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Fortress Press and the editor K. C. Hanson are to be highly commended for their reprint of von Rad’s *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. Originally this work came out in 1958 as *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, yet with an additional article, “Die Vorgeschichte der Gattung von 1. Kor. 13,4–7.” In the 1958 edition von Rad stated in the foreword, “Der Leser wird begreifen, daß es dem Autor nicht leicht fallen kann, ältere Arbeiten—die älteste liegt 27 Jahre zurück—noch einmal unverändert vorzulegen. Bei der Bewegung, die zu unser aller Freunde in der alttestamentliche Wissenschaft gekommen ist, hätte heute vieles anders formuliert werden müssen.” Taking his own words as a cue, one can say that the oldest article in the present collection is found in chapter 7. The article “The Tent and the Ark,” was first published some seventy-four years ago as “Zelt und Lade” in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*. It is a tribute to the magnitude of von Rad that a seventy-four-year-old article merits reprinting in the academic guild. The freshness of his insights and the significance of his scholarship are a testament to his enduring legacy. It is fitting that this classic should be reorganized at the hand of Hanson.

A cursory comparison between *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (hereafter *Problem*) and *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology* (hereafter *Genesis*) reveals a number of differences. Editor Hanson has
provided a valuable boon to readers by a number of features. First, he has changed the layout from footnotes to endnotes. This format allows him to add editorial notes (marked by square brackets), to transliterate Hebrew and Greek words, and to add missing publication information (and give parallel English citations where available). Second, Hanson has provided an outstanding narration of von Rad’s life in his “Editor’s Foreword” (xiii–xv). Third, Hanson has replaced the original essay on 1 Corinthians and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs with one on preaching Deuteronomy. Fourth, a select bibliography has been provided that details von Rad’s works in English (books and articles), major works in German, assessments of von Rad and his work, and the four Festschriften honoring von Rad. Likewise, one notes that a select bibliography on Old Testament theology and the history of Israelite religion is included as well as an index of authors and ancient sources.

The most enduring essay presented in this volume is unquestionably “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch.” In this penetrating essay von Rad sets out his understanding that the Hexateuch developed from the credo of Deut 26. Significantly, the casual reader often misses the context from which this essay was written. In 1934 von Rad accepted an offer from Willy Staerk, the great Psalms exegete, to come and teach in Jena, Germany. It should be remembered that in 1934 Jena was a growing hotbed of National Socialism, yet von Rad took the invitation. A close reading of von Rad’s life appears to support the fact that he took Staerk’s invitation “because” of his great love of Hebrew language and traditions. During the darkest days before the War, von Rad continued indefatigably to teach the language and literature of ancient Israel. As a consequence of his propagation of the Hebrew Bible, his classrooms often went empty. It was during this time that he sought solace in the Confessing Church. Hanson adroitly notes that an interesting parallel can be drawn between von Rad’s contrast of Israel’s historical credo with Canaanite fertility religion and von Rad’s own context of the Bramen Declaration over against the Nazi focus on “Blood and Soil” (xiv). Nevertheless, von Rad found in his church activities a freedom that he had not known at the university. In spite of being offered a pastorate in Hamburg, von Rad decided to stay in Jena and continue to confront anti-Semitism. A by-product of the distancing of von Rad was a great amount of time that could be dedicated to research and publishing. Consequently, in 1938 von Rad produced Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuchs, in which he argued that the Hexateuch was simply an expansion of the historical creed(s) found in Deut 6:20–24; 26:5b–9; and Josh 24:2–13.

The brilliance of von Rad’s thesis is that it synthesizes the thoughts of literary-critical giants such as Graf, DeWette, Vater, Hupfeld, Kuenen, Wellhausen, Gunkel, and his old friend Alt. Literary criticism, or “source criticism,” as it would come to be known, was busy postulating the chronology/theology of the differing strands of data. Von Rad,
however, saw in the credo the whole of the Hexateuch—in essence a confession of faith. In a stroke of brilliance he argued that regardless of the source’s chronology the story of the Hexateuch grew out of historical creed. For instance, in Deut 26:5b–9 von Rad saw the confession of salvation recited by Israel in connection with the major festivals. He states, “Deuteronomy 26:5ff is a creed with all the characteristics and attributes of a creed, and is probably the earliest recognizable example. There must therefore have been a cultic occasion for the recital by the individual of this short confessional statement of God’s redemptive activity” (4). Likewise, von Rad noted that a very similar account of redemption occurred in Deut 6:20–24. The major elements that were missing for von Rad were the Sinai and exodus traditions. This omission was even more puzzling in light of events such as the Reed Sea and the Balaam story in Josh 24:2–13. Questioningly, von Rad notes, “If the canonical redemption story of the exodus and settlement in Canaan on the one hand, and the tradition of Israel’s experiences at Sinai on the other, really stand over against each other as two originally independent traditions, then there must be more to be said concerning the origin and nature of the Sinai tradition” (10–11).

The absence of the exodus and Sinai traditions in the credos was quite troubling for von Rad. In essence, his research led him to conclude that these accounts were in fact separate in origin and transmission from the old creeds. Speaking of the Sinai accounts he states, “this tradition, especially as it is presented by E, appears to be complete and self-contained from the beginning down to the sealing of the covenant in the great sacrifice. Furthermore, all the peculiarities of the individual sources leave us in no doubt that behind the present form of the account there lies one single tradition of a firmly fixed order of events” (13). Deuteronomy as a whole (von Rad was interested in Deuteronomy “as we now have it”) gives the complete picture of God and does so by beginning at Sinai. This picture differs from both J and E by arguing that the covenant made with the patriarchs was still functional. Although Deuteronomy preserved the cultic rite in a more efficient manner, by doing so it became progressively more detached from the elements that were of interest to the cultus in an earlier age. Von Rad notes that the disparate speeches in Deuteronomy point to a multiplicity of versions. He explains, “Deuteronomy as a unity now reveals itself to us in a new light as a rather baroque agglomeration of cultic materials, which nevertheless reflects throughout one and the same cultic occasion” (26).

Once he had ascertained the “separateness” of the Sinai account, he then turned his attention to the Sitz im Leben to deduce the particular place and function of this tradition. A careful perusal of pericopae such as Exod 19–24 might lead one to contend that the “Feast of Booths” was the optative festival. However, if, as von Rad deduced, the Sinai tradition was bound up with the sanctuary, it had to be older than the temple at Jerusalem.
In this case, Deut 31; Neh 8; and Josh 24 supported von Rad’s claims that the Feast of Weeks was the origin for this tradition.

Von Rad adduced that this older cultic account was quickly intercalated by both the Yahwist and to a lesser extent by the Priestly writer. He states of the Yahwist, “If ancient traditions were collected and built up into new literary units, as was done by the Yahwist, it could only be because they had already become to a large extent detached from the cultic places in which they had grown up” (36–37). Von Rad insisted that the Yahwist had exclusive editorial powers over the older materials. He argued that “we can scarcely overestimate his [the Yahwist’s] contribution in shaping the material and in directing the theological motivation which runs right through it” (47). Elements such as the development of the original creedal statements, the arrangement of the patriarchal history, and the infusion of theological reflection are all attributed to the Yahwist. Von Rad states, “All the materials that he [the Yahwist] has gathered together, with all their manifold aspects, serve only one purpose which is to show how all the harm in the world comes from sin” (48). The purpose of the Yahwist, according to von Rad, was to weave into a coherent whole the incongruent accounts of the patriarchal narratives. In this way the Yahwist would provide a literary and theological introduction to the settlement tradition.

If it can be said that the Yahwist was the editor of the older traditions (as von Rad maintained), then a problem exists regarding the Yahwist. Von Rad alerts the reader by noting, “We ought, therefore, to consider whether in consequence it [the older traditions] necessarily became subject to a process of secularization, or whether the loss which any tradition suffered immediately by its divorce from the cultus was not perhaps made good, although on a different level, by new theological associations” (51). This, in von Rad’s opinion, is the most serious theological problem of the Yahwist. While the Yahwist did not take a cavalier attitude toward the cultic matters, he nonetheless took one of tolerance rather than conviction.

As for the relationship of E and P to the Yahwist, it was “purely a literary question” for von Rad. He states, “The form of the Hexateuch had already been finally determined by the Yahwist. The Elohist and the priestly writer do not diverge from the pattern in this respect: their writings are no more than variations upon the massive theme of the Yahwist’s conception, despite their admittedly great theological originality” (55). Von Rad concludes that the Hexateuch achieved its present form at the hands of determined redactors. In the making of the Hexateuch, these redactors molded their materials as a testimony to the faith contained in each of the source documents. Sagely, von Rad notes, “The Hexateuch will be rightly understood, therefore, not by those who read it superficially, but only by those who study it with a knowledge of its profundities,
recognizing that its pages speak of the revelations and religious experiences of many different periods” (58).

The second chapter, “The Promised Land and Yahweh’s Land in the Hexateuch,” is an examination of the place of הֵרָדִילַה in the Hebrew Bible. Von Rad notes that what fueled his investigation was the oath made to the early patriarchs (e.g., “the promise of the land, and formal references to this promise of the type” [59]). Von Rad argues that the idea of progeny and land are intertwined in a number of the oaths. Interestingly, he eschews an investigation into Çünkü because he argues it “lacks definition for the purposes of the investigation.” After careful examination of the sources, he concludes that there is very little “clear-cut division between the sources.” Consequently, it is noted that הֵרָדִילַה as a whole functions to identify hereditary lands of both families and tribes. A number of ancillary words such as חֵרְתָּ, חֵרְתָה, חֵרְתָּן, חֵרְתִים, חֵרְתִּים and חֵרְתִּים are examined for their supporting theology. Among the source documents it is no surprise to learn that both P and D give the greatest emphasis to the theology of the land. This theology is propagated by the notion of the settlement as fulfillment of the promise(s) to the patriarchs. One is assured that while P knows of the patriarchs and the promised land, the Israelite inhabitants are only “sojourning” in it and thus do not fully possess it. While it is noted that Deuteronomy paints a different picture of the creed(s), it nonetheless is reliant on the Shechemite festival of covenant renewal for its theology. Von Rad notes, “Deuteronomy is dominated from beginning to end by the idea of the land which is to be taken in possession. It forms the theme both of the laws and of the parenetic discourse…. Deuteronomy has fused together in a most intimate way the promise of the land made to the early patriarchs and the tradition of commandments given at Sinai” (67). He concludes that the ideology of הֵרָדִילַה as denoting Israelite “territory” as a whole is a late innovation in the interests of a dogmatic theology. This theology follows both the Yahwist and the Priestley writer’s vague conception of what the national promise will become in Deuteronomy.

“Faith Reckoned as Righteousness” is the title of the third chapter, an exploration of known difficulties posed by Gen 15. In his attempt to examine precisely the theological import of Gen 15:6, von Rad comments, “Such a pronouncement concerning the relationship of man to God, above all so weighty a divine judgment on humanity as this, is inconceivable amongst the peoples of antiquity except on the basis of quite specific sacral traditions” (70). A close reading of Ezek 18:5 reveals the phrase זָכָאָה לֹא הוּא הַיִּתֵּן, which the author takes to be the antecedent to the Genesis passage. The Elohist, contends von Rad, is polemical and his declaration indeed revolutionary. What is “revolutionary” about this declaration of the Elohist is that no cultic intermediary is needed to “reckon” faith as righteousness. Faith for the Elohist is now consistent with the specific spiritual self-commitment of the human soul.
According to von Rad, the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob consist of local sagas brought together by either the Yahwist or an even earlier writer. Thus in the fourth chapter, “The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom,” one is treated to a different cycle altogether—one that embodies the genre of “wisdom literature.” The visual elements of the story come together to portray Joseph as ensconced in the court of Pharaoh, giving evidence that he as the protagonist is one who is endowed with wisdom. Von Rad argues that the verbal mosaic paints a poignant picture of the virtues of Israelite “wisdom.” For instance, one may note the rapid rise of Joseph in the Egyptian court and compare it to the wisdom found in Prov 22:29. Likewise, the warning to the “hot-tempered man” found in Prov 14:29 is not lost on the narrator of Gen 39. While Joseph evidences Prov 10:12 (“Love covers all offenses”), it is God who directs a man’s steps in all that he does with his brothers (Prov 20:24). In short, von Rad argues that the Joseph narrative is a didactic wisdom story influenced heavily by Egyptian elements.

A systematic examination of the concept of “rest” makes up the fifth chapter, “There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God.” Von Rad cautions the reader that one must not “spiritualize” rest, for it is not peace of mind, but rather "םֶנוֹהָה" embodies “tangible peace granted to a nation plagued by enemies and weary of wandering” (83). “Rest” for von Rad is seen as a fluid concept that can be given a nation during the times of Joshua, David, and Solomon—yet rest can still be a future concept in the distance. Indeed, the Deuteronomist can still envision the possibility of a rest from adversaries (שֶׁב) even in his present age. An impossibility for von Rad is the linking of “salvation” in Gen 2:2–3 and “rest” found in Deuteronomy, Chronicles, and Ps 95.

The sixth chapter, “Ancient Word and Living Word—Deuteronomy,” is the only chapter that was not in the original Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament. As is noted above, “Die Vorgeschichte derGattung von 1. Kor. 13,4–7” was originally included in Problem, but Hanson has substituted an unstintingly well-constructed essay on preaching Deuteronomy. Originally this essay was published in 1961 in Interpretation under the title “Ancient Word and Living Word—The Preaching of Deuteronomy and Our Preaching.” In this essay von Rad examines the question of differences between “law and the gospel,” whereas law would be equated with the Old Testament and gospel with the New. Von Rad quickly disabuses his readers of this false dichotomy between law and gospel. He defines the legal ordinances of Israel as both apodictic or casuistic—yet Deuteronomy is characterized by neither of these styles. The reason Deuteronomy exhibits neither of these styles is that it is conceived as a speech of Moses to Israel. Although Deuteronomy is not a law code, it nonetheless does contain “legal moralistic preaching” (91). However, a closer look at the speeches in Deuteronomy reveals that promise is interspersed with warning. Von Rad notes, “Deuteronomy stands in the middle between promise and
fulfillment” (92). Von Rad further contends that the situation in the New Testament church was quite similar to what was found in Israel during the time of Deuteronomy. He notes that we are astonished how similar Israel’s situation before God is to that in which the New Testament church found itself. However, although there is similarity between the Testaments and their outlook, there is much difficulty in application and exegesis. While Deuteronomy and its “war-like” preaching can be discouraging for modern Christians, von Rad argues that we must interpret the message anew, that every sentence in the Old Testament must be interpreted anew—by the Spirit of Christ. He closes this essay by noting, “This steadfast conviction that God did not merely speak sometime long ago to an ancient people, but that he is ready to speak to people wherever they are, into the very heart of their own times, will remain a challenge to Christians until the end of time” (98).

The oldest article present in this collection of essays is “The Tent and the Ark” (originally published in Kirchliche Zeitschrift as “Zelt und Lade” in 1931). Von Rad contends that the tent and ark are enduring theological symbols that, if examined textually, can provide a glimpse into the heart of Israelite cultus. Von Rad begins with the tent, which he regards not as a solitary structure but rather as a highly composite affair. In the tent were a number of cultic objects—most prominently the ark of the covenant. A cursory examination is given to the ark as a major cultic symbol. One could argue that the trpכ is the place where Yahweh appeared to forgive the sins of Israel. However, a dichotomy appears to exist in the mind of von Rad, for he writes, “A decisive question now arises, however, as to how precisely Yahweh is thought to be associated both with the ‘cover’ and with the tabernacle. Does Yahweh dwell in the tent or not?” (100).

Indeed, Yahweh is said to dwell in a tent in the Priestly stratum of the Pentateuch, yet in the Deuteronomistic History Yahweh dwells neither in the ark nor the tent. His glory cannot be held by the whole earth, much less a cultic vessel. Such incongruent thoughts allow von Rad to postulate that the ark functioned as Yahweh’s throne. A brief comparison is made between Yahweh and the Egyptian wind-god Anum. Von Rad dismisses the connection between Anum and Yahweh via the ark. While he notes that information concerning the ark in the early life of Samuel is problematic, he nonetheless sees the tent of meeting as even more troublesome. The point of contention for von Rad concerns the theological material present in the Exod 33 account. Clearly at the time of von Rad’s writing scholarship was divided over the source of the text (J or JE). However, he does sketch a cursory picture of evidence with which he educates the reader. The research presented in this essay calls into question Wellhausen’s contention that the tabernacle is the temple projected back to the period of the desert wanderings. Von Rad concludes that the “theology of the tent, originally unrelated to the ark and at times certainly eclipsed by
it, ultimately gained the ascendancy. The ark was accepted into the tent only at the cost of surrendering its characteristic associations” (112).

Explorations concerning the nature of Zion in Isaiah make up the eighth chapter, entitled “The City on the Hill.” Here von Rad is in dialogue with writers such as Bernhard Duhm over the contention of an eschatological Zion tradition found in Isaiah. So powerful is this concept in Isaiah that the author can quip that Isaiah’s sole basis for religious justification is not the covenant but the fact that Yahweh had founded the holy city of Zion. Three oracles (Isa 2:2–4; 60:1–22; Hag 2:6–9) are adduced to garner support for von Rad’s contention that the eschatological stream comes from a single stock of tradition. He concludes by noting, “The conclusion would seem to be that Trito-Isaiah, despite what are clearly his own embellishments, has given the fullest expression to the basic conception that underlies all three oracles” (122).

The second section of the book, “From Samuel to Kings,” begins with the ninth article: “The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel.” In this sizeable essay (twenty-eight pages) von Rad explores early Israelite historiography. Unfortunately, he was quite skeptical concerning the origin of ancient Israelite historical writing. Commenting on the historical consciousness of Israel he states, “At a particular point in time it is there, and already we have it in its fully developed form” (126). Today we can contend with von Rad on this matter, yet it is only in the last decade that Israelite historiography has developed into a specialty field of its own. The question of the etiological saga takes up a good deal of von Rad’s research. He concludes that while the etiological saga does have a place in the Israelite stream of consciousness, it nonetheless is not “history” in the sense of Herodotus.

The “Saga of Heroes” is next examined in the quest for Israelite historical writing. Hero sagas for von Rad are the closest to Greek “history” as can be found in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the Gideon saga does not tell of a hazy figure of the past; rather, this hero stands in the full light of history. Consequently, the “hero saga” should be understood as advancing a political event that is already known to history. Von Rad takes pains to illustrate the process of ancient Israelite historical writing by analyzing the Davidic succession narrative. An in-depth (nine pages) examination of the facets of the Davidic narrative makes up the bulk of analysis. Von Rad’s analysis of the David succession is quite complete in its understanding. He strips the story of all of its grandeur in order that he might examine in detail the forms of its historical composition. It is noted that much of the stories surrounding David are in the form of *Novellen*. However, this does not deter von Rad, who claims that “these chapters contain genuine historical writing” (145), that it is the political state that generates historical writing. He argues that only the state can write contemporary history.
A comment on Noth’s Überlieferungsgechichtliche Studien alerts the reader to the topic of “Deuteronomic Theology” in the tenth chapter. Von Rad begins by praising Noth’s work as “closing a regrettable and indeed shameful gap in present-day [ca. 1957] Old Testament studies” (154). The issue at hand for this chapter involves understanding the kings of Israel and Judah in light of the Deuteronomic theology present in 1 and 2 Kings. The reader is informed that a major perquisite for the Deuteronomic understanding of the Israelite kings is how they related to the cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem. In this assessment either the kings walked according to David or Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Von Rad questions if this assessment is indeed fair for the kings. He asks, “was this standard of mandatory cultic unity laid down by the Deuteronomist something altogether new to Israel?” (155). Answering his own question, he postulates that the disasters that struck Israel and Judah in 721 and 586 respectively were the frame of reference from which the Deuteronomist wrote. An exhaustive examination of the theology behind 1 and 2 Kings demonstrates that both שילה ובסות and were requisites for kingship. The offenses that the kings committed were cultic in nature. In essence, von Rad understands the Deuteronomist to be charging the kings with lack of total obedience to the Torah.

If it can be said that total obedience is a subjective test of the kings, von Rad argues that an object test can be seen in prophetic prediction. A cursory examination of prophecy and fulfillment in Samuel and Kings illustrates that the Deuteronomist was working with religious sources. Consequently, the “Deuteronomic theology of history may be said to be self-fulfilling and therefore determines the course of history” (160). The situation is described as different in Judah from that of their northern neighbor. Coupled with human disobedience we see a greater measure of God’s patience over a much longer period of time. It is the “word” of Yahweh that determines the history of Judah. First, it may be argued that Yahweh’s word is a law that controls and destroys. Second, von Rad argues that the word of Yahweh is a “gospel” that continually “self-fulfills” the promise to David (164).

The eleventh chapter is an excursus on the royal coronations found in the Hebrew Bible. Specifically, von Rad is interested in examining the coronation practice as it was known in Judah. He admits that, of the kings crowned in the Hebrew Bible, the only ones we have records for are Solomon and Joash. The traditional elements such as the royal mule, anointing in the sanctuary, and enthronement in the royal palace are all examined in their historical context. This article closes with an examination of royal titles used in the coronation ceremony. A short excursus on Isa 9:6–7 illustrates how these royal titles could be considered messianic in certain contexts.

The book’s last section contains groupings from the Psalms to Chronicles. Accordingly, the twelfth chapter is entitled “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine
of Creation.” In this chapter von Rad seeks to answer the question of how relevant the idea of Yahweh as “Creator” is over against that of his redemptive function. He queries whether the doctrine of creation is presupposed by the doctrine of redemption. In seeking to answer his questions, he notes that in Deut 26:5ff. the prayer of the supplicant for the firstfruits thanks Yahweh only for being a part of the community and the land. Likewise we see in Lev 25:23 Yahweh’s blessing tied to the land of which Israel was a part. While these pericopes elucidate they do not address the element of “creation,” according to von Rad. If one takes Gen 1 as the starting point for this discussion, then other pericopes are better suited for the task. For instance, passages such as Pss 136; 148; Isa 40:27; 42:5 all point to the magnificent act of Yahweh’s creation. When one further investigates this matter, it becomes evident that creation is inexorably tied to redemption. A cursory examination of Pss 74 and 89 illustrate that Yahweh’s Ṭᵦᵦᵦ enthals both the creation of the world and the ordering of nature. Von Rad next turns his attention to the psalms that have been adduced as the “main evidence” for the Old Testament doctrine of creation (e.g., Pss 8; 19; 104). In these psalms von Rad contends that we find the belief that Yahweh created the world. Interestingly, he believes that while these psalms contain the Yahwistic belief that Yahweh created the world, they are not from the Yahwistic hand. He states, “A quite different strand of religious influence entered the Yahwistic faith in the form of wisdomlore, a highly rationalized mode of speculation concerning the divine economy in this world that we may regard as being of Egyptian origin” (186).

A further study of the psalms is taken up in the thirteenth article, “‘Righteousness’ and ‘Life’ in the Cultic Language of the Psalms.” Von Rad takes to task Gunkel’s scholarship regarding the “aesthetic quality of the psalms.” In particular, von Rad seeks to explore in this essay the assertion of the psalmist’s righteousness and his statements concerning life and death. The protestations of innocence by the psalmist are self-evident in the Beichtspiegel genre. Passages such as Deut 26:13–14; Ezek 18:5–7; and Job 31 are given as examples of this type of writing outside the Writings. Von Rad argues that within these passages and kindred passages in the Psalms one actually sees the portrait of the “idealized righteous man” (193).

The Sitz im Leben for these types of psalms was both the cultus and the commandments (e.g., Deut 30:15, 19). In these settings the supplicant received the word of life from Yahweh. Naturally, the matters of life and death were found in the cultic sphere, and it was only in this sphere that the supplicant was assured life. Von Rad assures his readers that it was the later writings of the “mystical” psalmists that began to dwell on eternal safety. Pericopes such as Pss 16:5–6; 142:5; and 73:23–28 show a propensity for dwelling on elements such as “holding,” “guiding,” and “receiving” the supplicant. What can be made of these mystical musings of the psalmists? Von Rad declares, “One can at least say with considerable confidence that the Psalter reveals the existence within the post-exilic
community of a group of spiritually alert Levites who interpreted the promise of Yahweh’s gift of life in a sense that is wholly sublime” (204).

In the fourteenth article one is introduced to “Some Aspects of the Old Testament Worldview.” The thesis for this article concerns the faith of Israel and her philosophical understandings of the world around her. Von Rad states, “Knowledge of the world cannot be attained simply by the perception of the multifarious knowable isolated phenomena that it contains; and attempt must be made to grasp it as a whole” (206). A starting point for von Rad is the idea of creation, yet he cautions that one cannot simply say that Israel’s belief in Yahweh as Creator God was unique. He supplies evidence that all religions have something to say about creation (e.g., El at Ugarit is seen as a creator god). In contrast, von Rad seeks to define Israel’s worldview from the angle of the commandment against making images. It is the prohibition on image making that set Israel apart from the rest of the ancient Near East. Consequently, he asks, “what are the cosmological implications of the prohibition of images?” (209). In prohibiting images, Israel made a statement about Yahweh and the world both more sharply and in different places than the ancient Near Eastern religions. As von Rad notes, “Yahweh was not one of the sustaining forces of the universe, nor was he even the totality of them. He was their creator” (209).

As a result of Israel’s monolithic view of the world and creation, Israel knew no thoughts of primordial matter, or the seat of mighty powers, personified in Greek mythology by the Titans. Rather, Israel understood all things as being visited upon humanity by the hand of Yahweh. The created order for the Israelites was one that was held together by Yahweh. Scriptures are adduced (e.g., Ps 19; Job 28; Prov 8; and Sir 24) to illustrate how the redactors understood wisdom’s progress in the world. The three passages “are concerned to show that these two manifestations of the deity, in creation and in history are identical” (220). Von Rad contends that the average Hebrew was born into a created order from which continually ascends an unending hymn of praise. Ironically, however, the people had to be taught as if they were blind and deaf that the world in which they lived is enfolded in the self-revealing secret of the created order.

A comparison between “Job 38 and Ancient Egyptian Wisdom” makes up the fifteenth chapter. It comes as a surprise to no one to note that von Rad was a doyen in Israelite wisdom literature. In this article he compares the Onomasticon of Amenemope with the famous wisdom chapter in Job. A very well laid out two-page listing of cosmological and meteorological elements are given for the reader. Von Rad concludes that the listing of phenomena of the cosmos and of nature in Job 38–39 follows a pattern ultimately derived from Egyptian wisdom literature. Likewise, he argues that the catena of questions in Yahweh’s speech corresponds very closely with the question structure found in the Papyrus Anastasi I.
The final chapter, “The Levitical Sermon in 1 and 2 Chronicles,” is written in order to examine the sermonic style in the Chronicler’s history. Von Rad postulates that the Chronicler took previously existing scripture and reused the material to fit his needs and audience. He examines 2 Chr 15; 16; 19; 20; 25; 28; and 32 to illustrate the diversity of the traditional material used by the Chronicler. Concerning these sermons, von Rad states, “it is quite evident that he [the Chronicler] is following an established pattern, since there is no difference between the speeches made by prophets and those declaimed by kings” (240). The form of genre that von Rad settles on is the Levitical sermon. In conclusion, von Rad argues that due to the propensity of the Chronicler to quote previous sources, it must be maintained that the Chronicler no longer felt himself God’s plenipotentiary but rather a historian. Second, it is important to note the breadth of the religious interest of the Chronicler. He incorporated preexilic and postexilic materials into his sermons. The quotations of the Chronicler presuppose that he has a keen interest in ancient writings and a vigorous desire to make them known.

The enormity of von Rad’s scholarship and his impact in the area of Old Testament studies cannot be overstated. A student in the study of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament cannot be without a compendium of this scholar’s writings. This book serves two major functions in the guild today. First, it places back into the hands of students and faculty alike a work that otherwise would have stayed out of print. This alone is sufficient grounds to have it reprinted by Fortress. The publisher should be commended for bringing this book back into print in softcover and thus keeping cost at a minimum for students. Second, this collection of essays is one of the more convenient ways for undergraduate and beginning graduate students to become immersed in the thought processes of von Rad. The breadth of essays is as dazzling as they first were when they came out in the late 1950s. It should be taken for granted that scholarship has moved on in a number of areas that these essays cover—particularly this is true in source and form criticism. However, in a few instances von Rad not only paved the way for scholarship but also has continued to be quoted in academic research. I would not hesitate to recommend this work to graduate students wanting to immerse themselves in the critical methodology for which Von Rad was known. Likewise, “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch” is mandatory reading for those wishing to understand the heart of von Rad’s ideology.