Introduction

> We all are theologians – every Christian! "Theology" means God's Word; theologian means one who speaks God's words. Each and every Christian should be such a person.
>
> Martin Luther[1]

> It has long been recognized that the term "Biblical Theology" is ambiguous. It can either denote a theology contained within the Bible, or a theology which accords with the Bible … The first definition understands the task of Biblical Theology to be a descriptive, historical one which seeks to determine what was the theology of the biblical authors themselves. The second understands the task of Biblical Theology to be a constructive theological one which attempts to formulate a modern theology compatible in some sense with the Bible.
>
> Brevard Childs[2]

There is a temptation, which has to be resisted, to throw up one's hands in this age of over-specialization and ask with St. Paul, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who knows the scope of the Bible and its various writings and its detailed exegesis, and its theologies well enough to write a biblical theology that does anything like justice to this vast subject? The painful truth is that no one can master the whole of the Bible, not even with many decades of close study and hard work. But sufficiency is one thing, mastery is another. I do not claim to have mastered the subject matter of the Bible, but I do think that at this juncture, having written exegetical commentaries on all the books of the NT, and various portions of the OT, and having plumbed a fair bit of the depths of intertextuality that binds the Bible together,[3] and having taught both the OT and the NT and biblical theology itself for some 35 years or so, if I am ever going to be competent and ready to undertake the task, the time is now.

[1] Martin Luther, "Sermon Psalm 5," in *Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Schriften) (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–), 9–11.

[2] B. S Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 3.

[3] See e.g. Ben Witherington III, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017); Ben Witherington III, *Psalms Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017); Ben Witherington III, *Torah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018).

From the outset, it has been clear to me that biblical theology is a horse of a different color from OT theology or NT theology (on the latter of which I have written various monographs).[4] By this I mean that biblical theology in a Christian context refers to something bigger and more comprehensive than is attempted either in volumes of OT theology or NT theology. Nor is it merely a matter of combining OT and NT theology and calling the task done. When I wrote *The Indelible Image* over a decade ago, I said that it was appropriate to start the conversation about NT theology and ethics with Jesus, for so many reasons, not least that this is where the NT writers mainly seem to start such discussions, precisely because he changed the discussion of theology and ethics, both in his teaching and by his life and its sequel. Biblical theology, however, if it is to be worth its name, cannot start with Jesus precisely because the first 39 books of what we call the Bible do not do so. As I stressed in my three books on intertextuality, to do justice to the biblical texts from a perspective of the whole Christian canon they must be read both forward and backwards. This study will build on that insight and methodology, particularly when it comes to reflecting on both the symbolic universe of the Bible and its narrative thought worlds.

Biblical theology involves more than just combining OT and NT theology. One has to think more globally, more comprehensively, and this means thinking along with both the OT and the NT writers and contributors in terms of how they think about theology. We may thank Brevard Childs for pushing us to think more critically about this subject, but at the end of the day, I am not merely interested in doing what came to be called "canonical" theology, if by that is meant doing Christian readings of the OT which either ignore or do not allow the OT text to have its own say in its own original context, as well as in the contexts in which it is later used after the Christ event. The mistake here, I think, is assuming that when the NT writers use the OT text *homiletically* to make their own Christian points, they are actually attempting to do contextual exegesis of the OT, when in fact, *most of the time they are not attempting that task*.[5] Theirs is, in the main, a hermeneutical rather than an exegetical enterprise of "relecture," re-audiencing, reapplying some of the "old, old, story."

I take it as a basic matter of fairness that we should allow the OT to have its own say, since, after all, it is just as much God's Word as any portion of the NT. Otherwise, what happens is that the OT is turned into a Christian theology textbook, which it is not. The OT, for example, does not much address some of the bedrock theological concerns of the NT – for instance the crucifixion *and resurrection* of the Jewish messiah, or the nature of the Trinity, or the second coming of Christ, or the existence of a divine person called the Holy Spirit and so on. But it teaches us much about the nature of the God we call Father, and his relationship with his chosen people. The OT from Abraham to Malachi is all about that subject and that story in various ways. And it teaches us much about the very nature of our God, who is not merely almighty, but almighty to save, who is both just and merciful, both righteous and loving, both gracious and yet holding his people accountable for their beliefs and behaviors. The OT is largely about God the Father, with some allusions,

[4] See e.g. Ben Witherington III, *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament* (2 vols.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009–10).

[5] See on this very point James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (London: SCM Press, 1966), esp. 65–148.

foreshadowings, and previews of coming attractions about the Son and the Spirit, and the afterlife, to mention but a few subjects. To be clear, this study will be focusing on the doctrine of God, properly speaking, and dealing with other subjects that are necessarily entailed by such a focus. For example, since apart from a few passages in exilic and post-exilic prophetic material the OT has little to tell us about the afterlife or eschatology *per se*, this study will not make such subjects a major focus, because while the NT has much to say about those things, a biblical theology must focus on what the *whole* canon tells us about God and his saving work, not just on what we may learn from some NT passages.[6]

But I have also been concerned all along with operating with the right hermeneutical principles, the chief of which is the notion of progressive revelation. A flat reading of the whole Bible, for instance a topical reading that largely ignores contexts and *developments* and mainly slots material from both the OT and the NT into some abstract grid of "themes" (see e.g. C. H. H. Scobie) does not do justice to the clues in the NT itself that we must read the canon *progressively*. For one thing, Jesus told us so. He says, for example, in Mk. 10 and Mt. 19 that some of the Mosaic instructions were given by God because of the fallen condition of its OT recipients, *due to the hardness of their hearts*. That sort of instruction is no longer directly applicable in the New Covenant, and with the eschatological saving reign of God breaking into human history.

As it turns out, the *lex talionis* of "an eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life" was an attempt to *limit*, not *license* the violence of God's fallen people. But already in God's direct "word" to Moses, he was letting us know that his perfect will for us is "no killing," "do no harm to others," which is emphatically made clear in the call to not only love God wholeheartedly, but to love our neighbor as ourselves, and as Jesus was to add, even love our enemies, forgive them, pray for those who persecute us. On further review, the ethic of the Kingdom, the ethic of Jesus, progresses beyond the ethics of some crucial bits of the Mosaic code in a way that suggests that Christians at least are called to a higher ethic by the Lord and Giver of Life. But you could not have fully foreseen this development simply by a close reading of any or all of the OT.

God, as it turns out, speaks his word into specific contexts, in specific ways. And as the author of Hebrews says (in Heb. 1) the revelation given in the past was partial and piecemeal, and the whole of the revelation must be evaluated in light of the fullest revelation of God that comes to us in Christ himself. This applies to the character of God, the nature of salvation, how we should read salvation history, the difference between election and soteriology, what we should think about the end times, and so much more. There is a historical before and after to God's Word in the Bible, and we must keep ever in mind that the OT *was not written by, or in the first instance for Christians* – it was written for the Hebrews, later called Jews.

The fact that a Jewish follower of Jesus could later, and with the benefit of hindsight, say to his largely Jewish Christian audience "it was revealed to them [i.e. the OT prophets] that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who preached the Gospel to you" (1 Pet. 1.12) does not negate this fact. Peter is referring to the fact that the prophecies were pointing forward to the

[6] For a detailed treatment of eschatology especially in the NT see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

eschatological age in which the messiah would come and the Spirit would be poured out, and the Good News would be preached. What he is not saying is that the OT was written chiefly for the benefit of Gentile followers of Jesus who had the good fortune of being born after the time of Jesus. Peter's audience is largely Hellenized Jews, for he was an apostle to the "circumcision" (Gal. 2.10).[7]

Instinctively, and necessarily, Christians realized from the outset that the coming of Christ and his saving activity was an eschatological game changer. New occasions taught new theology and new ethics that, while grounded in the OT, went well beyond it in various ways, sometimes leaving some of it behind as obsolescent. They read the story *progressively* from creation to fall to various acts of redemption first in the OT, and then climactically in the Christ event (both the present and future one). This sort of reading of the Bible's theological content seemed to dovetail nicely with a "salvation history" approach to the stories in the Bible (see e.g. O. Cullmann), but the limitation of this approach was that it meant reading the theologizing from front to back, but *not the other way around*. And what about the large quantities of material in the OT that do not seem to be about "salvation history" at all, for instance the Wisdom literature (see e.g. Ecclesiastes or Job)? Something other than redemption, rescue, salvation is the subject matter of a good deal of the OT.[8]

Yes, the NT writers read the story *retrospectively* as well, because the full significance of the OT revelation would not come to light before the coming of Christ. But this retrospective reading found in the OT types and foreshadowings, and occasional foretastes of what was to come, *without* trying to find Jesus under every rock in the OT. The text, in other words, was still assumed to have a historical *givenness* and there was a before and after to the story which was not collapsed into some sort of abstract systematic theologizing, much less an urgency to produce the sort of synthesis that denied the various historical contexts of the various different parts of the canon.

Yes, when the theology of the Son's pre-existence dawned on some NT writers, they did indeed find a place for the Son in the OT story as God's Wisdom who guided God's people all along, but *not* as a historical figure or even an angelic figure in the OT story. Jesus was not Melchizedek in disguise but rather a latter-day priest after the order of Melchizedek. Jesus was not the angel of the Lord, whom many OT figures ran into from time to time. Indeed, the author of Hebrews went to considerable lengths to make clear that the Son in no way fit into the category of a mere angel, even the most exalted one. To the contrary, the writers of the NT felt it fitting to apply language to the Son that had previously been reserved only for the Father.

In other words, there were limits to the Christological and eschatological reading of the OT by the NT writers, which is why the language of fulfillment, *rather than* the language of *identity*, of "this is that," comes up again and again in the NT. And that raises another point which comes up a lot in discussions with Catholic scholars – namely is Protestant biblical theology too Christomonistic? Shouldn't it in fact be Trinitarian in shape?

My answer to those questions is yes, and yes. Protestants are indeed products of the Reformation, which focused very singularly on Christ, to restore the proper biblical

[7] On which see Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, vol. 2: *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).
[8] See the discussion in Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 17–18.

balance on the nature and source of our salvation. It was not to be found in the saints, not even in Mary, but in her Son – Jesus. Nor was our salvation a self-help program, where through penance and infused grace we could be contributors (even partners with God) to our own justification in the sight of God. The cry *sola fide, sola gratia* was quite rightly a negation of all that. Salvation was by grace and through faith in Jesus and his finished work on the cross and in the resurrection. So, necessarily, the Christian discussion of soteriology must focus rather singularly on the NT and what it says about these matters. "Saved" in the OT doesn't mean "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and his atoning work."

But the Bible is a much larger book than just the NT, and salvation is not its only topic. A proper biblical theology ought to be Trinitarian in nature. It ought to tell us much about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and about their roles in the OT and NT. For this reason, after the methodological chapter we will focus at some length on each of the members of the Trinity, a chapter being devoted to each. Even to the beginning reader of the Bible, it becomes obvious that the OT is largely about the one Christians call the Father, the Gospels are largely about Jesus, and the rest of the NT is about the work of the Spirit in conjunction with the Father and the Son. That is, the Bible has a progressively more Trinitarian character the further we read from Genesis to Revelation. Any biblical theology worth its salt ought to do justice to these facts. This approach will distinguish this volume from most other recent "biblical theologies" and I will draw on some four or five of the recent ones. First, we must attend to matters methodological, and the best way to do that is by having an extended interaction with the best introductory textbook on biblical theology – James K. Mead's *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes*.[9]

Perhaps, as we draw this Introduction to a close, one may be wondering why the word "convergence" is in the subtitle of this book. The noun is often used in science to talk about the phenomenon of how parallel lines appear to converge on the horizon. It is also used of what happens when ocean currents from differing sources come together, producing some remarkable effects. I am using the term to refer to the effort to show how the various theologies of the Bible converge and can be said to produce *a single and singular biblical theology*. Like parallel lines, the closer you get to the end of the biblical stories, the end of the canon, and even the foreseen end of human history, the more the trajectories of discussion about Father, Son, and Spirit and their work to save, sanctify, and glorify their creatures and creation converge. In short, the further you go in the Bible, the more Trinitarian things become. I have to believe that this is because the Bible is a book of progressive revelation of the character and work of God, so that the fullest and clearest revelation of God's character and God's salvific plan and work comes not only in Christ, and in the NT in general, but more specifically in the *interpretation* of the Christ event recorded in the Gospels that we find especially from Romans to Revelation. Thanks be to God for the whole canonical witness. We need it all to understand our Triune Creator and Redeemer.

[9] James K. Mead, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

1

A Method to the Madness

> There are two kinds of water that are difficult to see through: muddy water and deep water. Biblical theology is deep water.
>
> James K. Mead[1]

> Until J. P. Gabler published his essay on the distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology [in 1787], nobody thought of writing "biblical" theology. They wrote theology and the shape of theology was dictated by the traditional doctrines of the creeds.
>
> G. B. Caird and L. D. Hurst[2]

Prolegomena

That biblical theology is a complicated matter is shown by the fact that J. K. Mead's textbook was the first attempt in some 30 years to try and define and refine the category in meaningful ways. At the outset, one has first to decide what counts as "the Bible." For persons of Jewish faith, a perfectly good "biblical theology" can be done simply by studying and analyzing what Christians call "the Old Testament," though ironically when asked about the Christian enterprise called biblical theology, some Jewish scholars say they are simply not interested in the subject.[3] But this would never be sufficient for a Christian study of "biblical theology." Unfortunately, Christians themselves don't agree as to what counts as Scripture, at least in the broad sense.

For the vast majority of Protestants, the Bible is composed of 39 OT books and 27 NT books, *plus nothing*. For those of the Catholic or Orthodox faith there are "deuterocanonical" books that should be included in a study of "biblical theology," books written during the intertestamental period like the Wisdom of Solomon, or like Sirach. It is simply undeniable that various of the early church fathers took various of these books as "Scripture" and theologized on their substance. Indeed, if one examines the early great codices, for instance Codex Sinaiticus, one discovers that bound together with what

[1] Mead, *Biblical Theology*, 12.
[2] G. B. Caird and L. D. Hurst, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 5.
[3] See J. Levenson, "Why Jews are not Interested in Biblical Theology," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (ed. J. Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 281–307.

Protestants call "the Bible" are books like Tobit, Judith, 1 and 4 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach, but also early Christian books like the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. Or consider Codex Vaticanus. It also includes Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Judith, and Tobit. It is not clear whether some scribes who composed these great codices (perhaps in at least one case originally at the behest of Constantine) thought all these books were *canonical*, or merely that they all were worthy of Christian reflection and study. Clearly later Orthodox and Catholic thinking on these matters came to consider such books as at least of secondary canonical status, if not full canonical status.

That, however, is far from the only problem. The question also has to be raised about "which OT" we will do biblical theology with. The Greek OT is the OT of choice for the Orthodox traditions and churches. Protestants and most Catholics tend to start with the Hebrew OT. The important point about this is that the LXX and the Hebrew OT often *differ*, not only in their readings of passages in the 39 books of the OT, but they differ in what books they include. The LXX includes Tobit, Judith, 1–3 Maccabees, Esther with additions, the Prayer of Manasseh, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, and the Psalms of Solomon (which, while originally in the LXX, is not included in the Orthodox canon). The Hebrew Bible does not include these additional books. In that respect, Jews and Protestants are in some agreement about what counts as the OT. In any case, biblical theology looks different depending on what one counts as included in one's source text – "the Bible."

As Jaroslav Pelikan makes perfectly clear, there was never a time when the Christian community combined the Hebrew OT with the Greek NT to make a single book. Rather, once it had agreed upon the shape of its New Testament it adopted a version of the OT *in Greek* to serve as its OT. This is suggested by an examination of the early codices like Codex Sinaiticus.

Christian biblical theology (as it was originally done when there was a book of two testaments) involved *an all-Greek canon*, which of course is not at all the canonical basis of Protestant and Catholic biblical theology today, which uses the Hebrew Scriptures along with the Greek NT.[4] The term biblical theology today would not mean the same thing that it did when there first was a "complete" Bible, and in any case that sort of approach to Christian theology, including NT theology, threatens to undo, muffle, or produce a false harmony or blending of the discrete witness of the Hebrew Scriptures which has its own Jewish voice, and the equally discrete NT Scriptures which have a largely Jewish Christian voice.

We cannot start with biblical theology and then try to fit NT theology into that Procrustean bed. Nor can we start with the theology in the Hebrew Scriptures and see the NT books as simply a renewal or extension of that theology or those covenants mentioned in the OT, though the Lord knows both of these hermeneutical moves have been tried by scholars. What strikes me is that, historically, this is not how the NT writers viewed things, nor, I think, should we. We must start with the discrete testimonies of the individual testaments and take *some* of our cues from the NT writers as to how Christians should approach the Torah. This is a historical approach which sees biblical theology and biblical ethics as something which must be done *after*, and on the basis of the detailed study of the theologies and ethics of the OT and NT.

[4] J. Pelikan, *Whose Bible is It? A History of the Scriptures through the Ages* (New York: Viking, 2005), 101–2.

To be clear from the outset, this exercise in biblical theology will limit itself to the Protestant canon, and with good reason. I take my clues from the writers of the NT, who do not ever cite *as Scripture any of the deutero-canonical books already mentioned*. They cite texts as Scripture only from the 39 books found in the Protestant OT.[5] This is not to say that the NT authors did not use some of these intertestamental books. Indeed, they did. The Gospels, Paul's letters, and James reflect a knowledge of and a use of Wisdom of Solomon and of Sirach. But the material is never *quoted as Scripture*, it is simply drawn on for its ideas, images, concepts. We are thus defining the source material for a biblical theology as involving a Bible of 66 books, though there will be places where we need to point out the influence of extra-canonical sources such as the Wisdom of Solomon.

One of the other limitations I am imposing on myself in writing this book, is that I am going to try and do my best to let the biblical text speak for itself, without the additional assistance of later Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox theologies. As Childs points out, biblical theology is for the most part a post-Reformation project, for the very good reason that the Bible "functioned within a dogmatic ecclesiastical framework in a subservient role in order to support various traditional theological systems. The Reformation signaled a change in emphasis by its appeal to the Bible as the sole authority in matters of faith."[6] J. P. Gabler was responding to that basic assumption when he wrote his famous discourse in 1787 on "the proper distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology and the correct delimitation of their boundaries."[7]

In my study *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, I pointed out at length that whenever a theological tradition has tried to say something distinctive (e.g. speaking in tongues is the litmus test of whether you are a Spirit-filled Christian or not, it being the initial evidence that the Spirit is in your life) it is not accidental that those points are the exegetically weakest points in that theological system, whether we are talking about Calvinistic, Arminian, Pentecostal, or Dispensational approaches to the Bible.[8] One could say the same thing, for example, about Catholic theology in regard to various aspects of its Marian doctrine (e.g. the perpetual virginity of Mary, or her bodily assumption into heaven), or Orthodox theology and some of its approach to icons and male-only priests, and so on.

If a theology is going to be worthy of the name "biblical theology" then it needs to be based solidly in the Bible, avoiding as much anachronism as possible. By anachronism I mean the reading back into the biblical text of later theologies of whatever sort. This latter practice is one of the major things that has caused so many divisions within the body of Christ. Biblical theology is neither merely historical theology, nor Reformed theology, nor Arminian theology, nor Catholic theology, nor Orthodox theology, nor any sort of systematic theology. It is *grounded* quite strictly in the exegesis of the biblical texts and their *clearest* implications. *The writers of the OT and the NT were not participants in nor*

[5] To be sure, there is a citation from 1 Enoch in Jude, but note that the author doesn't say he is citing "Scripture" but rather quoting "the prophet Enoch," which is not the same thing as citing Scripture. Paul, for example, quotes a Cretan writer about Cretans in the Pastoral Epistles but this hardly means he thinks that writer wrote Scripture. It just means he thought he said something true. And in any case, no Christian group later included 1 Enoch in their canons or canon lists.

[6] Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 4.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, Wesleyanism, and Pentecostalism* (2nd edn., Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015).

advocates of any of these later schools of theological thought. They were Jews, almost all of them, with the possible exception of the author of Luke-Acts and 2 Peter.

As Jews, their theology was, not surprisingly, profoundly Jewish in character and it did not involve, for instance, later debates about the inner workings of the Trinity, or the two natures of Christ. Those were debates fueled to a significant degree by later Greek philosophical thinking, which the writers of the NT show little knowledge of, interest in, or inclination to draw upon, with rare exceptions.

What I have discovered in this study is that the more one reads the NT as the Jewish book it is, the less difficulty there is in seeing how the theologies of the OT and the NT are compatible, with the latter to some extent a development of or from the former. Biblical theology becomes a less formidable and daunting task when one does not take a Marcionite approach to the OT and see it as somehow revealing a very different God than one finds in the NT.

James Mead offers a basic definition of biblical theology as follows: "Biblical Theology seeks to identify and understand the Bible's theological message and themes, that is what the Bible says about God, and God's relationship to all creation, especially to humankind."[9] This definition is good as far as it goes, but it is inadequate. The Bible is not in fact about "all of humankind." It is rather a tale told about God's people, his chosen people. Even in the very earliest portions of the Bible in the stories in Genesis 1–3 this becomes clear. Cain and Abel have wives from other people groups which the biblical author is not at all focusing on. All the way back to Adam and Eve, the Bible is the story about the origins of God's people in particular, and other peoples are mentioned tangentially only as they impinge on or enter the story of God's people. Other people only enter the story positively when God's people undertake their given task of being a light to the nations, and when Jesus of Nazareth takes over this role of being that light and sharing that light with the world through his disciples, so that both Jew and Gentile might be united in one people of God in due course.

Despite some protests to the contrary, this story about sharing the light of God with the world in the OT *presupposes human fallenness*, human beings *not* having a proper relationship with the living God.[10] The light that is being shared is not just any kind of light, but a light that redeems, transforms, saves, because humankind needs such redemption. The concept of the Fall does not originate with St. Paul or other Christian theologians but with the stories in Gen. 1–3, as was even recognized by early Jewish writers that were not followers of Jesus. For example, consider 4 Ez. 3.21–22: "For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus, the disease became permanent, the law was in the people's heart along

[9] Mead, *Biblical Theology*, 1.

[10] Here the Christian approach to various OT texts which are taken to deal with human fallenness often differs dramatically with a dominant Jewish view of such texts in various ways. For example, many Jews do not think Adam's sin affected the whole human race. Rather, they see an inclination toward the good and an inclination toward the evil as resident within each person, and they have a choice about what direction they go. Yes, people sin, but no it is not inevitable. The Christian notion of the bondage of the human will is not part of their calculus. In other words, they are not Augustinians nor Lutherans or Calvinists in their approach to issues such as human fallenness, divine election, free will and the like. Such a view of human nature runs into trouble not just in Gen. 2, but in texts like Ps. 51, or 4 Ezra which speaks about Adamic sin and its consequence for humankind. See Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 26.

with the evil root but what was good departed, and what remained was evil." Or consider 4 Ez. 7.48: "O Adam what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants." This does not lead the author to suggest that human beings are not responsible for their sin. To the contrary, they have the freedom to resist it, but they also have the *yetzer hara* – the evil inclination.

Biblical theology must, then, deal with a God that is both a Creator God and a Redeemer God, who chooses a particular people, and later a particular person, through whom to make known his special revelations and possibilities of redemption for all humankind. Even in his final revision of his definition of biblical theology, Mead only speaks about the divine–human encounter, and about God's relationship with creation and all humankind, and the implication of that for relationships between human beings. Nowhere in his definition does the word salvation or redemption show up, nor does human fallenness.[11]

Over half a century ago, my NT professor at Harvard, Krister Stendahl, wrote a seminal article for *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, paradoxically entitled "Biblical Theology: Contemporary."[12] Stendahl stressed, quite rightly in my view, that biblical theology must begin with the descriptive task, which involves studying the ancient texts and determining what they meant in their original contexts. Just so. Then, he says, we may ask the second-order question about what it means and how it is to be applied today.

But even if one limits oneself to the descriptive task there is a *presupposition* that is in play that needs to be stated plainly. If you use the phrase *biblical theology*, not biblical theologies, you are assuming that there is some sort of *theological unity* to and in the canon of the Bible. And behind that assumption is normally the further assumption that there is a divine mind behind and expressed through all these various texts written by a plethora of different human beings over the course of more than a millennium. These texts do not line up in a linear progression, if by that one means the later writers of texts know *all the earlier texts* and they are developments based on the earlier ones. In various cases this is simply not so. The Book of Job, for instance, is not a development of really anything that may have been written before it by the author's Jewish forebears. The detailed study of intertextuality of course shows clear evidence that some later writers are dependent on some earlier writers in various ways, but again the themes and ideas develop in different places at different times, involving different persons who have their own judgments, and yet *there is a unity to biblical theology*. It is from this fact that we find a partial basis for the concept of divine inspiration of the Bible. We don't, for example, have advocates of the god Baal writing a book which makes it into the Hebrew Scriptures. The biblical writers are all writing about the same God of the Bible, and saying diverse, but compatible, things about that God and his will and relationship with both creation and his people.

Nevertheless, biblical theology, as we have it in this study, is of course an *ex post facto* thing which I am assembling from the various pieces of evidence in the biblical texts and the way one assembles the data reflects one's own values and understanding. The author of Isa. 40–55, for example, is not playing with the same full deck I am when I lay my cards on the table and say "this is biblical theology." At best, the theologies of the individual writers in the Bible are a subset of what can be called "biblical theology."

[11] See Mead, *Biblical Theology*, 242.
[12] Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology: Contemporary," *IDB* 1:418–32.