NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

If theology is discourse about God, then there has been NT theology, i.e., discourse about God that is based on the NT documents, as long as those documents have existed. But so expansive an approach proves unhelpful: no serious reflection on the NT throughout the entire history of the church could be excluded. NT theology is best thought of as a subset of biblical theology and restricted to movements that adopt that label.

1. Biblical Theology and New Testament Theology.

The first known use of "biblical theology" was by W. J. Christmann in 1607, in the title of his book (no longer extant) *Teutsche biblische Theologie*. It was a compilation of *dicta probantia*, proof-texts drawn from the Bible to support Protestant systematic theology. This usage enjoyed long life: a century and a half later, G. T. Zachariae published his four-volume *Biblische Theologie oder Untersuchung des biblischen Grundes der vornehmsten theologischen Lehren* (1771-75). This was an exegetically rigorous and detailed version of the same approach, prepared within the framework of traditional views of inspiration well established from the time of the magisterial Reformation yet reflecting very little consciousness of historical development within the canon.*

A rather different usage is found in P. J. Spener and the Pietists he influenced. In his *Pia Desideria* (1675) Spener distinguished *theologia biblica* (i.e., his own theology) from *theologia scholastica*, the prevailing Protestant orthodoxy that had returned to the Aristotelianism Luther had rejected. Thus "biblical theology" took on an aura of protest, of being "more biblical" than the prevailing dogmatics.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, under the impact of English Deism and the German *Aufklärung*, a handful of biblical theologians protested against the prevailing dogmatics, not in favor of Pietism but in favor of rationalism. The aim of several of these works was to extract from the Bible timeless truths in accord with reason, truths that were still largely, if sometimes uneasily, acceptable to the confessional stance of the ecclesiastical establishment. The most influential by far was J. P. Gabler, whose inaugural lecture at the University of Altdorf captured the rising mood and precipitated the next step: "An Oration on the Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each" (Gabler 1787). Gabler charged that dogmatic theology is too far removed from Scripture, constantly changing, perpetually disputed. Biblical theology, by which Gabler seems to mean a largely inductive study of the biblical text, has much more likelihood of gaining widespread agreement among learned, godly and cautious theologians. The fruit of such study may then serve as the basis on which dogmatic theology may be constructed. Thus Gabler's primary appeal was not that the Bible must first be read historically or that the documents be set out in historical sequence (though a little of this is implicit in what he said) but that biblical theologians may properly go about their task without being directly bound by doctrinal aims—an epoch-making suggestion at the time and one that has earned him the sobriquet "father of biblical theology."

The first part of Gabler's proposal, the rupturing of the link between biblical study and confessional application, was soon widely adopted, but the second part, that the results of such biblical theology should then be deployed in the construction of dogmatics, was largely ignored. Moreover, the more that scholars worked at a merely descriptive level, with decreasing concern or responsibility to synthesize and prescribe what is normative, the more the diversities in the biblical material achieved prominence. Encouraged to think through the biblical text inductively without reference to confessional constraints, G. L. Bauer produced

not a biblical theology but an OT theology (1796), followed by a two-volume NT theology (1800-1802). Biblical theologies (i.e., of the entire Christian canon) continued to be written for the next century and beyond, the most influential being that of J. C. K. von Hofmann (1886), whose contribution to A. Schlatter's thought was significant. Moreover, some biblical theologians accepted the mandate to produce distinctive OT and NT theologies while still trying to spell out what bearing their work had for dogmatics (e.g., de Wette, 1813—although his push toward the unified was a synthesis of faith and aesthetics, or faith and feeling, attempting to isolate the timeless and the general while the particular data of the NT could be peeled away as the particular phenomena of one phase or other of the history of religions). But the drift of biblical theology was toward the increasingly atomistic, cut off from any obligation to traditional dogmatics.

2. Historical Criticism and New Testament Theology.

The long-standing ferment over the historical worth of the Bible, traceable in no small measure to Spinoza and Richard Simon generations earlier, erupted in the 1830s and the 1840s in D. F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (1835; ET 1972) and in the impact of F. C. Baur's historical reconstruction of how the Pauline epistles, the book of Acts* and the Gospels came to be written. The influence of the Tübingen School was far wider than the law/grace, Peter/Paul dichotomies at the heart of their historical criticism. The posthumous publication of Baur's NT theology (1864) marked the beginning of a passionate commitment by many biblical theologians to a developmental view of critically reconstructed history. Moreover, Baur's fairly radical naturalism meant that the NT documents could not properly be thought of as revelatory in any sense, still less theologically binding. They merely provided information about the first century.

Although few who followed him during the next half-century indulged in his degree of skepticism, Baur's insistence on the primacy of developmental history in the interpretation of NT documents shaped the leaders in the field—not only the best of the liberal biblical theologians (e.g., Holtzmann 1897, 1911) but the best of the conservative ones as well (e.g., Weiss 1868, 1903; ET, 2 vols., 1882-83). The focus on smaller and smaller parts of the Bible and the turn-of-the-century interest in a naturalism-inclined history of religions prompted many to doubt that one could meaningfully speak of NT theology: one must speak rather of NT theologies. And since the discipline of NT theology was disappearing into the wasteland of naturalistic histories of early Christianity, what need was there for the discipline? Hence the cheeky title of W. Wrede's work, written at least in part as a critique of Holtzmann: *Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentliche Theologie* (1897; lit. *Concerning the Task and Method of So-Called New Testament Theology*). Wrede argued that to treat each book of the NT separately was absurd, since each book provided too little information to enable an interpreter to reconstruct the entire "theology" of its author. The only responsible way forward was to construct "the history of early Christian religion and theology." Any unified NT theology, let alone biblical theology, is a chimera. This emphasis on the developmental-historical and on the descriptive remains a driving influence on not a few works dubbed NT theology today.

3. Some Responses to the Historicist Impulse.

The liberal track from these developments tended to produce works that were inherently unstable. Reconstructions of the historical Jesus, for instance, produced a Jesus who was acceptable to the current climate. Further historical work overthrew the construction. Three related but quite different developments responded to the growing crisis in the discipline.

The first was the impact of K. Barth. His commentary on Romans (1919, 1921) reflected a theological approach to the text that had been progressively eroded in the name of history. In part Barth was building on the outstanding conservative historical scholarship of T. Zahn, J. B. Lightfoot, and others. Thus in his 1922 debate with R. Bultmann, Barth was unwilling to allow a place for *Sachkritik*, a criticism of the content of the biblical texts on the basis of what is perceived to be the gospel* the text intends to articulate (Morgan). Barth had persuaded Bultmann to abandon classic religious liberalism; he could not persuade him to abandon the formation he had received in historical criticism of a skeptical variety (a background that Barth himself sometimes held on to in tension

with his own theology of the Word). Thus Barth diminished the importance of historical research for the understanding of the Bible, underscoring instead the importance of theological interpretation. For many this was an oasis in a parched land; for others this was escapism that could not long be sustained unless the underlying historical and hermeneutical questions were firmly addressed, not summarily dismissed.

The second was the tack taken by Bultmann. Attentive to Barth's insistence that merely historical description is arid but not to his call to abandon classic liberal historical criticism, Bultmann, in a series of articles and books and finally in his *Theology of the NT* (1948-53; ET 1952-55), developed a new path. The naturalism and historical approaches of Wrede dominate the work at one level, but instead of eschewing theological formulation or dogmatic synthesis, Bultmann "demythologizes" what he thinks "modern man" can no longer believe and seeks to isolate the real, unchanging nature of the gospel in terms that can still be believed. At one level his historical reconstructions are heavily indebted to the turn-of-the-century history of religions school, worked out on a Procrustean bed of source criticism now largely abandoned and on an assumption that early and well-developed Gnosticism* shaped many features of nascent Christianity—a reconstruction that finds fewer and fewer adherents because evidence for well-formed pre-Christian Gnosticism is distinctly lacking.

At another level, in his effort to make the text speak today Bultmann abandons the historicism of Wrede. His hermeneutical program enables him to find, especially in Paul and John, a kernel of kerygma* that is remarkably akin to Heideggerian existentialism. Along the way revelation,* God,* faith* and much else become redefined. Bultmann advocates using the ancient vocabulary because lay people who belong to the old ways will hear the words and be comforted by the repetition of the ancient mythologies, while the cognoscenti will understand them in an existentialist framework. More importantly this theological content is cast in such a way that it is independent of the historical reconstructions, so that changing historical fashions cannot by themselves challenge his theological construction.

Despite the enormous influence wielded by Bultmann's work, however, very few hold it up as a suitable model today. Scholars with a historical bent find little merit in reading late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century existentialism into the first century. Scholars with a higher view of revelation insist that history and faith cannot properly be driven into disjunctive camps. Many complain how profoundly unfaithful to the NT documents is the resulting theological synthesis: faith whose object is not tied to historical revelation; a Jesus about whom little can be said except for a raw *Dass*, a thatness of his existence; a resurrection* whose significance lies not in its reality but in the psychological faith of the community, and so forth.

The third development was the rise of the biblical theology movement. Influenced in part by Barth and in part by Hofmann's work in the nineteenth century, hungry to be theologically and pastorally relevant in a world rent by two world wars, the Great Depression and the cold war, exponents of the movement developed various emphases in Britain and the continent during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and in America during the 1940s and 1950s. Perhaps the movement's most influential theologian was O. Cullmann, whose insistence on salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) attempted not only to bring together two components that had been flying apart in the disputes over biblical theology at the turn of the century but who wrote in a style calculated to be edifying. His insistence that salvation history is the theme that unites both Testaments has not gained wide acceptance even though only a few would deny that he has rightly emphasized one important unifying theme. In the English-speaking world A. Richardson's more popular writings, culminating in his own NT theology (1958), exerted wide influence. But the biblical theology movement had many facets. R. Morgan (*ABD* 6:479) includes within its scope G. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1933-74; ET 1964-74), which was, after all, dedicated to Schlatter.

But the biblical theology movement as such could not last. In the hands of some of its exponents, the locus of revelation was in God's mighty acts, but the connection these acts enjoyed with the biblical text was less than clear. In the hands of others, entire theological structures were being made to depend on word studies of doubtful linguistic probity (a criticism leveled by J. Barr). *Heilsgeschichte* underwent

several semantic metamorphoses. Hesitations about the movement climaxed in B. Childs's critique (1970).

4. Recent Visions of the Nature of New Testament Theology.

The contemporary scene is flooded with diversity as to what is understood by NT theology, though most kinds betray threads drawn from one strand or another of the twisted historical skein briefly untangled here. It may be helpful to classify some of the NT theologies of the past hundred years, especially those of the last half-century.

One strand follows a pattern of generally conservative historical judgments, a commitment to describe the theological content of the NT books and an assumption that such content is of authoritative (*see* Authority) and religious significance. In succession to the substantive work of Weiss and Schlatter is the shorter but robust NT theology of Zahn (1928), who conceived of NT theology not as a scientific system or ordered religion, in the history of religions model, but as a presentation of the theology of the Bible in its historical development. Zahn begins with John the Baptist as the one who opens the final epoch of redemptive history; only occasionally does he make connections with the OT.

Along somewhat similar lines in the English-speaking world is G. B. Stevens (1901, 1906), most of whose historical judgments are conservative (e.g., he places Acts, James,* 1 Peter,* Jude* and 2 Peter in the section on "The Primitive Apostolic Preaching," before the section on Paul) but whose theology is sometimes cast in the artificial optimism of turn-of-the-century pious liberalism. R. E. Knudsen's subtitle (1964), *A Basis for Christian Faith*, displays his theological interest, but his structure of thought owes more to systematics than to inductive description of the NT corpora.

More recently the more substantial works of G. E. Ladd (1974, 1993), D. Guthrie (1981) and, at a slightly more popular level, L. Morris (1986) more faithfully honor the tradition from Hofmann and Weiss. Ladd and Morris interpret the NT corpus by corpus, working inductively from the text and generally following a developmental approach whose structure is built on generally conservative historical judgments. On some themes Ladd draws important links to the OT (e.g., kingdom*); neither Ladd nor Morris attempts to integrate his findings into a synthetic NT theology, let alone a "whole-Bible" biblical theology (cf. Oeming). Guthrie's massive volume addresses the demand for synthesis by choosing themes and tracing them through the various NT corpora. By and large the themes are dictated by the material; occasionally they have been dictated by the categories of systematic theology. The gain achieved by placing side by side treatments of how the various NT corpora treat selected themes (e.g., Son of Man) is somewhat mitigated by the loss in clearly seeing how the individual corpora are put together, how they tie together their own themes. In any case there is no attempt at integration of biblical or NT thought.

Although Hofmann's emphasis on what is now called salvation history helped shape both Cullmann and Ladd, his influence is felt in slightly different ways in E. Stauffer (1941; ET 1955) and especially in L. Goppelt's posthumous work (2 vols., 1975-76; ET 1981-82). Stauffer does not follow the chronological order of the NT books but opts for a christocentric theology of history (his approach to salvation history), running from Judaism* to post-NT times. At one level he follows Wrede in denying the need of a canon but not for the same reason: Stauffer holds that a canon is unnecessary for the writing of NT theology since it is the christocentric theology of history that runs in a straight line from "the old biblical tradition" (Stauffer 51) to the subapostolic fathers (*see* Apostolic Fathers).

By contrast Goppelt, in his far more rigorous work, builds on Hofmann but wants to distance himself from any association of salvation history with universal history. In Goppelt's hands salvation history is more narrowly tied to the notions of promise* and fulfillment and must not be abstracted from regular history. Moreover, however important the theme is to him, he tries to avoid elevating it to exclusive importance and accepts many standard historical-critical conclusions. He eschews mere description, arguing that modern human beings must be brought into "critical dialogue" with the NT writers. His first volume explores the theological meaning of Jesus' activity. NT theology is grounded in the reporting of the earthly ministry of Jesus. If we do not have direct access to this historical Jesus, we do have access to Jesus as he showed himself

to his followers, and study of this Jesus is as necessary as the study of the post-Easter developments (reserved for the second volume).

Certain works are so individualistic that they cannot easily be identified with a particular stream of the heritage of NT theologies. One thinks in particular of M. Albertz, who studied under both Zahn and A. von Harnack and who follows neither. The first two of his four volumes (1946-57) recast NT introduction along form-critical lines, and the next two unfold the NT's message. Against Bultmann he argues that it is improper to demythologize the NT writings since these documents contain no myths (but he distorts what Bultmann means by "myth"); against Baur he argues that naturalist ("philosophical") historical approaches fail to treat the NT on its own terms; against Weiss, von Harnack, Bultmann, Stauffer and others, he argues that NT theology is far too entrenched in a modern worldview and must return to the NT itself. His attempt to unfold the NT message he ties to the formula found in 2 Corinthians 13:13. But as G. Hasel (1978, 69) comments, it is far from clear how Albertz "can hold on to form criticism which is also influenced by the *Zeitgeist* and disclaim the validity of other branches of research which also reflect the *Zeitgeist.*"

H. Conzelmann (1968, 1987; ET 1969) is the only student of Bultmann to write an entire NT theology, and in many ways his work is indebted to his master. But his work eclipses Bultmann at several points. Whereas for Bultmann the historical Jesus was a presupposition for NT theology rather than a part of NT theology, for Conzelmann the historical Jesus is not a necessary presupposition. The basic problem of NT theology, according to Conzelmann, is why the church maintained "the identity of the Exalted One with Jesus of Nazareth after the resurrection appearances" (xviii). Even Bultmann's *Dass* disappears. (By contrast many other post-Bultmannians embarked on the so-called new quest for the historical Jesus [e.g., E. Käsemann, as early as 1954].) In line with his own commitment to redaction-critical study, Conzelmann supplements Bultmann with a section on the Synoptic kerygma. Further, taking up a suggestion from H. Schlier, who thinks of theology as the interpretation of early creedal formulations, Conzelmann seeks to trace out the trajectories that lead back to the earliest Christian creeds.* But once he has reconstructed them to his satisfaction, he regards them as no more than the objectification of early Christian self-understanding. As a true disciple of Bultmann, for him (and especially for H. Braun, ET 1965) theology is finally nothing more than anthropology. Even his fellow post-Bultmannians have roundly criticized him for the speculative nature of his creedal reconstructions.

Also reacting against Bultmann but in the center of the stream of discussion stand several NT theologies that survey the content of the NT corpora and adopt historical stances that are more or less conservative but are invariably more conservative than that of Bultmann and Conzelmann. These offer useful exegeses and theological insights but break little new methodological ground. Most of them offer descriptive sections to each of the various NT corpora. Included here are W. G. Kümmel (1969), J. Jeremias (1971), E. Lohse (1974) and J. Gnilka (1989). Kümmel's first chapter reconstructs the proclamation of Jesus, and his fourth section compares and contrasts Jesus and Paul, noting not only their commonalities and differences but also their different salvation-historical situations. Thus he is far removed from Bultmann, Braun and Conzelmann. Only Jeremias's first volume, on the proclamation of Jesus, appeared in print. He felt it was possible to reconstruct with a fair degree of certainty what Jesus had taught. But because so much of his historical work is based on a fairly doctrinaire form of redaction criticism, he has been criticized from many parts of the theological spectrum, even while those who are convinced that Christian theology must be grounded in responsible history are grateful for the antidote he provides against Bultmann.

At a somewhat more popular level Lohse similarly incorporates the proclamation of Jesus into NT theology. Lohse's "postulate of nonderivability" (*Unableitbarkeitsthese,* 21)—i.e., his confident affirmation that some sayings attributed to Jesus must be accepted as authentic because they could not reasonably have been derived from the early church—makes this stance possible and places him in the mainstream of his time. In any case the debate has moved on: the more liberal scholars discover little that they cannot assign to the creativity of the church, while the more conservative find odd any criterion that confuses the eccentric with the historical. (In what other field of his-

torical research would the most influential sayings of an extraordinarily influential individual be denied authenticity on the ground that because they were believed and repeated by the individual's followers they could not have been authentic?) The rest of Lohse's work follows roughly the chronological development of the NT, with a closing chapter devoted to its unity. This unity rests, Lohse asserts, on the fact that although the various NT corpora develop a variety of theological syntheses, all of these syntheses are based on the same kerygma of the crucified and risen Christ.

In the English-speaking world a handful of works plot roughly the same course. The volume by M. Burrows (1946) selects themes drawn from the categories of systematic theology and tracks them across the NT corpora. F. C. Grant's large volume (1950) disavows that it is a NT theology, but it is indistinguishable from some strands of the discipline. Grant strongly emphasizes the importance of historical anchoring (he is not far from Wrede in this regard and far removed from Bultmann) and emphasizes the differences he detects among the various "theolog*ies*" of the NT, which as a whole is not more than "a theology in process" (Grant, 60). The rest of the book treats an array of "doctrines" (e.g., doctrine of God, doctrine of man, doctrine of Christ, doctrine of miracles*), considering each in turn as it appears in the NT but refusing to trace any chronological development. By contrast F. Stagg (1962) seeks to highlight the unity within the diversity, as does the influential work of S. Neill (1974) and the more popular work of A. M. Hunter (1957). The contributions of C. C. Ryrie (1959) and C. R. Lehman (1974) are aimed at a popular readership. They primarily serve their respective theological constituencies without significantly engaging with the broader discipline.

5. Roman Catholic Contributions.

Roman Catholic scholars have come late to the discipline. Despite the popular, confessional works of A. Lemonnyer (1928; ET 1930) and O. Küss (1936), it has been the years since the publication of *Divino Afflante* (1943) that have increasingly displayed among Catholics the diversity of approaches that characterizes Protestant scholars.

M. Meinertz (1950) works inductively with the separate NT writings but attempts no assessment of their chronological or historical development. J. Bonsirven (1951) is much the same, but a gentle piety pervades his work as he sees his task as providing a responsible basis for Christian dogmatics. His historical judgments are almost always conservative: for example, he reconstructs the life of Jesus from the Synoptics and John. The later NT writings he denotes as "Works of Christian Maturity," thereby refusing to tarnish them with the pejorative adjective *late*, much loved by scholars whose NT theology is a historical discipline but little else.

R. Schnackenburg (1962) deals first with the kerygma and theology of the primitive church, reconstructs the teaching* of Jesus according to the Synoptics, summarizes the contributions of the individual Synoptists and follows with treatments of Paul, John and the rest of the NT writings. What is distinctive about his work is the space at the end that Schnackenburg devotes to some central topics that recur thematically in the sequence. The four-volume work by K. H. Schelkle (1968-76; ET 1971-78) is structured on traditional dogmatic categories: creation,* world-time-history (vol. 1); revelation,* redemption* and salvation* (vol. 2); ethos (vol. 3); completion (vol. 4/1); disciple, congregation and church* (vol. 4/2). But within each category Schelkle traces, in continuous dialogue with dogmatics, the diachronic development of the movement from the OT through Judaism to the NT.

The contribution of Goppelt has already been described. W. Thüsing (1981) identifies the unity of the NT in two kinds of criteria: the structures of the life and works and teaching of Jesus, as Thüsing reconstructs them, and the structures of christology* and soteriology in the post-Easter period. Gnilka adopts the now traditional form of NT theology that treats the various authors or corpora of the NT separately, with the caveat that James and 2 Thessalonians are treated in excursuses. Gnilka begins with the seven Pauline epistles whose authenticity is least disputed, glancing back at the same time to the generation before Paul. He then moves on to the Gospels, pausing to consider Q and his reconstruction of a primitive passion narrative. John is treated with the Johannine Epistles (*see* John, Letters of). Gnilka goes on to the so-called deutero-Paulines, the rest of the letters and the Apocalypse (*see* Revelation, Book of). In each case he organizes his material by focusing on

humanity, salvation, community and the sacraments (though he admits other themes as they crop up). His concluding chapter probes for unity and concludes that, whatever the extraordinary diversity, salvation is always through Jesus Christ, and the response of faith is always mandated. As with Lohse, what holds this together is the kerygma of the death and resurrection of Jesus (*see* Death of Christ).

6. New Testament Theology: 1985-95.

If one focuses on the most recent NT theologies, those published in the approximate decade of 1985-95, despite the fact that H. Räisänen (1990) has pronounced that the discipline is fundamentally impossible, the diversity of approaches is staggering.

Although much of his writing focuses on the OT side of biblical theology, H. Gese, who represents one wing of the so-called new Tübingen school, has left a plethora of studies that have a bearing on NT theology. (For English readers he is most easily approached through his 1981 volume.) Gese argues that in the time of Jesus and of the writers of the NT there was still no closed OT canon (a thesis increasingly questioned), and therefore biblical theology must be understood to deal with the process of tradition viewed as a whole—not with earlier and later forms or canonical forms but with the entire process.

Somewhat similarly P. Stuhlmacher, using the law* as a sample topic appropriate to this notion of biblical theology, traces developing and quite differing concepts of law through both Testaments (Stuhlmacher 1986). But his more recent work is nuanced and complex. After an extensive introduction to the aims and structure of the discipline, the first volume of his NT theology begins with the rise and distinctiveness of NT proclamation: first the preaching of Jesus, followed by a much shorter section on the preaching of the primitive church (i.e., the period between the resurrection and Paul) and concluded by a section on the preaching of Paul. The subtitle of this volume is critical: *The Foundation: From Jesus to Paul.* Here is neither massive historical skepticism nor a Bultmannian trench between theology and history.

In the second edition of his book on NT hermeneutics (1986) one detects a rapprochement between Stuhlmacher and G. Maier (Stuhlmacher 1986, 33-34), whom he no longer places in the fundamentalist camp because of the latter's commitment to take the text and history seriously, even if his judgments are sometimes more conservative than those of Stuhlmacher and his criticism of the historical-critical method more scathing (Maier, who had earlier proclaimed the "end of the historical-critical method," prefers "historical-biblical method"). Among the luminaries of German scholarship, however, Stuhlmacher, O. Hofius, M. Hengel and one or two others stand alone in the seriousness with which they treat the historical dimensions of the NT text.

H. Hübner has completed his three-volume NT theology (1990-95). The first raises questions about the extent and nature of the canon, evaluates canon criticism and explores what is meant by covenant* and revelation. The chapters devoted to the NT expression of revelation treat Romans 1:16-17 and Romans 3:21 (the self-revealing righteousness of God), the parables of Jesus, the focus on Jesus as the revealer of God in the Fourth Gospel and the Parousia* as the revelation still to come, concluding with some reflections from systematic theology on these chapters. This sets up Hübner for a chapter on the one God and both Testaments and an epilogue on Jewish and NT methods of exegesis. The second volume treats Pauline theology, both the theology of the "undisputed" Paulines and of "Pauline theology" as it works itself out in other NT epistles, including James and 1 and 2 Peter. The final volume considers Hebrews,* the four Gospels and the Apocalypse. It concludes with a lengthy section on the "interval" *(Zeit-Raum)* of grace* that harks back to the "being and time" categories of the existentialist theology of the first half of this century. Despite valiant efforts to identify points of continuity between the Testaments, the last chapter lays much more stress on discontinuity: the NT takeover *(in novo receptum)* of the Old demands this assessment.

The brief work by E. Schweizer (1989) is of mixed genre, simultaneously a NT introduction and a NT theology. The former component offers common critical judgments with sovereign disregard for alternative views. The NT theology component restricts itself to the NT canon. There is no separate treatment of the historical Jesus. Schweizer emphasizes diversity, with a typical scheme for the development of

eschatology,* christology,* ecclesiology (*see* Church) and the like: the diversity is in the canon, not in history. The brevity of the book ensures there is no reflection on the aims or methods of NT theology.

The contribution of W. Schmithals (1994) is in some respects not a NT theology but an independent reconstruction of early Christianity into which the NT is squeezed. Schmithals asks why the traditions* about the historical Jesus should ever have been attached to the post-Easter kerygma and its related confessions. He argues that such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 suggest a link between the theme of the kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus and Paul's theology. From this base Schmithals develops a fundamental polarity (methodologically akin to Baur's reductionism a century and a half earlier) between Antioch* theology and Damascus theology. Antioch theology was apocalyptic,* focused on the righteousness* of God and on salvation and had gnostic overtones. The theology of Damascus, where Paul was converted and molded, had by that time abandoned distinctions between Jews and Gentiles,* enjoyed a christology that affirmed preexistence* and Incarnation, taught a radical view of sin* and espoused a realized eschatology. From this polarity Schmithals proceeds to trace a number of subjects through the NT and into the apostolic fathers.

K. Berger's large, recent volume (1994) similarly traces the history of NT thought, but the picture is quite different. His book develops the metaphor of a tree: NT thought is like a large tree with roots in Jerusalem,* but the primary branching takes place in Antioch. The first Christians were charismatic, nurtured by the OT, and saw themselves as the new Israel.* Those more influenced by Hellenism moved to Antioch. The Jerusalem group shaped the early Roman church and the epistle of James. The more influential streams flowing from Antioch became the Pauline and the Johannine branches. A secondary node in the large Antioch branch generates the Gospels, including Mark, Q and John (in Berger's thought John antedates Matthew and Luke). All this material is laid out before Berger begins his systematic examination of the NT books. These are then studied to see how they fit into this grid, and Berger believes he can detect how the various branches repeatedly cross and influence one another. Berger traces his pattern beyond the NT into the second century. Although all of this generates many novel ways of looking at things, sometimes the speculation is palpable. More importantly for our purposes, there is no significant attempt to seek out what is unifying in NT thought or to wrestle with questions of revelation, theological normativity or canon.

Quite different is the posthumously published work of G. B. Caird (1994). Caird candidly assesses and criticizes previous approaches to NT theology—what he calls the dogmatic approach, the chronological approach, the kerygmatic approach and the author-by-author approach—and proffers another, the conference-table approach. "The presupposition of our study is simply stated: to write a New Testament theology is to preside at a conference of faith and order. Around the table sit the authors of the New Testament, and it is the presider's task to engage them in a colloquium about theological matters which they themselves have placed on the agenda" (Caird, 18). Caird sets forth his answers to possible objections, e.g., How many conferees are around the table? What is the presider's role? What about the troubling fact that the conferees are all dead? The latter leads into an important discussion on how and to what extent things from the past may be known.

Caird then works through various central concepts (e.g., predestination, sin,* ethics,* eschatology,* christology*), which are "discussed" by the participants (including Caird, the presider), the discussion moving on to a presentation of the theology of Jesus himself. The epilogue on dialogue, meaning and authority offers a brief, trenchant critique of both postmodernist readings of the NT and their antithesis in the denial of all development but mere reliance on original intention. In the latter case, he writes, "the infallibility of Scripture becomes a cypher for the infallibility of the interpreter" (Caird, 424). As for the postmodernist option of endlessly polyvalent meanings, these are "Gadarene precipitations into the Dark Ages. . . . Language is in essence a medium of communication. If the hearer takes words in a sense not intended by the speaker, that is not an enlargement of meaning but a breakdown of communication. This claim applies to all uses of language, but it is especially apposite where a claim of revelation is involved" (Caird, 423).

The creativity, exegetical sanity and fresh writing of much of Caird's work makes this volume one of the most useful and suggestive in the field of NT theology. But methodologically his approach is closer to Guthrie (whom he dismisses) than he thinks, though frequently with slightly less conservative results: much of Caird's book, talk of the conference-table approach aside, is an exploration of selected themes as they are developed by the various writers of the NT canon. There is only sporadic reflection on how these themes relate to the OT. Moreover, for all its strengths Caird's approach proves less able than some other approaches to provide a portrait of the overall structure of thought of a major NT writer (e.g., Paul), precisely because of the vertical trenches that are cutting across the corpora.

7. Other Influences That Shape New Testament Theology.

Eight further influences can be seen to be shaping what is meant in some circles by NT theology.

1. Some scholars have not yet produced anything like a NT theology but have in their writings given a lot of thought to certain dimensions of it. One thinks, for example, of some of the work of J. D. G. Dunn, who argues that the fundamental christological unity in the NT is the conviction that the predeath Jesus is to be identified with the postresurrection Christ. Whereas this is decidedly more conservative than, say, Conzelmann, the thesis is surprisingly minimalistic. Other instances of embryonic NT theology include th work of N. T. Wright (1991, 1992) and of R. B. Hays (1989).

2. Countless volumes have been written on the theology of particular NT books or corpora or on major themes within them. Such treatments are to NT theology what NT theology is to biblical theology.

3. A smaller but nevertheless substantial number of books and essays explore a chosen theme across the NT or across the entire Christian canon and refer to themselves respectively as NT theology or as biblical theology (e.g., Moberly).

4. The rise of canon criticism in its two dominant forms cannot be excluded from the discussion. By this expression J. A. Sanders (1972, 1987, 1995) refers to the canonical process begun at the first recitation of oral tradition and continuing beyond closure to our own (and future) adaptations and interpretations developed in living communities. Sanders does not mean to devalue the authority of what was originally said or written, so far as it can be reconstructed, but to elevate the later appropriations. By contrast, for Childs (1992), who disavows the expression "canon criticism" (though it is frequently applied to his work), the final form of the text and thus the closure of the canon is critical: the challenge is to understand the texts as they have been handed down in final form by the church. Childs never abandons historical criticism and rarely steps outside the bounds of "mainstream" critical judgments, but their hermeneutical and theological value is relatively small.

At the risk of simplistic judgments, one can say that it is not clear how Sanders can avoid sliding into an open-ended form of postmodernism, despite his mild interest in the original utterance; this at a time in which a number of biblical theologians are displaying a rising interest in discovering some form of enduring or authoritative theological message in Scripture (Hasel 1994). Conversely, despite his many useful suggestions as to how the Bible can be read as one canonical book, it is not clear how Childs's leap of faith to accept the church's canonical judgments, divorced from Childs's historical-critical judgments, will prove more epistemologically enduring than Barth's theology of the Word. Theologically Childs reaches conclusions that are very close to those of, say, Stuhlmacher. But the latter arrives at his destination by means of historical-critical judgments that leave his thought world a unified whole, while the former reaches them by consciously refusing to make much of a tie between his theology and his history.

5. More broadly the rising pressures from postmodernism are generating readings of biblical text that are distanced from what the texts originally meant. The most rigorous postmodernists deny that the notion of what a text "originally meant" is coherent. Inevitably these new "biblical theologies" or NT theologies use the text to support some current agenda. Some forms (certainly not all) of liberation theology fall into this camp, as do some forms of feminist reading (on the latter see Fiorenza 1994). There is now a plethora of literature that celebrates whatever is novel in a reading, a literature

that roundly denounces the very possibility of any "right" reading of a text.

6. Overlapping other developments (e.g., postmodern readings, Childs's form of canon criticism) but differentiable from them is the rising interest in narrative theology and related literary-critical readings of the NT and of the Bible. The results are extraordinarily variable. Although some scholars see these new tools as nothing more than an extension of the historical-critical method, itself the offspring of the Enlightenment, increasingly these tools are viewed rightly as the product of Romanticism, itself often in conflict with an Enlightenment view of the world. The results may often be seen as a branch of aesthetics: plot, implied author, characterization and the like are carefully laid out with no concern for historical claims in the text or with how the absence of such concerns may itself decisively shape one's understanding of the text (e.g., the choice of the nineteenth-century novel as a model to unpack the Fourth Gospel: Culpepper). Such works abound in insight at the level of details but substantially distort the whole.

7. Similarly, because meanings in language are inevitably tied to a social system, the current interest in the social structure or the social history that is presupposed in biblical books is sometimes useful in understanding the texts themselves. In the hands of some scholars, sociological analysis of past bodies is undertaken with a sovereign disregard for other branches of history and exegesis, usually with the aim of gaining biblical warrant for present fads in behavior. On the positive side one thinks (to choose a few at random) of the contributions to our understanding of the text of the NT and thus of NT theology by W. Meeks (1983), C. Hemer (1989) and M. Hengel (1991), whose work is less interested in imposing modern sociological categories on the NT documents than on delineating the social history behind those documents.

8. Especially in Britain and sometimes in Germany, "theology" can function as a generic term describing the study of anything to do with Christianity. In that framework NT theology may refer to collections of studies on the NT that have only accidental connection with NT theology in any sense that deals with the entire NT, any corpus within it or any theme running through it. For example see the titles of books by I. H. Marshall (1990), J. Blank (1992) and W. Thüsing (1995).

8. Controlling or Defining Elements of New Testament Theology.

The controlling elements have been alluded to and occasionally evaluated in the historical recital, but they demand separate reflection.

Morgan's analysis of NT theology (*ABD* 6:473-83) turns on the interplay of three elements: the biblicist, the historical and the hermeneutical; Corley's (1994) on three lines: the purely historical, the existential and the salvation-historical. Others proffer somewhat different categories (e.g., Ladd, *ISBE* 1:498-509; Via, 369-88). Whatever the breakdown, none of the elements or lines or categories can be evaluated in isolation. One's conception of the discipline of NT theology and of its present state turns on what one makes of the peculiar interplay of the defining categories.

8.1. Theology. NT theology is above all theology: i.e., it is discourse about God. For Christians this means it is discourse about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, about his character, nature, self-disclosure; about his acts of creation, providence and redemption; about his people, their origin, circumstances, salvation, destination. It is thus not to be reduced to the history of the Jews or the early history of Christians. NT theology is theology, not religion. It follows that the track worked out from Baur is profoundly mistaken not in this or that peculiar historical judgment but in its increasing collapse of the discipline into nothing but history.

But the interplay of theology with other elements must not be overlooked. Because this theology is our discourse about God (however much it is based on his self-disclosure), hermeneutical considerations must not be forgotten. To overlook them is not to escape them: it is to foster the illusion, characteristic of a great deal of modernity, that the latest opinion is the truly objective and culture-transcending one. Because this theology is grounded in God's revelation in history and because God's self-revelation in history "has often caught up elements from the religous [sic] milieu and incorporated them in *Heilsgeschichte*" (Ladd, *ISBE* 1:505), theology's relationship with history is exceedingly complex. It is not always antagonistic, nor is the experience of the people of God set antitheti-

cally to all others in every respect. Israel was not the only group that practiced circumcision, the church did not invent elders out of whole cloth and "house-tables" of duties were well known in the pagan world before Christianized forms were incorporated into the NT (*see* Household Codes; Household, Family). Thus theology cannot be abstracted from historical questions.

8.2. Supernaturalism and Revelation. In Morgan's view (*ABD* 6:474) the biblicist element in NT theology "is the tendency (more or less extreme) to attach greater weight to these writings than would be rational for non-Christians. It is necessary because Scripture is indispensable for knowing God in Jesus Christ, and that is central to Christianity. . . . But actually identifying Scripture with revelation is irrational biblicism."

Morgan is correct to insist that the biblicist element is necessary to NT theology. But if by this he means no more than that apart from the NT documents we have few other early sources regarding Jesus and the early church and that these are the earliest witnesses,* such that if Christianity is to survive at all we are necessarily forced to draw on them, he has conceded too little. The God of the Bible not only acts providentially in history but sometimes chooses to reveal himself openly in history, thus perpetually threatening all merely naturalistic readings of history. More importantly he is a talking God, and the very witnesses to which Morgan points insist that not only has this God talked with human beings in concrete historical situations in the past but that he has not left himself without verbal witness, choosing to use the words of mortals to convey something of himself. To fail to see that this is a recurring presupposition of the biblical writers is to assign too great a veto power to non-Christian perspectives.

It is true that an emphasis on supernaturalism without careful consideration of the other dimensions of Scripture can treat the Bible as a magic book and produce NT theology that is bizarre. It is true that focusing on revelation without perceiving that God has commonly disclosed himself in the "accidents" of history with all their "secondary causalities" may end up denying providence, hunting for a mysterious God-of-the-gaps. It is true that espousing revelatory authority without grasping that God's self-disclosure has commonly been through means, progressive in nature, and as often through institutions (temple*), rites (sacrificial system; *see* Sacrifice) and dynasties (the Davidic) as through words is to tumble into reductionism. It is true that the words of Scripture perform many functions in addition to conveying truth*: they bear witness to Christ, evoke worship,* call to repentance* and so forth, and these various speech-acts must not be overlooked. But it is never a responsible solution to meet one reductionism by another.

8.3. Canon. NT theology properly presupposes a NT canon. Many in the name of historical objectivity refuse any distinction between the canonical and the noncanonical (e.g., Wrede), and others (e.g., Morgan, *ABD* 6:481) argue that the notion of canon has no place in historical research and no place in demarcating books that are different in kind from other books (e.g., possessing some revelatory quality). For Morgan the notion of canon can be preserved only to mark out books that enjoy, for whatever historical reasons, a "special use" among Christians.

It is warranted to insist that the NT books are not different in every way from other books written about the same time. But to recognize a canon of books based purely on historical accident means that the discipline of NT theology improperly looks for any unity: at best it can describe the individual contributions of this accidental canon inductively and historically (where "historically" presupposes naturalism). But if the canonical books are bound up with the self-revealing God and are identified not with the totality of that revelation but as one crucial component of it, then the concern of many NT theologians not only to identify differences among the NT books but to work out what holds them together becomes a possible, even a praiseworthy, task. Because of the historical elements in NT theology, it is appropriate to make connections between the NT and the apostolic fathers. But that is not itself NT theology. R. B. Sloan (1994) is partly right to point out that a theological core helped to precipitate the books that came to make up what we call the NT canon and that this core can in large part be inferred by exegesis and historical analysis from those books themselves. But that reconstructed core must not be thought of as canon (a canon to which we have no agreed or direct access): that would be to confuse the means by

which canonical distinctions were made with the canon itself.

The point to underline is that the note of authority that most biblical theologians want to recover, namely, the connection between NT theology and the NT documents, has to be found in the text itself. It cannot be found behind the text, in realities to which the text points or in parts of the text. It cannot be found in the theology that apparently precipitates the text, in the lowest common denominator of the assembled NT texts or in the communities to which the text bears witness.

In much the same way a tighter connection between text and reality is necessary to make epistemologically viable Childs's approach to canonical (including NT) theology. To some extent the later works of Childs depend on H. Frei (1974), who argues that the triumph of rationalism in the historical-critical method during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries abandoned reading the narratives of the Bible as narratives. These rationalists, discounting the supernatural, tried incessantly to make the meaning of the text turn on what happened (as the critics reconstructed it), which was then read back into the text in circular fashion and found there. Reacting against this, conservatives stressed the historicity of the biblical accounts, thus making meaning depend on the history while failing to return to a narrative conception of meaning.

To some extent this analysis is astute. But what it fails to address directly is the relationship between ostensibly historical narrative and the historicity of the ostensible events. If while insisting on the primacy of a narrative conception of meaning one perpetually fails to address that question, one is inviting a faith based on a story line, regardless of the relationship (if any) between that story line and extratextual reality. Neither Judaism nor Christianity is Buddhism: we are not invited to an atemporal system of thought whose authority turns on the credibility and aesthetics of an abstract philosophical system. We are instead invited to the personal-transcendent Creator-God who deigns to address his rebellious imagebearers in "the scandal of [historical] particularity." "Were the biblical narratives written or read as fiction, then God would turn from the lord of history into a creature of the imagination with the most disastrous results. . . . Hence the Bible's determination to sanctify and compel literal belief in the past" (Sternberg, 32). One way of reading Childs is to see that the leap of faith that Frei seem to be advocating at the level of individual narratives, Childs seems ready to take at the level of the entire canon.

If the notion of the NT canon briefly articulated here is extended to the entire canon, then by similar reasoning one is driven to the importance of trying to discover "a whole Bible theology" *(eine gesamtbiblische Theologie)*. At issue is not simply whether the OT provides the most important matrix out of which to understand the NT but whether there is a continuous story line around which the canonical books are clustered and to which each book makes its own contribution. Granted the degree of specialization and the bias of naturalistic biblical scholarship against such a move, the task is daunting. Some envisage intensive cooperation between OT and NT specialists (e.g., Ebeling, 96); others anticipate that a specialist in one area might branch out into the canonical framework (as Childs 1992 and Seebass 1982 have done). But even those who do not feel confident to undertake the writing of canonically framed biblical theology may discipline themselves to careful exegesis that never loses sight of the canonical horizon. "A biblical-theology-orientated exegesis is the only way, in the field of Old Testament and New Testament studies, that a first step can be taken, and a first thrust ventured. Thus, we will not only ask for a 'theology of the Old Testament' or a 'Pauline theology,' but also, in these limited areas, keep the wider context constantly in sight" (Harrington, 373).

8.4. History. However much we eschew all reduction of NT theology to the study of the history of religions, a proper emphasis on history is essential to NT theology. "Biblical Theology is that branch of exegetical theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible" (Vos 1948, 5); or again, "Biblical Theology . . . is nothing else than the exhibition of the organic process of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity" (Vos 1980, 15). The critical expressions are progress, process, and historical continuity and multiformity. Several factors need examination, in each case tied to other elements in this list.

First, one must insist that the historical narratives refer to objective (i.e., extratextual) re-

ality. "If there is anything that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions and philosophies it is this: Christianity in the first instance is neither a set of doctrines nor a way of life, but a gospel; and *a gospel means news about historical events, attested by reliable witnesses, and having at its centre a historical person*" (Caird, 422, emphasis his). Adequately formulated NT theology will not permit a retreat to the study of texts as if they were naked art forms and nothing else.

Second, although the God of the Bible commonly works in the context of history that could reductionistically be explained in naturalistic terms, he sometimes enters this order with deeds and words that cannot possibly be explained in such terms. They may be explained away or discounted or relegated to the category of faith on the dubious ground that they are outside the historian's domain. But such a view of history is imprisoned by naturalistic presuppositions. We have returned to supernaturalism and revelation by another route. At no point in the discipline of NT theology are these issues more important than in assessing the place of Jesus the Christ (cf. Hasel 1978, 133-35). The resurrection of Jesus, for instance, cannot be historical according to the canons of a form of historical criticism committed to naturalism; it is difficult to see why historical criticism that is not committed to naturalism yet that is interested in determining what actually took place in the space/time continuum should not come out with a positive assessment (cf. Ladd, *ISBE* 1:507).

Third, although for the Christian salvation history is thus part of real history (i.e., it did take place), no one should think this represents all of what took place or that it is unbiased or uncommitted. We thus encroach on questions of hermeneutics and postmodernism (see 8.7 below).

Fourth, precisely because God's self-disclosure has taken place over time, NT theology, as part of the larger discipline of biblical theology, is committed to understanding the constitutive documents within that temporal framework. In this respect NT theology differs widely in emphasis from systematic theology, which tends to ask atemporal questions of the biblical texts, thereby eliciting atemporal answers.

8.5. Literature. However anchored in history, the NT documents, like the documents of the entire biblical canon, are cast in an extraordinary array of literary genres that demand both historical knowledge and literary sensitivity on the part of the interpreter. There are several entailments, which again lap onto the domains of other elements in this list.

First, NT theology is committed to inductive study of the texts. The texts are not first and foremost a quarry for abstract doctrines or the source of answers to questions they are at best only marginally interested in addressing but are texts that demand study on their own terms (cf. Schlier, 1-25; Harrington, 363-64). Thus at its best biblical theology has the potential for reforming dogmatics.

Second, NT theology will not on this ground treat the texts as literary forms to be studied on their own terms but, precisely because they are the sorts of texts they are, perceive the extratextual realities to which they point. This is powerfully elucidated by R. J. Bauckham in a review (*BI* 2 [1994] 246-50) of Childs (1992). In his laudable insistence on the theological integrity of the texts and in his focus on the historical reconstruction of the development of the text, Childs "seems to treat as insignificant for biblical theology any relationship of the theological witness of the texts to the concrete historical circumstances in which that witness originated" (Bauckham, 249). There is no attempt to illuminate Paul's thought by trying to understand what it was like to live in first-century Corinth, for instance. Real depth in a text is not found by most readers in a knowledge of the text's prehistory, any more than a reader will perceive Hamlet to be shallow until he or she knows about Shakespeare's sources, successive drafts and the ostensible contributions of later editors. Thus a careful reading of Gospels and Epistles will not endorse either a literary isolationism or a retreat to the most sterile forms of historical criticism. Depth will be found in a rich appreciation of their historical rootedness, their profound truth, their astonishing interconnections and their powerful vitality.

Third, such inductive and historical study cannot be set over against canonical considerations. "The work of New Testament theology is still not complete when the theology of the individual books or groups of writings is presented. The task is done only when we have succeeded in showing the unity of the different 'theologies'; and this underlying theological

unity must be brought out as explicitly as possible" (Harrington, 365; see 9 below). Given the occasional nature and literary quality of so many of the biblical writings, there is plenty of scope for cautious integration and synthesis instead of the penchant for finding closed and mutually conflicting systems of thought in each of the various NT documents.

8.6. Existential Bite. Ideally NT theology will have existential bite, a profoundly religious dimension (a point emphasized by Terrien, though regrettably at the expense of other factors). Gabler's success in abstracting biblical theology from dogmatic theology fostered an unhealthy independence: biblical theology is soon also abstracted from reverence, from commitment, from faith. In the name of objectivity that was in fact too often infected by naturalism, anything corresponding to doxological study in NT theology was viewed with suspicion.

Given the spiritual vibrancy and fervor of the early witnesses, it would have been unthinkable for them to have pleaded their cause with dispassionate neutrality. So it is equally unthinkable that modern Christians would engage in NT theology with aloof detachment. This is what Schlatter (1905) dismissed as "atheistic method," writing elsewhere, "As soon as the historian sets aside or brackets the question of faith, he is making his concern with the New Testament and his presentation of it into a radical and total polemic against it" (in Morgan 1973, 152; see also the comments of Ladd, *ISBE* 1:509).

8.7. Hermeneutics and Postmodernism. If, from Gabler on, classic modernism was too confident of its ability to produce timeless and culture-transcending biblical theology, postmodernism is too confident of its ability to say nothing that is true beyond what the individual or interpretive community perceives to be true. Postmodernism has released us from the hubris of a pretended omniscience only to introduce us to the no less dogmatic hubris of epistemologically determined relativism. Thus in his analysis of NT theology Via (380-81) follows L. Montrose's chiasm as a proper poststructuralist orientation to history: historical study is reciprocally concerned with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history (Montrose, 20). The historicity of texts insists that all texts "are embedded in a specific social and cultural setting"; the textuality of history means that "we have no access to a lived, material past that is unmediated by textual traces and that these traces are subject to further textualization (figuration), when the historian uses them in constructing a narrative." Although Via affirms "the possibility of some degree of knowledge about the real past" (Via, 384), in fact historical knowledge "is knowledge acquired by making interpretive meaning" and "history is about the creation of meaning" (Via, 384).

Via's views are now commonplace among many NT scholars. The element of truth in such postmodern epistemology is that no finite and fallen mortal perceives anything from the vantage of omniscience. All of our knowledge is in certain respects an approximation. But the antithesis that is then often assumed—either one enjoys absolute knowledge or all our knowing is utterly relative—is unnecessary. Various models suggest that one can enjoy true knowledge without absolute knowledge (e.g., the fusion of horizons: the hermeneutical spiral; the asymptotic approach: see Carson 1995b; *see* Hermeneutics). Although no interpreter can entirely escape his or her own culture and heritage and flee into another that is removed by millennia and distanced by language barriers, by patient distanciation and careful reading and rereading it is possible to have authentic contact with another mind through what that mind has written. Most texts are not as autonomous as many postmoderns assume, and the meaning of texts does not reside primarily in the interpreter. Poststructuralists do not like reviewers to misread their books: apparently they are prepared to invest their own texts with authorial intent. Why cannot they accord the same courtesy to Paul or for that matter to God, if he is a God who discloses himself through verbal revelation?

Reflections on postmodernism thus take us back to both questions regarding the nature of history and the issues of supernaturalism and revelation, for epistemological questions take on a different hue if there is an omniscient "God who speaks" and has chosen to disclose some things. Granted our finiteness and fallenness, God himself cannot disclose everything to us. But it is difficult to see why he cannot disclose true things even if he cannot exhaustively disclose all their relationships.

The bearing of these reflections on the writing of NT theology is obvious. The leading

intellectual movements of the day often foster the illusion that NT theology as a discipline that moves toward canonical synthesis is impossible and certainly disreputable. Those who configure the elements of NT theology and of biblical theology in a different way, lightly sketched here, must get on with the task.

9. Focal Issues.

To accept the configuration of NT theology just articulated does not mean that all the issues have been resolved. Among the most important challenges are three.

First, many of the fundamental questions pertaining to how NT theology should be constructed remain. The most pressing of these is how simultaneously to expound the unity of NT theology (and of the larger canon of which it is a part) while doing justice to the manifest diversity; or, to put it the other way, how simultaneously to trace the diversity and peculiar emphases and historical developments inherent in the various NT (and biblical) books while doing justice to their unifying thrusts. Methodologically it may be necessary to do something of both (Dunn 1977) or to invoke a creative device (Caird). But the tension will continue.

In addition to such large-scale strategic questions there are countless procedural issues. Those who write NT theology should ideally become intimately acquainted with the text of the NT, develop a profound grasp of the historical (including social and cultural) frameworks in which the NT books were written, maintain and sharpen the horizon provided by the entire canon, foster literary skills that permit varied genres to speak for themselves, spot literary devices and correctly interpret them, learn to fire imagination and creativity in a disciplined way and acknowledge and seek to accommodate and correct their own cultural and theological biases. All of these elements must be maintained in appropriate balance, nurtured by love for God and fear of God and growing hunger to serve his people.

Second, the issue of the unity and the diversity of the NT documents is not only a matter of presentation but of substance (cf. Hasel 1978, 140-70). The quest for the center of NT theology has three challenges (*see DPL*, Center). (1) What does "center" mean, and how might it be discovered? Does it refer to the most common theme, determined by statistical count, or to the controlling theme or to the fundamental theological presuppositions of the NT writers, so far as they may be discerned? Precisely how does one determine what a "controlling theme" is? Is pursuit of the "center" legitimate in literature that all sides admit is largely occasional? (2) How does one avoid mere generalities? One might say that the center of NT theology is Jesus Christ, but although at one level that is saying everything at another level it is saying almost nothing. Or one might say (with Dunn) that the fundamental tenet of NT christology is the belief that the predeath Jesus is to be identified with the postresurrection Jesus—but this too is anemic. (3) How shall one avoid the tendency to elevate one book or corpus of the NT and domesticate the rest, putting them on a leash held by the themes of the one, usually the book or corpus on which the biblical theologian has invested most scholarly energy?

There are no comprehensive answers. But we shall not go far astray if we adopt some such prescriptions as the following.

1. The pursuit of the center is chimerical. NT theology is so interwoven that one can move from any one topic to any other topic. We will make better progress by pursuing clusters of broadly common themes, which may not be common to all NT books. For example, we might examine how the temple functions and develops in the OT and, in terms of NT theology, observe how it is variously treated by the Synoptists (both Jesus' observance of temple ritual and his cleansing of the temple), note such features as the rending of the veil at the time of Jesus' death (Mt 27:51), study the peculiar Johannine emphases (including Jesus' self-identification with the temple destroyed—Jn 2), chart the tensions and changing role of the temple in Luke-Acts as the church increasingly becomes defined by Christ and not by any of the traditional Judaisms, examine the varied metaphorical uses of temple in Paul's writings, study the complex links between various aspects of temple ritual and Christ's work according to the epistle to the Hebrews and plot the development of the temple theme in the Apocalypse, which ultimately celebrates the absence of any temple in the new Jerusalem, because the Lord God and the Lamb* are its temple (Rev 21—22). In this last step there is no further need for mediation as the people of God are ushered into the unshielded glory* of the consummat-

ing new heaven and new earth. Out of such material it is possible simultaneously to treat the contributions to this theme made by individual books, entirely within the framework of thought provided by those books, and to reflect on the significance of the pattern that develops to so glorious a consummation. This sort of endeavor can be undertaken with scores of themes.

2. Clearly it is essential to treat each theme or passage within the framework of each book or corpus before treating it as part of the larger NT horizon. The comprehensiveness of such work will go a long way toward warding off falling victim to an arbitrary canon within the canon.

3. In particular it is imperative that relatively light themes in a particular book or corpus be teased out first within the context of the major themes of that book or corpus. For example, studies on discipleship in Mark that fail to work out how that theme plugs into Mark's story line that takes Jesus to the cross* and beyond will prove fundamentally flawed. Not infrequently the points of connection from corpus to corpus must be delineated through these major themes. Thus although it seems wise to avoid committing oneself to one disputable center, inevitably the texts themselves will force a hierarchializing of unifying themes.

4. It is essential to avoid the dogmatic antitheses that have afflicted so much of the discipline, antitheses that spot distinctive treatments while dismissing both complementarity and sweeping development.

5. Careful literary and historical examination of certain biblical themes may foster renewed ability to see that the shape of the theme in a particular corpus (e.g., temple and related matters in Hebrews) is tightly tied to the social, ecclesiastical and theological situation the writer is addressing. Such examination therefore encourages insight not only into the way that separate NT treatments may be complementary but also into the way that such themes should properly function pastorally.

6. Time invested in the history of interpretation will not only enlarge the horizons of the interpreter but also tend to foster appropriate distanciation and thus a degree of proper objectivity in exegesis and creation of NT theology.

Third, the most difficult question by far is the relation of the NT to the OT and in particular the use of the OT in the NT. The most recent collection of essays on biblical theology (Pedersen) reflects how strongly most biblical theologians struggle to avoid saying that the NT interpretation of the OT is the only correct one. The reasons vary from interpreter to interpreter but are reducible to three: (1) some think the NT interpretation of the Old so implausible that it should not be given such status; (2) others are so committed to the canons of postmodernism that any claimed hegemony in the field of interpretation must be dismissed with an anathema; (3) others, moved not least by the Holocaust, refuse to be a party to what some label "cultural genocide" even while they recognize that the writers of the NT themselves betray little doubt about the rightness of their reading of the OT.

Those are the large issues that help to determine the outcome when the countless little issues weigh in: what constitutes a quotation and what an allusion; the text form of quotations; the form and function of introductory formulae; the appropriation techniques deployed by the NT writers and their relationship to Jewish middoth; the hermeneutical axioms that govern many NT citations of the OT; the many forms of typology; how various NT uses of the OT fit into larger questions regarding the relations between the covenants*; ethical uses of antecedent Scripture; the place of Torah in Matthew or Paul; the meaning of "fulfillment" language; the symbol-laden, imagination-firing associational uses common in the Apocalypse; the assumption of various societal givens (e.g., God/family/society); and much more of the same. Such considerations are the stuff of studies on the use of the OT in the NT, and clearly no responsible NT theology, insofar as it sees itself part of a broader biblical theology, can proceed very far without taking them into account.

See also CANON; CHRISTOLOGY; CHURCH; COVENANT, NEW COVENANT; DEATH OF CHRIST; ESCHATOLOGY; ETHICS; GOD; HERMENEUTICS; HOLY SPIRIT; KINGDOM OF GOD; OLD TESTAMENT; PASTORAL THEOLOGY; REVEAL, REVELATION.

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