

Towards a Genre Based New Testament Theology

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Introduction

Is it possible to arrive at one NT Theology? Diverse authors with diverse backgrounds each writing for a particular audience to address a particular problem (in most cases) can they be having the same theology? It must be noted that this problem is not unique to NT Theology – at much larger scale attempts have been made to arrive at one biblical theology – incorporating the NT and OT theology(ies) (Hasel,1994:203). It must also be noted that in 1978 Gerhard Hasel pointed out that of the eleven who produced new testament theologies between 1967 and 1976 no two “agree on the nature, function, method, and scope of NT theology” (cited in Morris, 1990:10). For the English ones published after 1978 I can safely say the same. As James Dunn says in his essay ‘Few would want to claim that there is a single, uniform theological teaching on any subject within the NT writings. These writings certainly form a unified body of texts, united above all by their common focus on and devotion to Jesus Christ. But round that common core there is considerable diversity.’ (Rogerson and Lieu, 2006:699)

In this paper I will look at the possibilities of a single NT theology and propose the approach, structure and contents towards such a work. I will propose a new approach incorporating the existing methods and adding some new elements which will identify the unity and diversity in the enterprise of NT Theology.

Basic Clarifications

This section tries to define basic terms such as biblical theology and tries to differentiate between biblical theology and systematic theology.

A systematic theology is a systematic treatment of a theological subject. All major areas are covered. A biblical theology tries to understand what a particular book or author has to say about a particular subject – though different methodologies can be applied to arrive at this.

This distinction was first made by J. P. Gabler¹ in his inaugural address. In his own words ‘There is truly biblical theology of historical origin conveying what the holy writers felt about divine matters; on the other hand there is a dogmatic theology of didactic origin teaching what each theologian philosophises rationally about divine things according to the measure of his ability or of the times, age, place, sect, school and other similar factors’ (Sandys-Wunsch J. and Eldredge L., 1980:137)

As H.C. Thiessen said the Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the scientist a body of unorganized or only partly organized facts...it remains for us therefore to gather together the scattered facts and to build them up into a logical system (Thiessen, 1989:5). Systematic Theology assimilates truth from the entire Bible, Biblical Theology is narrower (Enns,1989:20).

Biblical theology also recognizes progressive revelation – how God revealed himself to humanity progressively. Even within a particular author’s writings, there is progression – Romans give a fuller treatment of Justification of Faith than Galatians or any other epistle by Paul.

Paul Enns brings out a table of difference between Systematic Theology (ST) and Biblical Theology (BT) :

BT	ST
Restricts its study to the scripture	Seeks truth from scripture and any source outside scripture – to be more accurate appeals to philosophy and logic for systematisation of truth found in scripture
Examines part of scripture	Examines the whole of scripture
Compiles information on a doctrine from a specific writer or a particular era	Compiles information on a doctrine by correlating all the scriptures
Seeks to understand why or how a doctrine developed	Seeks to understand what was ultimately written
Seeks to understand the process as well as the result – the product	Seeks to understand the result the product
Views the progress of revelation in different eras	Views the culmination of gods revelation

¹ However according to (Sandys-Wunsch J. and Eldredge L., 1980:149) G. T. Zachariae is the one who gave Biblical Theology its modern sense

Source: (Enns, 1989:23)

One of the distinguishing features of Biblical theology is its close relationship to exegesis and having the text as its foundation. Therefore the sequence should be

Exegesis -> Biblical Theology -> Systematic Theology (Enns,1989:22)

Nature of NT Theology

NT Theology is a historical discipline i.e. it focuses on how within the NT and even within a writers' works themes have evolved and how the particular historical context influences their writings. In the words James D.G. Dunn the NT covers a period of development and itself constitutes in some measure that development (Dunn,1992:xii)².

For example C.H Dodd comments that the early church expected Jesus to return sooner i.e. within their lifetime and that the indefinite delay of the Lords return caused the church to change its focus. (Dodd, 1962:53) Therefore the latter gospels particularly the gospel of Matthew contain more of Jesus' teachings than the others – because the church sought to live by the commands of Jesus.³ This insight will also help us to understand the Theology of Paul in Thessalonians; the Thessalonians believed in the eminent return of Jesus and some of them stopped going to work. An imminent problem that can be seen with this approach is that the historical context is very hard to reconstruct except in a few occasions. However this doesn't stop us from studying how the individual doctrines have evolved.

Therefore, this approach assumes that NT Theology is simply not laying what each author said about a particular topic it also traces its development within the author's writings as well as the NT writings.⁴

One of the arguments against a NT theology albeit a single NT theology is that there is little or no theology in the NT, Wrede argues

'most of it is practical advice, direction for life, instructions for the moment the stirring up of religious feeling talk of faith and hope for believers and hoppers New Testament theology

² However I would not as far as Dunn to say that the idea of Christ as the preexistent son of God was not present in the earliest NT writings cited in Ladd, 697.

³ C.H. Dodd of course uses this to his classic differentiation between *kerygma* and *didache*. So the Gospel of Matthew is not a 'gospel' in the pure sense of the word, it combines *kerygma* and *didache*, as a whole *didache* predominates (Dodd, 1962:53)

⁴ This is different to Historical Theology where we trace the development of the doctrine within the post NT church.

makes doctrine out of what in itself is not doctrine and fails to bring out what it really is.’
(Cited in Balla, 1998:35).

Raisanen – a prominent figure in current discussions about NT theology – seems to be agreeing with Wrede in this point (Balla, 1998:36).

What they seem to forget is that there are large portions of NT books dealing with theological issues – Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and even other letters of Paul contain solid theology. Even where there is emphasis on practical aspects – it is often based on theological aspects. As it is very often said Christian Ethics is based on theology. ‘Be holy because I am holy’ – the imperative to be holy –ethics- is based on God character – theology. For example when Paul deals with the problem of Sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6.12-20 he appeals to several theological arguments. ‘Our bodies are members of Christ himself’ body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that you were bought at a price. So even practical imperatives are based on solid theological truths. Therefore, it will be absurd to argue that there is no or even little theology in the NT and that it full of practical advice.

Survey of Approaches

This section not only surveys the major NT theology works but also has some important discussions on methods and approaches. The first five approaches are taken from Caird (Caird, 1995:4ff):

1. The Dogmatic Approach

Before the article by Gabler in 1787 on the distinction between dogmatic and biblical theology ‘nobody thought of writing 'biblical' theology. They wrote theology: and the shape of theology was dictated by the traditional doctrines of the creeds. The theologian turned to the Bible either as a source of proof texts or as *prolegomena* to the systematic formulation of doctrine.’

2. The Chronological Approach

‘The aim here is simple: we must trace the growth of Christian ideas from the seed-beds of Jewish or Greco-Oriental thought, through the various stages represented in the New Testament, to the catholic Christianity of the second century, in which some saw their full florescence, others their incipient fossilization.’ (Caird, 1995:5ff).

3. The Kerygmatic Approach

The hypothesis here is that there was a common apostolic theology which underlies the books of the New Testament and can be reconstructed from them, claiming further that this hypothesis offered a more credible explanation of Christian origins than any other (Caird, 1995:6ff). Therefore, this approach is an attempt to figure out and form the core teaching of the apostles in the NT.

4. The Author by Author Approach

In this method each authors contribution is examined and a chapter (usually many) written for each one of them. G.E Ladd's⁵ work is an example of this approach. However within Paul and John he switches to a thematic approach.

Caird criticizes this approach arguing that this is a lazy approach and that the 'collective comparison' is not done in this method – as it is the individual books or authors that are examined individually – However we must note that too much 'collective comparison will make the NT theology look like a systematic theology'. Marshall also agrees that it is the task of the NT Theologian to do some comparison between biblical writers. But he also notes that this is where the major problem starts for the NT theologian. The question of *Theology or Theologies* comes into play. For example if in the collective comparison we take Paul's view of Election the divine side and try to reconcile that with Peter's statement to make your calling and Election sure (2 Pet 1.10) - we might take one of two approaches. One is to say that Peter adds another aspect of Election to Pauls' view of Election. Some could even argue that Peter contradicts Paul (so does James). This will be to hold both in balance. Clearly it will be very boring to have a NT where all 27 books say the same things – even if it was saying the same things in different ways.

The other method is what I call the big fish technique. The Big fish (Paul) swallows the small fish (Peter). Since Paul is weightier than Peter we use the Pauline material to explain - very often explain away – Peter's imperative.

Caird rightly points out that this author-by-author approach tends to be dominated by Paul and John. For example W.G. Kummel in his brief (350 pages) NT Theology organized the material around Jesus – Paul and John – as a matter of fact the subtitle is 'according to its major witnesses Jesus-Paul and John' (Kummel, 1974). The works of Peter, James and Hebrews are referred to only a couple of times in the book and absolutely no reference to II Peter.

⁵ Although the gospels are examined topically.

5. Round Table Approach

This is the approach Caird proposes and uses. He takes a topic and then places almost all the NT authors in a round table (so to speak) and gets the opinion of each person. Discussion below.

6. Topical Approach

This is the approach taken by Donald Guthrie. He takes a topic then surveys each of the NT groupings (Synoptics, John, Paul etc.). The difference between this and the round table approach is that in the former all the authors are consulted at once – in the same chapter and a collective comparison is done – as Caird had promised. However, in the latter each author is consulted separately. There is no collective comparison – not even in the short summaries that Guthrie has after consulting each NT author group.

In addition, in my opinion this is the same approach taken by Schreiner. Some topics like the Holy Spirit are given a full chapter and each NT author is consulted within it. But Schreiner also has chapters like Christology according to Paul and Christology according to Heb-Rev. there is a bit of kerygmatic approach in his work as he looks at the NT as ‘Magnifying God in Christ’ – so his subtitle. While agreeing that there could be no consensus on one centre for the NT Schreiner concludes that the NT is God centred (Schreiner, 2008:13). Therefore, the whole of NT as per his subtitle is coloured by ‘magnifying God in Christ’. It is also noteworthy in his other work on Biblical Theology – on the whole bible - (Schreiner, 2013), he argues that the centre is the kingdom of God – thus his title ‘the *king* in his beauty’ – in this work Schreiner mixes his approach. He uses chronological, canonical and thematic approaches. For example, Genesis is examined in a chronological order, Psalms is explored according to their canonical ordering (by the 5 different books from the Hebrew Bible) and Paul thematically – his individual books are not explored one by one. While this is useful and is required due to the richness of the material I am not in agreement with Paul being explored thematically and not book by book. Paul must first be given a book-by-book treatment and then topical treatment.

The approach taken by W.G Kummel is slightly different in that first he goes by each author and then under each author takes up the different topics.

Problem with the topical approach is that it completely ignores the historical development within the NT or the context of each particular book. Another problem is that we will tend to look for topics even

if the text doesn't talk about the topic. In addition, we select what topics to put there. Therefore, it is like asking a conference speaker to speak strictly on a given topic and nothing else. However, we must deal with the fact that we are dealing with the dead documents – completed. Therefore, we need to take what is in there – everything that is in there for the purposes of a NT Theology. We might also ignore the topics that we think is not important even if the text talks about the topic.

7. Book By Book approach

This approach comes very close to what we are going to propose – Each of the books is examined for its theological and historical richness. This is the approach taken by Howard Marshall. He uses a mixture of approaches like Schreiner – however in my opinion Marshall's approach is superior to that of Schreiner's in his Biblical Theology book.

Marshall' approach has much to be commended – he goes book by book and after each grouping of the NT books he does another level of synthesis in a separate chapter. For example after the chapters on Mark, Matthew, Luke and Acts he has another chapter on 'the Theology of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts'. He does the 'collective comparison' referred to by Caird.

The order of the NT books is arranged not in the biblical order – but in the order Marshall thinks the books were written. This is also commendable as the progression in the NT thought patterns within - a single writers' corpus as well as within the books of the NT by different authors could be seen.

What does it mean to have one NT theology

1. Does it mean that all the NT authors say the same thing? Obviously no. They say different things. It will be ridiculous to ask all the NT authors to say the same things in order for us justify enterprise of *one* NT theology.
2. Could it mean that they say different yet compatible or even complementary things? This would certainly be the case. For example the law gets a little treatment in Galatians but a fully-fledged exposition and its relationship to salvation is further expounded in Romans. Each author can have a different emphasis.
3. Could it mean that they could say totally different things? This is possible and doesn't affect the 'oneness' of NT theology. For example a dominating theme in the gospels is the kingdom of God which is to the most part absent in the rest of the NT – most certainly very absent in Paul. However, this doesn't mean that the kingdom of God has no place in the one NT theology we are going to

arrive at. In addition, each gospel being written with a different emphasis still will not be major argument against the 'oneness' of NT theology. Each one could be written to a different audience.

So diversity doesn't necessarily mean that there is no unity. The diverse writings of the NT can indeed be compiled into a single NT Theology if the above three were the only cases.

4. Could it mean that they say contradictory things? Because if they do certainly the 'oneness' is destroyed. The evangelical tradition held that the scripture doesn't contradict itself. However what do we do when we see an apparent contradiction or where do we do it?

Do we try to solve the contradictions? What method do we use? Do we use the Big fish technique? Even some evangelicals use the big fish technique – they don't do justice to the warning passages in Hebrews 6 and 10 claiming that a person who has been predestined and elected cannot fall away from grace. He has been sealed by the Holy Spirit they say – how can he fall from grace, they ask. While not wanting to get into this age-old question – what I want to point out is that they are using a wrong method to answer the question. When a text is presented to them which contradicts their dogmatic theology (Perseverance of the saints) – they shouldn't swallow the 'small' passage in the light of the 'big' passage. If they want to handle the second passage the way to do that is to do an exegesis of the second passage itself.

I believe that there are no contradictions in the scriptures. If we see a seeming contradiction then we can try to either solve it or hold it in balance. If we are to solve all the 'seeming' contradictions, do we have to do it in Biblical Theology (NT Theology) - as opposed to a Systematic Theology? I believe that the place for a complete reconciliation of one part of the scripture to another and for a logical analysis is not Biblical Theology but it should be the Systematic Theology.

Therefore, the question that must be asked is that are the theologies divergent to such an extent that we can no longer speak about the *theology* of the NT (Balla, 1998:149). Which we will look in the next section.

Unity and Diversity

Did the NT ever have one theology i.e. orthodoxy? In the words of Dunn *was there ever in fact such an orthodoxy?* (Dunn, 2010:2). The traditional view is that the NT as whole gives voice to the same thing – one theology– the recent trend is of viewing the NT in terms of diversity is represented by Dunn (Dunn, 1990)

Up until the 20th century the general view was that there was in fact an orthodoxy. But with the work of W. Bauer 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity' – this view was challenged and he demonstrated that 'there was no pure form of Christianity ...in fact there was no uniform concept of orthodoxy at all –

only different forms of Christianity competing for the loyalty of believers. (Dunn:2010:3) Bauer confined his work to the 2nd century – and Dunn in his important work takes upon himself to show that there was no concept of orthodoxy even in the first century. Dunn cites the work of F.C. Baur who proposed a conflict between Peterine and Pauline Christianity – and argued that the whole course of earliest Christianity was shaped by this conflict.

Starting from Christian proclamation of the gospel kerygma Dunn argues that there was no common kerygma – challenging the C.H. Dodd's conclusion in *Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*. If we speak about a common kerygma we must also speak about the differences. While his conclusions are correct – we must remember that each sermon had some common elements. Jesus was the common element in all of them. Of course depending on the circumstances and the environment they customised their message from this *common pool of kerygma*. A Classic example is Paul's sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17. He didn't start the sermon with Jesus nor with David but with Adam. Before that as a point of connection he spoke about the 'unknown god'. Peter as is point of connection in Acts chapter 2 spoke first to explain that they are not drunk. Peter spoke to a Jewish audience, Paul a gentile one. There is no mention of cross in Athens. One of the sins Peter mentions in Acts 2 is that *you* crucified Jesus and he is both Lord and Messiah (v36). The sin that Paul refers to is idolatry – v29 'we should not think that the divine being is like gold...'. So when arriving at a common kerygma these differences must be factored into the equation. This even more so in the case of pre and post Easter kerygma. As the message of Jesus was repent and believe for the kingdom of God is at hand. But the message of the apostles was Jesus. (Dunn,2010:31-32). But this is to be expected – as resurrection had not happened and a clear view of who Jesus was had not developed in the Apostle's mind until resurrection or even Pentecost. Therefore, we cannot point to these obvious differences to build a case for Contradictions or even Diversity. If Paul had spoken to a Jewish audience, he would have spoken in the same way as Peter did and vice versa.

Dunn then looks for reason for diversity even disunity in the NT – he argues that Christianity from the beginning embraced two fairly distinct groups more or less from the first – Hebrews who spoke Aramaic (or Hebrew) as a badge of their Jewishness, and Hellenists who preferred to or who could converse only in Greek (Dunn,2010:290). He claims one group worshiped in the Jerusalem temple while the other finding its outmost expression in Stephan attacked the temple Acts 6.13 (Dunn,2010:292). It is claimed that the NT also has such diversity – Matthew and James are thought to represent a Jewish conservative viewpoint. Paul became the leader of the left wing Hellenistic group.

David Wenham in his essay on Unity and Diversity responds to Dunn (Ladd,1993). To summarize some of his arguments: While Acts shows Jewish and Hellenistic Christians going their own way it also shows them

being reconciled to each other and working towards the same goal and reaching a consensus. In addition, the fact that Acts records them having different opinions doesn't necessarily mean that the NT in its final form is self-contradictory.

Clearly there are different voices – some even though sounds contradictory adds a complementary element to the whole picture. It is my belief that there are no contradictions in the scripture. However there are seeming contradictions – passages which talk that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and other passages which warn that it is impossible for people who have shared in the Holy Spirit - if they fall away - to be brought back to repentance. Rather than using the big fish technique we must hold both in balance and take each of these as complementary. How we reconcile each to the other is the subject better suited for a systematic theology.

Reasons for unity – because the NT authored by one author - the Holy Spirit. As we looked at earlier the scripture was inspired. Also some have argued that NT authors have taken up the teachings of Jesus and applied it to their own situations (David Wenham's article in Ladd, 1993)

Reasons for diversity – it is written by many human authors in their historical context. Guthrie discussed 3 types of diversity in the NT 1. Diversity of forms of literature (narrative, epistles etc.) 2. Diversity of writings – refers to the leitmotifs of the NT 3. Evolution or development of ideas within NT. (Guthrie, 1993:49-51).

While the purpose of this essay is not to discuss every possible 'discontinuity' or controversy between NT figures in the following section we consider some of them. To maintain the unity of the NT theology one has to consider the relationship between the major figures or authors of the NT. So we start with:

Paul and Jesus⁶

One thing that strikes the reader of the NT is the stark disconnect between the teachings of Jesus and that of Paul. Guthrie tries to explain it by saying that Jesus was dealing with a Jewish audience and Paul with Hellenistic and Gnostic audience. (Guthrie, 1982:52)

Guthrie further notes some important points:

1. Paul's knowledge of the historical Jesus was limited – he was absorbed with the heavenly Christ.
2. The need to define the traditions that Paul received

⁶ The literature and the topics to be covered in this section are enormous – this paper only engages with a few introductory concepts.

3. Why Paul introduces many concepts which are not found in the teachings of Jesus – Guthrie explains that until his death (I might add resurrection) a full explanation of his mission was not possible. So what was inherent in the gospels in teachings of Christ blossoms into a full flower in Paul (Guthrie, 1981:53) I will show some examples of this in the following discussion.

Some –Johannes Weiss - have argued that Jesus never spoke about his pre-existence⁷ (Balla, 1998:167) . I wonder whether we are reading the same Bibles? Before Abraham was, I am John 8.58?

Some have claimed that Justification by faith was Paul's idea and that Jesus didn't believe or teach such a doctrine. (Loisy cited in Balla, 1998:166) However what they forget is that Jesus –while not giving a fully-fledged teaching on Justification-laid the foundations for such a doctrine. For example if you take the Pharisee and the tax collector parable – the one who goes home justified is not the one who has kept the law but the one who accepts his sins and inabilities before God. In addition, to my mind that is Justification by faith. In Paul's short sermon in Acts 17 there is no mention of Justification by faith – not even a call to faith in Jesus – but the call is to *repent*. In this way Paul's sermon is much similar to the message of Jesus. The point I am trying to make here is that Each NT author customized his message according to the needs of his audience. When Paul *wrote* to churches he talks about justifications and the other related matters. So the message changed not only based on the audience and the context but also based on the medium.

Jesus's message seems to be the kingdom of God whereas Paul's message is justification. To solve this Bultmann for example said that the kingdom of God corresponds to the righteousness of God i.e. Justification (cited in Wedderburn, 2004:102), the same view was taken by Eberhard Jungel's who saw the cross of Christ in 1 Corinthians 1 as a parallel to Justification. David Wenham has pointed out that Paul does refer to the kingdom of God occasionally 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5:21. (Ladd, 705). Even if Paul doesn't speak about the kingdom of God and even if Jesus explicitly doesn't talk about Justification this doesn't

⁷ Even Dunn in his important work 'Christology in the making' makes some confusing statements such as :

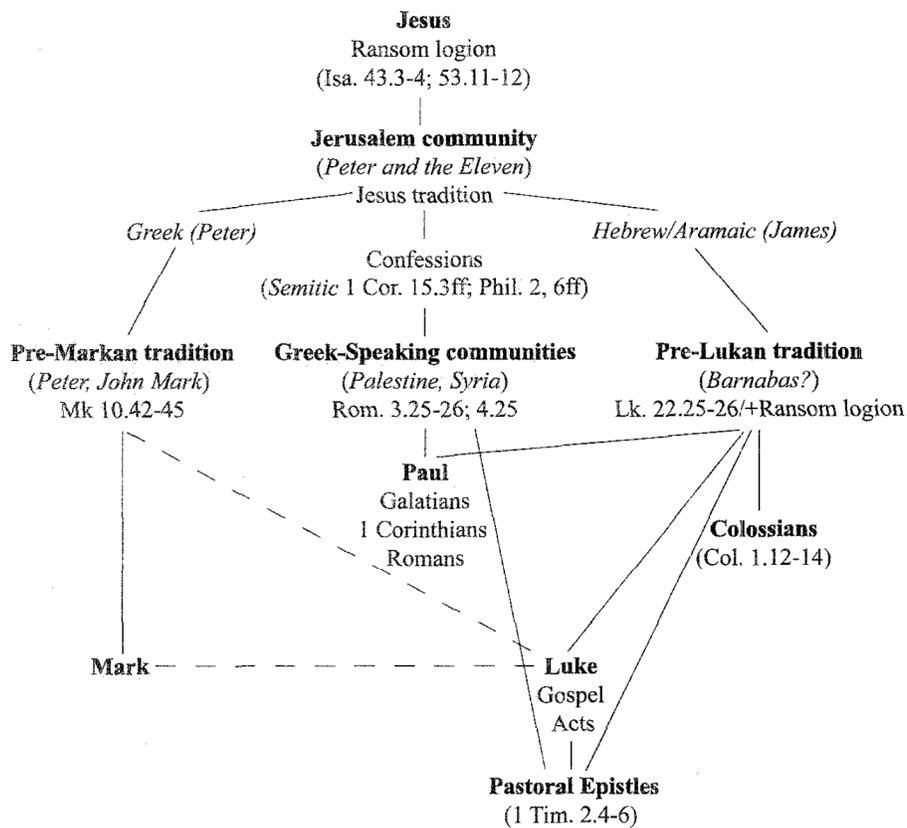
'We cannot claim that Jesus believed himself to be the incarnate Son of God; but we can claim that the teaching to that effect as it came to expression in the later first-century Christian thought was, in the light of the whole Christ-event, an appropriate reflection on and elaboration of Jesus' own sense of sonship and eschatological mission.' (Dunn,1992:254)

However when asked what would be the 3 misrepresentations among the evangelical scholars of his work Dunn listed (1) That I deny or diminish the divinity/deity of Christ in questioning the usual concept of his pre-existence; (2) that in the 'new perspective on Paul' I deny Paul's/the Reformation's basic teaching on justification by faith'; (3) that I diminish or deny the authority of scripture. (Viola,2012).

affect the ‘oneness’ of NT theology. As they are saying different yet complementary things. Not necessarily contradictory things.

Another related claim by Weiss is that Jesus never looked at his death as substitutionary and it was a *novum* that Paul saw (cited in Ball,1998:167). Well not every theologian looks at the death of Jesus as substitutionary! Jesus had the element of love – the true shepherd loves the sheep and gives his life for them. But even if you look for substitutionary death there are traces in the gospels – for example John the Baptist called Jesus as the ‘Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world’ John 1.12. The clear allusion to the Old Testament scapegoat and to the sacrificial system alludes to the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death.

Riesner compared the speeches of Jesus and that of Paul as recorded in Acts and saw many similarities (Riesner, 2003:175). After a lengthy discussion on the topic of Ransom Logion) he proposed the following model:



Source (Reisner, 2003:197)

So this shows that some of Paul's teachings can be traced back to Jesus. Some however have seen a connection between Jesus and Paul even in other minor issues such as in dealing with idol food see (Kim, 2003).

So there is more continuity and connection between Paul and Jesus than what is seen at the surface. However since they worked with different people – one with predominantly Jewish and the other with gentile – we cannot expect both to have said the same things or to have taken the same approach. This however doesn't mean that both their teachings can be combined together to produce one NT Theology.

Paul and James

Dunn (dunn,1990) sees James' Justification by works as polemic against Paul's Justification by faith. While a full exegesis is not within the scope – here is my own thesis on the subject. Paul tried to define what Salvation is and what Justification is. James was simply defining what faith is. Faith without works is dead. Paul said Justification is by faith. James went further and defined what that faith is. Faith without deeds is dead. James 2.20.

Balla argues that even in Paul similar statements to that of James can be found for example in Rom 2.13 Pauls says for it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God but the doers of the law who will be justified (Balla, 1998:195).

Is there a centre in the NT

Many such centres have been proposed, Balla cites Hasel's survey in 1978 counting 16 centres (Balla,1998:198). Many other centres have been proposed since then. Reumann's, Cullmann, Thusing, (Balla, 1998:198) James D. G. Dunn, David Wenham, Donald Guthrie, Marshall and Thielman's, Ferdinand Hahn's, Stuhlmacher's, Matera's, Analytical Approach of Redaktionsgeschichte these have been surveyed in another article by Olagunju and Adegbola (Olagunju and Adegbola, 2012).

All this shows that there never has been consensus among modern scholars as to the fact whether there is a centre in the NT at all. It is difficult to claim that there is one centre in the NT – if we take one aspect as a centre we are prone to miss out the others.

To what Extent 'One' NT Theology

Here I summarize the discussions I presented in the previous pages.

One NT Theology can be arrived in the sense that there are no contradictions in that. There is one message. In addition, there is also unity in the overall message of Jesus the saviour of both Jew and Gentile. Though the conclusion might sound meagre (Marshall, 2004:712) Dunn concluded that the common core in the four

categories of NT Christianity he identified (Jewish Christianity, Hellenistic Christianity, Apocalyptic Christianity, Early Catholicism) is the man Jesus with the risen Lord (cited in Marshall, 2004:712). This might truly be the factor that unites the different books of the NT.

The Bible never proposes that you can reach heaven by following Jesus in one part of the book and then in another claim that you can reach heaven by Lord Buddha. Even when there are apparent contradictions, upon closer examination the unity can be discerned.

However when each church had problems of its own some aspect of the message was applied. A leitmotif was born. So the NT books have a diverse theology because of this aspect. There is also the aspect of evolution of developmental theology.

Guidelines for a new approach

We should go back to the bible not only for the content of our theology – but also for the method. In this section we look at some underlying scriptural principles

Revelation

Scripture contains the Revelation of God. It contains the special revelation of God to his people and through his people to the world. We also understand the revelation to be progressive. God didn't give the law to Abraham. He just said go where I show you. As far as he was concerned that was his obedience. In the NT Paul talks about Justification by faith as no one else had done before (not to say it is absent in rest of the scripture – Paul takes Abraham as an example).

Inspiration of scripture

Millard Ericson defines inspiration as super natural influence of holy spirit upon writers which rendered their writing as accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote act being the word of God. So while revelation reveals the truths about God inspiration makes sure that it is recorded correctly (Ericson,1996).

I believe in the verbal inspiration of scripture- not only the message but the specific word was also given to the author by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1.20-21), without this becoming dictation or his personality being swallowed up in the process. It is not parts of the scripture that is God breathed – but *all* scripture (2 Tim 3.16). So we cannot ignore parts of the NT to arrive at a NT theology – of course we can ignore Peter and others and concentrate only on Paul if we are doing Pauline Theology. But for a full NT theology each book and author has to be considered.

Divine Authorship

While the NT is a combination of 27 books, written at least by eight authors our belief is that all of it had one Divine Author the Holy Spirit. So if somebody argues that the NT cannot have 'a' theology because it is written by different people at different times it could be offset by the fact of one divine authorship. However as we see in the next point having the same one author doesn't necessitate the fact that the message is the same or that there should be one theology. But it means that there are no contradictions.

Historical Documents

The NT is a historical document. Each book was born out of a necessity – a particular problem that was facing the church – even the gospels were written with a purpose and for a particular audience. The NT was not written as a manual of theology.

With these guidelines we are now ready to form our own approach

New Approach and Structure

Books and their approaches to New Testament Theologies have evolved – just like the New Testament Theology itself. Authors have taken different approaches as we saw in the section on the survey of methods. But almost all of those – ignores the genre of the particular books. This is one of the central contributions of my essay. For example in the writings of John you find Narratives (Gospel), Epistles (I,II &III John) and apocalyptic literature. So the diversity of this genre must be taken into account when 'drawing' theology from these books. Different methods must be used even within an author's writings. So one main drawback with the Author-by-Author approach is that it ignores genre and particular leitmotifs within a book.

When bringing the narrative into the picture techniques used in Narrative Criticism may be used in trying to analyse the narratives to look for a 'narrative theology'. Care must be taken as to not endorse all that a narrative stands for. For example from the Rehab narrative one cannot conclude that lying is right under the right circumstances. However principles from the narrative which doesn't contradict other parts of the scriptures should be elicited from the narratives.

The problem with the book-by-book approach is that fails to compare each book with the others (but as we saw Howard Marshall has achieved it – but his approach is not the 'typical' book by book approach). Since revelation is progressive the progressive nature of the New Testament Theology must be considered. Since it was written to a particular context the historical nature of the NT must be considered.

Since this is NT Theology as opposed to a Systematic or Dogmatic Theology, the NT must play the central role. Solid exegesis must be done before arriving at theological conclusions. The text must play a central role like never before. Solid hermeneutical principles must be applied to the task.

So we propose a book by book approach which aware of the above concepts. Each book in turn must be surveyed chronologically for theological content. A case study in this approach is in the Appendix.

Contents of a NT Theology

The question of contents is irrelevant in this approach as we look at everything that is of theological significance within each book from a chronological order. Since we don't propose a thematic or kerygmatic approach the question of content becomes irrelevant. Our content would be very similar to the one proposed by Marshall – which is simply the books of the bible and chapters on their synthesis.

However since the NT is full of practical exhortations drawing the line on what to include in NT theology and what not to include would largely be a matter of opinion. For example the exhortations to love one another - should it have a place in NT theology? Encouraging each other, walking in the light, confessing ones sins, praying for each other, loving each other? Now most of these are practical exhortations which in my opinion has no place in a NT Theology. Of course as I mentioned earlier Christian ethics is based on theology so 'love each other because God loved you first' is where the theology part comes in. While nobody would debate the rightful place of subjects such as justification, sanctification etc. in NT theology some of the practical aspects would depend on the one's subjective judgement.

Conclusion

We have looked at the various challenges that come in going for a NT Theology. However we have concluded that while there are diversities due to various reasons – leitmotifs, emphasis, audience and even personal experience of the authors there is one single NT Theology. Putting it in another way within the one NT Theology there is a lot of variety due to various reasons which doesn't disturb the unity of the NT theology. Because there are no controversies in the scriptures. That is because on the final analysis all scripture – be it Paul's writings or James's writings – is God breathed. There is the one author behind all this – the Holy Spirit. The breath of God is in them. This gives the unity and makes it one NT and one NT theology. And as Dunn rightly pointed out the NT 'certainly form a unified body of texts, united above all by their common focus on and devotion to Jesus Christ'.

Case Study Theology of the Gospel of John and The first epistle of John

In this section I apply the principles I have been discussing and arrive at a partial NT Theology using the approach I have proposed. We restrict our study to the first chapter of the gospel of John and the epistle of John. Narrative techniques are used in analysing the Gospel narration.

Gospel of John⁸

John starts his gospel with comparisons. He compares Jesus to the word and Light. Something unique about John's gospel is that he writes as an eyewitness. He has 'seen' his glory (probably a reference to the transfiguration of I Pet 1.16-18). John has taken some of the sayings of Jesus and used it in his preface to the gospel. I am the light is a saying of Christ – this he has used in saying that the light came that came into the world. It is also noteworthy that John's consciousness of time and timelines – that was in the *beginning*, there *came* a man ... John, (this would place the account of Jesus in the time of John), he uses the words *the next day the next day* not only to trace time from the time of Jesus' baptism but also as a way to demarcate literary units.

Christ in Trinity Not only was the word with God but was God. 'He was with God in the beginning'. Therefore, John doesn't simply start the gospel story on earth but in eternity. In his mind there is no question about the pre existence of God. In the beginning there was God and there was the word. The complications of the trinity start right here itself – the word was with God and the word was God. As Marshall notes John doesn't start with the term Messiah but with the 'word' (Marshall, 2004:494). The concept of the word (logos) would have meant a lot to the ancient readers of the scriptures. Word as an expression of thought – so Christ is the word of God – God has sent his expressed thoughts in the form of Jesus. No one has ever seen God except the one who is at the father's side. So the one at the father's side also is equal to the father. He introduces the word 'son of God' as a testimony of John the Baptist (v34). This will become one of his favourite terms for Jesus even in his epistles. He uses it sometimes as son of God, sometimes as son of man – sometimes simply as son where the context demands that it be taken as the son of God – John 5.20 for the Father loves the son and shows him all he does.

Christ in Creation the word was not idling – it was involved – as a matter of fact through the word only everything that has been made been made. Not that John doesn't simply say that 'without him nothing was made' – he say without him nothing was made that has been made. John wants to make sure that Christ is not a made being. Christ is not part of the things that were made. He is the creator. Although the world was

⁸ Only parts of chapter 1 are considered for this case study.

made through him the world did not recognize him. The same word that was used to create the world or rather the same word that created the world became flesh

Christ and Revelation his revelation is authentic and a unique – because he and he only has seen God and he has life and he is light. While law came through Moses Grace and truth came through Jesus.

Christ Rejected and Accepted though his own people rejected Christ anyone who received him was given the right to become his children. The term son (*teknon*) is to follow in his epistles also.

Light and Darkness The theme of light and darkness is John's favourite motif – to follow in his epistles – walking in the light, being in darkness etc. We see the motif of light running even in his epistles and Revelation. Rev 22.5.

John and Jesus John as a narrator goes to great length to let John do even in in the *written* gospel what he did in life – be a witness to Jesus. The narrator introduces Jesus through John the Baptist. Jesus gets his first disciples through the witness given by John the Baptist. John the Baptist reveals Jesus to Israel. It is also striking the voice of God which testified that 'this is my son' during his baptism is not mentioned by the narrator (of the three such occurrences –one at baptism, the other at transfiguration and the other towards his death John only records the last one). One probable explanation could be that the 'word' of God – which is the expression of God, God's words his voice has now become flesh and dwelt amongst us. So the words of God now come through personified word – Jesus.

John the Baptist also helped Jesus in some other ways too. By starting a ministry of baptism he shifted the focus from the Jerusalem temple to the desert. Now he points at Jesus and says that the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. So the temple and sacrificial system starts to be redirected – to say the least – to Jesus.

God – the Jewish monotheistic idea is repeated again and again. One and Only God (v14,18) God is someone who was in the beginning sends his prophets as witness to the light, who causes by his will people to be born. No one has ever seen God. But only the one at the father's side – this also shows the unique relationship of Jesus to God. In addition, God can only be know if he chooses to reveal himself – either in general or specific revelation.

Holy Spirit – Christ will baptise with the Holy Spirit – whereas John only baptised with water. However, in order to be baptised with the spirit he must first receive the spirit. As Dunn says 'the Spirit descended on Jesus and remained on him that is, the union of Jesus and Spirit continued through his ministry and after his exaltation' (Dunn, 1997:350). The reference to Holy Spirit baptism and the reference to Elijah and the

quotation from Isaiah (without reference) would have singled to the Jewish mind that the new era of the messiah has begun.

First Epistle of John (1.1.-2.2)

John testifies to something that he has seen and touched

God God is light. Yet we can have fellowship with him. God is not presented as a distant cosmic figure with whom we cannot have a relationship. He is faithful and just.

Sin something that can deceive us, something that will cling to us, something that can be forgiven if confessed and purified. The blood of Jesus purifies from all sin - meaning that there are varieties of sin and that all of it will be cleansed by the blood of Christ. In addition, the sin has affected not only a part of humanity but also the 'whole world' requiring an atoning sacrifice also for the whole world. Sin is darkness and breaks the fellowship with God. This is presented as a logical impossibility - Since God is all light without a pinch of darkness if you are walk in the dark you cannot have fellowship with him. Sin is a state you are in⁹ - 'claim to be without sin'; as well something you are doing 'claim we have not sinned' or 'walk in the dark'. Sin needs forgiveness from God as well as purification.

The path towards restoration is first a confession of sin¹⁰. The word for confess *homologeō* is found 26 times in the NT – 10 times in John. The word is comprised of *homos* (one) and *legō* or *logos* (word) – essentially to say the same word/thing. Legal connotation is dominant – a man agrees with another's statement or confesses something like his guilt before the judge (NIDNTT). So when we are asked to confess the sin we are asked to say the same thing as God did – that it is sin and agree with God that we are guilty. However, John surprises by what follows – if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive... The secular idea of justice might demand punishment from the one who confesses but since Christ died as the 'atoning sacrifice' and because his blood - meaning violent death – purifies us from sin when we confess our sins we are forgiven of our sins.

Death of Christ – blood of Jesus, atoning sacrifice – all these point to the nature of Christ death and the purifying effect of it. If our sins are to be forgiven or cleansed, the blood of Christ is the only way. While

⁹ While I don't mean original sin it could very well be the case here.

¹⁰ John Stott commenting on this section makes a fantastic observation - that there are three levels of deception – first we deceive others v6, then we deceive ourselves v8 then making God to be liar – thinking that God is not holy as he claims. While this is a superb pastoral observation, in my opinion it cannot be put into a NT Theology. As I see that as a practical exhortation. Again as mentioned above this is a subjective judgment that I am making.

Christ died for our sins on this earth, even now after being resurrected and taken to heaven he is still dealing with the problem of sin. As John Calvin commented, his intercession is actually his application of his death.¹¹

Synthesis of the Epistle and Gospel¹²

Both has a personal nature of witness – what we have seen or heard or touched. Both starts with the beginnings, both have the son of God as the title for Jesus. While in the Gospel Christ is portrayed as the light in the epistle God is light. This concept is taken further in the gospel

Gospel narrator records statement made by John the Baptist to Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – by the time of this epistle the idea has developed so far as to say that the blood of his son Jesus purifies us from all sin. Note that the word Jesus is used as opposed to Jesus Christ or Christ or the word won only. It refers to the earthly nature of Jesus – the fact that he died as a man.

¹¹ ‘Christ so intercedes by the sacrifice of his death... The intercession of Christ is a continual application of his death for our salvation’ Calvin

¹² It must be understood that this is a very limited and partial synthesis as I have only surveyed a few verses from each book.

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