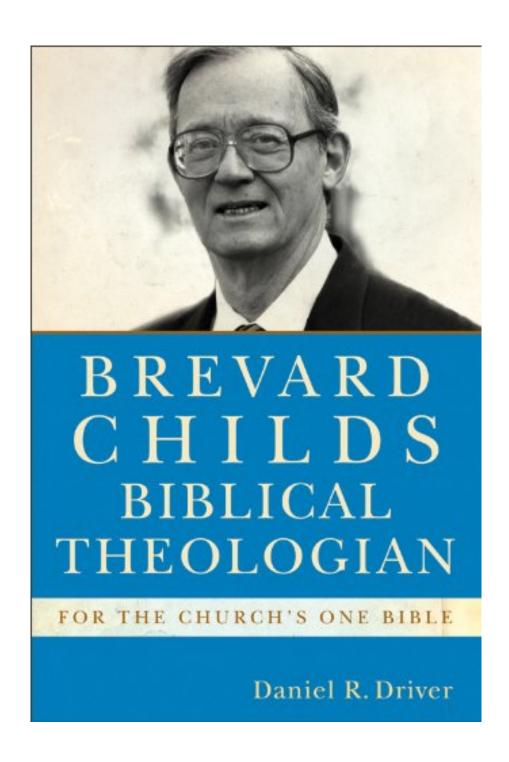


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- "[Brevard Childs] staked out a position and vocation for biblical theology that is sure to reshape our common work and that will require intense engagement by any who dare take up the risk."
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"The search for a fresh paradigm for a biblical theology resumed with new seriousness in the 1950s, and few scholars contributed more frequently and extensively to this debate than Brevard Childs. . . . This detailed critique by Driver explores the historical course of the debate, provides a comprehensive bibliography of the most relevant sources, including important reviews, and traces as closely as possible the points that have aroused sharpest contention. The result is a book that is indispensable in showing why, since World War II, historical and theological approaches to the Bible have found it difficult to establish a common ground. . . . It will certainly remain an essential work of reference for a while to come."

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An Instructive Hermeneutical Guide for Reading Childs

By Ched Spellman

In this revised version of his doctoral thesis completed at the University of St. Andrews, Daniel R. Driver seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of Childs' oeuvre and to uncover the inner workings of his brand of biblical theology.

After surveying Childs' life and the history of the canon debate, Driver divides his analysis into three main parts. In part one, Driver gives a sort of reception history of Childs' work both in English and German contexts. In part two, he exposits Childs' canonical approach itself and examines its internal coherence. According to Driver, Childs makes two major shifts or turns in his career. The first is Childs' movement from a focus on "form" to a focus on "final form." In part three, Driver examines the second major shift in Childs' career, which relates to his reflection on the relationship between the Testaments. Childs' concern in this area is to affirm that Christ is the subject (the res) that both the Old and New Testaments witness to in their own discrete voices. After providing a test case for the issues raised throughout his discussion (on the scope of Psalm 102), Driver concludes with an epilogue that surveys recent work on the canon and suggests its relevance to Childs' approach.

One of the consistent criticisms of Childs is that he is inconsistent and that his approach is in need of reconstructive surgery. This perception was encouraged by James Barr's biting criticism of Childs throughout his career. According to Driver, this critique in particular has helped generate a "bi-polar Childs" in much secondary literature (36-50). On the one hand, Childs champions a focus on the final form of the text, but on the other he engages in various forms of historical criticism in his treatment of biblical material. Many critical biblical scholars would decry a privileging of a final form, which they view as arbitrary, and many evangelical biblical scholars would balk at the use of critical methodology, which they view as dangerous.

For Driver, what is missing in the contemporary discussion is the historical Childs, or better, the canonical Childs. Though one might surely still take issue with elements of Childs' work, Driver maintains the importance of recognizing that for Childs, there is an internal logic to his version of the canonical approach. Driver points out that the "missing link" many critics neglect is the notion of canon-consciousness (71, 144ff) and that Childs sees an integral connection between the "pre-canonical" forms of texts and traditions and the shape they take in the canon as part of the church's Scripture. Driver's articulation of Childs' "career thesis" is that "the historically shaped canon of scripture, in its two discrete witnesses, is a Christological rule of faith that in the church, by the action of the Holy Spirit, accrues textual authority" (4). Driver's overall contention is that Childs' approach is complex but ultimately coherent.

Evangelical and historical-critical scholars alike who are wary of all things "canonical" would do well to situate Childs in his academic context. Driver demonstrates that throughout his career, Childs reflected on the relationship between historical-critical and biblical-theological methods and assumptions. And there are important differences between his application of these critical tools and "business as usual" in the scholarly guilds. In a sense, the burden of Driver's volume is to answer thoroughly the question, "What happens if Childs' work proves to have a logic of its own, even if it is a logic one finally chooses not to enter?" (59).

It is this suggestive yet balanced approach that makes Driver's volume an instructive hermeneutical guide for reading Childs.

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Old Testament theology is very much alive

By Robert Spender

Driver's book provides a thoughtful consideration of the theology and hermeneutic of Brevard Childs. A nice balance is struck between Child's views and their historical development. Much of Childs' positions are unpacked in conversation with others, especially his contemporary, James Barr and the past scholarship of Herman Gunkel. Actually, much can be learned about Gunkel's method by reading two chapters of Driver's book. The amount of time spent deciphering Childs in relationship to Barr is a bit tedious and almost detracts from sharpening further the accomplishments of Childs. While knowledge of German is not a must a basic understanding will greatly enhance reading the book given the number of quotations from German works. Bits and pieces of Child's life are shared but the clear emphasis is upon the times, works and persons that influenced him. One point the author makes is that Childs is much more consistent than many have perceived him to be. The different pursuits of Childs are observed and the influences they have had on the development of his hermeneutic. Driver's book is helpful and would be recommended for those moving deeper into OT theology and the roots of Canon criticism.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

The best book I know on an important and much misunderstood thinker!

By Throck Morton

This is the best thing I have seen on the very important Old Testament theologian, Brevard Childs. Driver understands the complexities of Childs' thought extremely well, better than either Childs' partisans or his many critics. In particular, the fact that Childs is focused on the question of how the OT can be responsibly harassed to the key task of making a Christian affirmation is central to this very important book. The theological roots, affinities, and implications of his work are set forth very helpfully and in a way that shows the obtuseness and shallowness of much of the criticism of him. In particular, Driver's analyses of James Barr and his many attacks on Childs are quite worthwhile.

I give this work four stars rather than five only because it still reads too often like a dissertation. The author feels a need to cover all the bases and to deal with all the critics and sometimes, as in his elaborate discussion of Gunkel, digresses, even if what he writes is of interest for its own sake.

To sum up: No one who is inclined to speak, teach, or write about Brevard Childs can afford to ignore this important book.

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