

Beyond Biblical Theologies

Herausgegeben von

Heinrich Assel

Stefan Beyerle

Christfried Böttrich

Mohr Siebeck

ULRIKE MITTMANN Die neutestamentliche Rezeption von Ps 2 und Ps 110 (109 LXX) als Prüfstein einer gesamtbiblischen Hermeneutik und Exegese. Hartmut Geses traditionsgeschichtlicher Ansatz in der Diskussion	183
JOHN J. COLLINS Biblical Theology Between Apologetics and Criticism.....	223
JOHN BARTON (Pan-)Biblical Theology in the German- and English-speaking Worlds: A Comparison	243
III. Fundamente / Fundaments	
<i>1. Namen und Gültigkeit / Names and Validity</i>	
TOMAS BOKEDAL Notes on the <i>Nomina Sacra</i> and Biblical Interpretation	263
GREGOR REICHENBACH Zur Gültigkeit biblischer Texte.....	297
<i>2. Der Psalter als „Kleine Biblia“ / Psalms as „Kleine Biblia“</i>	
CORINNA KÖRTING Israel und die Völker im Lobpreis. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Hebräischen Bibel und zur Biblischen Theologie	303
EVA HARASTA Between Prayer and Action: Psalm 22 as Orientation and Formation of Dogmatic Thinking.....	321
<i>3. Der Text als Fundament Biblischer Theologie / Text as Fundament of a Biblical Theology</i>	
MICHAEL COORS The Fragmentation of Theology at the Limit of the Text The Theological Reading of the Bible Beyond Biblical Theologies in the Works of Karl Barth and Johann Andreas Quenstedt	335
STEFAN SCHORCH Which Bible, Whose Text? Biblical Theologies in Light of the Textual History of the Hebrew Bible	359

<i>4. Themen und Motive / Themes and Motifs</i>	
JOEL S. KAMINSKY The Hebrew Bible's Theology of Election and the Problem of Universalism.....	375
ANATHEA PORTIER-YOUNG Drinking the Cup of Horror and Gnawing on Its Shards: Biblical Theology Through Biblical Violence, Not Around It	387
ECKART DAVID SCHMIDT Heiligung: Implikationen in 2Thess im Anschluss an 1Thess	409
<i>5. Theologische Paradigmen / Theological Paradigms</i>	
HANS-CHRISTOPH ASKANI Zeugnis ohne Ende? Zur Konfiguration von Gabe, Zeugnis und Stil	433
PHILIPP STOELLGER Biblische Theologie – in bildtheoretischer Perspektive: „Bild“ als Beispiel einer Hermeneutik der Differenz.....	455
MICHAEL WELKER Theological Realism and Biblical Theology	483
IV. Perspektiven jenseits des Kanons / Perspectives Beyond the Canon	
PETRA VON GEMÜNDEN Die Fremdheit der Bibel wahrnehmen – der kulturanthropologische Beitrag zur Exegese	497
BEATE EGO Abrahams Jugendgeschichte in der Literatur des frühen Judentums – Ein Paradigma theologischer Rezeptionskonzepte in der Antike	531
JACQUES T.A.G.M. VAN RUITEN The Book of Jubilees and the Genesis Apocryphon as Examples of the Rewriting of Authoritative Texts in Early Judaism: The Case of Abram and Sarai's Stay in Egypt (Gen 12:9–13:4)	545

Theological Realism and Biblical Theology

Michael Welker

You have invited us here today to explore perspectives "Beyond Biblical Theologies". Indeed, in your invitation you suggest that not only do we have such "great systems of 'biblical theology' from the second half of the twentieth century", but that "their achievements and limitations have been sufficiently discussed". Before going any further, let me make myself perfectly clear: I cannot find these "great systems" either within the German-speaking literature or in any other part of the world. An exception in Germany might be Friedrich Mildener's conceptually complex, yet not particularly evocative, *Biblische Dogmatik*¹. As for the USA, perhaps one could point to the Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments by Brevard Childs. Yet apart from these two texts, what we have seen in the twentieth century is a number of works arising out of tentative, programmatic and interdisciplinary engagements, subsequently published together in journals, series, yearbooks, and anthologies under the heading of "biblical theology".

While there have certainly been biblical scholars fond of calling their essays on the theology of the Old or New Testament "biblical theology", and while publications even on such topics as the biblical bases of church services, liturgy and pastoral care have used the expression "biblical theology" in their titles, none of this should distract us from the fact that the formulation and development of a stable and workable concept of "biblical theology" still lies ahead of us. By no means are we already at the end of or even *beyond* such an epoch.

Since the seventeenth century, there has been a tendency for programmatic arguments to be presented under the title of "biblical theology". Indeed, by 1982 Hans-Joachim Kraus had already completed a developmental history on the topic, insightfully entitled: *Biblical Theology: its history and its problems (Die Biblische Theologie. Ihre Geschichte und Problema-*

¹ FR. MILDENBERGER, *Biblische Dogmatik*, 3 volumes, Kohlhammer: Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln 1991-1993.

tik)². Its history and its problems! Similarly, John Collins' 2005 book, *Encounters With Biblical Theology*³ and James Barr's 2003 paperback, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*⁴ could also both be entitled "Modern History – and the Problems of Biblical Theology".

We are simply not able to speak here of any unified or consolidated position. Nor can it be argued that we have already exhausted the developmental potential of biblical theology. In these first years of the twenty-first century, current publications in biblical theology are being influenced both by critical perspectives as well as by the further conceptual development of the field. Even now, in 2008–2009, James Dunn, Leo Perdue and Walter Brueggemann have brought their three programmatic books together in launch for a new series: *Library of Biblical Theology* (published by Abingdon Press). Given this context, how are we to engage in a conference on the topic "Beyond Biblical Theologies"?

I think we should rather understand the program of this conference as a challenge to distinguish between sound and problematic concepts of biblical theology. To this end, it will be helpful to identify some of those interests which align themselves with "biblical theology". All attempts at biblical theology display an interest in a rich and differentiated theology and piety. Yet it has been easy to interpret this interest as naiveté or as obscurantism, which has led critics to question whether biblical theology is not simply an attempt to flee into long-forgotten times and world-conceptions, into queer or even dangerous rationalities and ways of thinking – indeed to escape even into worlds of pure fantasy and delusion.

Over against these vague suspicions, which equate biblical theology with naive biblicism, I would like here to shed some light on the connection between biblical theology and theological realism. In doing so, I will identify some of the inadequate concepts in biblical theology, concepts which academic theology must really abandon. In this sense, my paper aims to develop a perspective "Beyond Non-Realistic Biblical Theologies". Therefore, in the first section I will touch on "Theological Realism and Biblical Theology", drawing on the beginnings of the Reformation and its scriptural orientation. With this approach I will relate indirectly to the work of Rudolf Hermann, whose name and memory you want to honor

² H.-J. KRAUS, *Die Biblische Theologie. Ihre Geschichte und Problematik*, Neukirchen-Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982.

³ J. COLLINS, *Encounters With Biblical Theology*, Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis 2005.

⁴ J. BARR, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*, Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis 2003.

with this lecture. In his various contributions to Luther's exegesis⁵ as well as to biblical exegesis in general, Hermann repeatedly stressed the "Sachlichkeit gegenüber dem Bibeltext" (i.e., the need for a sober dealing with the biblical text) particularly in connection with a perspectival approach.⁶ In the second section of my presentation, I will look at the "multiple multi-contextuality of future biblical theology". I will conclude this second section with a brief look back at the more recent history of biblical theology's reception and influence – extending beyond exegesis.

I. Theological Realism and Biblical Theology

In his book *Science and the Modern World*, the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead draws out the parallels between the Reformation's academic theological methods and the development of the modern natural sciences. With its historically and philologically oriented "return to the sources", the Reformation offered both an early template for, as well as many parallels to, the modern natural sciences' revolutionary dual focus on efficient causes and experimentation. Whitehead concludes: "The Reformation and the scientific movement were two aspects of the historical revolt which was the dominant intellectual movement of the later Renaissance." The Reformation returned to the sources, to the origins of Christianity, to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ here on earth. Among others, Francis Bacon, one of the founders of modern natural science, stressed the need to examine efficient causes and to promote experimentation as a means for proving scientific claims. Here, Whitehead perceives two clear expressions of an anti-speculative intellectual movement.⁷

If we only listen to the slogans of the Reformation – *solus Christus, sola scriptura, sola fide* and *sola gratia* – then we may not immediately recognize this move to theological realism, which marked the beginnings of the Reformation. The Reformation saw deeply anti-speculative and anti-authoritarian tendencies combine with a desire to orient oneself to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Yet to recognize God in Jesus Christ, rather than in metaphysical speculations, meant that scholars must take their orientation

⁵ Cf. R. HERMANN, *Studien zur Theologie Luthers und des Luthertums, Gesammelte und nachgelassene Werke II*, H. Beintker (ed.), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1981, esp. 170 ff. and 310 ff.; *idem*, *Bibel und Hermeneutik, Gesammelte und nachgelassene Werke III*, G. Krause (ed.), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1971, esp. 38 ff. and 242 ff.

⁶ Cf. HERMANN, *Werke II*, 313 f.

⁷ A.N. WHITEHEAD, *Science and the Modern World* (1926), Free Press: New York, 1967, 8.

from Scripture. For this reason, while the text itself never became God, it did become “the queen” among all our witnesses to the faith.

In 1519, Luther drafted a report on John 6:37–40 concerning Jesus’ unity of will with God and his Father – and sent this letter to Spalatin, secretary of Prince Elector Frederick the Wise. In it he writes: “He who seeks to think beneficially about God should concentrate wholly upon the humanity of Christ.” And Luther stresses: “This is the one and only path to recognizing God, a path from which teachers of the Sentences have widely strayed.” With dramatic flair, Luther argues that the great medieval theologians, the speculative teachers of the Sentences, have used absolute speculation to bypass the humanity of Jesus Christ in an attempt to “worm their way” to God.⁸

What Luther offers here is the radical critique of a theology which seeks to elevate itself above and beyond the humanity of Jesus Christ into absolute speculations about the Divine. Little wonder that in this context we also find a sharp opposition between a *theologia gloriae* and the *theologia crucis*, for example in key texts such as the 1518 Heidelberg Disputation which rejects a theology of glory developed from pure speculation and turns instead to a theology of the cross which begins with the humanity and suffering of Christ. In modern terms, we could call this: “bottom-up theology”, theology from below instead of top-down speculation. There has been a tendency to reduce Luther’s deeply Christological and biblical orientation to a simple “theology of the cross”, which is then in turn reduced even more to an emphatic stress upon the self-humbling of God in Jesus, even to the point of death on the cross. Yet this often leaves us clutching at slogans such as “sub contrario”, “paradox” and “the mysticism of the cross” to cope with that nagging question: How, precisely, can a powerless and suffering God help us? All too often this process of reductionism only serves to substitute a “speculative theology from above” with an equally problematic “speculative theology from below”, and thus fails to appreciate the truly liberating, insightful and culture-creating power of the Reformed approach.

Anti-speculative theology, with its primary orientation toward the humanity of Christ and the insights into the nature of God to which such theology then leads, demands a biblical-theological orientation. It demands that theological teachers possess historical and philological qualifications. It enables common sense to think through issues of the faith and to understand the Word, even without philosophical or metaphysical training. It

⁸ M. LUTHER, Nr. 145. Luther an Spalatin. [Wittenberg,] 12. Februar 1519, WA.Br I, Weimar 1930, 326–331, 327 ff.; E. HIRSCH, Hilfsbuch zum Studium der Dogmatik. Die Dogmatik der Reformatoren und der alt-evangelischen Lehrer quellenmäßig belegt und verdeutscht, Walter de Gruyter & Co.: Berlin ³1958, 26 ff.

quickly becomes clear that the Reformers were not just dealing with the renewal of the entire field of academic theology but with a massive re-orientation in the education system and in culture. The Reformation became an educational revolution. Luther, together with Spalatin, Karlstadt and Melancthon, drafted university and scientific reforms aimed at driving back and repelling Scholastic philosophy and theology. The goal was for theology to return to its sources, to the biblical texts, which meant promoting Greek and Hebrew philology.

The issue was the establishment of a fundamentally new approach, yet also one which aimed at instituting a broad system of biblical education. When faced with the objection: “Why do we need Bible translations when the people can’t read?”, the Reformers responded by demanding the expansion of the school system as well as the education of children while they were still with their families. The Reformers responded with catechisms and pamphlets and with the comprehensive praxis of visitation. Those who study Luther’s diary⁹ soon see how tirelessly he worked and traveled for a biblically- and historically-oriented school system, and for the prevalence of general common sense. His deeply anti-speculative skepticism, which also shaped his often harsh polemic against Aristotle, stemmed from a theology and piety which, armed with a biblically-oriented realism, sought to take seriously the revelation of God in this world instead of simply resorting to speculative principles or even empty musings about God.

However, such anti-speculative tendencies with their desire for exegetically and historically oriented education, as well as for common sense, are not yet enough to allow us to speak of a “realistic theology”. At best, all we have is a “desire for realism” which can still all too easily become lost within a wish-fulfilling and fanciful “speculative theology from below”. Yet the Reformers truly did pave the way for a connection between biblical theology and theological realism – pathways which become recognizable in their praxis of a differentiated interpretation of the text: in their commentaries on individual gospels, on New Testament letters, prophetic books and sections of the Pentateuch, the Reformers concentrated on individual texts, individual authors and author groups. In particular, I see the connection between biblical theology and theological realism especially clearly in Calvin’s synthesis of exegetical, historical and legal competencies, and in the development of a humanistic education aimed at promoting a theology capable of offering political direction.

In his *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, Calvin draws on his broad biblical education to develop an almost comprehensive historical perspective on the world’s various forms of government, including an examination of

⁹ See A. VAN DÜLMEN, Luther-Chronik. Daten zu Leben und Werk, dtv: München 1983.

their various qualities and respective dangers. Calvin himself preferred the aristocratic system “either pure or modified by popular government”, since he supported the separation of powers and felt that this approach also provided the best option for protecting and promoting freedom while also stabilizing the balance between “liberty [...] [and] moderation”.¹⁰

Calvin’s broad perspective, shaped as it was by many biblical contexts – a perspective we could even describe as biblically, multicontextually informed – allowed him to evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of these governmental systems as they appeared in particular ages and locations, yet without abandoning clear developmental standards. For example, his comprehensive biblical orientation allowed him to engage with that incredibly irritating perspective which understands tyrants in the biblical narratives (such as Cyrus and even Nebuchadnezzar) as “instruments in the hand of God”. This points to the difficulty of simply assuming that lamentable political conditions automatically lie beyond the jurisdiction of God’s earthly rule, but suggesting instead that tyranny is often also linked with the sinful failings of those who suffer under it. Yet we must also ask whether we should take a stand against those tyrants who no longer act in accord with God’s commission.¹¹ Multicontextual perception in light of the biblical traditions does not produce relativism but rather forces us to distinguish, compare and assess differing developmental processes in those various contexts caught up between religion, politics and morality. Such perception does not spare us the search for truth, justice and appropriate knowledge of God; rather, it guides us in that search.

Having adopted this intellectual approach, the Reformers immediately found themselves on a long path not only toward the development of standards for historical-critical research but also toward contextual and multicontextual methods of access into the biblical traditions. In so doing, they combined historical-exegetical, systematic and practical-theological concerns and insights. The results of this work – such as Calvin’s insights into the rights and duties of resistance in bourgeois society – continue to inspire and direct us today.

Acknowledging and appreciating this struggle for a multicontextual realism in, and in connection with, the interpretation of Scripture allows us to identify these dead-ends and detours on the way to biblical theology, and to open up perspectives “beyond non-realistic biblical theologies”.

¹⁰ Institutio IV, 20,8.

¹¹ See here Calvin’s detailed exegetical and historical treatment in Institutio IV, 20, 25–29.

II. The Multiple Multicontextuality of Biblical Theology

One of the most important tasks of any future biblical theology will be to correct primitive ideas and concepts of uniformity, as well as monothematic reductionisms perpetrated in its name. Attempts to filter out a single theme from the biblical traditions – be it the history of salvation, covenant, “the Mighty Acts of God” or any other number of integrative themes – have all ended in failure. For a highly unfortunate, abstract vision of this unity of biblical theology, one need only look to a suggestion by Gerhard Ebeling. According to a programmatic statement of his often quoted in the academic literature, biblical theology is either the theology which is in accordance with *the Bible* or *the theology contained in the Bible*.¹²

This concept was embraced by many scholars, but it has also met with great reservation both by exegetes and systematic theologians, and has even attracted strong critique – for good theological reasons. If biblical theology is to be understood as theology in the sense of a comprehensive and fully formed matrix of thoughts and convictions, even as a particularly defined system that can simply be lifted as a whole out of the Bible, then its discovery and attainment is utterly impossible. Understood in this way, biblical theology would contradict the unique plurality and living nature of the biblical witnesses and traditions. It would also contradict the living nature of the divine revelation itself, to which the various biblical traditions (each in their own perspectival way) bear witness. Indeed, the complex multicontextual structure of the canon and the living nature of canonical memory would be deformed by such a concept of biblical theology, regardless of whether this theology was immanent within the Bible or “attributed” to it from without.

Karl Barth rightly argued against the foolishness of attempting to extract “from the Bible [a] concealed historical or conceptual system, an economy of salvation or a Christian view of things. There can be no biblical theology in this sense, either of the Old or New Testament, or of the Bible as a whole.”¹³

A biblical theology which ignores or even downplays the multicontextuality of the canonical traditions and distances itself from historical-critical

¹² G. EBELING, Was heißt “Biblische Theologie”?, in: idem, Wort und Glaube, Tübingen, 3rd ed. 1967, 69–89. For more detail on the following, cf. M. WELKER, The Tasks of Biblical Theology and the Authority of Scripture, in: W.M. Alston Jr. (ed.), Theology in the Service of the Church. Essays in Honor of Thomas W. Gillespie, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2000, 232–241.

¹³ K. BARTH, KD I/2, Evangelischer Verlag Zollikon: Zürich 1938, §§ 19–21, 535 (quotation: Church Dogmatics [CD] I/2, ed. by G.W. Bromiley/Th.F. Torrance, trans. by G.Th. Thomson/H. Knight, T&T Clark: Edinburgh 1956, 483).

cal research leads itself astray down a path that must be abandoned. One should by all means avoid associating biblical theology with “simple theology”. Those who, together with Friedrich Mildener, are searching after “simple talk of God” are always free to enter into discussion with some of the pietistic traditions – but they should not claim this as biblical theology. This is not to say that the path of biblical theology does not lead to clear, enlightening and, in this sense, “simple” insights which cast complicated exegetical and theological issues in a new light. I need only name here recent contributions by biblical scholars like Norbert Lohfink¹⁴ or Gerd Theißen¹⁵ which not only inform historical exegesis but have generated most helpful critical perspectives on contemporary society and culture.

Yet a biblical theology of the future would not only defend against false unifying conceptions and monothematic reductionisms. It would also grow through ever further stages of development. Many biblical texts must be interpreted not just in a monocontextual but also in a multicontextual way. They have come under the influence of various differing *Sitze im Leben*. They exist within an intertextual matrix of references and interpretations which are often the subject of intense debate. Here we must reckon with long and open-ended research processes, obliging us to live with truth claims which can only ever be provisional. The great complexity of the biblical canon with its polyphonous cloud of witnesses places us into open interpretive processes of truth-seeking communities. Truth-seeking communities do not just poke about in the dark. They raise claims to truth and then expose those truth claims to exegetical and rational investigation. They stand in line with Luther’s famous words before the Diet of Worms, declared before emperor and empire: “Unless I am convinced by the witness of Scripture and manifest reason” – I will maintain my claims to truth.

These subtle approaches to the inner multicontextuality of biblical traditions also help us to understand their powerful persuasion in various historical or contemporary contexts. We can understand, compare and learn from the complex systematic, ethical and practical-theological effects that particular biblical traditions have brought about in differing times and contexts. Such perspectives challenge us to work with differing evaluative and interpretive hierarchies with regard to various individual texts and text complexes. Thus, for example, the synoptic gospels offer variously weighted perspectives on the multicontextuality of Jesus’ life and work. In differing contexts, these emphases will be perceived and understood with dif-

¹⁴ N. LOHFINK, *Unsere großen Wörter. Das Alte Testament zu Themen dieser Jahre*, Herder/Neukirchener: Freiburg/Basel/Wien/Neukirchen-Vluyn, 3rd ed. 1985.

¹⁵ G. THEIßEN, *Jesus und die symbolpolitischen Konflikte seiner Zeit: sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der Jesusforschung*, *EvTh* 57 (1997), 378–400.

fering sympathies, and lead to the development of differing hierarchies of values and orientations. Furthermore, this subtle biblical-theological approach is required if we hope to use biblical perspectives in any fruitful dialogue concerning other perceived religious and secular problems and contexts. Will it be the contexts of law, wisdom or pneumatology that build these more appropriate bridges to consensus? Should we seek dialogue by privileging Matthew, Mark, Luke or another biblical perspective? In any future biblical theology, such approaches, with their multicontextual sensitivities, will have to replace the search for singularity – the search for one singular idea, or one all-encompassing concept.

At this point, we can turn to those programmatic interdisciplinary quests from the twentieth century carried out under the rubric of biblical theology – and we are now able, however humbly, to evaluate them and their relative successes. The dialogues between “Church and Israel” and between the various “Scripture-based religions” have produced quite a few solid impulses. What remains to be seen is whether the same can be said about metaphysical-theistic or transcendental-existential approaches. In my own opinion, the outcome is rather poor. Personalism and dialogism have managed to build some bridges and achieve a measure of integration, but even these forms have a “Wirkungsgeschichte” (history of reception and impact) with serious problems.

Since the Second Vatican Council, biblical theology has promoted creative exchanges between Protestant and Roman Catholic theology and regarding scriptural interpretation. This constructive cooperation has survived several frosts and winters in the ecumenical climate – cold fronts often triggered by church politics. Yet even amid the tensions and struggles for consensus in the Protestant half of Christendom, biblical theology has been able to uncover common ground and fruitful differences. We find ourselves on a long journey toward understanding the different confessions as “different pathways of learning from Scripture”. And we have begun to discover fruitful consensus on the differences of the liturgical traditions in conversation with their respective scriptural orientations.¹⁶ Many sterile conflicts could be transformed into constructive contrasts if only the discussions were founded upon the basis of biblical theology.

Amid the range of crises provoked by the self-secularization and self-banalization of many Western churches, biblical theology has managed to counter the loss of the spiritual contents of the faith and has awoken new interest in the study and knowledge of the faith. We see this not only in the enormous recent interest in the historical Jesus and in Christology, but es-

¹⁶ G. ETZELMÜLLER, “... zu schauen die schönen Gottesdienste des Herrn ...”. *Eine biblische Theologie des strukturierten Formzusammenhangs der christlichen Liturgiefamilien*, Habilitationsschrift Heidelberg 2009.

pecially in biblical theology's ability to take difficult and dark aspects of the faith – aspects which oversensitive religiosity and enlightened science would prefer to relegate to a barbaric past – and to open them up once more to constructive contemplation. Through biblical theology, difficult topics such as sin, atonement, sacrifice or substitutionary representation have once again become the object of broad academic and spiritual discussion.

Finally, biblical theology is beginning to support many religious awakenings and church renewal movements across the globe. These awakenings and renewal movements are occurring either in liturgically oriented congregations, in groups focused on diaconal praxis, or in interpretive communities. In the rapidly growing churches of China and India – which seek to connect religiosity with the will to education rather than play them off against each other – we see a strong and vigorously expanding interest in biblical theology. We find this interest even in those Pentecostal churches which are now entering a phase of academic consolidation and are seeking to understand themselves as part of the ecumenical church.

Nor is biblical theology any longer a stranger in academic, international and interdisciplinary research and cooperation, especially in Germany, England and the USA. Any theology which seeks to be interdisciplinary will certainly benefit from purposefully including in its thought historical and systematic analyses of the biblical traditions and their history of influence, particularly using the multicontextual method described earlier. This approach sparks off a particular level of attention and cooperative interest in its discussion partners, regardless of whether they come from the sociological, political, legal, social or even natural sciences – an attentiveness and interest quite different from that experienced by theologies which try primarily (or even exclusively) to import metaphysical, moral, transcendental-philosophical or existential “bridges” into the discussion.

Once we take the polyphony of the biblical traditions into account, we can become more comfortable with the phenomena of a multi-traditional search for truth. Our Scriptures have grown over a thousand years and not only encompass, but are interpreted within, vastly differing traditions. Problems arising from the pursuit of consensus or balance between these differing traditions and forms of the search for truth lead to an insight which is also highly relevant for the political and moral spheres: namely that “truth can be suppressed by injustice” (Romans 1:18). This reminds us clearly that we cannot allow truth-seeking and justice-seeking communities to be played off against one another. Rather, these two forms of community are both gathered into the larger salvation-seeking community, where the problems and proffered solutions of religion, ethics and science find

themselves in a constant movement not only to mutually distinguish themselves but also to reconnect with each other.

Due to its multi-traditional, ecumenical and interdisciplinary approach to biblical traditions, biblical theology is able to develop and offer models which allow and enable such differentiations and reconnections. Yet in so doing, it must honor, uphold and maintain the academic standards of exegetically and historically-trained truth-seeking communities, and must always point out that the search for truth can never succeed if it lacks a multi-perspectival approach or a desire for realism.