

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. For ex.

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 and 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, *Challenges to NT Theology*, 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 formulation 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, NT Theology is a descriptive, historical enterprise that deals with the canonical writings of the NT. One need not be a believer to practice it.

-**A.K.M Adam**, *Making sense of NTT...*, 1995, criticizes different aspects of the modern project of NT Theology inaugurated by Gabler. The modernity he challenged is: (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 antipolulist...

Adam 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 (continuation of the discourse of the canonized text + Theologian or audience’s sense of the NT). Focus to canon+ Reflection.

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

Method

1-Chronological

2-Thematical

3- The Both