

I. HISTORY, METHOD AND NATURE OF THE NTT

2. History and methods

- **Johann Philipp GABLER:** considered as founder of modern Biblical Theology, in his inaugural lecture to the Faculty of Altdorf, Germany, 1787.

- ✓ Goal: to distinguish Scriptures and Dogma
Biblical theology has to be “pure and unmixed with foreign elements” that would provide dogmatic theology with the universal and unchanging truths of Scriptures.
- ✓ Biblical theology is historical in origin;
Dogmatic theology is didactic in nature, “teaching what each theologian philosophises rationally about divine things, according to the measure of his ability or of the times, age, place, sect, school, and other similar factors”.
- ✓ Biblical theology as befits its historical approach, is “always in accord with itself”, even though it may be elaborated in different ways, whereas Dogmatic theology is subject to change.
- ✓ Biblical theology has two tasks (for Gabler):
 - (1) To provide an accurate historical description of the ideas found in the sacred writings
 - (2) To compare these ideas with each other in order to determine which are universal and enduring. In this way, biblical theology can provide dogmatic theology with the enduring and universal truths of Scriptures.

N.B: Most of scholars followed the first Gabler’s project (task), a historical presentation of the theology in Scriptures, abandoning the second one – providing dogmatic theology with the universal truths of Scriptures.

- **Georg Lorenz Bauer:** marked the beginning of NT Theology as an independent discipline: *Biblical Theology of New Testament*, a Four-volume work, 1800-1802.

- **Bernhard Weiss** (1868) and Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (1896-1897): wrote comprehensive handbooks of NT theology that meticulously examined the doctrinal system of the various NT writings.

- **William Wrede**, in his essay *The Task and Method of NT Theology* (1897) called for a purely historical approach, but with different note. For him, NTT should be “totally indifferent to all dogma and systematic theology” no longer confined by the limit of the canon of the doctrine of inspiration. Whereas Holtzmann’s NTT sought to set forth “in a Scientific way the religious and ethical content of the canonical writings of the NT”, Wrede advocated “the history of early Christian religion and theology”. For him, NT Theology is about “*what was believed, thought, taught, hoped, required and striven for* the earliest period of Christianity, not what certain writings say about faith, doctrine, hope, etc.

Conclusion of Wrede: to change the name of the discipline, from “NTT” to “Early Christian history of religion”, or “the history of early Christian religion and theology”

=== No restriction to the canonical writings of the NT

- **Rudolf Bultmann’s** *Theology of the NT* (1948-1953): a kind of marriage of existential philosophy and history of religion approach (beyond the canon, as Wrede, but a really theological work, because kerygmatic theology....Even he is essentially theology of Paul and John.

- 1990: a new period in NT Theology

- **Heikki Raisanen**, *Beyond NT Theology*: return to Wrede’s proposal but in a modified form:

NTT should be replaced with 2 different projects:

(1)The history of early Christian thought, and

(2)Critical, philosophical ethical and/or theological reflection on the NT as well as on its influence on our history and its significance for contemporary life

- **Gerd Theissen**, *The religion of the Earliest Churches*, 1999: NT Theology describes the Christian faith or primitive Christian religion for those who are not necessary believers.

-Against Raisanen and Wrede,

Peter Balla (1997) defended the discipline of NTT, clarifying the following points:

- (1) that historical study does not exclude the study of theology if the definition of theology is understood broadly enough;
- (2) that there are important arguments rooted in history for limiting NT Theology to the writings of the canon;
- (3) that the formation of the canon was not an arbitrary ecclesiastical decision;
- (4) and that there is an unifying theology in the NT rooted in early creedal formulas. Accordingly, New Testament Theology is a descriptive, historical enterprise that deals with the canonical writings of the NT. It is not a normative discipline, nor should it try to prove the claims of the NT. One need not be a believer to practice it.

- **A.K.M. Adams** (1995), against all aspects of the modern projects of NTT, challenging this modernity:

- (1) an opposition to tradition;
- (2) a concern with questions of chronology;
- (3) a commitment to a rationalized scholarly practice, and
- (4) a stance that is intellectually elitist and antipopulist;

He proposes a **postmodern NT Theology** which would formulate “an interpretation that begins with the sense one makes of the NT” and then restate it in different way (canonized texts + theologian or audiences sense of the NT).

The task is neither the history of early Christianity (Wrede, Räisänen) nor a historical description of the Theology in the NT (Balla), but a theological interpretation that makes sense of the NT.

3. Recent approaches

A. Diachronic approaches

This approaches investigate the theology of individual writings or blocks of material in a chronological order.

- **Redactional history** : structure of thought, in relation to their own historical and literary contexts ; NT conceptions on the basis of the theological (church) traditions they had received ; theology of the NT writers in light of their editorial activity.

Ex. : Georg Strecker : NTT= Theologies of Paul ; The Synoptic Gospels, the Johannine school (including Revelation) ; the deutero-Pauline writings, and the Catholic letters (Hb, 1 P, Jude and 2 P, and James)

- **Salvation/Redemption History** (19th and 20th century):

Cullmann never wrote a comprehensive NT theology, in three major works he defended salvation history as the hermeneutical key to NT theology.

Salvation history was one of the leading motifs of the "biblical-theology movement" and had immense influence in Roman Catholicism, especially in religious education.

B. Thematic approaches

== Identifying and linking different themes or sub-domains, even, sometimes, considering the historically line.

- **G.B. Caird**

+ NTT : historical discipline whose puprose is **descriptive** rather than dogmatic and apologetic.

+ NTT : reconstruction of the past, a past accessible to us through the interrogation of witnesses.

It deals with questions of revelation, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and christology.

- François Vouga

+ NTT : theological and hermeneutical interpretation that concentrates on the human subject in light of God's revelation in Christ.

+The writings of the NT are concerned with a new understanding of human existence and demand to be read and understood as if written *for us*.

+ Two consequences

(1) A NT Theology is not an introduction to the NT or a history of its literature.

(2)The discipline should investigate the relevance of the NT writings for the Christian faith

+ Unity and diversity of NT theology : two moments of the same dialectic moment of unique self-definition of christianity. We find in the NT, the dialogue and controversy over the great themes of Christian theology (what is the gospel, the kingdom, salvation, life, faith, hope, love ?)

+ Vouga : dialogue of the writings about different themes.

C. Both chronological and Thematic approaches

== Mixing history issues (traditions, chronology, redaction) and topics in their literary linking

D. Social Sciences approaches

- Eduard Schillebeeckx'

"Social-scientific methods" is an umbrella phrase for a host of emergent subdisciplines: study of social facts in early Christian texts, social history involving "political history and theology within an informed theoretical framework," study of social organization, forces, and institutions, and probing of the social world—"what it felt like to live in a world described by the symbols, rituals, and language of early Christianity."

This description shows clearly the value of these methods for disclosing "the world within which and from which" the biblical texts emerged. They also enable interpreters to speak more concretely about early Christian "experience."

4. The nature of the New Testament Theology

To illustrate some of the problems involved in this issue, it may be helpful to set out the following questions:

- Is there such an entity as 'New Testament theology'?
- If so, how does it differ from study of the thought of early Christianity?
- Is New Testament theology inherently confessional?
- What is/should be included in a New Testament theology (anything in the New Testament? Or only particular elements, e.g. 'highlights' such as Paul and John)?
- Does the teaching of the historical Jesus belong within a New Testament theology?
- Is a New Testament theology a theology of texts or of historical authors?
- Is 'the' theology of the New Testament a single entity, or a collection of different theologies?
- Is the search for a unity in possible diversity desirable and/or justifiable?
- Is New Testament theology an attempt to systematize what the text meant or an attempt to illuminate faith and practice in the contemporary world?

(Cf. Rowland, *The nature of NTT*, Preface, p. xi).