

President of the OTSSA: On the 25th Anniversary of *Old Testament Essays*

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I still vividly recall the discussions concerning the changing of the name *OTWSA/OTSSA* to *Old Testament Essays (OTE)* in the mid eighties of the previous century. The Old Testament Society of South Africa (OTSSA) was founded in December 1957 at Stellenbosch and its journal was initially called *OTWSA/OTSSA* but at a certain stage it was felt that a name change was necessary. It was mainly a UNISA initiative because the Department of Old Testament at UNISA founded a journal, *Old Testament Essays*, in 1983 and the name was considered more appropriate than *OTWSA/OTSSA*. Although the UNISA *Old Testament Essays* was successful its scope was too limited and after long discussions it nevertheless became the official name of the OTSSA's journal in 1987.

From its humble beginnings it has grown into an internationally acclaimed journal. It became an enormous impetus to OT scholarship in South Africa. *OTE* has also become an intellectual force, which has contributed immensely to OT scholarship and theological thinking in South Africa.

We frequently insist that the Old Testament Society of South Africa is more than a society. It is an intellectual space. And the same can be said of *OTE*. It is a physical space where researchers can publish their findings, share their scholarly views and develop as scholars. A space where the most refined work on the Hebrew OT in South Africa can be read. A space where different worlds and scholarly views can meet through intellectual engagement and the written word. A space where people can write and share in the fulfilment of a life devoted to OT scholarship.

One of the aims of *OTE*, which is shared by all and pursued with great diligence, is intellectual and scholarly integrity. Therefore, hermeneutical reflection and critical investigation have always been an integral part of all our written endeavours. We reflect thoroughly on text, method, theology, history and the writing of history. We have always endeavoured to consider and rethink the finest traditions of OT scholarship in the context of our part of Africa and to formulate it in *OTE*.

To put it differently, the twenty-five year long history of *OTE* (and also its predecessor) reflects the important layers of our scholarship like the layers of an archaeological site. One important layer is the struggle with and constant reflection on the intellectual heritage and the contribution of OT scholarship since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Another layer is the appropriation of a method called structural analysis, which focused on the final text, and the importance of language. This layer represents a magnificent period in South African OT scholarship when brilliant work on the Hebrew text (especially the psalms) was published in *OTE* and received international acclamation.

Yet another and significant layer in *OTE* refers to the field of OT scholarship that focuses on the other: the poor, the needy, the oppressed and the voiceless. Put differently: a kind of scholarship where the voices of the marginalised were not only heard but also formulated (in *OTE*) and which influenced our understanding of the OT in South Africa.

We not only celebrate the twenty-five years of *OTE* and the achievements of our journal but we also commemorate and pay tribute to all who wrote articles and contributed to its success in many different ways. Over the years numerous scholars devoted much time and energy to publish in our journal and to make our OT scholarship internationally competitive but also relevant for our context. We are extremely grateful to them.

However, we have to single out the role of the three editors who served *OTE* since 1987. Their endless efforts ensured the proper evaluation and editing of each article as well as the regular, timeous publication of *OTE*. Without the tireless labour of Jasper Burden, Phil Botha and Gerrie Snyman (the present editor) there would not have been an *OTE*. Therefore we express our sincerest gratitude to these colleagues for their commitment and dedication to a scholarly task from which we have all benefitted.

Old Testament scholarship in South Africa can never be understood apart from the OTSSA and especially *OTE*, which published the views of those who served our society and OT scholarship with the best of their talents. May *OTE* continue to be a beacon of light to present and future generations of scholars.

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