

Christ. Though the victory has been decisively achieved, its final celebration and realization awaits the day of the Lord which is yet to come.

The Bible is about "glory, radiant and ineffable, lost and regained. God's glorious presence, whether for salvation or destruction, is prominent in the key moments and central institutions of Israel's history and is decisively revealed in Jesus Christ. Through their sinful rebellion, human beings have forfeited the privilege, as image-bearers of God, of reflecting his glory. Yet through Christ believers are restored to glory.

The Bible is about "clothes, used not only to denote community identity, signal social status and enact legal agreements, but also and more significantly to illustrate God's redemptive activity. From the first act of mercy extended to fallen humanity, the covering of Adam and Eve with clothes, to the end of the age, when the community of the redeemed will be clothed with an imperishable, immortal, heavenly dwelling, the exchange and provision of garments portray God's gracious and redemptive provision.

The Bible is about "cities, in particular Jerusalem and Babylon and their fates and associations. Jerusalem as the religious centre of the holy land, both originally and in its final restoration, represents the people of God. The word of God issues forth from Jerusalem, peoples gather in Jerusalem to honour God, and the messianic king will appear there victoriously. Conversely, Babylon serves as a symbol of wickedness. Babylon is the proud and wicked city that will be left uninhabited and in ruins, whose name will be cut off for all time. Christians are citizens of the Jerusalem above. The clash between the city of God and the city of Satan will come to a head in the eschaton, with the fall of Babylon and the arrival of the new Jerusalem.

Thus biblical theology explores the Bible's rich and many-sided presentation of its unified message. It is committed to declaring the whole counsel of God... [in order] to feed the church of God' (Acts 20:27-28).

A Christ-centred structure

Finally, biblical theology maintains a conscious focus on Jesus Christ, not in some naive and implausible sense, where Christ is found in the most unlikely places, but in noting God's faithfulness, wisdom and purpose

in the progress of salvation history. It reads not only the NT, but also the OT, as a book about Jesus. Even if in the OT religion was focused on present relationship with God, based on his dealings with and for his people in the past, there is a firm and growing belief in the future coming of God on the day of the Lord for judgment and salvation. Christians believe that this hope culminates in Jesus and read the OT as a book which prepares for and prophesies his coming and the people of God he would renew and call into existence. The books of the NT connect Jesus with the OT in a variety of ways, seeing Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy, the ideal to which individuals and institutions aspired, or the climax of God's dealings revealed in various types.

Virtually every theme in biblical theology, as may be seen from the examples noted in the previous two sections, leads to Christ as the final and definitive instalment. Not only do we see Christ and his work in a different light by considering themes such as victory, peace and glory; the momentous nature of his appearance means that the reverse is also true. A host of topics, such as *death and resurrection and *sacrifice, and less obviously, but no less profoundly, "humanity, "Israel and "obedience, are seen differently in light of the advent of Christ. The article on *Jesus Christ could be cross-referenced to every article in Part Three, for all the subjects are relevant to him as God's final word and decisive act, and he to them. Even the articles on biblical people, such as *Abraham, "Moses, *David, "Elisha and "Jonah, refer to Christ, in a typological sense and/or as the fulfilment of the promises made to these people. Indeed, the Messiah is the theme which unites the Old and New Testaments (T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King*). If biblical theology seeks to connect text and truth (to use Watson's phrase), it never forgets that Jesus is the truth.

Conclusion

What is biblical theology? To sum up, *biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.*

Further clarification of the nature and promise of biblical theology is presented in the other articles in Part One. However, in the end, like civil engineering, biblical theology is best judged and understood by examining what it produces. The purists will always want more exact definition. Ultimately the proof that civil engineering and biblical theology are well conceived is in the quality of the things they build. For the latter, this can be inspected in Parts Two and Three.

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B. S. ROSNER

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History of Biblical Theology

Introduction

While some trace the origin of biblical theology to the Protestant Reformation, and others to J. P. Gabler's 1797 address, 'An Oration on the Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each', the fact is that the Christian church was concerned from a very early date to articulate a 'biblical theology' in some form. As far as is known, the actual term (*theologia biblica*, *biblische Theologie*) was first used in the early 1600s, but the attempt to discern a unified and consistent theology in the scriptures of the OT and NT is much older.

It might be argued that biblical theology has its origin within the Bible itself. Summaries of 'salvation-history' found in the OT (e.g. Deut. 26:5-9; Neh. 9:7-37; Pss. 78, 105, 106) and also in the NT (Acts 7; Heb. 11)

trace the continuity of God's dealings with his people. The NT Gospels and epistles interpret the Christ event in the light of the OT, but also reinterpret the OT in the light of the Christ event. Paul, it has been suggested, was the first 'Old Testament theologian', and the same claim could well be made for the writer to the Hebrews.

The early and medieval periods

As soon as the Gospels, the letters of Paul and other Christian writings began to be used alongside the Hebrew Scriptures, and well before the finalizing of what came to be recognized as the NT, these scriptures were employed by the church in formulating its beliefs and in countering what it believed to be false teaching. From the outset it faced the problem of "unity and diversity" (a major problem in biblical theology to this day). The church refused to follow Marcion's solution

of rejecting the OT altogether, and also set aside proposals to recognize only one Gospel (Marcion) or combine all four in a harmony (Tatian). Instead it opted for the fullness of scriptural witness with the attendant problems of diversity.

Irenaeus (late 2nd century) defended the fourfold Gospel as inspired by the one Spirit, and could well be regarded as the first biblical theologian. In countering the gnostic challenge he sought to develop a Christian understanding of the OT integrated with a consistent interpretation of the Gospels and epistles, an understanding that was in turn integrated with 'the rule of faith' preserved in those churches that claimed direct succession from the apostles.

Following the lead of Origen (c. 185-254), the church made extensive use of allegorization as a method of biblical interpretation. This enabled interpreters to find a uniform theology throughout Scripture, but it frequently bypassed the historical meaning and encouraged the reading of later doctrines back into the text. By medieval times Scripture was supposed to have four senses: literal (or historical); allegorical; moral (or tropological); and anagogical (or spiritual). The allegorizing 'School of Alexandria' was opposed, however, by the 'School of Antioch' which took a more historical approach, anticipating some of the findings of modern scholarship. Despite the popularity of allegory, the historical sense was championed by, for example, the 12th-century Victorines, and its primacy was asserted by Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74). For all its faults, medieval interpretation recognized the existence of different levels of meaning in Scripture which could be used to nourish the faith and life of the church.

The Reformation

The Reformers appealed to the teaching of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) against centuries of church tradition, and consequently practised a form of biblical theology. Martin Luther (1483-1546) scrutinized the church's beliefs and practices in the light of Scripture. In general he rejected allegorization and emphasized the grammatical and literal sense, and he addressed the diversity of the Bible by taking 'justification by faith' as his key hermeneutical concept. He focused on those books that 'show Christ', and questioned the

canonicity of Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation.

John Calvin (1509-64) regarded Scripture as the supreme authority for Christian belief. Both in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and in his biblical commentaries he sought to ground the faith of the church in the Bible more comprehensively and systematically than Luther did, attempting to do justice to the full range of biblical material. While the supreme revelation is found in the NT, Christ is revealed in the OT also. Faith is essential for the interpretation of Scripture and its truth is conveyed to believers by the 'internal testimony of the Holy Spirit'. Thus while Calvin was, by modern definition, a dogmatic theologian, in many ways he can be seen as the initiator of a truly biblical theology.

The emergence of biblical theology as a separate discipline

The fresh insights and bold discussions of the Reformers were followed by the period of 'Protestant Orthodoxy', which produced rigid dogmatic systems. A notable exception is found in the work of the Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603-69) who in his major work *Summa Doctrina de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (1648) sought to interpret the Bible as an organic whole by giving a central place to the concept of 'covenant'. Cocceius laid the basis for the influential 'federal' or 'covenant' theology; he also anticipated later developments in biblical theology through his emphasis on covenant and on God's dealings with his people in the 'history of salvation'.

In the 17th and 18th centuries three major trends led to the emergence of biblical theology as a more separate discipline.

First, the practice developed, especially within Lutheran orthodoxy, of compiling collections of proof texts (*dicta probantia*) to demonstrate the biblical basis of Protestant doctrine. These collections, sometimes referred to as *collegia biblica* (*collegium* collection) were usually arranged in accordance with the standard topics (*loci communes*) of dogmatic theology. Beginning around 1560, these *collegia* flourished for about two centuries, and the earliest works bearing the title 'Biblical Theology' were of this nature. While the shortcomings of a 'proof-texting' approach are obvious, nevertheless these collections did turn attention

back to the teaching of the Bible itself.

A second major trend was Pietism which, under the leadership of such figures as P. J. Spener (1635-1705) and A. H. Franke (1663-1727), reacted against dry and rigid orthodoxy and emphasized personal religious experience. Pietists turned to the Bible not for proof texts to support orthodox doctrine (though they did not intend to depart from orthodoxy), but for spiritual and devotional nourishment. Spener contrasted 'biblical theology' (*theologia biblica*) with the prevailing Protestant 'scholastic theology' (*theologia scholastica*), and in the 18th century several Pietists published works with the term 'biblical theology' in their titles.

A third trend was the development in the 17th and 18th centuries of new critical methods of literary and historical research, and of what came to be known as the 'historical-critical' or 'grammatico-historical' approach. Pioneers of the new approach included Richard Simon (1638-1712), Benedict Spinoza (1632-77), and J. S. Semler (1725-91) who argued that the books of the Bible must be studied in their original historical context as one would study any ancient book, and that this study must be separated from the use of the Bible by dogmatic theologians. Eighteenth-century rationalism saw in this new approach an objective method by which to free the church from centuries of dogma and identify the true Christian faith. The rationalists sought to extract from the Bible universal and timeless truths, in accordance with reason, distinguishing them from what was merely historically conditioned and time-bound. This approach is seen in the work of K. F. Bahrtdt, and especially in G. T. Zacharia's five volume *Biblische Theologie* (1771-75). W. F. Hufnagel in his *Handbuch der biblischen Theologie* (1785-89) argued that biblical texts must be used to correct theological systems, not vice versa.

Gabler's definition

It was at this point that J. P. Gabler delivered his 1787 inaugural address at the University of Altdorf on 'The Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each', an address which most historians see as a significant milestone in the development of biblical theology. Gabler was a professing Christian though strongly influenced by the rationalism

of his day, and saw 'biblical theology' as a historical discipline, separate from 'dogmatic theology' which applies the eternal truths of Christianity to the theologian's own time. Later, however, Gabler drew a distinction within 'biblical theology'. 'True (*wahre*) biblical theology' is the historical study of the OT and the NT, their authors and the contexts in which they were written. This is then to be followed by 'pure (*reine*) biblical theology', which consists of a comparative study of the biblical material with a view to distinguishing what is merely time-conditioned and what is eternal Christian truth; it is the latter that becomes the subject-matter of dogmatic theology. On this view, biblical theology is not merely descriptive but is also part of the hermeneutical process.

Gabler's views were not so much original as typical of his day. As the 19th century progressed, however, the title of his address became more influential than its content. Biblical theology came to be seen as a purely historical, descriptive and objective discipline, separate from the concerns of biblical interpreters. Hence it could increasingly be pursued in an academic setting, in effect divorced from the life and faith of the church.

The rise and fall of biblical theology

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries rationalist scholars made increasing use of the developing historical-critical method to produce 'biblical theologies'. Generally these works were used to criticize orthodox theology. Typical of this approach were the biblical theologies of C. F. von Ammon (*Entwurf einer reinen biblischen Theologie*, 1792) and G. P. C. Kaiser (*Die biblische Theologie*, 1813-21). More significant was the work of W. M. L. de Wette (*Biblische Dogmatik des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, 1813), a more independent scholar who distinguished 'Hebraism' from (post-exilic) 'Judaism', regarding the latter as an inferior form of religion. A more moderate rationalism characterized the *Biblische Theologie* (1836) of D. G. C. von Cölln.

Most of these scholars demanded that revelation be subordinated to reason, as they understood it, the result being that the supernatural was largely eliminated from their theology. Diversity within Scripture was addressed by the removal of temporally conditioned ideas (*Zeitideen*), which repre-

sented an 'accommodation' to the thought of people in biblical times; what was left was the essence of biblical religion, the timeless rational truths of religion and morality.

Not surprisingly, orthodox and conservative scholars stood aloof from this new movement, though in time they realized that biblical theology could also be written from a more conservative viewpoint. The earliest such work by a conservative scholar was L. F. O. Baumgarten-Crusius' *Grundzuge der Biblischen Theologie* (1828), which adopted a historical approach but emphasized the essential unity of Scripture. The more conservative J. C. K. von Hofman, in reaction to those who sought within Scripture a system of doctrine, stressed that the Bible is rather the record of 'salvation history' (*Heilsgeschichte*), an insight that was to prove influential. J. L. S. Lutz's *Biblische Dogmatik* (1847) and the massive and influential work of H. Ewald (*Die Lehre der Bibel von Gott oder Theologie des Alten and Neuen Bundes*, 1871-76) represent a moderate conservatism.

By the middle of the century, however, historical study of the Bible was revealing ever more clearly the diversity of the biblical material, and above all the difference between the OT and the NT in relation to their original historical settings. The very possibility of a 'biblical' theology was called in question. Ahead of his time in a number of respects, the rationalist scholar G. L. Bauer had written a *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1796), followed by a separate *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (1800-2). In due course Bauer's procedure came to be accepted as the norm not only by critical scholars but even by conservatives, and a series of 'Theologies of the Old Testament' and 'Theologies of the New Testament' was produced. For approximately a century from around 1870 'biblical theology', in the sense of works on the theology of the OT and NT together, virtually ceased to exist.

OT and NT theology

For the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, OT and NT theology pursued separate though generally parallel paths frequently reflecting the prevailing theological climate. Thus Hegelian influence was strong in NT theology, especially in the work of F. C. Baur (1792-1860) and the 'Tilbingen School'. This approach brought a

new awareness of the historical nature of the biblical documents and of historical development in biblical theology.

The application of historical-critical methods altered the consensus on the authorship and dating of the biblical books. Thus, for example, the belief in Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was abandoned in favour of source criticism which assigned every verse to J, E, D or P. Mark was deemed to be the earliest Gospel, while the Pastorals were assigned to the 2nd century. As a result new chronological schemes emerged for tracing the theology of both OT and NT; the emphasis was on diversity and development.

Liberal Protestantism tended in this period to downgrade and neglect the OT, so that OT theologies came from conservative scholars such as J. C. F. Steudel (1840), H. A. C. Fildernick (1848) and G. F. Oehler (1873-74). H. Schultz continued to regard religion as divine revelation while being open to more critical views in the later editions of his *Alttestamentliche Theologie* (1869-96). The German monopoly was broken by C. Piepenbring's *Theologie de l'Ancien Testament* (1886) and A. B. Davidson's *The Theology of the Old Testament* (1904).

Despite the shock waves caused by D. F. Strauss' *Life of Jesus* (1835, 1836), liberal scholars generally were confident of rediscovering 'Jesus as he actually was' by means of historical methodology. Harnack found 'the essence of Christianity' in Jesus' teaching on the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of humanity and the infinite value of the human soul.

The most influential liberal NT theology was that of H. J. Holtzmann (*Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Theologie*, 1896), while a moderate conservatism, influenced by liberal scholarship, is seen in the NT theologies of B. Weiss (1868-1903) and W. Beyschlag (1891-92). English-speaking scholarship is represented by E. P. Gould (*The Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 1900) and G. B. Stevens (*The Theology of the New Testament*, 1901). Of major importance was the work of A. Schlatter (1852-1938) who sought to work out a position independent of rationalism and liberalism on the one hand and conservatism on the other; while adopting a historical approach, he emphasized the basic unity of the NT and grounded NT theology in the historical Jesus. Evidence of his stature as

a biblical theologian may be seen in the 1973 publication in English of a key methodological essay (in R. Morgan, *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, pp. 117-166), the publication of a biography by Werner Neuer (1996), and the belated translation into English of his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (1909-10, '1921-22) in two volumes, *The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology* (1997) and *The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology* (1999).

From theology to religion

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries archaeological discoveries (which continue to this day) began to provide information about the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world. For many, these discoveries appeared to call in question the uniqueness of biblical faith. Babylonian creation myths and law codes, Jewish apocalypticism, Hellenistic mystery religions and pre-Christian Gnosticism all provided striking parallels to the biblical material, which could no longer be studied in isolation. A comparative approach to biblical religion was strongly favoured. Reacting against both liberals and conservatives who spoke of biblical 'doctrines', the history of religions (*Religionsgeschichte*) approach emphasized that the true subject matter of biblical studies is religion. The Bible is not a book of doctrine but the record of the life and religious experience of the communities of Israel and the early church. According to W. Wrede, the true subject matter of 'so-called New Testament Theology' is not in fact theology but early Christian religion, which must be investigated objectively and completely divorced from any system of dogma or systematic theology. The boundaries of the canon should be ignored: the inter-testamental literature and the Apostolic Fathers are just as important for the historian of religion as the canonical books.

An early example of this approach (despite its title) is A. Kaiser's *Die Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1886), while R. Smend's *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (1893) inaugurated a series of works which usually bore the title 'History of Religion' (*Religionsgeschichte*). Representative works from the field of NT studies are H. Weinell's *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (1911) and W. Bousset's *Kyrios*

Christos (1913). The influence of this approach in the English-speaking world can be seen in two works with significant titles, S. J. Case's *The Evolution of Early Christianity* (1914) and E. F. Scott's *The Varieties of New Testament Religion* (1943).

The history of religions approach remained dominant until the First World War, and it continues to be a major force in biblical studies, particularly in university 'departments of religious studies'. However legitimate it may be as an academic discipline, from the point of view of the community of faith it raises serious questions. Can an approach which totally ignores the canon really be considered 'biblical', and can an approach that fails to recognize the biblical material as theologically normative be appropriately designated 'theology'? It might appear that the post-Gablerian separation of biblical and dogmatic theology had led not just to the division of biblical theology (into OT and NT theologies) but eventually to its demise.

The revival of theology

The period following the First World War saw a major reaction against liberalism in the theology of Karl Barth. In biblical studies there was a renewed emphasis on biblical 'theology', though still in the form of separate treatments of the OT and NT.

Many see the 1930s as having inaugurated the golden age of OT theology. Particularly influential was W. Eichrodt's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1933-39), though the English translation, *Theology of the Old Testament*, did not appear until 1961-67. Other mid-century contributions included OT theologies in German by E. Sellin (1933), L. Kohler (1935) and O. Procksch (1949), in Dutch by T. C. Vriezen (1949) and in French by E. Jacob (1955). The most influential post-Second World War OT theology was that of G. von Rad (1957-60). A notable feature of this period was the entry of Roman Catholic scholars into the field following a 1943 papal encyclical which approved a more modern historical approach to Scripture; a transitional work was the *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1940) of the Dutch scholar P. Heinisch, and a major contribution was the *Theologie de l'Ancien Testament* (1954-56) of P. van Im Schoot. The tradition of writing OT theologies has been continued by such scholars as W. Zimmerli (1972), J. L. McKenzie

(1974), C. Westermann (1978), H. D. Preuss (1991-92) and W. Brueggemann (1997). Another trend has been the entry of conservative-evangelical scholars into the field with contributions by W. C. Kaiser (1978) and W. Dyrness (1979).

The revival of NT theology came somewhat later and was dominated by the brilliant but controversial two-volume work by R. Bultmann (*Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1948-53). A sceptical form critic, Bultmann regarded the historical Jesus as a presupposition of NT theology rather than a part of it, and focused largely on Paul and John where he found themes congenial to his existentialist 'demythologizing' of the Christian message. In the Bultmann tradition is H. Conzelmann's *Grundriss der Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (1967), though he adds a section on the Synoptics.

At the opposite pole stand scholars for whom the historical Jesus is the starting point of NT theology. These include A. Richardson (*An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 1958), and J. Jeremias (*Neutestamentliche Theologie, I: Die Verkiündigung Jesu*, 1971: no further volumes were published). Jesus is also the starting point for W. G. Kiimmel's *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (1969). Other important works include those by F. C. Grant (1950) and G. B. Caird, whose *New Testament Theology* was published posthumously in 1994. Roman Catholic contributions include NT theologies by M. Meinertz (1950), J. Bonsirven (1951) and the four-volume *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (1971-78) of K. H. Schelkle. Contributions by conservative-evangelical scholars include New Testament theologies by G. E. Ladd (1974, revised 1993), D. Guthrie (1981) and L. Morris (1986).

Every author who writes a biblical theology of this type has to adopt a structure. The earliest practice was to employ the standard topics of systematic theology ('God', 'Humanity', 'Sin', 'Law', 'Salvation', etc.) especially as these had been developed in the *dicta probantia* of Protestant Orthodoxy. Schemes like this were adopted by Pietist and rationalist scholars alike, and they were revived, with some variations, in OT theologies such as those by Kohler (1935), Baab (1949) and van Imschoot (1954). Jacob (1955) attempted to break new ground, but in fact still largely followed a traditional scheme. Twentieth-

century NT theologies that have more or less followed traditional theological categories include those of Grant (1950), Richardson (1958) and Schelkle (1968-1976). Though many have adopted this approach it has been widely criticized as imposing an alien scheme on the biblical material, omitting important biblical themes (e.g. wisdom, the land), and imposing an artificial unity on the diversity of the biblical books.

With the development of the historical-critical approach in the late 18th and early 19th centuries the Bible began to look less like a textbook of systematic theology and more like a history book. Theologies of both OT and NT generally adopted a chronological structure, tracing the development of religion through the history of Israel and the history of the early church, a common practice to this day. Such schemes generally depend on modern critical reconstructions of the dating of the various books. Some have adopted a hybrid scheme combining the systematic and historical approaches. For example, D. Guthrie's *New Testament Theology* (1981) has a basically systematic structure, but each topic is then traced through the Synoptics, John, Acts, Paul, Hebrews, other epistles and Revelation. Von Rad (1957-60) rejected systematic categories and focused on the biblical testimony to God's continuing activity in the history of Israel (which he saw as something quite different from the history of Israel as reconstructed by modern critical scholarship). A somewhat different approach is adopted by those who follow more or less the canonical order: an OT example is Oehler (1873), and a New Testament one is Ladd (1974).

Dissatisfaction with both systematic and historical approaches has led some scholars to structure their works around themes or topics which they see as arising from the biblical material rather than being imposed upon it. The classic example is Eichrodt, who took the concept of 'covenant' as the organizing principle for his *Theology of the Old Testament*. This stimulated a debate regarding the appropriate 'centre' or 'focal point', initially for OT theology, then for NT theology also. The difficulty of finding any one theme comprehensive enough to embrace all the diverse biblical material led others to adopt a multi-thematic approach. E. A. Martens, for example, in his *Plot and Purpose in the Old*

Testament (1981) identifies four key themes: salvation/deliverance, the covenant community, knowledge/experience of God, and land. W. J. Dumbrell, in a study of Revelation 21 and 22 (1985), traces five basic biblical themes: the new Jerusalem; the new temple; the new covenant; the new Israel; and the new creation. A more recent trend is to emphasize the dialectical nature of biblical theology: Westermann, for example, balances 'The Saving God and History' with a discussion of 'The Blessing God and Creation', while Brueggemann utilizes categories of 'testimony' and 'counter-testimony' in structuring his *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997).

Some have spoken of a 'biblical theology movement' that flourished, especially in the English-speaking world, from around 1945 to 1960. 'Movement' may be too strong a word, but certain trends did characterize this period, including a renewed interest in 'theology' (without the abandonment of the historical-critical approach), and an emphasis on 'the God who acts', on the 'uniqueness' of biblical faith and on the unity of the Bible. O. Cullmann's work on 'salvation-history' was seen by some as a key to understanding the basic unity of the biblical material. Typical also was the 'word-study' approach to biblical theology, evidenced in the production of biblical 'wordbooks'. The 'movement' is generally believed to have collapsed by the early 1960s, partly due to damaging methodological criticisms, and partly due to changing priorities among scholars.

From theology to theologies

One of the dominant trends in the latter part of the 20th century has been a renewed emphasis on diversity and development within the Bible, to the point where not only the concept of 'biblical theology' but even those of OT and NT theology have been radically called in question. This reflects the growing complexity of biblical studies resulting from new discoveries, the proliferation of methodologies and the seemingly endless output of secondary literature. In consequence many no longer consider themselves even OT or NT scholars, but specialize in a narrower area.

Many scholars prefer to speak of OT 'theologies' (Yahwist, Deuteronomic, Priestly, and so on). Similarly, many NT scholars focus on the disparate 'theologies' of Paul, John, Luke, and even of the hypothetical 'Q'

document. Biblical theology appears to have reached an impasse. The post-Gablerian separation of biblical theology from the life and faith of the church, as a discipline to be pursued in an objective, historical, descriptive way, has arrived at the point where many declare that a 'biblical theology' is in fact an impossibility.

New approaches

There has been a wide diversity of approaches to biblical theology in recent decades. One striking feature has been the questioning of the dominance of the historical-critical method. Few would reject it altogether, but many suggest a more thorough questioning of its (often rationalistic) presuppositions, and a willingness to see it as only one among several legitimate approaches to Scripture. Modern hermeneutical theory calls into question whether any approach to an ancient text can be neutral and objective, and scholars such as P. Stuhlmacher have called for 'a hermeneutics of consent to the biblical texts'.

The last third of the 20th century saw an explosion of interest in the literary approach to the Bible. Using diverse methodologies, literary critics focus on the final form of the biblical text. For example, the literary critic N. Frye in his *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1981) sought to understand the Bible as a literary whole, a task for which source analysis and modern theories of authorship are irrelevant. The Bible is undoubtedly the end product of a long and complicated literary process, but it needs to be studied in its own right. Frye sees a sequence or dialectical progression in the Bible, consisting of seven main phases which form a chain of types and antitypes.

One feature of the literary approach has been a renewed interest in biblical narrative or story, which has led to the development of 'narrative theology'. Some see this as part of 'the collapse of history' in recent biblical studies. A popular slogan is that the Bible is not 'history' but 'story' and some scholars deny any referential function to biblical narrative. Many scholars engaged in the literary study of the Bible are either indifferent or even opposed to a religious understanding of the text. A literary approach need not, however, be based on secular presuppositions and a number of scholars, such as L. Ryken and T. Longman, have shown that it is quite coin-

patible with more conservative presuppositions, including a high view of the historicity of the text. By looking at biblical stories and poems as literary wholes as well as locating them in their wider, literary, canonical context, biblical literary criticism has the potential to make an important contribution to biblical theology.

The latter part of the 20th century also saw a surprising interest in the "canon of Scripture, a subject that has not usually been regarded as of first importance in biblical studies. J. A. Sanders' form of 'canonical criticism' can be seen as a reaction against a historical-criticism that frequently treated only the (reconstructed) original form of a biblical text as 'authentic'. In his studies of the nature and function of canon Sanders stresses the importance of the whole process of transmitting, editing and shaping the material up to and including its final canonical form. In his view the canonical process was marked by both stability and adaptability.

Significantly different from this is the 'canonical approach' of B. S Childs first enunciated in his *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1970) and worked out in canonical introductions to both OT and NT. Childs does not reject historical criticism but is acutely conscious of the gap between such criticism and the use of the Bible as authoritative Scripture by the Christian community. Thus he argues that biblical theology must be based primarily on the final form of the canonical text. His approach is like that advocated in the methodology of G. F. Hasel, who sees biblical theology not as merely historical in its approach but rather as 'theological-historical', and as based on the canonical form of the biblical texts.

Another recent trend is the sociological approach to Scripture. This can be seen as an extension of the historical-critical approach, and it shares some of that approach's limitations, as it tends to be based on hypothetical reconstructions of the social situations out of which the biblical texts emerged. Moreover, a sociological approach is no more free from presuppositions than any other. Sociologists transfer models from other societies, and this procedure may not be valid in relation to biblical societies of two or three millennia ago. Nevertheless a sociological approach can provide a different perspective and can complement other methodologies.

Related to this approach has been a new interest not just in the context of the original writer but also in that of the modern interpreter. One criticism of the so-called 'biblical theology movement' was its irrelevance to the emerging social, economic and political issues of the 1960s. Since then various types of 'liberation theology' (Latin American, Third World, black, feminist) have sought a biblical-theological basis. Some of these focus on the Exodus as a key event which demonstrates that God is on the side of the oppressed and downtrodden; others, on the OT prophets' calls for social justice. A striking example is the work of N. Gottwald (*The Tribes of Yahweh*, 1979), who draws on Marxist analysis to present the early history of Israel not in terms of the traditional 'conquest' but rather primarily as a peasant revolt within Canaanite society. Feminist biblical theologians stress the thoroughly patriarchal nature of biblical society which in contemporary hermeneutics needs to be radically reinterpreted if not totally rejected. Others, however, see a basically egalitarian approach within Scripture, in the teaching and example of Jesus and possibly in Paul (but not in the Pastorals), an approach that was smothered by re-emerging patriarchalism even within the NT period. All forms of liberation theology combine biblical interpretation with a call to radical action in terms of contemporary social, political and economic structures. Such 'contextual theologies' need not be seen as reading contemporary concerns back into Scripture; rather, they can serve the very useful purpose of bringing out neglected aspects of biblical theology. Nevertheless the obvious focus on a 'canon within the canon' raises serious concerns as to how adequately these approaches can serve as the basis for a truly 'all-biblical' theology.

The rebirth of biblical theology

In the midst of a wide variety of new approaches in biblical studies there are signs that rumours of the death of biblical theology may have been exaggerated. In recent years a number of attempts have been made to bridge the rigid division between OT and NT studies and to return to some form of 'biblical' theology.

One such attempt can be seen in the 'history of traditions' approach associated especially with the German scholars H. Gese and P. Stuhlmacher. This is based on the as-

sumption that in the time of Jesus the OT canon was not yet closed, and that biblical theology is concerned with a continuous history of tradition. Divine revelation is not to be located only in the earliest forms of the tradition but in the entire process, which was long and complex as traditions were continually selected, edited and reinterpreted. This approach has been demonstrated in studies of such themes as 'wisdom', 'law' and 'righteousness'. Critics, however, point out that this type of tradition-history depends on a particular view of the canon (a subject that is currently very much under debate), that its use of non-canonical material is open to question, and that locating revelation in the process of tradition history fails to identify the norm of Christian faith.

Further evidence of a renewed interest in biblical theology in the 1980s and 1990s may be seen in the Fortress Press series *Overtures to Biblical Theology*, Abingdon's *Biblical Encounters* series and the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series published by Eerdmans and Inter-Varsity Press. Many of these studies do biblical theology by tracing biblical themes through both OT and NT, not ignoring diversity, but also seeking unity or at least continuity, in the biblical material.

The 1980s and 1990s also saw vigorous scholarly debate on topics such as 'Paul and the law' (J. D. G. Dunn, L. Gaston, H. Hubner, H. Raisanen, E. P. Sanders, P. Stuhlmacher), a theme that demands consideration of the place of the law in the OT as well as in other NT writings.

One unresolved tension in biblical theology is that between the academy and the believing community. The increasing use of the ecumenical lectionary in worship, for example, highlights the fact that for the church biblical theology is not an academic discipline but an integral part of its faith and life. F. Watson has argued cogently that a true biblical theology must bridge the gaps that presently exist not only between OT and NT specialists but also between biblical scholars and theologians. Such a biblical theology must emphasize 'both the ultimate coherence of the two Testaments and the theological dimension of the interpretative task' (*Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology*, p. 8). Some see biblical theology as an activity to be practised in the exegesis of biblical passages or in studies of individual books, authors or themes.

Whether it is possible to go beyond this and produce an 'all-biblical theology' (*gesamtbiblische Theologie*) is a matter of debate. Some (e.g. H. Hubner) have argued that the present state of scholarship rules out such an enterprise, which in any case would be beyond the competence of any one individual. Despite this, however, the late 20th century saw a revival of interest in the possibility of writing a 'biblical theology' encompassing both OT and NT. Two early 20th-century examples come from opposite ends of the theological spectrum. M. Burrows' *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (1946) is written from a liberal Protestant viewpoint, but is more akin to a dictionary of biblical themes than a full-fledged 'theology'. The *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948) of G. Vos is written from a strongly conservative perspective, though it acknowledges a progressive revelation; it is worth reading, though unfortunately it is incomplete. Of major importance is S. Terrien's *The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology* (1978), which uses the theme of divine presence as a hermeneutical key in a study of each of the main units of the biblical canon, and which seeks to uncover what the author calls 'a certain homogeneity of theological depth' which binds the biblical books together. Other biblical theologies include Horst Seebas' *Der Gott der ganzen Bibel* (1982) which presents a sketch rather than a full biblical theology; H.-R. Weber's *Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology* (1989), another example of the one-theme approach, and the more conservative and popular volume by G. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (1991). The most significant 20th-century biblical theology is B. S. Childs' *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (1992), which is the culmination of the author's 'canonical approach'. This volume first presents the 'discrete witness' of the OT and the NT, tracing the development of traditions in each of the main units of the canon; then it proceeds to theological reflection on the Christian Bible, discussing the biblical material under ten major topical headings, and concluding by relating these to contemporary theological discussion.

Despite the criticism levelled at these works from various quarters they demonstrate that it is possible once again to attempt the writing of a truly 'biblical theology', and they suggest

both some of the pitfalls to avoid and some of the approaches that are worth pursuing.

See also: CHALLENGES TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY; RELATIONSHIP OF OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT.

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C. H. H. SCOBIE

Challenges to Biblical Theology

Introduction

The discipline of biblical theology has faced challenges of various kinds since the end of the 19th century. In 1897, William Wrede published an essay entitled *Fiber Aufgabe and Methode der sogenannten Neutestamentlichen Theologie* in which he argued that the discipline of NT theology should be replaced by study of 'the history of early Christian religion and theology' (ET; in *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, p. 116). Heikki Raisanen's programmatic study, *Beyond New Testament Theology* (1990), and his numerous subsequent articles have revived Wrede's proposal. Although these works focus primarily on NT theology, their effect is to undermine biblical theology as a whole.

Biblical theology is also challenged implicitly by those who do not want to move 'beyond' the discipline but rather to modify it to such an extent that its traditional name can hardly be justified. For example, there is a widespread view that the diversity of the Bible's theological ideas rules out any unified

biblical theology (see e.g. P. Pokorny, 'The Problem of Biblical Theology', *HBT* 15, 1993, pp. 83-94, esp. 87).

Thus, there are two main challenges to biblical theology: first, the argument against confining study to the 'Bible' as defined in the canon; and secondly, the argument against the basic theological unity of the biblical authors and books.

There are also challenges which do not question the discipline of biblical theology as such, but which criticize some of the ways it has been practised. For example, in his article 'Revelation through history in the Old Testament and in modern theology', James Barr argues that the idea of revelation through history should not be overemphasized against other forms of revelation in the Bible, for example, the 'verbal self-declaration of Yahweh' (*Int* 17, 1963, pp. 193-205, quote from p. 197). He does not deny that salvation history, *Heilsgeschichte*, is a central theme of the Bible, but stresses 'that there are other axes through the biblical material which are equally pervasive and important' (p. 201).

Similarly, Barr repeatedly criticizes the biblical theology movement that lay behind Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, for grounding the unity and distinctiveness of the Bible in the alleged theological distinction between Hebrew and Greek thought and in the supposed rejection by the biblical writers of natural theology. However, even in his major work, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961), Barr affirms that his purpose 'is not to criticize biblical theology or any other kind of theology as such, but to criticize certain methods in the handling of linguistic evidence in theological discussion' (p. 6). His main criticism is that Kittel's *Dictionary* places too much emphasis on single words at the expense of combinations of words or sentences. Barr has put forward his thesis as follows (p. 263): 'It is the sentence (and of course the still larger literary complex such as the complete speech or poem) which is the linguistic bearer of the usual theological statement, and not the word (the lexical unit) or the morphological and syntactical connection.'

Scholars engaging in biblical theology ought to learn from such criticism in order to improve their methods; rather than abandoning the enterprise altogether they should attempt to write better biblical theological works.

In the present article we survey and attempt to answer some of the challenges to biblical theology. Many of these are related to hypotheses which, by virtue of their having become a majority view, are often presented as assured results of biblical scholarship. Our focus will be on NT theology. We shall briefly state the major challenges relating to the development of the NT canon and to the unity of its basic theology, and marshal some arguments in favour of studying biblical theology at the level of historical, descriptive inquiry.

Religious experience instead of doctrine?

The history of religion approach presents a challenge to biblical theology in its emphasis on experience over doctrine. Wrede argued against the dominant approach to NT theology in his day, i.e. the attempt to isolate doctrinal concepts, *Lehrbegriffe* (in *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, p. 73).

Raisanen has taken up this argument, claiming that 'religious thought is only one, relatively small, part of religion' (*Beyond*, p.

105). Although he suggests that for pragmatic reasons a 'comprehensive history of early Christian religion' should begin with the study of religious thought, he qualifies his statement (p. 106): 'A history of early Christian thought as I see it ought to make abundantly clear the connections of the thoughts and ideas with the experiences of individuals and groups. The development of thought is to be analysed precisely in the light of the interaction between experiences and interpretations.'

In response, it should be said that the theology of the Bible and its doctrinal concepts are not identical. Theology should be defined more widely as affirmations and actions involved in relationships between God and humans.

Furthermore, there is no need to exclude from the field of 'theology' what Raisanen calls 'aspects' or 'branches' of religion: 'cult, rite, myth, communality' including 'historical, psychological and social realities' (*Beyond*, p. 105). Inasmuch as these were part of the early church's beliefs about God they belong to a biblical theology. In other words, such a theology can include a wide range of religious phenomena; it is not limited to doctrine.

Thus it seems that the study of experience does not pose a challenge to biblical theology if we accept a wider definition of that theology, one which includes experiences relating to religious beliefs. Biblical theology should describe the experiences of God recorded in the Bible as well as the doctrine contained therein.

No distinction between canonical and non-canonical early Christian literature?

The claim that there is no historical justification for distinguishing a 'canon' of Scripture from other early Christian writings is a serious challenge to biblical theology.

According to Wrede and Raisanen, one particularly problematic issue is the relationship between early Christianity and Christianity as reflected in the canonical NT. They argue that NT theology should not be confined to the canonical writings. We shall focus on the problem of distinguishing between early Christian literature in general and the NT canon in particular; for discussion of the OT canon, see 'The canon of Scripture.'