

II. Fundamental Theology

BT is understood to mean either a subdiscipline of exegetical, systematic, or practical theology or an interdisciplinary theological program that takes up suggestions of the Reformation and → Vatican II or the regulative idea of a theology in accordance with the Bible or the idea of a theology contained in the Bible and its – at least latent – realization (→ G. Ebeling; see I. above). These four concepts are in many ways interrelated, which, on the one hand, evokes an impression of conceptual vagueness and, on the other, brings forth fruitful intra- and interdisciplinary tensions.

Biblical Theology as a theological subdiscipline or as an interdisciplinary theological program is always confronted with the following problem: If BT is to be understood as “theology” in the sense of an ultimately extractable, comprehensive horizon of thought and persuasion, perhaps even in the sense of a definite system, then it is impossible. This would contradict the variety and vitality of the biblical testimonies and traditions and distort the vitality of the revelation of God to which the texts provide a perspective testimony.

The theological and scholarly consensus maintains that it is erroneous “to pick out of the Bible a hidden historical or conceptual system, an economy of salvation, or a Christian worldview... There can be no BT in this sense: neither one of the Old Testament, nor of the New, nor of the whole Bible” (Barth 535). If by “theology,” however, one understands not reflection on God in a comprehensively worked out system of thought, but rather talk of God that is accompanied by expressions of certainty and truth, while remaining comprehensible and capable of development in terms of content, which – however fragmentary – serves the strengthening of the certainty of faith in the development of the knowledge of God, then talk of a BT seems to be reduced to the trivial indication that the biblical texts are filled and permeated with theology. Since all Christian theology ultimately claims to be related to the Bible, there seems to be no clearly definable place for BT. The term BT seems either to propagate a theologically and academically problematic idea of system and unity (cf. critically: Levenson, Ritschl) or to wrongly emphasize the mere circumstance that the biblical texts speak of God in a qualified way and that Christian theology is oriented toward the scripture.

In the light of these extremes, the term BT gained prominence as an intra- and interdisciplinary program in the course of the 20th century. Already in the 20s and 30s, opposition to the historical study of the Bible intensified, with the objections that “it divides the Bible into unconnected strata, places too much emphasis on the similarities between the Bible and its cultural environment, overstates the development process, and fails at

the task of providing a truly theological interpretation of Holy Scripture” (Barr 489; cf. I above). This opposition and the effort to develop alternatives were subsumed under, *inter alia*, the program and reform concept of BT. From the 70s on, this program and reform concept was also adopted more intensively by systematic theology and finally used to characterize interdisciplinary theological initiatives in thought and research.

1. Biblical Theology as a theological subdiscipline. In the 20th century, BT, esp. in the Anglo-Saxon world, was understood as a subdiscipline of exegetical studies which – as opposed to historical and history-of-religions oriented subdisciplines – sought to work out the theological messages of the biblical traditions. In doing so, BT attached particular importance to the “unity” of these messages, to grasping the “unity” of the OT, the NT, and both Testaments (Kraus), as well as to grasping and presenting the characteristics and uniqueness of the biblical message(s) *vis-à-vis* the religio-historical contexts (cf. I. above). At the same time, BT encountered problems in developing the various concepts of “unity” in view of the numerous traditions, and in justifying them *vis-à-vis* the historical and historicist subdisciplines, but also because of conflicting concepts of the “core of Scripture,” the “unity of the Testaments,” and the “proprium of the biblical message.” It was also faced with the question of the connection to and the difference between the theological disciplines, as well as with problems of demarcation to a BT coming from systematic and to some degree also practical theology. Finally, it also ran into the challenge of clarifying the differences in the scriptural understanding and the scriptural interpretation of church and Israel (cf. I. above and Zenger).

BT is also used, however, as a designation for a subdiscipline of systematic and dogmatic theology. Here, the programmatic concept of BT in no way simply stands for a rhetorical invocation of the scriptural foundation of theology. F.D.E. → Schleiermacher had already considered the internal differentiation of scholarly, symbolic, and “scripturally conforming” dogmatics and called the latter “biblical dogmatics” (see de Wette). He connected this with the concept of a dogmatics in which “the relationship to scripture was dominant everywhere” (cf. Oberdorfer). In contrast to the systematic-theological methods that isolate the *dicta probantia* within the biblical texts in order to support an individual idea, a figure of thought, or a line of reflection, he suggested a “usage of scripture at large,” which “gives attention to larger, particularly rich passages, in order thus to demonstrate, in the train of thought of the authors of Scripture, the same combinations on which the dogmatic results also rest” (*ibid.*). Still stronger than impulses from the history of theology (see also Beck, Lutz, and Kähler: cf. Frei), an entire syndrome of developments steadily

reinforced the interest in the differentiation and development of a BT in the last third of the 20th century.

Despite differences of emphasis in German and English contexts (Childs, Smart, Reventlow, Seebaß) as well as in other regions of the world (Fahlbusch, *et al.*), the decline in the normativity of the confessional documents (→ Articles of Faith), in conjunction with intensive efforts toward ecumenical agreement, as well as the decrease in the conceptual and cultural-diagnostic influence of philosophical theories, have produced a stronger historical, cultural, and social-scientific basis of orientation in systematic as well as in practical theology. This new basic orientation and the exemplary systematic productivity of many thematic contributions from exegetes, as well as the effort to correct the devaluation of the OT by canon theory in the systematic and NT theologies of the 19th and 20th century, have led to two different manifestations of BT. Common to both is the need to subject systematic-theological theme selections and thought forms to constant review and correction on the basis of what Schleiermacher called "usage of scripture at large." They exhibit various proclamation-related priorities in the quest for a "simple talk of God" (Mildenberger, Roloff) *vis-à-vis* a systematic theology that retreats ever more strongly in outward perspectives of faith, or in the search for a "critique of abstractions" that assesses systematic-theological and dogmatic thought forms in the light of the biblical traditions on which they are based. Here, it is intent on correcting reductionist thought figures through both more exegetically adequate and temporally and culture-diagnostically more productive thought figures (Schweiker/Welker, Oberdorfer).

2. Biblical theology as an interdisciplinary theological program. Whereas the exegetical disciplines, in the name of BT, seek to counteract dissociation and secularization primarily through concentration on unity and proprium, the systematic and practical theological disciplines primarily strive, under this heading, for a differentiation gain in the dispute with falsely oriented forms (e.g., following non-theological rationalities and primary interests) of systematics and of the religiosity shaped by them. Whereas exegesis, with its historical-critical competence, must preserve systematics from hasty analogy formations and biblicist "horizon conflations," systematics has the task of helping to test the exegetes' concepts of unity, proprium, and core of Scripture with respect to their systematic sustainability in historical and dogmatic historical contexts. The gain in experience with regard to a number of inadequate concepts of unity (covenant, the mighty acts of God, reconciliation, etc.), as well as in relation to the further testing of inadequate notions of unity (Schmid; Stuhlmacher) and the high sensitization for the contextual connection

of guiding concepts and working methods (Fahlbusch, *et al.*; Schüssler Fiorenza; Tribble) are the fruits of this critical dialogue. Finally, the theological disciplines under the programmatic formula BT face the common tasks of theologically comprehending the limits of canonical traditions and of expressing the continuity of the revelatory action of the triune God in biblical traditions in an ever newly justified theology, which ultimately leads to trinitarian-theological issues (Ritschl, 145–46).

3. Biblical theology as the regulatory guiding principle of a theology inherent to the biblical traditions and conforming to the Bible. Whereas Käsemann, in 1951, could answer "no" to the question: "Does the NT canon form the basis for the unity of the church?" by pointing out that the canon provides the basis of a plurality of confessions, the common opinion today is that the canon is the basis of the living unity of the church precisely in the plurality of confessions (Betz; cf. already Barth). Dynamic concepts of unity are sought and developed which are not abstractly set against difference, but which distinguish fruitful and creative differences from those that are unproductive and destructive. Instead of seeking a plain – inevitably reductionist – "scriptural principle," formally and substantially appropriate forms of "loyalty to scripture" (Sauter, ch. 3.3) are developed that take the scripture seriously, not as a mechanical whole, but in the wealth of its cross-references and interconnections, which in turn point to the living God (Haag).

The biblical traditions, which are in manifold ways tied together and at the same time often interwoven, form a structure which steers the perception of God's work among humankind (Williams), the living memory of it, and the expectations associated with this work, while enabling historical, cultural, and ecclesial learning and the growth of knowledge. Precisely at this point, the self-reference of Scripture manifests itself as a living whole (Sauter) by giving "testimony" in many ways and from many perspectives with respect to God and divine activity upon and during creation, thereby becoming a living source itself (Luther, WA 7.97, 24f.).

Bibl., see I. above; also: M. Luther, *Assertio omnium articulo- rum*, 1520 • W.M.L. de Wette, *Die Biblische Dogmatik Alten und Neuen Testaments*, 1813 • F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 21830/1831, §27 • J.T. Beck, *Die christliche Lehrwissenschaft nach den biblischen Urkunden*, 1847 • J.L.S. Lutz, *Biblische Dogmatik*, ed. R. Rüetschi, 1847 • M. Kähler, art. "Biblische Theologie," *RE*³ III, 1898, 192–200 • K. Barth, *KD* I/2, 1948, §§19–21 • E. Käsemann, "Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?" in: *idem*, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, vol. I, 1960, 214–223 • H. Haag, "Biblische Theologie," *MySal* 1, 1965, 440–459 • B.S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 1970 • H.-J. Kraus, *Die Biblische Theologie*, 1970 • *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 1971ff. • H.H. Schmid, *Schöpfung, Gerechtigkeit und Heil*, *ZThK* 70, 1973, 1–19 • H. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 1974 • *Overtures in Biblical Theology*, 1977ff. • *Biblich-theologische Studien*, 1977ff. • K. Haacker *et al.*, *Biblische Theologie heute*, BThSt 1, 1977 • J.D. Smart, *The Past, Present and Future of Biblical*

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Biblicism. The term biblicism does not refer to a chronological period of theology or to a theological orientation, but to an assessment of the Bible (mostly held in Protestantism) in whole or in part. It is essentially characterized by the fact that it takes all biblical statements literally, that it hardly assigns greater or lesser importance to any one of them, and that it relates them directly, as an authoritative source, to the word of God, the teachings and the order of the church, as well as to the conduct of individual and public life. Ever since its appearance in the 19th century (initially in England), the term has by no means been used unequivocally, though its connotations have largely been critical to derogatory.

The historiography of theology and dogmatics already finds evidence of biblicistic readings in the NT (Luke, Deuteropaulines), in the Early Church (→ Clement of Alexandria, → Irenaeus, → Tertullian, Antiochians) and in scholastic theology. However, biblicism only acquired its determining influence over all aspects of doctrine, church order and ecclesial practice as well as over the conduct of life of the individual believer in the wake of the Reformation and of its → scriptural principle – albeit less as a characteristic trait of Luther than of Zwingli and Calvin, and especially of the radical wing (→ Anabaptists, → Antitrinitarians). To shape the order of the entire private and public life according to norms derived directly from the literal meaning of biblical texts was the aim of Puritanism (→ Puritans and Puritanism), while the early Swabian biblicism (J.A. → Bengel, F.C. → Oetinger) produced apocalyptic, dispensationalist and speculative theosophical results. The more recent Swabian biblicism is primarily represented by J.T. → Beck, for whom the Bible assumes the position and status of an exclusive doctrinal system; a clearly biblicistic and speculative proclamation characterized the once influential Bremen Revival theologian G. → Menken, while

M. → Kähler, A. → Schlatter or P. → Althaus should not be regarded as biblicists in the strict sense (despite judgments to the contrary) because of their differentiated and historically conscious approach to scripture, but also because of their concentration on the essence of the revelation in Christ. Today, biblicistic approaches and tendencies are mostly found in conservative evangelical contexts, though not necessarily in full acceptance of the fundamentalist understanding of the infallibility of the Bible in all its statements.

The occurrence of biblicism was frequently associated with impressive scholarly achievements (Bengel: Text of the Greek NT), or missionary, educational and social achievements (founding of Bible institutions and societies, Bible distribution and Bible studies, peace activities, welfare and social work), all motivated by a high appreciation of the scriptures and understood as obedience to the God who speaks in the Bible. The urge to relate the Bible to reality and life as well as the desire to accept the timeless and unconditionally authoritative biblical text as the word of God has repeatedly challenged church doctrine and ecclesial practice as well as scholarly exegesis to recognize the authority of biblical revelation and thus also maintained the consciousness of the *sola scriptura* principle.

Unlike and partly also in contrast to the "genuine Reformation faith" that "draws its cognizance of God and salvation from Holy Scripture alone" (Brunner, 153), biblicism as a hermeneutical principle neglects the tasks of inner-biblical differentiation, of the adaptation of biblical exegesis to the general intention of scripture as a message of salvation, of analyzing its texts in terms of the history of their redaction and influence (in individual aspects as well as in general), of the mediation of its results in the light of the ecclesiastical doctrinal tradition and the (spiritual) experience of the parish as well as epistemological advances in post-biblical times. Biblicism – as its current history shows – can only avoid the resulting tensions and contradictions by adopting a factual or programmatic eclecticism, the criteria of which often remain undefined and which tends to make arbitrary selections or to interpret into the Bible whatever suits its own conceptions, thereby failing to take the biblical texts seriously and hindering the mediation of its message.

E. Brunner, "Falscher und wahrer Biblizismus," in: *idem*, *Ein offenes Wort, Vorträge und Aufsätze*, vol. II, 1944, 153–161 • M. Kähler, *Geschichte der protestantischen Dogmatik im 19. Jh.*, 1962 • H. Karpp, "Das Aufkommen des Begriffs 'Bibilizismus,'" *ZThK* 73, 1976, 65–91 • H. Karpp, *TRE* VI, 1980, 478–484 (bibl.) • O. Weber, *Grundlagen der Dogmatik* 1, 1987, §1, 3 • K. Berger, "Loyalität," in: C. Landmesser, ed., *Theologie als gegenwärtige Schriftauslegung*, *ZThK*.B 9, 1995, 120–132.

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