

Gerhard von Rad and Brevard S. Childs: The Theological Interpretation of Genesis 22

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[F]or our knowledge of Christ is incomplete without the witness of the Old Testament. Christ is given to us only through the double witness of the choir of those who await and those who remember... But the Old Testament must first of all be heard in its witness to the creative Word of God in history; and in these dealings of God in history, in his acts of judgment as well as in his acts of redemption, we may everywhere discern what is already a Christ-event.¹

- Gerhard von Rad

¹ Gerhard von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Claus Westermann (London: SCM, 1963), 39.

I do not come to the Old Testament to learn about someone else's God, but about the God we confess, ... I do not approach some ancient concept, ... but our God, our Father. The Old Testament bears witness that God revealed himself to Abraham, and we confess that he has also broken into our lives. I do not come to the Old Testament to be informed about some strange religious phenomenon, but in faith I strive for knowledge as I seek to understand in the light of God's self-disclosure.²

- Brevard S. Childs

I. Introduction

Brevard S. Childs and Gerhard von Rad have been widely acknowledged as two of the outstanding Old Testament theologians in the twentieth century. They wrote numerous books and articles in their careers. Why are their interpretations of Genesis 22 noteworthy among their academic works? Von Rad's influential commentary on Genesis 22³ has been frequently cited as an important legacy among scholars, including Childs' citation of von Rad's interpretation in his prologue of his interpretation of Genesis 22 as the first admirable example.⁴ Childs demonstrates his canonical approach by using the interpretation of Genesis 22 as one of his exegetical examples.⁵ They both read the text with Christian faith, and have a particular interest in it. It is therefore appropriate to outline, evaluate, and compare their readings because of (1) their common interest in the text, (2) their utilizations of Genesis

² Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 28.

³ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, OTL (London: SCM, 1972), 237-45.

⁴ Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM, 1992), 325.

⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 325-36.

22 as one of the exegetical examples of their biblical theology, (3) their common background of Christian faith in viewing Genesis 22, and (4) the importance of their interpretations in modern scholarship.

It is necessary to elucidate beforehand a well-grounded comparative point to approach their interpretations. Instead of going into technical details, I will begin with their interpretative "results" of the text from a Christian perspective as the common ground for comparison. For von Rad, Abraham is seen as a type of Christ in the road out into "Godforsakenness." For Childs, the main theological point of God's faithfulness stands out by the witnessing nature of Genesis 22 and the New Testament interpretations pointing towards the subject matter: one Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that these views provide an effective comparative point for three reasons. First, a Christian reading of the text is their prime aim. Most of the exegetical details are directed towards a theological conclusion. Thus, it is feasible to compare their interpretative "results" without going into too many technical details. However, these details will be highlighted in this analysis if they are important to construct the "results." Second, this comparative point can help us to investigate their interpretative approaches. The typological approach of von Rad and the canonical approach of Childs can be sharply appreciated by comparing their culminations in this comparative point. Third, what makes this comparative point effective is their common Christian perspective. The interpretative "results" are fully influenced by their Christian theological context. Comparing their Christian readings can trace their theological stands. Though they read the text in the context of faith and grace, they exercise different theological outlooks in the process of interpretation. Thus, it would be illuminating if their existential differences can be appreciated accordingly.

It is the purpose of this article to outline, evaluate, and compare the interpretations of Genesis 22 offered by von Rad and Childs. Their Christian reading of this text is my prime comparative point.

II. The Road Out into Godforsakenness: Von Rad's Reading of Genesis 22

1. Exposition and Analysis

The central culmination of von Rad's theological interpretation is the exposition that Abraham walks on the journey of testing as the road out into "Godforsakenness." Regarding this culmination, he writes:

Above all, one must consider Isaac, who is much more than simply a "foil" for Abraham, i.e., a more or less accidental object on which his obedience is to be proved. Isaac is the child of the promise. In him every saving thing that God has promised to do is invested and guaranteed. The point here is not a natural gift, not even the highest, but rather the disappearance from Abraham's life of the whole promise. Therefore, unfortunately, one can only answer all plaintive scruples about this narrative by saying that it concerns something much more frightful than child sacrifice. It has to do with a road out into Godforsakenness, a road on which Abraham does not know that God is only testing him. There is thus considerable religious experience behind these nineteen verses; that Yahweh often seems to contradict himself, that he appears to want to remove the salvation begun by himself from history. But in this Yahweh tests faith and obedience! One further thing may be mentioned: in this test God confronts Abraham with the question whether he could give up God's gift of promise. He had to be able (and he was able), for it is not a good that may be retained by virtue of any legal title or with the help of a human demand. God therefore poses before Abraham the question whether he really understands the gift of promise as a pure gift.⁶

I wish to offer three points to analyze this culmination. Firstly, in order to reach this culmination, von Rad spends most of the pages in following the logic of the story line. He renders the testing (22:1) as a temptation (*Anfechtung*).⁷ This *Anfechtung* leads us directly to the

⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 244.

⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 239.

context of Luther's "theology of the cross" in which God hides himself in the agonizing struggle to test faith as described by Bayer:

Believers have to live with this particular contradiction, as long as they are still on their journey through life, in agonizing struggle...This situation of the agonizing struggle, in which God withdraws and hides himself, is not downplayed and rendered unimportant by Luther; instead, he takes it seriously, ...Discussion about the "hidden" God has much more to do with a very specific "setting in life": it is extracted from within the agonizing struggle in the form of a lament... [T]he lament in the midst of the agonizing struggle drives one to take hold of the oppressive, incomprehensible God at the point where he allows himself to be comprehended and understood: in the Word of his promise.⁸

Thus, the testing of Abraham is interpreted as a life journey in the midst of God's hiddenness.⁹ This is further sharpened when von Rad argues that it is a story after the Solomonic Enlightenment which moves away from ritual cultic to secular experiences of personal faith.¹⁰ This implicitly classifies Abraham as an individual candidate to be tested in the same way a Christian is. Together with the depiction of the silent route of Abraham and Isaac via Auerbach,¹¹ von Rad is ready to reach the culmination describing Yahweh's testing of faith in an ostensible contradiction and the road out into "Godforsakenness."

⁸ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 11-12. The translator uses "agonizing struggle" to render "Anfechtung." See p.xiii.

⁹ See also Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works, vol. 4: Lectures on Genesis chapters 21-25* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 92.

¹⁰ For the implication of the Solomonic Enlightenment, von Rad writes, "The idea of an act of testing arranged for man by God leads ultimately to the realm of the cult. In the ritual of the ordeal, God is seeking to bring to light guilt or innocence. (...) On the other hand, the application of the idea of temptation or testing to the paradoxes of God's historical leading is to be understood as a suppression of the ritual and an *exit from the cultic realm*, i.e., with respect to the *history of faith*, as a sign of positive maturity. Incidentally, the application of the notion of temptation to the history of all Israel (e.g., Deut. 13.3; Judg. 2.22) is comparatively older than the notion of tests to which God subjects the *individual* in his personal career." (Italics mine) (Von Rad, *Genesis*, 239-40.)

¹¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 11.

Secondly, von Rad explicitly states that Abraham is a type of Christ in his exposition: "It is true that we also saw christological features in Abraham, who suffered being forsaken by God and who himself surrendered the promise!"¹² This should be understood in the wider context of his typological interpretation of salvation history. The key to understanding his approach is given in the introduction of his commentary:

There is often an entire world of events – actual, experienced events! – enclosed in a single saga. The saga, therefore, has a much higher degree of density than has history (*Historie*) ... Anyone who wants to understand such sagas correctly must acquire a broader and more profound conception of "history" (*Geschichte*) than what is often accepted today. At the beginning, the saga in most cases certainly contained a "historical" fact as its actual crystallizing point. But in addition it reflects a historical experience on the relevant community which extends into the present time of the narrator.¹³

Thus, von Rad resorts to a "continuous religious experience" of Israel reflected in sagas as *Geschichte*. Israel's experience of salvation gives crystallizing density to the story of Genesis 22 in which God contradicts Himself to test faith in the ostensible removal of salvation from history. In this sense, von Rad consistently applies his concept of salvation history to the story line. This tradition-historical interpretation can be further appreciated by his typological method. This method explores an ongoing re-contextualization of old traditions and beliefs through a form of analogical thinking based on historical experiences pointing forward to the New Testament.¹⁴ Abraham's story is thus going through a continuous re-contextualization process from individual sagas to the Elohist's narrative, to the whole complex of Abraham stories,

¹² Gerhard von Rad, *Biblical Interpretation in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 39.

¹³ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 34.

¹⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, vol. 2 (London: SCM, 1975), 320-24; Von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," 20-37.

and eventually to the Christian canon. This diachronic typological appropriation of Abraham's story manifests a type pointing towards Christ. Therefore, Abraham is ready to be a type grounded historically towards Christ.

Thirdly, another key to understand von Rad's interpretation can be found in his introduction of his commentary:

We receive the Old Testament from the hands of Jesus Christ, and therefore all exegesis of the Old Testament depends on whom one thinks Jesus Christ to be...What we are told here of the trials of a God who hides himself and whose promise is delayed, and yet of his comfort and support, can readily be read into God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Von Rad explicitly takes a Christological stance in his commentary, and applies this stance in Genesis 22 in at least two ways:

a. "Godforsakenness" can lead us to Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" spoken by Jesus Christ in His crucifixion. The road of Abraham seems clearly to be analogical to the road to Calvary.

b. Isaac is not a "foil" but a child of promise.¹⁶ The aim of the testing is to understand "the gift of promise as a pure gift"¹⁷ without any human demand and work. This gift can only be appreciated as "pure gift" by grace through faith alone, which echoes *sola fide* and *sola gratia* in Lutheran theology.

¹⁵ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 43.

¹⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 244.

¹⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 244.

2. Preliminary Evaluation

Most of the exegesis of von Rad is admirable. I wish to highlight some outstanding features of his exegesis together with my preliminary critiques. Since Childs has been one of von Rad's critics, the evaluation of von Rad's typological interpretation will be postponed until after my exposition and analysis of Childs' interpretation.

Firstly, though von Rad appropriates Gunkel's form criticism of tradition and saga, he does not allow himself to stay solely on Gunkel's aesthetic and romantic sensitivity.¹⁸ He intends to construct an organic link between sagas and subsequent contexts of the narrative, and fills it with a theological substance in the Lutheran-Christian context. To appreciate von Rad's Christological interpretation is not to reduce the theology of the story line to Christology. Rather, it just claims that Lutheran-Christian faith is his center of interpretation.¹⁹ Von Rad does not deviate from the story line, nor does he speculate on something alien from the text. The use of typology is entirely appropriate to the extent that he seeks to employ what the biblical type originates in his tradition-historical framework. Thus, his analogical correspondence is theologically and historically legitimate. Though the feasibility of his typology is open to question,²⁰ he indeed exemplifies an openness to Christian understanding of God centered on the cross of Christ in a wider Lutheran-Christian context. Abraham is a type of Christ and thus a type of Christian. The paradigmatic nature of Genesis 22 is intensified in the ongoing transformative activities of God and is related to the followers of Abraham in a manner of apprenticeship.

¹⁸ Gunkel's aesthetic handling of saga can be found in Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 234-35, 237.

¹⁹ I am indebted to Watson for this idea. See Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 209.

²⁰ For scholarly critiques of von Rad's typology, see Christopher Seitz, "Prophecy and Tradition-History: The Achievement of Gerhard von Rad and Beyond," in *Prophetic in Israel*, ed. I. Fischer et al. (Münster: LIT, 2003), 41-45; Watson, *Text and Truth*, 203-9; Bervard Childs, "Interpretation in Faith," *Interpretation* 18 (1964): 441-43.

Secondly, von Rad orientates most of his exegetical details towards the culmination. This exegetical focus is not something to be blamed. However, it would be helpful if his exegetical details were more deeply rooted linguistically and inter-textually. This negative critique can be illustrated in at least four points:²¹

a. The testing is rendered as a theologically-loaded term *Anfechtung* without explicitly stating the logic of linkage. His presupposition of the Solomonic Enlightenment in his excursus on "temptation" can just explain how the faith is tested in an individual dimension,²² but cannot effectively relate the testing with Luther's *Anfechtung*. Hence, as Moberly says, "there is a jump for which no warrant is offered."²³

b. Von Rad states that God does not intend to take the temptation seriously while Abraham takes it very seriously.²⁴ This comment is less helpful insofar as it downplays one of the most recognizable and energizing tensions of the story.

c. "The fear of God" is "simply as a term for obedience"²⁵ without seriously constructing such linkage inter-textually. For the inter-textual references provided in the excursus, only two references (i.e. Prov. 1:7; Job 1:1, 8) can relate "fear" to "obedience." But still, he does not further develop the ideas and is too hasty to direct forward to "the road out into Godforsakenness." He also misses an important reference of Exodus 20:20, which effectively hold the concepts of "fear God" and "test" together.²⁶

²¹ I am indebted to Moberly for most of the points. See Walter Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148-49.

²² Von Rad, *Genesis*, 239-40.

²³ Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*, 148.

²⁴ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 239.

²⁵ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 242.

²⁶ In his insightful articulation of Exod 20:20, Moberly writes, "It is striking to observe that these two verbs that structure the meaning of Genesis 22 occur in conjunction also in Exodus 20:20,

d. With regard to the place "YHWH sees," von Rad does recognize the religious importance of the place for many generations as a cultic center. But he leaves at this point a "pun" only, a playful pan which is open to subsequent readers for subjective renderings.²⁷ As Moberly comments: "He sees clues, but cannot piece them together in a coherent pattern."²⁸

Therefore, von Rad's Christological interpretation would be more theologically powerful if he considered these exegetical details more.

Above all, von Rad's interpretation is profoundly Christian. He demonstrates a typological interpretation with a Christological center. Negatively, he is overshadowed by Lutheran theology so that his exegetical groundwork is not deeply rooted enough. Although much of his biblical theology framework has faded out in our contemporary context, his reading is worth-reframing in a wider theological framework of interpretation not because of his method but because of his theological profundity.

where Moses interprets God's giving of the Ten Commandments: God has come 'to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin'. The general thrust here is that God gives Israel the Ten Commandments in order to searchingly draw them into a purer and more faithful way of living. The fact that the words that interpret the significance of the commandments for Israel also interpret God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac suggests an imaginative linkage between the two contexts: Abraham's response to God models what Israel's response should be. It is not that Abraham becomes an observer of Torah, but that the language of Torah has been used to make sense of Abraham and to intimate that there is an analogy between Abraham's response to God and that which is expected from Israel." (Walter Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 187.)

²⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 242.

²⁸ Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*, 109.

III. God's Promise and Faithfulness: Childs' Reading of Genesis 22

1. Exposition and Analysis

For Childs, the main theological point of Genesis 22 is God's faithfulness to His promise entrusted in an ostensible contradictory manner. The NT renderings (e.g. Heb. 11:17-19; Rom. 8:32) of the text also bear witness to the subject matter anachronistically but dialectically by the recognition of the exalted Christ. Regarding this theological point, Childs writes:

The theological issue at stake is that God's command to slay the heir stands in direct conflict with his promise of salvation through this very child, and therefore Abraham's relation to God is under attack. The Old Testament bears witness that God was faithful to his promise and confirmed his word by providing his own sacrifice instead of the child... The New Testament witness picks up this same theme. God demonstrated his faithfulness to the selfsame promise by not "sparing his own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). The parallel relates to the conduct of Abraham and not to the suffering of Isaac (Dahl). Both testaments bear testimony to the faithfulness of God, first demonstrated to Abraham, but understood as applying also to "us".²⁹

Alongside the theme of God's promise and faithfulness, Childs explores the history of interpretation of Genesis 22 by Luther and Calvin which point out that Abraham is rewarded not by his work but by his faith to the promise. The theme of divine grace can also be sharpened by a correspondence to Leviticus in which Abraham's private experience of "God will provide his own sacrifice" is connected to the sacrificial system of Israel's enduring collective worship as "the theological orbit of Abraham's offering."³⁰ How can Childs arrive at such thematic conclusions? I wish to offer three points to analyze his interpretation.

²⁹ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 334.

³⁰ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 327-28, 335.

Firstly, a key to understand how the OT and NT bear witness can be found in Childs' illustration on his canonical approach:

[A] major task of Biblical Theology is to reflect on the whole Christian Bible with its two very different voices, both of which the church confesses bear witness to Jesus Christ. There is no one overarching hermeneutical theory by which to resolve the tension between the testimony of the Old Testament in its own right and that of the New Testament with its transformed Old Testament. Yet the challenge of Biblical Theology is to engage in the continual activity of theological reflection which studies the canonical text in detailed exegesis, and seeks to do justice to the witness of both testaments in the light of its subject matter who is Jesus Christ.³¹

Thus, both the OT and NT bear witness in their own right, and are pointing to the subject matter who is Jesus Christ. Gunkel seeks to discover the primitive historical world behind the text solely in terms of history of religion regardless of what came subsequently in the process of canonization. But Childs does not allow this historical dimension to overwhelm his whole reading agenda, but relocates it within the framework of canonical shaping. He insists on a true engagement of the text in its own right, and yet maintains a dialogical movement between the divine reality and the history of traditions. This multiple-layer interpretation deepens and extends the literal or historical sense dialectically inside the internal logic of canonization which reflects an ongoing theological reflection of the text under the rule of faith. This canonical shaping reveals how the force of primitive sagas fades out to background in the process, and strengthens the witnessing nature of the text as a foreground pointing towards the subject matter. As can be seen, Childs consistently applies his approach in his interpretation of Genesis 22 by explaining the distinctiveness of the OT and NT witnesses to God's faithfulness in their own right together with a history of exegesis to strengthen his theological point, and believes the subject matter in the process of theological contextualization.

³¹ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 78-79.

Secondly, another key to understand Childs' interpretation of Romans 8:32 and Hebrews 11:17-19 can be found in his biblical theology:³²

The New Testament writers bear testimony to the gospel as the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They often return to interpret the Old Testament in the light of an understanding shaped by this exalted Christ... If an interpreter sees the exegetical task as largely descriptive (*erklären*), he tends to dismiss Paul's interpretation as a misconstrual. If an interpreter also includes the dimension of understanding (*verstehen*), he tends to defend Paul's interpretation as a true rendering of the text's true referent, even if different from the Old Testament's original sense.³³

If an interpreter stays solely on *erklären*, Hebrews 11:17-19 creates an anachronism that Abraham does not have a belief in the resurrection of the dead in Genesis 22. But this makes sense theologically in the level of *verstehen* in which the text's true referent (i.e. the subject matter) guides Hebrews' interpretation in the light of the exalted Christ. This does not mean that Hebrews flattens or overwhelms the literal sense of Genesis 22, but only illustrates how the unique witness of the NT deepens the distinctive witness of the OT, and points towards the subject matter (*res*) integrally. Hence, this openness to *res* and willingness to participate in *res* resemble Barth's doctrine of inspiration with the labor of apprehending *res*.³⁴

Finally, in order to illustrate how Genesis 22 bears witness to God's faithfulness, Childs offers four canonical guidelines, namely promise, God tests, God sees, and Leviticus' correspondence, together with a history of exegesis, especially Luther's and Calvin's interpretation.³⁵

³² For Childs' interpretation of Rom 8:32 and Heb 11:17-19, see Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 329-30.

³³ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 84.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1-20.

³⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 326-28, 330-32.

These canonical clues are chosen deliberately because they bear witness pointing to the theme of God's promise and its fulfillment. Abraham demonstrates a life of faith in the midst of the "patriarchal temptation," using Luther's terminology, from God who contradicts Himself and seemingly forfeits the promise entrusted in Isaac. Yet, God provides another sacrifice replacing Isaac in the context of grace, and this gracious sacrifice is pronounced in the ongoing institutional worship of Leviticus. Like von Rad, the notions of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* are highlighted because Childs incorporates the history of exegesis, especially Luther and Calvin, into his canonical guidelines.

2. Evaluation and Comparison

How can I evaluate such an outstanding interpretation? I wish to illustrate some of the admirable features of Childs' canonical approach together with my reservations on his interpretation of Genesis 22. In the midst of my evaluation, I shall compare his interpretation with that of von Rad so that their strengths and weaknesses can be succinctly pointed out.

Firstly, methodologically speaking, both Childs and von Rad take a multi-dimensional interpretation seriously. Childs' canonical framework can incorporate multiple levels of the distinctiveness of the OT and NT in historical, literary, and canonical context, and hold their similarities and dissimilarities with theological and analogical comparison under the unity of the OT and NT. This multi-dimensional interpretation engages with a true encounter with the subject matter.³⁶ This is theologically profound and imaginatively powerful to the extent that it combines the disciplines of dogmatic, patristic, historical-critical interpretations within a wider context of canon and the community of

³⁶ Brevard Childs, "Towards Recovering Theological Exegesis," *Ex Auditu* 16 (2000):125-28.

faith. Childs does not allow his theological interpretation to be reduced to history of religion, but extends it fully to a dialectical encounter with the life-transformative power of the subject matter through the witnessing nature of Scripture. In this sense, Abraham's story can be life-transformative because it bears testimony to a true engagement with the subject matter. Its NT interpretations together with Calvin's theological insights can also deepen and sharpen the witnessing power so that this multi-dimensional fruitfulness can draw readers to Jesus Christ dialogically.

Childs does explicitly compare his approach with that of von Rad:

This enterprise would share, for example, with von Rad the conviction that a fruitful avenue into Old Testament theology is in terms of Israel's continual reflection on the great redemptive events of her history. Yet it would differ from von Rad in hearing the voice of Israel, not in the form of scientifically reconstructed streams of tradition, but in the canonically shaped literature of the Old Testament as the vehicle of Israel's *Heilsgeschichte*. Both approaches have in common hearing the peculiar form of the Old Testament witness through the form which the historical traditions of the tradition gave the material rather than seeing the uninterpreted historical events themselves as the avenues to an understanding of God's intent.³⁷

Part of the brilliance of von Rad is his reluctance to stay solely on Gunkel's saga tradition but to retain an openness to a Christological center with a recognition of the development of traditions in salvation history. Both Childs and von Rad share this existential openness to the subject matter. Childs agrees with von Rad's treatment of tradition as "Israel's continual reflection on the great redemptive events" and "the peculiar form of the Old Testament witness." However, what makes Childs unhappy is the "scientifically reconstructed streams of tradition." This critique is rather odd in the sense that von Rad does not

³⁷ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 92.

intend to scientifically reconstruct the streams of tradition. Rather, he attempts to recognize various typological saving events in the midst of the diachronic development of traditions and fill these events with a theological substance analogically as types pointing towards Christ. Thus, this is a theological move instead of a scientific reconstruction. However, what characterizes their difference is Childs' recognition of the canonical shaping of traditions under the rule of faith. The divine reality is always at work in the process of canonization so that the witnessing nature of the OT and NT extends to the intrinsic logic of the whole Christian canon. This can easily solve the limitation of von Rad's typological rendering which cannot effectively hold the discontinuity and distinctiveness of different voices within the OT and NT by adopting a continuous view of *Heilsgeschichte*. In this sense, Childs' wider approach can incorporate different voices of witnesses much more effectively than that of von Rad.

Secondly, Childs' interpretation of Genesis 22 is not deeply rooted in an exegetical groundwork based on at least three points:

a. Regarding "God tested Abraham" (22:1), Childs states that this "patriarchal temptation" is non-repeatable and unique.³⁸ He simply employs Luther's category, unexamined and unexplained, and suddenly draws such a decisive conclusion. He neither investigates the semantic dimension of the word *nissah*, nor does he explore how this word is used inter-textually. Although von Rad commits a similar problem, Childs' unexamined category is more worse than that of von Rad in the sense that the notion of "patriarchal temptation" can hardly make the test non-repeatable. In contrast, von Rad resorts to Israel's experience of God who contradicts Himself in His ongoing testing of faith. This continuous experience is shared by subsequent believers and that makes the test "repeatable" in this sense. Childs does not perform this move based on his reservation about von Rad's *Heilsgeschichte*. But he needs

³⁸ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 327, 334.

to explain at least how this theological testing can be a witness to the subject matter in his framework.

b. Childs misses a theologically significant word "the fear of God" (22:12) in his interpretation without clarification. In his Exodus commentary, Childs does examine "the fear of God" in his interpretation of Exodus 20:20, saying: "The fear of God is not a subjective emotion of terror, but the obedience of God's law. The glory and holiness of God calls forth man's fear (cf. Isa. 6), but the end is not the emotion, rather the deed."³⁹ He can locate a helpful verse of Exod 20:20 in explaining 'the fear of God' but unfortunately he does not link this verse to his interpretation of Genesis 22, and explains the relationship between test (*nissah*) and fear (*yir'ah*).⁴⁰ In contrast, though not in depth, von Rad at least composes an excursus to explain "the fear of God" but Childs simply misses out this important word without justification.

c. Childs can locate "Yahweh sees" (22:14) as one of his canonical clues to expand it in the context of grace, and refers to Leviticus' linkage to collective worship of this grace.⁴¹ However, he neither provides an explanation of "Moriah," nor can he recognize the place of public worship as the temple of Jerusalem. This theologically insightful cultic center within Israel's tradition is simply missed out without any justification. Von Rad can see the clue as a pun but does not develop it. However, Childs just neglects this important clue.

Thirdly, Childs misses the important voice of James 2:20-24 which uses Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as an example to explain that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. This distinctive NT witness can be an embarrassment to Childs' interpretation in which

³⁹ Brevard Childs, *Exodus*, OTL (London SCM, 1974), 373.

⁴⁰ For Childs' critique on Moberly's inter-textual exegesis and his reservation on developing the linkage between Gen. 22 and Exod. 20, See Brevard Childs, "Critique of the Recent Intertextual Canonical Interpretation," *ZAW* 115 (2003): 178-84, esp. 180.

⁴¹ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, 327-28, 335.

God's promise is fulfilled by faith and grace alone. Childs should take this voice seriously in order to claim the feasibility of his canonical approach. However, he can successfully resolve the anachronism of Hebrews 11:17-19 within his canonical framework. By resorting to the subject matter, Childs can effectively allow the doctrine of the exalted Christ to be read in his wider framework so that Hebrews 11:17-19 is no longer an embarrassment to the historicity of Genesis 22, but an enrichment to bear witness to the divine reality.

Finally, von Rad and Childs' interpretations of Genesis 22 are profoundly Christian. The road out into Godforsakenness can offer a deeper typological exemplification of being a true Christian in conformity of Christ's journey to Calvary with details such as the silent route and the entrusted promise in Isaac. This theological force is picked up in Childs' wider canonical rendering of God's faithfulness in which Genesis 22 together with its NT interpretations bears witness to God who contradicts Himself in the route of entrusting divine promise. Both of their readings can draw their readers near to Christ directly in a manner of apprenticeship. But still, Childs' framework can incorporate different pointers broadly within the canonical context while von Rad can point to Christ deeply on his typological interpretation of Abraham as a type of Christ. In this sense, Childs' interpretation is wider while von Rad's interpretation is deeper.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the interpretations of Genesis 22 offered by von Rad and Childs have genuine strengths of in-depth theological credibility. Their readings are profoundly Christian with a Christological center and a canonical respect. Although they differ in their deepness and wideness based on their diverse methodological considerations, their interpretations give landmark contributions to subsequent interpreters. But regarding their exegetical details, they fall short of a deep engagement of the text linguistically, syntactically, and inter-textually.

This weakness can be sharpened when they employ Luther's categories without any in-depth explanation and justification. This leaves a challenge to their subsequent commentators: the challenge of a good interpretation with a coherent balance between theological fruitfulness and exegetical profoundness.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to describe, compare, and evaluate the theological interpretations of Genesis 22 offered by Gerhard von Rad and Brevard S. Childs. Von Rad applies a typological interpretation of the text. He does not wish to stay in the romantic interpretation, but attempt to depict various theological linkages within re-contextualizations. Childs applies canonical approach in investigating the subject matter of Genesis 22 as witnessing Jesus Christ. His interpretation is wider than that of von Rad because of his sensitivity of diversity within the canonical shape. As such, both interpretations have their merits and drawbacks that direct our attentions towards a better understanding of Genesis 22.

撮 要

本文嘗試描述、比較及批判馮拉德（Gerhard von Rad）與蔡爾茲（Brevard S. Childs）對創世記二十二章的神學詮釋。拉德運用的方法是預表詮釋（typological interpretation），他深信創世記二十二章中亞伯拉罕獻以撒的故事是由遠古的小故事（saga），經過不同時代的處境化（re-contextualization），最後被基督教納入成為正典。他不願停留在最遠古的小故事的浪漫主義的詮釋，而是為不同時代的處境建立歷時性的神學連結，並為這些不同層次的傳統注入基督向導的神學色彩。筆者認為他的詮釋很出色，能結合不同傳統層次的意義，在歷時性的向導上，注入不同指向基督的預表。這樣，亞伯拉罕進入一個被神棄絕的旅程，成為耶穌基督的預表。反之，筆者認為他的釋經未能充分處理經文的細節與原文的意思，而且也未能與舊約其他經文作互為文本的詮釋，這是他其中一點比較大的缺失。

蔡爾茲運用的方法是正典進路（canonical approach），他深信創世記二十二章的故事是見證耶穌基督作為重要主題（the subject matter）。他嘗試建立一個新舊約結合的正典架構，讓正典中不同的故事見證耶穌基督在正典形成的作為。因此，他比馮拉德的方法更為廣闊，更能納入正典當中不同多元的聲音，這是馮拉德的救恩歷史向度所未能處理的。蔡爾茲的正典架構能有效地解決一些新約對亞伯拉罕獻以撒故事的詮釋的一些時間不一致的問題（anachronism），卻在詮釋的細節與原文的處理上，與馮拉德一樣有比較大的缺失。

本文嘗試總結前人的神學詮釋，帶出作為一個聖經神學的詮釋者，如何在詮釋經文時平衡神學的構想與釋經的紮實。