Abstract

One particularly disputed topic within the field of Old Testament theology is the subject of creation, specifically the theological and ethical import of the creation materials. The present study conducts a survey of positions on the theme of creation in significant works of Old Testament Theology (excluding works that utilize a narrative or book-based approach) from the seminal volumes of Eichrodt and Von Rad to the present day. It is the intention of the present study to identify the various zones of general agreement and disagreement within the subcategories present in different discussions of creation in Old Testament Theology, in order to clearly isolate the areas that require further research.

Keywords: creation; Old Testament Theology; Walther Eichrodt; Gerhard von Rad; hermeneutics

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Introduction

Biblical theology provides the necessary link between exegesis and systematic theology. One relevant topic within the narrower field of Old Testament theology is the subject of creation, particularly the theological and ethical import of the creation materials. To obtain a bird's-eye view of the previous development and current state of play of this question, the present study will conduct a survey of positions on the theme of creation in significant works of Old Testament Theology and topical discussions from the volumes of Eichrodt and Von Rad to the present day. Specifically, attention will be paid to the organizing principles and criteria for the chosen corpus of each work, in order to clearly isolate areas that require further research.

Foundations: Eichrodt and von Rad

Background and Methodologies

If two works of Old Testament theology had to be identified as the archetypes for the discipline, it undoubtedly would be those of Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. Writing in the 1930's, Eichrodt was part of a movement that reacted against the trends of fragmentary evolutionary approaches that devalued the Old Testament as well as earlier approaches to Old Testament theology that were essentially just histories of Israelite religion. He sought to recover the theological content of the OT by identifying its central concepts throughout its historical development and addressing the material systematically. He used the idea of the covenant as his central organizing principle. The three main sections comprising his theology were entitled “God and the People” (which is essentially devoted to the institutions and personnel of the cultus), “God and the World,” and “God and Man.”

In contrast, von Rad, whose first volume of OT theology came out in 1957, set his primary focus upon “Israel's own explicit assertions about Jahweh,” as the key theme throughout the OT is “continuing divine activity in history.” OT theology, then, is a process of re-telling, paying attention to how Israel organized and utilized its historical traditions. Thus, the first volume of his work has a section covering the theology of the Hexateuch, a section entitled “Israel's anointed” (the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles), and “Israel before Jahweh” (which handled the poetry and wisdom materials). His second volume works through the prophets before a concluding section discussing integration with the NT.
Eichrodt’s Organization of the Creation Materials

With these contrasting methodologies established, the structure of Eichrodt’s approach to creation will be briefly examined (his specific views will be synthesized in the section surveying von Rad below). The first relevant chapter, “Cosmology and Creation,” opens with a section on Israelite cosmology followed by a much longer section called “The Distinctive Character of the Israelite Belief in Creation.” After first noting that Israel’s belief in creation was part of their faith from the beginning, his first subsection is called, “The Creation as the Free Institution of a Spiritual and Personal Will,” which contains six major points: 1) “The influence of the covenant concept.” YHWH, the covenant God is independent of and in control of the world; 2) “The exclusion of the Theogony.” Nothing is written about the emergence of God(s), and thus the world is entirely dependent on God; 3) “The creator as Lord: creation through the word.” The origin of creation is in a miracle of transcendent will; 4) “The inner coherence of creation and history.” Creation is part of a spiritual process; 5) “Creatio ex nihilo.” The primordial waters of Gen 1:2 simply reflect lifelessness and have been purged of mythological content; 6) “The eschatological creator God.” There is a prophetic hope of new creation to consummate YHWH’s purposes. Only the last two of these sections interact significantly with the textual evidence. The second subsection is called “The Creator’s Witness to Himself in His Works.” Its three points are: 1) “The original perfection of creation”; 2) “Teleology in the structure of the cosmos,” which covers the purpose seen in Genesis 1–2, Isaiah 40–55, the Psalms and the Wisdom literature; 3) “The unity of the cosmos.” All things in relationship to God. The third subsection is, “Comparison with the Creation Myth of Babylonia,” and it contrasts the OT with the Enuma elish.

Eichrodt’s next chapter is “The Place of Man in Creation.” Its first section is “The Peculiar Value of Man as Compared with Other Creatures.” Here he looks at the difference in power between man and other creatures (particularly from Psalm 8 and Genesis 2), the fact that the divine gift of life is only given to man (Genesis 2), and the issue of the meaning of the image of God (this section being significantly longer than the others). The remainder of this chapter covers the words for the individual components of human nature.

Von Rad’s Theology of Creation

Surveying von Rad’s views on creation requires drawing on a few sources in addition to his OT theology. First, in 1936 von Rad wrote an essay called “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” in which he (in contrast to Eichrodt) argued for the subordination of creation to redemption.
in OT thought as a whole. Von Rad notes that the OT opposed the Canaanite nature religions not with teaching on creation but instead references to election. In Psalms 136, 48, and 33, redemption and creation are side by side, but with the former as the climax.\(^1\) In number of places in Deutero-Isaiah, redemption is merged into YHWH’s acts of creation, most notably Isa 51:9–10, where YHWH’s defeat of the chaotic seas is merged with the parting of the Red Sea in the Exodus narrative. He also identifies this pattern of creation serving soteriology in Psalm 74.\(^2\) The centrality of redemption is also identified in Genesis 1, which sets up statutes and ordinances in a larger work (the Priestly source) concerned with more of the same.\(^3\) Although von Rad is aware there are passages that don’t fit this paradigm (particularly Psalms 8, 19, and 104 and the wisdom material), he handily sweeps them away by arguing that they originated in foreign sources and are thus not representative of Yahwism.\(^4\) He thus reiterates this thesis, “the doctrine of creation never attain to the stature of a relevant, independent doctrine….it was invariably related, and indeed subordinated to soteriological concerns.”\(^5\) In this context—1930’s Germany—there was an important political reason for von Rad to say all of this: it stemmed from his motivation to contrast Christianity with the “Blood and Soil” religion of National Socialism.\(^6\) He feared that an overemphasis on creation would give rise to the error of fertility religion.\(^7\)

Von Rad’s main discussion of creation in his OT theology opens with a short section (“The Place in the Theology of the Witness Concerning Creation”) that first asserts the lateness of the emergence of the Israelite doctrine of creation,\(^8\) or more precisely, the connection of the saving-history to a belief in creation (contra Eichrodt, who stated the Israelites believed in creation from the earliest times).\(^9\) He then surveys the familiar passages in Isaiah and the Psalms where he sees creation invoked only as a support of redemption (these passages which Eichrodt, conversely, used as evidence that God’s creation contains an eventual purpose of salvation).\(^10\) On this basis, he extrapolates that the dual creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 were in fact etiologies of the election of Israel. He then briefly observes the much more prominent place of creation (and absence of redemption) in the wisdom literature.\(^11\) The second major section dealing with creation, “The Pictures of Jahweh’s Acts of Creation,” starts with a comparison with the “J” and “P” accounts of creation in Genesis 1–2; they both make the creation of man central in their own way. God’s creation by means of the word emphasizes his power, possession of the world, and independence from the world\(^12\) (with which Eichrodt would agree; for him creation by the word emphasizes that creation is “the miracle of the transcendent creative will”).\(^13\) He covers the “image of God” issue; for him this means man’s status as Lord in the world;\(^14\) compare
Eichrodt’s answer of a “share in the personhood of God” and thus capability of divine and human relationality.30 Von Rad contrasts both Genesis 1 and 2 with the texts elsewhere describing YHWH’s struggle with chaos (he emphasizes that only elements of this mythological tradition are used).31 Eichrodt is somewhat stronger in disconnecting Israel from belief in the Babylonian chaos-myths.32 He briefly notes the different perspective on creation found in the wisdom corpus before arguing that the Israelites did not have a modern concept of “world” from which man was differentiated (“much less Being than Event”), and that the OT had no stable conception of the nature of man.33 Further on, in his section on wisdom he does address the treatment of creation in the wisdom literature: in Proverbs 8, wisdom is the first-born of God’s works in creation, and guided creation. Furthermore, “the world and man are joyously encompassed by wisdom…[creation] points back to God.”34 In contrast with the Priestly writer, who started with the saving-history, the wisdom school started with creation, and used the idea of the revelation of God’s will to understand it. The cosmic wisdom is identified with YHWH’s revelation.35 Eichrodt would disagree: “both the Yahwist and Priestly writers make creation the starting-point of a history.”36 Fortunately, von Rad was better able to appreciate the place of creation in his 1970 monograph on wisdom. For example, he found a parallel between wisdom’s call in proverbs and the testimony of nature in the psalms.37

The radically different conceptual schemas make the comparison of von Rad and Eichrodt’s views on creation difficult. However, the one recurring feature is that von Rad’s assumption of the subordination of creation in the overall schema of Israelite thought repeatedly leads him to draw differing conclusions than Eichrodt. These emerged, for example, in the discussions concerning the focus of the “priestly” creation account, the meaning of the references to creation in Isaiah, and the comparison of the wisdom and priestly corpuses.

Later Voices

Zimmerli and Childs

In his OT theology released in 1978, Walther Zimmerli took an approach similar to that of Von Rad, albeit one that started with the revelation of YHWH at Mount Sinai as its starting point for gathering the traditions. For him the central component of the OT was the sameness of God; he favors the Priestly account that the name of YHWH was first revealed to Moses in Exodus 3 and thus considers this the beginning of authentic revelation. Although he believes the exodus to be more central to the OT than creation, he holds that this event forced Israel to grapple with the reality of its creating God, and how he differed from the Canaanite deities.
(thus placing him perhaps halfway between von Rad and Eichrodt on this point). His section on creation begins with the accounts of Genesis 2 (noting its interest in man’s welfare) and Genesis 1 (covering its cosmological focus, demythologization of nature, and special place for man). Zimmerli then covers Deutero-Isaiah and Psalms, noting (like von Rad), their use of creation to support YHWH’s sovereignty and role as deliverer. However, here, for him creation is central, not derivative (as for Von Rad): “creation is one of the great evidences of Yahweh.” For Zimmerli, Isaiah took the pre-existing category of creation and enlarged its boundaries to emphasize YHWH’s absolute sovereignty as well as his ongoing work of deliverance. Likewise, in his short treatment of the place of creation in the wisdom corpus he chooses to dwell on the continuity rather than discontinuity between the wisdom and priestly corpuses. He ends by noting creation’s relevance to the kingship of YHWH and YHWH’s relationship to other gods.

Little had changed in 1992, when Brevard Childs included a section on creation (“God the Creator”) as part of the 10 “Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible” that occurred at the end of his *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Methodologically, although he clearly accepts the traditional critical reconstructions of the compositional history of the text, his concept of the controlling function of the canon prevents him from simply pitting the various sources against each other. Although he was clearly less dependent on critical reconstructions than Zimmerli, their results were virtually indistinguishable.

**Political Implications**

*Middleton and Brueggemann*

The next significant development in creation theology occurred in 1994, when Richard Middleton’s *Harvard Theological Review* article, “Is Creation Theology Inherently Conservative?” boldly challenged Walter Brueggemann’s assertions that creation texts tended to support the status quo of the social system and thus benefit rulers at the expense of the underclass. Middleton noted that Brueggemann had often argued that the emphasis on order in creation texts was inherently biased against liberation, and thus functioned as “imperial propaganda.” Middleton provided positive counter-examples to this hypothesis, starting with the Exodus account, which implicitly depends on creation theology for its critique of slavery (as a warping of the order of harmony), its portrayal of the gift of Torah as “dynamic and developmental,” and the proclamation of YHWH’s name throughout the nations as a “cosmic act.” His second example was Genesis 1 itself, which he reads against a Babylonian background in order to capture its function of delegitimizing Babylonian sacral kingship and giving the exiles a hope of an all-
powerful God. Middleton also argues that the historical memory of the exodus, the kind so highly prized by Brueggeman for its potential for social transformation, is ultimately insufficient on its own to guarantee a fair society. He leverages the liberation theologian Pedro Trigo, who contrast the cosmos/chaos dualism of some worldviews with the Biblical belief in a transcendent creator; he argues that this goodness is more primordial than evil, thus giving reason for hope.

This shift in focus—to the interest in the specific political implications for one’s theology of creation—introduced a new angle to the conversation. Brueggemann himself, in his 1996 *Theology Today* article “The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology” pondered these questions as he conceded Middleton’s critiques and rehearsed the political motivation for von Rad and Barth to marginalize creation in their context. He warmly highlights the late-1960’s work of Claus Westermann, whose introduction of the category of “blessing” set creation and history in a relationship of tension rather than hierarchy, and Frank Moore Cross, whose ANE background research revealed far more of the language of the OT (for example, the song of the sea in Exodus 15) to be based on creation than was previously understood. The work on wisdom of Schmid and the later von Rad also moved creation to the forefront of biblical faith by understanding it as a realm ordered by YHWH, nourishing, and sustaining. After noting some newer studies that understood creation in this way, he praises them for making possible better dialogue between theology and science, for aiding in environmental awareness, and facilitating a better understanding of the patterns of life (which he connects with femininity). He closes by reiterating his concern that creation theology can be used to maintain the social status quo, and that the suitability of a given theology for a given context needs to be constantly evaluated.

Brueggeman’s gracious acceptance of the validity of Middleton’s critique can also be seen in the two sections dealing with creation in his 1997 *Theology of the Old Testament*, although space does not permit their treatment here.

Rogerson

In the burst of Old Testament Theologies that have appeared since 1999, the treatments of creation have been relatively uniform, following similar groupings of texts as those used in von Rad (if not following his presuppositions regarding dating or theological emphasis). The surprising exception to this trend is the volume of John Rogerson (*A Theology of the Old Testament*, 2010), as he explicitly works from the category of communication in the modern world, in terms of both social relations and divine-human communication. Rogerson is primarily interested in what the OT has to say to today’s world; for him the central task
of OT theology is answering the question, “what does it mean to be human?”

Thus, he identifies profound social impact in Genesis 1, 6–9: this world of harmony between humans and animals is not the world of our experience, and it cries out for change. It teaches that creation is for humanity. At the same time, it is balanced by a text such as Job 38–41, which critiques an overly anthropocentric view of the world. In Jonah, Rogerson identifies a call to deduce the implications of the concept of creation; if YHWH is creator, then he cares for what he makes (a point Jonah stubbornly refused to accept). Rogerson then moves to Proverbs 8, which he reads as a blueprint for man’s dominion (called for in Genesis 1), a mode of both living in harmony and changing the world for the better. However, when he sees the wisdom mindset at work in Proverbs 8—that world can be understood by observation and the deducing of principles—he pauses and contrasts this thought with Qoheleth 1, which instead emphasizes the inscrutability of the world, and the need to avoid accepting and affirming the world uncritically. Qoheleth calls us to purge trivial concepts of the divine and strip away fantasies.

Rogerson’s conclusions concerning creation theology are distinctly memorable: a tension must be maintained between the ideal world of Genesis 1 and the compromised world of Genesis 9, so that one can accept the world enough to learn from it, but not so much that they lose their desire to change it. On this point he is considerably more thoughtful than the early Brueggemann, who tends towards a rhetoric of revolution with somewhat less balance. Also, while Rogerson does not intend to be systematic or exhaustive, he can at least be commended for working from the text itself as opposed to artificial categories.

**Chaoskampf in Recent Studies**

Three more recent works exhibit comparable approaches towards creation, if differing in length. First, their organizing principles will be noted. Anderson’s three main organizing categories are the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. In Rendtorff’s 2005 *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, the first part is dedicated to a theological reading of the OT in the order of the MT canon, while the second part unpacks 22 discrete themes that Rendtorff views as comprising the teaching of the OT, that “naturally emerged” from the first part. Kessler’s 2013 *Old Testament Theology* treats creation theology as one of the six major “representations of the divine-human relationship” in the OT: the other five are Sinai covenant theology, promise theology, priestly theology, the theology of divine accessibility, and wisdom theology.

To facilitate a brief glimpse at their results, their treatments of the *creation ex chaos* motif were arbitrarily selected as a lens through which to compare
them. For Anderson, the *tubu wabobu* of Gen 1:2 is “primeval disorder,” but he still is adamant that “God creates in absolute sovereignty.” He furthermore does not believe that this chaos is to be viewed pejoratively, but rather a good creation still waiting to be ordered by divine and human effort.\(^72\) Psalm 104 is for him further evidence that God simply puts these chaotic waters in their place.\(^73\) For Rendtorff, although ANE parallels can be adduced for the chaotic waters of Gen 1:2, the main point is YHWH’s superiority over these powers, which he repeatedly demonstrates.\(^74\) Like Anderson, he then examines Psalm 104 (and Job 38); although it shows the continued existence of these chaotic waters, God’s authority through his Word to set their boundaries is final; he further sees this theme in the firmament of Genesis 1 and the release and control of these waters in the flood (7:11; 8:2).\(^75\) Treating YHWH’s battles with Rahab and Leviathan in Isaiah 51; Psalms 74, 89, he stresses that the main point is really the terror of the real-world enemies of the psalmist and YHWH’s ability to exercise this great power for the psalmist. Just as YHWH defeated Chaos at creation, he can defeat Israel’s enemies in the present.\(^76\) Finally, Kessler begins to deal with this issue (“creation as the defeat of chaos”) by starting with Psalms 74; 89 and stating that ANE thought-forms were being used to express truths about YHWH. After adducing parallels between these texts and the West Semitic legends of Baal and his enemies, he, like Rendtorff emphasizes that the main point of these texts is YHWH’s power to similarly act for his people in the present. He ends by applying this same principle to Isaiah 51; it is a cry for deliverance from the God who fights evil.\(^77\) The convergence of these studies is remarkable given the divergent geographical and ecclesiastical settings of these scholars.

**Conclusions**

So what major patterns emerge when all this material has been surveyed? The first significant take-away is that issues of dating and authorship still matter, even when one is more interested in studying the theological import of the texts than their precise meaning in context. Assumptions about source divisions and dating were partially responsible for von Rad’s marginalization of creation as a whole, and for Zimmerli’s assertion that revelation started in the exodus event. Even for the somewhat more “postmodern” approaches of Middleton and Brueggemann, the Babylonian dating of the creation account is still important. Therefore, assumptions about dating and source divisions still exercise a strong influence on the theological conclusions being drawn.

Another issue concerns the precise boundaries of the textual materials considered relevant to the theology of creation. For example, Kessler includes
the “fall” narrative of Genesis 3 in his analysis of Genesis 2, considering them to function together as one unit; however, many do not follow him here. In Rendtorff’s treatment he uses passages that simply refer to the material world in general and utilizes them; the question could be asked if this exceeds the limits of specific references to the act of creation. While the categories chosen by the scholars in question inevitably influence the place of creation within their larger system as a whole, it is often unclear why they have chosen the precise sub-categories for their treatment of creation that they have.

A final issue concerns the treatment of political issues within an Old Testament Theology and the extent to which its categories should be shaped by concerns relating to practical application. While it may be easy for some to dismiss the treatment of Rogerson as being overly driven by a certain set of biases, this certainly raises the question of implicit biases in more descriptive approaches. The decision to not address how a theology of creation may relate to societal change is itself a political one. Nevertheless, contemporary societal issues will inevitably impact the treatment of creation theology, as is evident from National Socialism in von Rad’s day to the environmental concerns in our day. Rather than engaging in the false objectivity of favoring the horizon of the text and neglecting the horizon of the reader, it is clear that the construction of this and other topics in biblical theology needs to be performed with an eye to the pressing questions of one’s circumstances.

With these foundational issues identified, there is certainly a continued need for further works of Old Testament theology. Despite the recent convergence in the groupings of texts, there is further room for creative reflection on how these various aspects of creation relate to each other. There is also a continued need to discuss and delineate which types of texts can be grouped under the rubric of “creation.” Finally, this is an endeavor that cannot be carried out apart from seeking to understand how creation is informed by and can critique current issues in the world.

End Notes

1 For a helpful survey of the basic historical contours of biblical theology, its current models, and its relationship with the other theological disciplines, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Present and Future of Biblical Theology,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 56 (2013), 2–23. Elmer A. Martens, “The Flowering and Foundering of Old Testament Theology,” Direction 26 (1997), 61–79 (61–62), defines biblical theology as, “that approach to Scripture which attempts to see biblical material holistically and to describe this wholeness or synthesis in biblical categories...Biblical theology investigates the themes present in Scripture and
defines their inter-relationships.” He further describes the diversity of its output under the categories of goals, orientations, and method.

2 This necessarily excludes approaches that organize the materials diachronically, read through the canon in a linear fashion, or utilize categories that do not explicitly include creation.


5 This introduced an element of tension into his work. William John Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis: Canonical Praxis and the Sodom Narrative* (JSOTSup 352; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 20, states, “…Eichrodt took a single concept, that of the covenant between God and Israel, and made it the basis of his systematic study of the biblical materials. However, he proceeded to incorporate into his work as a necessity the very History of Religion approach against which he had defined his Old Testament Theology.”

6 Eichrodt’s method can be succinctly defined: He looked at the contents of the OT both in terms of their comparison with ANE beliefs as well as their completion in the NT, “taking a cross-section [i.e. topically] of the realm of OT thought…[thus performing] a comprehensive survey and a sifting of what is essential from what is not” (1:27). He defined his problem as, “how to understand the realm of OT belief in its structural unity” (1:31). However, this structure did not come from the categories of Christian dogmatics or other abstract conceptions; for Eichrodt Israelite religious thought began with their immediate experience of the Law and Cult. For a representative survey of critiques of the limitations of this approach, see Norman K. Gottwald, “Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, “


8 Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:106. This history was organized around the principle that God always dealt with Israel as a unit (1:118). He believed that Israel had developed short, confessional summaries of their saving-history (most notably Deut 26:5–9), the events of which they continuously re-told and adapted for future generations.

9 Recent works by John Walton (*The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009]) and Peter Enns (*Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* [2nd ed; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015]) have stirred considerable controversy within conservative evangelicalism by raising anew the issue of the continuity between the cosmology of the OT and that of other ANE sources. When one encounters this information in a source that is over three-quarters of a century old, it is an instructive reminder of how easily some knowledge is either lost or neglected by certain communities.


18 Von Rad, “Theological Problem,” 60.


22 Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 160–162, lists six reasons why scholarship swung away from this view point.


26 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:139.

27 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:139–144.


29 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:146.


31 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:150–151.

32 Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, 2:113–117. Eichrodt states, “In these contexts, however, the myth no longer has a life of its own. It is of no consequence for Israel’s understanding of the world, but belongs to the treasure-house of poetry, on which poets and prophets liked to draw in order to clothe their thoughts in rich apparel.”


35 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:450.


39 Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology, 32–33.


41 Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology, 37.


43 Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology, 40–42.


45 Childs, Biblical Theology. Contra von Rad, for Childs it is definitive that the canonical form of the text (in contrast to Israel’s lived experience) places creation before redemption, and the account of P prior to the account of J. He
begins with the “priestly” account in Genesis 1, which he identifies as an expression of praise, and notes that its inclusion of the Sabbath points toward the establishing of the everlasting covenant based on it in Exodus 31. Childs then traces the primordial formless overcome in Gen 1:2 to the accounts of YHWH battling chaos in Psalms 74 and 89, and sees them as expressions of YHWH’s continuing creative activity (385–387). Man’s dominion over creation is found by Childs in Psalm 8 (387). He then moves into Deutero-Isaiah, where YHWH’s power as creator is leveraged to guarantee redemption and deliverance in the future (387–388). Finally, the wisdom corpus (Job 28, Proverbs 8, Ben Sira 24) makes it clear that the world was established in wisdom, but there is no easy path for humans to understand it (388–389). The relative brevity of Childs’ treatment prevented him from going in to the level of specificity in which significant disparity with previous treatments could be identified.


58 Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament. These are “Yahweh, the God Who Creates,” (145–164) which occurs in the chapter “Testimony in Verbal Sentences,” and the later chapter, “Creation as Yahweh’s Partner” (528–551).
Perhaps the most striking quality of Brueggemann’s treatment of creation here is how conventional his conclusions are.

59 With the exception of synthesis-based works that have no discernible treatment of creation.


61 Rogerson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 193. Rogerson states, “To be created in the divine image is to be recognized as a unique individual, yet that individuality only becomes meaningful in communal life that is a ‘coercionless synthesis’ of the unique individualities.”


68 Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 74. Brueggemann’s forthright acknowledgment of this bias is memorable and worth quoting. He states, “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. For that I make no apology, for I believe it is not possible to maintain a completely evenhanded posture, and one may as well be honest and make one’s inclination known.” Barr dismisses this stance with equal rhetorical aplomb. In *Biblical Theology*, 561, he states, “When distributive justice is to be ‘concrete, material, revolutionary, subversive and uncompromising’ (745), are we to think of Brueggemann as a real bomb-throwing, Kalashnikov-waving revolutionary? Probably not. It’s only rhetoric, after all. As in many churchly attempts to pronounce on social matters, there is no consideration of the practical politics involved.”


71 Kessler, *Old Testament Theology*.


73 Anderson, *Contours*, 88. Anderson states, “[T]he poet uses the mythical language rather freely to portray God ‘rebuking’ and driving back the restive,
insurgent waters of chaos and assigning them their place in the orderly scheme of creation.”

74 Rendtorff, * Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 419. Rendtorff states, “The ancient near eastern traditions are however more varied and nuanced (cf. Stolz 1970), and the conflict between God and the chaotic flood is primarily the expression of his superiority over other powers that threaten his creation (Podella 1993).”

75 Rendtorff, * Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 419–421.

76 Rendtorff, * Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 420.


80 Bellinger, “A Shape for Old Testament Theology,” 291–292. Reflecting on the larger issue of the organization of a work of Old Testament Theology as a whole, Bellinger notes that a reading “framework” of some kind is necessary and vital, and that the entirety makes it possible to make sense of the individual segments. He specifically suggests that the Psalter could be a starting place for sifting through the rest of the OT.

81 See Tim Meadowcroft, “Method and Old Testament Theology: Barr, Brueggemann and Goldingay Considered,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57 (2006), 35–56 (46), for an appreciative assessment of the strengths of Brueggemann’s *Theology of the Old Testament* in this regard: “As we would expect from his previous work, Brueggemann maintains a strong focus on what he calls the ‘social practice that ... mediates Yahweh in the midst of life’ (p. 574). Consequently he emphasizes both the private and the public responsibility inherent in such a social practice.”

82 The necessity for creation theology to provide a strong backbone for ecological awareness is highlighted in Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (translated by Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 19–21, 192.

83 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd ed; translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall; New York: Continuum, 2004), 278. Gadamer states, “If we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices.” It may be helpful here to invoke Gadamer’s principle that understanding always takes place within the horizon of one’s temporal setting, and that accordingly a text can allow the interpreter to develop further self-understanding by either affirming or modifying these prejudices (291–299).