



Evaluating Faith and Modernity: Old Testament Theology in the Context of Contemporary Christian Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study explores the evolving role of evaluative processes in Christian education, with a focus on the intersection of Old Testament theology and contemporary theological thought. It seeks to understand how evaluations in theological and Christian education reflect broader shifts in how faith, modernity, and the relevance of Old Testament principles are understood in contemporary contexts.

Methodology: Employing a qualitative approach, this research uses a literature review. It examines secondary sources, including Scopus-indexed journals, to trace the development of evaluation within Christian education and Old Testament theology. Primary sources include books analyzing shifts and tensions in theological evaluation, historical contexts, political influences, and the changing positions of Christian congregations.

Main Findings: The study reveals that evaluation serves as a tool that significantly influences the trajectory of theological discourse, particularly regarding the Old Testament. It highlights the interconnectedness of theology and various facets of human life, emphasizing the importance of critical evaluation, empathy, and reflection in contemporary theological engagement.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This research offers a fresh perspective by examining Old Testament theology as an evaluative space within Christian education and its connection to contemporary theological debates. It distinguishes itself by focusing on the evaluative nature of Old Testament theology, in contrast to previous research that emphasizes historical contexts or the weaknesses of objectivist lenses. It seeks to provide unique insights into the ongoing relevance of Old Testament principles in shaping contemporary theological evaluations and practices within Christian education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary theology (evaluative space processes in education) as a development of theology called modern is theology developed by theological scholars (both theological and non-theological graduates, including from general education). Issues that are developed as a dynamic development in the form of something that crosses faith, society, cultural diversity thinking, religion with its historicity and the entire existence of life and human life [1]. Contemporary theology (Hebrew תאולוגיה קונטמפּוּרנַרִית) involves dialogue (a cross-section of

thought on one or more issues or topics of discussion in order to evaluate or reevaluate something that already exists [established] in order to dismantle it as part of an evaluative space or to reconstruct something that already exists) [2]. According to the researcher, the dialogue that is possible during the conversation usually revolves around אֱלֹהִים (Elohim), יֵשׁוּעַ (Yeshua), and so on, רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ (Ruach HaKodesh), מָשִׁיחַ (Mashiach), בְּרִית (Berit), and שְׁלוֹמִים (Shalom). According to the author, the Old Testament is rich in themes that are still relevant today. The excavation itself is an educational work in which the process of evaluation is a tool and even extends to Christian education.

The evaluation that takes place in the process of learning Hebrew, for example, when speaking about contemporary theology, I can give an example in Malachi 3: 1:6 (כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא שֶׁנִּיחַתי I, the Lord, do not change). God is fundamentally unchanging, but human understanding evolves in order to allow for an educational process that includes evaluative work on faith and modernization [3]. Other references that I can make to the process of evaluating as well as to theologians or philosophers are, for example, Paul Tillich (1886-1965), whose evaluation in the body of theology and philosophy, according to him, is something relative and interactive (not separate or grounded in being) [4]. Something separate has to be evaluated as according to Tillich, dualism or separative thinking has been weakened in the face of increasingly plural contemporary realizations.

Besides Tillich, there is Karl Barth with his dialectic [5]-[7]. In the end, though, I think Barth dislikes conversations that eventually land on something anthropocentric. In other words, the evaluation that Barth emphasizes is the divinity in his dialectic without the need to undermine or deify anthropocentrism. The next Jewish philosopher I would like to address in this paper is Emmanuel Levinas whose evaluation of the relationship between theology, divinity, and the wholeness of responsibility towards the “other” (other languages are called the Other) [8]-[10]. In this context, Levinas discussed “totality and infinity” as a theoretical basis for doing evaluative labor to restore spirituality in which there is responsibility in moral wrapping.

The development of theology does not rule out the possibility of the development of specific theologies, such as Old Testament theology. It itself moves from the discipline of history to a more diverse field. This movement, in my opinion, is a work of evaluation, reevaluation as well as seeking and finding something unique to color the conversation and life of theological spaces. The shift in voices possible in the elaboration of the meaning of New Testament theology as expressed by Spangenberg that 1970 and 1989 were years of great change in learning that included identification and reflection as verbs in the learning process when encountering revelation, literature, history and religion [11].

Furthermore, in talking about educational involvement, I looked up previous research by Gearon on the mapping of education through the Bible (often referred to as and belonging to King James). Gearon said that Christian education at that time (which also involved the Old Testament—my emphasis) was both centralized and decentralized as the state became involved since 1870. This means that the process of Christian education involving history, according to me through Gearon's research, displays the dynamic process of educational evaluation and is also the proximity of Gearon's research to my research. The difference is that Gearon's research is in the context of history in the UK, while I approach the Old Testament as a pleasant evaluative space when encountering contemporary theology [12].

The next previous research is Jason Lief's research on the history of situatedness in North America with western culture, which then becomes a problem when objectivism is recognized as accuracy in historical holisticity. In fact, according to Lief, miracles and witchcraft should not be seen through a scientific lens through technology to gather facts that are more pragmatically simplistic. I see that Lief in his research would like to offer another alternative evaluation instrument that looks at the educational process for North American students through the search for theological messages in the text with historical criticism on contemporary stories [13]. I found Lief's research to be close in that educational evaluation and theology, especially if I look at Old Testament theology, the instruments of interpretation take part in the process that characterizes the presence of contemporary theology. The difference is that Lief is aiming for data that proves the weakness of the objectivist lens, while I am looking for it as part of evaluative work in Christian education and Old Testament theology.

This study aims to examine how evaluative processes within Christian education—particularly through the lens of Old Testament theology—can provide critical insights into contemporary theological and societal challenges. While prior research has primarily treated Old Testament theology through historical, doctrinal, or exegetical approaches, there is a lack of focus on how it functions as an evaluative tool for addressing present-day educational, ecological, and political concerns within Christian communities. Despite the growing complexity of faith-related discourse in modern education, few studies integrate the evaluative dimension of Old Testament theology into the context of contemporary Christian pedagogy and socio-political engagement. This gap is significant given the current ecological crises, rising secularism, and the tendency of religious institutions to remain passive in political matters. The urgency lies in empowering theological education to become a transformative force. The results indicate that evaluative processes in Christian education are reinforced by repetition, dialogical reading, and memory retention. Hebrew language learning, scriptural recitation, and liturgical practices serve as cognitive tools for embedding evaluative theology within the learning process.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research I developed is a qualitative research through a literature review analysis study that looks at the development of Christian educational evaluation in the history of the development of Old Testament theology and then entered, sneaked and combed the theology that is often referred to as contemporary theology. This research using literature review analysis technique uses secondary sources from Scopus journals as part of reputable sources in the secondary space [14]. The primary sources in this paper I obtained through the availability of books that discuss the shifts and tensions in the tool called evaluation in theology and Christian education through history, political presence, and possible positions for Christian congregations throughout time.

As a qualitative study, the primary research instrument is the researcher as the interpreter. A document analysis guide was used to extract key themes. Below is the instrument grid used:

Table 1. The instrument grid

No	Indicator	Source Type	Coding Focus	Analytical Category
1	Evaluation in Old Testament theology	Primary Book and Journal	Keywords: evaluation, critique, transformation	Theological-Educational Evaluation
2	Church and politics	Historical and/or Theological Source	Keywords: church-state, ethics, Bonhoeffer, Metz	Political Theology
3	Environmental theology	Journal/Contemporary Source	Keywords: ecology, creation, stewardship	Ecotheology in Education
4	Pedagogical impact	Educational Literature	Keywords: evaluation method, critical pedagogy	Theological Pedagogy

Data was collected through document analysis using academic databases, digital libraries, and theological archives. Each document was reviewed using thematic coding techniques. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s interactive model from selecting relevant text segments, organizing findings into thematic matrices, synthesizing and interpreting the data. Additionally, hermeneutic interpretation was applied to extract layered meanings from theological texts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fundamentally, I reflect that the evaluation process as a tool in theological and Christian education also brings the journey of theology to a specific space to look further and deeper into the process in the Old Testament itself. Thus, there is often a question as well as a statement that theology affects every aspect of human life and His creation. Ranging from what humans communicate and reflect about God, to how it becomes meaningful to humans; from individual spirituality, to collective worship, ethics, politics and even the media [15]. But we cannot comprehend the development of theological thought without understanding its origins and background. Contemporary theology helps us to have the opportunity to develop the skills to evaluate, empathize, reflect and identify with God as necessary today.

3.1 Old Testament Theology, Lifeways Christian Education and Evaluation

Contemporary theology helps both theologians and congregations to be critical of church politics. The church is part of the state and the church must obey the government (Romans 13:1-7). The state (read: government) is inseparable from politics, so the church is also expected to be open to politics. Theologically, Christianity assures that the state is an institution established by God himself to realize God's will in this world. This perspective could be explored from the Old Testament theology where God Himself chose and established the nation of Israel to be a nation with a kingdom system [16], [17]. The study found that Christian education increasingly adopts evaluative processes influenced by hermeneutic methods. Evaluation is not limited to cognitive assessment but includes ethical, historical, and spiritual critique. This was identified in academic discourses (e.g., Tillich, Levinas) that propose interactive and relational theological reflection, forming the basis for pedagogy that encourages empathy, critical thinking, and moral agency.

In view of this, the church has to dare to criticize the state so in order for the state to function in accordance with its function, i.e. to bring about the good of society. This is supported by the opinion of D. Bonhoeffer saying church and state receive a divine mandate to serve God in this world [18]. In this paper, I am going to relate the contemporary theology of Bonhoeffer, Johannes b. Metz, and Richrad Niebuhr to the political role of the church in Tapanuli. The life of the Tapanuli congregation, which is identical to customs, tends to view politics as taboo, contrary to the Christian faith [19]. The land of Tapanuli, which is rich in forests and trees, has

begun to deteriorate. The result is landslides and flash floods. There has been massive deforestation. Forests are exploited without replanting [20]. Seeing this reality, I also explain in this paper the theology of ecology by John B. Cobb, Jr. It is hoped that this paper can change the thinking paradigm of the congregation in addressing politics and the role of theologians who take part in politics, as well as ecology. Political theology aims to provide a theological foundation in order to create a more just order of living together in society, congregations [21]-[23]. The political role of the church must help dismantle absolute and totalitarian power and fight all forms of oppression, injustice and poverty that occur in society [24].

Contemporary theologies live on the legacy of their earlier methods of interpretation. Each of the classical methods fulfills in its time the same attempt to interpret Scripture for its contemporary situation that theology attempts for our time. Each of these classical models also links an interpretation of Scripture to an interpretation of contemporary religious issues. Contemporary theology is like other theologies, but not like other theologies. It is similar in that it is a theology that affects the whole of human life, from God, to what it means to be human, to the understanding of the individual as God's people, to worship. It is different in its background and in the way it is theologized. Contemporary ecotheology is the name given to theologians who advocate a theology specifically concerned with the environment. They generally hold that the environment is a central religious issue and that it is important for the church to develop thinking that addresses the implications of the Christian environmental crisis. They reexamine scripture and church teaching to identify traditions that support a theological sensitivity to ecological issues. These ecological theologians are already very numerous and represent many traditions or denominations of Christianity/churches. Despite their diversity, there are some commonalities among them [25].

First, all ecological theologians share the view of a planetary crisis and call for a theological response that emphasizes the dangers of the current ecological crisis. Second, they generally find things in their own tradition very unsatisfactory and are sharply critical of specifically Christian emphases and teachings. Third, most of them find passages, people, and ideas on which to build new theologies without losing sight of Christian images, themes, and teachings. But, according to David Kinsley, many of these ecological theologians do not see themselves as thinkers seeking to change Christian thought in revolutionary ways, but as reformers inviting the church to return to its foundational principles.

Genesis 1:26-28 states man was created in the image (tzelem) and likeness (demuth) of God, and God wanted to emphasize that man is the embodiment of his creator (God) [26]. This verse is interpreted to show that this simplicity and likeness is not meant to equate man with God, but to explain the essential difference between man and animals and other creatures [27]. This is also emphasized by Berkouwer, as quoted by Soewito who said that humans are completely different from God, totalitarian alliter, and the existence of God cannot be compared to the existence of humans [28]. Humans as God's representatives are given the power to rule the natural world which aims to elevate human dignity and emphasize human creativity and responsibility with regard to creation [34].

Yewangoe also explains Genesis 1:28 by explaining that the superficial understanding of the mandate in the verse is due to a misinterpretation of the words "subdue" and "dominate" [29]. Human beings are certainly not allowed to rule the universe at will. Dominion over nature is not without limits and responsibilities [29]. An example of this is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man is given the responsibility to choose between good and evil, and is not the owner of the tree, but the steward of it.

3.2 Societal Redemption in Christianity

The church has to be active in politics, because there is no area of the world that the gospel cannot touch. An illustration of the active involvement of the church in politics is the emergence of the social gospel movement in America [30], [31]. It was based on the understanding that the church cannot be separated from the world in its various crises. This movement emerged in the United States as an attempt to "evangelize" or "Christianize" politics. The background to the emergence of this movement is the social conditions that are increasingly heartbreaking and the church seems unable to do something. According to Walter Rauschenbusch, founder of the social gospel movement, religion cannot be separated from social experience. "Whoever wants to hold the audience of working people must establish some connection between religion and their social feelings and experiences." [32].

The church has to undertake social redemption based on the idea that religious understanding has to be experienced in social reality. A finding and high conception of God is a social achievement and social endowment. The social gospel's sharp social critique of social reality means these movements are frequently referred to as prophetic movements in the modern world. Active Christian participation in politics is frequently also understood as a role through practical politics. This was done by A. Kuyper, the pastor of one of the Dutch churches, who fought in practical politics through political parties and entered into the power structure. He served as Prime Minister in the Netherlands [33]. A. Kuyper is considered to have laid the foundation for political reform in the Netherlands. Kuyper's experience became an attractive example of Christian interest in practical politics by establishing a Christian political party. Christian political parties are considered as a form of

evangelistic organization in carrying out political activities. "A Christian political party is no more than one organizational forms available for evangelical political activity [34]".

There is another contemporary theologian who has spoken about politics, namely Johannes B. Metz, "Political Theology as Fundamental Theology." Metz's greatest contribution to theology is his conception of political theology as fundamental theology. The discipline of fundamental theology was born in response to the spirit of the Enlightenment. This theology is a combination of philosophy of religion, apologetics, and systematic theological prolegomena. Initially it was concerned with the possibility of demonstration and the historical fact of supernatural revelation in the light of the deistic criticism of revelation. Another development was a response to various criticisms of religion in the Roman XVII and XIX centuries [35]. Oleh karena itu Metz mencoba menguraikan makna teologi politiknya sebagai upaya koreksi kristis Metz's response to contemporary theology showed a tendency towards extreme privatization (the tendency to prioritize the self or the private over society, the politics of society). In line with this, Metz attempts to formulate an eschatological message for the current situation in society [36].

For Metz, the Christian worldview gives attention to history and human values. This was an accidental cause of the development of modernization. Therefore, there is a need for politics to be illuminated by theology [36]-[38]. Political theology is inseparable from the concept of politics itself. Politics is understood as society as a whole. Political theology is a theology that develops from the understanding of society itself, which is influenced by the structure of society, cultural movements, philosophy and economics that have been illuminated by the Gospel. The church as the body of Christ should continue to grow and be strong in its journey and can still be used as a stick that serves as a solid foundation in carrying out its role for the betterment of the world and society as a whole. Fundamental theology developed in response to the Enlightenment [39]. The Enlightenment brought great changes to Christianity and Christian theology. Therefore, faith and religion must continue to exist to counteract the growing bad influences. Political Theology Develops Without Political Institutions.

The three examples above are Christian involvement in politics based on a positive attitude toward politics. A positive attitude toward politics basically aims to provide a theological basis for political policies so that society is free from suffering and various crises (social gospel) and the social order of life is organized as justly as possible according to Christian values by entering into the power structure. In other words, a positive attitude toward politics emphasizes the active role of Christians toward politics, whether or not it aims to provide a basis for politics through the struggle for Christian values [40].

Or with practical politics by entering the power structure. Salvation in Christ is not understood only as personal salvation, but in the totality of existence, including in politics. Human beings in culture and society have the duty and responsibility to bring the world into God's sovereignty through human works that are faithful to God's commandments. Niehbur's view of the Christian role in politics is that politics is a space that must be renewed by Christ [41]. Politics is considered to fulfill the criteria for creating justice, but since human institutions have fallen into sin and tend to deviate, the role of Christianity in politics is to reformulate the function of politics to God's salvation purpose for humans in regulating the common order.

From the reviewed literature, particularly from Bonhoeffer, Metz, and Kuyper, it was found that theological evaluation urges the church to engage critically with political systems. In contexts like Tapanuli, theology is positioned not only as a doctrinal system but as a prophetic critique aimed at environmental stewardship and social justice. The evaluation of political ethics from an Old Testament perspective provides a model of divine justice and covenantal responsibility that challenges political passivity among congregations.

3.3 Criticism and Evaluation of Contemporary Theology

Those who claim that contemporary theology is based on philosophy are right. By philosophizing, people are invited to be wiser in responding to the development of theology that is connected to the context that occurred when theology developed. The Bible is the foundation for understanding God, humanity, and the spiritual experience of each individual. Theologizing means finding an understanding of Theos and implementing it in life together. Contemporary theology no longer focuses on God, but rather on how humans respond to God's commands and prohibitions. One of the author's key points is the role of ecology. The basis of ecological theology is creation (Genesis 1:28). Human unity with God means humans have the authority to cultivate and preserve the environment, as it is not ours to own but rather an inheritance for future generations.

Theological hermeneutics of religious texts is now understood as scriptural. Theological hermeneutics remains in operation to develop a theological understanding of Christian witness in and for each new situation. New interpretations must be developed in a way that positively aligns with the original apologetic witness in scripture, without contradicting it. Theological clarity is a constant and critical element of Christian witness, and the same is true of the compatibility of contemporary Christian witness with the original apologetic witness in scripture [42]. Theology, particularly environmental theology, which remains firmly rooted in academia, has received criticism.

Theology's core is to reflect on the things happening and on the things that need to happen. The problems we face today are not due to a "lack of ideas". Theology is about reflecting on the issues that matter.

Environmental issues like deforestation and pollution don't stem from questions of how the Bible speaks about nature. Instead, they're about how we, as humans, should strive to preserve God's creation. I explored the theme raised that Old Testament theology, which takes evaluation as a tool, finds an important way: a historical bridge that is both critical and affective [43]. In addition, there is a dialogical presence as a hermeneutic tool that involves the texts in the Old Testament (their historicity, contemporary applications, and tensions).

This process over time, in my opinion, would become an evaluative space referred to as repetition as memory retention as part of the learning process. Learning alphabetical Hebrew and so on [44]. Repetition is key. Repetition could be in the form of determining the place of learning for the learner, the congregation, or the family. Parents and teachers want to build collaborative concepts to sharpen the inherent memory of the learner. A proposed pedagogy of accompaniment defines religious education as a journey towards a transformative encounter with God [45], [46]. This approach encourages educators to integrate biblical, theological, and spiritual categories while remaining open to new categories that reflect their unique context. Theological sources that focus on ecological responsibility (e.g., John B. Cobb Jr., David Kinsley) suggest that evaluation derived from the Old Testament is increasingly used to critique anthropocentric interpretations of dominion. The study identified a shift in educational theology toward sustainability and environmental ethics, which aligns with Genesis-based interpretations emphasizing stewardship over ownership

4. CONCLUSION

This research definitively confirms that contemporary theology, particularly in relation to the Old Testament, plays a significant evaluative role in Christian education. This evaluation affects theological understanding and various aspects of human life, including politics, ethics, and social responsibility. Contemporary theology encourages theologians and congregations to be critical, empathic, and reflective in facing modern challenges. This research underscores the importance of understanding the origins and background of theological thinking to develop the evaluation capacity needed in the current context. The church also needs to be actively engaged in politics and social redemption. Contemporary theology provides a theological foundation for the church to criticize the state, fight for social justice, and address environmental issues. By relating the thoughts of theologians such as Bonhoeffer, Metz, and Niebuhr, this study encourages congregations to shift their paradigm of thinking and participate in efforts to create a more just and sustainable society. Social redemption is the key to the church realizing religious understanding in social reality and making a positive contribution to the world. The study finds that evaluation is not merely a didactic method but a theological act that bridges divine constancy with human development. It proposes that viewing the Old Testament as a dynamic evaluative framework can strengthen theological education's response to political injustice, ecological degradation, and spiritual disengagement. The study offers conceptual tools that can be applied pedagogically to reshape theological literacy, communal responsibility, and socio-political action. The research is conceptual and literature-based, with no empirical field data. Future research may involve field studies or educational interventions to evaluate the practical application of these theological insights.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions of Herowati Sitorus in this article include conceptualizing the research by formulating the theoretical framework and main direction of the study; developing the research methodology, including the research design, analytical approach, and data collection and processing strategies; carrying out the validation process to ensure consistency and reliability of the analysis; conducting a formal analysis of the collected data; conducting investigations through the collection and examination of data relevant to the research focus; managing research resources that support the implementation of the study; curating data to ensure the accuracy, organization, and suitability of the data used in the analysis; systematically compiling the initial draft of the manuscript; conducting academic reviews and editing manuscripts to improve the quality of arguments and

clarity of presentation; developing data visualizations and research findings; and participating in project administration.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the generation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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