THE NATURE OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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II

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THE TASK AND METHODS OF 'NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY'

Everyone knows that the emergence, growth and development of biblical and especially New Testament theology is one of the most important features of theology in the past century. Everyone knows, too, how deeply New Testament theology penetrates the central problems of theology in the present. It goes much deeper even than historical-critical work on the New Testament documents, though admittedly since Strauss and Baur it has been closely bound up with that. For New Testament theology is decisive for the question of the essence and emergence of original Christianity.

An account of the task and methods of this discipline can therefore reckon on general interest. That is, provided that it does not remain at merely an abstract and formal level.

I

It may be asked just how fast the theology of the New Testament has developed since the year 1787, i.e. since Gabler's programmatic address De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regendique recte utrisque finibus (On the proper distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology and the correct delimitation of their boundaries). But it cannot be doubted that the development has brought considerable general advances.

That is clear from many matters which have only recently become self-evident. For example, the Old and New Testament are to be treated separately. Today it is self-evident not only that the teaching of Jesus is to be distinguished from that of the apostles, but also that the different views of different groups have to be distinguished within the latter. It is self-evident that somehow in historical development of the ideas of the New Testament has to be

demonstrated, and also that one must try to present these ideas not in line with a dogmatic scheme which is alien to the biblical writers, but according to their own points of view.

Can it also be claimed as self-evident that New Testament theology must be considered and done as a purely historical discipline? Formally and in theory most people would say yes. When the material is contemplated, however, a different view emerges. So long as New Testament theology retains a direct link with dogmatics as its goal, and people expect from it material for dogmatics to work on — and that is a common view — it will be natural for biblical theology to have an eye to dogmatics. Biblical theology will be pressed for an answer to dogmatic questions which the biblical documents do not really give, and will endeavour to eliminate results which are troublesome for dogmatics. The writings which contain the material are burdened with definite dogmatic predicates like 'normative', which say nothing about their character as documents. So long as this continues to be the case, it is at least psychologically probable that New Testament ideas which go contrary to expectation will be worked on and arranged till they fit those predicates. On these presuppositions some things, such as, for example, serious contradictions within the New Testament, are not allowed to emerge.

I do not intend to dwell on this question of principle for long, but I must state from the outset that my comments presuppose the strictly historical character of New Testament theology.

The old doctrine of inspiration is recognized by academic theology, including very largely the conservative wing, to be untenable. For logical thinking there can be no middle position between inspired writings and historical documents, although in fact there is no lack of partial doctrines of inspiration about the place. Biblical theology has to investigate something from given documents — if not an external thing, still something intellectual. It tries to grasp it as objectively, correctly and sharply as possible. That is all. How the systematic theologian gets on with its results and deals with them — that is his own affair. Like every other real science, New Testament theology has its goal simply in itself, and is totally indifferent to all dogma and systematic theology. What could dogmatics offer? Could dogmatics teach New Testament theology to see the facts correctly? At most it could colour them. Could it correct the facts that were found? To correct facts is
absurd. Could it legitimize them? Facts need no legitimation.

The first thing which must be required of anyone who wishes to engage scientifically in New Testament theology is, accordingly, that he be capable of interest in historical research. He must be guided by a pure disinterested concern for knowledge, which accepts every really compelling result. He must be able to distinguish between the alien modern ideas of his own thought and those of the past. He must be able to keep his own viewpoint, however precious, quite separate from the object of his research and hold it in suspense. Then he will indeed know only what really was.

One might say that this account of New Testament theology entirely surrenders its specifically theological character. It is no longer treated any differently from any other branch of intellectual history in general or the history of religion in particular. That is quite correct. But in what should the specifically theological type of treatment consist? It would always result in a mixture which included the personal theological viewpoint of the scholar, and that could only obscure things. Or can a specifically theological understanding of the discipline guarantee some kind of knowledge that goes beyond the knowledge of the historical fact that such and such was taught and believed by the men of the New Testament? Can it add anything to the factuality of this? It is not true, either, that the purely historical view of the discipline tends to rob the New Testament of its profoundly religious thinking or noble ethical outlook. An extra theological something would have to be demanded for exegesis, too, and for history of doctrine and church history, if this something were considered necessary before New Testament theology could be considered a theological discipline.

If the New Testament writings emerged in the course of a history and are the witnesses and documentation of this history, then we are faced with a question: why should our discipline be concerned just with these and no other writings? The normal answer is that only these belong to the canon. But that is not a satisfactory answer. Where the doctrine of inspiration has been discarded, it is impossible to continue to maintain the dogmatic conception of the canon.

No New Testament writing was born with the predicate 'canonical' attached. The statement that a writing is canonical signifies in the first place only that it was pronounced canonical afterwards by the authorities of the second- to fourth-century church, in some cases only after all kinds of hesitation and disagreement. The history of the canon is sufficiently instructive in this respect.

So anyone who accepts without question the idea of the canon places himself under the authority of the bishops and theologians of those centuries. Anyone who does not recognize their authority in other matters – and no Protestant theologian does – is being consistent if he questions it here, too.6

It is not necessary to doubt that on the whole the early church put together what was religiously most valuable and also oldest and so historically most important, not only of what we know but also of what was then in circulation. They made a collection worthy of all praise. But this judgment involves us in saying that the boundaries between the canonical books and the extra-canonical material closest to them fluctuate at every point.6

So unless one is prepared to consider the New Testament writings from the point of view of a 'subsequent experience' that had nothing whatever to do with their original character, they are to be seen not as canonical but simply as early Christian writings. In that case, of course, one's historical interest insists on taking together everything from the totality of early Christian literature that historically belongs together. The borders of the material of the discipline are to be drawn where a real break in the literature can be observed. This is not, of course, decided on a basis of religious value. The question is simply which writings are most closely related in ideas and outlook, or at what point the ideas take on a noticeably different character.

Is it possible to say that in this sense the New Testament writings constitute a special group, distinctly separate from the neighbouring literature? If only one could say that the New Testament is the literature of the apostolic in contrast to that of the sub-apostolic age! And if only the idea of a sort of decline were tenable, in which this apostolic period were followed by a lower level of thought! But this idea is legend. The New Testament can by no means be temporally located in the apostolic age. The Gospel of John, the Catholic Epistles, the Pastoral and other books lie outside its limits. Some of these writings belong chronologically in the middle of the group we call the Apostolic Fathers. I Clement is certainly older than several New Testament writings, and II Peter and
James are probably later than several of the Apostolic Fathers. Others of these New Testament writings stand close to them. Altogether they are no further (or not much further) in time from even the latest Apostolic Fathers than they are in the other direction from the Pauline epistles.7

The main point, however, is that their content accords with their date. In comparison with the older parts of the New Testament, writings like the Gospel and Epistles of John, the Pastoral Epistles, James, Jude and II Peter, and also Matthew, confront us with essentially new questions and phenomena. There is a christological dogma and it is defended; the struggle against gnostic heresy has flared up; there is the concept of orthodoxy in opposition to heresy; the formula of belief, the confession, begins to play a role; the ministry is beginning to become normative in the expanding church and the spirit is now associated with this; the church’s break with Judaism is a fact of the past – it utters polemic against Judaism as an alien religion. Nor are these the only changes over against primitive Christianity. All these traits, on the other hand, are characteristic of the Apostolic Fathers. There are, of course, also new characteristics there. But no clear line of demarcation can be drawn between them and those New Testament writings. The similarities are more obvious. Even the noticeable increase in Hellenistic ideas yields no complete division. Consider, for example, the specially close relationships between Hebrews and Barnabas, between James and I Clement or the Shepherd of Hermas, or between John and Ignatius. It is at least certain that the distance in ideas and outlook between these early Christian writings and the latest New Testament writings is by no means greater and in many ways smaller than the distance between these New Testament writings and the genuine epistles of Paul.8 Since our discipline cannot easily stop at Paul, and since it cannot make much use of the concept ‘apostolic age’ as its boundary,9 then it must extend outside the New Testament, as Krüger has recently quite rightly demanded.10

Against this demand it might be said that the church has, in its history and its theology, as in its practice, a quite peculiar relationship to the New Testament writings, and that theology ‘must serve the church’. However, this formula, so frequently used and going back to Schleiermacher, is – at least for everything in theology which belongs to history, and so for the whole field of biblical studies – either totally untenable or utterly devoid of content.11

The service to be rendered to the church would still have to be either the results of research or the way in which the material is treated or the tasks which are set. Striving to serve the church says absolutely nothing about results or method. Both are determined solely by the nature of the historical object. The tasks set come also in the main from the subject-matter. The questions and needs of the church can be a legitimate influence only in a limited sense – and probably least of all in the biblical field. On the whole it is not within the historical researcher’s power to serve the church through his work. The theologian who obeys the historical object as his master is not in a position to serve the church through his properly scientific-historical work, even if he were personally interested in doing so. One would then have to consider the investigation of historical truth as such as serving the church. That is where the chief difficulty of our whole theological situation lies, and it is not created by individual wills: the church rests on history, but historical reality cannot escape investigation, and this investigation of historical reality has its own laws.

The motive of having to serve the church therefore breaks down. It is, then, impossible to make the special value placed on the New Testament by the church of the past or the present, or any other account of its special historical importance, into a reason for a particular delineation of biblical theology, if this contradicts the nature of the subject-matter.12

Then how far beyond the New Testament should we go? A provisional answer is sufficient here; we must stop before the Apologists, because these can be recognized to have an essentially different character from all the preceding early Christian literature. But we shall come back to this point.13

II

The dominant method of New Testament theology may be labelled the method of doctrinal concepts.

It proceeds in this way. It sets out to reconstruct as exhaustively as possible the thoughts of every individual writer – i.e. his ‘doctrinal concepts’. Related authors or writings are grouped together, but treated separately within the groups. In the case of
Paul, the doctrinal concepts of different periods are sometimes further distinguished. The individual parts of the whole are, so far as possible, arranged in a historical way. The individual doctrinal concept is obtained by working out what the main characteristic ideas of this writer are and arranging accordingly what has to be said on this and every other point. In each case the individual concepts of a writing are carefully, meticulously analysed and maybe defined by combining all the passages which contain a reference to them.

The merit of this method is that it has grasped the individuality of each writer much more precisely than earlier attempts had done. Against the unhistorical and superficial mixing together of every possible New Testament view it has to be thanked for taking so much trouble to make differentiations. But at the same time one can only hope that the method has just about had its day. There are several objections to it, and I must now spell them out.

First, this method does considerable violence to the New Testament writers and documents. Writings like I Peter, II Peter with Jude, and James, are simply too small to extract doctrinal positions from. Their authors were not trying to write compendiums, so it is unreasonable of us to expect from a few pages any clear idea of their world of thought. At best they give us a characteristic touch of their religious thinking, but it is equally possible that what is most characteristic of them lies in the background - if they even have any leading characteristics. Finally, it is true of even a writing like Hebrews, though less acutely, that we possess only extracts from its world of thought. That applies even to Paul and must never be forgotten. The method in question, on the other hand, simply presupposes that an author's ideas are more or less completely present in his work or snippet. At every point it claims the right to put the views and ideas it has in front of it in every combination that is logically possible, drawing conclusions where necessary, but without much attention to the question whether the author himself ever thought of such combinations and conclusions.\(^{14}\)

It therefore continually falls a prey to the danger of regarding as characteristic what in fact is not. If an author chances to utter an idea which is not found elsewhere, this is made into one of his characteristics. The concepts are sharply isolated from their historical background.

The concrete aim of the piece of writing and the individual circumstances of its origin are also completely ignored. Yet the New Testament authors' pronouncements are very strongly influenced by them. It would be possible in many cases for the same writer to treat the same theme in a quite different, almost diametrically opposite way, in different circumstances, for different readers, or having a different practical slant. How then can one abstract from the particular conditions which affect a document? Consider I Peter. It talks a good deal about hope. Peter is therefore called 'the apostle of hope'.\(^{15}\) Whether we are dealing with Peter or some other author, one thing is certain: the epistle has a practical paraenetic purpose, not in a general sense but with reference to a particular point - suffering, to which readers are exposed from the non-Christian world. The whole matter is then clear. It is almost inevitable that the author will point to the one thing that can lift his readers above suffering - the glorious hope of the incorruptible heritage which does not pass away, which is reserved for them in heaven and which does not have to be waited for much longer. It is quite simple to assert that absolutely every Christian at that time in the same situation would be able to speak of hope in the same way,\(^{16}\) and that in another position the author of Peter would be able to write a letter in which hope was virtually never mentioned. Instead of seeing this, it is customary to credit him with a kind of special taste for elpis (hope), just as others preferred pisteus (faith) or agapē (love). That does violence to the document.

A second crime committed by this method is indicated by the name 'doctrinal concept'. It rests on the assumption that the New Testament writings contain 'doctrine'. In a sense, of course, they do. But on closer inspection the expression is inappropriate. It is only justifiable to speak of doctrine when thoughts and ideas are developed for the sake of teaching. That happens only rarely in the New Testament. Most of it is practical advice, direction for life, instruction for the moment, the stirring up of religious feeling, talk of faith and hope for believers and hoping. Ideas, notions and credal statements play a part here, but are touched on in passing or presupposed, rather than consciously developed. Where there is deliberate development this normally happens under the control of some practical impulse or purpose. New Testament theology makes doctrine out of what in itself is not doctrine, and fails to bring out what it really is. The after-effects of the old way makes doctrine out of what is not doctrine.
of doing dogmatics are clearly visible here. Every passage used to be asked what it teaches and ‘by religion in general a doctrine was assumed to be meant’.

This procedure has to be condemned especially because it forces the material into a mould which does not fit the historical reality and robs it of its living colours. One cannot help seeing that the intellectual level of the different authors and documents varies considerably. It is necessary to distinguish between those which are already formulated in theological terms and those which are not. The difference is a relative one, but it exists and is significant. Paul is not, of course, a theologian or systematician in the modern sense. He never writes treatises with formal sections, and it is important in his case also to do justice to the movement and liveliness of a spirit which cannot be forced into the fetters of technical theological language. But his epistles do contain a strong theological element. He is a Christian thinker, and reflects like a theologian. It makes some sense in this case to work out a ‘doctrinal scheme’, or sketch of his theological viewpoint. The authors of writings like Acts, the Apocalypse or the Pastoral, on the other hand, are not theologians, however many elements of theology are found here. Writings like this must therefore be treated differently.

But even apart from this sort of difference between writings – what is the use of a New Testament theology that lacks any feel for the variety and special character of all the elements of what we call religion and Christianity and which were there in the primitive period, as later? What is the use of a science which has nothing to say about the significance and power of the religious tone as well as ideas and concepts, but which in the grey monotony of its ‘doctrine’ mixes up every real difference between the living conception and what is merely taken over and has become half meaningless, or between the formula which is shared by all and the home-grown theological idea which bears the mark of an individual, between the mere pictorial idea and the credal statement affirmed in full consciousness, between simple faith and religious speculation?

This process of flattening out often goes with making individualizing distinctions between numerous doctrinal concepts.

Thirdly, mention should be made of something which is closely related to the preceding errors.

Concepts must no doubt play a leading role in New Testament theology. They are the easiest part of early Christian religion for us to grasp, and most of the results of the religious development are summed up in them. Our discipline, however, is not concerned with every single concept, but only with the normative and dominant, and hence the characteristic and indicative ones. In both cases, again, these concepts are not to be considered wholesale and from every angle provided by the material. It is only the historically important and typical aspects which are relevant.

The trouble with the usual method is that it has a wrong idea of what is to be done with the New Testament concepts and often approaches them in an incorrect way.

As regards this incorrect approach, I do not intend to discuss how wrong-headed it is to squeeze as much conceptual capital as possible from every single phrase and every casually chosen expression used by an author. Something else needs emphasizing here. People think they have mastered concepts when they have given an exact philological account of every passage in which they occur, have shown how they are related to other ideas in the passage, and have expressed the result in a logically correct definition which covers all the aspects discovered. Take, for example, the treatment given to the Pauline concepts of pístis (faith) or sárks (flesh). This procedure would be appropriate if the author had developed his concepts systematically and applied them precisely and with full awareness of their content and range of meaning. This can reasonably be expected of an academic dogmatic theologian. To presuppose the same thing of the religious writers of the New Testament is to allow one's own dogmatic habits to saddle them with a dogmatic procedure which is alien to them. There can be no question here in the New Testament of marking off the meaning of a concept according to every possible individual passage. The sense has rather to be oriented on a few decisive conceptions of the author, so that the main lines of its meaning can be given. In the case of the concept pístis, this will involve the characteristically Pauline view of its object and in the case of sárks, what he says about hamartia (sin), dikaiosúne (righteousness), nomos (law), thanatos (death), aión boulós (this age), pneuma (spirit), etc. Otherwise one will discover all sorts of things, even correct things, but not what is essential. Or perhaps one will find the essentials, but they will be mixed up with what is secondary.

But this is just what is wrong with the false view of the task
mentioned earlier. This is what I regard as most important. People feel obliged to be complete. They have to show every concept and every colouring of the main concepts (instead of leaving that to exegesis). Or they register every little deviation from the sense which another author gives them.

One might with some justification call New Testament theology the science of minutiae and insignificant nuances. That is bad. It means that the main things are obscured. It also means that New Testament theology is an arid and boring subject. It also means that the thought of the New Testament is not reaching us in the living freshness which belongs to it.

One example which will illustrate a number of earlier observations may suffice to show how New Testament concepts can even today be discussed in widely read textbooks. B. Weiss heads a paragraph in his treatment of the theology of James ‘Election’. One is led to assume that for James this concept has some special significance. Now the expression ‘election’ in fact occurs once, in the passage: ‘Has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?’ (2.5). One might also bring in 1.18: ‘According to his will he has begotten us through the word of truth.’ On this material Weiss builds the following definition: ‘Election is that act by which God makes his own the poor in Israel who love him.’ And further: ‘He does this partly by begetting them through the word, the purpose of which is to produce a specific consecration to God, and partly by effecting faith...’ (cf. en pistei, 2.5). He then goes on to express, among other things, his surprise that the condition of salvation brought about by election is not designated as being God’s children.

What can you say to this? The word ἐκλεγεσθαι (to choose) could not be used in a more neutral way than by James. Weiss uses it for constructing a definition. It does not occur to James to indicate that election must be thought of in connection with ‘effecting faith’. Weiss provides this combination. It now looks as though the author had reflected upon how election takes place. Hence the actual definition: as though James had a sort of dogma, and a special dogma at that, that God has chosen the poor! The whole section, over three pages long, can be dismissed by the simple observation that at that time, if not every Christian, then at least all those who could speak like this of election, were angry about the pride and luxury of richness. Think what it would be like to analyse the concepts in Paul Gerhardt’s hymns or Spurgeon’s sermons in this way!

This false procedure is nourished in the first place by people’s interest in what the biblical concepts are worth for dogmatics. With this, as already indicated, goes the unspoken assumption that these concepts must be of similar character to those of dogmatics. But other factors come in.

The custom of using texts, and that means every single word of the text, in sermons, plays a part. As a result of this, texts easily come to look different to us from the way they were meant. They have been given an aura making every phrase look significant and every word intentional and specially chosen, whether or not it was. How differently we read and respond to a story like the prodigal son from the way its first readers did! Think what the Didache would look like to us if it had served for centuries as texts for sermons and had had to be learned off by heart in confirmation classes!

The hair-splitting glosses of our commentaries are partly responsible, though perhaps it ought to be said that what we find in exegesis is only the same thing as turns up in biblical theology. It is far more tolerable and to some extent even necessary in exegesis.

There is, at any rate, one more thing that strongly favours the method I am attacking and will continue to give it support for a long time yet. It is particularly important to bring it up here because the critical camp itself (though not only the critical camp) has a special interest in it.

What I mean is the widespread type of literary criticism which finds connections of thought and expression between the documents at every point and tries to establish literary influence and dependence in matters great and small.

This phenomenon cannot be thoroughly assessed here. It must be freely acknowledged that such criticism has done valuable work in establishing chronological relationships between particular writings, in grasping their peculiar character, in the question of authenticity and other problems of ‘critical introduction’. On the other hand, it has been all too often over-hasty and too clairvoyant in assuming literary connections or in saying that a writer could not have said such and such. It is above all deeply enmeshed in the view that early Christian phrases, formulae and ideas generally travelled from one person to another by literary channels. It
follows, however, from the nature of the subject-matter that then, as indeed now, there existed a rich unwritten community tradition in the wider (and again in the narrower) group, from which even literary Christians must have received by far the greater part of their ideas and religious language. This makes it quite natural that numerous similarities and points of contact exist. It is impossible to estimate the extent of literary influences correctly and to see what is possible for an individual author and what is not, unless this fact is borne in mind. It is necessary to have a definite conception of that shared material or community tradition. In other words, one must always keep in mind the course of historical development. Literary criticism, on the other hand, usually isolates the documents being compared and so sees them in a very narrow perspective. It then easily finds, of course, what it is looking for.

This results in a number of corresponding errors in New Testament theology which need to be pointed out. Quite neutral statements about faith (I am not thinking here of James) by later writers are immediately understood as an effect or an abandonment or a half-rejection of Paul’s teaching about faith. Similarly, as for example in Luke, mention has only to be made of divine grace and mercy for Pauline influence to be seen. As though there was not enough about faith and grace in Jewish writings which generally sound just as Pauline! In other cases, where definite ideas are derived wholly or in part from individual passages, we are not given any intelligible account of how the idea came from the passage. Psychology, which should have something to say here, seems to have been totally suspended.²⁴

But let that pass. Much more important than recognizing examples of careless and premature conclusions is, I think, understanding that literary criticism has been given²⁵ a role in New Testament theology that does not belong to it.

Even when the literary-critical observations are correct, that says nothing about their significance. It does not even say how much significance such borrowing and dependence has for an author. For example, an author who gets a lot from Paul may still be less closely related to him than another who takes over less. Nor does it say anything about its general historical significance. Only an evaluation made from the perspective of the history of religions can decide that. But it is with just this significance that

New Testament theology is concerned. Similarities and differences²⁶ which are unimportant for the history of ideas — and that means most of the ones which can be traced — are irrelevant to it. Minute comparison and distinguishing between different authors is just as bad as making trifling distinctions between the concepts of a single author. Here, too, what is unimportant can be disregarded. Literary criticism all too easily sidetracks one into a false attention to and overvaluation of these details.

This does not mean a treatment which skims over things and is confined to large vistas and superficial sketches. Where the matter of detail is characteristic and significant it cannot be utilized too thoroughly. The minute hair-splitting I am attacking is only the undifferentiated attention to detail which is unable to recognize, as it should, the difference between what is historically important and what is not.

One more thing. In a living religion, almost every significant change of outlook is conditioned by processes in the history of religion and only very slightly by the influence of what is read. It therefore requires in addition a proper religious explanation and not simply a literary one. Literary criticism conceals this. Quite apart from the inadequacy of many of its own explanations, by continually pointing to the dependence of later upon earlier authors, it easily gives the impression that it has made an important contribution towards the historical explanation of the conceptions and the way in which they have changed.

The method of literary comparison plays a positive and by no means insignificant part in New Testament theology. It helps decide, for example, a number of important preliminary questions about the character and relationships of the literary documents, and contributes towards weighing up the historical influence of a man like Paul. In individual cases it is able to draw attention to characteristic variations in the ideas. None of this, of course, is being questioned in any of these comments.

A fourth error of the method under discussion is, finally, that it sees New Testament theology as a succession of individual doctrinal concepts, or so to speak a conglomeration of clear little biblical theologies. The most that is done to relate them to each other is to place them in chronological succession, make a few comparisons and glance at what has gone before. Although people like to see the truly scientific character of the procedure here, it must be
stated that, far from meeting the demands made by a really historical presentation, this is by no means adequate, and even signifies more or less the abandonment of any such project.

This point needs thorough discussion to itself, since it is of decisive importance. But first it may be worth going back over what has been said so far.

Consider the following: suppose that we are living two thousand years from now and are interested in the social democratic movement in our nineteenth century. Most of the literature of social democracy is lost, but we do still have a reasonable number of sources – two popular biographies of Lassalle, an academic treatise of Marx, a few letters of Lassalle, Engels and one or two unknown workers active as agitators; then a few pamphlets two or three pages long and finally a socialist inflammatory writing describing the socialist picture of heaven upon earth, – i.e. a collection of literature something like the New Testament. Now suppose we want to use these documents to get a picture of the outlook, ideas and earliest development of socialist democracy. We proceed as follows: we establish the order in which they were written. We then treat each one on its own. Marx and Lassalle rank alongside all the rest, only are dealt with more fully. The same procedure is adopted in each case. We naturally ask what Marx understands by labour, production, surplus value, etc. But we also ask what the pamphlets and letters mean by the concepts bourgeoisie, proletariat, by the idea of its ‘disinheritance’, and by the variation in the concepts of labour or co-operative. Perhaps we manage to establish that in one of the papers the concept of ownership means just the same as that of property, and that some of Lassalle’s ideas and phrases can no doubt be found in the inflammatory writing, and also – remarkably enough – traces of Darwin’s influence, and a little Nietzsche. There are four occurrences of ‘struggle for existence’, two of ‘adaptation’, and one of ‘master morality’. Another author has a special preference for the idea of agitation – so he is clearly ‘the socialist of agitation’. In this way we carefully catalogue the ideas of each writing, stolidly piling one investigation upon another, arranging it all attractively according to the main points of view. Then we call the whole thing ‘The Ideas of Social Democracy in its Period of Origin’.

Now is that a caricature? Opinions may differ. It is enough to concede that the method of doctrinal concepts provokes caricature.

I have spoken of the ‘dominant’ method. That needs some explanation. I wanted to describe a kind of average specimen of this method such as we have in B. Weiss’s textbook.

But the method cannot in this form be called dominant now. Many of its peculiarities have been criticized for a long time. There are monographs on biblical theology which are quite free of its aberrations. The description I have given would certainly not fit a presentation like that of Baur’s posthumously published Lectures on New Testament Theology. Yet certain of the basic characteristics and errors of the method reach far into the list of those works which, because they take quite seriously the separation between dogmatics and biblical theology, are most free from its crimes.

It is natural to think here of H. J. Holtzmann’s recently completed two-volume textbook. The announcement of this work can be thankfully welcomed. Until now learners have had to be directed to the widely-used work of Weiss and the more recent one by Beyschlag. One cannot withhold praise for the careful and thorough work of Weiss, and we can gladly acknowledge that it contains a good deal that is correct and instructive on particular issues. But – if the comment is still necessary – it must be said quite plainly that no one can learn ‘New Testament theology’ from it. A New Testament theology must show us the special character of early Christian ideas and perceptions, sharply profiled, and help us to understand them historically. The textbook of Weiss blurs what is characteristic and special at almost every point, so that it is impossible to recognize the decisive issues. Individual chapters are linked in purely external fashion, and no real connections are made. The New Testament conceptions are put into a number of separate baskets, and, not to mention the critical basis and the scholastic pedantry of the presentation – what has happened to the fresh air of real life?

The supple, fresh and warmly written book of Beyschlag is rid of some of the ballast – in a biblical theology to have a lot of exegetical detail is ballast – and moves altogether more freely than that of Weiss. But in other respects it is inferior to Weiss, and equally fails to give a true reproduction of early Christian religion and theology. The author brings far too many of his own ideas into the New Testament. He modernizes, and smooths things over, too often passing by the most important historical problems with complacent ease.

In contrast to these books, Holtzmann’s work is without doubt
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a very welcome enrichment of the literature. As regards historical sense, illumination from many sides of the wider and the immediate historical context, sharp and adequate grasp of the imagination and thought peculiar to early Christianity, sensitivity for the difference between teaching and edification, between the religious and the theological—in all this Holtzmann's work is superior to the other two at almost every point.

Nevertheless, I cannot see in it an ideal New Testament theology. Leaving aside results which seem to me open to criticism, and also questions of form—for example, I consider the presentation determined far too much by its attention to all sorts of extraneous views—my reservations are largely on the lines of these methodological considerations. I cannot allow that Holtzmann has really broken sufficiently with the method of doctrinal concepts and posed the task of New Testament theology correctly. In some parts of the work the characteristics of the literary-critical approach as described above are clearly evident. Corresponding to the excess of literary criticism is a shortage of really historical grasp and reflection that is truly history of religion. It has to be emphasized here that Holtzmann, too, has treated every single writer separately. This brings us back to the theme already posed.

II

Holtzmann gives New Testament theology the task of setting out in a scientific way the religious and ethical content of the canonical writings of the New Testament, or reconstructing scientifically the religious and ethical world of thought which can be known from them. Against this, I would say that the discipline has to lay out the history of early Christian religion and theology. That might sound virtually identical, apart from the question whether one may go beyond the limits of the New Testament. In fact, there is a much bigger difference, in that one approach looks closely at the content of writings whereas the other simply considers the subject-matter. If we take them to mean the same thing, this only shows how heavily our interest in the history of literature outweighs our interest in history.

What are we really looking for? In the last resort, we at least want to know what was believed, thought, taught, hoped, required and striven for in the earliest period of Christianity; not what certain writings say about faith, doctrine, hope, etc. The two would be identical only if spelling out the content of writings or the views of writers were the only (or at least the best) way of making plain the history of faith and doctrine itself. Although that seems clearly to be the case, the case is certainly not so clear. Who will say that the task of a history of doctrine or one of its sections is to lay out 'the content of the relevant literature'?

A section of the history of philosophy can be treated by successively developing the individual systems of each philosopher one after another—though this, of course, is not the only possible way of doing it. The reason is that the emergence of independent thinkers and the formation of complete systems can, in fact, be seen as the main content of this history. A history of early Christian faith and theology cannot proceed in this way, for the following reason. Here, with a few exceptions, the writers' personalities and the writings as such are not important, but very subsidiary matters.

When does an individual writer's point of view justify inclusion in an account of the early Christian development? Clearly, when he and his ideas have had an epoch-making influence on the church. Then secondly, when he proves to have been a spiritually and intellectually outstanding personality capable of producing an overwhelmingly characteristic and independent view of faith, even though not so influential. Or, perhaps, also if without being really significant, he nevertheless had a very distinct character, one that is sufficiently distinctive to be grasped historically not simply through individual features but as a whole. This is the least that is necessary.

Now let us look at some early Christian literature.

Take I Peter, the Lucan writings, Mark and Matthew so far as they do not merely codify the tradition, I Clement, James, the Didache, the Pastoral Epistles, II Peter and Jude, the Epistle of Polycarp, and the Shepherd of Hermas. We know nothing, or virtually nothing, about the authors of these writings. There may and will have been amongst them personalities of some significance in their own narrow circles, as well as perhaps others about whom one cannot even say that. None of these writings shows signs of an individual mind that, even though we could not put a name to it, we could clearly regard as epoch-making or even moderately outstanding in the history of religions. None of them advances with one-sided power so much as a single conception.
that was significant for the whole development in a way that makes us say: the idea has become normative or established through this writing, or has even been created by it. In fact all these documents, though containing definite differences in content and situation, are so lacking in distinctiveness that what characteristic features they do have are submerged under the views that are held more widely or by the whole church. However valuable they may be for edification, and though they may be treasured as sources, a historical judgment must say that they contain simply average Christianity.

This means that these writings and their authors are of no interest to New Testament theology, just as the history of doctrine is not obliged to evaluate every episcopal writing that contains nothing except other people’s ideas or the general view. Setting out the intellectual content of the Pastoral Epistles, etc., is therefore only preliminary work for New Testament theology. It is the gathering of raw material, not in itself the real historical fashioning of it.

Ephesians, which I cannot regard as Pauline, contains more characteristic features than the writings already mentioned. It contains more speculation, but basically it still belongs with them. It does not represent an independent and individual conception in any higher sense.

The Apocalypse, Hebrews and Barnabas look rather different.

It is true that the Apocalypse is a unique case within the New Testament. However, on a historical valuation, it is only one specimen of a widespread literary type. Further, this type does not so much create as draw upon the tradition and develop it in particulars. But quite apart from this, and ignoring the fact that the book can hardly be considered a literary unity, one cannot see in it a total religious conception of its own. The Apocalypse is only concerned with one side of the Christian outlook, although a very important one. Its material will be significant for the chapter on the future expectation, but the author with his personal characteristics is not really of interest to New Testament theology.

The author of Hebrews was without any doubt a very well-educated Christian. One can even call him a theologian. The average Christian could not have written an epistle like this. It required artistry, the higher artistry of scriptural interpretation and application. There is something quite deliberate and systematic about the way he can parallel the old covenant with the new. There are also other theological elements. Yet despite all this, one cannot demand for this epistle, either, that its contents be treated separately and systematically. Its proper theme — the glory of the new covenant in contrast to the old — is a very limited one, being confined to one single theme. This theme, moreover, is more a matter of scholarship and theory than of the real life of religion. Although from quite early on the epistle was treated with great respect just because of its artistry and gnosis, the subject-matter itself made it impossible for these reflections to exercise any great influence upon the general theological and religious tone of the period. Besides, despite interesting details, it is not possible to get from it a really characteristic view of the whole of Christianity as a religion and doctrine. Its value for the history of religion is to be found in the significant material that it provides for early Christian judgment on Old Testament religion, the method of scriptural interpretation, the influence of Alexandrianism, and also the development of christology.

The same sort of thing has to be said about the Epistle of Barnabas, as it is called.

There are not many solid entities left. There is no question that the preaching of Jesus and also Paul’s Christianity and theology require independent treatment which is as penetrating as possible. But there is some point in explicitly discussing the situation with regard to the Gospel of John, and the Johannine Epistles which on any showing belong closely with it.

The presupposition behind the undertaking to present a ‘Johannine theology’ is, of course, that the gospel is not a historical writing in the usual sense, but that the author’s theology is put forward through his account of the history. I consider it most appropriate to call it a doctrinal writing, and in fact a polemico-apologetic doctrinal writing, in the form of a gospel. In my view we do not know who the author was, though he was without any doubt a significant personage.

There is little enough that can be said about the direct historical effect of his work. It is still very much a question whether the related ideas which are found in the Apostolic Fathers indicate the influence of the gospel or are shared traditions to which the gospel also had access. Even if they were derived from the gospel, they would not prove much. Otherwise, apart from the Montanist movement, one can assume that the gospel had some effect without being able to show what it was. But it is all the more certain that
the Johannine writings are uncommonly clearly distinguished from what remains of early Christian literature as a whole by their special character, their peculiar religious language and their worldview. So there seems no doubt that there is an independent Johannine theology. In fact, however, this is only where questions begin to arise.

Just because the gospel's outlook is not found in the antecedent literature, does this mean that it is the author's own creation? Supposing the Christian atmosphere that he breathed, the area unknown to us which produced the gospel in so remarkable a way, was already full of the elements of Christian speech that it used, namely 'Johannine' images and ideas? I am here touching on a problem which must be felt, even if it cannot be solved. We come close to the problem which is ultimately decisive for the historical understanding of the gospel. This is the question of the origin and emergence of the Johannine world of thought. The two particulars must, of course, be distinguished. In one case we try to determine which alien soil has produced the ideas that cannot be understood from early Christian (including Pauline) premises, but require explanation. That is, we seek the religious significance in which ideas like Logos are taken over for Christianity. The question whether the author of the gospel or other Christians before him were the first to use this material is irrelevant here. In the other case, as here, what we ask is just that: whether in material we are accustomed to call peculiarly Johannine, the evangelist already had Christian predecessors or not. It is here, of course, very important whether or not one has to assume alien soil.

It would not be difficult to show that by no means all of what is commonly taken to be an author's own work is in fact his individual creation. I am thinking, for example, of the highly characteristic usage of the concepts of light and darkness, death and life, etc. It is compatible with having a strong sense for original personalities to assert nevertheless that such a distinctive type of religious language is not created by a single individual. What is original in original minds is generally found less in the shape of the conceptual material than in what they make out of this material. What is the position with Christology, the really central point of this theology? Was the evangelist the first to formulate in the way that he does, for example, the conception of Christ as the bringer of truth and the revealer of the inaccessible God, or were there others before him and contemporaneous with him who did the same? We can leave the answer undecided. It has only to be emphasized that it is no easy matter to separate what in the gospel has been inherited and what is the evangelist's own.

However, this is not to cast serious doubt upon the justification for treating Johannine theology separately. Such treatment has, indeed, to be insisted upon. Even if the author puts forward much that is not his alone, his outstanding significance is in no way destroyed. And either way his was not so rich and creative a spirit as Paul's. Nevertheless, he was the first to forge also what he took over into this impressive unity and to shape it in his own way. But even the way in which he has set down his teachings in a historical picture of Jesus, and the many stereotyped traits and the frequent mannerisms which can only be understood as coming from the individuality of the narrator, show that his own personal participation in his theology must have been considerable. So indeed does the allusion contained in the gospel itself to the newness of its ideas. But even if this were not the case, the author would, as the typical representative of a group with which he shared this particular outlook, be no less certain of a special evaluation in the history.

The same treatment is due, though in another way and on other grounds, to Ignatius. Or at least, he is more deserving of this than any of the authors mentioned above. It is not that he has had an unusually strong effect or developed a coherent theological system. But he typifies, and for us in many ways especially clearly embodies, personal Christianity at the beginning of the second century. It is perhaps doubtful whether it would be any use producing a 'theology of Ignatius', exhaustive in all particulars. But something like a character-portrait of how he thought, bringing out the characteristic traits, is needed.

To return to the starting point of this survey. If it is not possible to sketch a doctrinal system for Ephesians, James, Hebrews, the Apocalypse, etc., nor to give an exhaustive account of their ideas, still they do all come into consideration simply as witnesses for ideas, moods and interests more or less generally widespread, though here and there bearing marks of individuality. Their positive significance for the discipline is that they provide the material with the help of which it is possible to conceive the physiognomy and clarify the historical development of the earliest Christianity which lies behind them.
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The norms governing the presentation are therefore not the writings but the decisive ideas, problems and spiritual or intellectual phenomena. The significance of the few creative or outstanding personalities must, however, be preserved by a special account of their individual conceptions. Because if these also were treated simply as ‘material’, that would of course be as inappropriate as taking historically unimportant authors individually. History of doctrine also combines the two points of view, the personal and the material.

It is not merely the unimportance of most of the writers which compels us to give up analysing a mass of doctrinal concepts and to abandon the individualizing treatment guided by the literature. We come to the same conclusion when we proceed from the ideas and conceptions themselves, and this is even more important.

One might suppose that it is the task of New Testament theology to depict, for example, early Christian eschatology as clearly as possible. The main lines of it have to be distinguished from individual ideas, and whatever changes can be observed have to be indicated. Can this task really be done adequately by registering the general and particular eschatological statements of every document and establishing their relationship to the rest of what is in the document? The subject-matter, rather, urgently demands that all the material should be considered together. It is quite misguided to treat individually every statement about baptism, when what is wanted above all is to dig out the historically normative views about it – how it was regarded, and an account of possible developments. What is the use of being told that in one place sin is spoken of thus, and elsewhere rather differently, if we never learn what role the concept of sin as a whole played in the early Christian understanding of salvation and of Christian life? The same question could be asked of every chapter and sub-section. Our presupposition, again in opposition to the dominant method, is here, too, that the type is far more important than the variant and that the individual conceptions and interpretations are at most points quite insignificant in comparison with the general, widespread views that influence the individual cases. This presupposition is confirmed in every concrete instance. The individual’s own contribution is trifling in notions like eschatology, or angels, or in the ethical field. It is generally quite irrelevant who introduces a particular idea. It does not follow that the only person who hands it on, himself produced it. But even if he did actually produce it, that would not be important. The scattered material belongs together by its very nature, and if what belongs together is torn asunder into little pieces, the chance of getting an adequate impression of what is being dealt with is lost.

Splitting things up in this way also makes it more difficult to understand each individual part. A single writing contains insufficient criteria for deciding what is significant and what secondary. When we place it in its proper context, the whole world of related ideas, it is easy to estimate its value and show where it belongs. This is the only way that some ideas can be adequately clarified.

From the other side, even correct observations relating to an individual writing do not in themselves amount to much. They only become truly instructive when they are made to throw light on the whole and so clarify the historical development. If in studying I Peter we analyse correctly the conceptions of Christ’s death, or the ideas of the community as the true Israel, and Christians as aliens and sojourners on earth, in themselves these are only isolated notices. But even the sorts of observations which can be made about allegory in Hebrews and the high value set on poverty and charity in Luke can only be properly assessed when used in a wider context.

Here, as before in some of our earlier observations, the monograph literature has to be included in our deliberations. It is not by chance that when dealt with in a monograph, a writer’s conceptions are often not really made historically intelligible or are even wrongly understood. Much of it remains merely dead material, a collection of correct individual observations. Most dangerous of all is a monograph on simply a single concept of an individual writer.

A further argument must be levelled against separating doctrinal concepts. A New Testament theology should try to make clear so far as is possible the development and developments. There is not, generally speaking, a very lively feeling for this task at present, and that is quite comprehensible, given the usual way of treating it. But setting that aside, let us now proceed on the assumption that the task itself is more or less generally recognized.
The Nature of New Testament Theology

The most important question is, of course, the order and grouping in which the different authors are to be placed. Only someone who has no interest in historical illumination at all will see this as merely a question of form. In fact, the overall impression depends upon the course the development takes. A mere succession of different doctrinal concepts could only give a very crude idea of the development. When that is sensed, one will want to discuss the total development separately to clarify it. Further, a number of individual historical threads will be traced which take us well beyond the basic pattern and at the same time make this more fully intelligible and protect it against being wrongly interpreted. In this way, too, the basic pattern will determine, or at least in large measure determine, the impression one gets from the development when the account is taken at all seriously from this point of view.

Here again, the method of doctrinal concepts fails to achieve an adequate account of the development. It is bound to fail, today at any rate. In his own way Baur in his day succeeded in treating everything in the form of doctrinal concepts, and from his standpoint this was a meaningful procedure. For in Baur's account of the history, one well-known contrast was absolutely decisive. The different writings were all seen as witnesses to this and were characterized above all by their relationship to it. This meant that the heart of the real historical development in fact coincided with his construction of how the individual writings followed one another. Of course – if in fact this order of the writings was a true reflection of the development. But Baur's edifice was an untenable construction. However, his followers and opponents do not possess this sort of total conception of the development as hinging on one main point. This is no longer possible. That means that a particular arrangement of the literature can give only very incomplete expression to the character and content of the development. The successive writings or groups of writings do not strictly correspond to so many characteristic moments of the development. They do not express its really significant moments exhaustively or sharply. Yet they give the impression of doing so. Or the intention of giving a historical presentation is at certain points suspended, and in the middle of a generally developmental account things are inserted which are only externally related to it. The resulting impressions are therefore only partly right, and are partly wrong or unclear. Furthermore, so that the less significant writings are not just put one after another, they tend to be given historical labels which are only half appropriate.

These observations can even to some extent be applied to Holtzmann's presentation, though he takes far more account of the developmental point of view than the others. His book contains the following main divisions: I 'Jesus and the Evangelists' (Acts and the Apocalypse are also discussed here along with the evangelists); II 'Paulinism'; III 'The Deutero-Paulines' (i.e. Ephesians, and also perhaps Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles, Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles, viz. 1 Peter, Jude, II Peter, James); IV 'Johannine Theology'. Holtzmann himself mentions certain difficulties about his arrangement. These are directly reflected in his scheme. The evangelists should come not before but after Paul, if their individual viewpoints are being considered. The same might be said of the Apocalypse. The Catholic Epistles (apart from 1 Peter) are considered mainly in negative terms if they are labelled as Deutero-Pauline. 1 Peter would follow Ephesians better than the Pastors. As regards the post-Pauline writings as a whole, Holtzmann does not mean that every writing represents a further stage or little step on the way. Otherwise he would probably have put the Pastors, for example, nearer to John. Nevertheless, a reader involuntarily gets some picture of a development from this presentation. The general impression is that this development from Paul onwards is characterized by the aftereffects of Paul, still strong at first, but then significantly diminishing, and that it comes to an end in Johannine theology. No doubt this gives a recognizable historical line. But one can still ask: Is it enough? Did Paul's heritage provide the essential nourishment for the whole of Christianity between Paul and John? Does not this straight line oversimplify the development? Is not the Johannine view presented too one-sidedly as the peak of a development? Holtzmann can, of course, point out that he has elsewhere given important supplementary information. In particular, he has characterized the change which took place after Paul much more clearly and positively. In my view, however, the characteristics of the individual writings do not make these remarks any clearer, and have prevented Holtzmann from giving us more; he could have investigated more deliberately the development of each main conception.
Different objections will be raised against the thesis advanced here. It will be stressed from the practical, ecclesiastical side that independent and exhaustive treatment of each New Testament writing corresponds to an interest which cannot be given up. I can only repeat: scientific work cannot be tied too closely to practical needs. If a scientific task or method really grows out of the subject-matter, it cannot be refused for the sake of some practical interest, however honourable, without ceasing to be science.

But is it not also a scientific concern carefully to bring out the intellectual content of each individual writing? Is not a knowledge of their world of ideas necessary for the interpretation of each particular part? Is there not a good deal in the conceptual material, in the terminology and religious language, in characteristic combinations of ideas, which history can and may have to ignore, but which is significant for the character of the piece of writing? Without doubt. But it does not follow from this that our view of the task is incorrect, or that there are several equally possible and equally necessary methods of doing it. The place for surveying the content of individual documents and indicating their special features and discussing disputed questions is, apart from in monographs, simply in commentaries; partly, too, in ‘Introductions to the New Testament’. Literary relationships which are important for understanding the documents will be investigated more closely here, as circumstances allow. The results of all this will be of use to New Testament theology.

Another objection to the procedure recommended here will be that it rolling out the clearly visible differences and variety of types. It will only lead to an average cross-section which provides a picture that never actually existed. But why should anyone be afraid of this false levelling out? What is truly shared will have to be done justice to as much as what is individual but historically important. Both must be placed into a right relationship with each other. Individual writings, too, will have to be carefully considered, if they are really typical in some special way. For example, when early Christian moralism is under discussion, James and I Clement will have to be talked about. Whole trains of thought, even, for example like that of Hebrews, will on occasion have to be spelled out if they happen to illustrate a particular theme. It may be that what is really characteristic about the individual writings comes out no less sharply than it did in the individualizing method.

The Task and Methods of New Testament Theology

The closer relationships existing between individual writings will also then emerge.

Or are we to abandon this method of doing New Testament theology because the task is so difficult? To work through a wide range of scattered material, make connections and bring order out of it so that a luminous picture emerges is, in fact, a task in comparison with which simply reproducing the content of writings is a very straightforward matter. Unfortunately, however, history does not ask us when it sets its tasks whether they are burdensome for us or not. But the task cannot be insoluble. Are not the materials out of which the history of doctrine gets its pictures also often widely spread out?

Just as, of course, many issues are still open, so too a number of individual problems have not yet found a solution which is generally accepted, even amongst those interested in historical work. But that cannot be a reason for postponing this necessary change of activity until a more favourable time. Questions that are unsettled today will still be largely matters of debate in fifty years' time. It will also perhaps be advantageous to take a new look at some issues from a different perspective.

IV

Giving up treating individual writings independently means laying the axe to the root of the tree, or more correctly, blocking up at least one main source of the other errors of the usual method. The possibility of inadequate or misguided literary comparisons is still not excluded. But when every question is considered in the light of a wide range of material, it will, just because of this material, be easier to guard oneself against overhasty and narrow conclusions. One will be far less inclined to place too much weight upon the literary relationships. It will also be possible to assess correctly what is common property and what is the author's individual contribution. In many cases what is important will automatically separate itself off from what is unimportant, and so one will be free from the curse of trying to include everything. What has gone before is sufficient to exclude the misunderstanding that all that is necessary is to examine the individual writers, and merely gather together their statements, compute them, laboriously arrange and link them up.
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It has not, however, yet been said clearly enough what our procedure involves in positive terms, and what its guidelines are to be. That can only be shown exhaustively, if at all, by going more deeply than is possible here into the material itself or into individual areas. I must confine myself to a few aphorisms on what is especially important. This is partly a matter of drawing simple conclusions from what has already been said.

One of the advantages of the historical over the literary method is its fruitfulness. This results from the undreamed-of richness of large and small questions which an overall view of the related material yields. It is, of course, assumed here that our procedure is always both genetic and comparative. We are at every point interested in distances, connections and effects. Where does this come from? How did that happen? What conditioned it? These are the questions we ask. Every historical datum is only made comprehensible so far as we are able to set it in the context out of which it has grown.

So far as we can, we shall try to get beyond the weak and imprecise judgments which, unless I am mistaken, we meet all too often these days in the discussion of biblical theology, even where historical links are taken seriously. We read that a conception 'recalls' another one, is 'related' to it, contains the 'beginnings' of it, 'links' on to it, marks an 'advance' on it or an 'intensification' of it. All this gives no clear picture of how the historical relationship is to be conceived. It only evokes an indefinite impression of general similarity, and does not clarify whether the conceptions really were stages in the strict historical sense or only seem to us to be stages from some particular standpoint. There is a very big difference, and it must be strictly observed. It is easy to construct a straight line out of a number of conceptions using the logical criterion of greater or less similarity. Whether the logical arrangement reproduces the historical actuality remains a question. These indefinite remarks are admittedly necessary on occasion, but we must be perfectly clear how much they are worth.

How something emerges is always to be understood as a psychological-historical question, not merely a literary one. Literary information does not generally tell us much. Equally, we try to argue not simply from individual passages, but also on the basis of the development. Every significant idea, every influential concept, every important conception is understood as a living plant out of religious history. It has grown according to the same inner laws which today and always govern the emergence of ideas, concepts and conceptions.

In a sense our procedure is always constructive; i.e., we draw conclusions which extend as well as connect what the documents say. People's reserve about doing this is exaggerated. It only appears to be more subjective and open to error than the usual method. The danger of it lies in seeing connections which do not exist and making mistakes in one's derivations. That is no worse than taking a stand on the letter and evaluating it wrongly or making mistakes in throwing historical light on it. Besides, if we were not so used to particular ways of questioning and answers by which the matter is partly concealed from us, we would probably be more aware of how much construction is involved even today in answering 'ultimate' questions. Constructions are not the same as vague suppositions. A justified and necessary construction has firm bases which can be spelled out.

In trying to explain things we do, of course, all too often run up against gaps, so that our whole endeavour can be seen as one large fragment. But spotting gaps means spotting problems, and clear recognition of a problem is always a positive gain for historical understanding. It therefore makes sense to set out to make clear the gaps in our knowledge. If we do not do this, some striking and astonishing phenomenon will not be understood and evaluated as such. Consider the concept of the kingdom of God. Let us take it as proven that Jesus spoke of a present and worldly development of the kingdom and thought of it as an ethical community growing on earth. The Jewish eschatological concept of the kingdom would then have been not merely slanted gently but essentially changed. Precisely for this reason, such a reconstruction could not have taken place unnoticed. It must have been conscious and it must also, without doubt, have struck the disciples as an innovation. But in that case it is a quite remarkable fact that just this, Jesus' characteristic view, is what was lost in the following period from Paul onwards. Their own concept of the kingdom stands more in line with that of late Judaism, even though it is not quite identical with it. An explanation must be given, or else the puzzle itself must be posed as sharply as possible. Otherwise an important fact - for it would be not merely remarkable, but important - will not be clearly perceived.
It is erroneous to think one-sidedly of the ideas contained in the New Testament and the earliest Christian literature as the spontaneous production of a Christianity considered in isolation from its surroundings. We will therefore, of course, have to pay attention to the wider religious context. This is a theme of its own which can only be touched upon here. Leaving aside individual cases, one must at any rate try to make clear how much Judaism was in primitive Christianity, the significance of the incorporation of an Alexandrian element, what sort of Hellenic and also what sort of oriental influences played a role.

I have no fear that in this kind of explanation and historical analysis the significance of personalities such as, for example, Paul’s, is bound to be misunderstood. Why should one not be able to recognize that a person’s individuality and work itself explains much that is otherwise inexplicable? I believe that in the appropriate place the explanatory method will show us the significance of personality in the clearest manner imaginable. Now, of course, we stop making an individual responsible for an idea merely because the earliest evidence happens to occur in his work. And we give up wanting to understand on a basis of personality what cannot be understood in this way. The contrasts which dominate Johannine theology – God and world, light and darkness, life and death, truth and lie – are often derived from the evangelist’s own ethical energy and abruptness. But the psychological approach must first show how personal abruptness can lead one to think continually in terms of these contrasts. Concrete conceptions are never made intelligible by peculiarities of personality, however marked, or at least never by these alone. There must be a reason why the peculiarities found expression in these particular conceptions.

It is frequently recognized that our literary material is fragmentary. Just how fragmentary, is seldom clearly estimated. How much is there just by chance! How many ideas, speculations, theories and arguments which must have been quite important, have to be thought of as lying between and behind the documents? But in any case, what matters is not just recognizing the situation, but finding a method which copes with it. That means that we can no longer pose questions simply in the light of the literary material. We must pose them as far as possible in view of the subject-matter, the historical situation. That would certainly be a quite significant advance, and at the same time, of course, a corrective against false or one-sided judgments about the literature.

The New Testament speaks only sporadically about monotheism. To judge from the documents, it is hardly necessary for us to discuss the point. Yet historical reflection compels us to accept that the material is deceptive here. It is quite clear that of all that their new religion brought to the Gentiles who came to Christianity, what they valued about it especially included belief in the one Lord and Creator of the world. This must have seemed to them the main contrast to their earlier belief and a liberation from the spectre of superstition. It would be stupid of New Testament theology to ignore this fact or minimize its significance on the grounds that discussion of monotheism is only found in the literature from about the time of Justin. Again, the tradition gives us no information whatsoever about how the Old Testament became the Christians’ holy book. That took place quite unnoticed as the church itself took shape. Even the formation of the church, the emergence of a consciousness of being the human fellowship specifically chosen and protected by God, took place without anybody documenting it. Again unnoticed, the Old Testament became the religious book of the converted Gentiles. Can nothing be said about these matters? Must not their fundamental significance be spelled out? We have no idea on the basis of the New Testament alone what miracles and miracle-stories meant for people’s religious feeling and practice. We know even less about how Gentiles who became Christians understood baptism and Lord’s supper in their own terms, how they understood Christ as Son of God, what the title Messiah meant to them and what it did not, or their attitude to the Jewish-Christian belief in demons. Can a history of the religion simply by-pass these matters on the grounds that we do not know much about them?

Another necessary principle is that we cannot be satisfied with establishing positive facts. It is often very important to be aware of and to evaluate what one might call negative facts. It must be made clear which special virtues early Christianity either created or especially valued or cultivated. But it is almost equally important to know which ones it did not foster. It is impossible here, as in any other living formation, to talk of abstract uniformity. But instead of thinking merely about individual facts, we should also
consider the general direction taken by a total development. Could we not, on the basis of the premises we possess, see the development quite differently, and think of other ideas and phenomena? What questions have not been asked? Which parts of the world of ideas have not been completed? By asking these questions we get a clearer picture of the real development with its characteristic features. We see the frame which supports an entire development, and that is more important than the individual facts within the framework.

The usual discussions of biblical theology generally give the impression that the early Christian outlook was produced purely by the power of thought, as though the world of ideas hovered above external history as a world of its own. We must break with this view. The early Christian world of ideas is very strongly conditioned by external history, and this must be made quite clear.

Paul would never have formed his characteristic doctrine of justification by faith had he not taken in hand the task of converting Gentiles. The doctrine had a practical origin and practical purpose. It was not the other way round, as though the praxis were developed from a doctrine which had been created by religious thought and experience. Paul’s contrast between man’s deeds and merit and God’s grace could perhaps be explained by his reflection upon his experiences with the law as a Pharisee, when he tried in vain to satisfy its demands. Or it could be explained by his experience of conversion. But his making faith into the opposite of the works of the law could never be explained in this way. The explanation for this must be that it was a question of the conditions under which Gentiles could be accepted into the Christian community. Paul saw the necessity of denying that the Jewish ritual law – originally only this, and not the ‘commandments of God’ were at stake – was obligatory for Gentiles. One would expect that in forming his theory he would have set against the works of the law not only faith but also love and other virtues, or more generally the keeping of moral laws which are not to be broken. However, he could in fact find a positive condition for justification only in what made not only Gentiles but also equally Jews into Christians, something absolutely new, which distinguished the convert equally from Jews and Gentiles; and that was exclusively faith in the Christ.

A different example for the significance of the ‘external history’ is provided by the persecutions. The outbreak of persecution is an important piece of data for biblical theology, because conceptions and feelings were powerfully influenced by it. Hope flares up with passion, enthusiasm is awakened, hypomenô (endurance) becomes a supreme virtue. Ethical views and ideals are in general conditioned at the core by the situation. That philoxenia (hospitality) was at that time one of the cardinal virtues can be explained by the situation of travelling Christians and the significance which attached to travelling and foot-slogging. Love of the brethren meant more than love of one’s neighbour, because it was a matter of a small exclusive fellowship or community. An essential factor in the striving for enkratia (self control) and bagneia (purity) is that the community was surrounded by a lax and licentious world. Its position in the world is also responsible for its sense of honour, which stresses that the Lord’s name must not be slandered on account of the sin of Christians.

All these observations are only meant, as I have said, as illustrations to show what is involved when we insist upon a really historical procedure, at the same time both more rigorous and more free, in place of a mainly literary one. As regards the presentation itself, it is enough to stress one thing here: we must go for the dominant features. It must, for example, come over very clearly that the earliest Christianity lived from its belief that it stood in the eschatological era, and that it saw the proof of this in its possession of the Spirit.

My account is still in need of considerable expansion. It would be quite incomplete if I did not try to develop the shape of our discipline’s task through a positive description based on the actual material. As a preliminary, I want to glance back again at an earlier theme.

Only now can we see clearly the full significance of the question whether the discipline must attend to the New Testament alone or whether it must also include literature from farther afield.

There is no doubt that the absolute necessity of going beyond the limits of the New Testament only becomes clear from our conception of the task. If I ask what was the content and state of development of Christian belief and thought at a particular point in time, it is clear that all the material from this period is relevant to resolving the task. It is therefore really senseless here to propose
some external division between writings that are essentially related. This is a simple consequence for anyone who approves of my understanding of the task.

At the same time, it now becomes clear that bringing in material from outside the New Testament contributes significantly to the subject-matter itself. It would perhaps always make a noteworthy, and for certain individual questions not unimportant difference, whether or not I add some more to the total number of doctrinal concepts in the New Testament. But in the end this difference will not really go deep. If, on the other hand, the writings merely provide the materials which we use in constructing the history, then it is bound to be an extremely significant question whether there are more materials. The more plentiful they are, the better I can compare, the more lines I can draw, the more questions I become aware of, and the more certain I am of finding out what is essential.

The question of the real limits of the discipline can now be taken up afresh.

No kind of limitation used by the history of early Christian literature, commonly called ‘New Testament Introduction’, can be of any importance here. Whether a piece of writing is in the strict sense literature or not, or to which of the literary forms it belongs, is as irrelevant for biblical theology as it is important for literary history. That is, the question of delimitation means something different in both cases.

But it is also immediately apparent that the answer: ‘The Apostolic Fathers belong to the material of the discipline, but the Apologists do not’, is insufficient. Nor is it, of course, improved when we add to the ‘Apostolic Fathers’ other items like, for example, the Kerygma Petrou (The Proclamation of Peter) or the fragments of the older apocryphal gospels. On the contrary, it is clear that a fixed literary boundary cannot be given. Not only what comes into the period of time under consideration belongs to the subject, but also what does not. This, too, is certainly instructive, though only indirectly. We are to welcome anything that Justin says which clarifies the earlier history because we want to know about that history. In some individual questions the thread of the development would be cut at the wrong point and the natural connection of things ignored if we were not resolved to go beyond the Apostolic Fathers where circumstances demand it. What Justin gives us about argument from prophecy is directly continuous with what earlier writers say. Are we not to be allowed to consider his evidence? On the question of the condemnation of Judaism or the Old Testament, should not Marcion and the Gnostics be considered? Is Marcion irrelevant when asking what effect Paul had? When, on the other hand, one of the Apostolic Fathers touches on a theme which only has a real history later on, then it is not significant for the earlier period and does not have to be considered just because it turns up in Hermas or the like.

Furthermore, no exact date can be given as the boundary, such as AD 120, 130 or 150. These are far too detailed specifications, and can hardly be matched with a clear idea of definite differences. It can only be said that the border is where new movements in the church begin, new ideas gain momentum and the old has run its course. This moment coincides in the literature approximately with the transition from the Apostolic Fathers to the Apologists. We must not, of course, think that at a stroke people like Clement, the author of the Pastoral Epistles, Ignatius and Polycarp cease to exist and make room for men like Justin and Aristides. Thoughts like those of Justin and Aristides will probably have been in circulation long before. Here, too, the literature which has survived will give a misleading impression about how things really were, and that should not be underestimated. One must certainly not forget that Justin wrote not for Christians but for non-Christians. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Apologists with their Hellenistic education is the sign of a new era. Other things more or less coincide with this: the emergence of the main Gnostic schools and the corresponding struggle of the church against them; the start of the Montanist movement; the conscious distinction of the time of the apostles from every subsequent era as the classical period; the beginnings of a New Testament canon, and so on. This is where, taken as a whole, the borders are to be found. On particular issues, the boundary can only be decided in the course of the work. There will always be a certain elasticity in determining it.

V

The first main theme of New Testament theology is Jesus’ preaching. This is not the place to go into it, but two observations can be made, indicating the special difficulties of this task.

First, the preaching of Jesus cannot be presented as an actual
doctrine. That is, it cannot be cut loose from Jesus’ personality, and the course of his life, so far as this can be known. It is sufficient to recall that neither his proclamation of the kingdom of God nor even his preaching of the true righteousness is independent of his ‘plan’, his understanding of his vocation and his judgment about himself. Both personality and life will always, therefore, have to form the background of the account, and almost all the most profound difficulties about grasping a personality and a life therefore attach to New Testament theology, too. On the other hand, precisely because of this interconnection, Jesus’ own world of ideas must be reproduced. That is, unless one considers it impossible to say anything certain about it.

This means that at this point the presentation must be critical. Not just in the sense that all historical research is of course critical, but in a more specialized sense.

We do not possess ipsissima verba of Jesus. We only know about Jesus from later accounts. In these accounts, which are all directed towards the Christ of faith, the picture of Jesus’ personality and his preaching is overlaid and obscured by numerous later conceptions and interpretations, as can be seen somewhat from a comparison of the three synoptic gospels, and more clearly from other considerations. There are often several layers superimposed upon each other. Accordingly, the top coats must so far as possible be set aside. But this business cannot be concluded in a merely external manner, say by comparison of texts. Criticism at individual points, and one’s conception of the whole, condition each other mutually. There is little agreement about what is original and what secondary, even amongst scholars whose general position is similar. On the contrary, one might well say that there is no other central issue in the New Testament where everything is so much in a state of flux and where such diametrically opposite judgments are possible on precisely the central questions. This all means that, even here, the presentation must at every decisive point first distinguish between what is original and what has come in later, and between what is one way or the other relatively clear and what is doubtful.

We turn now from Jesus to the community, the church.

In order to be able to write an adequate historical account of its faith and doctrine in the earliest period, we should have to know more than we in fact do know.
of our knowledge is evident, too, from another angle – that here again we do not know the names. I still cannot, at least at present, convince myself that the author of the Fourth Gospel is the ‘presbyter’ John.

Such facts must be considered in biblical theology, too. It is, however, true that no matter how many unknown quantities may and must be mentally inserted into the eternally obscure map of early Christian history, there is one fact which not even the most intimate knowledge would move. This is the fact that Paul is the epoch-making figure in the history of primitive Christianity. He is not only the most powerful religious personality. By his missionary activity he decisively changed the physiognomy of the entire church. He made Christianity independent over against Judaism. He naturalized it upon Gentile soil, and so gave it a new horizon. He is – considering all this – the creator of a Christian theology. One has therefore to take one’s bearings on this figure who stands before us more clearly than Jesus himself.

We must next distinguish in our presentation between the faith of the Jewish-Christian early community and Christianity on heathen soil. We cannot always mark the borders with any certainty. That is, it is sometimes impossible to say whether something was or was not yet to be found in Jewish Christianity, did or did not grow only on Gentile Christian soil. But this uncertainty does not alter the necessity of making such distinctions.

In the period from Paul to the end of our account one cannot make a further subdivision of even approximately similar clarity and importance. Everything must be considered together here.

So the preaching of Jesus is followed by the faith of the early community. In my opinion we have no direct sources for this earliest period. I Peter and James certainly do not belong here. The speeches of Acts may contain older material – that cannot be investigated here; they, too, are certainly not a direct source. We are dependent upon some information from Acts and the Pauline epistles, and upon inferences from the gospels and especially Paul, and upon the nature of the historical situation. The chapter will unfortunately be short.

In retrospect the question naturally arises what the transition from Jesus to the community signifies.

Next comes a special chapter on Paul. The characteristic teaching of the apostle will be treated in detail. An important task is to make it historically intelligible. As I see it, the question should be stated like this: how did Paul’s Pharisaic Jewish theology become, through the experience of his conversion and what followed it, transformed into his Christian theology? One must reconstruct, on the basis of what Paul has written, the Jewish theology he once held. That is on the whole possible. One must also analyse his conversion experience psychologically. I do not say, explain it. All that matters here is what content and significance the experience, however it is explained, had for Paul’s world of thought. This is not the place to discuss what position this point should have in the structure of the whole account. All that is being stressed is that Pauline theology must not be seen as static and complete, but as something which has come into being. It must be made clear what is Jewish heritage – and that includes some Hellenistic material, what is Christian new formation, and what is Christian amalgamation of that heritage.

It must also be stressed that not all the images and ideas contained in the Pauline epistles are to come into the presentation. In whole areas, for example in the eschatological images, angelology and demonology, and concrete ethics, Paul is only one among many. There is a Pauline doctrine of redemption, a Pauline doctrine of justification, but (to exaggerate somewhat) no Pauline angelology and eschatology; there is only a Jewish or early Christian one. These and other things (such as his view of scripture) should only be touched on here in so far as they are controlled by the characteristic basic ideas and serve to illuminate these; that is in fact often the case. Otherwise the material in which Paul is not original, or where his originality is not historically significant, can be put with the material from the remaining writings. The advantage of this restriction is that what is characteristic about the apostle is clearly delimited, what in his ideas really made an impact comes over far more sharply, and what he shared or even might have shared with others is not put in a false light. We should not forget that Paul is being considered here, not for his own sake but as a member of a historical sequence. But I would like to repeat expressly that when the general development is being investigated, the truly ‘Pauline’ material also can and must be brought in again wherever it is important for understanding this. There is no need to be afraid of repetition. The same material will be considered from different sides and seen in a
different light. The text-book accounts also take up the same statements of the apostle in different places.

Important questions arise about the historical contexts as a whole.

Paul signifies a very wide distance from Jesus,74 and simply cannot adequately be understood on a basis of Jesus’ preaching. Nobody can write a New Testament theology as the development and continuation of Jesus’ teaching. Everything in Jesus revolves around an ethical imperative born of the most exalted religious individualism. Paul’s centre is faith in a system of redemptive facts that took place simultaneously in heaven and on earth (incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ).75 The picture of the human individual personality of Jesus has virtually disappeared in the apostle. Who could even guess from the sayings of Jesus that twenty years later the Pauline doctrine of the Son of God would be proclaimed? In short, it is an absolutely essential task to investigate the historical relationship of Paul to Jesus, to measure the distance between them and, so far as one can, to explain it. Only New Testament theology can decide how much goes back to Jesus, and how much the apostle who had never seen Jesus76 and yet became the gospel’s first witness to the Gentile world – what that fact contains! – is responsible for the emergence of Christianity.

Alongside this theme stands another, which also requires special investigation: the question of Paul’s relationship to the primitive community.

Other tasks are immediately pushed into the foreground. The after-effects of Paul must be indicated as exhaustively as possible.77 A sharp distinction must be made here between merely literary influence78 and a real continuation of his ideas, between his general influence upon the whole church in certain basic ideas (universalism, etc.) and his particular influence upon smaller groups through his more specially theological ideas – I have in mind Ephesians, I Peter, and Hebrews. It is also necessary to distinguish between the influence exercised by the real, living Paul and that of the later Paul living in his letters. With the general recognition of his letters a new and special phase of his influence begins. In this whole problem one must not think only of the doctrine of justification and what goes with it; Christology and the conception of Christ’s death have also to be considered. Finally, it has to be asked why not more of Paul’s teaching became the common possess-

sion of the earliest church, and what of his theology did not and could not take root. People have rightly spoken about the non-transferability of the element of Pharisaic theology in his teaching.79

What has been said so far raises the question of what we know about Jewish Christianity, after Paul had on the whole robbed it of its influence.80 It also raises another: what is involved in the acceptance of the Christian faith by Gentiles with their presuppositions. How far can the concepts and views they brought with them be observed in contrast to the world of ideas grown on Jewish subsoil?

All these themes have already brought us to the large and by far the most difficult section, where faith and theology on Gentile-Christian soil have to be described.

There is no single brief slogan which will characterize the content of this development. To bring it all under the heading of ‘watered-down Paulinism’ would mean saying nothing about the positive forces of the period. We would also have to show first that ‘Paulinism’ really was at one time common stock and that it is justified to make it the norm of all subsequent forms of Christianity. The expression ‘Paulinism continued’ says too little about what happened, because in fact Paulinism was only continued in a very limited sense, and because there is a good deal for which Paulinism did not provide the basis. When this ‘continuation’ is qualified by Pfleiderer through the addition ‘on the soil of Hellenism’, then ‘Hellenism’, the significance of which is unmistakable, is either a very vague concept, or else it too is too narrow to account for or explain every important phenomenon. Is it really true that ‘the different forms of development found in primitive Christian and in early catholic teaching can be understood without any forcing of the evidence’ from the ‘reciprocal relationship of penetration and separation, priority and subordination, that exists between Paul’s Christian proclamation and Hellenism’?81 Can one really point to such a neat straight-line development of Hellenistic doctrinal formation from Hebrews to the Gospel of John, seen as increasing dependence upon Alexandrian philosophy of religion?82

We shall have to try to abandon one-sided schematizations and give every factor in the development its due. The actual obligation to make clear the development and change which took place from Paul onwards up to the close of the period is already fully recognized. What we now need are accounts summarizing it. But as well
as or before this it is necessary to investigate in the way described the individual main areas of the world of ideas. This must be done with an eye to the development, but at the same time with an eye to the relationship between the different ideas.

It can be seen here how important it is to find the ‘headings’, to apprehend the themes correctly and group them correctly. That means in fact being able to take control of the phenomena, and is the quintessence of historical understanding. 83

This is not the place to give a programmatic sketch. Nor am I trying to give an exhaustive account of the tasks which come into consideration. The following intimations are only meant as further illustrations of what I have in mind.

Closely related to the problems already touched on above (the influence of Paul, etc.) is the extremely important question of what the church thinks about Judaism, both present-day and historical Judaism, and how it sees itself in relation to it. Two further themes are at once closely connected with this. I am thinking, first, of the significance of the Old Testament for the Gentile-Christian church. How is it regarded? How interpreted? What is important about it for the church? What does the Old Testament history mean to it? What has it taken over from Judaism in the way of valuation and interpretation of scripture? How far has the Old Testament become a new book when considered in a Christian way? There is plenty of material available for answering these sorts of questions. If we consider the argument from prophecy 84 in its different forms, we come at the same time to a second theme: what can we know about the church’s apologetic in the first place vis-à-vis Judaism? This certainly did not begin with Justin. In my view, Jesus’ prophecies of his death and resurrection belong here. So does the development of the story of Judas Iscariot, as it can be seen for example in the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John does in general provide a particular wealth of material for the struggle against Judaism. One must also consider, of course, Jewish polemic against the church.

Ethics is a large topic. What are the characteristic features? How closely is their morality connected with that of the Jewish or Hellenistic world? What effect does the peculiar position of the Christian community have upon the material adopted? What role does asceticism play? What is meant by sin? What vices are most hated? How firm a tradition of ethical rules is there? What is the significance of Jesus’ moral sayings and his example? What is not their significance? How far is there ‘moralism’? How old is it? In what relationship does enthusiasm or fanaticism stand to it? How far are they mutually exclusive? A related question is how much actual religion there is in religious belief and practice.

Gnosis – and here I do not mean the systems of Basilides or Valentinus – cannot be passed over in silence. Rather, it has to be attended to very seriously. I presuppose that gnosticism is older than Christianity and did not grow out of it. Thus far its history forms a task of its own. But it certainly does come into contact with Christianity and is amalgamated with it. There is even an ecclesiastical Christianity upon gnostic subsoil. I believe that the Gospel of John has to be understood in this way. 85 Did Christianity produce its now special gnosis? In what does it consist? How is it related to that which grew on other soil? There is plenty of scope for questions here – and puzzles.

Problems such as those posed by the history of thought about the second coming, the rest of eschatology, angelology and demonology, and the Christian mysteries of baptism and Lord’s supper, have already been touched on. Other points like the question of norms and authorities in Christianity, speculation about the church, and especially the history of Christology, can only be mentioned.

One thing, however, must be stressed rather more clearly. One of the most important facts of biblical theology is that in this period (and partly in the very early period), the original picture of the life of Jesus was more and more dogmatized. This development can be demonstrated from the gospels. What critical procedures cut out as not an authentic part of Jesus’ preaching is now – with other material – evaluated constructively to depict the emergence of the gospel picture of Jesus. How did it come about that whereas Jesus was first thought of as ‘his own precursor’, 86 i.e. that he was called Messiah as the one who was to become this (Paul and the synoptics never speak of a second coming, but only of a coming of the Messiah), afterwards he is the Messiah who has come and who will come again? How did the different ‘saving facts’ – these are not only ascension, descent into hell and supernatural birth – which were added to Christ’s death and resurrection arise? Both questions lead, strictly speaking, beyond the picture of Jesus in the gospels, but are largely related to this.
In this section Johannine theology will form a chapter of its own, I think at the end.

We are unable with any certainty to allocate the Gospel of John to its place in the course of the development. It will always be something of an island, but when the whole development has been completed it will not be completely isolated.

Here, too, we must exclude at the outset everything which belongs to more general themes. This includes attitudes to Judaism and to the Old Testament, anti-Jewish polemic, etc., except in so far as these matters are of interest for the actual contents of the presentation – these are above all Johannine christology, its fundamental world-view and perspective on the future with its teaching about the Paraclete.  

When the gospel is dealt with in biblical theology, I think we have to consider something which is generally overlooked. If it really is a matter of a doctrinal writing in gospel form, then the author's own theological viewpoint is clearly projected on to the picture of Christ's life. This means that we are not directly faced with his theology; it is veiled. Had the author presented it in so to speak dogmatic form, it would certainly not confront us primarily as a view of the life of Jesus. It would not revolve around this centre. Rather, it would show the Son of God in the light of his significance for faith, which is always a contemporary significance. It follows that we must distinguish within John's picture of Christ between the picture of the life, and the christological viewpoint itself which created it. If one simply analyses this picture and considers the result to be Johannine theology, false results and questions are reached.

First, an account of the life of Jesus is bound to place in the foreground matters which have only subordinate significance for the 'theology' of John – or have a different significance from what appears to be the case. For example, the erga (works) of Jesus which are so strongly emphasized are for the evangelist a proof by which Jesus' status is confirmed in opposition to his opponents. They are therefore quite probably important for apologetic purposes, but have nothing to do with his characteristic teaching about the Son of God. They are only significant for this in so far as they are at least in part (like the raising of Lazarus) at the same time statements about Christ and images of his essence. The important thing is then not the ergon and semeion (sign) itself, but what it says. This all means, too, that Jesus' omnipotence and omniscience which do, of course, point to his divine status are only so prominent in the gospel because this deals with the life of Jesus. The same thing is true of the frequency with which Jesus' freedom and autonomy in making decisions is stressed. That, too, is an apologetic element.

Something else must be added. The evangelist has indeed made the picture of Jesus' life entirely into a mirror of his own ideas. But he did not in the main invent it. The picture of the history which he had to use for his purpose was the one that was already there. But that means that he was in many ways bound and restricted by the tradition. The picture of the history handed down was always only up to a point capable of being pressed into the service of his ideas. There was always a remainder which did not suit them and even directly contradicted them. We hear of Jesus' human utterances and human emotions, or of Jesus withdrawing from his enemies in a miraculous way that is unthinkable for material corporeality. One might think here, and it has been thought, that the author reflected thus upon the relationship of the human to the divine in Christ, or – in the other case – thought of Jesus' corporeality in a docetic way. But this has nothing to do with docetism, as I John amply proves. The human traits are, so to speak, of no importance to the 'Christ of faith'. The theologian, the dogmatician, was only interested in the general idea that the Logos became sarx (flesh). As soon as the Logos or Son of God was really seen and shown in history, it was inevitable that all sorts of difficulties and questions would arise not only for the evangelist's but also for our logical thinking, which simply did not exist within the author's dogmatic framework.

This point of view must not be overlooked when we consider the statements about the attitude of the evangelist or his Christ to Judaism. Nobody could write a life of Jesus which entirely separated him from the national soil upon which, according to the tradition, he had stood. On the other hand, the Judaism with which Jesus was concerned was for the author identical with the Judaism which the church of his time had to combat. Whatever can be explained as resulting from this tension plays no part in the actual theology of the gospel – or at least belongs only to its periphery.

So, to understand 'Johannine theology' we must first to some
extent reverse the procedure by which the ideas have been projected on to the picture of the history.\textsuperscript{98}

If the ideas of Ignatius and his religious type are to be accorded a special characterization, this will best be inserted – I say this with some hesitation – where the characteristic marks of the period are being described and summarized; perhaps at the end of Johannine theology.

We must now return once again to our starting-point and consider an important task which has not yet been mentioned.

The preaching of Jesus cannot be made intelligible unless it is understood in the context of contemporary Judaism, and also in contrast to this. The theology of Paul is quite incomprehensible without a knowledge of late Jewish theology. But even apart from Jesus and Paul, from where does the mass of early Christian conceptual material come if not from Judaism? There were at the beginning very few 'Christian' concepts, even though these were extremely significant. They emerge in the nature of the case only gradually from the significance gained by specifically Christian matters such as the person of Jesus and the facts of his life or the church; or rather, through the decisive modification of Jewish concepts as a result of their relationship to these. Similarly, except for the belief in Jesus as the Messiah, what is essentially Christian only gradually becomes an active principle representing a tangible and valid factor in the whole development.\textsuperscript{94} One must reflect above all that the main presuppositions of all early Christian intellectual construction – religious individualism with the association of achievement and reward, the idea of resurrection and judgment with its separating of this world from the beyond, the world of eschatological-apocalyptic ideas in general, the concept of the Messiah, the particular evaluation and interpretation of the Old Testament and other matters – are all the result of development on Jewish soil immediately prior to Christianity. Judaism, not the Old Testament, is the basis of Christianity in the history of religion.\textsuperscript{95}

This means not only that the connections with Judaism must be thought through again and again, but also that New Testament theology must begin with an account of the main lines of late Jewish religion and theology – in the first place the Palestinian, and secondly also the Alexandrian. This is the necessary basis on which the account of early Christian religion and theology must stand and from which it must stand out. One of the greatest merits of Holtzmann's book is that it does not merely speak of the importance of Judaism for understanding primitive Christianity, but in fact prefaces its proper content with a detailed description of Judaism at the time of Jesus. One may hope that from now on no really scientific account will be published which does not to some extent meet this requirement.

Deissmann has insisted that not only Judaism, but also the religious and ethical position of Graeco-Roman paganism must be considered in biblical theology.\textsuperscript{96} 'The intellectual and spiritual situation of the century around the beginning of the Christian era' must be sketched as a whole, so that Christianity is shown in connection with its age but also at the same time as standing out against its background. One can then understand how it must have looked to the people of the time.\textsuperscript{97}

This consideration deserves careful attention and indicates a necessary aim. I have already, as occasion arose, explicitly or implicitly acknowledged that biblical theology is very seriously concerned with the question what Christianity brought to the pagan when he became a Christian, what was readily intelligible to him and what was not, and again what he brought to Christianity at the points where pagan views run parallel to Christian ones. But I would like to see Deissmann's demand met in a rather different form. When we are considering the mother-soil of Christianity, paganism is in a different position from Judaism. A fairly detailed description of the pagan world of thought at the beginning of the account would be bound to go beyond the framework of the whole. On the other hand, when the entry of Christianity into the wider world is spoken of in the course of the narrative, the facts of the religious life of paganism and its world of thought which are important here must, of course, be brought up and discussed. What will matter here, however, is not the actual philosophers, but the typical outlook of the man in the street.\textsuperscript{98}

Finally, something needs to be said about the name of the discipline.

The name 'biblical theology' originally meant not a theology which the Bible contained, but a theology which has biblical character, and is got from the Bible. That can be set aside as irrelevant to us.
Nevertheless, the name New Testament theology is wrong in both its terms. The New Testament is not concerned merely with theology, but is in fact far more concerned with religion. The reasons why 'New Testament' is inappropriate do not need to be repeated. One cannot speak of 'early Christian history of dogma', because dogma in the proper sense only comes into view at the end of this period. The appropriate name for the subject-matter is: early Christian history of religion, or rather: the history of early Christian religion and theology. If anyone protests that this is no longer a New Testament theology, that is a strange objection. the name is obviously controlled by the subject-matter, not vice versa.

It is certainly easier to pose problems than to solve them. No one is more acutely aware than I am how much work and what a change in our traditional way of working will still be necessary really to satisfy the programme which I have tried to establish. But it is justifiable to try to formulate the problem without having oneself solved it.

One thing cannot be denied. Biblical theology today is much less developed than the history of the apostolic and sub-apostolic age. Yet it belongs with this in the same way that the history of doctrine belongs with church history. It is not yet in the true and strict sense a historical discipline at all. May it become one!