

The Origins of New Testament Theology

Edited by
RAINER HIRSCH-LUIPOLD and
ROBERT MATTHEW CALHOUN

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A Dialogue with Hans Dieter Betz

edited by

Rainer Hirsch-Luipold and
Robert Matthew Calhoun

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Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, born 1967; studies in Protestant Theology and Greek Philology; since 2011 Professor of New Testament and the History of Ancient Religion, University of Bern; since 2015 Extraordinary Professor in the Department of Ancient Studies, Stellenbosch University.
orcid.org/0000-0002-6938-268X

Robert Matthew Calhoun, born 1971; Ph.D. 2011, University of Chicago in New Testament and Early Christian Literature; since 2016 Research Assistant to the A.A. Bradford Chair, Texas Christian University.
orcid.org/0000-0001-5056-2050

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Preface and Acknowledgments

The subtitle of the present volume signals its dialogical character. Like the philosophical dialogues of antiquity, it has its roots in conversations that occurred in “real life,” and that featured open-ended debate on pressing questions. It began with an almost book-length article by Hans Dieter Betz on the origins of the concept of “New Testament theology.” In one of many discussions conducted over email, the idea of a conference in Bern in May 2017, devoted to Betz’s arguments in this essay, took shape. At this event, Betz delivered an overview of his paper, followed by responses from several scholars representing different disciplines: Ulrich Luz, Samuel Volkenweider, Johan Thom, Christoph Riedweg, and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold. These papers, revised in light of the vigorous and incisive discussion between speakers and audience, form the core of the present volume. In order to enrich the “literary dialogue” further, Harry Attridge and Gerd Van Riel were asked, and graciously agreed, to add contributions from their own perspectives. Betz concludes the volume and continues the dialogue with an additional test case-study for his own thesis, taken from Paul’s letter to the Romans.

In October as we were beginning the final preparations to the manuscript, we received the sad news that Ulrich Luz had passed away. It is thus with heavy hearts – but with tremendous gratitude for his decades of superb research, generous mentorship and leadership, and warm friendship – that we present one of his final contributions to the study of New Testament theology.

The editors thank the participants at the conference and all of the contributors to the present volume. Furthermore, we gratefully recognize Dr. Christine Harker, who handled the organization of the conference and assisted with the manuscript in its early phases; also, for wonderful assistance on various minor tasks, we thank David Staub, Joelle Ramseyer, Jana Gözl, Barbara Schlunegger, and Barbara Hirsch.

Finally, the editors thank Mohr Siebeck’s ever-amazing team for bringing the volume to completion, especially Elena Müller, Tobias Stäbler, and Matthias Spitzner; and Jörg Frey with his associates Markus Bockmuehl, James A. Kelhoffer, Tobias Nicklas, Janet E. Spittler, and J. Ross Wagner, for

receiving our volume into the eminent *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* series.

Rainer Hirsch-Luipold
Bern, Switzerland

Robert Matthew Calhoun
Fort Worth, Texas, United States

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor (Yale) Bible
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AKG	Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte
AMMTC	Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Texts and Contexts: Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism and the Platonic Tradition
ANF	Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325</i> , repr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985–1987)
ANRW	Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, eds., <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972–)
ANTF	Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BDAG	Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BDF	Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BNP	Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, eds., <i>Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World</i> , 16 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2002–2010)
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BRLAJ	Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism
BSGRT	Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
Budé	Collection des universités de France, publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BzA	Beiträge zur Altertumskunde
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CÉFR	Collection de l'École française de Rome
DDD ²	Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> , 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999)
DK	Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, eds. and trans., <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , 3 vols. (Zürich: Weidmann, 1974–75)
DNP	Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, eds., <i>Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike</i> , 16 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–2003)

EBR	Hans-Josef Klauck, et al., eds., <i>The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–)
EC	<i>Early Christianity</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
EWNT	Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., <i>Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> , 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978–1983)
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GAT	Grundrisse zum Alten Testament
GGP	Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
Heb.	Hebrew
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HrwG	Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Matthias Laubscher, eds., <i>Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe</i> , 5 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988–2001)
HThKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
HWRh	Gert Ueding, et al., eds., <i>Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik</i> , 12 vols. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992–2015)
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ICS	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JAOC	Judaïsme ancien et origenes du christianisme
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JWV	Julius-Wellhausen-Vorlesung
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
KRS	G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, eds. and trans., <i>The Presocratic Philosophers</i> , 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th ed. with rev. suppl. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996)
MJTh	Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie
MnemSup	Mnemosyne Supplements
MThSt	Marburger theologische Studien
NAB	New American Bible
NAWG/PH	Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse
Nestle-Aland	Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , 28th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012)

NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NThG	Neue theologische Grundrisse
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OCT	Oxford Classical Texts (Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis)
OT	Old Testament
OWC	Oxford World's Classics
<i>PGM</i>	Karl Preisendanz and Albert Henrichs, eds., <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> , 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973–1974)
PhA	Philosophia Antiqua
<i>Phil</i>	<i>Philologus</i>
PhilSup	Supplements to Philologus
PrTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
PW	Georg Wissowa and Wilhelm Kroll, eds., <i>Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , 50 vols. in 84 parts (Stuttgart: Metzler & Druckenmüller, 1894–1980)
PWSup	Supplements to PW
RAC	Theodor Klauser, et al., eds., <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–)
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>RGG</i> ⁴	Hans Dieter Betz, et al., eds., <i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> , 4th ed., 8 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007)
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
<i>RPP</i>	Hans Dieter Betz, et al., eds., <i>Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion</i> , 14 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2007–2013)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
SAPERE	Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SD	Studies and Documents
SGRR	Studies in Greek and Roman Religion
SHAW/PH	Sitzungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaft, philosophisch-historische Klasse
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SPhiloA</i>	<i>Studia Philonica Annual</i>
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>SVF</i>	Hans Friedrich August von Arnim, ed., <i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> , 4 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1924)
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
ThSt	Theologische Studien
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>

TRE	Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller, eds., <i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1977–)
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TWNT	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> , 10 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932–1979)
UALG	Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VF	<i>Verkündigung und Forschung</i>
VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WdF	Wege der Forschung
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZBKAT	Zürcher Bibelkommentare, Altes Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Introduction

Rainer Hirsch-Luipold and Robert Matthew Calhoun

“New Testament Theology” as a genre was inaugurated at the end of the eighteenth century with Johann Philipp Gabler’s “Von der richtigen Unterscheidung der biblischen und der dogmatischen Theologie und der rechten Bestimmung ihrer beider Ziele.”¹ It arguably reached its peak with the magisterial, groundbreaking, and extremely influential (but also highly controversial) *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* by Rudolf Bultmann.² Numerous “Theologies” have appeared since then in both German and English, but “New Testament Theology” remained largely a European and more specifically German enterprise. This may well have to do with the fact that in the United States “theology” continues to carry the confessional meaning (as distinguished from a history-of-religions approach), which Gabler intended to overcome with his “Unterscheidung.”³

In addition to the “Theologies of the New Testament” and of the “Old Testament,”⁴ as well as the “Biblical Theologies” that have appeared,⁵ we have

¹ Repr. in *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Georg Strecker, WdF 367 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), 32–44.

² Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953); ed. Otto Merk, 9th ed. (1984).

³ The volume edited by Cilliers Breytenbach and Jörg Frey (*Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, WUNT 205 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007]) intends to discuss systematically the basis of “New Testament Theology” and its “Grundlagen und Ziele” as well as its “Vorgehen.” An excellent overview citing and discussing all the major approaches to the question of New Testament theology in Germany as well as in English-language scholarship (mainly from the UK, with some notable contributions from the US) is given in an introduction to the volume by Frey, “Zum Problem der Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments,” 3–53. An earlier volume edited by Georg Strecker (*Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments* [see n. 1]) assembles programmatic contributions to the problem, ranging from Gabler’s “Unterscheidung” to Ernst Fuchs, Herbert Braun, and Heinrich Schlier in the middle of the twentieth century.

⁴ Most recently Konrad Schmid, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, NThG (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019); Eng. trans., *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019).

⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, 2 vols. (London: SCM; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). Cf. most recently the two volumes authored jointly by Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann

recently witnessed an increasing awareness of “Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion”⁶ (as present in epic and drama, novel and philosophy, law and ritual) as well as theologies of certain philosophers or philosophical schools.⁷ This growing interest in “theologies” of different ancient literatures necessarily involves debate about what “theology” might mean in these sources. For example, in their introduction to the volume *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*, Esther Eidinow, Julia Kindt, and Robin Osborne differentiate five usages of the term theology:⁸

(1) Theology understood “etymologically as ‘talking about gods,’ where ‘talking’ is construed at its broadest (the term ‘theology,’ in this sense, would merely aim to pick out references to gods, whether verbal or pictorial”);

(2) An indirect expression of concepts, ideas or questions about the gods, as present for instance in prayer;⁹

(3) “[P]ractices like prayer, divination and reciprocal gift-giving” that can be viewed “not only as themselves conveying a concept of interventionist and communicative gods, but as conveying beliefs that there exist interventionist and communicative gods”;

Spieckermann (a New Testament and an Old Testament scholar), *Der Gott der Lebendigen: Eine biblische Gotteslehre*, Topoi biblischer Theologie 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); 2nd ed. (2017); Eng. trans., *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Menschwerdung*, Topoi biblischer Theologie 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

⁶ Esther Eidinow, Julia Kindt, and Robin Osborne, eds., *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*, Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). See also Dorothea Frede and André Laks, eds., *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath*, PhA 89 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002).

⁷ Stefan Dienstbeck, *Die Theologie der Stoa*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 173 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Friedrich Solmsen, *Plato's Theology*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 27 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1942); Michael Bordt, *Platons Theologie*, Symposium 126 (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2006); Gerd Van Riel, *Plato's Gods*, Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), containing a chapter on “Plato's theology”; and the new exposition on Stoicism by Maximilian Forschner, *Die Philosophie der Stoa: Logik, Physik und Ethik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2018), similarly containing a chapter on “Theology” of the Stoic tradition. According to Jaap Mansfeld, only metaphysical speculation can be the subject of reflection on “theology” in a philosophical perspective (“Theology,” in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. Keimpe Algra, Jonathan Barnes, Jaap Mansfeld, and Malcolm Schofield [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 452–78, 452).

⁸ “Introduction: What Might We Mean by the Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion?,” in eadem and idem, *Theologies of Ancient Greek Religion*, 1–11, 3–4; see also the review by Corinne Bonnet in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2017/2017-06-13.html>).

⁹ Theology can “signify the verbal or pictorial articulation of certain conceptions of attitudes towards or questions about gods.”

- (4) A certain belief system about the gods;
 (5) A “systematic and generalized theory about the divine or, conversely, explicit and abstracted speculations about divinity which may be either systematically doctrinal or open-ended and aporetic to different extents.”

Unlike these scholars working anew on the theologies of Greek religion, investigations of New Testament theology characteristically omit consideration of the more basic question of the meaning(s) of θεολογία, as Hans Dieter Betz points out in his main essay below. Usually, their concept of “theology” conforms to the paradigm of modern academic theology, particularly when they trace its development forward, from the later writings of the New Testament into the period of the early church. Consequently, the notion of institutions and “schools” of theology has provided the means to organize the inquiry conceptually and temporally, e.g., the Pauline and Johannine schools, the school of Alexandrian catechists, and so forth.¹⁰ But the existence of these “schools” has itself become the subject of intense scholarly debate.¹¹ In recent years, more theoretical and methodological considerations have gained ground, in pursuit of greater clarity on what “New Testament theology” is, and how it should be carried out.¹²

¹⁰ Christoph Markschies, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Eng. trans., *Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology*, trans. Wayne Coppins (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015). A similar focus on “schools” in the study of the history of philosophy led to the assumption that “Middle Platonism” (as the name suggests) is merely a bridge between the end of the institutional Academy at the beginning of the 1st c. BCE and the foundation of the four “chairs of philosophy” in Athens by Marcus Aurelius in 176 CE, which meant a renewed institutionalizing of Academic tradition.

¹¹ Cf. Christoph Riedweg, ed., *Philosophia in der Konkurrenz von Schulen, Wissenschaften und Religionen: Zur Pluralisierung des Philosophiebegriffs in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike; Akten der 17. Tagung der Karl und Gertrud Abel-Stiftung vom 16. und 17. Oktober 2014 in Zürich*, *Philosophie der Antike* 34 (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Tor Vegge, *Paulus und das antike Schulwesen: Schule und Bildung des Paulus*, BZNW 134 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2006); Thomas Schmeller, *Schulen im Neuen Testament? Zur Stellung des Urchristentums in der Bildungswelt seiner Zeit*, HBS 30 (Freiburg and New York: Herder, 2001); Roelof van den Broek, “The Christian ‘School’ of Alexandria in the Second and Third Centuries,” in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and Alasdair A. MacDonald, *Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History* 61 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 39–47; Clemens Scholten, “Die alexandrinische Katechetenschule,” *JAC* 38 (1995): 16–37.

¹² Cf. the essays in Breytenbach and Frey, *Aufgabe und Durchführung* for efforts to reckon with the issues of the unity, multiplicity and diversity of the theology/ies of the New Testament, a historical versus a hermeneutical perspective, questions of canon, and a history-of-religions perspective. In his introductory essay (“Zum Problem der Aufgabe und

The approach of this volume differs from that of traditional “Theologies of the New Testament” because the principal question here is not *What is “New Testament theology”?*, but *Where does it come from?* What are its origins and preconditions? How did it begin, both in terms of the historical circumstances that may have sparked it, and in terms of its earliest literary expressions?¹³ A straightforward answer presents itself at once: New Testament theology (as everyone should agree) is firmly rooted in the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures and the theology/ies potentially encompassed therein. But here the seemingly-straightforward answer produces more puzzles. The Hebrew Bible has no word for “theology,” and neither the translators of the Septuagint nor the authors of the New Testament use it. Furthermore, the very idea of a “theology,” as we have come to know it – namely as a “systematic reflection on and explication of the fundamental content of the Christian faith ... as practiced in the context of academic institutions in the various theological disciplines ... and in relationship to the Christian community of faith in the various churches”¹⁴ – seems to have a Christian flavor to it, if it is not altogether “specific to Christianity, more particularly the traditions of the Western church.”¹⁵ In any case, it turns out that some of the specifically theological strands of New Testament writing lead us to the Greek tradition – the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, which, as is well-known, was the basis for most New Testament writings, alongside Second Temple Jewish texts which were composed in Greek or at least heavily influenced by Greek thought.¹⁶

Durchführung,” see n. 3 above), Jörg Frey poses, as the first of a series of “grundlegende Fragen” the following: “Ist der Begriff der ‘Theologie’ in Anbetracht seiner Geschichte überhaupt zur zusammenfassenden Beschreibung der Auffassungen der urchristlichen Zeugen und der Verkündigungsinhalte der neutestamentlichen Texte verwendbar?” (6). This question is especially pertinent, he says, since the term is ambivalent and can be used to either designate theology proper, i. e. the doctrine of God and the Trinity, or more generally the system of Christian beliefs and doctrines about God and his dealings with the world and his people.

¹³ These questions lead to others, e. g.: What might *θεολογία* or *θεολογεῖν* have meant for the authors and initial audiences of New Testament’s component documents? Is *θεολογεῖν* something the authors do *self-consciously*, or do they do it only tacitly, implicitly? If they know the terms, why do they choose not to use them? Is *θεολογία* something the authors put in the texts, or is it something interpreters bring to the text, as a feature of canonical reception?

¹⁴ See Christoph Schwöbel, “Theologie,” *RGG*⁴ 8 (2005): 255–306, 255 = “Theology,” *RPP* 12 (2012): 617–46, 617.

¹⁵ Schwöbel, “Theologie,” 255 = “Theology,” 617.

¹⁶ This so-called apocryphal tradition is not part of the Reformed Bibles, but was held “good and important to read, but not on par with the Scriptures” by Martin Luther.

It is possible that the “origin” of New Testament theology has contributed to the notable unpopularity of the term “theology” in contemporary Jewish thought (not so much in the Judaism of the Hellenized Jews in Alexandria and elsewhere, as in Philo, for instance).¹⁷ Wikipedia, which (if nothing else) shows the popular usage of terms, has an article on “Jewish philosophy,” but not one on “Jewish theology.”¹⁸ It is surely not without significance that one who prominently made use of the concept of theology in his presentation of Jewish thought in Roman Imperial times was Jacob Neusner,¹⁹ who engaged in extensive dialogue with his Christian colleagues. He offers the following definition:

Theology, broadly construed, is the science of the reasoned knowledge of God. Theology presents the system that results from philosophical analysis of, thinking about, the facts set forth by religion. In the case of a Judaism knowledge of God is made possible by God’s self-manifestation in the Torah. The theology of Judaism sets forth knowledge of God produced by rigorous reflection upon, generalization and universalization of, the hard facts of the Torah, written and oral.²⁰

Neusner has here opted for the disengagement of *θεολογία* from narrowly Christian or Greco-Roman philosophical conceptions for his research on rabbinic literature.

It is our hope, therefore, that the investigations of the “origins” of theology presented here will shed new light on some old questions of New Testament theology: (1) the historical problem of how it came about that the authors of the New Testament began to formulate “theologically” through the systematic reflection on the divine and the development of a vocabulary suitable for their inquiries; (2) the form-critical question of whether the authors of the New Testament regard particular genres as amenable for doing theology; and (3) the theoretical problem of what “theology” can mean if it is applied to the biblical writings.²¹ Ideally, the present volume will stimulate renewed

¹⁷ On this point, see Betz, “New Testament Theology,” 7–92, below.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_philosophy.

¹⁹ Jacob Neusner, *Handbook of Rabbinic Theology: Language, System, Structure* (Boston: Brill, 2002); idem, *The Theology of the Halakhah*, BRLAJ 6 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001); idem, *Theological and Philosophical Premises of Judaism*, Judaism and Jewish Life (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008); idem, *Theology of the Oral Torah: Revealing the Justice of God* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999).

²⁰ Neusner, *Theology of the Halakhah*, xxxi.

²¹ Markschies (*Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie*, 12–13), even though he argues against an “Einbahnstraßenhermeneutik” that perceives a one-way-street running from Aramaic communities in Palestine to Hellenistic communities and their school-like institutions, still speaks of a “paradigm of contemporary Platonic philosophy,” which is also more a modern construct than anything else. Criticizing this idea of a “one-way-street,” Markschies rightly claims that Palestinian forms of early Christianity did not simply give

debate about the merits of investigating “New Testament theology” with an eye to similar inquiries happening in neighboring fields (history, religion and philosophy), and will deepen the comprehension of its vital contribution to wider research in the humanities.

way to Hellenized (Gentile) Christian communities. But the opposite is also true: Greek philosophy did not take shape in the 1st and 2nd centuries untouched by the religious turn in Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity. Platonism in this period turned to the new form of “theology” that now included the interpretation of religious traditions (and thus precisely departed from the paradigm that was later believed to be that of “contemporary Platonism”). This makes it problematic to talk about the “appropriation of the pagan term *θεολογία*” in the 1st–5th centuries. Marksches furthermore calls this an “interesting process of inculturation.” Rather, early Christianity as well as Hellenistic Judaism help shaping the very concept of a theology that includes the reflection of “implicit theology” (14) in the form of traditions of lived religion, something that was later believed to be exclusively Christian.

New Testament Theology

The Origins of a Concept

Hans Dieter Betz

Was ist das Schwerste von allem?
Was dir das Leichteste dünket.
Mit den Augen zu sehen, was vor den Augen dir liegt.

Goethe

A. Laying the Foundations

I. Introduction

In his introduction to the reprint edition of Rudolf Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, Robert Morgan, the editor, calls attention to the need and opportunity to study further the question of the terminology employed by Bultmann.¹ Specifically he says:

... theological assumptions governing Bultmann's work demand more discussion. They are a prerequisite for understanding his *Theology of the New Testament* because the exegetical and historical study of a lifetime that it distills was developed in

¹ Bultmann's work is cited here as *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1951–55), repr. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), with a new introduction by Robert Morgan. The original German is *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953), ed. Otto Merk, 9th ed. (1984). Cf. Georg Strecker, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 1–3; Eng. trans., *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Berlin: De Gruyter; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 1–4; idem, "Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments," in idem, *Eschaton und Historie: Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 260–90. For different approaches see Cilliers Breytenbach and Jörg Frey, eds., *Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, WUNT 205 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). This work contains contributions presented at a conference in Berlin (2004) by a German and British group discussing the publication of Ferdinand Hahn's *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); 3rd ed. (2011).

part as a theological response to the increasing ‘secularization’ implicit in late nineteenth-century scholarship. Bultmann himself remained within that critical tradition but joined Barth in recalling it to its theological roots. He strengthened its exegetical shoots by hermeneutical reflection and produced a still unsurpassed synthesis of philosophical and historical theology which is also an exegetical master-class.²

One of Bultmann’s unexamined presuppositions to be named is the term “theology,” whose background in Christian dogmatics, but not its earlier history in Greek thought, has been dealt with since the Reformation. How important the concept of “theology” (θεολογία) is in its earlier history is shown by the questions raised in the first paragraph of Bultmann’s work:

The message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself. For New Testament theology consists in the unfolding of those ideas by means of which Christian faith makes sure of its own object, basis, and consequences. But Christian faith did not exist until there was a Christian kerygma, i. e., a kerygma proclaiming Jesus Christ – specifically Jesus Christ the Crucified and Risen One – to be God’s eschatological act of salvation. He was first so proclaimed in the kerygma of the earliest Church, not in the message of the historical Jesus, even though that Church frequently introduced into its account of Jesus’ message motifs of its own proclamation. Thus, theological thinking – the theology of the New Testament – begins with the kerygma of the earliest Church and not before. But the fact that Jesus had appeared and the message which he had proclaimed were, of course, among its historical presuppositions; and for this reason Jesus’ message cannot be omitted from the delineation of New Testament theology.³

Going by these succinct statements, the term “theology” cannot simply be applied to what is called either the “message” of the historical Jesus or the “kerygma” of the earliest church. Also, it remains unclear how the Christian faith is related to theological thinking. Consequently, the historical Jesus and his proclamation were classified as pre-Christian. If this is agreed, why does it not include Jesus’s Jewish theology? One answer could be that Judaism, at least at Jesus’s time, did not have a theology. In his own day, Bultmann could have referred to Jewish authors who claimed as a fact that Judaism, at least in antiquity, did not have “theology.” Since he does not include such a reference, the conclusion remains that whenever “theology” is found it is by definition Christian. Hence, as a Jew the historical Jesus could not have “theology.” Since his “proclamation” had a “kerygma,” it must have been non-theological or quasi-theological. While this argument seems to be supported by the

² Robert Morgan, “Introduction,” in Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:xi–xxxvii, here xvii. See also Robert Morgan’s review essays, “New Testament Theology as Implicit Theological Interpretation of Christian Scripture,” *Int* 70 (2016): 383–98; and “Liberal Theological Hermeneutics,” *JTS* 68 (2017): 212–29.

³ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:3.

non-occurrence of the Greek θεολογία in the New Testament, the language of “kerygma” (Greek κήρυγμα, κήρυξ, κηρύσσειν) does occur in the New Testament, but it clearly points to a Christian concept.⁴ Apparently, Bultmann tries to avoid contradicting himself when he distinguishes between the proclamation of the historical Jesus and that of the earliest Christian church.⁵ When, however, he provides a sketch of the proclamation of the historical Jesus, the material content of that message is constructed from passages in the Synoptic Gospels, which were written by Greek-speaking Christian authors. This creates the difficulty that Jesus’s supposedly Jewish message is really a Christianizing reconstruction. Subsequently, New Testament scholars after Bultmann, including the present author, have made far-reaching changes by constructing the “theologies” characteristic of each of the authors of the Four Gospels. Accordingly, the first Gospel is that of Mark, whose theology seems to be Pauline.⁶ Matthew’s author may represent the church of Cephas/Peter, indicated by the unique identification in Matt 16:13–20. This author is able to include substantially older Jewish-Christian traditions, especially the Sermon on the Mount. In my *Hermeneia* Commentary I have tried to show that both versions, the Matthean (Matt 5:3–7:27) and the Lukan (Luke 6:20–49), constitute summaries (epitomes) of Jesus’s teaching, created by the early church, perhaps in Jerusalem ca. 50 CE. Both versions intend to instruct disciples coming from Jewish (Matthew) or Gentile (Luke) backgrounds.⁷ The author called Luke is a Hellenistic-Christian historian revising Mark’s Gospel and expanding it further in the book of Acts. In these two literary works (called λόγοι), Luke expresses his own Gentile-Christian thinking. Finally, the author of the Fourth Gospel is substantially different from the earlier three because of his Hellenistic philosophical ideas, specifically the

⁴ For references, see 1 Cor 1:21–23; 2:4; 15:14; etc.; cf. BDAG 543–44, s. v.

⁵ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, ch. I, §§ 1–4 (1:3–32): “The Message of Jesus”; ch. II, §§ 5–8 (1:33–62): “The Kerygma of the Earliest Church”; ch. III, §§ 9–15 (1:63–183): “The Kerygma of the Hellenistic Church Aside from Paul.”

⁶ I agree here with Margaret M. Mitchell, “Epiphanic Evolutions in Earliest Christianity,” *ICS* 29 (2004): 183–204; repr. in eadem, *Collected Essays*, vol. 1: *Paul and the Emergence of Christian Textuality: Early Christian Literary Culture in Context*, WUNT 393 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 237–55.

⁷ See my commentary, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); also my essays in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 2: *Synoptische Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), especially “The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Interpretation,” 270–89. Cf. also Ernst Baasland, *Parables and Rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount: New Approaches to a Classical Text*, WUNT 351 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); for my review of this work see *TLZ* 142/7–8 (2017): 756–60.

concept of Logos (λόγος), on the basis of which he thoroughly rewrote his source material. And yet, similar to Paul, this author does not openly claim himself as being under the influence of Greek philosophy.⁸

Coming to the issue before us, what then does the title “Theology of the New Testament” or “New Testament Theology” mean in the present situation of New Testament research? There is more than one answer to be considered. The title could be conceived as a modern concept of systematic theology and could present the theology designed by the modern author, reflecting his or her own work. Bultmann’s work would then turn out to contain his own theological assessment of the New Testament. Or, such a title could express a historical perspective and could then announce a plurality of theologies. That is, it would assemble the Jewish theology of Jesus, the Jewish-Christian theology of the earliest church prior to Paul, the Christian theologies of Paul and his followers (the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral Epistles), the theologies of the three Synoptic Gospels and Acts, the theology of the Fourth Gospel and the Letters of John, the theologies of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles, and finally the theology of the book of Revelation. In addition to these diverse theologies, an effort would have to be made to summarize what is common to the variety and to justify the theological status of the New Testament “canon.” This concept of “New Testament theology” would then constitute the Christian rubric of “Kanongeschichte” and, together with the Old Testament, of the Christian Bible.⁹ In other words, according to this perspective, “New Testament Theology” would be part of what in Christian theology is called “Biblical Theology.”¹⁰

While these perspectives look at “New Testament Theology” in its final stage, it is in fact a part of post-New Testament historical or systematic theology. Yet, it does not teach us anything concerning the “newness” suggested by the category of New Testament. It is furthermore not self-evident why the term “New Testament,” as applied to the collection of books, does not occur in the collection itself, but is introduced by its interpreters in the 2nd/3rd c. CE, Clement of Alexandria in particular.¹¹ The same is true of its biblical

⁸ Implicitly announced in the Prologue, John 1:1–18, based on the concept of λόγος (1:1, 14). For further analysis, see below, §B.

⁹ See Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, Alfred Schindler, and Klaus Huizing, “Canon, I–III,” *RPP* 2 (2007): 352–55 (with bibliography) = *RGG*⁴ 4 (2001): 767–71.

¹⁰ See Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker, “Biblical Theology,” *RPP* 2 (2007): 83–89 = *RGG*⁴ 1 (1998): 1544–53; Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

¹¹ See Barbara Aland, “New Testament,” *RPP* 9 (2011): 142 = *RGG*⁴ 6 (2003): 218. The term refers back to καινὴ διαθήκη (“new covenant”) in Gal 4:24; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 11:27; Luke 22:20.

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