

## **Disruptive Grace: An Analysis of Violent Texts in the Old Testament**

### **Abstract**

This writing contains the multiple of conversations related to violent texts within the Old Testament. Pro-cons appear when we are dealing, talking, and arguing in regard to those texts. Whatever, those texts become part of the Scriptures we read, understand, then become guidelines in our daily lives. Therefore, we need prudence and liability to interpret and understand those violent texts.

### **Violent Texts in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament produced violent texts abundantly ranging from the books of taurat, prophets, history, and wisdom. Violent perspectives continue to appear and float within the passages of those books. Starting from the first book in our Bible, pro-contras have emerged related to the charge of violence because God seemed to create everything on earth from the outcome of the fight with other divinities. That way, diverse perspectives arise by stating that God has created mankind by his image and likeness as a violent offender (Creach 2013, 17–18).

Other violent texts are the quarrel between Cain and Abel (Gen. 4); the sump water that hits humans without forgiveness (Gen. 6–8); Saul who destroyed the entire Amelek nation, including young children and babies (1Sam. 15:2); David who punished thousands of people on God's permission (2Sam. 24:1, 15); God who tries to kill Moses (Ex. 4:24-26); God enacts a deadly law (Gen. 21:15-17, 31:15b; Lev. 20:10, 13a, 15-16, 27; 24:16-17); Uzza who died holding the ark of the fallen agreement (2Sam. 6:7); God who stifles Sodom and Gomora (Gen. 19:24-25); it is God who kills every firstborn in Egypt (Ex. 12:29); God is the warlord who fights the other nations (Ex. 14:24-15:5); God who

commands genocide (Deut. 7:1-2; Josh. 10:40); the inner Pharaoh tormented God is blessed (Lev. 9:12); approved slavery (Gen. 9:20-27); mandate to dominate other nations as an advocate of colonialism (Yos. 6-11); violence against women (Jer. 13:22-27); some texts permit and advocate violence against children (Gen. 22; Prov. 22:15; 23:14; 29:15); texts blaming LGBT people (Lev. 18:22; 20:13); and God-deceived Jeremiah (Jer. 20:7-18).

When dealing with texts like this, the fundamental question is how does this text remain the source and living guidelines of Christians?

## **Diverse Approach to Violence Texts**

### Introduction

There are a great many styles of interpreters to approach, analyze, understand, and recognize violent texts within the Old Testament. In this section it will be exposed to the related descriptions of the way violent text is read and interpreted then become a handle of teachings for a group of people. These descriptions were described from the style of reading already used in its long period of time.

### God is Good, all the Time

The first approach that should not be missed to be discussed is divine freedom or that is more familiar with God's term either, all-time (God is good, all-time). This approach assumes that whatever God does, God cannot blame for God's will must be for the good of man. Every act which God cannot judge is wrong, for God is impossible to do so. With this kind of perspective, it feels like every accusation to God's mentally cruel actions.

There are two theological perspectives underlying the divine freedom of God's absolute power and God's unquestioning goodness. These two theologies envelop the chambers of defence when God is brought into the courtroom for being the perpetrator for the tragedy of the death penalty against Uza or other violent texts. In the end, this theology will

always insist that “whatever God does must be regarded as good. If God is all the Bible says he is, all that he does must be good—and that includes his authorization of genocide” 1.

### Justify the Action of God

God has strong reason to declare his will. Those reasons of God are usually related to evil that has been rampant on earth (Gen. 6:11-13) so that God needs to purify man from sin, wrong, and ugliness. This approach attempts to show readers that there are mistakes that humans have made such a mass killing and sump water. God is not likely to exercise His power arbitrary without considering justice and peace on earth.

This approach seems dangerous to use when we are dealing with Uza-like texts that receive the death penalty from holding God's ark that almost falls. Unfortunately, Uza's actions instead received rewards, not respect. Interpreters like David Lamb agree that the act of Uza holding God's ark is a mistake because of the ban on not holding the ark 2.

### For Something Better

This approach is quite unique in that it stands as an excuse that pounces on God’s violent acts. This approach attempts to claim that God is violent with better intent and purpose for human life. This is the reason for violence that is quite fragrant. This claim is in line with the understanding given to the person who is experiencing disaster or catastrophe: “There must be a better intent of God behind this catastrophe.”

Justified violence based on this path of thought would at least legalize other acts of violence, so violent texts would continue to produce

---

1 Eugene Merrill, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, ed. C. S. Cowles, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2003), 94.

2 David T. Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist, and Racist?* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2011), 25–28.

violence. Terence Fretheim gave a unique way out by claiming that the violence God committed solely to stop human violence<sup>3</sup>. Thus, man is not entitled to violence over his fellow man because what God does is far different from the violence that man does. Ultimately, Fretheim's theological argumentation arrived at the conclusion that God committed violence as an effect of human violence (sin), so to stop that sin, humans accepted rewards from doing the same back<sup>4</sup>.

### **Different Testimony: Old Testament and New Testament**

This time approach was spelled controversial for comparing two entrusted sets of books as truth and moral grips to the faithful life of the Christian religion of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament was accused of much producing violent texts and the New Testament was claimed to produce compassionate texts. Comparing the news, stories, and stories within these two sets of books, readers as if they had concluded such and become doctrines.

Lois Barrett claims that the Old Testament has been discredited for containing violently charged texts and God described in it as “as if” were in favor of violence<sup>5</sup>. These eyeglasses seem to discriminate against violent texts within the Old Testament and as if to understand these violent texts as a collection of narratives and testimony that need not be maintained as part of scripture again.

As a result, Christians' viewstyles towards the Old Testament and the New Testament have differences. It was frankly expressed by Tremper Longmann III and Peter Enns that “Christian readers may also find it difficult to reconcile the OT images of God as warrior with some

---

3 Terence E Fretheim, “God and Violence in the Old Testament,” *Luther Seminary, Word and World* Volume 24, no. 1 (2004): 23–24.

4 Terence E. Fretheim, “‘I Was Only a Little Angry’: Divine Violence in the Prophets,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 58, no. 4 (October 2004): 370, accessed September 1, 2019, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002096430405800405>.

5 Lois Barrett, *The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament*, The Peace and justice series 1 (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1987), 9–15.

characterizations of God in the NT and may be tempted to dismiss the OT as less revelatory for Christian faith and practice.”<sup>6</sup> The authority of the Old Testament as part of the Scriptures of Christians who led his life was eroded by these two conflicting perspectives.

God's metaphor as a warlord has a problematic feel because God ostensibly supports that violent war. The violent texts that are bandaged in this war are hard to understand for a moment because “the war demanded by God always including the annihilation of men, women, and children, other times including also the killing of domestic animals, the wanton destruction of whole cities, and the reduction of all cultural artifacts to rubble”.<sup>7</sup> At that point, violent texts inspired humans to commit violence.

Peter C. Craigie has another slightly more subtle way. To him, violent texts within the Old Testament referring to God show that God is on the process of self-revelation. The Statement of God becomes intact when Jesus incarnates into the world. Therefore, Craigie claims that “that God’s self-revelation may increase and that... more may be known of him over the passage of time, but the progression in revelation does not contradict or cancel out the earlier substance of revelation”<sup>8</sup>.

---

6 Tremper Longman and Peter Enns, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, 2008, 833, accessed August 28, 2019, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10757529>.

7 Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 8.

8 Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 37.

## **Author: God or Human?**

This approach seeks to prove to readers that the violence present within the Biblical texts is not part of God's will. This perspective inadvertently swayed violent texts within the Old Testament and lowered the texts.

Nicholas Wolterstoff found one way to understand the violent texts of “hagiograpgy” or “holy writing”. It was done by comparison between the book texts of Judges and Joshua regarding warfare. For him, the story of the war in Joshua could be seen from the hagiograpgy eyeglasses so that it could not be read in literary terms. The text does not really command man to kill his fellow, but one of the ways God reminds man not to turn away from Him 9.

Paul Copan and Mattheww Flannagan were the two interpreters who critiqued this paradigm. For them, violent texts such as genocide (Josh. 6-12) is an exaggerated view of the author of the text. Those parts contain hyperbolism so that they are not merely inspiration that comes from God 10. Walau dengan sengaja, Wolterstoff menyatakan bahwa “The book of Joshua has to be read as a theologically oriented narration, stylized and hyperbolic at important points, of Israel’s early skirmishes in the promised land, with the story of these battles being framed by descriptions of two great ritualized events.” However, he turted back and admitted thaht the story needed to be read with perspective of “hagiograpgy”: “If we strip the word ‘hagiography’ of its negative connotations, we can call it a hagiographic account of Joshua’s exploits. The book is not to be read as claiming that Joshua conquered the entire promised land, nor is it to be read as claiming that

---

9 Paul Copan and Matt Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?: Coming to Terms with the Justice of God*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 94–95, accessed August 29, 2019, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3425672>.

10 *Ibid.*, 84–85.

Joshua exterminated with the edge of the sword the entire population of all the cities on the command of Yahweh to do so.” 11

### God’s Plan and Human Plan

This approach is a little ironic because it places the free will of man and the will of God in conflict. For adherents of this approach, they claim that God's will is not human will. The violence that exists in the Bible occurs because humans do as they are as perpetrated as they will. For Hershberger, it is Israel's typehold that makes God allow the occurrence of bloodshed among fellow humans. Indeed, it is not the will of the the Ultimate.

This difference in will between God and man does not accuse the text of violence as a piece worth removing from man. Unfortunately, this argumentation is as if to twist the redaction of the Old Testament. As if, those readers became the new editors replacing the editors of Scripture and retelling the stories of their versions. This approach is about to tame violent texts, but in a way arrogantly removes the violent part of the text by accusing the disobedient human beings of God and the reigning God to destroy the Canaanites is not to blame.

### Mystery of Divine Justice

This approach views humans as having a finite will so as to not understand the intention of his suffering. Sometimes the violence that had happened to him was incomprehensible. This is what is referred to as the mystery of divine justice. According to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the injustice that human beings experience is solely justice from God. Unfortunately, humans in licensing do not see that justice 12.

---

11 Ibid., 94.

12 Andrea Poma, *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy: The “Essais” of Leibniz*, *Studies in German idealism* v. 14 (Dordrecht ; New York: Springer, 2013), 3–5.

This perspective is as if negating the understanding that sometimes God is a violent offender. Furthermore, this perspective rejects violence in the Bible that is accused of God. God never commits violence. If that happens, it is human beings who have the limitations to understand God's justice.

### Textual and Actual Violence

This approach was managed and held by Terence Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich. Both assume that the textual God is recorded in the Old Testament and the actual God comes towards man, namely through the incarnation of Jesus. These two differences of God are dialogued to harmonize the bad views that have been referring to God in the Old Testament. Both set out from perspective that not everything recorded in the Old Testament really happened 13.

Eric Seibert added that by distinguishing textual and actual God, readers could potentially interpret the Old Testament responsibly. Seibert judged that this was the first step for us to be able to obtain a solution related to God's image in the Old Testament 14. Seibert looks about to make quite fundamental and involuntary differences (if he is absolutely sure), the violent texts within the Old Testament are ignored for not storing God-related facts. This approach is boldly for a biblical theologian because Seibert read (judgment) textual God based on actual God then plunged textual God as a collection of less trustworthy wreaths.

### To Enforce Justice

The “Enforcing justice” approach is spelled interesting to trace in this writing because God is seen as a figure who does not wish violence to happen. Therefore, God insists on enforcing justice by violence. The

---

13 Terence E Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich, *The Bible as Word of God in a Postmodern Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 116–117.

14 Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 181.



divine law should not be polluted and violated because God will be angry and “that anger and hostility are divine practices that are necessary for the maintenance of justice and divine law, or that divine love and goodness presume divine indignation as well.” 15

This approach triggers unsustainable questions and debates as violence is justified to the extent for good and truth. In fact, truth and goodness are at a high value of subjectivity.

### The Old Testament as a Friend

The “Old Testament as a Friend” approach arguably pleased researchers of violent texts seeking to appreciate the texts as part of the Scriptures (particularly the Old Testament—the violent text). The violent texts sought to be seen as traveling companions within a life of faith so that it was no longer as a text living under stereotypes. Matthew Schlimm was one of the ones who held on to this approach. Schlimm claims that we cannot avoid violent testimony within the Old Testament.

The Old Testament holds the richness of believer life guidelines that can be used to deepen our faithful lives. Therefore, embracing the Old Testament is a logical choice.

“As we embrace the Old Testament, we embrace its God. As we become close to the Old Testament, we also become close to the God who showed up at Abraham and Sarah’s tent, the God who heard Hannah’s desperate prayers, the God who stood beside Daniel in a foreign land.” 16

---

15 L. Daniel Hawk, *The Violence of the Biblical God: Canonical Narrative and Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 3–4.

16 Matthew Richard Schlimm, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), 7.

From here, Schlimm encouraged his readers not to hate the Old Testament, but rather to be his best friend. A friend who faithfully read and understood it, rather than hostile to the texts.

## **Conclusion**

If observed, whether impliedly or not, some of the above perspectives are attempts to defend God. Unfortunately, some of those efforts were precisely in contrast to Bible testimony. The attempt to understand violent texts was indeed difficult even to arrive at discrimination against violent texts within the Old Testament (For example approaches: Different testimony: Old Testament and New Testament).

The diversity of this approach needs to be accurately and carefully listened to because it has the potential to cause passivity in a life of faith as a Christian. Which is, Allah is seen as omnipotent, whatever He does. This position corners the text of the Bible because its testimony can be viewed as false, specific to the Old Testament. This position could potentially have been to make the Old Testament, specific to violent texts, quiet of enthusiasts or readers. Ultimately, violent texts lacked power as part of the Bible. These texts were potential to arrive at serious rejection. However, another danger is to ignore these texts even though it sees them as part of Scripture. In later sections it will be analyzed the perspective of interpretations of violent texts and the way out that it is trying to propose.

## Variety of Intepretation

From a wide variety of approaches it sticks out different outlets. In this section it will be shown some of those solutions. There is an solution that rejects the subtly to harshly violent text. At its essence, the interpreter enveloped the Bible reader's world to the present as alternatives to the way out which it could take should be critically responded.

## Text or Reader?

Text and reader from the text have interesting issues to note on this section. Where do we find solutions, from those violent texts or interpreters now? This question became a guide to researchers of violent texts within the Old Testament as the wrestling over this truth was present enveloping the interpretive world to the present.

The critical historical style of interpretation claims that Scripture can only be interpreted using critical historical. To understand Scripture, we need to understand the world (context) of the author of the text. This claim is not false, but becomes erroneous when placing historical critically as the only way out to understand the text of the Bible.

Leo Perdue argues through his book “Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History” that historical criticism can no longer be maintained as the only way to know the truth uncovered in Scripture. To him, the historically critical style of interpretiveism has been overrun by the theological perspective of the western world. The Old Testament needs to get out of the shadows of those powers. To that end, Perdue attempted to invite his readers to give birth to Old Testament theology from their respective locus (Perdue 2005, 22–23). From that locus, we're theological.

Perdue encouraged his readers to find a solution from revelation-revelation within the Bible. Perdue encouraged his readers to be accountable with the locus. Thus, the interpreters understood the text of the Bible to find a solution to the context it faced and lived. Until at the end, the texts sided with the oppressed, insolidarity with the discriminated, and in voice in the name of humanity 17.

## Reject The Old Testament

Marcion was one who rejected the Old Testament along with its God. For him, the Old Testament carried more violence. In his book

---

17 Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History, Overtures to biblical theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 76–77.

“Antitheses,” Marcion claims that the Old Testament God is different from God in the New Testament. God within the Old Testament is cruel, abusive, and malicious; whereas God within the New Testament has a good reputation for loving humans (Lieu 2015, 66).

When Marcion presented his thoughts to one of the local churches in Rome, he was considered a defector. Nevertheless, Marcion's interpretive thoughts and styles continued to live and flourish. Two of Marcion's notable followers with their frontal postulates were Friedrich Delitzsch (1850-1922), Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), and Hector Avalos (1958-present) Judith Lieu called them modern Marcion devotee (hailed Marcion as the modern believer) 18.

Delitzsch arguably closely followed in Marcion's footsteps by not recognizing the Old Testament as part of the Scriptures of Christians. Plus, Delitzsch was a German. In his write, *Die grosse Tauschung* or *The Great deception*, Delitzsch claimed that Germany was better off accepting help from its own myths than the Old Testament. In fact, Delitzsch arrived at the statement that as he read the Old Testament, he increasingly distrusted God 19.

Harnack had a fairly extreme solution for the church or Christians, it could even be said to endanger Christianity because he rejected the Old Testament by decanonizing the Old Testament. Bravely, Harnack claimed that churches in the second century had ignored Marcion's opinion when the perspective could be viewed as a reform in the church body 20.

---

18 Judith Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

19 Brent A Strawn, *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*, 2017, 126–128, accessed August 29, 2019, <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4901256>.

20 William Baird, *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 127.

Avalos was a follower of Marcion who chose a more subtle path if compared to Delitzsch and Harnack. For him, not all the texts within the Old Testament contained violence. The problem is that our Scriptures contain violence and potentially justify violence. As a result, these violent texts ostensibly influenced readers to view the Old Testament as a collection of books that chronicled the abundant texts of violence. Therefore, he proposed reading the Old Testament which contained violent texts as not part of Scripture (Avalos 2005, 102–5).

Avalos further explained regarding the tips of decanonizing violent texts:

Given that we already are removing violent texts from various aspects of our lives, then I simply propose the next step: the principled decanonization of violent texts. That is to say, our omission cannot be passive, but rather one based on a resounding affirmation of a theological principle that will not tolerate any endorsement of violence in our scriptures. Briefly, my case will include five intertwined arguments: 1. Reinterpretation of violent texts is inadequate, morally and practically; 2. The current canon is the product of late and imperialistic decisions under Constantine; 3. Canonicity is ultimately a theological decision and its criteria have been repeatedly revised in Christianity. Since the canon relies ultimately on theological criteria, then we can show that Christian theology and tradition provide warrants for decanonizing violent texts. 4. The issue is not only the physical deletion of texts, but also the visible expression of the theological principle of zero-tolerance for violence” 21

By decanonizing the violent text within the Old Testament, readers were spared the justification of his errors, ugliness, and crimes based on violent texts. Article, violent texts do not become part of the Scriptures of Christians anymore.

---

21 Hector Avalos, “The Letter Killeth: A Plea for Decanonizing Violent Biblical Texts,” *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1.

Bryan F. Le Beau analyzed the atesime that occurred in America. One of the notable drivers of atheism in the 80's–90s was Madalyn Murray O'Hair. Bravely and straightforwardly, O' Hair claimed that the Old Testament was a cause of atheism. Beau saw that O'Hair was quite bold and frontal, even to the point of establishing an atheism movement that opposed the Old Testament, , “O'Hair found the Old Testament contradictory, to wit she cited the two different stories of creation. She also found it “nothing but hatred, vengeance, cruelty, oppression, lust, and depravation,” and branded it “a perfectly horrible book.” 22

Julie J. Exline, Joshua B. Grubbs, and Steffany J. Homolka are three people who have lately researched violent texts in the Old Testament that God initiated. For them, there are those who intersect closely and correspond in God's cruelty in the Old Testament and human disappointment to God. These two insurers sparked atheism as Old Testament readers were disappointed, angry, and moved away from the Old Testament. The Old Testament was increasingly in doubt (Exline, Grubbs, and Homolka 2015, 29–32).

### Ignoring (Apathetic to) the Old Testament

It seems that, the violent texts recorded within the Old Testament not only resulted in the Old Testament being rejected, but also increased apathy among Christians. James Barr claims that “So far as I know, the loss of outhority to the Old Testament is primarily a phenomenon of English-speaking Christianity.... We've always accepted the Old Testament and we're not going to change now.... There is No. one name which can be qouted as the person who embodies this apathy towards the Old Testament.” 23

The readers who held this position endangered because they were still a Christian, but did not respond and categorized the Old Testament as

---

22 Bryan F. LeBeau, *The Atheist: Madalyn Murray O'Hair* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 177–178.

23 James Barr and John Barton, *Bible and Interpretation: The Collected Essays of James Barr*, First edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 30.

part of Scripture. Christians like this categorized Barr and John Barton as anti-Old Testament (Barr and Barton 2013, 31). The Old Testament's not even unbelievable. Such abandonments of the Old Testament have a sharp effect on atheism, even the hunt down of the name of Christianity itself because it turns out that the Old Testament, part of its Scriptures, is no longer credible.

Barton claimed that apathy was born of people who were not serious with their faith and beliefs. They ignore their beliefs and the Scriptures that are the foundation of their faith. Barton claims that apathy is born of people. To that end, obedience becomes one of the keys to exit abandonment of the Old Testament. For Barton, “The obedience called for is not to blind obedience, but obedience in faith. “ 24

## The Seeker of Solutions

### Allegory

Origen was one of the developers of the allegorical interpretive style of Philo. He even taught this exegesis style in the Alexandria catechization school (Hawk 2019, 6). For him, when we confront the war texts that tell of violence, the text of the Bible needs to be read allegorically. That is, readers are only asked to find spiritual meaning within the text. In this way of interpreting, readers were spared violent texts potentially to inspire them. Origen gives emphasis that “Scripture must Not only be true (at some level) but profitable as well, set about the imposing tasks of finding edification in every detail of every text.” 25

Later, Jerome Creach through his work “Violence in Scripture” tries to promote how to read allegoricals back to overcome violent texts that

---

24 John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 109.

25 Stephen Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 92.

had chances to inspire violent acts. For him, the way of interpreting Origen has a high value of validity to be a solution of interpretation of violent texts. He asserts that “The early church promoted spiritual interpretations of passages that seem promote violence, and those interpretation have more validity than many modern readers have recognized.”<sup>26</sup> In this interpretive way, readers will no longer understand the text literally or assume the text chronicles reality, but rather seeks the spiritual message of the text.

## Typology

There is a resemblance between typological and allegorical styles of interpretives: both are equally exegesis of the text spiritually. However, typological interpreters more cone to one core of necessity concentrate its interpretation on Christ (Christocentric). Lawrence Feingold in his work “Faith comes from what is heard: fundamental theology” shows that this style of interpreter was co-born to Origen. Origen tried to find another solution when dealing with violent texts, it was typological. In this interpretive style, readers are helped to see the meaning and message Christ declares in the Bible for their daily lives. Origen claims that bahwa 27:

Also in his Homilies, Origen took every opportunity to recall the different dimensions of the sense of Sacred Scripture that encourage or express a process of growth in the faith: there is the “literal” sense, but this conceals depths that are not immediately apparent. The second dimension is the “moral” sense: what we must do in living the word; and finally, the “spiritual” sense, the unity of Scripture which throughout its development speaks of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who

---

26 Jerome F. D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture*, First edition., Interpretation: resources for the use of scripture in the church (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 8.

27 Lawrence Feingold, *Faith Comes from What Is Heard: Fundamental Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Pub, 2016), 463.



enables us to understand the Christological content, hence, the unity in diversity of Scripture.”

Thus, readers can understand Christ's intentions and violent texts can be warded by understanding it within the landscape of Christ.

Origen co-developed this style of interpreter. He interpreted the text of Josua and attributed it to Christ. To him, there was a connection between the names Joshua and Jesus. Therefore, the stories in the book of Joshua need to be spiritually re-conceded. The Book of Joshua actually tells about “Christ’s saving work in the life of the believer and of the believer’s work with Christ to defeat the power of sin that hold sway in the human heart.” 28

### Symbolic Intepretation

Symbolic interpreters have a similar focus as allegorical and typological interpreters, namely eliminating the historical perspective of the text so that the text is judged only on a spiritual or metaphorical basis. Thus, the images of violence in the Bible are judged only as mere metaphors, not as true stories behind the Biblical text. The readers of symbolic interpreters emphasize and attribute the development of faith, so that most vital to them is that texts written first may encourage living people now to be even better humans 29.

### Reading Core Testimony

Walter Brueggemann is one of the theologians not to be forgotten when we try to approach and understand the violent texts within the Old Testament. Brueggemann tried to divide the Old Testament into two important pieces: core testimony and tank testimony. The core testimony records the testimony of Israelites regarding good God,

---

28 Hawk, *The Violence of the Biblical God*, 6.

29 Eric A. Seibert, “Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives),” *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 1 (October 2016): 29, accessed September 1, 2019, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1476993X15600588>.

abundant loyal, compassionate, just, and peaceful; whereas tank testimony witnesses the opposite, namely God is cruel, anger, and unfaithful to the nation of Israel. These two contradicting passages show a fundamental theological struggle because tanking testimony is part of the Scriptures of Christians who co-inspire and become the leading man of Christian life.

Ultimately, Brueggemann asserts that the Old Testament never testified intact beginning from verbs, nouns, and adjectives to God as a cruel, wicked, and unfair figure. God never got such a predicate in the Old Testament. Instead, God has a positive predicate within the Old Testament as noted in the book of Exodus 34:6, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in loyal love and faithfulness.” 30

## Epilogue

The multiplicity of exegesis and consequent of such exegesis has been noted in this writing as part of the assertion that interpretation of the text has a consequence. Some refused, and did not care at all, and sought a way out when reading violent texts within the Old Testament. The Old Testament does have a unique narrative fortune. Unfortunately, appreciation of Old Testament texts is still judged under the New Testament, Christocentric, symbolic interpreters, allegorical interpreters, and typological interpreters. Brueggemann and Schlimm had begun rewarding Old Testament texts by seeking solutions from the Old Testament itself, not from outside it. Schlimm invites his readers to endow the Old Testament and Brueggemann tries to emphasize core testimony as guidelines for Old Testament readers.

Unfortunately, Schlimm did not specifically speak of violent texts within the Old Testament and Brueggemann instead deflected the strongest counterpoint testimony of such violent texts. This writing

---

30 Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 117–265.

would later attempt to reward violent texts within the Old Testament. The texts became part of the Old Testament as the inspiring Word of God and motivating humans to do good work, not the other way around.

Those texts serve as an example for readers now not to repeat any violence resembling or the same as that. Those texts constitute a gift present as part of our Scriptures, not to be ignored, but seriously invite us to wrestle. We are constantly plagued and unseated to grace the violent texts and to name them as unsettling texts of grace. With the unrest that is inflicted when we read the texts, do not ignore, and reject the Old Testament. The texts constitute such a disruptive grace that we are spared the moisturizers and not imitating the violence recorded on those texts.

It was, in the end, through this grace that God saved His people from warfare, genocide, wretch, violence against children and women, colonialism, and other kinds of violence. Through those texts, God unleashes us to wrestle through positive and responsible motivation when we read violent texts. God has spoken through those violent texts to allow us to entertain and corroborate the victims of violence thus; and for us to protest the molester as a form of human beings.

## Sources

- Avalos, Hector. "The Letter Killeth: A Plea for Decanonizing Violent Biblical Texts." *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–18.
- Baird, William. *History of New Testament Research*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Barr, James, and John Barton. *Bible and Interpretation: The Collected Essays of James Barr*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Barrett, Lois. *The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament*. The Peace and justice series 1. Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1987.
- Barton, John. *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.
- Copan, Paul, and Matt Flannagan. *Did God Really Command Genocide?: Coming to Terms with the Justice of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015. Accessed August 29, 2019. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3425672>.
- Craigie, Peter C. *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.
- Creach, Jerome F. D. *Violence in Scripture*. First edition. Interpretation: resources for the use of scripture in the church. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.
- Feingold, Lawrence. *Faith Comes from What Is Heard: Fundamental Theology*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Pub, 2016.
- Fretheim, Terence E. "God and Violence in the Old Testament." *Luther Seminary, Word and World* Volume 24, no. 1 (2004): 18–28.
- Fretheim, Terence E. "'I Was Only a Little Angry': Divine Violence in the Prophets." *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 58, no. 4 (October 2004): 365–375. Accessed September 1, 2019. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002096430405800405>.
- Fretheim, Terence E, and Karlfried Froehlich. *The Bible as Word of God in a Postmodern Age*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002.
- Hawk, L. Daniel. *The Violence of the Biblical God: Canonical Narrative and Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019.
- Lamb, David T. *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist, and Racist?* Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2011.
- LeBeau, Bryan F. *The Atheist: Madalyn Murray O'Hair*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.
- Lieu, Judith. *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

- Longman, Tremper, and Peter Enns. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, 2008. Accessed August 28, 2019. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10757529>.
- Merrill, Eugene. *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*. Edited by C. S. Cowles. *Counterpoints*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2003.
- Niditch, Susan. *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995.
- Perdue, Leo G. *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History*. *Overtures to biblical theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Poma, Andrea. *The Impossibility and Necessity of Theodicy: The “Essais” of Leibniz*. *Studies in German idealism* v. 14. Dordrecht ; New York: Springer, 2013.
- Schlimm, Matthew Richard. *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015.
- Seibert, Eric A. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- . “Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives).” *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 1 (October 2016): 8–40. Accessed September 1, 2019. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1476993X15600588>.
- Strawn, Brent A. *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*, 2017. Accessed August 29, 2019. <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4901256>.
- Westerholm, Stephen. *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.