RESPONSE TO MATITIAHU TSEVAT

"THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT —
A JEWISH VIEW"

by Bernhard W. Anderson

A. A New Opportunity for Dialogue

It is a pleasure to respond to a paper by a Jewish colleague who boldly ventures out into an area which Christians too long have monopolized. Professor Tsevat is aware of the novelty of his venture; indeed, he admits that a presentation of "Old Testament Theology" from a Jewish point of view is almost unheard of — something like "the zoology of a unicorn." Nevertheless, his paper, together with other preliminary theological "stabs" by Jewish scholars, may well augur an exciting new day when Jewish and Christian colleagues stand together theologically on the common ground of the Hebrew Bible.

Whether "Theology of the Old Testament" actually can be traced back to the Apostle Paul, as my colleague avers, is debatable. Paul did not have to face the question of the relation between two "testaments," in the sense of two bodies of canonical literature; but he did have to face the problem, posed by apocalyptic theology, of the intersection of two ages, the old and the new, and along with this the co-existence of two communities of faith, the Jewish and the Christian, each of which, he contended in Romans 9-11, somehow belong together in the inscrutable election of God. The apostle's view was undoubtedly much more theocentric than his christocentric interpreters have made out.¹
It was not until the second century of our Common Era that the question of the relationship between two separate bodies of literature came to the fore, especially under the leadership of a later, extreme disciple of Paul, namely Marcion. Modern attempts to repristinate Gnostic Christianity will inevitably run into Marcion's problem: that is, the Old Testament — the *graphē* that was read and quoted in the early Christian community. To speak of "Old Testament theology" in Christian circles is to inquire into the relation between the two Testaments that compose the Christian Bible.

Old Testament theology as a separate discipline arose in the historical and cultural climate of the Enlightenment. The division of Biblical Theology occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century, when Georg Lorenz Bauer wrote separate works on each (OT, 1796-1801; NT, 1800-1802). Today the title survives even among Christian theologians who want to go beyond the Enlightenment into a post-liberal hermeneutic. Curiously, *Old Testament Theology* is the title of Gerhard von Rad's influential work, although this theologian's christocentric view of the relation between the Testaments calls into question Old Testament theology as an independent discipline. At the very end of his two-volume work he remarks that if the Old Testament is considered in isolation from God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, that is, apart from its linkage with the New Testament, then this literature really belongs in the field of the "history of the religion of the Old Testament," not Old Testament theology.2

B. Tsevat’s Major Hermeneutical Principles

Von Rad’s remark, which if taken seriously would bring Old Testament theology as a separate discipline to an end, provides a jumping off point to consider the two major hermeneutical principles set forth in Professor Tsevat’s stimulating essay.