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COURSE CODE: TH 311

COURSE: Theology of the New Testament

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ANSWER QUESTION ONE AND ANY OTHER

1. MANDATORY QUESTION

"The New Testament Theology" is the title of some academic syllabi (courses). Does it exist?

It exists as a historical subject. Below we presented our reasons, relying on some New Testament Scholars. To answer the above question we must first of all define what is "*New Testament Theology about?*" The answers to this question are so many and so various that they would appear to be largely dependent on the understanding of those who attempt to define it. To the New Testament scholars, however, New Testament theology is primarily an historical discipline. Our difficulties lie chiefly in knowing how to approach it and analyses it.

New Testament Theology is a historical discipline, a product of the 19th century division of Biblical theology into Old Testament and New Testament section. The process which led to a New Testament Theology was exclusively protestant. Catholic interest in New Testament theology was stimulated by the encyclical *Divina Afflante Spiritu* (1943) which called for works on the theological content of the individual passages and books.

There is no perfect definition, but we have various approaches to define New Testament Theology: On one hand, some scholars say that New Testament Theology is concerned with something *outside the text* (*the text becomes the access to the real subject matter of New Testament Theology*). William Wrede: the proper subject of New Testament theology is the history of early Christian religion and theology (*what they believed, hoped for, and taught*). For Oscar Culmann: New Testament Theology focuses on the content and significance of the mission of the historical Jesus.

On the other hand, other scholars suggest that the text of the New Testament is the proper subject matter of New Testament. Ex: Butmann. Dona Via: New Testament is a strictly historical project, a dialectic interaction between historical interpretation and hermeneutical concerns. Herbert Braun, New Testament Theology identifies and articulates theological meanings found in the New Testament For James Dunn: The task of New Testament theology student is to find the unifying principle within the variety of New Testament writings. This unity is the affirmation of the continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the exalted Christ.

George Caird wrote: "*it follows that there is no such thing as New Testament theology*" (1994, p. 4). It might seem an unpropitious beginning! Yet Caird was right, for as we have noted already, our New Testament authors were not attempting to write a "*theology*", but were engaged in apologetic and dialogue. The real problem with talking about 'New Testament theology', however, is that it

suggests something static and complete, whereas what we have in the New Testament is a number of different people all 'doing theology' in different situations. We do not have an inanimate corpse, labeled "*New Testament theology*", laid out on a mortuary slab and waiting for dissection; rather we have a series of photographs of people vigorously engaged in the process of 'theologizing', trying to work out the significance of their faith.

Luke Timothy Johnson says that books called "theology of the New Testament" seem to have so little to do with theology or the New Testament, and why they do not give rise to theological thinking with and about the writings of the New Testament, why, in fact, they do not give rise to a vigorous theological conversation.

According to (Thomas R. Schreiner in *Magnifying God in Christ, 2010*), New Testament Theology focus on God's magnification in Christ through the spirit. It is a subject that helps us to know what God has done in Christ in the history of salvation. But this centrality of God in Christ must be related to the history of salvation, to the fulfillment of God's promises, in the scriptures.

We also need to understand that the New Testament unfolds the fulfillment of the promises made in the Old Testament. That is why it is God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated, However the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit must be understood along a salvation-historical timeline.

New Testament Theology aims to introduce students to the major issues raised by the nature of what is called New Testament Theology. First it is very important to understand New Testament Theology because it is very debatable. Can we have a harmony of Theory for the whole New Testament? Yes it is possible but which kind of Synthesis?

It is not evident of one Theology in New Testament Theology (*even though the name suggests*). Even though we may not find evident of one Theology we can find some common elements.

From what we have said above it follows that the purpose of New Testament Theology is descriptive. As an independent discipline, it is an attempt to reflect methodologically upon the revelation of J.C as attested in the New Testament, and upon the faith which is a response to it. It uses method of scientific history.

The primary task of New Testament Theology consist in isolating and describing in appropriate terms the theological contents of a particular writings or group of writings, multiplicity of theologies as difficulty. Hence, we agree with Caird that New Testament theology is nothing more than a book which a scholar chooses to write, an attempt to describe in some sort of orderly fashion *what the writers of the New Testament believed*, in the hope that the book may be of benefit to readers and preachers of the New Testament. To ask 'What is New Testament theology?' is to ask how an author may most effectively write such a book.

CONCLUSION

we conclude with (*Marshal, I. H. 2004, page. 23*) argument, that a theology of the New Testament has two tasks: first, it will investigate the way in which the theological thinking of the early Christians, as deposited in these documents, came into being, analyzing the theologies that come to expression in each of the several documents or in appropriate groups of documents. Second, it will then enquire as to the existence and character of a possible synthesis that will bring out the common beliefs expressed in the documents and also show how they have individually developed these beliefs in different ways, so that we may see whether there is some kind of harmony between them or there are discords that cannot be resolved.

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2 QUESTION (E)

The Kingdom of God / Heaven as a common theological theme in the Synoptic Gospels.

The theme of "kingdom of God; (*basileia tou theou*)" is central in New Testament Theology. Literally it is an idea that underlines the rule of God over creation, over all creatures, over the kingdoms of the earth, and in a unique way, over his chosen and redeemed people.

The Synoptic Gospels make it immediately apparent that the kingdom of God is central to Jesus' teaching. In this regard he is not to be differentiated from John the Baptist, who likewise proclaimed the coming kingdom (Matt. 3:2). John's preaching in the desert and his baptism in the Jordan signal the promise of a new exodus for those who repent and confess their sins (Matt. 3:3–6), but judgment will come for those who fail to repent (Matt. 3:7–10). The expression "kingdom of God" occurs four times in Matthew, fourteen in Mark, thirty-two in Luke.

At first glance, it might appear that Matthew does not use the phrase often, but then we notice that Matthew uses the expression "kingdom of heaven" thirty-two times. Older dispensational thought distinguished between the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven," but today very few argue for such a distinction. The usual scholarly explanation today is that the Gospel of Matthew was addressed to Jews, and the Jews often reverentially avoided using God's name. The term "heaven," it is argued, was a reverential substitute for "God." It follows, on this view that the expressions "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" refer to the same reality and should not be distinguished.

These are the passages related to the above topic: "**Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14 -15; Luke 4:14-22**" When we go through the different New Testament writings, it is apparent that they maintain a tension between the present fulfillment of God's promises and the future realization of those promises.

In the synoptic gospels (Matthew 4:17 "*Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand*"; Mark 1:14-15 "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel*"; Luke 4:14-22 "*(...) the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good*

news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to the set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (...) And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."), it is remarkable that the kingdom is present in Jesus' ministry, and yet at the same time there is a future fulfillment.

Both Matthew and Mark introduce Jesus' teaching ministry with pregnant sayings about the kingdom of God (*Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-22*). Jesus proclaimed the fulfillment of the good news that God would redeem his people. But how should we understand what Jesus meant by "kingdom of God"?

In fact, when we go into the teaching of Jesus, we can say that he too pointed out to an end-time kingdom where God would fulfill his saving promises. This is evident from the Lord's Prayer, in which we pray, "Your kingdom come" (*Matthew. 6:10*). Besides, Jesus speaks to his disciples of the day when he will come "in his kingdom" (*Luke 23:51*), which clearly refers to the future fulfillment of the kingdom's promise. The coming kingdom can be described as a great end-time feast in which the righteous will rejoice but others will be cast out into the darkness (*Mark 14: 25; Luke 14:15*). Jesus did not believe that the kingdom had come in its fullness in his day; but he envisioned a future day when he would enjoy the Messianic banquet in God's kingdom (*Mark 14:25*).

Mark presents to us a series of expressions given by Jesus connected with the Kingdom of God: *Mark 1:14-15; 4:11,26,30; 9:1,43,45,47; 10:14-15,23-25* "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God; 12:34 "you are not far from the kingdom of God"; 14:25 "when I drink it new in the kingdom of God; 15:43 waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God."

In the contrary, it is also evident that the kingdom of God cannot be restricted to the future in the ministry and teaching of Jesus. It is also a present reality. The unique element in Jesus' teaching about God's kingdom is its presence in his ministry. With Jesus ministry on earth, the Old Testament promises of a new covenant, a new creation, and a new exodus were beginning to be fulfilled. One of the most remarkable statements is found in *Matthew 12:28* when Jesus says, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you". In this passage it is remarkable that Jesus saw in his exorcisms a sign that God's kingdom had broken into history. Likewise, the kingdom of God was also present in Jesus' miraculous signs and preaching as it is still present in today's Church proclamation of the Good News. In Luke's Gospel Jesus began his ministry by citing the Old Testament scriptures and claiming that they reach fulfillment in his person and ministry (*Isaiah. 61: 1-2; Luke 4:16-20*): the Good News of release from captive had now been realized through him. The year of God's favour and the liberty of God's people had arrived.

But it is also remarkable that many of the prophecies found in the Old Testament remain unfulfilled. In Jesus' ministry, Israel did not reside in Jerusalem with everlasting joy, nor were they free from their enemies. They were still under the Romans. But the truth is that the promises were not coming to pass in the way Israel expected. The kingdom had arrived, and yet Israel must await the day of vindication and the completion of all that God promised (*Luke 17: 20-21*).

Similarly, why pray for the kingdom to come if it has already arrived in the person of Jesus. For this reason, many scholars now agree that the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching in the Synoptic Gospels is both present and future. It is already inaugurated but not yet consummated. In fact, the kingdom had already arrived in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, but God's enemies had not yet been entirely removed, and the people of God did not yet possess all the blessings pledged to them in the Old Testament. Jesus' miracles are not just the promise of the kingdom; they are themselves the actualization, at least in part, of God's kingdom. They testify to the already-not yet character of the kingdom. They demonstrate that the kingdom of God has entered into this world, and

yet not everyone is healed, which shows that the kingdom is not yet consummated. Death and evil still cast their long shadow over the world.

Besides, the nature of God's kingdom is not the way Israel expected it to be. The nature of the kingdom is captured well in the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven (Matthew 13:31-33). These parables portray that the kingdom does not arrive manifestly and clearly but rather is nearly invisible, like leaven in flour and small like mustard seed. The watching world cannot perceive the presence of the kingdom. Only at the end will the kingdom rule over all, and then, it will be as comprehensive and complete.

CONCLUSION

In this question we came to underline the kingdom of God/Heaven as a common theological theme in the Synoptic Gospels. We understood that the expression "*the kingdom of God/Heaven*" emphasizes God's sovereignty and majesty. He is the one exalted far above human beings. Therefore, both kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God refer to the kingdom that belongs to God.

The kingdom of God in the synoptic gospels, suggests God's rule and reign over all, and the fulfillment of His saving promises. The coming of the kingdom in Jesus Christ testifies that God is a promise-keeping God. It also calls attention to both his sovereignty and mercy, communicates the goal for human existence; Meaning that human beings live for God's sake, for his glory, giving the whole of their lives over to God.

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