

Voices from the Past, by Graeme Auld
SOTS Presidential Address, 5 January 2005

You have done me the great honour of electing me and welcoming me as your President for 2005. As is the wont of competent Home Secretaries, John Jarick required of me, if not a song, at least the title of a song well before I was sure which song I wanted to sing. 'Voices from the Past' seemed in September to cover most eventualities in Old Testament studies. I have been working recently on papers that have explored the way in which some biblical writers stood on the shoulders of their predecessors, and looked backwards into more distant pasts. One (or more) of these writers had created much of 1 Samuel out of materials in 2 Samuel and the books of Kings. Another had framed a new preface in Genesis 1-4 for a book which had previously started quite happily with the words: 'This is the book of the generations of Adam.' (Gen. 5:1) But if I were to tell you these stories, you might well not believe me. In any case, it is too early in the year, and too late in a travelling day, for me to set about stretching your incredulity. In the end, and in response to your kindness, I felt it incumbent on myself not to inflict on you the sort of paper I might ordinarily read to an academic meeting. You can read these other papers soon, and find out whether at least you believe me about that! The voices I want you to hear this evening – and sometimes see – are from a much more recent past. And they are amply documented.

Some sixteen months ago, Norman Porteous died at almost 105. He was one of my Edinburgh teachers – 40 years ago¹, I heard him give his inaugural lecture as Principal of New College. At the time of his death, he was by some distance our senior surviving past President. He had been President of the Society in 1954. In the months since then, his family have made over to the University of Edinburgh many letters which he had preserved, from a wide circle of academic and other friends and colleagues. I'm very pleased that his son Malcolm, one of his trustees, is with us this evening. The oldest of these letters is from 1920 and the latest from 2003. The collection includes letters from eighteen past Presidents of the Society, from the second (A.R.S. Kennedy, President in 1920) to the second last (Robert Gordon, President in 2003), covering between them (the Presidents, not their letters) all ten decades in which we have existed. And, if I have played the decades with our Presidents, it could be almost the complete alphabet with the other luminaries: from Alt and Albright, Baumgartner and Buber, Childs and Crenshaw, Dalman and Dentan, Eichrodt and Eissfeldt, ... to Weiser, Welch, Würthwein, and Zimmerli. And these are just a few of the voices from the past: how long have we got this evening?

There are some 780 letters from some 280 correspondents. That seems a large number; and yet, for someone who did keep letters and cards, only 780 kept from a period as long as 83 years is not so many. Why these and not others? At times there seems to be an implicit autobiography: they certainly illumine many of the key choices, as well as many of the key contacts, he made during his career. I should add that the collection includes some letters from a still earlier generation of scholars to Adam Welch, which his widow had passed to Norman Porteous – some of these from a younger Albrecht Alt.

¹ October 1964.

Letters from SOTS Presidents

In as far as there is serious intent to this paper, it is simply to have you reflect, as you hear letters read, how much and how little has changed.

ARS Kennedy was our second president. And he also had a considerable role in Hebrew studies in Scotland, and the wider study of Divinity in Edinburgh. Towards the end of the First World War, just when this Society was being established, he also played a key role in the development of an inter-collegiate, inter-confessional Edinburgh Graduate School in Divinity. And, for almost a thirty-year period between the 1930s and the 1960s, the Professors of Hebrew and Oriental Languages in all four of the then Scottish Universities were his students: his son in Aberdeen, Mullo Weir in Glasgow, Porteous first in St Andrews, and then in Edinburgh, and Honeyman – Porteous's successor in St Andrews. Two letters from Kennedy are preserved. But first, a word from John Lamb, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, 11/7/31 –

The King having been pleased to approve your appointment as Regius Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages in St Andrews University I have to request that you will be so good as to remit the sum of ten shillings in payment of stamp duty on the Royal Warrant of appointment, which will be forwarded in due course.²

Kennedy, still in post in his mid-70s, writes to the new St Andrews incumbent in his mid-30s about his inaugural lecture³:

My dear Professor,

I have just returned from a weekend in the country after a most exacting week spent in correcting MA. and B.D. degree papers. It is only now that I have had an hour in which to read your inaugural address. I thank you sincerely for letting me have a copy of it, and I have read it with great interest and enjoyment. I wonder if Dr. Welch's theory is making headway – he certainly is most indefatigable in defending it. I have not yet had time to read his second volume on the framework of Dtn.

You may remember that I suggested to you the advisability of joining the Society for Old Testament Study, which now numbers, I think, between 200 & 300 members, including all the best known names in O.T. scholarship in this country. The subscription is 5/- a year, & we get the Zeitschrift d. A.T. Wissenschaft at a slightly reduced rate.

If you will permit me I shall be glad to propose your name, along with that of my son, at the forthcoming half-yearly meeting in Birmingham.⁴

P.S. I have only one criticism to make in your excellent address – I don't like the word 'concoct' and 'concoction' on p.5.

On p.6 'Shalmaneser' should be 'Sargon'.

However, it was Adam Welch who had been Porteous's principal Edinburgh Hebrew mentor. Here is a flavour of our 1934 President, from a series of letters to NWP studying in Berlin with Sellin in the 1927-28 winter, enclosing proofs of *Jeremiah: His Time and His Work* for the younger man to correct:

² Not only **not** the King's shilling, but the candidate's ten shillings.

³ Does this letter deconstruct itself?

⁴ Was that 1933? And who was William Wardle?

Why am I moved with the desire to write books? Nobody wants another book on Jeremiah, and nobody will bother to read mine, except a faithful few. They will read G[eorge] A[dam] Smith. It is not for *kudoj*: I only get criticism. It is not for money: Heaven knows one gets none. It is not for spreading the light, for the light does not spread. Parsons want texts from Jeremiah and care not an iota whether he meant what they make him mean.

Then on Jan. 14, 1928 (to a 30-year-old), who had just told him he was giving up Hebrew and Old Testament for Systematic Theology:

I am greatly interested in your letter and satisfied to think that you have found your bent and made up your mind as to what you want to work at. Half the battle is there, to choose a subject in which you are interested and realise that you can give expression to yourself. My one regret is that I may have misled you, so that all this Arabic and Syriac, good stuff, has been wasted on you. I don't regret the Hebrew: that will remain useful, but the linguistic time and energy have been wasted. Your next business is to switch definitively off to your new subject. Drop Syriac, drop the work you were planning about the Old Test., and get a new subject for your Cunningham more closely connected with what you want to work at in future.⁵ Don't halt on two legs like the men at Carmel.

The one thing you are not to be allowed to drop is correcting these proofs. It will do you no harm, only good, to have your name mentioned in connection with any academic work. It will let some in the church know that they may expect something from you.

The letters I most like from Welch are those from the 20s. But the SOTS President for 1934 was in trenchant form on 6 February on the arrangements for his summer meeting:

Glad to learn about the paper. I shall manage two papers from the older men and two from the younger. It is high time that the Socy. was having the courage to draw out you young fellows and give you a chance to try out your opinions. Then you will venture on publication. Besides, I am so weary of Oesterley and Robinson and Cook and that dreary gang.⁶

Porteous had missed the Winter Meeting in 1953. Winton Thomas wrote to him a few days later telling him of his election as President for 1954. (It can be unwise to miss a meeting.) Guillaume wrote in July 54: the Edinburgh meeting had been 'the happiest conference we have had' and had set 'an impossible standard for next year'.

The next President of SOTS, Aubrey Johnson (1956), he often described as his closest friend in the Society.

He encouraged Norman to get on with the job of producing an OT Theology, a response to Eichrodt and von Rad, long before von Rad's famous volumes of 1957 and 1960. Johnson already in 28 August 1949:

⁵ One of the conditions of the Cunningham Fellowship, which was financing Porteous's three semesters in Germany, was that candidates gave a public lecture on their researches on their return to Edinburgh.

⁶ The Presidents of 1931, 1928, and 1925. Theodore Robinson was our original secretary, serving from 1917 to 1946. John Rogerson's *A Short History* notes that only T.H. Robinson 'has had the honour of being elected twice to the Presidency of the Society ... and this was in recognition of his unequalled service to the Society'.

What you have to say about Eichrodt and von Rad quite whets my appetite and makes me long for more. I shall look forward to the January meeting of the SOTS all the more, as I should much like to hear about the issues raised. You are tackling the philosophical problems which for me, while urgent enough, seem far away at present (a) because I still feel ill-equipped for this (especially in comparison with yourself), and (b) because I am so busy with the minutiae of the historical problems. Having got the first of the Vitality series (!) with the press, I am now back onto the Psalter – in accordance with my principle of ringing the changes! I fancy that H.H.R. would prefer the latter (although he has already said that the former is just the sort of thing that he wanted), as he has often said that it was time that this question was ventilated again at one of the Society's meetings, and you have probably noticed how it always seems to hover around in discussions. While I think that Mowinckel was wrong in some respects, I am quite sure that he was right in others, and that Snaith, for example, is far from having said the last word on the subject.

The letters from Godfrey Driver relate, not to SOTS, but to the OT panel of the NEB. Theodore Robinson was the original secretary to the panel, after a near 30-year stint as our first secretary.⁷ He himself was responsible for the draft of Jeremiah. While that book was being worked on, he had had a serious car crash, in which he had been injured, but his wife killed. Driver writes:

Dear Porteous

Robinson has written to tell me that he hopes to be present this week, as his doctor assures him that it will be the best possible cure – which makes me anxious lest he becomes slower than ever.

However, bring Daniel too in case he fails at the last minute.

In a chasing letter, he added:

Meanwhile, please consider carefully Jeremiah xxiii 33-40 in the light of my notes and his comments.

I cannot see any real sense in the traditional view nor understand R.'s defence of it; and the double entendre, which he wishes in v.33, seems to me to have no point.

I don't mind accepting the usual view if sense can be made of it; but can it?

The passage is extremely obscure and I fear that R. will sink us in a flow of verbiage unless you with your clear and philosophical (Scotch?) mind can put the issues clearly.

Yours sincerely

1 Nov. '59

5 June 1971

... It's also very good news to hear that the N.E.B. is being well regarded; I have had similar good reports, only a few unfriendly. One missionary church won't use it because of our translation of *hml* [in Isaiah 7:14; and one Anglican (?) parson in a church review condemns us for beginning with a 'howler' (Gen. 1:1), two other 'howlers' which I forget, and the usual *hml* [, asking why we have not followed the N.T.? (Dodd now tells me that he thinks

⁷ The following picture is of an early panel meeting in Cardiff.

‘young woman’ proper also for the N.T., as I have pointed out that *parqe,noj* does not necessarily connote virginity even in classical Greek and that Dinah is so called by the LXX (Gen. 34:3) after being seduced! And what about Prov. 30:19: is seducing virgins one of the wonders of the world? Lastly, a crazy woman in a 10 pages’ letter denouncing the wickedness of Dodd and myself (addressed to us ‘c/o the department of Heathen Philology!) concludes that, as we have put ‘Dogstar’ in Jb. 38:13, 15 and ‘there can be no such thing’, we must be homosexuals, that she is having us watched and that, if caught, we shall be taken to court

C.R. North was the Home Secretary of the Society (joint with Robinson) who informed Porteous of his election to membership in 1932. Porteous also kept two of North’s letters from 1948:

I hope the reading of your article [in SJT] will stimulate me in my efforts to write a Presidential address. I’m about bone dry, though my mind is active enough in fields where I’ve little knowledge – this Scandinavian tangle, for instance. But I must have printed close on 200,000 words in the last three years or less, and I’d be glad enough to lie fallow for a bit.

John Mauchline (President in 1959) wrote at the end of 1939:

I was happy to learn that in your home there is a place of security, your wife and I’enfant doing well.

Concerning Kahle’s visit [to lecture in Glasgow and Edinburgh] – I imagine that provisional arrangements should be made forthwith. Would the week commencing 22nd January suit Edinburgh? About that time the moon should be full, and that may be a decided convenience; and I suppose that a week fairly early in the term would be preferable.

When he wrote to ‘My dear Uncle Norman’ in May 1952, G. Henton Davies was Home Secretary:

Since the outline of the Society’s life is now broadly arranged for 1953, my mind is turning to 1954, and in particular to the Diamond Jubilee Meeting, July 1954. The suggestion has been made that we could worthily celebrate our Diamond occasion by meeting in Scotland, and several desire to combine that opportunity with their desire to see you in the Presidency of the Society for that year. It is my intention therefore to sow the seeds of all this at our Committee in July.....

Next Aubrey [Johnson] and I have been discussing confidentially the question of a Festschrift for the ‘Big Chief’ (H.H.R.). Since he retires in three years, and since such a Festschrift will require contributions from at least the ends of the earth, and possibly beyond by that time, preliminary discussions should be taking place!! Aubrey immediately raised the question of a Festschrift for C.R.N., and I had to confess that I had not thought of it. Accordingly a delicate position has arisen. Do we promote two of these? If so, how do we get round the difficulty of the comparison between North’s inevitably small Festschrift, and H.H.R.’s international, perhaps two volume affair? Does the Society promote one for H.H.R. and not one for C.R.N.? Does the Society promote neither, and do a few friends get busy on one for Rowley only? These are some of the problems we have in mind.

Henton Davies may have taken us to the ends of the earth and beyond. Letters which Porteous preserved from later Presidents of the Society bring us too close to the land of the living for it to be sensible for me to continue long in this vein. Let me conclude with part of a 1964 letter from James Barr in Princeton:

Thank you also for your remarks in the recent Expository Times article, which were very helpful and have been well received by those with whom I have had discussion. I don't feel that Is. 7.8 needs to be taken in the sense you suggest: I see it as a collocation of two usage meanings, and not a reference to a 'root-meaning'. I may send a brief note to the ET about this. But apart from this I was much gratified by your remarks.

Johnson, from whom we heard last in 1948, sent Norman advance mention almost 30 years later (2 May 1977) of his comments on that Barr/Porteous debate on *!ma* in ExT:

'Now that my own enquiry into the various notions evoked by the use of *!ma* in the Qal, Niph'al, and Hiph'il has enabled me to express an opinion with regard to this question of a word-play, I must refer the reader to the discussion of this issue between N.W. Porteous and J. Barr, E.T. lxxv (1963-64), pp.71f. and 242; for, on looking again at their arguments, it seems to me in the light of my own investigations that both writers have points to make about the question of 'root meanings' and the matter of 'overtones' which need to be borne in mind when dealing with the semantic aspects of Hebrew.'

Don't trouble to acknowledge this, but I thought you would welcome the information and my recognition of your attempt to maintain an approach to the subject which was more balanced than that of J.B.

Letters from Other Correspondents, many of them Honorary Members of SOTS⁸

Porteous, President in 1954, never held other office in SOTS; but he would have made a model Foreign Secretary. He was very concerned to revive friendship and promote renewed cooperation with German scholars immediately after the Second World War. As the German front was crumbling at the end of the First War, he had known army service in northern France. Ten years later he had spent three formative semesters in the universities of Berlin, Tübingen, and Münster. And in 1935 – two years into the Nazi government – with a dozen other members of SOTS, he had attended in Göttingen the second world congress of OT scholars (they had been urged by their German colleagues to attend and give them support and advice).

Letters from Eissfeldt span more than thirty years. The first is a card of 11.12.35:

Many warm thanks for the friendly despatch of your report on the Göttingen Old Testament meeting in Expos. Times. I've read it with great pleasure. You have really known how to paint a fitting picture of the meeting, and I am very pleased that through your report a very considerable part of the theologians of Great Britain will now have knowledge of the contemporary strivings in the field of Old Testament studies.

⁸ The translations below are my own.

A letter from soon after the war nicely illustrates the need to be economical with typewriter ribbon.

Albrecht Alt wrote from Leipzig in April 1950:

I still remember you very well from Göttingen in 1935 and only regret that I could not come into closer contact with you then, because I had to leave the Congress early to start on a journey to Palestine, probably the last one of my life. I'm all the more pleased now over the fresh start to the connection between us.

I am glad to know that I could perform a small service with the dissertation on the concept of 'Remnant' in the Old Testament by my assistant Werner Müller, who fell in 1944. But truly there is no need of a return service, and it would be dangerous if I wanted to start listing to you the works published in your country in the last ten years which I am lacking; for then I would really find no end at all, though thanks to the kind care of several colleagues I have already received many an important book. It has now got to the stage that here in Leipzig I can hardly obtain a new book through the bookseller from the other German zones, but am left to obtain it from the author himself as a gift. All the more must I waive returning my library to being up to date with the newest literature from abroad! I am accustoming myself gradually to considering this waiver as a kind of reparations effort which is imposed particularly on the representatives of academic learning in this area and which we should not complain about bearing. Be assured in any case of my genuine thanks for your friendly offer, and please do not understand it amiss that I do not know whether and how I may make use of it.

And from Tübingen in August 1952, on hearing that Welch's Jeremiah had arrived for him in Leipzig⁹:

I am very glad that through your initiative the work could still be published after the death of the author; for even if I have not shared for a long time in any connection the views of the author, I have still always treasured him particularly highly as an independent and sensitive scholar, and have also no doubt that I will learn a great deal from the new work.

Then the two most famous Alt-Schüler. There are fifteen letters from Martin Noth over a similar number of years, from October 1947, this the first of them, from Bonn:

I would have liked to have my wartime books (The Laws in the Pentateuch and the Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien) follow the first smaller mailing and hear now that Eissfeldt has already sent them to you. I'm pleased; but I would have liked to have despatched them myself. Admittedly I have no copies of them at hand, because it usually takes quite a long time for mailings from publishers in the Russian zone to reach here. However, I still have available a few copies of my book The World of the Old Testament (1940). Now after the war they have been very badly bound. I would very happily send you a copy of it, if you don't yet have the book.

Your friendly offer to send me a copy of A.C. Welch, The Work of the Chronicler, I take up with hearty thanks. It will be very useful for me to

⁹ The art of the thank-you letter!

possess the book, especially since I myself have worked on the Chronicler. I think that the book can be sent directly by the post....

It is very good that Weiser has invited you to participate in the 'Alte Testament Deutsch'. In this series I myself should work on the books Exodus – Numbers, but will only be able to start work after some time, since before that I must write a 'History of Israel'. And writing books is now rather difficult over here on account of the bad library situation. I myself lost my whole private library in Königsberg, and the Bonn libraries are in large part very damaged. It is therefore rather troublesome to acquire the books necessary for the work, and it is often quite impossible.

And from a letter of May 1948:

I have meanwhile sent the Book Lists of 1946 and 1947 to Prof. Weiser in Tübingen, and he wrote to me that they had been very worthwhile for him. I too have had great benefit from them; for these excellent lists are for us still today to a large extent the only source of knowledge for the academic literature on the Old Testament published outside Germany. The Society for Old Testament Study achieves with these lists a great service towards the recovery of international cooperation in our field. We in Germany are extraordinarily grateful for this.

Porteous was very supportive of Weiser who had to wait several years after 1945 before being restored to his chair in Tübingen. Several of the letters from Weiser and others relate to this case. The problem is neatly illustrated in an offprint Weiser had sent to Porteous in 1937.

Back to Noth – from a short letter in April 1949:

Colleague G. Dehn delivered to me the 1948 Book List and your fine article 'Towards a Theology of the Old Testament' and told me of his visit to you. I was heartily pleased about both. Many thanks for your friendly gifts. Your article I briefly read through immediately, and will come back to study it carefully. In the past winter semester I lectured for the first time in Bonn on Theology of the Old Testament and worked out this series completely afresh and took great pains to come closer to the essence of Old Testament Theology. I believe that the way you recommend is basically the right one. We must come to the point that we properly comprehend the concept of Heilsgeschichte.

So Noth in his own words. The assistant to the Scottish Representative of the British Council wrote in November that year to Porteous about the Edinburgh leg of a Council-sponsored visit to Britain by Martin Noth:

Apparently Professor Noth is a large, genial man whom you will find rather accommodating. His interests seem to be archaeological rather than theological. His English is good enough to carry on a slow conversation.

Yet, from a short card a decade later – from a time closer to the well-known portrait:

Your mention of the problem of the relationship between Heilsgeschichte and scientifically mediated history of Israel is quite justified. I would just like to think that the question of this relationship can not be answered at all easily with an either-or, but is very subtle and complicated. It may be that a very

important theological task for Old Testament study lies here. As regards this task, I have read your article with great profit.

von Rad, writing from Göttingen in January 1948, also recalled the congress there in 1935:

I remember you very well; we stayed together in the theol. Hostel and sat together one evening. The talk then between us was about the Abyssinian crisis. But in the meantime still more crises have come upon us. All the more heartily do I thank you for your letter and your friendly sentiments.

The book which you have sent me I can use very well. I have certainly already read it before, but I do not possess it and it is difficult to borrow. And since I have to write a commentary on Deuteronomy, I shall have to study my way through the books of Welch once again. I shall of course write a letter to Mrs Welch.

It is so important for us after the years of being cut off, to come again into contact with the theological work from abroad. May I then immediately latch on to one sentence of your letter, in which you write that you are happily ready to help us: A book was published over there, A.G. Hebert, 'The Authority of the Old Testament', London 1947. Is that a respectable book? And – please forgive my 'importunity' – if it is a book worth reading, could I perhaps get it? I would send it back to you soon.

Here there is a great deal to do; the zeal of the students is very great, and it is remarkable how little of the bad upbringing of the last 12 years has stuck to them. At least to the theology students.

Nineteen months later, just before leaving Edinburgh in August 1949:

Most of all I was pleased over our agreement in theological matters; it does one good to know that others too are on the same path.

Unfortunately I forgot to ask you once again if you couldn't identify for us a younger man who could write a report on English Old Testament study since the outbreak of the war (we would take care of the translation). It is for *Verkündigung und Forschung*; this organ of the society for protestant theology, edited by E. Wolf, may be known to you. Mr Rowley whom I asked directed me to you.

And from Göttingen in January 1950:

It is already a near scandal that I have still not yet thanked you for sending the book by Welch. It was very friendly of you to have thought of me. I was completely surprised again how original is the thinking of this scholar, and what we can still learn today from him. Especially the elders! For it is certainly a bad law that the intellectual property of a generation inexorably obsolesces after a certain time, whether what it has in the way of thoughts and stimuli is used or remains unnoticed. I often shudder, when I go through the periodicals in our library and think of the immeasurable effort of the elders which was mostly wasted on us. And that, simply because we are so careless. Perhaps it is different with you in your country which lives so much more from traditions? I am always amazed at your fine openness to the old and the new.

[Welch on 28 Nov. 1927:

Remember that a great number of the men merely repeat the ideas of their predecessors with very slight individual variations. You soon learn on whom it is worthwhile to concentrate. Personally I blame the German students for not sifting out their massive bibliographies. They fling the whole lot at their men with no guidance as to which are representative and which give no more than Monday's hash – the redishing of Sunday's roast with a little – not Condry's fluid, but HP sauce to help it down.]

Then from Heidelberg in July 1951, on his receipt of *The Old Testament and Recent Study* (1950):

... I congratulate the Society that it can project itself with so representative a work. How far we in Germany are from such a shared effort. There is evidence here and there of something new in Old Testament research, and young forces are also announcing themselves. But the greatest difficulty is the printing of books. In fact only books which can be bought in larger numbers can be printed.

March 1958:

It has given me great pleasure, as you might think, that you have written in so friendly a fashion about my book¹⁰. It brings me great grief, and it distresses me most of all that so much is dealt with much too briefly. I have often thought of you and especially of your demand for a theological semasiology. I know that my book offers much too little, precisely as regards the central theological concepts. That you also have questions and misgivings over this and that – how can it be otherwise! It is certainly a great pity that I have not yet had sight of your article on OT Theology. Your article 'The Necessity of the OT' came today. I have already read it with agreement.

Perhaps we would also come to an understanding over typological interpretation of the OT? I am completely persuaded that it can be of great help in determining properly the relationship of the OT to the NT Christ-event. I wanted to show already in the first volume that we do not understand Israel's faith properly, if we reduce its content to some religious ideas. It is inseparable from facts, and we must relate these facts also to Jesus Christ. If we do not succeed in that, I am afraid that we then completely lose the relation of the OT to Christ. I want to say something about that at the end of the second volume. But alas that will take a long time.¹¹

April 1958:

Today only just a small request as appendix to my last letter: The translation and publication of the first volume of my *Theology* is in the hands of Oliver and Boyd in Edinburgh. Should you by chance have any sort of connection with this publisher, then please be sure to help me so that the book comes out in England whole, just as it is, and not abbreviated, as they want. I may well assume of you that you understand my concern, if the book is shortened; for I am certainly not convinced of its infallibility, but I am of the impossibility of removing some 75 pages from the first section. It is more an American publisher that wants it than Oliver and Boyd. But it would of course be of great effect if you too could speak once of the impossibility of abbreviating –

¹⁰ The first volume of his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1957).

¹¹ Only three years in fact: the second volume appeared in 1960.

least of all in the first section, which already dares the ultimate in conciseness.¹²

There is an even longer correspondence with Eichrodt¹³: In 1957, he wrote:

I'm at the end of the very troublesome correction of the 5th edition of my OT Theology, 1st volume. It is coming out in new covers in about 350 pages. I have let the book stand in its essentials, but have undertaken 3 larger and many smaller reworkings and added the newer literature in the notes. Now it would give me pleasure if I could dedicate this volume to the University of Glasgow as an indication of my thanks for the honorary DD I received in 1951. My question is:

- 1) Can I use for this purpose the revised edition of an already published book, or is a completely freshly written book expected in England in this case?
- 2) Must I previously enquire in Glasgow whether the dedication would be welcome?
- 3) How must the dedicatory sheet be composed?
- 4) Who should receive the dedicatory copy of the book? The Principal or the Chancellor or the Theological Faculty?

You see how out of one question four have grown

That was on 13.2.57 – before or after he knew that von Rad's 1957 first volume was dedicated to the same University of Glasgow?! Whatever the state of their rivalry, he wrote on 30/7/62 expressing much concern over whether the TLS reviewer had been right to characterise his appendix on von Rad as 'unfair': the strongest critique possible in English!

Then, on 19/7/64 –

Your Daniel commentary demonstrates your excellent exegetical and theological work, and I am amazed above all how, along with an excellent mastery of the historical and religio-historical questions, you so resolutely set about the proper theological task, and are always breaking through to the relevance of this much misunderstood book. It is the same respect for the Bible as book of the christian community, as has always occupied me and kept me in suspense in the explanation of Ezekiel, and I am pleased to have you as an ally in this, while I cannot take in all sympathy Elliger's attempts at direct bearing on the NT. Here the charismatic-eclectic procedure which vRad recommends has surely become too questionable.

4/7/70 –

What you write to me about Brevard Childs has much surprised me. I had not believed that Bright too was possessed of this canon-idea. All of that we were amazed to hear Wilhelm Vischer preaching in his prime; and I did not believe that we would turn again today back into this cul-de-sac. The crisis of Biblical Theology must be really bad if we are clutching at such a straw! I'm glad that you are at last in agreement with me over this.

¹² Whether in English or German it was only some hundred pages long.

¹³ Right, at a SOTS meeting in Oxford. Porteous is 3rd from right. Help with identifying the others would be welcome.

Porteous had come to know Rudolf Bultmann in 1935. He had successfully proposed this already established star of New Testament studies for an honorary DD in St Andrews. I say that; however, a little after the graduation, Porteous had a letter from Sir Edwyn Hoskyns in Cambridge – 31.10.35:

Bultmann stayed with me for two nights after receiving his honorary degree, and I want to say how right your judgment was in proposing him as a Doctor of Divinity. I found him a much bigger man than I had supposed. ...

As often in these matters a double tribute had been intended: not just to Rudolf Bultmann, but also his University of Marburg, from which Patrick Hamilton (400 years earlier in 1535) had brought back to St Andrews ‘those evangelical doctrines for which he was content to die, thereby heralding the dawn of the Scottish Reformation’ (as the laureation address puts it).

A forty-year correspondence ensued. Bultmann took the opportunity of a visit to Denmark in 1937 later to write an uncensored letter:

That the pressure bears heavily on us all as we struggle for the Christian Church and for intellectual life in Germany, you can imagine. Schools and universities have to suffer severely. You yourself can appreciate a small piece of the situation in that the appearance of the Barth-Festschrift is still being hindered by the secret state police. The situation of the church at the moment is opaque. I had hoped that the Board of the *Reichskirche* would let itself be led by genuine ecclesiastical motives, and had therefore made myself available for the work of theological examining. But what I have experienced in connection with this has me doubting the Board, and I shall withdraw from working with it. I reckon that another severe period of persecution will come upon the Church, and I hardly believe that a church-split can be avoided.

In July 46, the first postwar letter preserved, he mentioned the state of students: Our students are very assiduous; but it is a very difficult work of education that has to be accomplished on them. Many have sunk into resignation and pessimism, into a scepticism which is doubtful of knowledge of any truth, many even into a desperate nihilism. The fruit of the past years! We must have patience, but may also hope.

Then in July 54 he offered detailed engagement¹⁴ with ‘The OT and some Theological Thought-Forms’ (Porteous’s presidential paper to this Society):

Hearty thanks for sending your lecture ‘The Old Testament and some Theological Thought-Forms’! I have read it with all the greater interest, as it deals with the problem which has long occupied me too, the problem how (in your terminology) one gets from phenomenology to theology. I could also say (latching on to the essay by Noth cited by you): how one ‘realizes’ the OT, how it happens that a purely descriptive (historical or phenomenological) exposition of the OT becomes one which addresses today’s hearer.

I am glad that I can speak with you about this problem when I come in November to Edinburgh. But I would like already today to express a few thoughts on your lecture, which can prepare a discussion.

¹⁴ These excerpts are the top and tail of a two-page letter – NB footnotes at end.

I am with you in this: a theology of the OT “is possible only through some kind of participation” (p.168). But I ask myself: is it right to say that in a biblical theology [there] “is bound to be an axiological element; the judgment of value cannot be excluded” (ibid.). At the very least it is open to misunderstanding; for it sounds as if first of all a state of affairs can be determined (historically or phenomenologically) which must then be appraised later. That is of course (at least in Germany) an oft-expressed thought, but one which I cannot hold to be right. I believe that in the exposition itself that moment which you describe as the “axiological element” must be real. If that is the case, the description itself becomes one that addresses. How it can be the case, is a question of Hermeneutics, and therefore for me your problem becomes reduced to the hermeneutical problem. At this point I would only say (in opposition to “Positivism”) that an interpretation only with the cold eye “of intellectual scrutiny”[sic] is absolutely no genuine exposition; and that is true in respect of any text (which is not simply a communication of facts), not just in respect of the text of the Bible.

Just voices from the past? I am not at all bound to the answers offered in Bultmann’s essays on the Old Testament. But I do find myself engaged by his formulation of the questions. There is an easy acceptance in academic societies like our own that we can and should do most of our business in a large area of common territory settled by archaeology, and folklore, and geography, and philology, and religious history – and largely bracket out theology as ‘confessional’: business that is either strictly private, or at most belongs to individual religious communities.

It may be that Eichrodt and Elliger, Porteous and von Rad contributed unwittingly to this development. By their repeated probing of the relationship between Old Testament study and Christian faith, they may have offered too easy a target for post-Christian and non-Christian critics.

And yet, to return to the lectures that I might have presented, the opening of Genesis and the first Book of Samuel do raise – and I think I mean intend – big questions. And these questions, as it seems to me, are only tangentially illumined by archaeology or geography or even religious history. The big questions – the great issues of theology and tragedy and ethics – questions of the destiny of peoples and their leaders, of loyalty, of guilt and whether it can ever be removed – should be made available to all and sundry. When we acquiesce – whether in the theological claims of religious communities or in the refusal of theology by professional academics – we may be settling for readings which are relatively trivial.