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Remembrance and Worship in Israel
A Study of Gerhard von Rad's Theology of Worship
In the Old Testament

by
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The Task

One of the major discussions which theologians, pastors, and laymen face today is centered around worship. The primary question seems to be whether it is first and foremost *God's service to us* or whether it is, instead, *our service to God*. The resolution to these two opposing viewpoints, it would seem, would help also to answer whether the worship service is primarily *to proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet heard (or embraced) it* or whether it is intended initially *to build up the faithful*. This, in turn, should provide a basis for determining whether one should adhere to traditional forms which have been practiced through the ages or move to more "contemporary" services. (The debate as to what is meant by "contemporary" is far beyond the scope of this limited study, but aspects of the debate hinge upon the initial questions posed in this investigation.) Though it seems obvious to work with a model of worship which is either anthropocentrically- *or* theocentrically- driven, the truth of the matter cannot be sorted out so easily. Whether one speaks of worship as a combination of these two driving factors or throws out these categories altogether, the picture is more complicated than this simple dichotomy would suggest.

As we look at worship in the Old Testament, whether that worship be corporate or private, one semantic domain stands out as key to a proper understanding. In order to understand worship, one must understand the concept of memory/remembrance. As will be shown, in the context of worship, not only do people remember, but God remembers, as well. Often, the people call upon God to remember that which will help them and to forget (not remember) that which will ultimately result in pain, sorrow, or loss for them. God has promised to remember His mercy and His covenant. He also calls the people to remember His acts and promises, *especially in the context of corporate worship*. To address fully the issues regarding worship, it is vital to comprehend what was meant

by the references in the Old Testament to memory/remembrance. When that is clear, then one can begin to relate remembrance to the New Testament and finally to the modern context.

In this study we will attempt to establish a basis upon which these issues can properly be answered. The primary focus will be upon worship in the Old Testament, though to limit any study of worship to the time and writings before God incarnated Himself would be to answer inadequately any applicable question regarding worship in the modern context. Therefore, this study will also look to see how the analysis of worship in the Old Testament context is manifested in the New Testament. When the proper correlation is made, then one is ready to address the questions and concerns regarding modern worship of the same God who was worshiped by Israel and the early church.

The Methodology

In this study, we will look at the concept of remembrance first and primarily from the perspective of the Old Testament. The idea of remembering is tied to the Old Testament hermeneutical principle often referred to by modern scholars as *actualization*. This principle describes the way in which events from the past are made relevant to the participants or observers in the present. For von Rad, as will be demonstrated later in this study, this means that as people participate in a particular rite or read or hear a literary work from the past, they are so intimately connected to the original events which prompted the rite or literature that they become *actual* participants in the original events. One particular example of this hermeneutical principle is the proposal of the celebration of a recurring covenant renewal festival. Both the principle of actualization and the postulation of a covenant renewal festival had their heyday in the middle of the

twentieth century. Though many of their proponents have died, and scholarship seems to have moved beyond actualization to other principles of interpretation, they still exert influence on current theological trends. After examining the positions of several critical scholars, we will examine the Hebrew root זָכַר to establish a more concrete understanding of “remembrance.”

After one understands remembrance as presented in the Old Testament, it is appropriate that one look at its relation to the New Testament. Of particular importance to the person seeking to understand a Biblical presentation of remembrance are the texts concerning the Lord’s Supper. The view one holds on what it means to remember will contribute much to his understanding of the Lord’s Supper.

Finally, this proper understanding of remembrance plays a central role in the theology of worship. Many questions which arise as both clergy and laity discuss worship can be distilled to a few simple questions. Who is it that remembers? That is, do people gather together to remember what God has done for them and continues to do, or does God remember and bring people together in order to give gifts to them? Or is neither view entirely correct? What is it that is remembered? That is, are God’s deeds, man’s good works, or man’s sins the objects of the remembrance? When these questions are properly answered, they will help provide more concrete answers for many of the other questions which arise.

A History of Actualization and the Covenant Renewal Festival

Actualization and covenant renewal are intertwined in their developments to such an extent that it is often difficult to separate them. Actualization is a hermeneutical principle of interpretation of the Old Testament. The covenant renewal festival is one (and the primary) example of the use

of actualization in the Old Testament. It is difficult to discuss the covenant renewal festival without employing the principle of actualization, nor is there sufficient solid evidence of actualization without bringing up the covenant renewal festival. Though the two often run together in the various authors which will be presented, in this study they will be separated as much as possible; first we will look at the concept of the covenant renewal festival, then we will discuss in broader strokes the principle of actualization.

The Covenant Renewal Festival

Gerhard von Rad was a theologian of the tradition-critical exegetical method who specialized in the Old Testament. His view of Scripture allowed for various authors, sources, and redactors to be considered as one examined any portion of Scripture. That is, while he might express that the teaching of the Old Testament was divine, he would deny that it is inerrant. He saw various problems in the text of the Old Testament and sought a consistent way of explaining the inconsistencies away. He researched and wrote the article "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch" in 1938 in an effort to harmonize some particular problems created by form criticism. Out of this article came the proposal of the covenant renewal festival, along with the hermeneutical principle of actualization, which was necessary to explain the existence of the festival.

Von Rad, in subjecting the Hexateuch to his own scrutiny, found a way to explain away some of the difficulties that were perceived by tradition-critical scholars. In particular, he sought to explain why the Sinai account was included within the account of the exodus, when it appeared to him that they were from two different sources. His first task in approaching such a difficulty was to determine his methodological approach. According to von Rad:

the Hexateuch itself may, and indeed must, be understood as representative of a type of literature of which we may expect to be able to recognise the early stages, the circumstances of composition, and the subsequent development until it reached the greatly extended form in which it now lies before us.¹

His goal as he studied the Hexateuch was to strip away all that was slowly added over time so that he could look at the original form. He followed the method of the critics before him and separated the text into the various sources, whether J, E, P, or D. Once it was separated, he could determine which writer was first and then explain away the additions of the other redactors.²

One must also understand that to von Rad, the Hexateuch is a document expressing a people's faith rather than a factual account of events. That is, he essentially dismisses the books of Moses and Joshua as any basis for establishing the factual account of the events described therein. "Doubtless [the source documents of the Hexateuch] have been overlaid with much historically "credible" material . . . it is exclusively of the *faith* of Israel that they speak. . . . We might equally well call it a *creed*, a summary of the principal facts of God's redemptive activity."³ Even if it is indeed intended more as a faith document than as a history narrative, the historical facts should, in theory, fit together to explain the basis of the faith. However, von Rad, by nature of his aforementioned presuppositions, is less inclined to be concerned about the strict historicity of what is presented in the Hexateuch. Nonetheless, when he finds what to him appears to be a discrepancy, he seeks to provide a solution to harmonize it.

¹Von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," 3 (hereafter cited as "Form").

²Von Rad, "Form," 2-3; *Genesis*, 30-31, 36.

³Von Rad, "Form," 2.

One major problem that von Rad discovered which eventually led him to a theory of actualization was that the redemption story of the exodus and the experiences at Sinai seemed to him to be of two originally independent traditions. Several texts seem to be in a particular sort of creedal form. Deuteronomy 26:5b-9 provides the first clue; this prayer seems to be liturgical, much older than the context, yet makes no mention of Sinai. The same lack of mention of Sinai is apparent also in Deuteronomy 6:20-24 and Joshua 24:2b-13. Other texts, such as Psalms 86, 105, and 135 demonstrate a less rigid creedal structure, yet do not mention Sinai. (He also cites Exodus 15 among these examples, but since Israel had not yet made it to Sinai in the Exodus account, it would be *especially* difficult if it *did* mention the events at Sinai within that account of “redemptive history.”) Apart from the Exodus account, it is not until Nehemiah 9:6ff that von Rad finds a reference to Sinai imbedded within a redemption narrative account.⁴ Assuming from the beginning that Exodus was written as a saga rather than as a factual account, he concluded from this evidence that the Sinai account and the account of the exodus were originally separate.⁵ This, in turn, demonstrates that the account presented in Exodus originally came from at least two separate origins, thus further supporting his method of redaction criticism. As a result, if one follows von Rad’s arguments, one must conclude that the final form of the Exodus document was developed relatively late, since the two traditions were not interwoven until the time when Nehemiah was written.

The solution to the discrepancy for von Rad was found in Wellhausen’s *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, in which Wellhausen also dismissed the account in Exodus. Von Rad quotes Wellhausen:

⁴Von Rad, “Form,” 4; 9-12.

⁵Von Rad, “Form,” 19.

Clearly visible behind the work of the Yahwist is a form of the tradition in which the Israelites moved on to Kadesh immediately after the crossing of the Red Sea, without first making the expedition to Sinai. Although we reach Sinai only in *Exod.* xix, we are already at Massah and Meribah in *Exod.* xvii, and thus in the area of Kadesh. Hence the narratives which tell of events *before* the arrival at Sinai brings us back to the same place *after* the removal from Sinai: the locality is the same both before and after. In other words, the Israelites reached Kadesh, the original goal of their journey, immediately after the exodus, not after an excursion to Sinai.⁶

For von Rad, the solution to the problem is that the Sinai account does not historically belong where it was inserted by the redactor. While this answer resolves the discrepancy, it does not explain *why* the redactor made such a move. Von Rad then aims to discover what would prompt such a bold insertion.

The first move which von Rad makes is to separate the Biblical account into its two separate traditions. The Kadesh narratives found in Exodus 17-18 and Numbers 10-14 are interrupted by the Sinai-cycle in Exodus 19-24 and 32-34. In this separation, he follows the formulations of Wellhausen and Gressmann.⁷ He then labels the two separate traditions as narratives of redemption (exodus/Kadesh) on the one hand and justice (law/Sinai) on the other. Exodus 19-20 lack mention of the redemptive acts of God in the exodus and desert wanderings; therefore they must not belong in the narrative.⁸ The form of the Sinai narrative in Exodus, he notices, contains four major elements:

⁶Von Rad, "Form," 13-14.

⁷Von Rad, "Form," 14.

⁸Von Rad, "Form," 18.

1. Exhortation (Exod. 14:4-6) and historical recital of the events at Sinai (Exod 19ff.).
2. Reading of the law (Decalogue and Book of the Covenant).
3. Promise of blessing (Exod. 33:20ff).
4. Sealing of the covenant (Exod. 24).⁹

As von Rad looks at the other Hebrew writings, he determines that several passages presuppose a cultic ritual. Along with Sigmund Mowinckel, he connects it to a supposed New Year Festival, which according to Mowinckel was “translated into the language of literary mythology.”¹⁰ The two scholars center their examination especially upon Psalm 50:1-7, Psalm 81 (especially v.9-11), Nehemiah 8, and Isaiah 2:2ff.¹¹ In Psalm 50, the Psalmist tells of the faithful ones gathered together to Yahweh, who “made a covenant with him by sacrifice.” Psalm 81 recounts the first commandment, grounding the command on Yahweh’s deliverance. In Nehemiah, Ezra read the Law of Moses before all of the people, as was commanded in Deuteronomy 31:10ff. “When Isaiah sees in a vision the nations gathering as pilgrims to Zion, where they will receive instruction on their way of life, it is surely obvious this refers to an actual practice known to the prophet.”¹²

Von Rad concludes that there was a cultic ritual that Israel knew and kept. His next goal is to discover the content of this ritual. He first examines the time at which this event (in the Sinai narrative) occurred. Hindered by the time reference in Exodus 19:1, he concludes, “It has always

⁹Von Rad, “Form,” 27.

¹⁰Von Rad, “Form,” 21.

¹¹Von Rad, “Form,” 22-25.

¹²Von Rad, “Form,” 25.

been recognized that the verse is textually corrupt, that **בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה** cannot here mean “at this time.”

After presenting his arguments, he concludes that this correlates with the Feast of Booths, at which the Law should be read before all Israel (Deut. 31:10ff). Being further solidified by the actual reading of the Law recorded in Nehemiah 8, von Rad declares, “It is therefore inconceivable that the festival of the renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and the people should not be identified with this very same festival.”¹³

Though Mowinckel originally associated this festival with the temple of Jerusalem, von Rad instead agrees with Sellin and Noth who place it at Shechem, as evidenced in Joshua 24. Von Rad refuses Mowinckel’s arguments, because the festival must have been a continual event, whether annually or according to a different cycle of time. He finds Sellin convincing, because this festival would be one which is repeated frequently and “in which the oath of allegiance made by the tribal coalition to the new God and to his purposes was continually renewed.”¹⁴ Together with Deuteronomy 27, he feels equipped to describe the “original” festival:

The liturgical apportionment of blessings and curses to two mutually responding choirs must certainly be regarded as the original form of the ritual, whereas the pronouncement of blessing and curse (after the sealing of the covenant) was made, according to Deuteronomy xxviii, at the mouth of a cultic individual, and therefore

¹³Von Rad, “Form,” 34 (he cites Keil and Knobel); 35.

¹⁴Von Rad, “Form,” 36. He here quotes Sellin, *Geschichte des israelitisch-jüdischen Volkes*. Vol. 1, 2d ed. Leipzig, 1935, 101.

reflects a refined, less primitive, and thus somewhat attenuated form of the same cultic occasion.¹⁵

Von Rad continues by following Sellin, “who realised that there was an obvious correspondence between the individual elements of the covenant ritual at Shechem and those of the Sinai covenant.” He proposes the following order of service to describe the festival at Shechem:

Joshua’s allocution (Joshua 24:14ff).

The assent of the congregation (Joshua 24:16ff, 24).

The proclamation of the Law (Joshua 24:25; Deut. 27:15ff).

The sealing of the covenant (Joshua 24:27).

Blessings and curses (Deut 27:12f.; Joshua 8:34).

Comparing the elements of the Sinai account and the Shechem service, von Rad demonstrates further proof that the Sinai account in Exodus describes the same festival as the service at Shechem. “We would hold that our contention that the Sinai festival at Shechem is as certain as such matters ever can be.”¹⁶

Reaction to Covenant Renewal Festival

Though for many scholars von Rad’s covenant renewal festival appears quite attractive, other scholars find fault with his proposal for a variety of reasons. We will at this point look at works by two representative theologians to see how they reacted to this development. We will also critically examine his theory ourselves.

¹⁵Von Rad, “Form,” 37.

¹⁶Von Rad, “Form,” 38.

Walter Harrelson, building on the work of Noth, Alt, and Kraus, in addition to von Rad, supports the belief in the covenant renewal festival. He postulates that “the form and content of this early ceremony of covenant renewal may provide one of the most helpful clues as to the place and understanding of worship in the entire Old Testament.”¹⁷ While he considers the details in the account in Joshua 24 very important in understanding the character of early Israelite worship, he considers the manner by which Israel acquired the “simpler” forms of worship from their new cultural situation in Canaan as even more important. He connects the festival in Joshua with the Canaanite *harvest festivals*, which were by their very nature repeated annually. Harrelson agrees with von Rad and Guthrie particularly in that the worship service in Joshua was centered around the constant influx of new people and tribes into “Israel.”¹⁸ He attempts to draw more support for his position by comparing the “order of service” presented in Joshua 24 with the elements of a “modern” Christian worship service:

<i>Joshua 24</i>	<i>Contemporary Service</i>
1) Call to people to present themselves before Yahweh	Call to worship
2) Recitation of the kerygma	Lessons from Scripture; hymns
3) Call to decision and response	Sermon; prayers, and Lord’s Prayer
4) Putting away of foreign gods	The Creed
5) Covenant act and giving of Law	Holy Communion; recitation of Ten Commandments

¹⁷Harrelson, 2.

¹⁸Harrelson, 7.

6) Closing admonition and dismissal Benediction¹⁹

In the end, though, he acknowledges that “it may well be that too much has been made of a single ceremony from early Israel.”

Artur Weiser, on the other hand, gives plausible explanations for some of the discrepancies relied upon by von Rad and others, while acknowledging that the covenant renewal festival might, in fact, have existed. Against von Rad’s claims that the exodus tradition and the Sinai tradition were originally separate traditions, he argues that von Rad is arguing from silence. He further remarks, commenting in particular on 1 Samuel 12, that “if the fundamental idea of the Sinai tradition runs like a red thread through the whole speech, then naturally a special mention of the ‘Sinai events’ would be superfluous.” Using descriptions similar to von Rad’s labeling of the two separate traditions, salvation history (redemption/exodus) and commitment to covenant (justice/Sinai), Weiser demonstrates that both themes are already present in Joshua 24; verses 2-13 indicate salvation history, while verses 14-26 show the people’s commitment to the covenant.²⁰ He concludes that:

von Rad’s question should be posed from the opposite end with the idea that the *theophany* (Sinai) tradition with *the manifestation of God’s will* and *the making of the covenant* on the one hand and *the account of God’s historical acts of salvation* as *the manifestation of his nature* on the other hand were the original basic component parts of one and the same festival celebrated at the central sanctuary of the tribes (the holy Ark). These components appear already at the foundation of this

¹⁹Harrelson, 10.

²⁰Weiser, 86-87.

union at the 'Assembly' at Shechem (Jos. 24) and from then onwards had a certain normative significance in the festival of the covenant for the whole of 'Israel', i.e. the sacral union of the tribes, and for the shaping of its tradition. Here is to be sought the original cultic environment into which all the Pentateuchal sources were compelled by the weight of a living tradition to fit their presentation of the history of salvation. Hence also the Pentateuch as such is not to be judged merely as a literary precipitate of tradition long since detached from the cult (von Rad), but as a fixation of traditions intended for liturgical recitation which sprang directly out of the cult and still stood in active relationship with it.²¹

Each of these scholars represents, first of all, a traditio-critical approach to interpretation of the Old Testament. The problem with their conclusions lies, not in the postulation of a festival of covenant renewal, but *in their assertions that Joshua 24 was the first known Scriptural occurrence of such a festival*. Their conclusions are based on their belief that the Pentateuch (Hexateuch) was written later in order to provide a basis for what was already going on in the cult of Israel. Though they might allow for some truly historical material being present in the Pentateuch (in particular in the exodus/Sinai accounts), their basic assumption is that the Pentateuch was written as a myth or saga to provide a background or basis for the worship which was going on in Joshua 24. Because of their traditio-critical approach, they are compelled to provide such a solution to the "problem" they address, without entertaining the proposal that there is not a problem to be solved.

The simple answer to the proposal of the covenant renewal festival is that the Sinai account in Exodus provides the basis for worship, which is continually carried out by the Israelites. The

²¹Weiser, 89-90.

passage in Joshua 24 simply presents one particular instance of this worship, based initially on God's commands at Sinai. Thus, there could be said to be a covenant renewal festival. But it was based on the Sinai experience with Yahweh rather than adapted from a Canaanite new year festival or Near Eastern harvest festival. This would explain the similarities between Joshua 24 and Exodus 19ff. But contrary to von Rad, the Exodus tradition is therefore the older "tradition." The two themes of redemption and justice (the exodus and the Sinai experience) were intertwined from the beginning, though Biblical authors often tended to explicitly state one or the other (probably assuming that the missing theme would be assumed by the hearer or reader!).

The primary difference between the proposal by von Rad and the position of the author is that von Rad relies heavily upon the festival being a human-centered event. Along with Guthrie and Harrelson, as well as other scholars such as Martin Noth and E. W. Nicholson, von Rad assumes that Israel is the sum of a group of tribes gathered together for convenience. Joshua 24 provides the most complete early account of a festival of worship for this tribal coalition. According to their view, the Pentateuch was written in order to provide a basis for what was already going on. This is not to say that it was not rooted in history; on the contrary, most of these scholars readily acknowledge that at least some of the pieces of the narrative are historically accurate. But the two separate accounts of redemption history and the giving of the law, though perhaps each was by itself relatively accurate, were later joined together to explain the festival which had at some point in time incorporated both of them. This also happened with various other festivals or rites, which all eventually became woven together so that Israel did not find her foundation in any one event alone, but in a whole (constructed)

series of events.²² In addition, the presupposition that the worship of Israel developed from the primitive mythical cult has been called into question in recent scholarship.²³

Along with the concept of a covenant renewal festival must be a reason for continually perpetuating it. If a covenant is binding when it is made, there is no reason to continually renew it in a ceremony. Von Rad arrives at a different reason for the perpetuation of the rites than does the author. For the author, the cause of the perpetuation is two-fold: *Yahweh* desires that Israel remember His covenant with them along with His mighty deliverance and *the people* desire to remember the mighty deeds and merciful love of *Yahweh*. Von Rad, though, presents a slightly different case, which later gets described as “actualization.” Though it also involves “remembrance,” it differs from the author’s view in the role played by memory in the reason for and the practice of carrying out the rites.

Introduction to Actualization

Actualization is essentially a hermeneutical principle used by some to interpret the Bible. It involves some means of making the past meaningful to the present, though different theologians have varied opinions on exactly what this means for Biblical interpretation. The word *actualization* is the English translation of the German *Vergegenwärtigung* or *Aktualisierung*, which terms are used almost interchangeably.²⁴ The two German terms are very similar to each other and their differences

²²Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2:106 (hereafter cited as *Theology*).

²³Ludwig, 45.

²⁴Other terms occur as well, though they are less frequently used by multiple scholars. Mowinckel predominantly used *Wiederholung* and *wiederholen* in his discussions of cultic remembrance, though fewer scholars after von Rad continued using this particular label.

are not easily (or often) distinguished in English. The overall concept is often traced to Gerhard von Rad, principally in his previously-mentioned essay entitled “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,”²⁵ though his language is not yet clearly defined. The foundation for the principle can be traced further back in his own writings as well as to the writings of Sigmund Mowinckel. In many of his writings, including this essay, he quotes Mowinckel frequently when dealing with actualization.²⁶ A close look at the development of actualization as it relates to the covenant renewal festival can be seen in this early work of von Rad, but we will first examine the scholars whose influence can be seen in von Rad and who paved the early way for his work.

Among von Rad’s influences was Johann Gottfried von Herder, who wrote in the late eighteenth century.²⁷ He maintains that one could not interpret the events of history without first understanding the original context of the events. The historian needs first to immerse himself in that context in order to understand the event from that point of view, then can interpret in light of his own historical context. The interpreter of any piece of literature “should transfer himself into the thoughts of his author and read him in the spirit in which he wrote.”²⁸ This process involves more than a mere intellectual understanding of the event, but the historian must approach the original author on an emotional or empathetic level. This particular approach is valid for all literature, including the Bible.

²⁵Groves, 7.

²⁶Groves, 8.

²⁷Groves, 14. Von Herder wrote his influential work analyzing Hebrew poetry, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, in 1783.

²⁸Groves, 15. Groves quotes Alexander Gillies, *Herder*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1945, 28.

This idea that all periods in history are unique and incomprehensible outside their immediate context is explored and utilized extensively by von Rad.

An examination of the works and investigations which influenced and led up to von Rad's principle of actualization must also include Hermann Gunkel.²⁹ The tradition-criticism which is a significant part of the foundation of von Rad's work is also found in Gunkel. The Bible is composed of layers of tradition which must be recognized, sorted out, and removed in order to discover the original content of the story that was told. Gunkel moves beyond the work of Wellhausen and others as he attempts to "establish" the oral tradition behind even the core of the written tradition. He utilizes Herder's approach to analyze each of the successive layers which separate the oral tradition from the final literary form by attempting to empathize with each of the authors of the various sources. In the process of analyzing the individual layers, he sees some patterns which form. "Occasionally it is even possible to see the same material passing through different literary types, being transformed on each occasion in the spirit of a new age. For instance, the Saga can be seen passing into the Romance and into the Legend."³⁰ Because Gunkel is primarily concerned with the historical and literary analysis of the traditions, he does not demonstrate any attempt at developing a particular Old Testament theology. However, his approach helps von Rad to come to the point where he *does* try to develop an overarching theology of the Old Testament.

The greatest direct influence on von Rad's development of the principle of actualization alongside the proposal of the covenant renewal festival seems to be Sigmund Mowinckel, judging

²⁹Groves, 17.

³⁰Groves, 20. He quotes Hermann Gunkel, "Fundamental Problems of Hebrew Literary History," *What Remains of the Old Testament*, 66.

by the repeated references to his discussions of actualization within von Rad's works. The viewpoint from which Mowinckel began was "that of form history—or, as it may better be termed, type history—a method of approach introduced by Hermann Gunkel." But as he worked on the Psalms, he discovered that Gunkel's point of view was not sufficient, so he used "the cult functional approach," examining the Psalms in conjunction with the devotional life of the congregation.³¹

Mowinckel studies the way in which the Israelites related to their history. Mowinckel uses several terms to describe their relation to past events. These include *Wiederholung* (repetition), *Wiederbelebung* (resuscitation), and *Vergegenwärtigung* (re-presentation).³² According to the interpretation of Mowinckel by Joseph Groves, "when [myth becomes mixed with history], there is a breakdown of the primitive *Wiederholung* and the total reliving of the events which it spurred. In its place are the less complete, more spiritualized experiences of *Wiederbelebung* and *Vergegenwärtigung*."³³ Further, Groves questions whether Mowinckel is here discussing contemporization, where the historical is made relevant to the present, or archaizing, where the people are taken back to the historical event. Alan Ludwig, on the other hand, asserts that Groves is only dealing with one example rather than the whole of Mowinckel's understanding. Ludwig points instead to an earlier use of the terms by Mowinckel to describe the discrepancy between the practice and the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Mass. According to Ludwig's extrapolation from Mowinckel, "what is supposed to be 'only the thought of a re-presentation [*Vergegenwärtigung*] of

³¹Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, xxxi. The "form history" Mowinckel writes of is "form geschichte" or "form criticism."

³²Definitions from Ludwig, 3; Langenscheidt New College German Dictionary, New York: Langenscheidt, 1995, 702; Ludwig, 4.

³³Groves, 22.

the sacrifice of Golgatha before God' is in practice actually 'the thought of a repetition [*Wiederholung*] of the immolation of the Son of Man.'"³⁴ The difference between these two terms is not as great as Groves understands it. Ludwig goes on to conclude from other evidences in Mowinckel's writings that "both terms denote the making present of the past, one-time primary saving events for the worshippers' present and future rather than the projection of the worshippers into past time."³⁵

Ludwig summarizes Mowinckel's view of remembrance in the Israelite cultus as follows:

Not only are God's mighty acts said to be remembered in that they are re-experienced, but conversely, when they are remembered, they are "thereby turned into new effectual reality by Yahweh's presence at the festival." They are "remembered and repeated." The remembrance encompasses both what is supposed to have happened the first time (myth) and what presently happens in the cult (reality). "There is consequently no disagreement between myth and reality"; remembrance links them.³⁶

To conclude his discussion of Mowinckel, Ludwig says of him, "true cultic remembrance for him is both effected by and makes present God's salvation."

³⁴Ludwig, 5. Ludwig quotes Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien*, Vol. 2. Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1961, 33.

³⁵Ludwig, 8.

³⁶Ludwig, 9. Ludwig quotes Mowinckel, *Religion und Kultus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953, 78.

Actualization in von Rad

Following Mowinckel is the primary author in the development of the principle of actualization as mentioned above, Gerhard von Rad. Von Rad's principle of actualization can be summed up this way: the authors of the Hebrew scriptures believe that through particular rites and literary devices the barriers of time and space can be and are removed with the result that the people become *actual* participants in the events. The *actualization* occurs in the devices, whether literary or ritual, which connect the prior event to the participants or observers. Along with his proof of the presence of the covenant renewal festival, he attempts to demonstrate how this principle applies to the entire Old Testament, though he concentrates on the Hexateuch and the prophets.

In his *Studies in Deuteronomy*, von Rad concludes that the author of Deuteronomy writes in a homiletical, rather than historical, style. He "worked over" and "presented homiletically" the traditional cultic material; he made it accessible to his own historical context.³⁷ In the aforementioned article on the Hexateuch, von Rad describes the presence of parenetic material, but does not consider it significant to the understanding of the entire book. However, in *Studies in Deuteronomy*, his consideration of the parenetic material grows. The old traditions and commandments are actualized through that same parenetic material.³⁸

Von Rad demonstrates that the use of "today" has special meaning for the hearers of the Deuteronomist's sermon. Though six centuries separate these people from the event at Mt. Horeb, they are nonetheless "set once more at Horeb to hear Yahweh's word of salvation, which has not yet

³⁷Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 60 (Hereafter cited as *Deuteronomy*).

³⁸Groves, 34.

lost its power.”³⁹ He relies heavily upon the Deuteronomist’s use of “today” throughout the book of Deuteronomy to support his conclusion that by means of a literary device, the people are being somehow intimately connected to the original events which the Deuteronomist proclaims.

Von Rad’s view of the historicity of the Bible (especially that of the Hexateuch) nurtures his desire and ability to discover examples of actualization. Though both are concerned with history (*Geschichte*), saga differs from precise history writing (*Historie*):

Just as for an individual certain events or decisions of the past determine his whole life, so in the life of tribes and peoples past events have a direct influence on the present and mold it. Here it is the saga much more than historical writing that knows this secret contemporary character of apparently past events; it can let things become contemporary in such a way that everyone detects their importance, while the same events would probably have been overlooked by historical writing (if it can be thought to have existed at the time). . . . the manner of [the saga’s] representation and visualization is different.⁴⁰

This does not make the saga any less true for the people; they should still take it quite seriously and “believe” it. The saga also must not be understood in the modern sense of saga—that some bit of truth was expanded by a large amount of fantasy in order to have a good and complete story. It was, at least for the author, truth, but written with a sense of an “inner history” in view. As more details were added to the saga by different traditions or redactors, the saga was made relevant to the new

³⁹Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 70.

⁴⁰Von Rad, *Genesis*, 32.

narrator, while still maintaining the “‘historical’ fact as its actual crystallizing point. The saga is always “the witness of a past, and at the same time completely contemporary, act of God.”⁴¹

The contemporizing aspect of the saga begins to sound like actualization. Somehow the past and the present realities are connected in the event which is proclaimed. Von Rad presents further evidence in the rites and religious practices of Israel. God’s people could not simply rely on the original context of an event or even a commandment. According to von Rad, [the league of tribes known as] Israel “was obliged in every situation to ascertain afresh what Yahweh’s will for the cult was at the moment for the situation in which she had to remain loyal to the first commandment was constantly changing. . . . The interpretation of the first commandment was therefore very flexible.”⁴² His concept of actualization provides a means for describing how these earlier events or instructions could become relevant for the culture contemporary, not only to each narrator but to all Israel. He says further that:

The historical acts by which Yahweh founded the community of Israel were absolute.... They were actual (*gegenwärtig*) for each subsequent generation; and this is not just in the sense of furnishing the imagination with a vivid present picture (*lebhaften geistigen Vergegenwärtigung*) of past events—no, it was only the community assembled for a festival that by recitation and ritual brought Israel in the full sense of the word into being: in her own person she really and truly entered into the historic situation to which the festival in question was related.⁴³

⁴¹Von Rad, *Genesis*, 33-34.

⁴²Von Rad, *Theology*, 1:209.

⁴³Von Rad, *Theology* 2.104.

He follows with the example of the celebration of Passover. When Israel ate the Passover meal each year, just as was prescribed in Exodus 12, “she was manifestly doing more than merely remembering the Exodus: she was entering into the saving event of the Exodus itself and participating in it in a quite ‘actual’ way.”⁴⁴ Each time Israel celebrated the Passover as it was instituted, she participated in the *original* Passover. This sense of making something real, not just to the imagination, has been dubbed *cultic actualization*.

Von Rad agrees with G. Pidoux that there were two ways “by which history could be actualized, one cultic and the other chronological.”⁴⁵ Though the two ways co-existed for a time, the latter eventually dominated until the former disappeared. Von Rad does not specifically spell out the differences between the two types, but he describes that after cultic actualization died out, “it was now no longer really possible to regard history as turning back on itself. . . . In Deuteronomy the preacher makes it apparent that the generation which he addresses is well aware of the distance which separates it from the one with which the Sinai covenant was originally made.”⁴⁶ Though in his early writings he considers the function of Deuteronomy tied to cultic actualization, he later concludes that the addressees of the Deuteronomist’s sermon were aware of the gap in time (thus the use of “today”), and so the material is better described by a different model, that is, *chronological actualization*.⁴⁷ It is this second type of actualization which von Rad sees as most important for interpreting the greatest portion of the Old Testament.

⁴⁴Von Rad, *Theology* 2:104.

⁴⁵Von Rad, *Theology* 2:108.

⁴⁶Von Rad, *Theology* 2:108-109

⁴⁷Ludwig, 14.

A further difference between von Rad's cultic and chronological types of actualization is expressed in summary by Groves. "With cultic actualization one is making vital the events of the cult in a periodic festival. . . . [which is] the same regardless of external historical events." On the other hand, there is a different situation in the prophetic literature. One finds there "a response to definite historical movements of the day. . . . Therefore, every actualization by a prophet of an old tradition was very, very specific. It pertained to one set of historical circumstances, one particular generation."⁴⁸ As a result, no prophecy could be repeated exactly in its original sense. Von Rad's theology of actualization leads to his view of typology:

A prophet's preaching was not restricted to its original audience. As Israel journeyed through time, the message accompanied her, even if the historical circumstances to which it had originally been spoken had changed in the interval. The basic conviction underlying the process of tradition was that, once a prophet's word had been uttered, it could never in any circumstances become void. The time when, and the way by which, it reached fulfillment were Yahweh's concern; man's part was to see that the word was handed on. And we must notice particularly that even the prophecies which had plainly found their historical goal, and had thus clearly been fulfilled, were retained as prophecies which concerned Israel and could always have fresh meaning extracted from them.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Groves, 50; 51.

⁴⁹Von Rad, *Theology* 2:45. The typology presented here by von Rad is addressed and considered "bad typology" by Voelz in *What Does This Mean?*, 272-273.

These prophecies were even continued into the New Testament. The New Testament writers freely used and reinterpreted Old Testament prophecies, just as had the prophets before them.⁵⁰

Von Rad's view of typology nearly demands his concept of actualization, and vice versa. Some form of contemporization is necessary to make prophecies and events of one era applicable and understandable to an entirely different group of people at another time. He sees the New Testament as the final fulfillment of Old Testament types and prophecies:

That the things which happened to Israel on her way were always "types," and that this Old Testament saving event was full of pointers to the New, was, of course, only revealed through the coming of Christ. It was also revealed, however, that what the New Testament designates as fulfillment cannot be understood as a straightforward and literal realization of the promise, but as a fulfillment which, even from the beginning, far surpasses it.⁵¹

At the same time as von Rad sees Christ as a final fulfillment, he also maintains that the Bible must still be made contemporary for today. There are many Old Testament themes which are not exhausted in the New Testament, since each age finds its own interpretation; thus the Old Testament speaks in an entirely new way to each succeeding generation.⁵²

⁵⁰Von Rad, *Theology* 2:327.

⁵¹Von Rad, *Theology* 2:384.

⁵²Von Rad, *Theology* 2:337.

Reactions to von Rad's Actualization

Various scholars have different levels of agreement with von Rad's principle of actualization. Weiser and Mowinckel fully accept and concentrate on the cultic actualization which von Rad begins to move away from.⁵³ Noth begins to move away from von Rad's position, relying primarily on the narrative aspect of cultic actualization.⁵⁴ Westermann provides strong opposition to von Rad in this area of discussion, demonstrating that cultic actualization is totally absent from the Psalms. Instead, he proposes another "type" of actualization, which more closely resembles von Rad's chronological actualization, though it also has its differences; he calls this type *narrative actualization*.⁵⁵ Groves disregards both cultic and chronological actualization in favor of *literary actualization*. For a more detailed overview of the positions of the various scholars, see the discussion by Joseph W. Groves, in Actualization and Interpretation in the Old Testament and Alan G. Ludwig, in Remembrance and Re-Presentation in Israel's Worship.

Groves attempts to describe the three primary types of actualization which he has picked out from various scholars. This brief summary does not accurately paint a picture of any one scholar's view, but it sums up the features that seem to be common to each scholar as he discusses that particular type. These categories and labels are to some extent forced upon each scholar, as these labels are not generally used by the scholars themselves to describe their own positions.

⁵³Ludwig, 30-31.

⁵⁴Groves, 71.

⁵⁵Groves, 72.

Cultic actualization, which is found primarily in Weiser, Mowinckel, and von Rad's early work, contains five key features:⁵⁶

- 1) It is found in the re-enactment of basic, sacred events of a community.
- 2) These re-enactments are dramatic—often found in play, symbol, dance, or mime.
- 3) These events are often “reality-producing.”
- 4) The events are repeated at regular intervals.
- 5) The participants identify simultaneously with two distinct moments in time.

A different approach to contemporization, literary actualization, describes how *any* new age struggles with older materials or traditions; it describes any act of interpretation, whether it be of literature, customs, art, or other means of communication. Groves ascribes this to Westermann and Gunkel, but also adopts a modified form of this type himself. There are four distinguishing features in this type of contemporization:⁵⁷

- 1) The participants perceive the difference between the two moments in time.
- 2) The contemporization is directly related to both historical situations.
- 3) This actualization is applied primarily to written materials.
- 4) The contemporization is *not* reality-producing.

Chronological actualization seems to be the best mix between these two opposite extremes one can achieve. This describes the work done by von Rad, Noth, Porteous, Childs, and others in their tradition. Salient features are:⁵⁸

⁵⁶Groves, 105-108.

⁵⁷Groves, 108-112.

⁵⁸Groves, 112-116.

- 1) The participants in the actualized event simultaneously experience the identity of two moments in time, though they maintain the historicity of the revelation.
- 2) The participants adopt traditions according to the spirit of their own era.
- 3) The contemporization is valid *only for that time and place*, though they can be re-actualized by a later generation.
- 4) This actualization is applied primarily to oral traditions rather than to written materials.

These three categories of actualization are not as well-defined as the labels might indicate. There is a considerable range of opinion even among the scholars Groves cites as supporters of a particular type. As we will see, there is certainly more going on in Old Testament worship than literary actualization. Whether cultic or chronological interpretation better describes what happens in that context is difficult to determine; perhaps the categories are not adequate to describe the events in the worship life of Israel. Instead of continuing to concentrate on imposed categories, we will shift our focus to attributes of remembrance inherent in the text.

Remembrance (זכר) in the Old Testament

As many of the scholars in this traditio-critical school spend their time trying to determine which type of actualization best describes the manner by which Israel contemporizes historical events, commandments, and prophecies, several other scholars began to treat the text as a whole (instead of atomized fragments) and look at particular words and contexts. Ludwig provides a brief summary of the study of the root זכר in recent scholarship. He compares the work of Thurian, de

Boer, Childs, Schottroff, and others. Thurian is well in line with Weiser and Mowinckel in emphasizing the divine initiative in remembrance (actualization), while Childs and Schottroff approach the same concept from a human remembrance.⁵⁹

Several important points should be noted from these studies of זָכַר. The root is used frequently in the Old Testament (over 300 times), within a small variety of contexts. It is not easily summarized or categorized into one distinct meaning, for various nuances are found within different contexts. It is therefore not possible to base a complete theology on the definition of this one root. However, when one looks at particular uses within particular contexts, one can begin to piece together a picture of remembrance for Israel. That is, as we look at the contexts regarding worship, we can understand remembrance in terms of worship. This understanding of remembrance in worship will help to address the issues presented above, of actualization in general, and of the covenant renewal festival in particular. In addition, this understanding will help to comprehend worship in the New Testament, and it will guide us as we examine worship today.

In the various contexts in which זָכַר is used, it assumes several subjects and objects of remembrance. It is not used only of Yahweh's or Israel's remembering. The object of remembrance ranges from personal deeds (Gen. 42:9) to Yahweh's covenant(s) (Ezek. 16:60). There is not a clear pattern of usage from author to author or book to book. Yet one conclusion stands out among nearly all of the uses—remembering leads to action (Exod. 32:13-14). Though today we often concentrate on the content of a memory and consider how it affects one's brain, for Israel, to remember was to act accordingly. Yahweh called on Israel to remember His covenant and His mighty deeds, that they

⁵⁹Ludwig, 32-44.

might act according to His will (Deut. 32:7). People prayed to Yahweh to remember His covenant and His mercy in the past so that He would act mercifully in the present and future (Jer 14:21). Remembrance of a past event is directly connected to present and future actions, whether for Yahweh or for people.

Especially important to our discussion is remembrance in the context of worship. When Yahweh prescribes a festival or appointed day to be remembered, it is for a purpose. He desires that Israel keep the festival alive so that the results of the festival will also live on (Exod. 13:1-10). Ludwig summarizes it well:

Yahweh's memory and action are not manipulated by Israel's re-enactment of the days and festivals. Rather, it is His instituting of them, His words and promises connected with them, and His acting through them that are paramount. In the re-enacted days and festivals the worshippers participate anew in Yahweh's salvation as He manifests His name—this manifestation is Yahweh's doing even when the priest utters the name—and this strengthens their remembering of the divine name in His creating and saving acts. Israel's remembering, then, does not recreate the event in mythical or magical fashion, nor does it merely picture the event so vividly in the mind through symbolic re-enactment that it seems real. Through the festival Israel's memory truly partakes of the reality as Yahweh acts for His people.⁶⁰

In the remembrance of days and festivals, Israel's remembering comes to the fore. It is through these means that Yahweh causes His salvation to be remembered by Israel. A major part of the remembrance occurs in connection with re-enactment of the original event.

⁶⁰Ludwig, 84.

Though Israel's remembrance is highlighted in their celebrations of days and festivals, it is Yahweh's remembering which is accented in the remembrance associated with sacrifices and other cultic objects (Psalm 20:4). Re-enactment is not as important in this context of remembrance. These forms of remembrance were designed to bring the worshippers to Yahweh's remembrance, that He might act according to the promises He had given to them.⁶¹

These two contexts of remembrance cannot truly be isolated as has just been done; they usually occur together. As Israel celebrated an appointed day or a festival, she usually also offered sacrifices and used cultic objects in the rites of worship. Remembrance, therefore, often takes place in both "directions." People gather in worship according to the direction of Yahweh so that they re-enact and remember His acts of salvation and act in worship and daily life accordingly. Simultaneously, the people offer up prayers and sacrifices to Yahweh so that He will remember His covenant with them and act graciously towards them. To merely say of worship in the Old Testament that "Yahweh called His people together to bestow upon them His gifts in accordance with His promises" is to give only a partial picture. It is likewise incomplete to accentuate the gathering of people to serve Yahweh or seek His mercy and guidance. Both elements must be present to discuss Israel's worship. It is as difficult to explain whose remembrance is "first" or "most important." Those lines of thought do not sufficiently address the concept of Old Testament worship.

⁶¹Ludwig, 110-111.

Summary, Conclusions, and New Directions

In this study, we have examined the concept of a covenant renewal festival held by von Rad and others. The passage von Rad uses as the key to his whole concept is Joshua 24. While he is correct that this passage describes a context of worship, it is not the covenant renewal festival which he describes. In the first place, the presuppositions which he brings to the discussion necessitate that the account in Exodus be used to justify the ceremony in Joshua. That, though, need not be the case. It is more congruent with Scripture to assume that the Sinai account paired with the story of the exodus in the book of Exodus was written to describe those events in their own right, not to explain a ceremony which was already being celebrated. Secondly, he assumes an anthropocentric view of the festival; the people of Israel got together to fulfill their own purposes. On the contrary, if we accept the Exodus account as legitimate, then the people gather for worship because of Yahweh's desire and instruction. Finally, there is little evidence to show that this event was an annual event. If one assumes that the worship was not derived from a local agriculture-based festival, it is equally likely that it was celebrated more often, even monthly or weekly. Though there is not sufficient evidence to *prove* this alternative, there is no less evidence than the amount used to support von Rad's position. Yet without evidence indicating a frequency of the festival described in Joshua 24 and elsewhere, correlated with the lack of mention of frequency in Yahweh's instruction, it is likely that the festival was held more frequently than once per year. That the various Biblical authors take it for granted without specifying how often it is celebrated lends further support to a more frequent occurrence.

We have seen several "types" or degrees of actualization presented, yet none of them provides a clear explanation of worship in the Old Testament. When one dismisses the

presuppositions of the traditio-critical method, namely that the final form of the Old Testament is due to the work of several redactors working with various sources, the attractiveness of literary actualization also diminishes since there is less contemporization of earlier literature than of oral traditions. Chronological actualization looks at first very attractive, but is at its heart anthropocentric. The contemporization is brought about by and for men, and must be re-contemporized for each new generation. Even the festival of covenant renewal discussed by von Rad seems to carry with it a certain amount of meaning, as the service does not show indications of being continually altered. Other rites, it would seem, would fare the same. Of the three major types, cultic actualization seems to fit the reality the best. But the idea of simultaneously identifying with two separate moments in time seems quite foreign to the Biblical witness. The reality-producing feature described by Groves is, however, very attractive. This would fit very well with a salvation motif, and especially in the New Testament in the Lord's Supper.

As demonstrated by the overview of זָכַר in the Old Testament, worship for Israel was more than merely Yahweh or Israel alone remembering. Instead, it involved *both simultaneously*. Ludwig explains:

Divine and human remembrance play different roles. Yahweh's remembering is the active component in the cultus in that it brings His name with all that that means—His mercy, active presence, and mighty saving deeds of past, present, and future—to the worshippers. Israel's remembering, on the other hand, is receptive: it receives

Yahweh's benefits in the worship, and these result in praise and confession of the divine name, with all that goes along with it.⁶²

Remembrance is also intimately connected with action. Thus it can be said to be reality-producing, even as von Rad suggests that "once a prophet's word had been uttered, it could never in any circumstances become void" because the fulfillment was Yahweh's concern, and Yahweh Himself was reality-producing.⁶³ Worship, then, as it contained the remembrance of both Yahweh and Israel, was reality-producing.

The implications for further study in this area are numerous. A detailed look at worship in the New Testament should corroborate the present understanding of Old Testament worship. Especially important is a look at the ἀνάμνησις in the context of the Lord's Supper in both Luke and 1 Corinthians.⁶⁴ The historical traditions of worship from the early church to the present day also deserve examination to understand how the church has understood worship. Finally, a systematic study of the total implications for a modern theology of worship should prove fruitful.

The questions which were posed at the beginning of this study do not yet find their concrete solutions. Such answers are beyond the scope of this limited study. However, as one understands the implications of actualization and remembrance from an Old Testament viewpoint, one is generally more equipped to posit answers and solutions. While many in the church argue from one extreme or another, the answer lies in a combination of both extremes. It is not Yahweh alone who

⁶²Ludwig, 113.

⁶³Von Rad, *Theology* 2:45.

⁶⁴Several authors have addressed this issue. Though Jeremias and Chenderlin go into great detail, Clancy's conclusions correlate more closely with the conclusions reached here.

remembers and gathers His people for worship. Nor does worship consist solely of people gathering to remember Yahweh and praise Him. *Both extremes occur together within the context of worship.* One therefore cannot appropriately argue that worship is primarily evangelistic *or* directed toward sanctification of the faithful. To argue in this way is to force categories upon an event which defies all categorical interpretations. Instead, one should export his interpretations from the Biblical accounts themselves.

Worship in the Old Testament should be seen as a mutual remembrance on the part of Yahweh and Israel. Assuming that the theology of worship based on the Old Testament is valid also for modern worship, then one must begin a theology of worship with the view of remembrance that includes Yahweh remembering His covenant *and* people remembering His acts of salvation *simultaneously*. The result of this remembrance is that Yahweh as well as His people will act according to His will. This is true worship.

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