

published in 1607 (*Teutsche biblische Theologie*). The work is no longer extant, but was apparently a compilation of prooftexts drawn from the Bible to support Protestant systematic theology. This usage continued for at least a century and a half, culminating in the learned five-volume work of G.F. Zachariae (*Biblische Theologie oder Untersuchung des biblischen Grundes der vornehmsten theologischen Lehren*, 1771–1786). More exegetically rigorous than the little volume by Christmann, this work nevertheless belonged to the same approach, displaying very little awareness of historical development within the canon.

Overlapping with this usage of biblical theology Philip Jacob Spener introduced a new overtone. In his famous *Pia Desideria* (1675) Spener distinguished *theologia biblica*, his own theology suffused with piety, from *theologia scholastica*, the prevailing Lutheran orthodoxy that had returned to the Aristotelianism Luther had rejected. Thus biblical theology took on the flavor of protest. Spener's theology was claiming to be more 'biblical' than the prevailing dogmatics.

The same flavor of protest soon attached itself to a rather different use of 'biblical theology.' Influenced by English Deism and the German *Aufklärung*, this movement, in the second half of the eighteenth century, opposed the prevailing dogmatics in favor of rationalism rather than pietism. In several works the aim was to extract from the Bible timeless truths in accord with autonomous reason, truths that were still largely acceptable to the orthodoxy of the ecclesiastical establishment. J.P. Gabler belonged to this group, and it was his 1787 inaugural lecture at the University of Altdorf that captured the mood and prepared the way for the next developments. Contrary to what is often claimed, his lecture, 'An Oration on the Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each,' was not primarily an insistence that the Bible must first be read historically, or that its documents need to be set out in historical sequence (though some of this is implicit in his argument). Rather, convinced that dogmatics as a discipline was too far removed from scripture and that dogmaticians were endlessly disputing matters that could not be resolved when their discipline was so divorced from scripture, Gabler proposed a mediating discipline: biblical theology. By this, Gabler meant a largely inductive study of the biblical texts. This sort of study, he argued, was much more likely to generate widespread agreement amongst godly, learned, cautious theologians. Such results could then usefully serve as the foundation on which a more precise and broadly acceptable dogmatic theology might be built. Intrinsic to the proposal was the assumption that biblical theologians would go about their study of scripture with a minimal sense of being bound by dogmatic considerations. The unambiguous articulation of these priorities has earned for Gabler the sobriquet 'father of biblical theology.'

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

In one sense, any sort of disciplined theological reflection on the Bible might usefully be labeled 'biblical theology.' But so far as our sources go, the expression was first used in the title of a book by W.J. Christmann,

How much Gabler really wanted the fruits of biblical theology to serve as the basis for a revitalized systematic theology, and how much this part of his appeal was little more than a sop for the establishment, it is difficult to tell. Certainly that part of his proposal was not seriously taken up, while the first and fundamental part, inductive study of the biblical texts, assuming a ruptured link between biblical study and confessional application – was soon widely adopted. The effect was to tilt biblical study toward a recognition of scripture's diversities, with diminishing interest in building a coherent 'system.' By 1796, G.L. Bauer had written not a biblical theology but an Old Testament theology, followed shortly by a two-volume New Testament theology (1800–1802). Biblical theologies of the entire Christian canon continued to be written during the nineteenth century and even in the twentieth (see below). The most influential during the nineteenth century was doubtless that of J.C.K. von Hofmann (1886), whose work contributed significantly to the thinking of Adolf Schlatter. But the tide was flowing in another direction.

Throughout the nineteenth century, a diminishing number of scholars conceived of their work in biblical theology as the foundation for a larger systematic or dogmatic synthesis. That stance tended to be associated with theological conservatives, who still confessed one Mind behind scripture. But there were notable exceptions. W.M.L. de Wette, for instance, tried to spell out the bearing of his work on dogmatics (1813–1831), though his vision was a synthesis of faith and aesthetics, of faith and feeling – an attempt to isolate the timeless and the general while the hard data of the New Testament could be stripped out and jettisoned as the particular phenomenon of one phase or other of the history of religions. In any case, attempts at synthesis were against the grain: the tendency in biblical theology was toward the atomistic, cut off from any obligation to confessional dogmatics. This drift toward fragmentation soon meant that even categories like 'New Testament theology' and 'Old Testament theology' were much too broad, except as boundary definitions of sources. One had to focus on the theology of the Pentateuch, or of the sources of the Pentateuch; on the theology of Wisdom, or of the various Wisdom books; on the theology of the Synoptics, or of each Synoptic Gospel individually, or of its sources, including the theology of Q (Quelle, an ostensible sayings source used by Matthew and Luke); on the theology of Paul, and of each document linked to his name. In short, so far as substance is concerned, we must deal with Old Testament theologies and New Testament theologies. This approach to biblical theology still governs much of the discipline, and across a very wide theological spectrum (e.g., compare Ladd 1974 and Strecker 1995).

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the flowering of these developments, and some reactions against them. A 'whole Bible' biblical theology could

still be produced (e.g., Vos 1948), but it was very much out of vogue. One may usefully distinguish four overlapping movements.

The *first* may be labeled the historicist impulse. Historical criticism, with roots reaching as far back as Spinoza and Richard Simon, became part of establishment academic scholarship during the nineteenth century. In no small measure it was stimulated by the work of F.C. Baur and the Tübingen school, whose influence extended far beyond the rather simplistic law/grace, Peter/Paul dichotomies that lay at the heart of their historical reconstructions. In 1864, Baur's New Testament theology was published posthumously, and it marks the beginning of a commitment by many biblical theologians to a developmental view of critically reconstructed history. Invested with a fair degree of naturalism (for which Darwin's discoveries provided substantial reinforcement in later decades), the biblical documents tended less and less to be thought of as revelatory, still less as theologically binding. They merely provided information about the first century and earlier. They were therefore to be studied as part of the development of religious thought in general. The history-of-religions school, which controlled much of the discussion at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, aspired to a cool neutrality, to an approach that was usually comparative, synchronically descriptive, and interested as well in diachronic development.

The primacy of a developmental view of history in the interpretation of biblical documents shaped 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). Increasingly, however, a narrow definition of history prevailed, i.e., one that excludes any possibility of accepting as true any biblical affirmation that talks of God acting in history. Its assumptions are naturalistic. Of course, it does not deny the possibility of the existence of God, but denies that history can find any evidence of him. History is by definition a closed continuum. Under such a regimen biblical theology can never be more than the study of what various groups thought about God and related matters at various times. Hence the cheeky title of the influential work of W. Wrede (1897), *Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentliche Theologie* (*Concerning the Task and Method of So-Called New Testament Theology*).

Reacting to the sterility of the history-of-religions school, Barth generated the *second* movement. His commentary on Romans (1933) threw down a gauntlet: it was a profoundly theological work, an approach progressively eroded by the history-of-religions school. For many, Barth's reduction of the importance of historical and comparative research for the meaning of the Bible, and his elevation of the theological, was an oasis in a parched land; for others, it was a form of theological escapism that could not long endure.

Moreover, Barth convinced Bultmann that classic theological liberalism had to be abandoned. But instead of joining Barth's crusade, Bultmann introduced and led a *third* movement that dominated discussion (especially in the realm of New Testament theology) for almost half a century. At one level, the naturalism and historicism of Wrede persisted; but at another level, instead of eschewing theological formulation or dogmatic synthesis, Bultmann 'demythologized' what he thought 'modern man' could no longer believe, in order to isolate the real, unchanging gospel in terms that could still be believed. In that sense Bultmann abandoned the historicism of Wrede to produce a kerygma that is remarkably similar to Heideggerian existentialism. Along the way, revelation, God, faith, and much else were redefined. The gain, however, from Bultmann's perspective, was a theological grasp that was utterly independent of historical criticism. His enormously influential *Theology of the New Testament* (1948–1953; ET 1952–1955) provided a faith whose object is not tied to historical revelation, a Jesus about whom little can be said except for a raw *Dass*, a resurrection whose significance lies not in its ostensible historical reality but in the psychological faith of the community, and so forth.

Today his views are largely abandoned. This is not only because it is increasingly difficult to accept as normative Heideggerian existentialism, and still more difficult to see it as somehow at the core of biblical revelation (thus the demythologizing project is seen as obsolete on the one hand and anachronistic on the other), but also for a stronger reason. Once allowance is made for the conceptual structures that prevailed when the biblical documents were written, many passages in both Testaments (e.g., Luke 1:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:6) approach what we mean by scientific history, i.e., tight linking of the textual witness to what actually happened. Christianity is not Buddhism; its claims are in part irreducibly historical. Contemporary scholars may judge that witness to be true, and advance their reasons, or they may hold it to be false, and justify their skepticism. But biblical theologians cannot disallow historical reflection as part of their task of understanding the biblical documents, or relegate such reflection to a compartment hermetically sealed off from theology.

The *fourth* movement was the short-lived but widely influential biblical theology movement which was strong in the 1930s to 1950s in Britain and Europe, and in the 1940s to 1950s in America. Perhaps its most influential figure was Oscar Cullmann. His emphasis on salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) as the unifying theme of scripture sought to bring together the themes that had been flying apart since the turn of the century. Moreover, his influence was magnified by his determination to write in an edifying way. Inevitably, those who constructed the 'history' inherent in 'salvation history' a little differently raised many objections.

This was not the only stream of the biblical theology movement. Another stream focused on 'the mighty acts of God' (esp. G. Ernest Wright) as the unifying theme of scripture, though acts apart from an authoritative interpretation of their significance can prove very plastic. R. Morgan (*ABD* 6.479) includes Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1933–1974; ET 1964–1974) within the biblical theology movement: after all, it was dedicated to Schlatter.

But the biblical theology movement soon suffered catastrophic criticism. The relation between the mighty acts of God and the biblical texts was less than clear. The attempt to erect entire theological structures on word studies soon faced the withering attack of James Barr (1961). The meaning of *Heilsgeschichte* proved slippery, with quite different emphases from writer to writer. Hesitation about the movement climaxed in the criticism of Childs (1970).

The last fifty years have witnessed extrapolations of most of the earlier stances regarding biblical theology, plus some new developments. We may summarize as follows:

(1) Some of the most straightforward extrapolations have yielded works of great influence. For instance, in the field of Old Testament theology, Eichrodt (1959–1964), though he himself insisted that the discipline should not be shaped by any 'dogmatic scheme,' nevertheless sought a theological center in the documents. On the one hand, he developed a triple division: God and the people, God and the world, God and the individual; on the other hand, the controlling concept in his work was the covenant — an approach which, if nothing else, generated prolonged discussion regarding the 'center' of Old Testament theology. By contrast, von Rad's complex and influential work (1957–1960) rejects any attempt to elaborate the structure of the Old Testament 'world of faith.' Because the Old Testament documents present *Heilsgeschichte*, a history of salvation, Old Testament theology worthy of the name must in the first instance retell this history. But von Rad does not want to return to the sterile 'narrow' history against which Eichrodt and others reacted. Rather than creating a history of Israelite religion, von Rad develops a sequential ordering of the theological witnesses that build up an account of Yahweh's action in history — depending, as he goes, on more-or-less standard historical-critical reconstructions of the sources and their dates.

Similarly in the domain of New Testament theology: some lines of extrapolation from earlier work are plain enough, and show up in various configurations. Some (e.g., Kümmel 1974) begin with a reconstruction of the teaching of Jesus as that can be extracted from the Synoptic Gospels on the basis of standard historical-critical givens. This is followed by an analysis of the primitive church's beliefs, so far as they can be reconstructed on form-critical grounds. There follows in turn

the theology of the New Testament corpora, on roughly chronological grounds, starting with Paul. Although the judgments and results vary considerably, the same methodological approaches are followed by many (e.g., Stuhlmacher 1992; Hübner 1990–1995). A more conservative biblical theologian such as Ladd (1974) varies this procedure by starting with the Synoptic Gospels rather than with the historical Jesus *behind* the Synoptics, since he is persuaded that the Synoptics bear faithful witness. None of these writers, however, makes much of an attempt at synthesis. Guthrie (1981) attempts to escape the lack of synthesis by tracing a rich variety of themes across the New Testament corpora. This produces a certain gain in perspective, but at the very considerable expense of losing sight of the distinctive emphases and contributions of each corpus. Caird's conference-table approach (1994) is more creative, but shares Guthrie's methodological limitations.

(2) Approaches that rely on a fairly radical application of historical criticism, usually tied to a 'narrow' understanding of history, tend to produce idiosyncratic results. The work of Schmithals (1994), for instance, is less a New Testament theology than an independent reconstruction of early Christianity (shades of Wrede) into which the New Testament is squeezed. Attempting to find a reason why the traditions about the historical Jesus should have been connected with the post-Easter kerygma, he fastens on such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 and links between the theme of the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching and Paul's theology. From this base Schmithals develops a fundamental polarity between Antioch theology (typically apocalyptic, focused on the righteousness of God, and with gnostic tendencies) and Damascus theology (characterized by high Christology, real incarnation, a radical view of sin, realized eschatology) – a polarity which is then traced in various ways through the New Testament documents and on into the Apostolic Fathers. Berger's large volume (1994) develops the analogy of the tree: New Testament thought is like a tree with roots in Jerusalem, but with the primary branching taking place in Antioch. The Jerusalem believers shaped the early Roman church and the Epistle of James; believers more influenced by Hellenism moved to Antioch and became the source of the Pauline and Johannine streams. A secondary node in the Antioch branch generates the Synoptic Gospels, including Mark, Q, and John (which according to Berger antedates Matthew and Luke). All this Berger lays out before his systematic examination of the New Testament documents. The examination itself places the documents within the established grid. Berger thinks he can detect how the various branches repeatedly cross and influence one another. There is no significant attempt to seek out what is unifying in New Testament thought.

(3) Roman Catholic contributions to the discipline were negligible until 1950. The earlier popular and

confessional works of Lemonnyer (1928) and Küss (1936) broke little new ground. Since the publication of *Divino Afflante* (1943), however, Catholic scholars have gradually come to display the diversity of approaches to biblical theology that characterize their Protestant colleagues. Meinertz (1950) works inductively and descriptively with the New Testament corpora, but attempts no evaluation of their chronological order or historical development. Bonsirven (1931–1951) is not dissimilar, but is suffused with gentle piety. It was Schnackenburg (1962–1965) who, in the domain of New Testament theology, broke into the main stream of discussion. After first dealing with the kerygma and the theology of the primitive church, he reconstructs the teaching of Jesus according to the Synoptics, summarizes the contribution of the individual synoptists, and then progressively examines Paul, John, and the rest of the New Testament writings.

Meanwhile, Roman Catholic Old Testamentologies were written by van Imschoot (1954–1956), J.L. McKenzie (1974), and Mattioli (1981). Both Schelkle (ET 1968–1976) and Harrington (1973) wrote a biblical theology of the entire Christian Bible – the former a four-volume work structured more-or-less in traditional dogmatic categories, but concerned to trace those categories from the Old Testament through Second Temple Judaism to the New Testament. By the end of this period, mainstream Roman Catholic biblical theologies could not easily be distinguished from, their Protestant counterparts (e.g., Goppelt 1981–1982, Thüsing 1981, Gnilka 1989).

(4) Biblical theology has been increasingly shaped by various perspectives on the canon or on 'canon criticism.' The last twenty years have witnessed a gentle revival of what the Germans call *eine gesamtbiblische Theologie*, a 'whole Bible theology,' what Barr (somewhat dismissively) refers to as 'panbiblical theology.' Sometimes this is the product of strong confessionalism: if the canon is considered in any sense to be the product, ultimately, of one Mind or Actor, then scholars may responsibly pursue its unity within its diverse movements.

But two movements have most commonly been tied to the rubric 'canon criticism.' The *first* is the communitarian stance of J.A. Sanders and his disciples. Sanders does not content himself with the final form of the canonical documents. It is precisely their growth and development that interest him, and in particular the changing communitarian experiences and interests that such changes reflect. The *second* (and more influential) form of canon criticism is found in the work of Brevard Childs and his followers (though Childs himself does not now use the category for his own work). Childs allows only the final form of the canon to shape his theological synthesis. Unlike Sanders, Childs is little interested in delineating the communitarian interests that produced our documents, and not at all interested

in ostensible extracanonical influences. The Christian church recognizes a restrictive canon (whose borders are a little fuzzy as one moves from group to group), and if we are Christians that must be the framework in which we do our theological reflection. Ultimately, Childs is interested in using the biblical documents of both Testaments to show how, together, they justify a more-or-less traditional, orthodox theology, as expressed in postbiblical categories. Although much of his work is fresh and stimulating, he has sometimes been charged with 'canonical fundamentalism' because his reason for using the canon as his boundary is not well defended (since he rejects any traditional view of scriptural authority). Childs emerges with a unity of result, but it is less than clear how he gets there as long as the unity of the foundation documents is affirmed by little more than the results (cf. Noble 1995).

(5) The impact of postmodernism on the discipline of biblical theology has begun to be felt, and will certainly increase in years ahead. Some postmodernists criticize the earlier 'biblical theology movement' for being too 'modernist' in its epistemology (e.g., PENCHANSKY). Jeanrond provides a definition of biblical theology that 'maximizes diversity and competing perspectives, rebukes all systematic theology, encourages all nondogmatic models and paradigms,' and eschews any hint of unity. Brueggemann's recent Old Testament theology (1997), wonderfully stimulating and innovative, greatly stresses the virtue of imagination, constantly insists on interpreting individual biblical narratives independently of the larger narrative of its corpus (still less of the biblical metanarrative), and builds into its very structure mutually contradictory options. In other words, it organizes its material into core testimony, countertestimony, unsolicited testimony, and embodied testimony. An example of the outworking of the first two (core testimony and countertestimony) occurs in Brueggemann's treatment of Exodus 34:6-7. This 'credo,' according to Brueggemann, embraces a 'besetting tension not between opposing theological traditions, but in the very life, character, and person of Yahweh': between, on the one hand, Yahweh's solidarity with his people and gracious fidelity, and, on the other, his sovereign, sometimes excessive and destructive self-regard. The net result, of course, is a picture of a god whom Brueggemann is happy to embrace, but scarcely one that can reform his perspectivalism.

(6) Despite repeated pronouncements that the 'biblical theology movement' of the first half of the century was dead, biblical theology has renewed itself and begun to flourish anew in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The journal *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* has been published for over fifteen years, *Horizons in Biblical Theology* for more than twenty. Major volumes in the field are complemented by countless others. Although enormous diversity of perspective is still the order of the day, the best of this work is

enriched by fresh thinking about literary genre, speech act theory, intertextuality, and, more broadly, the use of the Old Testament in the New.

(7) At the same time, one cannot ignore the condemning voices who view askance all or part of the biblical theology project. We may mention two of the more articulate of these voices. Räisänen (1990) is convinced that New Testament theology in any integrative sense is a chimera: the divergences are so great that the pursuit of unity is futile. Barr's recent volume (1999), though it pursues certain biblical theologians intemperately (especially Childs), is at best cautious about the rest of the discipline, especially if it attempts to clothe itself in anything that smacks of the normative or the revelatory.

At the beginning of a new millennium, biblical theology stands on the threshold of major advance. On the one hand, the diversity of the traditions and hermeneutical assumptions that have gone into its history has left the movement in some serious disarray. There is still no broad agreement on such major issues as the nature of revelation, the significance of the canon, the relationships between theological reflection and history, and much more – all of which bear on the very definition of the enterprise. On the other hand, enough groundbreaking work has been done that a path has been cleared for major, creative syntheses to take place, syntheses that do not for a moment downplay the diversities of the biblical corpora but that refuse to succumb to the minimalism of those who think 'whole Bible' biblical theology is a chimerical vision.

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