

THE DOUBLE RHETORIC OF BRUEGGEMANN'S THEOLOGY: HEGEMONY AS A RHETORICAL CONSTRUCT

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During 1990's, several extensive theologies of the Old Testament have been published.¹ This trend sharply contrasts with the two previous decades, which have been described by many as unfruitful, overshadowed by the magisterial work of Gerhard von Rad or focused on evaluation of previous scholarly developments.² We do not want to scrutinise this very interesting, and quite complex, topic further.³ Our aim is to concentrate on the work, which has been produced during the last decade, at the very end of 20th century. We will try to evaluate critically an exceptional work by Walter Brueggemann, which has become the first extensive postmodern theology of the Old Testament, and which, in many respects, represents a watershed in Old Testament scholarship.

At the present time Walter Brueggemann is unquestionably one of the most famous American biblical scholars. After the publication of influential works, such as *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme and Text* (1992) and *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (1993), a firm promise was made that the next work would be orientated toward a very specifically construed theology. This vow was fulfilled by the voluminous work *Theology of the Old Testament – Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997). This theology, which contains nearly eight hundred densely printed pages, brings a fresh agenda, not only to the subject of the Old Testament but also to biblical studies in general. Also a recently published Festschrift dedicated to Brueggemann, entitled *God in the Fray* (1998) confirms the exceptional nature of this new and suggestive theology.

Let us turn to the author's main work, which consists of the most significant emphases of a lifetime of his theological activity. What does the structure of the book look like? There is a prologue (pp. 1-114) and an epilogue (pp. 707-750). The main body of the book (pp. 117-

¹ For instance, Childs, B. S., *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (1992), Preuss, H. D., *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (two volumes; 1991 and 1992), Gunneweg, A. H. J., *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments. Eine Religionsgeschichte Israels in biblisch-theologischer Sicht* (1993), Kaiser, O., *Der Gott des Alten Testaments. Theologie des AT* (1993 and 1998; the third volume still unpublished), Rendtorff, R., *Theologie des Alten Testaments – Ein kanonischer Entwurf* (two volumes; 1999 and 2001)

² Cf. Hayes, J. H., and Prussner, F. C., *Old Testament Theology - Its History and Development*, London 1985, and Rendtorff, R., *Approaches to Old Testament Theology*, in *Problems in Biblical Theology. Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim*, Grand Rapids 1997.

³ Cf. the reaction to the proposals of Hayes and Prussner and that of Rendtorff in Barr, J., *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, London 1999, 467: "A number of recent presentations of the problems of Old Testament theology have concentrated their attention on the more familiar and earlier 'classics' of the field... as if these (Eichrodt and von Rad) formed two basic types and as if a 'crisis' or a 'stalemate' was created by the difference between them. I think that it was mistaken, and that important advances were made by the work of the 1970s and especially that of 1990s."

704) consists of extensive discussions that present the author's own understanding of how to develop a theology of the Old Testament. Brueggemann uses a plethora of biblical texts to elucidate his views. In the prologue, he starts with an overview of the scholarship commencing with the Reformation and concluding with the contemporary situation which he identifies as POSTMODERN⁴. This new situation is characterised by the epistemological rubric of UNSETTLEMENT which is manifested by a PLURALISM of (a) faith affirmations, (b) methods and (c) interpretative communities. At this stage, Brueggemann reveals the method that he will follow in the main part of the book. He discloses his sympathy with RHETORIC, which, he asserts, is the most suitable way of doing theology in a pluralistic context. Brueggemann states that consequently, "rhetoric is indeed capable of construing, generating, and evoking the alternative reality"⁵ which is created by the UTTERANCE that "leads to reality, the reality of God that relies on the reliability of the utterance"⁶. The *Sitz im Leben* of this utterance is illustrated at the beginning of the book. Here a nicely developed image elucidates the subtitle of the book: a new and instructive way of formulating a theology is suggested by the metaphor of a COURTROOM, in which TESTIMONY, DISPUTE AND ADVOCACY play a key role. In this courtroom, the medium of SPEECH is used in the process of disputing and advocating the pros and cons of the testimony. Thus, the primary premise of the book is provided by rhetoric. Old Testament materials are to be rhetorically expressed. Their testimonies which comprise the metanarrative of Jahwism must be "courageously voiced" in the courtroom where they stand *vis à vis* other contemporary metanarratives in a way, which enables their density and richness to expose the inadequacy of the dominant metanarratives.⁷ In this respect Brueggemann speaks especially about nowadays prevailing metanarrative of the military consumerism. According to the author, this is what is at stake in Old Testament theology.⁸ Rhetoric, says he, is a way to construe theology. Speech, therefore, is the rhetorical medium which bears witness to the reality of God throughout the Bible. The speech about God, which is recorded in Israel's biblical texts, is constitutive of reality. God is a "reality" contained *in* the text. Whether the same reality also exists *outside* or *behind* the text is not a question Brueggemann is interested in. His theology, as many times expresses, is, therefore, not concerned with (a) ontology, (b), metaphysics, (c) and history. What counts is the text and its reader, who must use all the rhetorical skills he has to call reality into existence through the medium of speech.

The newness of this approach can hardly be overestimated.⁹ Nevertheless, after intensive study of Brueggemann's work we could not escape the impression that some arguments in the prologue and epilogue needed to be more precise in dealing with older and contemporary intellectual concepts, and especially in discussing ideas which originated in European intellectual history. This issue will be elucidated further.

As we have already pointed out, the core of the Brueggemann's theology is provided by RHETORIC. Rightly so, if the author had not simultaneously yoked his concept of rheto-

⁴ All terms in capital letters in the article are mine.

⁵ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 720.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 720.

⁹ Cf. *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, Minneapolis 1993, 12ff and also 89-91 where the main themes of Brueggemann's new theology have already been discussed briefly.

ric with a rhetoric that might be called "auxiliary", insofar as it supports the main rhetoric, which focuses on the contest between biblical testimonies excellently presented in the main body of the book. This "second" or "hidden" rhetoric has very little in common with the proclaimed strategy of the book, according to which testimonies of the Old Testament are to be uttered in terms of rubrics which are masterfully traced, organized, and denoted by the author as ISRAEL'S CORE TESTIMONY, ISRAEL'S COUNTERTESTIMONY, ISRAEL'S UNSOLICED TESTIMONY and ISRAEL'S EMBODIED TESTIMONY. According to our viewpoint, Brueggemann supports his ideas of the first rhetoric which characterises biblical texts with sharp criticism of other concepts of biblical scholarship and its cognate scholarly disciplines, particularly philosophy. As it turns out, Brueggemann has an immense interest in ontology, metaphysics and history although this is mostly expressed in negative terms.¹⁰ That is, it is possible to discover that two modes of rhetoric are being used by Brueggemann. The first, elaborated in the main part of the book, is positive, as it elucidates the richness of the Old Testament in an outstanding and new way. The second, worked out mainly in the prologue and the epilogue, promotes, very unfortunately, the first mostly by very partisan, unjust and unfounded criticism of (a) scholars such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Wellhausen and more recent figures of biblical scholarship such as W. Eichrodt, B. S. Childs and J. D. Levenson and of (b) intellectual concepts related to the Enlightenment, historical criticism, and positivism. In short, in this book, these concepts are connected with rather unclear terms such as hegemony, supersessionism, settlement, reductionism, evolutionary developmentalism, and Christian and Jewish monopoly. Since these terms, according to our persuasion, are not explained properly when they are used, we can not avoid suspicion this has been made deliberately.

It might be asked whether this strategy of employing an auxiliary, second rhetoric is legitimate. We do not absolutely oppose this notion. Talking about the hegemonism or reductionism of others can be really a part of scholarly discourse. Yet, examples of such "flaws" must be clearly proven. This does not seem to have been done in the theology we have reviewed. Therefore, we mention two main objections which will reveal some deficiencies, without which, we will explain, Brueggemann's conceptualisations would have enriched the discipline twice as intensively as it has.

The first objection is FORMAL. Brueggemann criticises his scholarly colleagues in a way that is characterised by some remarkable methodological shortcomings. From its very outset, the history of the discipline presented in the prologue works with principles used in the first rhetoric, as if all scholars and movements from the Reformation onwards knew that there would be a postmodern time in the second half of the 20th century with a rhetorically based theology. This approach might have scholarly relevance but one can only guess why this strategy was not announced in advance. Expressed more pointedly, Brueggemann employs a debatable strategy when the constructs of his own reasoning are, through contrast, read into previous intellectual concepts which are, as a result of this tactic, shown to be corrupt and scarcely valid for any use. It is a pity that the author speaks at length about his own proposals

¹⁰ For positive, but not clearly articulated, interest in the ontology and history of Brueggemann's theology, cf. Gottwald, N. K., *Rhetorical, Historical, and Ontological Counterpoints in Doing Old Testament Theology, in God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, Minneapolis 1998, 14-23.

from the second part of the prologue on.¹¹ Brueggemann concludes the first part of the prologue by saying: "The convergence of INNOCENT CERTITUDE and READY CONTROL have made the treatment of the biblical theology enormously useful for HEGEMONIC CONCEPTS."¹² In light of this dubious exaggeration of the unquestionably complicated process which underlies the intellectual history of biblical scholarship, we feel that it is necessary to express our conviction that this "convergence" has hardly led to a programmatically intended "hegemonism".

The second objection is more weighty than the previous and concerns the CONTENT of the criticism which the author addresses to some branches of scholarship. This objection takes into account Brueggemann's considerable neglect of complexity of the history of the theological and philosophical scholarship which, to a large degree, originated in Europe. There are some discrepancies that must be stressed. Let us mention two examples (see *a* and *b*) and propose two consequent explanations, which we believe justify our arguments regarding what might stand behind these shortcomings (see *c* and *d*).

(a) European Intellectual History taken "en masse"

In order to keep his readers' minds focused on his assertion regarding the "convergence of innocent certitude and ready control... (that) have made the treatment of the biblical theology enormously useful for hegemonic concepts" Brueggemann uses a schematising procedure which tries to remove the distinction between very different intellectual concepts which we assume cannot, in fact, be easily brought into a common frame of reference. Not according to his point of view! Not only are theologians targets of the author's critique. European philosophy is also seen as being problematic. Let us quote, for instance, Brueggemann's judgement concerning the German philosopher Heidegger: "Martin Heidegger serves both as a specific reference point and as a symbol for the universalizing of the European culture, against which Jewish particularism stands, characteristically at great risk. Christian supersessionism, as a theological practice and as a preemption of the Hebrew Bible, is surely part of the universalizing for which Heidegger is blatant and notorious."¹³ This sharp verdict simplifies the complexity of European intellectual history exorbitantly. *Was* and *is* the situation on the Continent really that clear? In the time of so-called hegemonic Heideggerian ontological philosophy were there not at least three other important philosophical streams, namely, phenomenology, existentialism and hermeneutical philosophy, each of which specifically dealt with ontology on its own term? To believe that these groupings have never opposed each other and can be

¹¹ Cf. the newly published first volume of Rolf Rendtorff's *Theologie des Alten Testaments – Ein Kanonischer Entwurf*, Neukirchen 1999 where we can observe a similar tendency. Readers who would like to know more about the author's hermeneutical emphases will have to wait until the second volume of his theology is published. Fortunately, Rendtorff published several preliminary discussions of the hermeneutics of his theology before the first volume was issued (cf. *Kanon und Theologie: Vorarbeiten zu einer Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1991 and *Die Hermeneutik einer kanonischen Theologie des Alten Testaments. Prolegomena in JBTh 10/1995*). Cf. also Brueggemann, W., *Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect, in God in the Fray* where more of the sorts of transparent comments which are lacking in the *Theology* are offered.

¹² Brueggemann, *Theology*, 60. Cf. also *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, 3 and *Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect*, 310.

¹³ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 330.

therefore brought into a synthesis which can provide a basis for the "hegemony" represented by Christian supersessionism is really an incongruous idea. It is as if such influential thinkers as Levinas or Derrida have never lived and have not successfully challenged Heideggerian philosophy. Even more surprising is the fact that Brueggemann himself mentions both of these thinkers many times. Does not he, then, labour under an overly one-sided vision of European philosophy only when it suits his rhetorical agenda? Brueggemann not only castigates 20th century scholarship. He asserts that the Reformation had some irremediable problems. It is astonishing that as excellent humanist and grammarian as Matthias Flacius is accused of creating a Protestant system which has been responsible for "jeopardising and compromising of the freedom of the gospel"¹⁴. The Enlightenment is also criticised with similar severity as causing the intellectual supersessionism of Christianity which is best represented by historical criticism. Historical criticism, as a whole, is evaluated negatively because of its reductionism, rationalistic and "evolutionary developmentalism"¹⁵. The strongest criticism of so-called hegemonic tendencies can be found in the epilogue where there is total denial of even the positively nuanced judgements of European intellectual history which sometimes were made. The intellectual history of the Continent is described as a form of Western theological discourse which has been committed to Aristotelian logic and to the Enlightenment enterprise in which "the Cartesian skeptic and Kantian knower would prevail over the text"¹⁶. Thus, the theological claim of the text meets the hostility of the Cartesian program to which "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)"¹⁷ is committed. We think that most of these assertions are greatly exaggerated. To characterise European intellectual history "en masse" is either impossible or a task which only a genius could perform. We infer from previous works, which are in their criticism more moderate and better-balanced,¹⁸ that Brueggemann himself knows this. Thus, his intention becomes quite clear if we consider what has been said about his hidden rhetoric. In other words, Brueggemann's account of the prehistory and history of European intellectual history is deliberately oriented in ways which are more rhetorical than factual. We doubt that the so-called collapse of history, as has been characterised by Leo Perdue,¹⁹ necessarily is the only result of the (de)evaluation of the older tradition. Consequently, the sharp contrast between the contemporary "postmodern" situation and the previous "hegemonic" period seems to have been created consciously. As a result of this hidden, or at least unarticulated, strategy Brueggemann's own reasoning is advanced as the inevitable outcome of the previous schol-

¹⁴ Ibid, 5.

¹⁵ Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 11. Evolutionary developmentalism sounds rather tautological to us. Or is it, as we suppose, another feature of the author's rhetoric which stresses the alleged flaws of certain fields of older scholarship?

¹⁶ Ibid., 708.

¹⁷ Ibid., 727.

¹⁸ Cf. *Biblical Authority in the Post-Critical Period* (in *ABD*, volume 5, pp. 1049-1056, 1992), *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*, Minneapolis 1992 and *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*. In our opinion there is a clear tendency in author's theological development. The newer the book is, the more it exhibits a postmodern bias, and the more critically it argues against perspectives provided by other theologies and theologians.

¹⁹ Perdue's *Collapse of History*, Minneapolis 1994, is the book Brueggemann most commonly refers when he focuses on the distinction between previous hegemonic scholarship and the contemporary postmodern pluralistic situation. Cf. also a detailed review of this study by Prudký, M., in *CV 1* (1998) 74-85.

arly history which "was dominated by objective positivism that made a thin kind of historical scholarship possible, and that granted interpretative privilege to certain advantaged perspectives"²⁰. As will be shown in the next paragraph, every biblical scholar who knows the complexity of the history of biblical scholarship and difficulty of evaluating it must take the previous sentence as a rhetorical overstatement. Accordingly, the idea of taking European and especially Christian intellectual history as one monolith,²¹ seems dubious to us especially when this method clearly serves as a latent or at least unarticulated rhetorical device which judges that everything which might compete with the author's point of view is corrupt, reductionistic, hegemonic and so forth.²²

(b) *The Albertz Case*

That even Brueggemann himself does not apply his own assertions consistently can be clearly shown by the work of the German scholar Rainer Albertz. Brueggemann frequently refers to Albertz's recently published work *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit* (1992), which stresses the pluralistic background of the Old Testament world. The fact that Albertz proposed that plurality can be discovered in the Old Testament has been praised many times not only in Brueggemann's theology.²³ Yet, the other part of Albertz's voluminous study remains surprisingly undiscussed. The reason for this silence seems to be obvious to us. Albertz places strong emphasis on the historical reconstruction of what happened in the biblical times. Albeit Albertz refuses the evolutionary model of the history of Israelite religion of the 19th century and adds his own concept containing a new sociological dimension of the history of the ancient Israel exemplified on the patterns of tribe, family and individual and their piety, his historical interests are abundantly clear. He describes the task of developing a sociologically orientated history of Israelite religion in the following way: "Aufgabe der Religionsgeschichte Israels ist es dann, mit Hilfe *historischer Rekonstruktion* den in den alttestamentlichen Texten geforenen Dialog in ein lebendiges Streitgespräch verschiedener israelitischer Menschen und Gruppen zurückzuübersetzen."²⁴ What are the other main characteristics of his *Religionsgeschichte*? Let us mention six of them: (a). The History of Israelite Religion is a subjective discipline but this subjectivity is moderated by external data. (b). This discipline uses the historical method. (c). It starts with a clear interpretative context, which is the historical milieu of the authors of the Old Testament text. (d). The History of Israelite Religion has a distinct structure that consists of chronologically ordered historical periods. (e). It provides a survey of religious witnesses which is both synchronic and diachronic. (f). When the comparison of the History of Israelite Religion and its environment which is free of apologetically orientated intentions, an interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue is possi-

²⁰ Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology* 61f and also *Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, 1-25.

²¹ Cf. Olson, T. D., *Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization: A Dialogue with Childs, Brueggemann and Bakhtin*, *BI* 2 (1998) 177-178.

²² Cf. paragraph d.

²³ Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 64, 71, 264, 710. See also Brueggemann's review of *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit* in *JBL* 113 (1994).

²⁴ Albertz, R., *Religionsgeschichte Israels statt Theologie des Alten Testaments! Plädoyer für eine forschungsgeschichtliche Umorientierung*, in *JBTh* 10 (1995) 23.

ble.²⁵ Consequently, in the wake of the remarkable contributions which have resulted from Albertz's historical (!) approach we will end this paragraph with conclusions which are similar to the ones which we reached in the previous section. If, in his theology, Brueggemann employed Albertzian way of reasoning, which draws upon plenty of historical and external data, the artificiality of his sharp distinction between older historical scholarship and present scholarship seems to be evident. It makes it necessary to suggest that Brueggemann should have described earlier intellectual efforts more carefully.²⁶

(c) Subverting the "Subversivity" of the Old Testament: When the Second Rhetoric Influences the First.

According to Brueggemann, today's interpretative situation is totally different from the previous one because the long-standing establishment of the study of the Old Testament as a dominant Christian and academic enterprise has been disestablished and replaced by a pluralistic and universalising interpretative context. This so-called "contextual shift"²⁷ rejects the hegemonic interpretation which the author identifies as being committed to historicism, evolutionism and rationalism and epitomised by an alliance between triumphalist Christendom and critical positivism. Postmodern testimony regarding the "second" rhetoric which is created by today's epistemological situation is applied by Brueggemann to his positive first rhetoric where a universalising interpretation of biblical texts concentrates the advocacy which characterises the subversive potential of the metanarrative of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, at the end of Brueggemann's exposition of the first rhetoric one could not escape impression that some biblical texts, even if observed *as they stand*, that is, freed from all external and text neglecting "hegemonic" interpretations, do not give us clues to universalising interpretation which in its pluralistic tendency, according to author's recognition, gives space for all interpretative communities. Therefore, also Jewish claims that have been expressed by J. D. Levenson, whose interpretation is, said with Brueggemann "not as problematic as a Christian pre-emption of the text but which in fact is also unacceptable because it violates the character of the text itself"²⁸, are partly right and we, Christians, atheists, postmodernists or whoever else must acknowledge that these texts are closely related to the community to which

²⁵ Ibid., 14-16. Cf. also Albertz, R., *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, 30-32 and *Hat die Theologie des Alten Testaments doch noch eine Chance?* in *JBTh* 10 (1995).

²⁶ Cf. Brueggemann's partial retraction of his anti-historical stance in *Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect*, 315: "I am sure that I have not done well in articulating the delicate relationship between historical criticism and theological exposition. Part of the problem is that I am so deeply situated in historical criticism that it is likely that I appeal much more to such categories than I am aware. And part of the problem is that it is increasingly difficult to say with precision what it is that constitutes historical criticism, given the eruption of methodological alternatives. What now is taken as historical criticism is certainly very different from what it was in ancient days when I was in graduate school." Taken as a whole, this self-confession hardly does justice to historical criticism as a legitimate intellectual device if the author incessantly blames it for being hegemonic, privileged and reductionist at the same time. Cf. Ibid., 314: "I suppose I am more aware of the problem of history behind rhetoric than I am skilled at articulating the countercase against that long-standing Western assumption."

²⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 710.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 95. But cf. Olson's judgement, 176: "Brueggemann speaks of meanings he himself is uniquely able to discern in the text itself and without any tendentiousness as opposed to other less able readers who impose outside meanings on the biblical text."

they had been in their *textually form fixed* to refer.²⁹ If we do not accept this fact, our interpretation of these texts might appear to be a scholarly fraud and an intellectual self-contradiction.³⁰ That is, what Brueggemann also says is at stake in his Old Testament theology.³¹ The postmodern stress on *Lust am Text* can destroy the text with its distinctive witness if it is not heard properly. The imposed construct which sees the universality and subversivity of biblical materials everywhere sometimes neglects the (hi)story of these texts. As mentioned above, Brueggemann's macroscheme of the scholarship dividing sharply between hegemony and pluralism has as impact, when applied, to the first rhetoric. Thus, in spite of the first rhetoric's well developed and, for us, persuasive structure it sometimes loses its appreciation for the complexity and elusiveness of biblical materials. That is to say, not everything in the Old Testament is subversive or universal in the way the author would like it to be. The second rhetoric, therefore, can endanger the first.

This problem can be elucidated in terms of Brueggemann's discussion of "the blessing to the nations". He agrees with H. W. Wolff that the theme of the blessing to the nations is a leitmotif in ancestral narratives (cf. Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) and continues with the Jacob narrative (Gen 47:7+10), Exodus (12:29-32) and the Isaiah of the exile (is not this elsewhere by author blackened affirmation of the historical criticism!)³² in whose book: "The horizon of Israel's testimony is expansive and takes in the whole human as the scope of Yahweh's sovereignty and concern."³³ If Brueggemann's timeless travel through biblical texts is intended to exhibit their universality and anti-exclusiveness, we cannot be surprised that even prophetic texts proclaiming God's intention to destroy the nations (cf. Deut 7:14; Exod 17:8-16 etc) are dismissed as being "ideological" because "it is likely that the seven nations are a theological construct without any historical base, and because in this case the sovereignty of Yahweh is drawn most blatantly and directly into the service of Israel's political agenda"³⁴. Nevertheless, this affirmation does not answer much and we doubt that texts such as Ezekiel (cf. chapters 25-32), not to mention Nehemiah and Ezra (cf. 10:2ff), are friendly to the nations in the way the author would like. The text *itself* does not serve as a reference to subversivity and universality in all cases. Indeed, the Old Testament sometimes consoles a specific group of people or supports political establishments (Solomon, David), even as it promises the destruction of others. Consequently, even if the modern interpreter and his community relocated themselves in the situation of the consoled exiled Jews, which might be entirely possible,

²⁹ Why Brueggemann accepts Barr's semantic theory, which represent a positive evaluation of historical criticism and distinguishes between what the text "meant" and "means", is not quite understandable to us. Cf. an implicit critique of the "debilitating fragmentation" of Barr's historical criticism in *Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect*, 315.

³⁰ Contradictions in Brueggemann's theology would require separate consideration. An interesting example of author's inconsistent reasoning is epitomised by his references to so-called "typical Jewishness" which, when it serves his needs, is used against "Christian assumption". At other places, this notion of "typical Jewishness" is opposed as being reductionist in light of the universal openness of the text which means that no interpretative community is to be given priority. From our point of view, as previously explained, we suspect that this is a feature of the second rhetoric. Cf. *Theology*, 95, 325-332, 733-735 and *Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect*, 316-318.

³¹ Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 720.

³² Cf. Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*, 183: "The exile was indeed a real historical experience that can be located and understood in terms of public history."

³³ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 433.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 497.

there would remain (as biblical texts explicitly say) some other groups outside the positive promise whose destiny would not look so optimistic. This fact cannot be denied by the assertion about the powerful polyphony of the text nor by a rejection of the one-dimensionality of the Old Testament.³⁵ Whether the milieu behind the texts is historical is not as decisive as the fact of the clearly stated exclusiveness of some of biblical texts. It must be acknowledged that their specificity cannot always be easily adapted to the subversivity which is so frequently seen in the Bible in these days.³⁶ In short, the hermeneutical construct of a universalising interpretation and the stresses on subversivity which are elaborated in Brueggemann's rhetoric do not function everywhere. Settlement and certitude are inherent to some biblical texts, if these are not seen only as being literary artefacts with no inner value. We hope that this observation has nothing in common with the reductionism which the author criticises so strongly.³⁷ In summary, even postmodern focus on the subversivity³⁸ of the Old Testament is often "subverted" by biblical materials which do not fit to parameters of a discourse, which in the name of pluralism and universality and without an appreciation for the delicate nature of the Old Testament, violates the specificity of the materials which it contains. Once again, it is the second rhetoric which is to be blamed for this depreciation of the excellently elaborated first rhetoric.

(d) Old Testament Theology and Conflict of Interpretations

Brueggemann criticises influential figures of 20th century biblical scholarship and their theologies of the Old Testament in an unconvincing manner. Here, the second rhetoric also plays a key role. According to our reading and understanding of these theologies, neither W. Eichrodt, G. von Rad nor B. S. Childs created "centrist" or "hegemonic" theologies, and one can only assume that this was their main intention. These scholars were aware of their political and epistemological context and their theologies became centrist because they were persuasive and because they correspond vividly with the contemporary situations. We think that part of Brueggemann's strategy may be that in order to promote his own theology, he does not allow to speak his opponents properly. Let us turn to the author's most frequent target, which is epitomised by his American colleague, Childs, whose theological interpretation is characterised as "hegemonic" and "massively reductionistic"³⁹. If we quote from Childs' opus magnum, the hegemonism attributed to him suddenly looks very different: "Perhaps the major contribution of Biblical Theology to this complex theological issue is to illuminate the full diversity of the biblical witness regarding the church. Clearly no one form of polity has the

³⁵ Ibid., 731-732.

³⁶ For a more nuanced consideration of subversivity, cf. Magonet, J., *The Subversive Bible*, London 1997, 1: "For if the Bible is sometimes subversive, it is all too often subverted in turn by its interpreters. Today we know that we have to interpret those who interpret the text in our behalf."

³⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 107.

³⁸ An attentive reader of Brueggemann's books knows that the topic of subversivity is itself contradictory because (a) it is related to theories about social revolution which were developed by Marx and which have been applied to biblical materials, particularly by G. Mendenhall and N. Gottwald, who have not only searched in, but also behind, texts of the Bible and have thus also explored historically (!) sociological movements that have coded their ideology rhetorically (!) with the texts from the Old Testament. These ideologies are, therefore, (b) laden with a subversivity that competes with other social historical groupings. Cf. Gottwald's very sound response to Brueggemann in *Rhetorical, Historical, and Ontological Counterpoints in Doing Old Testament Theology*.

³⁹ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 710, 729-730, *Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect*, 315-318.

sole claim to biblical warrants."⁴⁰ Is Childs' notion really so hegemonic? Does not Brueggemann use only the second rhetoric to challenge Childs' theology? This propensity is clearly debunked by D. T. Olson who has shown that Childs himself is aware of diversities among the biblical testimonies of the Old and New Testaments. That is why expressions like "enormous diversity", "multiplicity of approaches", "complex process of reflection which continued to shape its diverse traditions" and "variety of different voices" are employed in Childs' theology.⁴¹ To charge him with "hegemonism" is wrong if we consider that he himself considers his theological effort to be one of many.⁴² Certainly, in light of its dogmatic and church-related interests, Childs' work is reductionistic. But in some sense, whose efforts are not?⁴³ It is clear that his ideas have been described as "epoch making" and "paradigmatic" only retrospectively. Therefore, not only Childs', but also von Rad's and Eichrodt's, theologies have become "hegemonic" not because these authors from the outset, described their concepts as centrist or hegemonic, but because of the reasons that have just been mentioned. Intellectual honesty and persuasiveness which tries to reach consensus by using cogent reasoning and solid argumentation is what these scholars surely must have in mind. Hegemony, especially as understood by Brueggemann, is something different. Correspondingly, Brueggemann's second rhetoric leads to some very peculiar assertions, which already know what the critique of influential scholars will look like before evaluating their remarkable enrichments and before describing their contribution to today's situation. Therefore, the caesura between the contemporary situation and previous developments is not as sharp as Brueggemann suggests and many concepts which were developed previously must be recognised as contributing influentially to contemporary biblical scholarship. It is clear the sharpness of this discontinuity is more a result of the hidden rhetoric which underlies the author's vision of how the theology of the Old Testament should look than because of a carefully scrutinised and well-balanced evaluation of the older intellectual effort which mainly originated in Europe. Accusing Childs and others of reductionism inevitably turns out to be a construct of the second rhetoric which supports Brueggemann's own theology.⁴⁴ Consequently, this theology must be taken as one of many, despite efforts at self-promotion and its very successful rhetoric.⁴⁵ At the present time, there are many competing and conflicting theologies. There were also many - although for obvious reasons surely not such a quantity as now - in the past.

⁴⁰ Childs, B. S., *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament*, SCM Press, London 1992, 448-449.

⁴¹ Cf. Olson, T. D., *Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization: A Dialogue with Childs, Brueggemann and Bakhtin*, 169.

⁴² Cf. Childs' positive evaluation of Jewish biblical theology in *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament*, 25-26.

⁴³ Cf. a critique of Brueggemann's reductive mode of theologising by Brett, M. G., in *Canonical Criticism and Old Testament Theology*, in: Mayes, A. D. H., (ed.) *Text in Context. Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Studies*, Oxford 2000, 77: "Yet in spite of his theoretical gestures towards post-modernism and the details of his exegetical observations, Brueggemann frequently reduces heterogeneous material to recurring themes, condensing his interpretations without regard to the diversity of traditions from which they are drawn."

⁴⁴ Brueggemann admits that reductionism is a mode of critical reasoning when he speaks about the rhetorical modelling of his own theology. Cf. *Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect*, 310: "It may be that notion is reductionist because one can, I am sure, claim that not everything is testimony." But five pages later, when talking about the same matter, Childs receives this piece of criticism: "(H)is notion of canonical strikes me as unfortunately reductionist." What is, then, not reductionist?

⁴⁵ Cf. *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, Minneapolis 1998.

Summary

In summing up our considerations, we are strongly persuaded that the second rhetoric used in Brueggemann's theology could have been omitted. Possibly he should have expressed his critique of earlier intellectual history in another book where his reflections on previous and current scholarship could have been compared with his rhetorically based theology. Without the prologue and epilogue, which, as has been demonstrated, are useless for the main part of the book, the first rhetoric which was developed in Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament, Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* might have been more persuasive. Nevertheless, this book represents a postmodern work which is made challenging by Brueggemann's active method of the Old Testament. This voluminous work is worthy of discussion and critique. The critical remarks made above only express our desire for more refined and better-balanced argumentation in an otherwise outstanding theological work which unquestionably has become the first fully postmodern theology of the Old Testament.