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Levinson, Bernard M., and Eckart Otto, eds.

Recht und Ethik im Alten Testament: Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne" anlässlich des 100 Geburtstags Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971)

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Gerhard von Rad's contributions to the study of the literary development and theological shape of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament placed him in the topmost stratum of modern biblical scholars. His literary acuity, seen in his commentaries on Genesis and other books, and his extraordinary ability to integrate large elements of the biblical witness into a theologically stimulating whole, most obvious in his two-volume *Theology* but in many shorter pieces as well, allowed him to create a body of work that still rewards readers a third of a century after his death. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that the contributors to this volume should offer it in his memory, even as they advance aspects of his work or supplant it altogether. This is the sixth volume from the same symposium, with previous collections on the Old Testament and modern culture, theology in Israel and its neighbors, prophecy, wisdom, and preaching having appeared in 2003 and 2004. The essays at hand focus upon Deuteronomy, a prime interest of von Rad's, but not narrowly. Rather, they address issues of import to biblical studies generally.

Levinson and Otto, with the collaboration of Walter Dietrich, have assembled a team of leading (mostly European) researchers on the Pentateuch. The twelve essays in the book fall under five heads: (1) the continuing relevance of von Rad's work on Deuteronomy (essays by Otto, Braulik, Veijola, and Rütterswörden); (2) the Decalogue (essays by Hossfeld and Kreuzer); (3) biblical legal texts in the history of interpretation (essays by

Levinson and Dance, Morrow, and Schaper); (4) the nature of an Old Testament ethic (a dialogue in theic form by Crüsemann, Dietrich, and Schmitt); and (5) the usefulness of the Old Testament for contemporary social ethics (essays by Herms and Otto). Three of the essays are in English, and the rest in German.

Cutting across the essays, several themes emerge. First, although the book does not focus primarily on von Rad's setting, several of the contributors do identify ways in which he, though a child of his time, bravely opposed National Socialist efforts at eliminating the Old Testament from Christian theology, explaining some of his theses (e.g., for Levitical preaching as the basis of Deuteronomy or his de-emphasis of creation theology) against the backdrop of the theological betrayal of the Deutsche Christen and their sympathizers. Von Rad, like all of us, interpreted texts in the light of his own theological setting, at least in part. Levinson and Dance's historical survey of von Rad's work in the 1930s and 1940s brings this out eloquently, as do Rütterswörden's observations about his liberation of Deuteronomy from a "kalte Gesetzlichkeit" in order to make it available to Christian preaching.

Second, von Rad's concern for the literary development of Deuteronomy and traditions interacting with it abides as an issue (see Schaper's splendid essay on Isa 56 and Ezek 44 as interpretations of Deut 23:2-9). Although the mid-century's confidence in redaction criticism has eroded (especially outside Germany), the quest to understand how various traditions can coalesce into a literary work and then produce further works, as well as further lines of interpretation and theological reflection, continues to inform us as we acquire new methods for investigating the problem. As with von Rad, so for us: research proceeds simultaneously along several tracks, with both diachronic and synchronic approaches yielding important results and neither standing alone. His efforts at locating legal and hortatory material in a common milieu outside the royal court (where one would expect it elsewhere in the ancient Near East) still pay dividends. Thus Morrow's study of the book's literary technique of *Fortschreibung* (copying without alterations except through expansion) situates the book within ancient Near Eastern legal circles.

Third, specific themes of Deuteronomy continue to stimulate our reflection, not only because they were central to that and other Israelite texts, but because they lie at the heart of the religious traditions that began in ancient Israel, Judaism, and Christianity. Thus Braulik reexamines von Rad's 1929 essay "Das Gottesvolk in Deuteronomium" and subsequent essays building on it, concluding that while the latter's reconstruction of the literary development of Deuteronomy was probably backwards in its dating and thus misrepresentative of the development of Deuteronomic theology, his realization that the covenant form was only the book's model and not its *Sitz im Leben* stands up to scrutiny, as does the most basic realization that in its final form Deuteronomy examines the full

complexity of life under YHWH. Otto's opening essay on "Gerhard von Rad als Deuteronomiumkommentator" situates him in mid-century scholarship and connects his work to most subsequent developments in the subfield. The essay is valuable as the take of a major pentateuchal scholar on the work of a major predecessor.

Fourth, the role of law was central to von Rad as an heir of Luther (see Kreuzer), as it remains for all Christian readers of Deuteronomy. Though inheriting the Lutheran law/gospel distinction, von Rad managed to find a more helpful way of appropriating the Torah for Christian theology. Otto points to the Bible's critique of power as a resource for modern social ethics, while Herms reminds us of the relevance of the past for the present.

A memorial volume to a scholar dead since 1971—part of a multivolume series no less!—might seem at first an odd exercise in academic nostalgia, particularly in an era when publishers' catalogues routinely announce new models for unfolding the historical-literary-theological development of the Pentateuch or even for reconceiving the task of biblical scholarship in toto. Still, Levinson, Otto, and their colleagues remind us that some questions about the Bible are of perennial interest and should not be eclipsed by fads. At the same time, our methods of addressing those questions must evolve, and with them new questions will arise. This volume advances our inquiry and so deserves our appreciation and study.