

The Importance Of The Old Testament To The Christian Spirituality

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Abstract:

Christian Spirituality draws heavily on the Old Testament which is essential to knowing the Lord God of Hosts, the creator of the universe and to having a true understanding of the Bible and God's unfolding of the greatest love of human kind. The aim of the paper was to show that the Old Testament is an essential and enriching source for the development of a Christian concept of spiritual formation. The paper reviewed published literature and references in the Bible (Old and New Testaments), to show and establish the importance of Old Testament in Christian Spirituality. It followed the standard methodology for systematic reviews of published articles on "Old Testament and Christian spirituality". The research revealed that the Old Testament narratives on Creation, Covenant, Community and role models in the Bible are an essential and enriching source for Christian spirituality. However, the concept is complete with the fulfilment of prophecies as stated in the New Testament.

Introduction

The term spirituality has been defined in various ways for various purposes. For example, Weltzen (2011) referred to spirituality "as the lived experiences of the early Christians". Downey (1997) also defined "Christian spirituality as the Christian life". Schneiders (2000) defined spirituality as 'the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption, but of self-transcendence towards the ultimate value one perceives'. For the Christian believer, this ultimate value is God. Craghan (1983) claim Jewish belief claim that spirituality is too encompassing to ever be properly captured in a word or idea. Green (1986, p. 7) writes, "Where a modern employs the term 'spirituality,' an ancient Israelite employs 'yir'at YHWH', (fear of Yahweh), or "avodat YHWH' (service of Yahweh)." To the Jew, the comprehensiveness and mystery of spirituality are too great to be analyzed or studied and so, it is more important to

affirm that spirituality *is* than to attempt to describe it⁴.

For the purpose of this text Christian spirituality can be generally described as a set of beliefs, values, and way of life that reflect the teachings of the Bible and the way in which Christians express their faith. Christian spirituality is therefore concerned with all of a person's life and how they are connected to our relationship with God. The definitions suggest an ongoing means by which a meaningful relationship with God is established and maintained.

Old Testament spirituality is important to Christian spirituality today as it was in the past. Yet some so called "New Testament Christians/Churches" claim the Old Testament is outmoded or lacks Christian spirituality^{6&7}. Lombaard (2003) claims the Old Testament takes on small role in the practice and study of spirituality than the Bible suggests because those "New Testament Believers" who hold such belief

tend to draw infrequently from the Old Testament for spiritual exercises or ignore the New Testament's references to Old Testament texts; and even when the Old Testament is referenced, it is often done too briefly and in a more or less metaphorical sense rather than exegetically or theologically. Lombaard asserted that the ten possible reasons used to explain why the Old Testament takes on such a little role in the practice and study of spirituality by the "*New Testament Believers*" are: Textual complexity or critical theological education or scholarship; Modern popular pieties; The cultural gaps between the Old Testament worlds and our worlds; Theological difficulties and Christian sensibilities; Fear of "boundary-less" interpretations; The reference to Scripture by writers on spirituality; The notion of progressive revelation; Theological diversity within the Old Testament "Law; versus New Testament grace; and the actual textual elements of the tests. The relevance of Christian spirituality is not one side quest based on the New Testament. Certainly the focus of Christianity is Christ. Jesus was a Jew and so the Christian faith had its origins in Judaism. It is impossible to separate the New Testament from the Old without violating the message of both. The Old Testament is relevant to Christian Spirituality as much as the New Testament. The Old Testament sets the contexts for the New Testament⁸.

The Old Testament is an introduction to God himself and his plans for mankind; and essential to having a true understanding of the Bible and God's unfolding love and therefore Christian spirituality. The Old Testament, made up of the five books of Moses, the History Books, Poetry and Wisdom and the Prophets are filled with many wonderful stories and characters and full of prophecies that were either fulfilled in the Old or the New Testament making the Old Testament so important in Christian spirituality. For anyone seeking to know the Lord God of Hosts and to understand the creator of the universe, get answers

to the most fundamental questions of life and death, the Old Testament helps to comprehend the incomprehensible. Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would be meaningless; as per the Old Testament, spirituality is a life lived within the framework defined by God's saving Acts in history with his people. This sacred history is reflected in the faith of the community and its ritual, particularly its annual commemorations such as Passover and centre place of the temple.

The books of the Old Testament were composed over a period of approximately a thousand years so technically speaking there is no Old Testament spirituality but a series of Old Testament *spiritualities* (that is ,the issue of the Old Testament canonicity)⁹.The recognition of a plurality of spiritualities must not be ignored in an in-depth study of the subject¹⁰. However, the Wesleyan view of canon maintains belief in the "connectedness" among the books of the Old Testament and so we could not legitimately speak of *one* testament. Again, there is a real and necessary sense in which the revelatory process occurred in such a way that a larger unity was produced in the midst of plurality. This is not only true within the Old Testament, but also a fundamental unity within the New Testament and between the two Testaments themselves, otherwise it makes no sense to talk of *a* Bible; and so we can speak of an Old Testament spirituality¹¹. The Old Testament spirituality or the "the spirituality of Old Testament times" that emphasizes the historical dimension and focus on the faith and practices of ancient Israel. The text also focuses on the spirituality which is informed and nourished by the Old Testament. The emphasis is on the contemporary and focuses on the Old Testament's references in the New Testament and its contribution to a sound spirituality today¹².

Rationale for study

The rationale is to write about Old Testament spirituality under selected categories that describe

the spiritualities associated with following areas: Creation, Covenant, Community, spiritualities reflected in the Psalms and Challenges. The topic of Old Testament spirituality was also viewed as present, essential and describable within the larger flow of revelation, and the references to the Old Testament made by Jesus and his followers.

Aim of study

The *aim* of the paper was to demonstrate that the Old Testament is an essential and enriching source of Christian spirituality.

Objectives

- The text explored the key elements of Old Testament spirituality
- Some key Old Testament references in the New Testament
- Discuss the limitation of Old Testament Spirituality

Method

This is a retrospective review on “Old Testament and Christian spirituality”. The method followed the standard methodology of systematic reviews of published articles relevance to Old Testament and Christian spirituality. To obtain the papers, extensive search of the electronic databases e.g. ALTA, HINARI, NEXIS, Web of Science, British Humanities, and other relevant sources (dissertation abstracts, Google Scholar) were searched for paper published between 1980 and 2015. Key words used for the search included: **Old Testament, Christian and Spirituality**. Authors did not subscribe to most of these data bases and so the texts quotes were mainly from Google Scholar.

Findings

Creation

Spirituality rooted in the theology of creation is essential starting point for Christian spirituality. First, in the Old Testament God created the universe and declares that every facet of creation is good and purposeful. At the heart of creation is

Love. So it will be unwise to escape God’s goodness. Spiritual formation maintains that if we look at the world through the perspective of the Old Testament, we will conclude that God is Love. The Creator God is so in love with the creation that nothing can cause the love to end or curb its redemptive power. It is this Love that makes it possible to understand the importance of Old Testament themes such as covenant, prophecy, wisdom, and even eschatology (Deuteronomy, 7:7-8). God formed man (Adam and Eve) and had a relationship/fellowship with them. This revelation of God forms the foundation for the Old Testament call to worship Yahweh¹³. Since God is holy, and the fact that man is made in the image of God means that man has holiness through creation. So the starting point in life as created by God points to its “Goodness,” “Rightness” and “Holiness” (Ps 139:7-12). For Christian spiritual formation, this means that the first word in spirituality is “Sacred”¹⁴. Even after the “*fall of man*” it is possible to say “the heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps 19:1, NIV).

In Christian Spirituality, the world is the object of God’s love (John 3:16), and we are to glorify God in our bodies and our substance (Romans 12: 1; I Corinthians 6:19-20). So Christian spirituality must be practiced in this world, which God made good (Mark 7: 17) and which God is in the process of redeeming (Romans 8: 18-25).

We also see that life is sacred so the murder of Abel by Cain is cited as a serious violation of the order of creation. This notion is further enforced in the Ten Commandments’ “Thou shall not kill. When one human being violates, abuses, or takes the life of another human being, there is a loss of the sacredness that God intends (Gen 9:6). Similarly, there is an equal concern for the sanctity of life when a person does violence to another as in adultery or the seemingly lesser evil of a falsification of weights and measures. All

these find their source in a theology of creation which declares that every person, thing and activity is somehow infused with the divine. Only integrity with this sacredness is acceptable to God. The Old Testament plays a valuable role in the formation of Christian spirituality by not allowing us to forget or minimize the sacredness of life.

Second, from creation it can be deduced that there is a general distinctiveness and individuality in the creation of the various species. The value of life is heightened as no person is a duplicate of anyone else. This individuality and specificity is amplified and given special attention in the creation of Adam and Eve. Even down to the etchings of our fingerprints, the work of creation bears witness to the uniqueness of each human being. The process of naming further amplifies this fact. Whereas animals may be named by order, each human being is given a name which differentiates them from every other human being.

The uniqueness of self and the preciousness of personality are indispensable elements of Old Testament spirituality. This view of life forms the basis for contrasts between the Israelites and pagan cultures. It stands behind the ethical-behavioral allowances and prohibitions of the Law; and the foundation of the prophetic call to justice and mercy for all persons in a society. This view of sacredness makes it impossible to speak of a hierarchy of value in creation. Differences in role and function are inevitable, but an assessment of value based on an attempted hierarchy is unacceptable. There is no attempt to define relative sacredness in relationship to race, sex, or role. Here is at least one reason why the Old Testament sounds a note of **compassion** for the poor and the oppressed as a societal test of how complete a view of human sacredness is in operation. People are intended to live in peace with one another and indeed with the rest of creation. The Old Testament is filled with passages that condemn the oppression of people by other people. Whatever dominion may mean, it

does not mean domination or exploitation. Morality, fairness and concern are the standards of interpersonal relations¹⁵.

The idea of specificity as an element in Old Testament spirituality also relates to sexuality. The relationship between sexuality and spirituality is presented in the creation story. The sexual differential of human beings into males and females is mystery of the highest order and stands out in creation as a principle of divine significance. Clearly, each man and each woman are made in the image of God. Therefore Man can experience intimacy in interpersonal relationships because we are made in the image of God. This intimacy is characterized by respect, service and love.

Finally, our being made in the image of God has implications for the rest of creation. To be made in the image of God means that we are not merely passive receptors of divine destiny, but active participators in shaping that destiny. We are to "have dominion" over creation in the sense of stewardship. Adam and Eve, and their descendants, are God's representatives on the earth to order and care for it so that it can reflect its own glory. The Hebrew concept is that of the faithful discharge of duty. This unity between humanity and the rest of creation is seen in general by the way the creation narratives flow from one stage to another. In a more specific sense, the unity is seen through two specific acts: that the "creeping things" and Adam are both created on the sixth day; and that Adam is given the duty of naming all the animals¹⁶. The creation story reveals that God sets forth information about allowances and limits for Adam and Eve, the allowance for authentic choice, and the execution of judgment after failure (judgment only makes sense if responsibility is a reality). The fact that we are created in the image of God means that we are "response-able."¹⁷

In the Wesleyan tradition is seen a theology of “natural conscience” as well as a reflection of *prevenient grace*. Old Testament spirituality as revealed in creation is that amazing and awesome mixture of allowance and accountability, liberty and limitation, freedom and fidelity. Thus our very creation becomes a major element of our spirituality. Such a spirituality saves us from any notions of dualism¹⁸. Such a spirituality clearly reveals the value and sacredness of life. Through the spirituality of creation, we see our interconnectedness, mutual dependency and moral responsibility; and recognize that true life is being sustained by an intimate relationship with God.

Covenant

At the core of Old Testament Spirituality was the Covenants made between God and his chosen people. The God who created man who share in the *imago dei* cannot be satisfied with a generalized relationship. Through the introduction of covenant, the Old Testament reveals the strengthening and the uniqueness of the divine-human relationship. Through the covenant, we learn important things about the spiritual life such as the bond between God and those who accept the covenant. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people (e.g. Exodus 6:6-7; Leviticus 26:12). This bonding through covenant began in Genesis 9:16 in the covenant between God and Noah. It continues through the patriarchs, climaxing in the national covenant with Israel. The Major Covenants were:

- The Covenant with Abraham, which is a promise for a people and for a country (Gen.15 and 17). The history of the Hebrews therefore is based on promise and fulfilment and can be seen in the Patriarchal stories of the Book of Genesis
- The Mosaic Covenant of the Law made at Sinai with the whole people and directly resulted in the Exodus (Ex. 24 & 34). For the Jews this forms the basis of a spirituality that

is understood as being active in the present and not in the past.

- The Davidic Covenant of eternal Kingship that provided the basis of the Messianic hope (2 Sam.7).
- The Exilic Covenant of the Heart (Jer. 31 & Ezek. 36). The loss of the Kingdom caused a deep reflection by the Jews on the nature of their spiritual relationship with God. The people of Israel came to recognise that God could not be at fault but that their own spirituality had strayed from that which God desired; and failed to keep to their side of the Covenant commitments. The resultant effect is the new spirituality that began to grow based on love and proper inner dispositions as was seen with the Pharisees. This type of spirituality was not universally adopted by the people of Israel.

One can only conclude that the covenant is God's invitation to “come closer.” Through the covenant, the ideas of closeness and intimacy are amplified. This revelation of God in the Old Testament is directed towards a perfect communication of God to humanity. Images of this covenantal bonding run through the Old Testament: marriage intimacy as a symbol of God's intimacy with Israel, a husband who cannot abandon a whoring wife, a child nursing at a mother's breast, a deliverer who releases captives from bondage.

Another major aspect about Old Testament spirituality is that God's revelation, and the spirituality that accompanied it, developed and changed over time as circumstances change. The Psalms express the full range of Old Testament Spiritualities but within the traditional contexts for prayer of Praise, Petition, Thanksgiving and Adoration. For example, “He remembers his covenant forever ...” (Psalm 105:6-15); is a hymn of thanksgiving and praise to God for all his gifts and benefits and is about the Abrahamic

Covenant. Psalm 78: 5-8 is about the Mosaic Covenant - "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make it known to their children". The Davidic Covenant (Psalm 110) "Royal dignity has been yours from the day of your birth". Finally the Covenant of the Heart (Ps. 51:10) "Create for me a clean heart, a pure spirit within me" As in the Old Testament, Christian spirituality does not imply that one is to flee this world to find God, but that one must find God and grow in grace and truth. The individual appropriated this history and identity, especially in individual prayer life (petitions, praise, thanksgiving, and repentance), Intercession, especially for the sins of a people, as Abraham (Genesis 18:25; 20:7), Moses in Exodus (32:112-12) Amos (Amos 7:1-7) arguing or persuading God to grant their requests. Thus, the Old Testament spirituality is as express in psalms is essential to having a true understanding of the character of God and God's unfolding love of man and how one can become Christ-like.

The Psalms also suggest that the worshippers assumed earthly advantages and protection from enemies, either as individuals or for the nation as a whole. So was a spirituality based on a notion of God as Yahweh Sabaoth, God of Hosts, and Victorious in battle. In Psalm 3 "You strike all my foes across the face ... on your people a blessing". Psalm 84- "He gives grace and glory and refuses nothing good to those whose life is blameless". Psalm 89 says "Yours is a strong arm ... you are the flower of their strength, by your favour our strength is triumphant"; and Psalm 142 says "I pour out my worry in his presence ... and you rescue me from my persecutors" This reflects a concept of God who is concerned about his people's safety and other needs, angry at their sins, and even open to a change of mind and enters into a dialogical relationship with his people (Exodus 32: 7-14; Numbers 14: 13-25; I Samuel 8: 4-22).

The *Shekinah* is God's glorious presence with the people which fills the heavens and the earth in a general sense, but comes to reside specifically in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. It is important to note that this presence is "located" in that place where the worship of God is conducted, where the Law is read and interpreted, and where the people offer their sacrifices and make their responses¹⁹. But here, as in creation, God maintains intimacy without destroying reverential distance—so that the Creator-creature distinction is preserved. God is not reduced in majesty, and humanity is not absorbed into divinity²⁰.

In the Old Testament Spirituality, God can be absent from and silent to his people (Job 23: 8-9; Psalm 30:7; Habakkuk 1: 2), or present to and seen by his people (Psalm 42:2; 84; 7). God's absence is painful to endure (Psalm 51:11). Though God's presence was sometimes dreaded and not always desired (e.g. Job 23:15-17; Psalm 51:9); life is to be lived in the consciousness of God's presence as death (sheol) usually means the loss of consciousness, the absence of God, and the cessation of the praise of God (Psalm 6: 4-5; 88: 3-6; Ecclesiastes 9: 5-6 & 10). Those who truly experience life were those who obeyed God and were penitent and humble in God's presence (Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119). For this reason, obedience to the law is central in Hebrew spirituality, for the law of God is virtually the presence of God in his people's midst. The law expresses the mind of God and his intentions for his people, and one is to meditate on, study, and keep the law (Deuteronomy 6:4-9); by so doing, the Hebrew was perhaps exercising the equivalent of the Christian way of practicing the presence of God.

This reverential distance is preserved in two primary ways. First, the "vision of God" which affects and enriches the nation is something reserved for a relatively few people. The

experience of Moses is an example. Moses is a reminder of the nearness of God, but Moses is not presented as a model of spirituality available for any and every Jew. Such a universalizing of intimacy, from the Old Testament perspective, must await "the Day of the Lord" (e.g. Joel 2:28-32). And second, Israel's closeness to God is never seen as automatic and guaranteed. Individuals (e.g. Samson) and the nation as a whole experience the *absence* of God²¹. Thus, the bond between God and Israel cannot be assumed or presumed upon. It must be reverently received and conscientiously maintained. In creation we are given a picture of God's relationship with the world. But in the covenant, there is something of a narrowing of relationship. This is both frustrating and revealing. It is frustrating because we are left to wonder about the precise nature of the relationship between God and other peoples and nations.

Once Israel becomes the focus, the Bible never again answers all the questions of God's general relationship with the rest of the world. The implications from a spiritual formation perspective could be the *qualitative* difference between Israel's knowledge of God and that of other people and nations. A second implication of the idea of boundary is that within the Judeo-Christian tradition there is sufficient faith content and experience to render unnecessary any movement toward another religion. Therefore, the task which should consume our time and energy is the cultivation of our relationship with God through Christ to its maximum potential.

Both Judaism and Christianity have realized that God wants every human being to have a saving relationship with Him. So, the Jews have proselytized and the Christians have catechized. The goal has been to incorporate as many as possible into the covenant community. For the Jews, land and law were two primary means to remind themselves that God did not intend for people to live as they please. Through the land,

Israel received a place to cultivate its spiritual life²². Through the law, Israel received the information and the perspective to live its life before God²³. Presence in or absence from the land and obedience or disobedience to the law become two concrete means of assessing the nation's vitality, and the two are interrelated.

Finally, we see in the covenant the motif of blessing, with its flip side of cursing. We state it this way because it seems clear to us that the primary intent of the covenant was to insure the beatitude of Israel. The message of God's judgment more technically belongs to life lived outside the covenant than life lived within it. The covenant itself is a medium of blessing. And it is important to emphasize that even in the Old Testament, the note of "blessedness" is contained and valued. Traditional Christian spirituality has seen such blessedness clearly in the Beatitudes²⁴. The same can be said of the Wesleyan tradition²⁵. It is helpful to see that the Old Testament idea of covenant provides the necessary ingredients of substance and accountability as it relates to the blessed life. The Old Testament notion of covenant helps us a great deal in seeing the blessed life in a more proper perspective.

Fundamentally, the idea of covenant blessing is a communal idea²⁶. Thus, the blessed life is a life of obedience to and participation in the community of faith, especially in such things as worship, sacrifice and prayer. The idea of blessing was made tangible through the existence of sacred sites, objects, seasons and leaders. The idea of curse is therefore more nearly the result of disobedience than it is an expression of any type of negative emotion in God. God's wrath and judgment follow Israel's breaking of the covenant. In other words, something sacred must be broken or violated if cursing is to result. To be sure, original sin creates a primal rupture in the divine-human relationship which only grace can restore. But here again, the covenant as blessing offers sinful humanity a place to be reconciled. And

when that offer is accepted and lived out, blessing becomes the norm²⁷.

Community

Another important aspects of Old Testament Spirituality which is closely related to creation and covenant is Community. Even though the covenants are made with individuals it was never an individual spirituality but community spirituality. The Old Testament knows nothing of authentic spirituality apart from community and several Old Testament theologies make "community" the central concern of the Old Testament²⁸. Maturity and mission are conceived of only in relation to the community of faith²⁹. Here again, we note a significant contrast with contemporary culture and aberrant spiritualities³⁰. The Old Testament helps us to set true spirituality in its proper perspective. Both the law and the prophets are instructions for the people. Spiritual leaders are those who have the nation in their hearts. Private spiritual advancement is not even a minor theme in the Old Testament³¹. The patriarchs, matriarchs, seers, judges, priests, prophets and kings are all people for others. Stepping outside the community to embrace a private experience or a "foreign" entity is anathema. So also is living within the community in ways that violate its ethos. No matter where you are, you are a Jew. Nothing can change that. There is no understanding of faith and life or authentic existence apart from this community perspective. An examination of the Old Testament shows that Israel had to contend with tribalism and sectarianism. But when the nation was at its best, the tribes and sects saw themselves as part of something far bigger - part of a fellowship and a community. As Jews, they were grounded in the revelation of God as Yahweh (one God), the law (one standard), and the nation (one people).

In this emphasis on community, we see several important aspects of spirituality. First, we see the

formation of identity. Such identity is fueled by a strong sense of national consciousness, which is itself integrally related to sacred actions, sites, objects and seasons³². It is an identity which begins in the family and moves outward to embrace the entire nation—and in time, even those in dispersion who live outside the boundaries of the nation. This identity is maintained as the people remember the mighty acts of God, and the certainty of such past acts becomes the grounds for hope.

There is also interdependence. The Old Testament reveals close connections between the king, the priests, prophets and people. A breakdown anywhere along the line causes the whole nation to suffer. And there are times (e.g. Hos 5-7) when nothing short of national repentance will bring healing to the sickness. The theme that "righteousness exalts a nation" is sounded time and again; it is a righteousness which can only be achieved by mutual faithfulness. Holiness exists only where all segments of the nation live properly before God and each other. This helps to explain why immorality, injustice and oppression cannot be tolerated in the community³³.

The community is sustained and challenged by a divine intuition—a discernment of the word and will of God that comes frequently through the message of Israel's prophets. This word is by no means limited to the prophets. All of Israel's leaders are to be those who walk close to God. And so at various times we see judges, priests and kings expressing the word of God to the people. But when they are not obedient, God raises up prophets so that the people are not without the truth of God in their midst. There can be no genuine community without a sensitivity to God's will and a determination to carry it out. Without this, community is destroyed³⁴.

In contemporary spiritual formation, we learn the necessity of community through the witness of the Old Testament. Even by itself, the Old Testament

supplies us with all the evidence we need to stand over against the erosion of community in our society. When this biblical revelation is coupled with the witness of the New Testament and the ensuing Christian tradition, we are left with no room to erect any notion of the spiritual life which omits or minimizes community. Community is an essential ingredient for every Christian, regardless of status, maturity, or experience. It is at one and the same time a provider of an essential element in spirituality, and a protector against excesses and pitfalls.

Challenge

All of this culminates in a grand challenge. Old Testament spirituality is never finished. On the one hand, it is a challenge to bring each new generation into the experience of God. And on the other hand, it is a challenge to hold the present generation in a faithful relationship to God.

And finally, the spirituality of the Old Testament is one which ultimately looks beyond itself to the coming of the Messiah and the flowering of the People of God.

Christian spirituality therefore draws heavily on the Old Testament. However, the pragmatic concerns of the spirituality were for the present, as there was no appreciation of an afterlife in most of the Old Testament. Much of Old Testament spirituality focuses on God's presence in this life. For the Hebrews, Israelites and Jews, obeying and worshipping God would result in material blessings and benefits here on earth. There was no emphasis or belief in an afterlife except that mentioned in the Book of Daniel (Daniel, 12).

Jesus, Peter and Paul, Matthew and John, and numerous others in the New Testament, frequently quote from the Old Testament. The Old Testament is so important that one would not be able to prove Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, our Saviour, without using the Old Testament. Jesus Christ preached

the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and He did it altogether out of the Old Testament. They all based their teachings on the Old Testament. So, the Old Testament has a tone of expectation—a forward look. This tone of challenge is an invitation.

Christians believe that the Old Testament became fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ. This is because all Old Testament spirituality lead to him. The scriptures that Jesus quoted were all from the Old Testament. For example, Jesus read a prophecy from the book of Isaiah (Luke 4:16-21) in the synagogue, and explained that part of that prophecy was being fulfilled as He spoke. Isaiah 7 also prophesied about the virgin's birth. Jesus also said in John 5:45-47 and Luke 24:25-27 that Moses wrote about him and that what Moses wrote was part of the scriptures.

Israel is invited to embrace the world as God's creation, themselves as being made in God's image, the covenant as God's bond of love, the leaders as God's appointed servants. The comprehensiveness of the invitation is astonishing. The essence of the challenge is an increasing closeness and intimacy between God and Israel. Nowhere is this seen any better in the Old Testament than in the Song of Songs. Scholars have given this book a number of different interpretations, but one thing is common—the lover is inviting the beloved, and the beloved is responding to the lover. The result is increasing intimacy. In the process, the Old Testament celebrates such things as spontaneity, longing, fidelity, union, joy and the beauty of nature. In fact, this book has been considered by some to capture the major themes of Old Testament spirituality³⁵.

The problem is that the people do not always respond as they are intended. The glorious invitation to intimacy is ignored and/or rejected. And so we see the repeated cycle of

repentance/reconciliation. As far back as Adam and Eve, we see the breaking of relationship with God and the need to restore fellowship. The law, with its elaborate system of worship and sacrifice, is one means of restoring the nation to God. The prophets are another way through which God seeks to heal the brokenness. The Old Testament does not shield us from a picture of God's ideal intention for all creation

And once again, at the center of the challenge to intimacy (even in the face of brokenness) is God's inestimable love. The God we meet in the Old Testament has made an indestructible commitment to keep faith with Israel. Nothing can cause God to pull out of that relationship. God's absolute faithfulness is the foundation for everything in the Old Testament. The psalter focuses upon it³⁷. These are some of many scriptures that were fulfilled in the New Testament to show how God had a plan from the beginning to unfold His Holy love for us. He told us what would happen in the Old Testament and He did, indeed, see His work finished and fulfilled in the New Testament.

Paul explains how the New Testament Church was “built on the foundation of the apostles [the New Testament] and prophets [the Old Testament], Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). Christ was sent from God the Father as the messenger of the New Covenant—yet He preached that message entirely out of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The models provided in the Old Testament that Christians strive to be like. For example, Joseph showed great forgiveness when he forgave his brothers who sold him (Genesis 45:5 & 15). Noah trusted God's word and built an ark to escape the raging flood (Genesis 6 & 7); Abraham had a faith in God to the extent of sacrificing his own son Isaac (Genesis 22); David had faith enough to face the giant Goliath. (1 Samuel 17) and Elijah showed complete confidence in God when he

defeated the prophets of Baal. (1 Kings 18:20-40). Godly men, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and Daniel also provide us with examples of how to walk with God.

Gospel of John also made use of significant characters, themes and imagery, all taken from the Torah. In doing so, he created new spiritualities amongst the readers of the Gospel of John to endorse the identity, reality and a certain image and experience of the unseen God (John 1:18) of the Old Testament through Jesus Christ. The spirituality in the Gospel of John is bound up with a real God interacting with real people in real situations³⁸.

Conclusion

These major categories of Old Testament theology provide us with numerous insights regarding the nature of spirituality. In creation we are invited to the richness of the cosmos and the sacredness of life made in the image of God. Through the covenant we are encouraged to bond ourselves to the living God, which necessarily calls us into community with all other persons who have done the same. Thus formed, we are challenged to deepen our intimacy with God and to direct our energies toward the service of others.

To be sure, there are many other aspects of Old Testament spirituality which could have been included, and they would have increased our appreciation for the importance of the Old Testament in shaping a biblical spirituality. But these four will serve as irrefutable evidence that a truly spiritual life is informed and formed through the revelation of God as found in the Old Testament. They serve as a reminder that we have not done ourselves or others a service by omitting or minimizing this part of the Story from our theology and experience of the spiritual life.

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