

## THE UNITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT<sup>1</sup>

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THOSE embarking upon a serious and constructive reading of the Old Testament usually have two basic questions to ask: first, 'Where should I begin?', and second, 'How should I read?' Though it may not seem obvious, actually I believe that the first of these questions is the more important. The second to some extent solves itself as one progresses. So it is a possible answer to the first question that I want to suggest here. 'Where should I begin?' Emphatically not, I suggest, at the beginning. The composition of the Old Testament is utterly unlike that of a modern book. It is a complex of traditions which has grown up round a central nucleus, and which has only subsequently been crystallized in book form. The most ancient and the most creative of these traditions constitutes the central nucleus and the later traditions have been either added on to it at the beginning and end, or else inserted into it. Thus von Rad speaks of the *Einbau* of the Sinai tradition, the *Ausbau* of the patriarchal narratives, and the *Vorbau* of the Primordial history (Gen. i-xi) into or on to what he regards as the central nucleus, namely the events of the exodus and the entry into the promised land.<sup>2</sup> The first task then is to grasp this central nucleus, and to examine how and in what sense it influences or is presupposed by the later traditions. For these reasons, it seems to me, one should begin reading the Old Testament in the middle. That of course sets us our next problem, where is the middle? How does one find the central nucleus?

What the Old Testament is about, reduced to its simplest terms, is two concrete subjects and the relation between them. The two subjects are Yahweh and Israel. The relation between them is established by and embodied in the sacred and eternal treaty known as the covenant. This relation is created by the free will of Yahweh at two specific moments in history, and at two concrete geographical points: the covenant with Israel at Sinai, the covenant with the house of David at Sion. In so far as one may generalize one may say that these are the two central nuclei of

<sup>1</sup> The text of a conference given to novice-mistresses at Spode House in January 1939.

<sup>2</sup> G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, Göttingen, 1956, pp. 13 ff.

the Old Testament. It follows that we should know the circumstances and the terms of these two covenants first, and almost off by heart.

Let us begin with the covenant of Sinai. What sort of a God is he that meets the people there? What sort of a people is it that is moulded there into the Israel of God?

‘And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled. . . . And mount Sinai, the whole of it, smoked, because Yahweh descended on it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet waxed louder and louder Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice’ (Exod. xix, 16, 18, 19). The first thing we know about Yahweh is that he is holy and that his holiness is *numinous*, that is to say terrifying and death-dealing in its sublimity to that which is profane. It is like an electric force discharging itself on anyone who draws too near. ‘Whosoever touches the mount shall be surely put to death’ (Exod. xix, 12). It reduces mountains and the very foundations of the world to dreadful tottering. What happens at Sinai is that for one terrible moment in history the numinous penumbra of God touches the world in its profanity. The ensuing phenomena are of three kinds: first, those which belong, so to speak, to the outer fringe of the penumbra, thunder and lightning, fire, smoke and thick darkness, and the deafening sound of a trumpet; second, even more terrifying in its numinousness, and issuing from the very centre of the penumbra, the divine voice; third, the effect of this on the world and its inhabitants, anguished trembling that reaches down into the very roots of the earth. This theophany becomes the prototype for later theophanies in the prophetic books. The prophets, too, speak of Yahweh appearing amid storm and darkness and fire, uttering his terrible voice, and making the foundations of the world to totter by the sheer impact of his holiness. They are striving to re-awaken in their contemporaries that *awe of Yahweh as numinous* which was the beginning of Israel’s wisdom here at Sinai.

Moreover it is at this time, and at this place, that Yahweh the numinous comes to dwell in the midst of his people. The numinous penumbra actually descends and covers the ark. The

sense of Yahweh's presence in the shrine dominates Old Testament thought and is rooted in this exodus-Sinai tradition. It gives rise to two great theological conceptions, the 'Shem'-theology of the Deuteronomists, and the 'Kabod'-theology of the priestly school. Both are concerned to explain how it is that Yahweh makes himself present in the midst of his people, while still remaining transcendent and uncircumscribed in heaven. The Deuteronomists explain that he is really present in his shrine because he has put his name (*shem*) there. The priestly theologians explain that it is because he occupies the shrine with his theophanic cloud, his glory (*kabod*). The *kabod* theology derives from the concept of Yahweh's glory descending on the tabernacle at this point. The *shem* theology is inspired by the concept of Yahweh's name as projection of his personality. This holy name was likewise revealed to the people in the desert, in this creative phase of their existence.

This then is Yahweh the numinous. What of the people whom he has chosen? His deliverance of them from 'the house of bondage' has turned them for the time being into a band of nomads landless and in need of land, and to that extent the enemies of those who already own land. An Egyptian text speaks of the Amorite, the prototype of Near Eastern nomadism as existing for the purpose of attacking and pillaging existing property holders.<sup>3</sup> At this stage in their history the Israelites evince something of the same mentality. Their well-being is to be achieved by *disrupting* the established order, and *dispossessing* the existing owners of the land which has become the object of their desire. As nomads they place their hope in the furious, burning and destructive aspects of Yahweh's holiness. They want to get this elemental destructive force on their side, and in its power to smash their way into the land of Canaan. Thus the revelation of Yahweh's holiness at Sinai exactly corresponds to the needs of his people in this nomadic phase. If they make him absolutely and exclusively their God, the numinous impact of his holiness will be directed against their enemies. But if they fail for one moment to obey his will, that same numinous force will break out upon themselves and destroy them from his shrine in their midst.

The second, and more intimate attribute of Yahweh which he

<sup>3</sup> The 'Teaching for Merikare'; cf. R. de Vaux, O.P., 'Les Patriarches Hébreux et les Découvertes Modernes', in *Revue Biblique*, July 1946, p. 342.

reveals at Sinai is his 'righteousness', *tsedaqah*. This righteousness he imparts to the people in the form of law. The law is the right order of his divine will imposed on the people as a mould, by which he fashions and creates them from an amorphous band of refugees into a nation of priests. What he demands of them is that they shall dedicate their entire lives by obedience, to making his glory manifest. They are to rely on him as the sole and exclusive provider of their needs. By the miraculous abundance in which he supplies those needs, Yahweh will show forth his power and goodness in them. For he will bless them with blessings that are elemental and creative: life and light. Life—that is strength to destroy their enemies and fruitfulness for their own bodies, for their beasts, and for the land they are destined to possess. Light—that is oracular guidance and supernatural wisdom so that the Gentiles will say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and an understanding people' (Deut. iv, 6). Conversely, if they are false to the covenant, he will punish them precisely by withholding those needs from them. They will be conquered by their enemies and suffer cruelly at their hands. They will be afflicted with disease and barrenness in their own bodies, in their beasts, and in their fields. They will be 'smitten with madness and blindness and astonishment of heart' (Deut. xxviii, 28). These are Yahweh's elemental curses, deprivations of life and light, reversals of the blessing of creation. From this central experience at Sinai of the creative impact of Yahweh's holiness, grows the Hebrew notion of creation as such. Yahweh creates essentially by separating off to himself, moulding according to the pattern of his own righteousness, and blessing with light and life. This creative impact occurs on a cosmic, a national, and an individual plane, and is constantly being renewed.

Grouped around the shrine of the ark, the Israelites are intensely aware of living constantly in the holiness of Yahweh. And as holiness imports 'separateness', 'otherness' to the profane and the 'this-worldly', so they participate in the 'otherness' of Yahweh himself. They are conscious, and will remain conscious throughout their history, of being a nation apart. Finally we should notice as one of the pervasive ideas of the Old Testament which originates at this point, the idea of a constant *dialogue* between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>4</sup> 'Moses spoke, and God answered him with a voice.'

4 cf. A. Neher, *L'Essence du Prophétisme*, Paris, 1955, pp. 85 ff.

(Exod. xix, 19). To the Gentiles, the voice of Yahweh is meaningless and terrifying noise, a portent of numinous destruction. But Israel understands the words of the voice and can respond to it. She can call on this God of holiness by the secret covenant-name which he has revealed to her. She can move him in her favour. When Israel clothes herself in sack-cloth and weeps, Yahweh will clothe himself in the storm, and thunder destruction against her enemies. In its ideal form this intercourse between Yahweh and Israel is a dialogue between lovers. In its more tragic moments the voice of Yahweh becomes the voice of an angry lover reproaching his faithless spouse, as in Osee. Then when the scourge of the exile has fallen on Israel, the dialogue changes. The voice of Yahweh consoles Israel; the voice of Israel 'sings to Yahweh a new song'. One could say that the Old Testament is a continuation of this dialogue between Yahweh and Israel which started at Sinai when 'Moses spoke and God answered him with a voice'.

These very briefly are the creative ideas which seem to derive from the nomadic phase of Israel's history. Here she encounters Yahweh as destroyer, furious, burning, jealous, disrupting the established order on behalf of his people by the sheer impact of his holiness. Through the covenant she becomes one with this destroying holiness, and so at last enters the land.

But once the people is established in the land and has begun to till it, these ideas of Yahweh are no longer adequate. At this point the Israelite is developing from nomad into peasant; he depends for his well-being not on the disruption of the established order, but precisely on its maintenance. If he continues to think of Yahweh merely as a destroyer God, he will be tempted to abandon him, and to turn to the local fertility gods for his needs. As peasant therefore he has to accustom himself to the opposite idea of Yahweh as upholder of the natural order, as the giver of rain in due season, as preserver of the regular rhythm of the seasons, by which the fruitfulness of the land is renewed from year to year. Out of the tension between these two opposed ideas, the nomadic idea of Yahweh as *destroyer* of the regular order, and the peasant idea of Yahweh as *upholder* of the natural order, grows the deeper conception of Yahweh as transcendent lord of nature, who *both* destroys *and* upholds according to the just decrees of his will. This idea was already latent in Yahweh's initial act of self-revelation. It becomes explicit in the Israelite's mind in response to the

altered conditions and needs of his life. For his peasant life, no less than his nomadic life in the past, is regulated by Yahweh's law. This law is applied in judgments by the 'elders at the gate', the leaders, that is to say, of the small patriarchal communities gathered into little settlements throughout the land. Thus two kinds of law are to be distinguished in Israel, one far more sacred than the other. The first is the 'apodictic' law characterized by the introductory formula 'Thou shalt' or 'Thou shalt not'. This is thought of as coming from Yahweh himself. The second is 'casuistic law', with its characteristically hypothetical form. 'If a man . . .' etc. This is a record of past decisions by the 'elders' of the community, applying the right order of Yahweh's will in particular cases.

The actual division of the land is regarded as sacred and God-given. Land may be bought and sold only for a limited period. Periodically the original sacred division must be re-established in its pristine form at the Jubilee, when debts are to be remitted and each particular lot of land reverts to the family to which it was originally assigned. The law against removing boundary stones is another instance of this conception of the sacredness of the lots determined by Yahweh's will. It was his holiness which won the land. He presided over the division of the spoil. His decision must not be altered. All this ensured that Israelite society should remain patriarchal and 'classless'. At least in theory, no one family could enrich itself permanently at the expense of others. The social structure was still based on the unit of the family and the tribe, as it had been in the nomad phase. The tribes themselves were bound together in a confederation that was based on blood ties and the need for mutual protection, but far more on the fact that they were all united to the same covenant God. At the great feasts the men of Israel would meet together at the central shrine which Joshua had instituted for the ark. There are indications that the most important of these feasts was the autumnal feast of Tabernacles. It coincided with the great pagan fertility festivals of Israel's neighbours. At the very time when pagan peasants and farmers were striving to identify themselves with the fertility gods of the land, the 'baals', the Israelite peasant was striving to unite himself anew to his covenant God. No doubt the Canaanite fertility cults exercised a debasing influence on the forms of **worship** in Israel. The reference to the feast in Shiloh in Judges xxi,

21 suggests that Yahweh was worshipped there by orgiastic dances derived from these fertility cults. Nevertheless the essential idea that Yahweh as the one God transcends the natural order is preserved in the true traditions of Israel. The Israelite peasant is taught to attribute the fruitfulness of his land exclusively to Yahweh as covenant God, and not as 'baal' or 'lord' of the land. Standing before the shrine he sees the offering of first fruits which he has brought placed upon the altar by the priests. Then he solemnly recites a cultic *Credo* in which he recalls the sacred origins of his nation. 'An Aramaean ready to perish was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and we cried to Yahweh, the God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness and with signs and with wonders; and he has brought us into this place, and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey'. (Deut. xxvi, 5-9). This *Credo* (which occurs also in Deut. vi, 20-24 and in Jos. xxiv, 2-13) is in its essential features an extremely ancient record of what Israel considered her most vital traditions. As such it provides an invaluable answer to the question with which we started: 'Where ought I to begin?' The themes assembled in it, the promise to the patriarchs, the exodus, the miracle of the Red Sea, the conquest of the land, have, like the theme of Sinai, exercised a creative influence on the Old Testament as a whole.

The tribal confederation centred on the covenant shrine had a further significance. It united Israel for purposes of mutual defence. When any one tribe or family was attacked, the men of Israel would leave their peasant holdings, and revert to the old nomad life of the war camp. There they would strive to steep themselves more intensely in the holiness of Yahweh, that destroying holiness which had won them their land, and which they felt to be present among them in a special way in the war camp. It was that holiness, working in and through the menfolk of Israel, that brought her survival and victory. Thus preparations for the holy war took the form of elaborate rites of purification and measures designed to increase holiness in the warriors, as well as solemn ritual cursing

of the enemy by the priests. Here is another tradition which has profoundly influenced the sacred writings. This patriarchal 'holy war' tradition is destined to be revived, after a long period of oblivion, in the great Deuteronomic reform of the late seventh century. To this same tradition belong the long series of charismatic chiefs or 'judges' as they are misleadingly called, who were raised up on specific occasions to lead Israel in her holy wars against a specific oppressor.

Far the most dangerous and the most persistent of these oppressors were the Philistines. It was their incursions that gave rise to the general demand for a more permanent form of charismatic chief, a king. Thus the Philistine threat was indirectly the occasion of the second supreme creative moment in Israel's history—the institution of the monarchy and the covenant with the royal house of David.

To anticipate for a moment, let us notice the effect the monarchy is going to have in deepening the Israelite's knowledge of Yahweh. As nomad he thought of him primarily as a destroyer God; as peasant he learned to regard him as transcendent lord of nature—transcendent because he both destroys and upholds the forces of nature and of fruitfulness. Now as peasant society evolves into civic society, as the Israelite becomes subject and citizen in a state, the idea of Yahweh's lordship is projected on to a new plane. As citizen, the Israelite has to take fresh cognizance of the fact that Israel is a nation among the nations, that she has a part to play in international politics. Gradually he learns that in this sphere too, Yahweh is transcendent lord; that he not only defends Israel against her enemies, but also uses those enemies to scourge her; not only scourges her, but also delivers her miraculously when all seems lost. In this sphere of international rivalries, as in the sphere of nature, Yahweh not only destroys but upholds, not only upholds but destroys. He presides over and manipulates the nations, as he presides over and manipulates the forces of nature—and for the same purpose, to implement the just decrees of his will.

But this is, as I say, to anticipate. Let us return to the Philistines. They brought their oppression to a climax when they sacked and ruined Shiloh, the Ephraimite sanctuary of the ark, and actually carried off the ark itself to their own pagan temple. From the time of Joshua, the Ephraimite leader and heir of Moses, Ephraim had



been the chief tribe of Israel, and the guardian of the sacred covenant shrine. Now, as a result of this disaster, her greatness was suddenly eclipsed. After a long period of sinfulness and corruption she had betrayed her trust and lost the ark. And when, a few months later, having mocked and routed the Philistines by its sheer numinous force, the ark returned unaided and alone to Israelite territory, it chose as its temporary resting-place a town of Judah, hitherto one of the weakest of all the tribes.

‘He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,  
The tent which he pitched among men,  
And chose not the tribe of Ephraim,  
But chose the tribe of Judah . . .’ (Ps. lxxviii, 67-68).

A little later the ark was to be conducted in triumph to a new and more glorious sanctuary in Sion, and this divine ‘choosing of Sion’ is the first of two great themes of this new phase in Israel’s traditions. The centre of Yahweh’s theocracy had now finally passed from the north to the south, from Ephraim to Judah.

‘For Sion is Yahweh’s choice,  
It is his will to make it his dwelling.  
“This is my resting place for ever,  
There I shall be enthroned, for I have willed it” ’  
(Ps. cxxxii, 13-14).

The ark is the chief connecting link between the old exodus tradition in which Moses was the charismatic leader, and the new Sion tradition, dominated by the figure of David. It is important therefore to realize the connection between the ark and the temple. The plan of the temple is the plan of the ark reproduced on a vaster scale and in stone instead of wood. In fact the temple is a sort of stone ark. When it is completed, the theophanic cloud descends and covers it, just as it covered the ark. There is therefore complete continuity between the older sanctuary and the new one.

This is the first connecting link with the old order. The second is the figure of Samuel, the last and greatest of the judges, and the anointer of David. Reared as he was at the Ephraimite sanctuary, Samuel was incontestably heir to Joshua, the founder of that sanctuary, and more remotely to Moses, the leader of Israel. It is by using this particular judge to impart the charism of kingship to David, that Yahweh ensures continuity between the old tradition of charismatic leadership and the new. Samuel and the ark are then the essential connecting links between the Mosaic and

Davidic orders. Just as it was the Philistines who sacked Shiloh, and so indirectly caused the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem, the 'choosing of Sion', so too it was these same Philistines who caused Israel to demand a king, and so paved the way for the Davidic dynasty. Just as the shrine achieves a stabilized and permanent form in the temple, so the tradition of charismatic leadership acquires a stabilized and permanent form in the monarchy. What is emphasized particularly throughout the Old Testament is that Yahweh has chosen Sion and chosen the house of David *for ever*.

These new traditions profoundly altered the significance of the old institutions. Henceforward the feast of Tabernacles is celebrated not merely as a feast of covenant renewal, but to celebrate this divine choosing of Sion and choosing of David. Behind Psalm cxxxii, the processional psalm from which we have already quoted, for example, probably lies a ritual re-enactment of the discovery of the ark at Qiriath-Iearim (where it had remained after its victory over the Philistines), and of its triumphal procession into Sion, with David dancing before it. We should realize, however, that the threshing-floor of Areunah, where David erected the altar and where the temple was subsequently built, had probably been for many years a major sanctuary of the Jebusites (a sub-division of the Canaanites). It may be therefore that in taking over this shrine, David also took over much of the liturgy connected with it, and adapted it too to the service of Yahweh. This might account for the unmistakable Canaanite influence which we find in certain of the 'royal' psalms. However this may be, Sion itself is henceforward conceived of as the source of holiness for all the land, and even, in later and more idealized passages, for all the world. The whole city acquires a quasi-sacramental quality in the Israelite's mind. Its very waters, the waters of the little stream of Siloah at the foot of the hill, are a symbol of divine grace.

So much for Yahweh's house which the son of David built. What of David's 'house', which Yahweh promised to build for ever? This now becomes, under Yahweh, the source of those elemental blessings which we have seen at work in the nomadic and peasant phases. The king is spoken of as the 'lamp' of Israel (II Sam. xxi, 17), and the 'breath of our nostrils' (Lam. iv, 20), that is, the life of his people. In connection with these two passages, Dr A. Johnson justly remarks that '... from first to last

the king, or to be more precise the ruling member of the royal house of David, is regarded in some way as the light or life of his people'.<sup>5</sup> Yahweh's holiness now operates in and through the king. Externally it thrusts back the forces of evil embodied in Israel's enemies. Internally the king is a centre and source of divine *tsedaqah*, 'righteousness' for his people, imposing the right order of Yahweh's will upon them in his inspired judgments. A good king is a source of peace, security and of the creative blessings in all their amplitude. The blessing that flows from his person extends even to the sphere of nature and gives fertility to the fields

'He shall come down like rain on mown grass,  
As showers that water the earth' (Ps. lxxii, 6).

The king's title in Israel rests upon two supernatural acts of Yahweh: the act of anointing in virtue of which he is called Yahweh's 'messiah' (anointed one), and the covenant between Yahweh and the Davidic house. For each of these we find striking precedents in Egyptian conceptions of kingship. In the fourteenth century Tell-el-Amarna letters we read of the Pharaoh instituting a subordinate king by pouring oil on his head.<sup>6</sup> In Israel this anointing is elevated into a supernatural charism uniting the king to Yahweh, and making him 'a channel for the operation of the Divine Spirit'. The covenant with the house of David described in the oracle of Nathan (II Sam. vii) likewise corresponds in its natural basis of thought and expression to the *Königsnovelle* or ideal programme for the future reign, which Pharaohs were deemed to receive from their patron god at their accession.<sup>7</sup> The introductory formula 'When the king dwelt in his house' (II Sam. vii, 1), the plan for a new temple (v. 2), the divine oracle concerning the king's everlasting posterity (vv. 12-13), the promise that the future king shall be in the position of a son to the divinity (v. 14), and the final ratification of the king's authority (v. 16) all have striking precedents in Egyptian court texts concerned with the coronation of the Pharaoh. It seems reasonable to suppose that the oracle of Nathan uses these Egyptian court texts as its material basis. Yet here again, what is mere court ceremonial among a profane people is elevated in Israel into a miraculous and everlasting covenant between Yahweh and the royal house.

<sup>5</sup> A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, Cardiff, 1955, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> cf. A. R. Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> G. von Rad, *Theologie des alten Testaments*—I, München, 1957, pp. 48-49.

This is the ideal of kingship. Out of it grows the great messianic theme, in the most developed form of which the ideal Son of David is visualized as one who is adopted into divine sonship, conquers the nations of the world, extends the bounds of David's kingdom to the ends of the earth, and rules over it for ever with inspired justice, inaugurating thereby an age of paradisaical fertility and blessing.

In practice nearly all the kings of Judah fell disastrously short of this ideal. It is startling to realize the extent to which the old patriarchal tradition was disrupted at the advent of the monarchy. We can actually see changes in the social order exemplified in the lives of the first three kings: Saul still the peasant-king, David the warrior, and Solomon the merchant-diplomat. Solomon in particular one suspects of having planned his court on the model of the Pharaoh's palace, rather as certain European princelings once tried to reproduce in their petty domains the splendour of Versailles. Corresponding changes took place throughout the whole structure of Israelite society. The loose religious confederation of tribes gives way at this point to a highly centralized form of government. A new professional army, with a *corps d'élite* of charioteers, takes the place of the conscript peasant-armies of the old 'holy war' tradition. A professional corps of administrators, educated in many cases on Egyptian lines, gathers taxes, administers justice, and advises the king. Professional judges take the place of the elders at the gate.

The effect of all this is that the old 'classless' society gives way to a new city-state society, in which warriors and administrators constitute a new permanent upper class. At this time, too, the new merchant capitalist emerges. Obviously these changes brought great evils with them: a division of the Israelite community into rich and poor, capitalist and proletariat, the first class preying on and exploiting the second; the professionals use their position and their skill to swindle the poor, to buy up their hereditary holdings, and to absorb them into ever-growing estates, perhaps even to buy up the persons of their fellow-Israelites as slaves. Thus an intense conflict arises between the new capitalism and the old sacred system of land-tenure. An example of this is the episode of Naboth's vineyard, in which the king himself is the capitalist, and Naboth the representative of the old patriarchal system, who strives in vain to cling to his sacred

hereditary lot. It is this conflict that forms the background to the social teaching of the prophets. Amos in particular upholds the ancient peasant ideal against the new capitalism.

However, all that comes out of this new social structure is not evil. The desire for humanistic education and knowledge which evinces itself among the new professional classes is to form the natural basis for the great 'Wisdom' tradition in the Old Testament. The wise counsellor or administrator becomes a charismatic figure. The natural skill or knowledge which he seeks for is elevated in Israelite tradition into a divine charism. The charismatic sage in Israel is one to whom Yahweh has vouchsafed a share in the creative wisdom which made the world, and who can use this knowledge to control the world and to instruct his fellows.

'Where should one begin in the Old Testament?' Where else but at Sinai and Sion? For the themes which constitute the essential framework of Israel's tradition grow out of these two supreme creative moments in her history. From Sinai comes the conception of Yahweh the numinous who destroys Israel's enemies before her and creates her by imposing the mould of his own righteousness upon her; who dwells in the midst of the people, infecting them with his own radiant holiness, making them a people apart; between him and them there is constant intercourse, question and answer, appeal and response, the divine dialogue initiated between Yahweh and Moses. Then in the peasant phase we have seen the idea of Yahweh's lordship deepening, and the adaptation of the old nomadic ideal to the changed circumstances in which the Israelite depends for his livelihood on tilling the soil. Yahweh is here transcendent lord of nature; Israel is a patriarchal community centred on the covenant shrine, her members worshipping together at the feasts of covenant renewal, and warring together in the power of Yahweh's holiness, learning to refer the fruitfulness of their land to that holiness rather than to the local fertility gods, preserving as sacred the division Yahweh had made of the land between the tribes and families. We have seen how the advent of the monarchy breaks up this patriarchal structure and introduces a 'classed' society into Israel, with all its attendant evils. Yet as citizen the Israelite learns that Yahweh is transcendent Lord in the sphere of international politics as well as in the sphere of nature. Henceforward the creative impact of Yahweh's holiness reaches Israel in and through the person of her charismatic chief,

her king. We have seen the theocratic centre of the community pass from north to south, from Ephraim to Judah, and we have considered Samuel and the ark as the two great connecting links between the old Mosaic order and the new Davidic one. The two basic themes that grow out of these events are the 'choosing of Sion' and the 'choosing of David'. They in turn give rise to the great messianic theme, and to the Wisdom tradition. We have mentioned the effect this has on the forms of worship, and we have seen the continuity between the new shrine of the temple and the old shrine of the ark.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Old Testament tradition begins not from abstract ideas but from historical events. For a tradition to be authentic and creative it *must* be rooted in this immediate way in history. Here I have tried to indicate how the basic traditions of the Old Testament do in fact grow out of two supreme historical moments, two points in space and time at which God seized a particular family and made it his own. The answer to our initial question: 'Where should I begin in the Old Testament?' must needs be, I suggest, somehow along these lines. But in the mind of every Christian there remains the further question: 'How should I continue? How am I to grasp the significance of these themes as they converge upon Christ?' The answer to that question is to be found, surely, in the New Testament. What the New Testament presupposes is Old Testament thought in its most developed form. The texts most frequently quoted are late and post-exilic. Joel ii-iii, Malachi, Zechariah and Daniel are the prophets who are principally regarded as having foretold the crisis of Christianity. Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah are drawn upon most to present the Church as 'the new Israel of God'. Certain psalms (mostly of late date and developed theology) and the great 'Servant' poems of Isaiah are invoked to explain the significance of Christ as a suffering Messiah. The oracle of Nathan and certain messianic psalms which presuppose it are cited to show how Christ fulfils this same messianic theme. To see how this more developed Old Testament theology develops from the basic traditions which we have been considering here is precisely to grasp the Old Testament message *in depth*, and so to perceive its authentic witness to Christ.