that the rhetorical tension in the text has a corresponding theological tension within YHWH. I would argue that this conclusion is not necessary to accept and this topic will be examined in the third and last part of this study.

PART III IN SEARCH OF YHWH

According to John Goldingay (1942-), Brueggemann wants to describe, in a normative way, the attributes of YHWH, the God of Israel.[631] This reflection from Goldingay's side is interesting to analyze because this normative intention on Brueggemann's counter-testimony would have serious theological implications for the church. Questions that logically searches for an answer is whether Brueggemann's concept of God is in accordance with the ontological being that is referred to in the Old Testament. Is it possible to withhold unity in the concept of God amid the visible diversity in the testimonies? His most frequent counterpart, Brevard Childs emphasizes that the Rule of Faith is not an isolated idea without connection to the Old Testament, arguing rather that it is in conjunction with a Christian reflection of the Old Testament. This means that the Rule of Faith functions to conserve the understanding of a unity in the concept of God whereas Brueggemann wants to emphasize that the Rule of Faith is the end result of the interpretation of the Old Testament. Here emerges a watershed for Brueggemann in relation to Childs's approach. In order to offer a deeper understanding of the question of a possible unity in the concept of God amid diverse testimonies, I will suggest that Brueggemann's distinction of core and counter-testimony could be used as an organzing principle, not as a theological conclusion. However, his distinction of God *above* the fray and *in* the fray, slightly modified as God above the fray and Israel in the fray, could be used as a theological conclusion.

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[631] John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 19: "Like Walter Brueggemann (I think) and unlike David Clines, I want to try to subject my framework of thinking to the Old Testament's." According to Goldingay, Clines argues that there are only relative truth statements in the Old Testament, whereas, in contrast, Goldingay argues that he and Brueggemann attempts to present a normative Old Testament theology.

CHAPTER 6 RULE OF FAITH AS LENS OR AS RESULT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Brueggemann's theological conception of God in the Old Testament, YHWH, he becomes involved in an important disagreement with Childs concerning the correct understanding of the Rule of Faith. Childs argues that the Rule of Faith as described by the Church Fathers is necessary for a correct description of the God that is revealed in the Old Testament. Brueggemann disagrees. It is interesting to analyze this disagreement. The Rule of Faith (Latin: *regula fidei*) is visible already in the New Testament[632] and was naturally established during the patristic period, closely related to the Church Fathers Irenaeus of Lyon and Tertullian. This rule can be seen partly as a defense against Gnosticism and partly as a hermeneutical principle in biblical interpretation. The Rule of Faith implies a guideline for understanding the Bible as Christian Scripture. The rule implies that the Christian God is presupposed before any encounter with the text.[633] The term played a continuing important role in the Reformation when Luther, in opposition to the Rule of Faith as defined within the Roman Catholic Church, furthered the Analogy of Faith (*analogia fidei*) as a principle of interpretation: Scripture alone, *sola scriptura,* he argued*,* should be the foundation and determine the doctrines of the Church.[634] At first sight the Rule of Faith seems unimportant for Brueggemann. However, in his encounter with Childs' approach, this rule becomes a hermeneutical cliff between them and the comparison between him and Childs concerning the Rule of Faith forges a deeper insight into Brueggemann's concept of God. In short, chapter 6 demonstrates that whereas Childs argues for a return

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[632] See e.g. Romans 12:6: ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα, εἴτε προφητείαν, κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως.

[633] E.g. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 105: "The *Regula Fidei* [Rule of Faith] requires that we should first of all believe in the God of the Father and Lord Omnipotent; that is, the absolutely perfect Founder of all things."

[634] Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral, A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 11.

to the Rule of Faith as a lens or as a basic structure in biblical interpretation, Brueggemann argues that this kind of hermeneutical pre-understanding precludes the text from conforming to a dogmatic concept of God. Instead, he argues that the result of the interpretation of the Scripture gives the Rule of Faith. My impression then is that understanding the Rule of Faith is of utmost importance in order to evaluate Brueggemann's incorporation of core and counter-testimonies that together form his concept of God with a tension at the core. According to Brueggemann, a reading informed by the Rule of Faith forecloses or reduces the interpretation prior to any encounter with the text:

> Childs's proposal seems difficult and problematic on many counts. Childs's project strikes this writer as massively reductionist. To limit the reading of the Old Testament text to what is useful for Christian theology—That is, for witness to Jesus Christ—means that much in the text must be disregarded.[635]

According to Brueggemann, Childs's understanding of the Rule of Faith is a hermeneutical impasse: "The odd outcome of such a statement is an unqualified embrace of the Tridentine inclination to subject the text and its possible interpretation to the control of church categories."[636] Childs, however, is critical of Brueggemann's attempt at interpreting the Old Testament. He argues that Brueggemann has missed fulfilling the intention of serving the church with a confessing theology:

> The saddest part of the proposal is that Walter Brueggemann is sincerely striving to be a confessing theologian of the Christian

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[635] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 92. Even though Brueggemann is critical towards Childs, it is also important to stress his appreciation of him. E.g. Brueggemann, review of Childs, 284: "Given these not inconsiderable wonderments, I have no doubt that, once again, Childs is the teacher of us all. He will move theologians, teachers, and preachers to greater nerve and passion, a nerve and passion not grounded in methodological cleverness or shrewdness but in nothing less than the truth, the 'solid rock on which I stand.' And even where one disagrees, we are mightily instructed, informed, and admonished."
[636] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 92.

church, and would be horrified at being classified as a most elo-
quent defender of the Enlightenment, which his proposal respect-
ing the biblical canon actually represents.[637]

The above juxtaposition describes a fundamental problem for the discipline of
Old Testament theology. Should an Old Testament theology presuppose any
dogmatic principles before the encounter with the text or should the text deter-
mine the result? The answer seems at first sight to favor the latter. However,
as we have seen, Brueggemann's theology has presented a concept of God with
a tension which is deeply problematic. Therefore, it is interesting to compare
the proposals put by both him and Childs. How do they converge and how do
they differ? Should the Rule of Faith be understood as a lens in biblical inter-
pretation or as the result of biblical interpretation?

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Dennis T. Olson argues that Brueggemann and Childs stand closer in orienta-
tion than expected.[638] Olson lists six common theological presuppositions:

1) They both consider the present form of the text as the proper starting
   point for a biblical theology.
2) Biblical theology must be fully aware of the diversity of the biblical
   witnesses.
3) There is an inherent reductionism in the work of biblical theology.
4) Biblical theology is enhanced by a dialogue between different social,
   cultural, and religious contexts.
5) The practice of biblical theology is always provisional.
6) Biblical interpretation is always contextual.

Olson's analysis is worth emphasizing. However, it is obvious that there are
disagreements, which result in totally different presentations of the God in the
Old Testament. In what follows, I structure the comparison of Brueggemann

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[637] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 73.
[638] Olson, "Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization," 170.

and Childs using Olson's six presuppositions and critically analyze in what ways they agree and disagree.

With regard to the first basic agreement, the present form of the text, it is obvious that both Brueggemann and Childs start in the final form of the text. Moreover, Brueggemann bases his understanding of canon upon Childs's impressive work in this regard. From Brueggemann's perspective, it is important to stress that he appreciates Childs's canonical perspective because it functions as a way out of the hegemony of the historical-critical method. Brueggemann writes: "…Childs in his canonical perspective resists the fragmentation of the text by seeking to read all parts of the texts in terms of the whole."[639] Turning our eyes to Childs's understanding of the canon it is worth mentioning that a correct understanding of the canonical approach is to place it in close relationship with the Rule of Faith, wherein the formation of the historical canon functions in itself "much like a *regula fidei.*"[640] Moreover, to claim a canonical approach within biblical theology is to claim the normative character of the word of God.[641] Childs explains:

> The text of Scripture points faithfully to the divine reality of Christ while, at the same time, our understanding of Jesus Christ leads us back to the Scripture, rather than away from it.[642]

However, an important difference is that Brueggemann stresses that the interpreter of the text is the main carrier of canonical identity, and not the text itself.

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[639] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 85.
[640] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 71: "I also stressed in this description of the canonical shaping the enormous variety at work on the different levels of composition. This shaping activity functioned much like a *regula fidei."* See also Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context,* 84. Chen makes the following important analysis of Childs' thinking: "The idea of combining the canon with regula fidei is for Childs a way of emphasizing the importance for the Christian church of understanding the Holy Scripture theologically and of using it boldly in the modern secularized age."
[641] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 100.
[642] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 103.

According to Childs, this would mean that Brueggemann denies a literal meaning of the text.[643] Childs also stresses that the Church never can make a book canonical, the Church can only bear witness to the divine Origin of Scripture. The Church accepts the Scripture as the Word of God and at the same time seeks to understand its origin: "These texts as Scripture of the Church are witnesses to a divine reality."[644] Explaining this in more detail, Childs starts from the position that the canonical text is primarily based on the authority of the apostles.[645] He admits that the canon—he suggests a narrow canon of 66 authoritative books—has no strict boundaries and that the early Church did not have a perfect understanding of it. Nevertheless, the fixed canon of 66 books can be traced within the tradition of the Church.[646] Childs relates the interpretation of Scripture to what he calls the *canonical intentionality* of the text.[647] By using this term he means the confession "along with the church to the unique function that these writings have had in its life and faith as Sacred Scripture."[648] He explains the canonical intention of the text by way of the following example:

> …the book of Deuteronomy, which arose historically in the late monarchial period of Israel's history, was assigned a particular canonical function as interpreter of the law by its structure and position within the Pentateuch….[649]

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[643] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 72. Childs argues for "the conviction that the biblical text and its theological function as authoritative form belong inextricably together."

[644] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 112. If we compare Childs with Brueggemann, the following difference emerge; whereas Brueggemann argues that after the text, one has reality, Childs presupposes a reality prior to the text.

[645] Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context,* 84. The authority of the Apostles was a criterion used by the early Christian church "to guarantee the oral and written continuity of the apostolic witness to its faith in Jesus Christ."

[646] Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context,* 52: "Childs argues that the NT canon did not fall from heaven, and that the early Christian church did not claim that it had created a canon; rather, the early church aimed to discern among competing claims what it recognized as apostolic, though this process took hundreds of years and involved much controversy and uncertainty."

[647] Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context*, 80-82.

[648] Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context,* 80.

[649] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 71.

The problem for Childs is to justify this canonical intentionality of the text. He argues that the canonical intention of the text can only be understood within the framework of and on the presupposition of a faith within the community of the Church. Childs's way of describing the canonical intention in relation to the community of the Church actually shares a kind of similarity with Brueggemann's focus on the canonical interpreter of the text. However, there is one difference which is important to stress: Childs argues for a latent or frozen meaning in the text that the modern interpreter is capable of finding. He stresses the existence of a literal, canonical intention in the text, whereas Brueggemann stresses that the canonical intention exists within the mindset of the interpreter in the midst of the community.[650] This means that Brueggemann primarily situates the meaning of the text within the community that interprets the text, whereas Childs primarily stresses that the text itself has an inherent canonical identity and that there are obvious literary signs that prove this fact. Brueggemann argues for a more open interpretation that is formed in part by the community that interprets the text. He insists that "the canon of the OT itself contains suspicion as a part of its canonical claim."[651]

Finally, worth emphasizing, is that when Brueggemann relates the canon to imagination, he actually places a kind of Rule of Faith that guides the interpretation. The *canonical interpreter* uses *imagination* in an equivalent way to Childs's Rule of Faith. In this way imagination stands outside the text and forms the text and interprets it. Brueggemann writes: "The canon is an act of bold, venturesome *imagination* that is concerned to ground and sustain a peculiar community."[652]

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[650] Brueggemann discusses this topic in *Interpretation and Obedience,* 120: "It would be more helpful to claim this or assert authority in the *content* of the literature [a substantive articulation of what is true] than to try to assert authority in the literary *shape* of the material."
[651] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 115.
[652] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope*, 41.

With regard to the second basic agreement, that biblical theology must be fully aware of the *diversity* of the biblical *witnesses*, let us first pay attention to the term *diversity* and then secondly, *witnesses.* On *diversity,* Brueggemann explains it in his review of Childs' *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* from 1985:

> Specifically, Childs regularly recognizes 'diversity' in the witnesses but then works promptly and readily toward a unity of witness that is voiced in Christological categories. While Childs acknowledges diversity in the witnesses, he insists that the text is stable, that it has a persistent, clear meaning. I submit that this is a reader-response decision on Childs's part to which he is entitled, but it is not self-evident.[653]

Brueggemann's conclusion is that Childs stresses the diversity in the text. However, they draw different hermeneutical conclusions of this shared observation. Childs works towards a unity of the text whereas Brueggemann works towards diversity or tension, stressing the polyphonic and elusive character of the text.[654] Concerning the biblical *witnesses*, both scholars agree that the perspective in the Old Testament must be on Israel as the subject, i.e. Israel is the witness who presents the testimony. Childs writes: "The position which is being defended in this book is that the object of historical study is Israel's own testimony to God's redemptive activity."[655] Defending this starting point in his theology, Childs' approach has three hermeneutical implications. Firstly, Israel has a privileged role, a normative role in relation to other religions. Secondly, the focus in biblical theology should be on defining the text as witness and not as the source. This implies that the testimonies refer to a divine reality. Thirdly, the history that these witnesses describe is Israel's canonical history, which

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[653] Brueggemann, review of Childs, 282.
[654] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 731: "One must recognize that the Old Testament is powerfully polyphonic in its testimony, both in its substantive claims and in its characteristically elusive modes of articulation."
[655] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 97.

means that this history is the authoritative history. Childs's conclusion is that neither the conservative nor the liberal approach to Scripture has succeeded on this point:

> Because I do not feel that either of these two theological reactions to modern historical-critical scholarship has been successful, I would like to outline a different approach which I shall attempt to employ in the more detailed historical analysis of Israel's traditions which follows.[656]

Childs's outline concerning the biblical witnesses closely parallels Brueggemann's approach in this regard. Brueggemann also begins with Israel as witness, i.e. Israel is the subject and YHWH the object. He is not impressed by neither the liberal nor the conservative approach. However, alongside these two similarities, there are also striking differences. Brueggemann stresses that Israel's testimony is to be found within the whole text corpus of the canonical books, regardless of genre. Childs argues that the biblical testimony is found in "its historical, literary, and canonical context."[657] Childs argues that God is never the object alongside other objects. God is always the knowing subject who knows us first. By grace YHWH can reveal his nature to mankind. The object of our knowing, i.e. God, is then always subject in a theological sense.[658] Understanding Israel as a witness involves both "divine and human agency."[659] Childs writes:

> Rather, it is constitutive of true interpretation to move within a circle which encompasses both the movement from text to reality as well as from reality to the text.[660]

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[656] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 99.
[657] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 379.
[658] Selby, *The Comical Doctrine*, 44-45.
[659] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 9: "The role of the Scripture is not being understood simply as a cultural expression of ancient peoples, but as testimony pointing beyond itself to a divine reality to which it bears witness."
[660] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 381.

Childs also stresses the importance of the Holy Spirit, not as a hermeneutical principle but as a theological principle.[661] The Spirit is necessary in order to understand the text:

> If the church confesses that the spirit of God opens up the text to a perception of its true reality, it also follows that the Spirit also works in applying the reality of God in its fullness to an understanding of the text.[662]

In Brueggemann's approach, the above reflection of God as the ultimate subject, known by grace, and any discussion of the Holy Spirit is notably absent.[663] For him, revelation takes part in the community, after the process of court.

With regard to the third basic agreement, that there is an inherent reductionism in the work of biblical theology, both affirm a reductionism, but on different grounds. Brueggemann admits that the discipline as such implies a thematization of the text material. This necessarily implies a kind of reductionism.[664] However, as commented above, he criticizes Childs of reductionism due to his understanding of the canon.[665] Brueggemann endeavors to show the polyphonic tension in the text. Childs endeavors to construct his approach around

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[661] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 87: "The Christian doctrine of the role of the Holy Spirit is not a hermeneutical principle, but that divine reality itself who makes understanding of God possible."

[662] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 382.

[663] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 121: "Here we touch on the difficulty of the authority of Scripture, which has usually been articulated in the scholastic categories of inspiration and revelation. It is simpler and more helpful, I believe, to recognize that when utterance in the Bible is taken as truthful, human testimony is taken as revelation that discloses the true reality of God."

[664] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 267: "Doing Old Testament theology is not finally the same enterprise as commenting on one text at a time. Its work is to construe out of the texts a rendering of God. But at the same time, this work of thematization [not systematization] is the great hazard of an Old Testament theology."

[665] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament, a Prompt Retrospect," 315.

the risen Christ and stresses a Christian reading of the Old Testament.[666] This makes one conclude that Childs has a specifically *Christian* approach.

With regard to the fourth basic agreement, that biblical theology is enhanced by a dialogue between different social, cultural and religious contexts, the difference between Brueggemann and Childs is quite limited, with one exception, the sociological method. Brueggemann is very positive to Gottwald's sociological approach, whereas Childs argues that Gottwald's sociological approach introduces a critical perspective to the concept of revelation.[667] Childs concludes that the sociological method decreases the differences between sociology and theology and therefore it becomes difficult to discern the real truth behind the confession of the text. Instead, for him, the canon presents the text as it should be understood.[668] Childs and Brueggemann both acknowledge the importance of a dialogue between Old Testament theology and the historical-critical method. Childs uses the historical-critical method, but at the same time he argues that it is…

> …an inadequate method for studying the Scripture as the Scriptures of the church because it does not work from the needed context. This is not to say for a moment that the critical method is incompatible with the Christian faith – we regard the fundamentalist position as indefensible – but rather that the critical

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[666] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 86: "But the heart of the enterprise is Christological; its content is Jesus Christ and not its own self-understanding or identity. Therefore the aim of the enterprise involves the classic movement of faith seeking knowledge, of those who confess Christ struggling to understand the nature and will of the One who has already been revealed as Lord."

[667] Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 25: "Gottwald's attempt to replace biblical theology with biblical sociology by offering examples of his method of demythologizing the tradition only illustrates the high level of reductionism at work."

[668] Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context,* 25: "To claim that these confessions are simply symbolic expressions of common social phenomena not only renders the uniquely biblical witness mute, but destroys the need for closely hearing the text on its verbal level."

method, when operating from its own chosen context, is incapable of either raising or answering the full range of questions which the church is constrained to direct to its Scripture.[669]

Brueggemann ultimately seems to be more negative towards the historical-critical method than Childs. He argues that the historical-critical method "cannot tolerate intellectual or theological claims and affirmations that run against its thin objectivism, which is itself an acknowledged intellectual, theological claim."[670] With regard to the Jewish tradition, it is important to acknowledge that both emphasize the Jewish heritage but elaborate in different directions; in Brueggemann's case towards an acknowledgement of the Jewish heritage, in Childs's case towards a distinctive Christian confession.

The fifth and sixth basic agreements both concern the provisional character of biblical interpretations. Brueggemann and Childs stress that the proper context for the discipline of biblical theology is "within the community of faith that treasured them."[671] This means that of necessity there is a tradition that stands behind and forms their respective biblical interpretation. Brueggemann explains this fact aptly when he writes that "every interpretative gesture is a provisional one that must be adjudicated yet again."[672] In comparison with Childs, it is important to stress that he is a postmodern scholar whereas Childs stands close in orientation to a classical Christian confession. This means in sum that Childs's interpretation is formed by a doctrinal church theology going back to the Reformation and beyond, whereas Brueggemann is formed by approaches that stem in part from the epistemology of the postmodern context.

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[669] Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis,* 141. See also Levenson, "Is Really Brueggemann a Pluralist?" 273: "It is only when historical criticism gains a monopoly in the interpretive process, so that a theological reading of the Scripture in its integrity is ruled out of order, that Childs finds it 'a distorting enterprise.'"
[670] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 14.
[671] Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis,* 99. Compare with Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 745.
[672] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 711.

CONCLUSION: THE RULE OF FAITH IS THE WATERSHED

The main conclusion of the comparison of Brueggemann and Childs is that even though they have many apparent similarities they differ at a deeper level. The reason for their deeper level of disagreements deserves investigation and I will proceed by comparing Brueggemann with Childs on four areas, epistemology, hermeneutics, theology, and finally the Rule of Faith. Some comments on each of these areas introduce the importance of study:

Concerning epistemology, Collins' conclusion that both Childs and Brueggemann share a non-foundational epistemology must be analyzed.

Concerning hermeneutics, both Brueggemann and Childs have written commentaries on the book of Isaiah. This is interesting to compare.

Concerning theology, Childs accuses Brueggemann for a gnostic reading of the Old Testament and a gnostic concept of YHWH. What does this actually mean?

Concerning the Rule of Faith, we have already seen that this term creates a watershed between Brueggemann and Childs. An independent description of the Rule of Faith will be offered in order to suggest a conclusion how to understand this rule within the discipline of Old Testament theology.

6.2 DIFFERENT OR SIMILAR EPISTEMOLOGY?

As noted in chapter 4, Collins described both Brueggemann and Childs as non-foundationalists. Interestingly, Brueggemann defines Childs as a foundationalist. He argues that Childs's theological approach presupposes categories from outside the texts, categories that come from dogmatic statements prior to the text.[673] Moreover, in a letter to Arthur L. Merrill, Brueggemann notes that most of the critique concerning *ToT* comes from "Childs's people."[674] One such theologian who fits well into this group is Walter Moberly, who is closely connected with Childs. In a letter correspondence with Moberly, Brueggemann

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[673] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 92: "It is my impression that to force this text into such categories prepares the way for a programmatic misreading."

[674] See Walter Brueggemann, *Letter to Arthur L. Merrill,* March 9, 1999. See also Merrill, review of Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament. BSac 157 no 625* (2000): 109-11.

uses the term foundationalism when he criticizes Childs's approach. The background for the correspondence is that Moberly has written a handout review of *ToT*, in which he defends Childs against Brueggemann's criticism. Brueggemann thanks Moberly for letting him read a second and "greatly improved" version of this review. Brueggemann writes: "I do not think it matters at all that we disagree but that is different from simply dismissing the book. And in this draft I think you have not done that."[675] In the same letter to Moberly, Brueggemann discusses whether a CF or a NF epistemology should be used within the discipline of Old Testament theology:

> …foundationalism strikes me as a circular argument to prevent anything but evangelical from being said…. It might be useful, to reflect on "social location" in terms of the draw to foundationalism and non-foundationalism.[676]

Brueggemann also writes: "I suspect it would be fair if you would in the review also acknowledge there are deep problems in foundationalism as well."[677] In this letter he also sharply distances himself from Childs's approach:

> I am suspicious of Childs or anyone else who finds the 'more' in the history of doctrine that is derivative. Indeed, Childs seems very close to returning to Trent, wherein the text of the Scripture must yield to the claims of traditions, a judgment I reject….
>
> …I think we are dead in the water if we claim that the text of the Scripture must derive from and conform to the tradition. I do not think it has functioned that way in the great ones, and surely there is no gospel in such a move…. [678]

[675] Brueggemann, *Letter to Walter Moberly*, April 8, 1998.
[676] Brueggemann, *Letter to Walter Moberly*, April 8, 1998.
[677] Brueggemann, *Letter to Walter Moberly*, April 8, 1998.
[678] Brueggemann, *Letter to Walter Moberly*, April 8, 1998.

Finally, Brueggemann also responds to Childs's critique in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* and argues that the text must give the theology and not the other way around:

> If one cannot discuss the texts, then it seems to me that one is left
> with an 'up or down' decision about whether your particular way
> of saying things offers the final solution for interpretation. I can
> hardly imagine the claim of arriving at such a final solution that
> cannot be explored and critiqued by looking at texts. I would not
> have thought that one could so easily claim such high ground.[679]

Even though Brueggemann defines Childs as a foundationalist, it is important to stress that Childs defines himself as a non-foundationalist. As noted previously, he served as professor at Yale, where this epistemology has its origin. Childs writes "that the reality of God cannot be defined within any kind of foundationalist categories and then transferred to God. Rather, it is crucial that the reality of God be understood as primary."[680] Childs has also criticized the BThM for seeking to establish a foundation outside the text. Instead, he argues that "Scripture does not exist as a book of truth in itself, yet there is no church tradition independent of the Biblical text."[681]

In sum, there are many opinions concerning Childs and Brueggemann's epistemologies, and there is no doubt that they have quite different presuppositions in their theologies, e.g. Brueggemann focuses on the *testimony,* whereas Childs pays attention to canon/God as the foundation in his theology. However, I think that exactly this circumstance also could justify describing them both as weak foundationalist.

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[679] Brueggemann, *Letter to Walter Moberly*, April 8, 1998.
[680] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 82.
[681] Childs, *Theology in Crisis,* 103.

6.3 THE COMMENTARIES ON THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Both Brueggemann and Childs have written commentaries on the book of Isaiah.[682] After Childs published his Isaiah commentary, he also wrote the book *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture.* The purpose for Childs was to describe how Christians throughout centuries have interpreted Isaiah.[683] Childs has a chapter to postmodern interpretation and here Brueggemann is used as the role model. Childs is mainly critical towards post-modern hermeneutics:

> Many are negative: there is no single substantive concept of ra-
> tionality, no method leading to a scientific concept of the whole
> of reality, no single determinate meaning accessible to later gen-
> erations of interpreters, no sort of semantic property with which
> texts are imbued.[684]

However, Childs acknowledges Brueggemann as a postmodern theologian and a brilliant interpreter of homiletics:

> Brueggemann, as with many postmodernists, shares features of
> his interpretation with other approaches not dependent on post-
> modernism in origin, goals, and techniques….

> Finally one can see a further development of his use of postmod-
> ern categories in his *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997) that
> reflects a more radical postmodern formulation than found in his
> Isaiah commentary. Readers should also acknowledge
> Brueggemann's brilliant homiletical interpretations, which are
> often fresh, probing, and skillfully applied.[685]

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[682] Brevard Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah, Vol. 1: Chapters 1-39* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah, Vol. 2: Chapters 40-66* (Kentucky: West-minster John Knox Press, 1998).
[683] Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture,* x.
[684] Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture,* 291.
[685] Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture,* 292.

When comparing Brueggemann and Childs on Isaiah, the most striking difference is that Brueggemann divides his commentary into two volumes, Isaiah 1-39 and Isaiah 40-66, whereas Childs's commentary is in one book. No doubt, Childs accepts a first, second and third Isaiah, and in the commentary he also frequently relates to the historical-critical discussion of various authors of the book of Isaiah.[686] However, Childs also clearly wants to see a commentary in the service of the Church and believes that a commentary that treats the canonical shape of Isaiah is important for hearing the evangelical witness:

> The effect of coercion of the text itself in faithfully shaping the faith of the church—its doctrine, liturgy, and practice—in such a way as to leave a family resemblance of faith throughout the ages. In search of this goal, the voices of the great interpreters—Chrysostomon, Augustine, Thomas, Luther, Calvin—remain an enduring guide for truthfully hearing the evangelical witness of Isaiah in a manner seldom encountered since the Enlightenment.[687]

Brueggemann, like Childs, frequently refers to Calvin. Both share a reformed heritage, but in his commentaries on the book of Isaiah, as in *ToT*, Brueggemann, in contrast to Childs, is skeptical of the classical church theology that Calvin represents:

> Isaiah is enormously open in more than one direction. It is a matter of considerable importance, in my judgment, that Christians should not pre-empt the book of Isaiah… But that is very different from any claim that the book of Isaiah predicts or specifically anticipates Jesus. Such a pre-emption, as has often occurred in the reading of the church, constitutes not only a failure to respect Jewish readers, but is a distortion of the book itself.[688]

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[686] See Childs, *Isaiah,* 7.
[687] See Childs, *Isaiah,* 5.
[688] Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66,* 6.

His criticism against "classical Christianity" or "high theology" is also visible in his interpretation of Isaiah 54:7 where Brueggemann argues against Calvin's interpretation of the same verse. Whereas Calvin argues that this verse shows Israel's deepest feelings of despair in the face of God's abandonment, Brueggemann argues that the verse proves that God really abandons Israel:

> God's own testimony here is that *God did abandon Israel in exile.* What this means is that even though God's compassion overrides the moment of abandonment the verse is a testimony of God's real abandonment. In contrast, Calvin interprets this verse as Israel's feelings of despair.[689]

In relation to the historical-critical method that tends to describe the servant songs as later additions, Brueggemann argues that these songs should be treated as integrated parts of Isaiah 40-55.[690] The servant is "Israel and seems to have a mission to Israel."[691] Moreover, both Brueggemann and Childs are especially dependent upon Westermann's Second Isaiah commentary (Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66,* Westminster John Knox Press, 1969). Westermann's terms, e.g. *oracle of salvation*, *speech of disputations*, and *hymns* set the standard for defining the genre of the text for the interpretation. For example, Brueggemann writes: "Chapter 41 contains a series of speech of disputation and oracle of salvation. Together they permit the exile to see Yahweh."[692] He also comments: "This statement is meaningless if not the merciful also is powerful. Yahweh energizes, authorizes and empowers Israel do the safe."[693] Even though he frequently refers to Westermann's commentary, he also distances himself from Westermann's search behind the text. For Brueggemann, the recital of the texts is of primary concern:

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[689] Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66,* 153.
[690] Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66,* 141.
[691] Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66,* 13, 42.
[692] Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39,* 28.
[693] Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66,* 33, 128.

Israel's faith is rooted in a recital of ancient miracles that affirm the reality and force of Yahweh as the definitive player in its life.[694]

In sum, it is important to acknowledge that Childs chooses Brueggemann as the role model for a postmodern interpretation of the book of Isaiah. From their different interpretations of the book of Isaiah they orient in different directions. Whereas Childs stresses a commentary that could appeal to the evangelical witness of the Church, Brueggemann wants to pay attention to the wide range of possible interpretations which omit a specific Christian interpretation.

6.4 BRUEGGEMANN –A MODERN GNOSTIC?

Childs and Hanson criticize Brueggemann's concept of God as being *gnostic*. When they use such a strong term, they argue that Brueggemann's concept of God shares a similarity with the gnostic theologian Marcion who argued against the Church Father Irenaeus of Lyon and said that the God of the Old Testament is different from Jesus in the New Testament.[695] It is worth emphasizing that Irenaeus, who used the Rule of Faith in the debate against Marcion, did so primarily in order to defend the use of the Old Testament within the Christian tradition.[696] Childs, in his criticism of Brueggemann, argues in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* that Brueggemann has misunderstood the concept of canon.[697] According to Childs, the Scripture itself refers to biblical persons and presents Moses not Korah, Jeremiah not Hananiah and argues that they were considered to be credible witnesses of divine revelation. Therefore, when Brueggemann believes that the lament literature constitutes part of the counter-testimony, he actually cuts off access to understanding the lament literature as a constituent element in Israel's faith. Childs therefore accuses him of being

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[694] Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66,* 58.
[695] See also Childs, "Walter Brueggemann's Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy: A Review by Brevard Childs and a Response," 174-75.
[696] See Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (Create space Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), Chapter 10:1.—"Unity of the faith of the Church throughout the whole world."
[697] Childs, "Walter Brueggemann's Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy," 231.

Gnostic—Brueggemann's concept of God includes an unsolved dualism that actually does not exist and he has created a dualism by a mixture of rationalism and intuition. In sum, Childs believes that Brueggemann has turned in a negative way "the identity of the Church for future generations."[698]

Brueggemann responds to Childs' critical conclusion and he writes that Childs' "major charge against my book in his critique is that its 'closest' analogy is found in the early Church's struggle with Gnosticism."[699] According to Brueggemann, Childs has completely misunderstood him and accuses him of being a *Docetist* in the way he seeks to capture everything in a closed transcendental system.[700] When he characterizes Childs as a Docetist, he refers to the idea that Jesus only seemed to be a human, i.e. that Jesus´ human body was an illusion. During the doctrinal conflicts in the early Church, Docetism was rejected at the first council of Nicaea (325) and is regarded as heretical by those churches that accept the Nicene Creed. We can say that Brueggemann criticizes Childs' concept of God for neglecting the suffering to which the counter-testimony specifically refers. In contrast, Brueggemann defends his own concept of God. There is no dualism in his description of YHWH but a tension between self-regard and passion. For Brueggemann, this means that his concept of God tilts towards the suffering and pain that embraces the counter-testimony, as well God in his essence. He wants to achieve an approach that highlights those "other voices" that are visible in the Old Testament and give them a serious treatment. He also hesitates to agree that he has rejected "any appeal to an ecclesial reading."[701] His interpretation of the counter-testimony is therefore an example of Luther's "theology of the cross."[702] Likewise, his term *countertestimony* could also be termed "Good Friday" because Brueggemann argues that his reading of the Old Testament is a reading that is informed by the lived reality of the believing Church and here in particular there is a tension

[698] Childs, "Walter Brueggemann's Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy," 230.
[699] Brueggemann, "A Response to Professor Childs by Walter Brueggemann," 175.
[700] Brueggemann, "A Response to Professor Childs," 228.
[701] Brueggemann, "A Response to Professor Childs by Walter Brueggemann," 177.
[702] See Allister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Blackwell Publishing, 1990).

between crucifixion and resurrection. In this reading there are no "'large' claims" but rather a reading marked by attention to the silence and absence of God:

> In both liturgy and pastoral reality, one is endlessly aware of the disjunction and tension that must be faced and embraced and not overcome rationally. It is therefore not surprising that I am drawn to a particular range of texts in a certain way.[703]

Finally, Brueggemann reacts against Childs's canonical approach which forecloses a reading of the Scripture that will be "too costly for the faith of the church."'[704] Brueggemann also argues that the early appeal to the Rule of Faith is equivalent to the Rule of Love.[705]

6.5 DIFFERENT VIEWS ON THE RULE OF FAITH

It is crucial to understand the different understandings that Brueggemann and Childs have when it comes to use the Rule of Faith within Biblical theology. It is apparent that already in the 1980s Brueggemann disagreed with Childs's understanding of the Rule of Faith. In a review of Childs's book *The Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (1985) he writes:

> The book is a disappointment, because I had hoped that Childs's program would lead to a genuinely fresh shaping of Old Testament theology.[706]

Brueggemann ends this review with a hope that Childs's next work would "help us more on the matter of canonical construal". He could not have been more disappointed by the next book. In Childs's Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments, published in 1993, Childs has developed his approach to

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[703] Brueggemann, "A Response to Professor Childs by Walter Brueggemann," 177
[704] Brueggemann, "A Response to Professor Childs by Walter Brueggemann," 178.
[705] Brueggemann, "A Response to Professor Childs by Walter Brueggemann," 177.
[706] Walter Brueggemann, review of Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, *ThTo* (1985): 286.

a point which is completely unacceptable for Brueggemann. In ToT, he highlights Childs's development by making a sharp difference between the later Childs (1993) and the early Childs (1985). He accepts the early Childs of 1985, who argues that the text of the Old Testament "constitutes the Rule of Faith", but cannot accept the later Childs of 1993:

> Earlier, Childs had suggested that it is the shape of the text itself that constitutes the 'Rule of Faith for Christians. … In his recent book, however, Childs makes a major and problematic interpretative move. Now he concludes that the Scripture is to be read 'according to the Rule of Faith,' by which he now apparently means the doctrinal tradition of the church.[707]

Brueggemann fears the standpoint that Childs presented in 1993 because he believes that it will lead to a theological conclusion that is formed by Church doctrines prior to the encounter with text itself.[708] Brueggemann's own position is the opposite of Childs's. For him, the testimony of the Old Testament constitutes the Rule of Faith and such reading is not easy to submit to church theology.[709] Brueggemann writes:

> No amount of careful formulation can completely conceal the
> deep problematic of the Scripture's relation to church faith.[710]

In order to understand his criticism of Childs it is necessary to become acquainted more deeply with Childs's understanding of the Rule of Faith. L.G. Finn notes that to a large extent Childs is informed by the Swedish theologian

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[707] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 92. See also Fretheim for the same analysis as Brueggemann, Fretheim, review of Childs, 324.

[708] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 92: "The odd outcome of such a statement is an unqualified embrace of the Tridentine inclination to subject the text and its possible interpretation to the control of church categories."

[709] See Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* 394: "I do not believe that even in its most intentional and normative canonical achievement does the text serve so easily and so readily what subsequently became the church's *Rule of Faith.*"

[710] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 5.

Bengt Hägglund (1925-2015).[711] Hägglund takes an historical perspective on the Rule of Faith.[712] Hägglund describes four points of this rule that are important to highlight:

- The Rule of Faith is not the Scripture as such but it is equivalent to the content in the Scripture.
- The Rule of Faith does not concern a specific text or a fixed doctrine. Instead it is a guiding principle for the teaching in the Church.
- The presupposition for grasping the Rule of Faith is to treat it, not as the Creed or Scripture, but rather as faith which is in harmony with the Creed and the content of Scripture.
- The Rule of Faith is not a fixed formulated doctrine but should be understood as the instrument of discerning what is true or false.[713]

The conclusion I draw is that Hägglund understands the Rule of Faith as something external, not in contradiction to the message of the Bible but in harmony with it, not explicitly defined in the Scripture itself but explicitly presupposed in Scripture. Finn shows that Childs to a large extent is dependent on Hägglund's view. Childs shares Hägglund's conclusion that the Rule of Faith

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[711] Childs refers positively to Bengt Hägglund's article, "Die Bedeutung der regula fidei Als Grundlage Theologische Aussage," *Studia Theologica* 12 (1958): 1-44, see Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah,* 54, Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 30-32. See also Childs, "Walter Brueggemann's Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy: A Review by Brevard Childs and a Response," 175: "When Irenaeus countered the Gnostic threat [Adversus haereses], he appealed to a *regula fidei* [rule of faith] grounded in the truth of Israel's faith…" See also Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," 221: "Driver's own extended discussion of the rule and what it specifically means for Childs is instead derived more from a study of Childs's influences - The work of Hans von Campenhausen and particularly Bengt Hägglund…" Childs refers especially to Hägglund's understanding of the Church Father Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-c. 202). Irenaeus uses the term *regula veritatis* as equivalent with the Rule of Faith. The Rule of Faith was for Irenaeus the truth itself. In its historical setting the term can be defined as a concept of truth that stands in sharp contrast to the Gnostics. See also Chen, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context,* 99: "Childs gives prominence to Irenaeus' approach, which sought to present a comprehensive summary of the Christian faith in terms of the testimony of the Scripture as the written form of the church's rule of faith." Finally, there is an important distinction to make between the historical understanding of the Rule of Faith as Hägglund describes it in his article and the confessional understanding as formed within the Roman Catholic Church where the Rule of Faith is strictly identified with the Roman Catholic confession.
[712] Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," 232.
[713] Hägglund, "Die Bedeutung der Regula fidei," 7.

should be seen as an external hermeneutical tool for interpreting the Old Testament text.[714] Moreover, this affinity between Hägglund and Childs, leads all the way to Irenaeus, the Church Father who used the Rule of Faith in his argumentation for the legitimism of the Old Testament as part of the Christian Scripture.[715] When comparing Childs's approach with Brueggemann's on the concept of the Rule of Faith it is this matter, it is obvious that they disagree. [716] There are of course many similarities, e.g. each stresses that the New Testament authors return to the Old Testament in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Moreover, they both stress the uniqueness of the Old Testament as distinct from the New Testament. In Childs's words:

> Old Testament bears its true witness as the Old which remains
> distinct from the New. It is promise, not fulfilment. Yet its voice
> continues to sound and it has not been stilled by the fulfillment
> of the promise.[717]

But Brueggemann nevertheless clearly opposes Childs's link between the canonical approach and the Rule of Faith.[718] Childs's description of God is not based on the text but on a pre-understanding that stands over the text, i.e. the Rule of Faith.[719] According to Brueggemann, the Rule of Faith creates a reduction and forecloses the polyphonic character of the Old Testament texts. The

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[714] Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," 222.
[715] See Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," 233. According to Finn, Irenaeus argued that "the rule was not identical with scripture, but was that sacred apostolic tradition, both in oral and written form, that comprised the church's story." This understanding occurs in Childs, *Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Scripture,* 47.
[716] According to Finn, I would argue that Brueggemann understands the Rule of Faith as a kind of "metanarrative, a grand plot, that can be discerned in the scriptures that then provides coherence to the Christian life" See Finn, "Reflections on the Rule of Faith," 224.
[717] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 77. Confer Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 732: "Old Testament theology, as a Christian enterprise, it seems to me, must resist both (a) the untenable claim that such mutations in meaning are at all *intended* by or hinted at in the Old Testament; and (b) the historical-critical, rationalistic notion that the Old Testament *precludes* such interpretive moves, for such a notion of preclusion fails to recognize the polyphonic, elusive, generative intentionality of the text."
[718] Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament, a Prompt Retrospect," 318.
[719] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope,* 87: "It becomes clear that Childs' understanding of God in the text, 'extra-biblical reality,' is not constructed or nuanced according to

Rule of Faith tries to keep the message within a fixed form, but this is impossible: "The holy one of Israel will not be held in Church claims."[720] His comments on Childs's approach are as follows:

> In his most recent and most mature book, it is now more clear
> than in his earlier work, that Childs means by 'canonical' reading
> the text according to Christian norms and categories.[721]

In effect, however, it appears for Brueggemann that Childs approach has generated a reading of the Old Testament in and through the categories of Christian systematic theology. Such an approach features its own reductionism which, in turn, overrides and distorts the specificity of the text. The gain of a canonical perspective is that without embarrassment it takes up theological themes that modernist foundationalism must eschew. An accent on such themes, though theological as they are, tends to override the specific theological data of the text that refuse to be flatly thematized.[722]

6.6 BRUEGGEMANN'S APPROACH: JEWISH OR CHRISTIAN?

In the encounter with the Jewish tradition the question emerges as to whether Brueggemann's position is best defined as Jewish or Christian or neither. Childs argues that a Christian and a Jewish reading of the same text functions differently: "it is crucial to recognize that the Christian understanding of canon functions theologically in a very different way from Judaism."[723] In contrast, Brueggemann stresses the similarity between a Christian and a Jewish reading: "if the church has no interpretative monopoly on the Old Testament, then it must recognize the legitimacy of other interpretative communities, of whom

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the detail of the text, but is a reference that is known apart from and at times over against the text."
[720] Linafelt & Beal, *God in the Fray,* 319.
[721] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope,* 86.
[722] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 85.
[723] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 64.

the primary and principal one is the Jewish community."[724] Brueggemann is ambivalent towards an exclusive Christian interpretation because he fears a supersessionist reading of the Old Testament.[725] He therefore argues that a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament is a legitimate one, but not the only one. In sum, Brueggemann stands between, on the one side, Childs, and on the other side, a Jewish reading. In a letter to Tracy Early, date April 14 1998, Brueggemann writes:

> Your second point about Christian exclusivism and Jewish faith claims
> seems to me to be very important questions to which I do not have an
> answer. I do not doubt at all that as a confessing Christian to read the
> Old Testament toward Jesus is exactly right. I do note, however, that you
> say that Karl Barth said the New Testament is 'a commentary' on the
> Old Testament. I think that the burden of my argument is that it is pre-
> cisely a commentary and not the commentary.[726]

In this letter he hesitates to stress that he proposes a specific Christian approach and instead argues for a middle way. Levenson, as noted previously, together with Joel Kaminsky, are two Jewish scholars who would have preferred Brueggemann to have had a more specific Christian approach.[727] Kaminsky comments that Brueggemann has good intentions, but fails to understand that his theology also "prevents him from fully accepting the validity of either a Jewish or Christian reading of the Scripture."[728] Brueggemann responds to Kaminsky's criticism and claims that he is a Christian interpreter. According to Brueggemann, Kaminsky's criticism depends on a deeper disagreement on biblical interpretation.[729]

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[724] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 733.
[725] See Brueggemann, "*Theology of the Old Testament*, a Prompt Retrospect," 316. Supersessionism is equivalent to replacement theology, i.e. that the Christian community forms the new Israel and that God has abandoned his covenant with the historical people of Israel.
[726] Brueggemann, unpublished from Jon Bulow Campell Library, Box 15, Letter to Dr Tracy early, April 14, 1998.
[727] See Joel Kaminsky. Review of W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* in *RBL* 1: 1-21 (Kaminsky 1-6). 1999.
[728] Kaminsky, review of Brueggemann, 4-5.
[729] Kaminsky, review of Brueggemann, 5.

My own and reflection is that Brueggemann wants to combine a kind of Jewish Midrashic interpretation with a Christian theologization of the Old Testament and this is indeed not easy to accomplish. Benjamin Sommer's conclusion is worth emphasizing: "the discipline of Theology does not have the same place within Judaism as in Christianity,"[730] Formulated as questions reads: is it possible to combine a Jewish reading with a Christian theological thematization of the Old Testament? In what ways do the hermeneutics of writing a commentary differ from the hermeneutics of writing an Old Testament theology? I would suggest and answer by notate that in *ToT* Brueggemann's point of departure is that the Old Testament in no way points directly to Christ. Instead he argues that as a confessing Christian he performs "the imaginative construal of the Old Testament towards Jesus" and this is "a credible act" but in no way obvious because the text is so "polyphonic".[731] In a response to Brueggemann Peter Enns suggests that one must be able to combine a Christian confession (Theology) with recognition of the polyphonic character (Midrashic interpretation) of the Old Testament text. This means, according to Enns, that there is no tension between a Christian confession and the polyphonic nature of the biblical witnesses:

> We must continually balance the way in which the Old Testament story was given, in all its 'polyphonic and elusive' glory, with the Christian confession that the Old Testament story finds its final and ultimate purpose in God's revelation in Christ.[732]

6.7 CONCLUSIONS

Whereas Childs reads the Scripture through the lens of the Rule of Faith, Brueggemann argues that the result of biblical interpretation presents the Rule of Faith. I conclude that Child's use of the Rule of Faith stands in accordance

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[730] Benjamin Sommer, *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 9.
[731] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 732.
[732] Peter Enns, review of Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament, Westminster Theological Journal 64 no 1* (2002) 207.

with that of Hägglund's. This means that Child's epistemology is clearly a foundational epistemology because the Rule of Faith is defined as something external. It could now be suggested that Brueggemann's approach in this regard is neither in keeping with a classical Christian nor a classical Jewish reading of the Old Testament. His approach is best defined as a mixture: a Christian who believes that Jesus is the Messiah, but who interprets the Old Testament from the position of the Jewish tradition.

CHAPTER 7 A THEOLOGY OF THE FRAY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose in this chapter is to analyze Brueggemann's theology. Brueggemann's description in no way fits in with a classical Christian description of God:

> The God of this countertestimony is clearly not the God of the philosophers.[733]

> If it is claimed that God is morally perfect, the rather devious ways of the God of the Old Testament must either be disregarded or explained away.[734]

> Who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterance of the Israelites, or, derivatively, the utterance of the text.[735]

As the title of this chapter indicates, the God of Israel, YHWH, according to Brueggemann, is a God who stands in the fray of human suffering. My conclusion is that his description of YHWH is concluded in three steps:

Step I: On the foundation of testimony, the description of YHWH becomes available. *This is his epistemology.*

Step II: By use of a rhetorical approach, a concern that speech and reality co-exist, informed by a Jewish reading that honors irruption, he argues that the various testimonies refer to YHWH in an extra-referential way. *This is his hermeneutics.*

Step III: When the core-testimony and the counter-testimony give their full meaning in the context of the court, the theological conclusion is as follows: YHWH's incomparability yields a "profound disjunction at the core of the Subject's life." *This is his theology.*

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[733] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 384.
[734] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 106.
[735] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 65.

The procedure in order to analyze Brueggemann's theology is as follows; firstly, I will first pay attention to some biblical passages that aptly describe Brueggemann's interpretation of a tension within YHWH. Secondly, I will describe some important theologians that have influenced Brueggemann. Thirdly and finally, I will analyze his theology by applying it to Psalm 44 as a kind of case-study.[736] In this analyze I will also suggest a modified alternative to Brueggemann's term of God above and God in the fray.

7.2 YHWH IS UNFAIR

An important theme in Brueggemann's theology, previously referred to in chapter 2, is his attention to the dark side of YHWH. This can be traced back at least to 1982 in his Genesis commentary wherein he worked on the topic of "divine deception."[737] The dark side of YHWH plays an integral role in *ToT*, and I will here present three examples which he uses to argue that YHWH is deceitful. These are as follows:

- The verb פתה (*patah*).
- The narrative of David and Saul.
- The tension between Isaiah 49:14 and Isaiah 54:6-7.

THE VERB פתה

The verb פתה *(patah)* is important for Brueggemann when he argues that YHWH is unfair. He makes this conclusion on the basis of Jeremiah 20:7, I Kings 22:20-22, and Hosea 2:14 where this verb occurs. The verb means "to be open like a child", but also that someone is persuading or enticing the person

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[736] I am inspired by Nathan Tiessen's use of Brueggemann's core and counter-testimony in the book of Ruth. See Tiessen, "A Theology of Ruth," 258-62. Notable is that Brueggemann does not quote from the book of Ruth in *ToT*.

[737] J.E. Andersson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster, A Theology of Deception and YHWH´s Fidelty to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle.* Siphrut 5 (Wiona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 11: "The question of divine deception in Genesis has been raised surprisingly few times within the last century, with Hermann Gunkel being the earliest proponent of the view that God engaged in deception, yet it is only fairly recently that the issue has begun to be addressed in any meaningful way. Investigation remains inchoate and embryonic. Works by three scholars warrant more thorough mention: Hermann Gunkel, Walter Brueggemann, and Michael James Williams."

to do something negative.[738] For Brueggemann, the problem becomes apparent when YHWH is the subject of this verb: "It is astonishing that in three cases, including the Jeremiah text we have cited, the verb is used for Yahweh with such implications."[739] In Jeremiah 20:7, he draws the conclusion that YHWH has been dishonest towards Jeremiah:

> 7 O LORD, you have enticed me,
> and I was enticed;
> you have overpowered me,
> and you have prevailed.
> I have become a laughingstock all day long;
> everyone mocks me.[740]

The prophet has been "pressed into a relationship for loyalty toward Yahweh (cf. 1:4-10), a relationship in which Yahweh has not been fair, supportive, or constructive."[741] In 1 Kings 22:20, Brueggemann draws the same theological conclusion:

> 20 And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing, and another said another.[742]

Here the verb is used in the heavenly court in order to entice King Ahab. YHWH acts in this way because he wants to deceive the king, "even if it means deceptive violence."[743] Finally, in Hosea 2:14 it is written:

> 14 Therefore, I will now allure her,
> and bring her into the wilderness,
> and speak tenderly to her.[744]

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[738] See Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles August Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). Abridged [פָּתָה] vb. denom. be simple—Qal 1. *be open-minded* (?), *simple.* 2. *be enticed, deceived.* Niph. *be deceived;* c. עַל *enticed unto.* Piel 1. *persuade,* woman (fig., ʼʼ subj.), *seduce,* virgin; *entice,* husband. 2. *deceive;* subj. ʼʼ, obj. proph.; obj. ʼʼ. Pual 1. *be persuaded.* 2. *be deceived; be beguiled;* by ʼʼ.

[739] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 360.

[740] Biblica Hebraica: פִּתִּיתַנִי יְהוָה וָאֶפָּת חֲזַקְתַּנִי וַתּוּכָל הָיִיתִי לִשְׂחוֹק כָּל־הַיּוֹם כֻּלֹּה לֹעֵג לִי׃

[741] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 362. Cf. 1 Sam. 8:7: "And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.'" Cf. 1 Sam. 15:24 where Saul said to Samuel: "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice."

[742] Biblica Hebraica: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה מִי יְפַתֶּה אֶת־אַחְאָב וְיַעַל וְיִפֹּל בְּרָמֹת גִּלְעָד וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה בְּכֹה וְזֶה אֹמֵר בְּכָה׃

[743] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 361.

[744] Biblica Hebraica: לָכֵן הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מְפַתֶּיהָ וְהֹלַכְתִּיהָ הַמִּדְבָּר וְדִבַּרְתִּי עַל לִבָּהּ׃

Brueggemann argues that the same verb as used in Jeremiah and 1 Kings, here translated as *allure,* "also bespeaks something forcible, coercive or violent about Yahweh."[745] In sum, basing his argument on the interpretation of the verb פתה (*patah*) he draws the conclusion that YHWH is deceitful and acts unfair.

DAVID AND SAUL

In the narrative of David and Saul, Brueggemann pays attention to the fact that within the Jewish tradition Saul has been understood in a more positive way than within the Christian tradition.[746] According to him, there are at least three arguments from the narrative that show that YHWH is unfair towards Saul:

1) Samuel obeys the people in 1 Samuel 8:7 but when Saul does the same, "at least to some extent", he is condemned in a negative way (see 1 Samuel 15:24).[747]

2) When Saul defeats the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15, he does not follow the *ḥerem* demands, i.e. total annihilation in accordance with Exodus 17:8-16 (cf. Deuteronomy 25:17-19).[748] However, when David defeats the same tribe in 1 Samuel 30, the narrator does not show any interest in *ḥerem* theology.

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[745] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 362.

[746] David M. Gunn, *the Fate of King Saul, An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1980), 23-27.

[747] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 369.

[748] See BDB Abridged [חָרַם] "vb. Hiph. ban, devote, exterminate — *ban*, *devote* (esp. religiously, sq. objects hostile to the theocracy; this involved gen. their destruction; when a city was 'devoted' the inhab. were put to death, the spoil being destroyed or not acc. to the gravity of the occasion; 1. most oft. of devoting to destruction cities of Canaanites and other neighbors of Isr., *exterminating* inhabitants, and destroying or appropriating their possessions: a. Isr. and her leaders subj. (destructions acc. to vow); (commanded through Moses), (commanded by י); quite secondary is simple *exterminate*. b. secondary mng. *destroy*, *exterminate*, also with other nations subj.   c. *God as subj.*, fig. all nations and their armies; the nations of Western Asia; the tongue of the Egyptian sea (by drying it up). d. so also of *devoting* even Israelites: a. a city of Isr. for worshipping other gods; residents of Jabesh-Gilead for not joining in campaign against Benj."

3) Saul seeks forgiveness in 1 Samuel 15:24, but Samuel does not forgive him. In contrast, David is forgiven for his crime against Uriah in 2 Samuel 12:13.

Brueggemann draws the conclusion that in contrast to David Saul is unfairly treated by YHWH. David becomes connected to YHWH in a new and special way; he is accepted by "Yahweh in modes of acceptance and affirmation heretofore unavailable in Israel and certainly unavailable to Saul."[749]

A TWO-STEP SEQUENCE TEXT

The third example that compels Brueggemann to conclude that YHWH is unfair is his analysis of some exile texts. He terms these texts as *two-step sequence texts*. In the first step of the sequence, YHWH's sovereignty is visible as a destructive force. In the second step of the sequence, YHWH shows his loyalty to Israel by maintaining the covenant.[750] A serious theological interpretation, he argues, must assume that there is no visible convergence between these two steps, i.e. between YHWH's sovereignty and mercy. There is evidence that YHWH loves Israel during the exile, but there are also texts which suggest that YHWH has abandoned Israel in the exile. As proof text for an exile two-step sequence, he compares Isaiah 49:14 with Isaiah 54:7-8. In Isaiah 49:14 it is written:

> 14 Can a woman forget her nursing child,
> Or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
> Even these may forget,
> Yet I will not forget you.

This text clearly says that YHWH will never forget Israel. Within the same genre, however, stands Isaiah 54:7-8 which argues that for a moment YHWH did exactly that:

> 7 For a brief moment I abandoned you
> But with great compassion I will gather you.
> 8 In overflowing wrath for a moment

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[749] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 370.
[750] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 310-11.

I hid my face from you,
But with everlasting love
I will have compassion on you,
the Lord, your Redeemer.

According to him, interpreting these texts theologically means that there is a theological tension in YHWH:

> These voices of witness, nonetheless, constitute part of Israel's countertestimony, and while these texts are commonly disregarded in more formal theology, they are important data for our understanding of who Yahweh is said by Israel to be.[751]

It is worth noting that even though Brueggemann stresses that YHWH is unfair, he likewise emphasizes that it belongs to the core-testimony to say that YHWH is a compassionate God: "To be sure, even these texts bespeak a two-stage sequence, in which the outcome is great compassion."[752]

7.3 INFLUENTIAL THEOLOGIANS

Brueggemann's theological conclusion of a tension within YHWH does not rely only on biblical texts. He is also indebted to some influential theologians:

- Blumenthal's theological conclusion that God is abusive.
- Lindström's analysis of the Psalms of complaint.
- Fretheim's exegetical and Moltmann's theological criticism of the axiom of divine impassibility.

ATTRIBUTE OF GOD: ABUSIVE

As shown previously, Brueggemann orients his theology towards the Jewish tradition. In this respect, he has been inspired particularly by Blumenthal's so called seriatim reading. A seriatim reading pays attention to the fragmentation and irruption in the text, "of course the very matters which Childs wants to

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[751] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 359.
[752] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 311.

exclude."[753] In practice, a seriatim reading means that Brueggemann wants to avoid any kind of systematization of the biblical message. The message of the Old Testament must be heard without being reduced by various philosophical presuppositions. Brueggemann is particularly impressed by Blumenthal's book *Facing the Abusive God, A Theology of Protest* (1993), in which Blumenthal argues that the rather provocative word *abusive* is actually an attribute that belongs to the concept of God. Blumenthal defines *attribute* as follows:

> A quality said to be inherent in the subject it describes; for God, there are 'essential' attributes without which one cannot understand God and 'accidental' attributes which are metaphors.[754]

The tremendous problem of the Holocaust and the problematic but apparent context of child abuse in general stand in the foreground for his conclusion that YHWH is abusive. Of major importance is also his interpretation of various texts, especially a close reading of Psalm 44. Blumenthal argues that the God of the Hebrew Bible, as a provident God, is capable of causing suffering and this must define God in terms of abuse. Referring back to medieval theologians, Blumenthal argues that *holiness* and *personality* belong to the essential attributes of God: "Using the language of the medieval thinkers, we can say that God has two essential attributes: holiness and personality."[755] Blumenthal, however, adds a third attribute, YHWH is abusive:

> Is abusiveness, then, an attribute of God? Is abusiveness a quality without which we cannot understand the ultimate reality that we call God? Yes; and to the six personalist attributes listed in 'Personality,' I must add a seventh: *God is abusive, but not always.* God as portrayed in our holy sources and as experienced by humans throughout the ages, acts, from time to time, in a manner

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[753] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope*, 86.
[754] See Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusive God,* 301.
[755] See Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusive God,* 7. He also argues that humanity is related to God through the fact that male and female are created in the image of God. This, he concludes, means that God and humanity stand in relation to each other.

that is so unjust that it can only be characterized by the term 'abusive.'[756]

Even though Brueggemann does not make such a provocative claim as Blumenthal, he refers very positively to Blumenthal's conclusion of an abusive God. Blumenthal also refers positively to Brueggemann's theological efforts. According to him, Brueggemann's theological interpretation of the Psalms "seems to me the most serious scholarly and theological effort to deal with the dark side of human being."[757] Nevertheless, he also criticizes Brueggemann for charging only God with having the dark side of humanity:

> Because Brueggemann cannot accept the dark side of humanity
> as a permanent and equally valid moment in human experience,
> he proposes that the solution to rage in the book of Psalms is not
> to repress anger and rage but to state it clearly and forcefully to
> God.[758]

> "The Holocaust was abuse, and, in a theology of divine provi-
> dence, God is an abuser."[759]

This quotation shows that according to Blumenthal, Brueggemann describes YHWH as the ultimate source of the anger that is expressed in the book of Psalms, whereas Blumenthal seems to try to balance suffering between God and humanity.

SUFFERING AND SIN

Lindström has worked intensively on the origin of evil and suffering in the Psalms. Brueggemann refers primarily to Lindström's conclusion as presented

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[756] See Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusive God,* 247. See also pp.14-20 for the six Personalist attributes of God. According to Blumenthal, God must be fair, God addresses and can be addressed, God is powerful but not perfect, God is loving, God gets angry, God chooses, God is partian.

[757] Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusive God,* 243.

[758] Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusive God,* 246.

[759] See David R. Blumenthal, "Confronting the Character of God, Text and Practice," in *God in the Fray, A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. T Linafelt and T, Beal Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1998), 47.

in his book *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (1994) when he discusses the counter-testimony.[760] Lindström argues that the reason for human suffering is the absence of the presence of YHWH. Brueggemann writes that Israel prevails and suffers not only because of the sin of the people but because YHWH is absent. Lindström argues that retribution in no way contains a satisfactory answer to the suffering which is described in some Psalms of complaint. Instead, Lindström's solution is that the problem of suffering and sin is related to God's absence and hiddenness.[761] The divine presence is not absent because of human sin, but because of an enemy that competes with God. Brueggemann affirms many of Lindström's conclusions and writes:

> But in many other Psalms, as Fredrik Lindström has effectively
> shown, Israel is indeed innocent, and the suffering inflicted or
> allowed by Yahweh is unwarranted and indicates a failure in the
> covenant on Yahweh's part cf. (Ps 25:21; 26:11).[762]

Despite Lindström's influence on Brueggemann, it is likewise so that Brueggemann always stresses the sovereignty of YHWH and it is because of this conclusion in his theology that he draws the conclusion that it is YHWH that is unfair.

BRUEGGEMANN ON DIVINE IMPASSIBILITY

According to Brueggemann, it is in the encounter with divine impassibility that the problem with classical church theology becomes most apparent. A long and established Church tradition has held this axiom which insists that it is impossible that God in his essence can suffer from pain.[763] Brueggemann strongly

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[760] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 321, 354, 375, 378, 471, 537, 660f, 741.
[761] Lindström, *Suffering and Sin,* 460: "Suffering in the individual complaint Psalms is a sure sign that the kingdom of Death is at hand [e.g., Ps 143:5]. Just as certain, is that this is possible if YHWH is absent. The reason for this is and remains uncertain."
[762] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 378.
[763] See Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 152ff. The axiom of divine impassibility implies that the son suffers as human and not as God, the Father in the trinity.

rejects this axiom and falls back the German systematic theologian Jürgen Moltmann in particular.[764] Brueggemann writes:

> If Moltmann's rendering of the issue is correct, as I take it to be, then Christian theology is pushed into issues that are as difficult for Christians as for these witnesses in the Old Testament. We are left with solidarity that is short of sovereignty…except for Easter. This is a huge exception. The Old Testament witnesses, of course, appeal to no Easter, and that may make all the difference.[765]

In contrast to the doctrine of Divine impassibility, Brueggemann formulates the thesis that YHWH have passions for, and can suffer with and for his people:

> I mean not an acknowledged change, but a powerful insistence, assertion, or decision that flies in the face of a previous insistence, assertion, or decision, without any acknowledgment of a reversal.[766]

> YHWH is devoted to his partners in freedom and passion. This is a dialectical relationship marked by strong feelings for someone, and the capacity to suffer with someone and for someone.[767]

According to Brueggemann, *change* and *passion* include the capacity to suffer with someone and for someone.[768] YHWH's partner exists because of God's sovereignty, but when the partners sin they continue to exist because of YHWH's passion.[769]

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[764] Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God,* 17.

[765] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 312.

[766] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 362.

[767] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 412.

[768] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 411: "But the term *passion* means, secondly, the capacity and readiness to suffer with and to suffer for, to stay with a partner in trouble, vexation, and danger."

[769] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament.* 411: "The most characteristic thing to be said about Yahweh's partners is that the partners exist in the first place because of Yahweh's sovereign freedom, and that the partners continue to exist because of Yahweh's faithful passion."

Fretheim, author of *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (1984), has inspired both Brueggemann and Moltmann. Fretheim is somewhat critical of some of Brueggemann's theological conclusions. For example, he questions Brueggemann's interpretation of Exodus 34:6-7. Whereas Brueggemann argues that anger is an attribute of YHWH, Fretheim argues that Exodus 34:6-7 and other similar texts should be interpreted as God's holiness that is turned towards the sin of Israel's people.[770] Fretheim describes God's anger as related to a kind of mourning that comes from God's passion for Israel when Israel has hardened her heart. This kind of passion is described well by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 4:19):

> 19 My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!
> Oh, the walls of my heart!
> My heart is beating wildly;
> I cannot keep silent;

According to Fretheim, God's anger here should not be related to some psychological attribute within YHWH resulting in YHWH being described as irrational:

> Walter Brueggemann speaks of the 'profound irrationality' of
> Yahweh, a 'Yahweh who is out of control with the violent, sexual rage of a husband who assaults his own beloved' (Theology
> of the Old Testament [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997] 383). He ap-

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[770] Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," 30: "I would claim that divine judgment is *always* in the service of God's loving and saving purposes, and their juxtaposition in Exod 34:6-7 says precisely this." See also Terence Fretheim, *What Kind of God? Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim* (ed. B. Strawn et al. Eisenbrauns, 2015), 297: "Or, for Walter Brueggemann, the judging God and the faithful God are [215] incongruous; 'the completed tradition of Jeremiah makes in turn two quite different theological emphases which are impossible to coalesce,' namely, judgment and promise. 13 Thus, regarding various texts in chapters 1–25, he makes the following statements: 'God has withdrawn fidelity"; God 'has ceased to care'; a 'complete absence of fidelity on God's part.' 14 I have dealt with this dimension of Brueggemann's thought elsewhere. 15 I reiterate: "Why should love be inconsistent with 'just judgment'? Why is divine judgment an act of unfaithfulness? Why cannot judgment be in the service of graciousness? Why is a word or act 'against Israel' by Yhwh incongruous with God's will 'for Israel'? I would claim that divine judgment is always in the service of God's loving and saving purposes."

peals to Ezekiel 16 and 23 as examples. These are deeply prob-

lematic texts, but God's wrath is clearly motivated by infidelity,

so the word 'irrational' is not appropriate.[771]

However, despite Fretheim's critical assessment of part of Brueggemann's theological conclusion, they are both united in their criticism towards the axiom of divine impassibility. According to Fretheim, God suffers because he has completely and intimately bound himself in relation to the created world, especially his people Israel.[772]

Mattew R. Schlimm makes a comparative study of the Jewish rabbi and leading Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel (1907-1972. He and concludes that Brueggemann and Fretheim are both influenced by Heschel.[773] Schlimm's position is that the axiom of divine impassibility is a negative heritage that derives more from "Plato and Aristotle than from Hosea and Jeremiah."[774] However, Schlimm argues that Brueggemann goes far beyond both Heschel and Fretheim in his understanding of the meaning of *passions*:

> Heschel stresses that God is never overcome by passion, but
> Brueggemann describes God as 'one who goes wholly overboard
> in passion, to Israel's great gain and then to Israel's greatest
> loss.' Brueggemann diverges considerably from Heschel and
> Fretheim.[775]

Schlimm also observes that Brueggemann, in contrast to Heschel in particular, but also to Fretheim, ignores the distinction between human metaphorical language and ontological language about God. According to Schlimm, Brueggemann seems to take "Bible's descriptions of God at face value without

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[771] Fretheim, *What Kind of God?* 151, note 39.
[772] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God,* 11.
[773] See Mattew Schlimm, "Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos: An Examination of Hermeneutics in Biblical Theology," *CBQ* 69, 2007. All three also agree that God experiences pathos. Fretheim, in his book *The Suffering of God,* argues that God suffers (a) '*because* of the people's rejection of God as Lord,' (b) '*with* the people who are suffering,' and (c) '*for* the people.' In a statement that sounds strikingly similar to Fretheim's writings, Brueggemann talks of God's 'propensity to suffer with and suffer for, to be in solidarity with Israel in its suffering.'"
[774] Schlimm, "Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos", 673.
[775] See Schlimm, "Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos", 677.

pausing to explore the limits of each description."[776] According to Schlimm, Brueggemann also in a partial way stresses the sovereignty of YHWH to the expense of the free will of humanity:

> The careful differentiation between the ways of God and the ways of humanity is largely missing from Brueggemann's descriptions of God's wrath.[777]

In sum, Schlimm, like Blumenthal, argues that Brueggemann understands the wrath of God as steaming from God's own self-regard, i.e. from the essence of God. According to Schlimm, this makes Brueggemann's description of God's wrath unique.

WEINANDY DEFENDS THE AXIOM OF DIVINE IMPASSIBILITY

There are few theologians today who defend the axiom of divine impassibility because it seems that the idea of a God who cannot suffer, stands as an extreme alternative to a suffering God. Tomas Weinandy (1946 -) is, however, one who defends the axiom. He writes: "God is never in a state of inner *angst*."[778] Such a theological conclusion stands in sharp contrast to that of Brueggemann and Blumenthal. The interesting thing is that whereas Weinandy searches for hermeneutical tools from the presupposition of a constant concept of God, comparable with Childs—tools that can bring various disparate texts together without changing the concept of God—Brueggemann begins in the other end, with the presupposition of a polyphonic text and concludes that on the basis of the text, the God in the Old Testament has a tension that ultimately goes back to a divine tension within YHWH. Weinandy, like Fretheim, argues that suffering primarily depends on humans sinning against God:

> Moreover, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is sin then which has brought the evil of suffering into the world. This

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[776] See Schlimm, "Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos", 681. See also 682: "Brueggemann's writings give significantly less attention to metaphorical discontinuity than those of Heschel and Fretheim."

[777] Schlimm, "Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos,"684.

[778] See Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 153.

suffing is fourfold as witnessed already in the Genesis account

of 'the fall.'[779]

The British philosopher Paul Helm (1940-) also defends the axiom of divine impassibility and argues that the interpreter of the Bible must make a choice between a "metaphysical" and an "anthropomorphic" interpretation of the text.[780] This means that one has to choose between descriptions of YHWH as infinite, eternal and immutable, and let such descriptions have priority when interpreting Scripture, or basing a description of God on a more literal interpretation of Scripture. No doubt that the axiom of divine impassibility forms a demarcation between classical and postmodern theology. Helm's choice means that the battle of the correct interpretation of God in the Old Testament begins not in the text but prior to the text, in the epistemological and hermeneutical discussion. We can conclude that Brueggemann stresses, using Helm's terminology, an anthropomorphic interpretation of the Bible.

ILLOCUTIONARY AND LOCUTIONARY ACTIONS

A help to solve the hermeneutical problem of interpreting the Old Testament without reducing the message of the counter-testimony comes from Neil B. MacDonald in his book *Metaphysics and the God of Israel: Systematic Theology of the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006). MacDonald makes a distinction between illocutionary action and locutionary action where the former is expressed in a literal sense, i.e. "the illocutionary action is identified with the locutionary action."[781] However, the illocutionary action can also be other than the locutionary action, expressed in the sentence: "'Jones is a pig.' This sentence might be used to mean that Jones treats people dreadfully or that he has abominable eating, or table-manners."[782] From this

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[779] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 147 ff. Sin affects the relationship between God and humankind, human beings against human beings, God and Creation and humanity.
[780] See Paul Helm, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy* (ed. N M. Cameron; Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 129.
[781] MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel,* 5: "We mean the literal sense of our utterance. We utter the sentence 'The cat is on the mat' and we mean that the cat is on the mat."
[782] MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel*, 5.

discussion, MacDonald concludes that biblical interpretation must be informed by the literal sense, i.e. the illocutionary action of the word, but adds that if this literal sense conflicts with the identity of God (locutionary action as a propositional act) "the meaning of Scripture at this point is other than the literal sense."[783]

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that the theological tension within YHWH, suggested by Brueggemann, is based on an interpretation of the verb *patah,* the narratives of David and Saul, and *the two-stage texts* of Isaiah 49:14 and Isaiah 54:7-8. He also supports his conclusion by inspiration from Blumenthal's argumentation that God is abusive, Lindström's thesis that suffering does not always depend on sin and Fretheim's exegetical and Moltmann's systematical criticism of the axiom of divine impassibility. Taken together, Brueggemann concludes that there is a kind of unsettledness within the very concept of God, that in no way fit within a classical understanding of the God of Israel, YHWH, in the Old Testament.

This chapter has also shown that Moltmann, Fretheim and Brueggemann, despite having come to various different conclusions, and despite their different understandings of the meaning of *passion,* all agree that the Old Testament clearly stresses a suffering God. This conclusion stands in contrast to Weinandy and Helm, and partly MacDonald, who argue that God's concept must be the beginning point for every interpretation. They argue that it is impossible to interpret every testimony literally, and that one has to make a decision between literal and non-literal interpretations of the Old Testament. A relevant question to ask now is: if we accept a theological understanding of the counter-testimony, how should such a testimony be understood without being tamed? Moreover, how should such an interpretation avoid accusing YHWH with a profound disjunction at the core of the Subject's life?

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[783] MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel,* 6. See the definition of a locutionary act: Richard Nordquist, "Locutionary Act Definition in Speech-Act Theory." ThoughtCo, Jul. 18, 2019, thoughtco.com/locutionary-act-speech-1691257.

CORE AND COUNTER-TESTIMONY AS AN ORGANZING PRINCI-PLE?

According to Bruce Birch, the search for a theological center around e.g. salvation history or covenant or the metaphor of the court should be understood not as a theological principle but as an organizing principle:

> No single understanding of the mode of God's working [salvation history, von Rad] nor a single central theme [covenant, Eichrodt] is capable of doing justice to the multi-faceted witness of the Old Testament.[784]

Could Birch's suggestion become a possible solution to the above questions? I think so. This means that we do not treat Brueggemann's distinction of core and counter-testimony as a theological conclusion of the nature of God. The God of Israel is not in a state of inner anger, or disjunctive, even though there are testimonies that describe YHWH in like manner. However, we cannot and should not avoid these texts and by help of Brueggemann's distinction of core and counter-testimony we can organize the Old Testament testimonies in a fruitful way. His approach makes justice to the suffering side of the Old Testament. However, the logical question arise, if the counter-testimony should be understood primarily as an organizing principal, in what way is it then a theological testimony? I would argue that the counter-testimony is a theological testimony in the way it expresses a suffering of YHWH through his chosen people Israel. The counter-testimony is a theological testimony that alludes to how Jesus Christ suffers as human, not as God, within the Trinity.[785] The counter-testimony is a theological testimony that alludes to an incarnational aspect of YHWH already in the Old Testament that is immanent within the chosen people of Israel. This aspect within biblical theology I will develop in part 7.5

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[784] See Bruce C. Birch, "OT Theology: Its task and Future," *HBT,* 6/1 (1984), vi.

[785] Even though it is obvious that the distinction of core and counter-testimonies and God above and in the fray relates to the Christological discussion of the two natures of Jesus Christ, it falls outside this study to develop the topic of Communicatio Idiomatum further within the Old Testament. What I suggest in part 7.5 must be understood as an alternative solution to Brueggemann's concept of God as described in *ToT*.

of this chapter. But before that I want to show how the distinction of core and counter-testimony could function as an organizing principle for observing the suffering side of the Old Testament. For this purpose, I have chosen Psalm 44.

7.4 APPLYING BRUEGGEMANN'S APPROACH ON PSALM 44

I have chosen Psalm 44 for many reasons, primarily because, as Bob Becking comments, Brueggemann himself pays special attention to this Psalm,[786] and moreover it was important for Blumenthal's conclusion that God is abusive. It is also obvious that Brueggemann stands somewhat resistant to most Christian interpretations of Psalm 44 which to easily tilt towards an ignorance of the darker side of the psalm:

> In that way, they insist that nothing shall separate us from the love of God. Such a 'mismatch' between our life experience of disortation and our faith speech of orientation could be a great evangelical 'nevertheless' (as in Habakkuk 3:18). …But at best, this is only partly true. It is my judgment that this action of the church is less a defiance guided by faith and founded in the good news, and much more frightened, numb denial and deception that does not want to acknowledge or experience the disorientation of life. The reason for such relentless affirmation of orientation seems to come, not from faith, but from the wishful optimism of our culture.[787]

I will now interpret this Psalm by applying Brueggemann's distinction between core and counter-testimonies. I will try to highlight the counter-testimony as an organizing principle and not as a theological conclusion on YHWH.

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[786] Bob Becking, *Reflections on the Silence of God: A Discussion with Marjo Korpel and Johannes de Moor* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 134: "It is not surprising that Brueggemann discusses Psalms 44, Psalms 74, Lamentations 5, and many other provocative 'witnesses' in Part II, which deals with this 'countertestimony'."

[787] Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984, republished 2002), 25-26.

CORE AND COUNTER-TESTIMONY IN PSALM 44

In Psalm 44:1-8 we read[788]:

> 1 O God, we have heard with our ears, Our fathers have told us The work that You did in their days, In the days of old.
> 2 You with Your own hand drove out the nations; Then You planted them; You afflicted the peoples, Then You spread them abroad.
> 3 For by their own sword they did not possess the land, And their own arm did not save them, But Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, For You favored them.
> 4 You are my King, O God; Command victories for Jacob.
> 5 Through You we will push back our adversaries; Through Your name we will trample down those who rise up against us.
> 6 For I will not trust in my bow, Nor will my sword save me.
> 7 But You have saved us from our adversaries, And You have put to shame those who hate us.
> 8 In God we have boasted all day long, And we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah.

It is quite obvious that the above passage is a core-testimony. For example, in verses 1-8 the Psalmist praises YHWH for his marvelous deeds in "the days of the old." Verse 1 is an example of the re-use of previous materials that allude to the Exodus narrative. This is a practice of imagination in combination with memory. Israel retells, in a new situation of despair, how great their God has been in the past.[789] Verse 2 refers to the narrative of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 9) and how the nations were formed through the affection of disparate languages. Verses 3-4 present YHWH as a mighty King who will save Israel from its adversaries. The word הלל (boast) in verse 8 and the word תּוֹדָה (give thanks) both clearly have YHWH as the object.

In sharp contrast to verses 1-8, verses 9–26 present Israel's despair. The author now accuses YHWH using imperative verbs, e.g. verses 12, 13 and 14:

> 12 You sell Your people cheaply, And have not profited by their sale.
> 13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors, A scoffing and a derision to those around us.
> 14 You make us a byword among the nations, A laughingstock among the peoples.

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[788] Verse 1 in ISV is verse 2 in Biblica Hebraica. I hear follow the ISV.
[789] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 177-81.

It is shame that fills the inner man. The author/s of this Psalm writes in verses 15-16:

> 15 All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face
> 16 at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger."

The author wants to correct YHWH and, using Lindström's phrasing, the one who suffers imagines that his suffering is in no way parallel to his sins—*suffering without sin.* Brueggemann here depends on Lindström and maintains that the counter-testimony is in force when YHWH punishes in disproportion to the sin of the people and this is exactly what happens now in verses 17-25:

> 17 All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant.
> 18 Our heart has not turned back, And our steps have not deviated from Your way,
> 19 Yet You have crushed us in a place of jackals And covered us with the shadow of death.
> 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God Or extended our hands to a strange god,
> 21 Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.
> 22 But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
> 23 Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever.
> 24 Why do You hide Your face And forget our affliction and our oppression?
> 25 For our soul has sunk down into the dust; Our body cleaves to the earth.

Israel stresses her innocence, e.g. verse 17: "we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant." Psalm 44 ends with the accusation that YHWH is not awake.[790] The Psalmist presupposes the schema or retribution, i.e. that those who do not honor the covenant will face suffering. However, the Psalmist strongly opposes that the situation is such. Instead, Israel is placed in a context of great despair and shame and accuses YHWH as the source of the despair.

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[790] See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 320: "The accusation is that Yahweh, who promised to be present and in whose very character it is to be present, is noticeably absent. And when Yahweh is absent, bad things happen."

Israel begs for mercy because Israel believes that YHWH shall honor the covenant. In the final verse 26, Israel urges YHWH to rise: "Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your loving kindness." In understanding Psalm 44 in terms of Brueggemann's distinction of core and counter-testimony, the second part, i.e. Psalm 44:9-26 could easily be defined as a counter-testimony.

CONCLUSIONS

Following Brueggemann's approach all the way, the rhetorical tension between core testimonies in verses 1-8 and the counter-testimonies in verses 9-26 have a corresponding theological tension within YHWH. However, this is not the only theological reading of Psalm 44. My response is that it is fruitful to organize Psalm 44 and other passages in the Old Testament according to the distinction of core and counter-testimony, especially because such organization of the texts highlights the various facets of human suffering within the Old Testament. However, to address the rhetorical tension as a corresponding theological tension within YHWH is neither necessary nor preferable. Instead, I would argue that the main theological message of the counter-testimony is the unconditional suffering of being in relationship with YHWH which does not stand in relation to either sin or suffering but to being in covenant with the God of Israel, YHWH.[791] If we focus on Israel, the chosen people of God, this people is elected as an instrument for YHWH for the salvation of the world and therefore this people suffers. At least Psalm 44:22 presupposes that there are evil forces that stand against YHWH and his people, and this enemy is - at that particular moment - more mighty than expected. The context of Psalm 44 gives no possibility of explaining God as the source of evil, as Lindström correctly emphasizes in *Suffering and Sin.* Instead, Psalm 44 stands as a testimony to the unconditional violence between on the one side, YHWH and his people, and

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[791] For this conclusion I am partly indebted to Nicolaus T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God, Part III & IV* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2013), 810: "Are we saying, then, that in Paul's view God chose Israel for a purpose he intended to accomplish *through* Israel? Yes. Does this 'instrumentalize' Israel, and the notion of election, as has been suggested? Yes and no. It is a well-known phenomenon in Israel's scriptures that God can use people or nations as 'instruments' in his purpose: Assyria in Isaiah 10, Cyrus in Isaiah 45."

on the other side, those who stand against YHWH. YHWH and Israel are in covenant and Israel argues that the covenant must be valid. Israel's suffering and complaining presupposes a loving and involving God. Psalm 44 indeed embraces pain but does not embrace a theological tension within YHWH, because it is impossible to pray to a God who is unfair. It is, however, necessary to pray to a loving God in the face of evil. Being in covenant with YHWH is to stand in the fray unconditionally. Therefore Israel is indeed in the fray. Instead of defining God as an abuser in Psalm 44, this text presents YHWH as a God that stands in an immanent relationship to Israel.

7.5 GOD ABOVE THE FRAY AND ISRAEL IN THE FRAY

YHWH stands close to Israel in suffering, and how the relationship between them could be understood will complete this chapter. Let us begin with summing up three important conclusions that could function as cornerstones in a Rule of Faith within Old Testament biblical interpretation:

Firstly, Blumenthal, Fretheim, and Schlimm argue that Brueggemann has missed to make the distinction between human, metaphorical language and ontological language about God, and God's will and the will of Israel/mankind. We acknowledge that both MacDonald, Helm, and Weinandy stresses that a literal reading of the testimonies never can motivate a contradiction of the identity of God. This affirmation must be possible to withhold without ignoring the existence of counter-testimonies.

Secondly, Brueggemann stresses the sovereignty of YHWH, and draws the conclusion that it is YHWH who is unfair. However, it must be possible to stress a sovereign God and simultaneously solve the problem of theodicy in another way.

Thirdly and finally, Brueggemann, stresses a God that in his essence is *relational*. [792] As noted in chapter 2, Brueggemann refers positively to the orthodox

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[792] Cf. Meadowcroft, "Method and Old Testament Theology, Barr, Brueggemann and Goldingay considered," 45: "Perhaps none speaks more clearly into our own age than his [read Brueggemann', my emphasis] insistence on understanding God from the standpoint of God's relationality rather than his attributes [pp. 201-28]."

theologian John Zizioulas for such a conclusion. Brueggemann recognizes that this orthodox theologian, like him, argues that God is always a God in *relation*.[793] For Zizioulas *being* corresponds with *community*:

> Being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. The tautology 'God is God' says nothing about ontology, just as the logical affirmation A = A is a dead logic and consequently a denial of being which is life.[794]

Notably, Zizioulas does not stress a tension within God but argues that God's most signifying substance is *love*.[795] However, the connection between Brueggemann and Zizioulas could have important and be applied as a Rule of Faith on the interpretation of the Old Testament. Zizioulas' relational concept of God could be used as a presupposition: "God exists thanks to an event of communion."[796]

In sum, I would argue that these three conclusions are important to acknowledge. This means that there must be a distinction between God's will and Israel's will, otherwise God becomes the controller and finally becomes the abuser of the abused, as Blumenthal argues for. Moreover, it must be possible to defend YHWH as sovereign, despite the counter-testimony, and without arguing that YHWH is unfair. Finally, it is important to stress that the God of Israel is a God that always stands in relation to his creation and his people of Israel. These three conclusions, I would argue, could function like a Rule of Faith, as Childs stresses, with an understanding of God prior to the encounter with the text. Moreover, in order to understand the counter-testimony theologically, the appearance of God in the fray is immanent in the chosen people of Israel. *God in the fray* could therefore also be labeled as *Israel in the fray.* The

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[793] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 409.
[794] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 17.
[795] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 46: "Love is not an emanation or 'property of the substance of God-this detail is significant in the light of what I have said so far-but is *constitutive* of His substance, i.e. it is that which makes God what He is, the one God."
[796] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 17.

relationship between YHWH and Israel unconditionally leads to suffering. The voice of Israel in Psalm 22:1 alludes to the voice of Christ at the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). Instead of phrasing God in the fray, I would argue that the illocutionary action, using MacDonald's terminology, of a visible tension in the text, could be identified with Israel's testimony of e.g. the absence of YHWH. Israel is the instrument of YHWH that manifest the immanence of YHWH, through the Holy Spirit, in the Old Testament. My argument that *God in the fray* could be also be changed to *Israel in the fray* is motivated by some passages in the Old Testament.

YHWH AND ISRAEL IN RELATION

Let us first look at Exodus 3:7-8. This passage sums up how the God of Israel, YHWH, is both transcendent, using Brueggemann's distinction of *God above the fray*, and immanent, through his people:

> 7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,
> 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land.

In these verses from Exodus, YHWH is almost incarnated with the suffering of his people. YHWH *has come down to deliver* Israel and *bring them up out,* of the fray, to the holy land. The term *immanence* refers to *the people of God – Israel.*

Secondly, there is in the Old Testament a close relationship between the name and the personality of the name, e.g. 1 Samuel 25:25. [797] In the narrative of Jacob, the patriarch, in Genesis 32:24-29 and his wrestling with the man without name, Jacob receives a new name, Israel:

> 24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.
> 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.
> 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

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[797] 1 Sam. 25:25 אַל־נָ֣א יָשִׂ֣ים אֲדֹנִ֣י ׀ אֶת־לִבּ֡וֹ אֶל־אִישׁ֩ הַבְּלִיַּ֨עַל הַזֶּ֜ה עַל־נָבָ֗ל כִּ֤י כִשְׁמוֹ֙ כֶּן־ה֔וּא

27 And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name?" But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.

The translation of *Israel* is complicated. Following the Hebrew text, the word-play leaves no doubt that *fight* is associated with Israel.[798] In Eerdmans Dictionary *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* we read:

> While most scholars render the verb 'strive,' 'struggle,' or 'fight,' some believe the root to be śrr, "to have dominion," and translate "prove himself ruler." One tradition divides the consonants and vocalizes śār ʾaṯā, rendering "you are a prince (śar) [with God]" (Genesis Rab. 78:3). While Hebrew usage would dictate that 'Israel' means 'God fights,' the story in Genesis 32 takes Jacob as the subject, and understands the meaning to be "He who fights with God."[799]

Regardless of the exact meaning of the name of *Israel,* the narrative describes how Israel is in the fray with God, YHWH. In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is in the fray and complains on behalf of Israel: "for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts (Jeremiah 15:16b). Israel is now in deepest dissolution, due to Israel's abusive behavior towards the covenant. However, the prophet Jeremiah formulates Israel's pray: Israel, through the name, is connected with YHWH, and therefore salvation must come over Israel.

Thirdly, coming back to Psalm 44, it is obvious that being identified with the name of Israel means to be identified with suffering on the edge. The people of Israel is in the fray because they are in relationship with YHWH. In order

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[798] Gen. 32:29 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם־**יִשְׂרָאֵל** כִּי־**שָׂרִיתָ** עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל׃

[799] Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Eerdmans, 2000), 655.

to understand a difficult verse such as Psalm 44:22[800] a close relationship between YHWH and his people is necessary in order to find the correct interpretation. From a Christian perspective, partly informed by N.T Wright[801], this verse alludes to the New Testament and Romans 8:31-37:

> 35 Who will come between us and the love of Christ? Will trouble, or pain, or cruel acts, or the need of food or of clothing, or danger, or the sword?
> 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

According to Paul in Romans 8, Psalm 44:23 is directed to those Christians who live in the covenant with God but who must suffer. The question of theodicy has a point of departure also in the fact that suffering is the other side of being in relationship with the God of Israel. If one wants to find a similar parallel in a Jewish context one could read e.g. 2 Mack 7:20: "Although she saw her seven sons die in a single day, she endured it with great courage because she trusted in the Lord." Here in this passage we have seven brothers who had to sacrifice their own life because they wanted to be faithful to the covenant.

If one wants to find a similar parallel in the New Testament one could read Acts 9:4, When Saul, later Paul, was on his way to Damascus, he hears a voice:

> 4 "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

It is Jesus, "I am" - "Ἐγώ εἰμι" - who identifies himself with the suffering of the persecuted Christians.

Reading *God above the fray* and *Israel in the fray* means that the people of God, i.e., Israel and the church is in covenant with YHWH. It seems that the reading of the Old Testaments tilts gradually towards resurrection, because YHWH will ultimately take care of his people for the sake of the covenant. It is actually problematic that Brueggemann in *ToT* suggests a distinction between *God above the fray* and *God in the fray* and that this distinction finally

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[800] Psa. 44:23. כִּי־עָלֶיךָ הֹרַגְנוּ כָל־הַיּוֹם נֶחְשַׁבְנוּ כְּצֹאן טִבְחָה:
[801] See Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God,* 634. In the passage from Romans, Wright argues that Paul defines Jesus Christ as the one that redefines Monotheism around Jesus the Messiah.

leads to describing a tension within YHWH. This conclusion is neither necessary nor biblical.

A CRITIC OF GOD ABOVE AND ISRAEL IN THE FRAY

A critique of my presentation could be that Israel in the fray cannot be equivalent to God in the fray. Israel is simply not comparable with YHWH. There is of course a huge difference between Israel and YHWH. There is also a great difference between Israel and Jesus Christ, and, simultaneously, Jesus Christ and the Church. Jesus is without sin. Israel and Church are not. What I mean when I change God in the fray to Israel in the fray is that God in the Old Testament, YHWH, is intimately connected with Israel and the term Israel in the fray has the opportunity to imagine Israel (and the church) as the carrier of the same nature as the human side of Jesus. The distinction of God above and Israel in the fray, understood in this way, has its ultimate description in the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth. As Paul writes in the letter to Philippians 2:6-8:

> 6   …though he was in the form of God,
> Did not regard equality with God
> As something to be exploited,
> 7 but emptied himself,
> Taking the form of a slave,
> Being born in human likeness.
> 8 And being found in human form,
> He humbled himself
> And became obedient to the point of death—
> Even death on a cross.[802]

But, again, why cannot God be in the fray of human suffering? God is of course in the fray, but not in his ontology, only in his economy. As a Christian writer, believing in the Trinity, God is always in a relationship of love, as Zizioulas expresses. Because of that God is never the agent of suffering, even though God permits evil to exist. If God in his ontological trinity, would be in the fray, then God becomes victim to his own character because God becomes agent of

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[802] See Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms,* 11: "I find Phil 2.5-11 a helpful articulation of this movement. It can, without any forcing, be correlated: *Orientation*: 'Though he was in the form of God…' *Disorientation*: '[He] emptied himself.' *New Orientation*: 'Therefore God has highly exalted him…'"

the suffering that he is engaged to save. If God is sovereign, God then becomes the problem in the theodicy, because God of the Old Testament, YHWH has an inner anger. God is in the fray of human suffering, but through his *economy,* and in the Old Testament, this economy takes place through his chosen people Israel. In the New Testament, this immanence takes place through his son Jesus Christ, and in the new covenant, through the Church. God of the Old Testament, YHWH is transcendent, sovereign, above the fray of Israel's suffering, but simultaneously, the counter-testimony reflects a suffering that affects YHWH. YHWH is in the fray through Israel. I do not argue that Israel is God, and God is not Israel, referring again to Zizioulas that outside the relationship of the Trinity there is no God.[803] However, I argue that Israel is an instrument in service of YHWH and Messiah could only be born within this people, because Israel as a people is united with their God in a unique way.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, Brueggemann presents a theology that stresses that the God of Israel, YHWH, is in the fray on behalf of human suffering and his chosen people Israel. However, when Brueggemann combines a theology where he argues that the rhetorical tension between core and counter-testimonies also should lead to a theological tension, the theological problem of the nature of YHWH arises. The disjunction within YHWH stands in another tension with Old and New Testament testimonies who argue that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:4). What this chapter suggest is instead to use Brueggemann's distinction between core and counter-testimony as an organizing principle and God above the fray and Israel in the fray as a theological conclusion, where God above stands for transcendence and Israel in the fray stands for the Trinitarian God in his economy through his chosen people where the revelation of God's immanence becomes completed in Jesus Christ.

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[803] See Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 41: "Outside the Trinity, there is no God, that is, no divine substance, because the ontological 'principle' of God is the Fater."

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 8 sums up this study. I conclude:

- Brueggemann's theology should be understood as an alternative to the historical-critical method and church theology, and thus formulate a stronger alternative to the destructive force of military consumerism.
- *Brueggemann's epistemology is crucial* for understanding his theology. I argue that it is a justified epistemology for the discipline of Old Testament theology.
- *Brueggemann's concept of God with a tension is no necessary conclusion.* The distinction of God above the fray and Israel in the fray could be used as a solution to the problem of a polyphonic text with a visible counter-testimony and a constant concept of God. This means that it is impossible to consequently use a literal hermeneutics within the discipline of Old Testament theology.

8.1 A THEOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVE

This study can confirm that Brueggemann intends to use religious language in a theological sense. In this way, he stands in sharp contrast to e.g. Hanson's proposal of a figurative understanding of the counter-testimony. A figurative understanding here is equal to an equivocal referentiality. Such an understanding, I argue, omits a theological interpretation of the counter-testimony. Albertz, who also argued for the impossibility of a theological approach, along with Hanson, would be correct in maintaining their position if religious language only had an equivocal reference point. However, religion would then be merely a human product and thus should be approached historically, as a social and empirical phenomenon. It would then also be true that the divine authority in whose name religious texts announce their theology has no justified epistemological foundation. Logically then, Scripture should be interpreted as a text laden only with symbolical meaning. However, if this were to be the case, one might just await the coming of a new Barth who criticizes Feuerbach. Brueggemann is in my opinion the new Barth within Old Testament theology

who criticizes a narrow, and inappropriate method that only presents a religious-historical result.

Brueggemann's hermeneutics is based upon the written testimony with imagination as the human process of inspiration and a deconstructive Jewish reading that goes beyond the visible and pays attention to the incongruities in the text. For him, imagination is both the energy that has produced the text and that which makes the text alive today in the ecclesial community. He does not equate imagination with the work of the Holy Spirit, but imagination is the human process of the witness who has had an encounter with the Holy Spirit. According to Brueggemann, the text sometimes converge, but not always, and this leads him to conclude that there is a disjunctive aspect or tension when it comes to describing YHWH. His hermeneutics is extra-referential but notable is that Beal and Linafelt find striking similarities between Brueggemann and Derrida. On this basis they argue that his hermeneutics is non-referential. Moberly also agree with Beal and Linafelt. Strawn, on the other hand, argues more convincingly that Brueggemann's hermeneutics is extra-referential. Brueggemann uses a Lutheran *communicatio idiomatum* term when he argues that YHWH is available only *in, with, and under the text.* On the basis of this hermeneutical presupposition, he also believes that speech and reality coincide. Brueggemann shares an affinity with Wittgenstein that is mediated by Lindbeck. Brueggemann is very reluctant to use the term *the Real.* Childs' search for the Real, according to Brueggemann, is the wrong approach, because the Real is encountered only *in, with, and under the text.* Again, this way of using dogmatic terms and embracing Wittgenstein's thinking, mediated by Lindbeck, creates an inspiring hermeneutics that opens up for a text-based and at the same time extra-referential hermeneutics. Moreover, in the previous chapter 4, it was concluded that a weak foundational epistemology differs from a non-foundational epistemology in the way it refers to a reality outside the text. My conclusion is that he intends to present an interpretation of YHWH to be taken as a truth within the community that listens to it.

8.2 A CRUCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

This study can also affirm Brueggemann's critical analysis of the epistemology of modernism and its method, the historical-critical method. This method is neither neutral nor objective. He has critically shown that the historical-critical method is an interpretation that is performed on the presupposition of classical foundationalism which, in turn, presupposes that the human mind is capable of perceiving the world with full control. His epistemology is brilliant because it creates a shortcut—passes through the hegemony of historical critical method—to a theological analysis of the Old Testament text.

An alternative presupposition to the epistemology that undergirds the historical-critical method is presented by Brueggemann; an epistemology that waits for the answer to the historical question "What really happened?" and the ontological question "what is really real?" Instead he pays attention to the final and canonical text of the Old Testament and asks: "What is really written in this text?" Based on this question, he wants to describe God in the Old Testament, YHWH. His approach is based upon a weak foundational epistemology wherein his methodological ground stipulates a testimony that comes from outside the text, as a ground of certitude. His thinking does not require human access as necessary in order to be legitimate. His epistemology requires faith: if one believes these testimonies, one is near to reality. Believing the testimonies is, for him, Barth's and Plantinga's, and Ricoeur's way to the biblical history and ontology, and this history and ontology come after, and not before, the text, because without testimonies there is no written history or ontology in a Christian theology. The testimonies are being heard from above or inside a believing community, without any attempt to legitimate the testimonies by use of human reason. The proper encounter, relying on Ricoeur's philosophical theory of the identity of a testimony, is a testimony which is accepted as probable and not certain. One can never be certain concerning a testimony, because it stands in relation to a community that either accepts it or denies it. Brueggemann's epistemology could be termed as *testimonial foundationalism.* In accordance with Ricoeur's conclusion that a testimony is probable and not

certain, Brueggemann is consistent, and argues that when one believes the testimony one is close to reality. A biblical notion of testimony and faith means that faith in the testimony is the way to reality and this process has been presented in an excellent way by him.

8.3 A CHRISTIAN READING OF A POLYPHONIC TEXT

ToT has inspired both Christian and Jewish theology with a fresh stimulation of imagination and with a theological reading of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, a problem arises when Brueggemann's hermeneutics is extra-referential so that the rhetorical tension has a corresponding theological tension. The theological outcome means that YHWH has an ontological tension. This study has also concluded that Brueggemann's concept of God with a tension at the core is based on his epistemology and a hermeneutics where his rhetorical distinction between core and counter-testimonies creates a theological tension. This concept of God, formulated as *God above the fray* and *God in the fray* is important to understand in relation to the Rule of Faith and his criticism of Childs' understanding in this regard. Olson wanted to emphasize that Brueggemann and Childs have many points in common, but these similarities are less fundamental than they seem to be at first sight. There is a watershed between them which becomes obvious in their different understanding of the function of the Rule of Faith in Old Testament theology. The God of Israel is described on the basis of the testimony in Brueggemann's theology, whereas Childs uses the Rule of Faith as a lens to understand the Old Testament. In the analysis of Psalm 44, it seems that a faith in YHWH will lead to suffering, and that a Christian must thus be aware of taking up his cross and following him. In that case, Psalm 44 open the question about the need for suffering of loyal believers and such a horizon opens up the Resurrection and retribution after death. In the application of his theology on Psalm 44, there is an unconditional suffering involved in being in relationship with YHWH which does not stand in relation to either sin or suffering but to election. At least the author in Psalm 44:22 presupposes that there are evil forces that stand against YHWH and his

people, and this enemy - at that moment – is mightier than expected. There is no tension within YHWH, but he is in the fray for his suffering people. Israel becomes God's human instrument. YHWH is not source of the suffering because God as a perfectly good being could not create that which is ontologically evil. However, YHWH *is in, with, and under* the suffering of his chosen people Israel. In this way, the counter-testimony expresses Israel's suffering and not the ontological presence of God.

Brueggemann, in accordance with his intention, stipulates the testimony as his solid foundation. It is on the result of this foundation that he argues that the Rule of Faith is to be defined. This approach seems rational, i.e. he does not presuppose a concept of God before the encounter with the testimonies. He has only one foundation prior to the text, the testimony. Nevertheless, the result of this approach is an irrational concept of God, a God in tension. I argue that the theological solution to this problematic concept of God lies in the correct distinction of God above and Israel in the fray. I propose that it is theologically possible to connect Brueggemann's hermeneutics of core and counter-testimonies—apparently disparate and contradictive core and counter-testimonies—into a harmonious theological conclusion, without neglecting the polyphonic character of the text.

My conclusion from chapter 3 is that his theology has developed in a process of continuity where *ToT* can be understood as a synopsis of his theology. In this process of continuity, there was an exception: his distinction between *God above the fray* and *God in the fray.* In articles before *ToT* he maintains that God is involved both above the fray and in the fray. In *ToT* this distinction is absent and God becomes specifically *in the fray.* In *ToT*, his concept of God stresses a tension of suffering and pain that corresponds to a tension in YHWH. What I suggest from the conclusion in chapter 3 and chapter 7, is then that the metaphor of the court is the organizing principle that shows a counter-testimony. This testimony indeed describes an ontological description of God, but not of God's divine nature, but rather of God's immanence. In this way, there is a mysterious incarnation of the God of Israel in the people of Israel. The God

of Israel, YHWH, is *in the fray* on behalf of Israel. The counter-testimony is a human testimony, not a figurative testimony, but a testimony from Israel, the people of God, which describes the human pain and suffering — presented as human testimonies of God's absence in the light of apparent suffering. The counter-testimony stresses God's immanence, i.e. that God is *in the fray* through his own people, wherein Jesus Christ was born, and the Church was incorporated into. In this way, there is a close Christian parallel between the counter-testimony, Christ's human nature, and the apostolic church today. The core-testimony represents testimonies of transcendence, i.e. God as *above the fray*, i.e. Christ's divine nature. The God above and Israel in the fray could then be related to the two natures of Christ—two natures in one Person. This in turn means that the suffering that the counter-testimony expose does not refer ontologically to God, but actually to Israel who in the Old Testament embraces the suffering as YHWH's chosen people. There are of course many differences between Israel/church and Jesus Christ, but in the existence of Israel/church there is a sacrifice that is incorporated in being God's chosen people and which corresponds to Jesus Christ suffering at the cross for all mankind. "

8.4 CLOSURE

Brueggemann's postmodern approach for understanding the Old Testament opens up new landscapes. His convincing thought that the hegemony of the historical-critical method has diminished and that the reductive force of church theology has lost its attraction is indeed a new approach. In a sermon at Luther theological seminary, Minnesota, in 2000, he emphasizes that the western Church suffers from the same problem as the Pharisees; they do not understand the real point of issue that Jesus questions: "They missed the messianic declaration that creation is now working well to produce and multiply and be fruitful, enough, more than enough…"[804] Likewise, I argue that the academy as

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[804] Brueggemann, *Inscribing the Text*, 67.

community has missed the theological message of the Old Testament. Brueggemann correctly stresses the following:

- The primal subject of the Old Testament is God.
- The problem with the epistemology of modernism is apparent.
- The foundation of certitude upon the biblical testimonies constitutes a justified epistemology.
- The testimonies in the Old Testament must be treated as referring to an ontological reality.

Throughout this study, however, I have disagreed with Brueggemann's theological conclusion in *ToT*. The problem with his approach is that the description of YHWH does not sufficiently discern and correctly dismantle the distinction between core and counter-testimonies. However, in the encounter with Brueggemann's concept of God, I have suggested that the distinction between God *above the fray* and God *in the fray* can function as a hermeneutical key to distinguish correctly between the ontological and immanent reality of God without ignoring the visible counter-testimony in the biblical text. The Church does not believe in a God that is arbitrary. The Church believes in a God that is love, 100 %. The search for solid ground will have its answer when one believes the testimonies. A Christian reading anticipates that the polyphonic text has a corresponding relationship to the suffering and pain of this world. However, a Christian reading hopes for and believes that when one finally sees, in heaven, without a veil, every testimony will sing the perfect hymn to the elusive God who will enter into real presence with his children.

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In Search of Solid Ground

Understanding the Epistemology, Hermeneutics, and Theology in Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament, Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*

For Walter Brueggemann, the postmodern situation offers a new perspective on biblical interpretation that forges its way between the historical-critical method and classical church theology. In his masterly *Theology of the Old Testament, Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997) Brueggemann present a new trajectory for the discipline of the Old Testament which is based on a new epistemological and hermeneutical ground.

However, Brueggemann's conclusion of a concept of God in the fray has been a challenge for the discipline. This thesis offers an analysis of his approach from the backdrop of his concept of God and its relationship between the biblical text and Brueggemann's own epistemological and hermeneutical presuppositions as presented in *Theology of the Old Testament*.

The argument in this thesis is that it is possible conclude a theological counter-testimony without a tension within YHWH. Instead of a concept of God in tension this thesis suggest that Brueggemann's distinction of God above the fray and God in the fray could be labeled God above the fray and Israel in the fray.