

REG. NO. **DI/884**

Course: NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY II (TH 311)

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Date: 4th Feb. 2021

First Semester Examination

Question One (1): “The New Testament Theology” is the title of some academic syllabi (courses). Does it exist?

Introduction

Theology is basically understood from its root (*theos and logos*) as “a discourse about God.” Why it is true that God is infinite in all perfection and beyond the *full* grasp of human beings, a fair knowledge about him that is enough for humans is possible given his self-communication in time. We can know about him from creation and from the deposits of faith (Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition). There are various branches of theology as there are various questions one may ask in the attempt to make sense of God’s revelation. We have, systematic, moral, biblical etc There is also the deliberate effort to ground “New Testament Theology” (NTT) as an independent branch of theology with some worth. This effort is not without critics. The central challenge is represented in this questions by : Is it possible to arrive at one NT Theology? Diverse authors with diverse backgrounds each writing for a particular audience to address a particular problem (in most cases) can they be having the same theology?¹

NTT: Towards an Understanding

A simply definition for NTT remains elusive simply because people are yet to fully grasp its subject matter. It is however, a subset of the Biblical theology. Its origin is traced to J.P. Gabler, who is considered the founder of modern biblical studies. But, NTT as an independent discipline, it is particularly associated with Georg Lorenz Bauer’s work of 1800-1802. John Ashton sees, NTT as “an interpretation of the New Testament designed to be religiously significant to present-day readers.” Others approach it from a purely historical stance. The likes of William Wrede, Heikki Raisanen, Gerd Theissen, Thomas Hatini etc. Wrede for instance, advocates for a historical approach that would include discussion from sources other than the 27 canonical books. They together uphold that NTT scholarship should

¹ See in M. Alroy Mascenghe article *Towards a Genre Based New Testament Theology*

be precisely historical and not theological and normative. So the discourse on the unity and diversity of NTT is non issue and in fact impossible. This position does not augur well with the likes of Howard Marshal, Frank Thielman, Brevards Child, Frank Matera, Thomas R. Schreiner, Udo Schnelle, G.K. Beale among others. These defended the discipline of NTT and outlined the task before this discipline.

The Task (Subject Matter) and Method of NTT

The attempt to reach an understanding provides several material for consideration. Frank Matera, warns and rightly so that whoever seeks to detect NTT must avoid any kind of segmentation of the Scripture. He must be sensitive to the internal coherence of the different writings, i.e. different witnesses of divine revelation. That is why, for him, “NTT...should seek to provide a theological interpretation of the NT that integrates and relates the diverse theologies of the NT into a unified whole without harmonizing them, as elusive as this task may be”.² Consequently, the task of NTT should be historical and literal, descriptive and interpretative and importantly, theological. By and large, the method/approach so adopted (be thematic or diachronic) must do justice to both the diversity and the unity (orthodoxy) of the Testament canon which though is a presupposition of faith need some reasoned proof. This then is a worth while project. With this, one asserts the existence of the NTT.

Conclusion

We note that there are inherent diversities due to differences of writers, historical backgrounds, leitmotif, primary audience among others, but these apparent differences do not disturb the *orthodoxy or unity of the NT* nor thwart the possibility of a NTT. The Bible is divinely inspired and so free of contradiction as scripture. The NT has the experience of Jesus Christ as key. Equally, NTT has a subject matter or task and methods that can do justice to its task as well as myriad of researches to its credit. With this considerations, we assert its existence as a valid and promising discipline at least the topic has generally a central position within New Testament studies.

² F.J. MATERA, “New Testament Theology”, p. 16.

Question Two (2. A): The importance of the Old Testament for the theological study of the New Testament

St Augustine and other Fathers affirms the complementarity of the Old and New Testaments: *“The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is brought to light in the New.”* Consequently, in the Christian world, the Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They bear authoritative Witness to God’s revelation of Himself in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and the whole history of salvation. Hence, the importance can not be over-emphasised such that to understand the New, the Old must be brought into perspective.

The OT as ongoing Revelation : The Father of Jesus who is revealed to us in New Testament (NT) is not separated from the God, Father of Israel, YHWH. Like creation, revelation is a thing of gradual completion. From the state of nature, to the state of grace and in view of the state of glory. Therefore, OT offers a window into the beginning of God’s self-communication to humanity.

The Old Testament (OT) is of great importance because it was a very official and obvious authority for the first Christians and writers ideas, allusion, quotations etc. This is to say that full doctrinal teaching and meaning of facts are only fully accurately to be known in the light of the facts of OT.

The NT authors considered OT essential (2Tim 3:14-16.). Regular quotations from OT is a strong point to its clarificatory role. There are also the fulfilment quotations especially in Matthew. For instance, Gal. 5 :14, Luke 24 :44, Mark 1:2; John 12:14; Acts 15:15; Rom 1:17; 4:17; 15:19; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 8:15; 2 Pet 3:15. So they give some solid grounding to the revelations of the NT.

The New Testament has, in no sense, superseded or abrogated the Old (Matthew 5:17); nor is its teaching a different teaching from that of the Old, if, by different, it is meant to imply any degree of opposition. The preacher or theologian, who neglects the study of the OT, must either teach only some part of the gospel of the Christ who interpreted in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself, or some perversion of that gospel, some “other gospel that is not Christ.