Preface

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: ITS TASK AND FUTURE

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In 1972 an important monograph on biblical theology by Gerhard Hasel began with the line “Old Testament theology today is undeniably in crisis.”¹ In 1979 it was the assessment of H. G. Reventlow that Old Testament theology was largely in an impasse unable to move beyond the approaches of von Rad or Eichrodt, both of which seemed no longer viable.² The decade of the seventies ended with many suggesting only gloomy prospects ahead for the discipline of Old Testament theology. There was certainly no emerging new consensus of approach. Vigorous new arenas of research in Old Testament studies seemed to receive major interest as the cutting edges of study (sociological studies, rhetorical criticism) while the house of Old Testament theology was in disarray.

Lament was, however, premature. Already in the late seventies there was beginning a remarkable flurry of new publication in Old Testament theology. New works of significant importance appeared from Terrien, Hanson, Trible, Brueggemann, Childs and Westermann.³ Along with numerous periodical articles these works and others seem to have
signalled a new and vigorous discussion over the methods, content and prospects of Old Testament theology. There is still no clear emerging consensus, but there is a remarkable range of creative approach to the ancient texts of our disciplines. Creativity and innovative approach are in abundant evidence. Vigorous discussion in print and at professional meetings clearly signals a broad interest in the matters under discussion.

To take advantage of this new vigor in Old Testament theology, and hopefully to further it, it was decided to devote a portion of the program for the Section on Old Testament Theology at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature to a symposium on significant topics in Old Testament theology. The idea was to provide a forum for established Old Testament scholars to share and advance their work in public discussion. Heretofore the section program had been mainly devoted to the volunteered, short papers on narrowly focused topics, and these were primarily by less established scholars seeking a wider hearing. By sponsoring a symposium each year the section leadership hoped to provide an opportunity for open discussion of some of the broader and more integrative issues of Old Testament theology.

For the first of these symposia, at the Annual Meeting in 1982, it seemed appropriate to begin with a broad assessment of the prospects in Old Testament theology by inviting presentations from some of those scholars most responsible for brightening those prospects. This hope was amply borne out when Walter Brueggemann, Paul Hanson, and James Sanders accepted the invitation to address remarks to the topic "The Future of Old Testament Theology."

In 1983 the format was slightly altered by inviting presentation of a single, longer paper (allowing fuller programmatic development) with a panel of respondents to begin the discussion. Rolf Knierim offered a challenging