In his first volume, published eleven years ago, Leo G. Perdue had used the inverted title *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). Obviously, the work of reconstruction in his opinion has advanced since then. But what is it exactly that collapsed and is on its way to a promising recovery? Seven heavily freighted chapters (chs. 2–8 [25–339]) probe the thematic and methodological approaches of a wide variety of Old Testament theologians in search for answers to these and other burning questions. Central to all of them is the vexing problem as to how much objectivity and absoluteness can be communicated by human language. The real antagonism is between historical critics well-grounded in faith, on the one side, and extreme “postmodernists” (see ch. 7 [239–79]) who have fallen prey to their own nihilistic ideology, on the other side. Only the latter earn the author’s harsh criticism and agitated rebukes. Those many exegetes and theological interpreters of the Old Testament located somewhere in the middle field, such as adherents of religious history, liberation theology, feminist interpretation, postcolonial approaches, and the like, usually are credited at least with some valuable insights (see the nice verdict over Walter Brueggemann: he “has not sold himself totally to postmodernism” [251]). In his “Postscript,” then, Perdue candidly proposes a “Paradigm for Old Testament Theology” (347–52), disclosing his own fundamental guidelines: faith and critical reason have to work jointly to establish truth;
or, in his own words: “epistemology and the construction of faith may be used together but are not to replace each other. Faith ultimately must move beyond reason and human understanding to an affirmation of important beliefs concerning the nature and existence of God, humanity, and the world” (350). The drama of Old Testament theology revolves around this axiom, as it were, of divine being in history.

The introductory chapter prepares the ground for the discussion (1–24). The “collapse of history” is depicted as the scholarly alienation from Enlightenment goals of knowing history and as a dangerous substitution of God by “other matters, including the social and anthropological description of human beings and avoiding the location of the church” (6–7). Modern intellectual and religious pluralism (loss of homogeneity) has caused the variety of approaches, but exegetes and theologians such as James Barr (14–17), who—although not perfect—try to find new criteria for building a solid platform on theological construction sites. The dichotomies of modern thinking, however, have to be taken into account (17–21).

Then the drama is unfolded full-scale. Chapter 2 (25–75) dives into the conflict between religious-history and biblical-theology approaches starting with Philipp Gabler (1787), moving through the heated debates around Julius Wellhausen’s and Gerhard von Rad’s concepts, and portraying some, mostly German, representatives of “religionsgeschichtliche Theologien” in present times. The gist of the matter for Perdue is this: “Is biblical theology a historical enterprise in which the variety of views about God … is set forth in diverse and multiple expressions?” Of course not, because “Biblical theology … has to do, at least in part, with revelation, that is, the effort to find a divine voice that exists within the multiple voices of the text… This effort, of course, is based on the commitment of the scholar to the Christian faith.” (p73). A theological mark has been pinpointed, but I still wonder how divine revelation may be defined and recognized in those choirs of ancient witnesses.

The following chapters open up the horizon of contemporary theological debate in a marvellous and unique way. Two of them deal primarily with Third World interpretations of the Bible (ch. 3 [76–10]; ch. 8 [280–33]). The latter carries the greatest emphasis (postcolonial theologies!), being the longest, holding the end position in the book, and comprising two sections authored by doctoral students from abroad: Aliou C. Niang from Senegal (319–29), and Royce Victor from Kerala (329–36) as authentic witnesses. Two chapters evaluate current feminist approaches to the Bible. The first of these is dedicated more to exegetes who work along historical-critical and sociohistorical lines, such as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and Carol Meyers (ch. 4 [102–44]), the second to theologians involved in literary and womanist studies, such as Sally McFague, Phyllis Trible, Renita Weems, and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz (ch. 5 [145–82]; Mieke Bal is prominent in ch. 7, on
postmodernism; see 256–57). Finally, Jewish scholars are being presented in their readiness to enter the dialogue with Christian theologians (ch. 6 [183–238]), even after Jon D. Levenson’s forceful 1987 denial of having anything to do with Christian theological usurpation of Hebrew Scriptures. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Marc Zvi Brettler, Benjamin D. Sommer, Martin A. Sweeney, Ziony Zevit, Tamar Kamionkowski, and others play important roles in the increasing dialogue with Jewish exegetes and theologians. Most of all, Michael Fishbane is treated at length (215–25 and beyond). Perdue, in spite of some impasses, sees great chances to broaden the dialogue with Jewish partners in faith: “if one understands sola scriptura as the continuing hermeneutical engagement of Scripture as the primary, though certainly not exclusive, means of revelation through insight and the application of clear and commanding interpretations, then Jewish theology is quite similar to Christian theology, including that of Protestants.” (237).

In this fashion the main chapters of Perdue’s study (chs. 3–6, 8) are a significant contribution to the much-needed interconfessional and interreligious discussion of biblical faith. This larger part of the author’s painstaking investigations does offer a wealth of information on exegetical and systematic readings of the Scriptures, often going beyond the immediate requirements of the chosen general topic: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology. Perdue is, so to speak, writing with his heart-blood, passionately, full of energy, as one can sense also by the changing styles in his treatise. Information he gives, abundantly so, but he also astutely evaluates what and whom he examines under the guidelines hinted at above. In his ominous, quite polemical chapter 7 on postmodernism as well as in his postscript chapter 9 (140–52), his own convictions come powerfully to the fore. It is at this point that we, readers and colleagues so richly endowed with Perdue’s insights and challenges, must take up the dialogue with him. Where may revelation be found? Only in critically examined history? Not also in everlasting creation, as he himself postulates here and there? Further, will not all other beings, events, and institutions, like religious history and social configurations, potentially become transparent for the presence of God? This may even become the decisive point: theology, in reality, does not search in the past for the traces of divine being but has to respond here and now to divine presence.