

THE AGENDA FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY Issues and Challenges

Murray J. Harris

Titirangi, Auckland
New Zealand

In an editorial in *Christianity Today* several years ago, J.I. Packer suggested that professional theologians are God's plumber and sewage men and women, "securing a flow of pure truth and eliminating theological effluent."¹ If that is the case, then I suggest that professional Biblical scholars are God's electricians (or "sparkies", as they are called in New Zealand!), securing a supply of pure light and eliminating the darkness of Biblical ignorance. The church needs both electricians and plumbers, just as a home needs both light and water. Now I am aware of the limitations of analogies. I would not want you to press this analogy and conclude that since people in a home can do without light but must have water, in the church we must have plumbers but could safely dispense with electricians!

¹ *Christianity Today*, April 6, 1992, 15.

Inevitably, my effort to identify present and future needs in Biblical studies not only will illustrate the enormous gaps in my appreciation of "the state of the question" but also will reflect my own biases – as a male WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant),² as a Westerner, as a New Testament specialist and as a native English speaker, although with justification but without the concurrence of the Germans or the French, we may speak of English as the *lingua franca* or the *Koine* of modern Biblical scholarship. I trust that the two respondents will rectify this imbalance by identifying many additional areas, particularly in Old Testament studies, that deserve our special attention in years to come,

In making proposals about work that merits the attention of Biblical researchers or writers during the next few decades, I have in mind not only technical works that would be read only by the scholarly fraternity but also general works that popularize scholarly findings in non-technical language or that address issues of current or perennial interest to thoughtful Christians.

It will come as no surprise if I divide the treatment of my topic into two parts – a long treatment of "issues" and a very short list of "challenges" – provided we remember that the very isolation of an issue constitutes a challenge to respond, while any identification of a challenge presupposes an issue worthy of response. My suggested issues are specific in nature; my proposed challenges are more general in character.

Issues

Old Testament

Perhaps the most dramatic alteration of focus in Old Testament studies during the last thirty years has been the special attention given to synthesis as opposed to analysis, the overarching concern for a holistic as opposed to an atomistic approach to the texts. Preoccupation with the putative literary sources of, say, the Pentateuch or Isaiah, has given place to a preoccupation with the process of composition of these texts

² On recent trends in feminist Biblical studies, see Alice Bach, "Reading Allowed: Feminist Biblical Criticism approaching the Millennium," in *Currents In Research: Biblical Studies 1* (1993), 191-215; A. Loades, "Feminist Interpretation," *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. Barton (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 81-94.

and their final redactional form, that is, their canonical form.³ The focus of attention rests on the overall message of a book and the hermeneutics of the putative final redactor(s). So instead of further refinement of the JEPD theory of the origin of the Pentateuch, interest is now largely focused on the internal unity and principal themes of the Pentateuch.⁴ In the place of endless discussion about the character, setting, date and boundaries of Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah, and the existence of an "Isaiah school," discussion is centred around the comprehensive themes of the book of Isaiah in its canonical form.⁵

It may be that this realignment of the focus of interest in the general scholarly arena has eased the way for some evangelicals to posit "a process of composition" leading to the final form of a book, that allows for different historical settings for the material incorporated in the book. Defence for this approach is found in the "updatings" of material in the Pentateuch, as in Deuteronomy 34:1-8 with its account of Moses' death or Numbers 12:3 with its reference to the supreme humility of Moses. So, for example, Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III argue that "recognizing that the setting of Deuteronomy 34 requires an author living later than Moses, the author traditionally assigned to the book, is not materially different from recognising that the background of Isaiah 40-66 presumes an author living during the Exile".⁶

All of this poses two questions with which evangelical Old Testament scholars will need to grapple. First, are there discernible criteria for distinguishing the literary and thematic unity possibly created by redactors from the literary and thematic unity that may have been produced by a single author? Second, are there discernible criteria for distinguishing late editorial activity of a minor nature, such as the

³ J.W. Rogerson speaks of "that trend in German biblical scholarship in which traditional strengths in the minutiae of source and redaction criticism are employed to trace the growth of the tradition towards its final form" ("Recent Continental Old Testament Literature," *ExpT* 110 [1998], 11).

⁴ See R. Rendtorff, "Directions in Pentateuchal Studies," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 5 (1997), 43-65, especially 56-58.

⁵ See M.A. Sweeney, "The Book of Isaiah in Recent Research," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 1 (1993), 141-62, especially 141, 158.

⁶ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 275; cf. 39-40. See also their comments regarding Jeremiah (292) and Daniel (332).

addition of details or clarifying glosses, from late compositional activity of a substantial nature, such as some would find in the MT version of Jeremiah when compared with the LXX?

Since the Old Testament contains much material that purports to be historical, it is inevitable that the question of historicity should never be far from centre-stage, especially in the minds of non-specialist readers of the Old Testament who naturally and properly ask, "Did this actually happen?" or "Is this record really true?" At the present time the parties that address this matter of historicity fall into two distinct camps: the "maximalists" who on *a priori* grounds or as a result of examining the data, are convinced of the accuracy of the Biblical records, and the "minimalists" or "revisionists", who, for the same two reasons, doubt the veracity of these records and wish to rewrite (at least) the early history of Israel. Unless I am mistaken, both these camps share two convictions: first, that no writing of history is free of presuppositions or "ideological commitments" (to use the current jargon); second, that archaeology has a unique place in reconstructing the history of Israel.

Against the "minimalists", I would observe that it is not simply ancient historians who bring their ideological commitments to the task of writing history; all historians do, including modern historians who write about ancient Israel. If it is true that in all writing of history there is a blend of fact, interpretation and literary purpose, we should not assume that the presence of theological purpose must endanger the historical reliability of a given narrative. Is it not anachronistic to claim that Biblical authors lacked the methodological tools necessary to write *Tendenz-free* history⁷ – if such exists? Should we not embrace "hermeneutics of goodwill" rather than "hermeneutics of suspicion", and always assume that narratives that are presented as history are factual until proven fictional and innocent of error until proven guilty?

With regard to the second conviction held in common, I would argue, also against the "revisionists", that since the evidence uncovered by archaeology must itself be evaluated and is usually capable of more than one interpretation we cannot set archaeology on a pedestal, as though it offered instant, objective history. Moreover, even if the experts

⁷ Cf. N.P. Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 151, n.1 (cited by I.W. Provan, "Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel," *JBL* 114 [1995], 595, n.50).

always agreed on the interpretation of archaeological data, that evidence by itself is insufficient for the writing of a continuous history. For this, pride of place belongs to written documents, particularly when they purport to provide this continuous history. But all too often the archaeological evidence is not merely too meagre; it simply does not exist. In this case the minimalist who argues for the primacy of archaeological data over literary texts in historical reconstruction is tempted to make what is an illegitimate use of the argument from silence: no extant evidence for X is taken as evidence that X did not exist. G. Garbini, for instance, argues that the absence of inscriptional evidence that mentions the exploits of Israelite and Judahite kings after the manner of the rulers in Egypt and Mesopotamia, indicates that such kings never existed.⁸ But the negative evidence of archaeological "gaps" cannot be used to overthrow the positive evidence of literary texts that actually describe the reigns of these kings. In this connection one recalls an anecdote about a man accused of theft. At his trial the prosecuting barrister brought forward four witnesses who saw him commit the crime, while the defence lawyer introduced as evidence fourteen persons who did not see him do it. Needless to say, the man was found guilty! I conclude that archaeology has the distinctive role of illustrating and supplementing the admittedly selective Biblical record but should never be seen as eclipsing the primary place of texts in the reconstruction of Israelite history.

With that said, we should be profoundly grateful for the patient and creative endeavours of various evangelical archaeologists and linguists who are at the forefront of the scholarly rehabilitation of the Biblical text. When we are told by Karl Van der Toorn that "the biblical story of exodus and conquest is a charter myth of a later date, designed to provide a young nation with a sense of a common (though largely fictive) past,"⁹ we must applaud and encourage the pioneering efforts of Kenneth A. Kitchen and James K. Hoffmeier to show that the sojourn in Egypt, the Exodus and the Conquest are not mythical constructs.¹⁰ In

⁸ G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London: SCM, 1988), 16-19, as cited by R.N. Whybray "What Do We Know About Ancient Israel," *ExpT* 108 (1996), 73.

⁹ Karl Van der Toorn, "Currents in the Study of Israelite Religion," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 6 (1998), 23, citing his work *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 287-315.

¹⁰ A popular account of these two scholars' work is found in *Christianity Today*, September 7, 1998, 44-51 ("Did The Exodus Never Happen?").

the work of these two Egyptologists and of Donald J. Wiseman and Alan R. Millard, both distinguished Assyriologists, we have the distinctive perspective of specialists who investigate Syro-Palestinian (or Biblical) archaeology against the wider backdrop of Near Eastern archaeology. Very few "minimalists" have the advantage of this wider perspective.

As I see it, there are two particularly disturbing features of the so-called "new literary criticism", at least in its more radical forms. One is the denial of any "determinate meaning" in a text, the other is the rejection of the Bible's "ideology" and consequently its authority.¹¹ But once the search for an author's intended meaning or meanings is abandoned, we are left with an open-ended polyvalence of texts that potentially makes any interpretation legitimate and none authoritative. This approach to hermeneutics has given rise to the call for commentaries to focus on readers' response to the Biblical texts down through the ages. John F.A. Sawyer expresses the challenge this way. "Let us lay before our readers, clearly and accurately, as many of the recorded interpretations of a text as we can, from scholarly reconstructions of its earliest meaning to its most radical mediaeval or modern appearances in music, art, architecture, literature, politics and theology".¹² Doubtless this would increase the sales of commentaries and line the pockets of many a commentator! But we should carefully distinguish the intended meaning of a text from the history of its interpretation. It is the difference between what is authoritative and what is informative – at least in the minds of those who regard Scripture as more than simply a literary gem. If we blur this distinction, then Sawyer is right when he claims that "what people believe a text means, whatever scribal error or mistranslation or allegorical method or word-play or free association is involved, may be as interesting, historically important and true – in a theological, ethical or political sense – as the original meaning, if not more so".¹³ The net result of these new approaches to literary criticism is the improper elevation of the reader over the text, of personal autonomy over historical tradition, and of transient concerns over timeless issues.

¹¹ A recent example of this approach may be found in the collection of essays edited by J.C. Exum and D.J.A. Clines, *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: JSOT/Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993).

¹² John F.A. Sawyer, "The Ethics of Comparative Interpretation," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 3 (1995), 164.

¹³ Sawyer, "The Ethics of Comparative Interpretation," 164.

What I am strongly advocating here, in response to these trends, is a renewed commitment in our exegesis and in our commentary writing to the pursuit of an author's intended meaning, using all the tools and techniques conducive to that pursuit and illustrating the influence of the text, appropriately understood, in the history of Judaism and/or Christianity, especially their liturgy and literature.¹⁴

During the last decade, under the stimulus of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, particular attention has been paid in Old Testament studies to discourse analysis, sometimes called text linguistics or discourse grammar.¹⁵ This is the study of thought and language units larger than the sentence. Since traditional grammars have largely focused on the sentence and its components, this wider horizon will profitably inform future discussions of syntax¹⁶ – provided the technical jargon of discourse grammar does not promote its early demise.

The stormy waters of debate have always swirled around the barque of Israelite religion. Four contemporary claims call for a decisive response:

1. the claim that the plurality of Baals was matched by a plurality of Yahwehs, each associated with a particular locality;
2. the claim that Asherah was the official consort of Yahweh;
3. the claim that systematic opposition to images was a relatively late development in Israelite religion and that there were images of Yahweh in pre-exilic times;
4. the claim that the Israelites or proto-Israelites emerged from within the Canaanite world. "In the turmoil of the Late Bronze

¹⁴ In this latter connection, see D.L. Jeffrey, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); D.F. Wright, ed., *The Bible in Scottish Life and Literature* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew, 1988).

¹⁵ Whereas "text linguistics" or "discourse (or text) grammar" refers to the analysis of written language, the expression "discourse analysis" includes both spoken and written language.

¹⁶ See R.D. Bergen, ed., *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics/Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); D.A. Dawson, *Text-Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994); W.R. Bodine, ed., *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995). On discourse analysis in New Testament studies, see S.E. Porter and J.T. Reed, "Greek Grammar since BDF: A Retrospective and Prospective Analysis," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 4 (1991), 156-63 and the bibliography listed on 157, n.62.

Age, groups of Canaanites abandoned the cities and adopted the lifestyle of migratory pastoralists, roaming the land for pasture and various means of livelihood. These people were known as Habiru, a social appellative that, in the form 'Hebrews', became an ethnic designation in the Bible." Thus Karel Van der Toorn.¹⁷

The four "Servant Songs" of Isaiah (viz. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) are central to the Old Testament messianic hope. We have two relatively recent treatments (1975 and 1985) in English which are of a more popular nature.¹⁸ What we need is a detailed exegesis of the Hebrew text of these Songs that includes a brief history of their interpretation and a discussion of their place in the book of Isaiah, their relation to the other two depictions of messiahship in Isaiah (viz. King and anointed Conqueror¹⁹) and their influence on New Testament writers. And all of this while interacting with the negative findings of T.N.D. Mettinger in his book, *A Farewell to the Servant Songs: A Critical Examination of an Exegetical Axiom*.²⁰

In the matter of the production of up-to-date, comprehensive, advanced works, the lexicography of Classical Hebrew has a distinctive edge over its grammar. The fourth and final volume of the English translation by M.E.J. Richardson of the Koehler-Brueggemann-Stamm *Lexicon*²¹ is due to appear in April of this year, while the fourth volume of the *Sheffield Dictionary*, edited by D.J.A. Clines, has recently appeared.²² On the other hand, when we turn to the grammar of Biblical Hebrew, there is not yet a successor to Gesenius-Kautzch-Cowley (GKC)

¹⁷ Toorn, "Currents in the Studies of Israelite Religion," 23 (see above n. 9). There is an exemplary treatment of this latter issue by D.F. Kidner in *The Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin*, Summer 1970, 3-12 ("The Origins of the People of Israel").

¹⁸ H. Blocher, *Songs of the Servant* (London: IVP, 1975); F.D. Lindsey, *A Study in Isaiah: The Servant Songs* (Chicago: Moody, 1985). See also C.G. Kruse, "The Servant Songs: Interpretive Trends since C.R. North," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 8 (1978), 3-27.

¹⁹ See J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester and Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 3-16.

²⁰ Lund : Gleerup, 1983. A preliminary step towards a full-scale study may be found in G.P. Hugenberger's essay, "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. P.E. Satterthwaite, R.S. Hess and G.J. Wenham (Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 105-40.

²¹ *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament- Vol. 4: ט-ת* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

²² *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Vol. 4: ח-ט* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1998).

or the much older three-volume work by E. König.²³ *The Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* by B.K. Waltke and M. O'Connor does not purport to be a comprehensive treatment, but rather is presented "as a textbook and as a work of reference and study"²⁴ in the light of modern linguistic analysis. The nearest approach to an updated GKC is the two-volume translation and revision of Paul Joüon's *Grammaire de l'Hébreu biblique*²⁵ prepared by the Japanese scholar Takamitsu Muraoka and published in 1991.²⁶ Undoubtedly the relatively recent morphological tagging of the BHS text by scholars at the Free University of Amsterdam will continue to give an impetus to the syntactical analysis of the Hebrew Bible,²⁷ as demonstrated by E. Talstra's investigation of Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8.²⁸

Two recent developments in bibliographical aids deserve special mention. One is a new series of annotated bibliographies of individual Biblical books published by the Garland Press, covering both Testaments.²⁹ The other is "An Annotated Bibliography of Old Testament Studies", available in the *Denver Journal: An Online Review of Current Biblical and Theological Studies* 1 (1998).³⁰

Finally, would it not be helpful for hard-pressed pastors to have an exegetical guide to each Old Testament book, providing them with detailed guidance in the exegesis of the Hebrew text and offering homiletical suggestions that smooth the transition from text to sermon or from study to pulpit? What I envisage is an Old Testament version

²³ *Historisch - kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1881-1897).

²⁴ Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990, ix.

²⁵ Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1923.

²⁶ *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2 vols. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993).

²⁷ A.J.C. Verheij, *Grammatica Digitalis I: The Morphological Code in the 'Werkgroep Informatica' Computer Text of the Hebrew Bible*, Application 11 (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit University Press, 1994).

²⁸ E. Talstra, *Solomon's Prayer: Synchrony and Diachrony in the Composition of 1 Kings 8, 14-61*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 3 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993). I owe these last two references to W. Johnstone, "Biblical Study and Linguistics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J. Barton (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 141, nn. 23, 24.

²⁹ T. Wittstruck, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols. (1994); W.W. Klein, *The Book of Ephesians* (1995); R.L. Muse, *The Book of Revelation* (1996).

³⁰ Access at <http://www.gospelcom.net/densem/>.

of my *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (EGGNT).³¹ Why not an EGHOT – an *Exegetical Guide to the Hebrew Old Testament* – in the interests of encouraging systematic expository preaching based on the Hebrew text?

Now let me move on to the Greek Old Testament. No one will deny that the study of the Septuagint and other Greek versions should be deemed a scholarly pursuit worthy of attention in its own right. Yet the fact remains that most of those who pursue Septuagintal studies have primary interests elsewhere – whether in Old Testament textual criticism or the history of Jewish interpretation of Scripture or New Testament lexicography or grammar. In each of these four areas, the LXX makes a unique and profoundly significant contribution which should be constantly investigated. Take the area of word study, for example. There are only four places in the Septuagint where the terms "son" (υἱός) and "beloved" (ἀγαπητός) are conjoined. One is in Jeremiah 38:20 (MT, 31:20), in reference to Ephraim, while the remaining three uses are found in a single chapter (Gen. 22:2,12,16) within 15 verses, of Issac, the "beloved son" of Abraham, whose death was averted by the intervention of the angel of the Lord. Now this is the expression (υἱός ἀγαπητός) that is found in the three Synoptic accounts of the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism: "You are (or, This is) my beloved Son, on you (or, on him) my full approval rests" (Mt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22). Not only is here a combination of the coronation formula of the messianic King of Israel (Ps. 2:7) and the ordination formula of the Servant of Yahweh (Isa. 42:1). Jesus would have discerned in this divine conjunction of words (whatever language the voice spoke) the confirmation of his Father's appointment of him as the new Isaac, destined actually to be offered up (cf. Rom. 8:32). It confirmed his sonship but defined it in terms of suffering messiahship. There was, in one sense, a straight and narrow path from his baptism in water at the Jordan to his baptism of blood at Calvary.

With regard to basic tools for Septuagintal study, we have a splendid pair of classified bibliographies covering material up to 1993.³² We

³¹ The first volume in this projected 20-volume series is *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

³² S.P. Brock, C.T. Fritsch, and S. Jellicoe, *A Classified Bibliography of the Septuagint* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); C. Dogniez, *Bibliography of the Septuagint/Bibliographie de la Septante (1970-1993)* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

eagerly await the second volume of the *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*³³ which will make reliance on Liddell-Scott-Jones (LSJ) for LXX lexicography a thing of the past. But a comprehensive, up-to-date grammar of the LXX remains a desideratum.³⁴ The title of the new and innovative monograph series, *Studies in Biblical Greek*, edited by D.A. Carson, which covers both Testaments, reminds us of the truth of the dictum that the person who reads both parts of the Bible in Greek gains a fresh appreciation of the unity of Scripture.

New Testament

I believe it is an overstatement to say that computer-related technology has revolutionized the way Biblical studies is done; it has, however, added a rich new dimension, in that information that once took many hours to assemble is now available in a few seconds so that statements about the range of a word's meaning or the frequency of a grammatical construction can be made much more often and with greater precision and therefore confidence. But we should never forget that all the raw data so readily available must still be evaluated and classified. And the more copious and comprehensive the data, the greater the need for linguistic competence to explain the exceptions to any theory that emerges from the analysis of the data. I am an unrepentant traditionalist when it comes to linguistic analysis, whether lexicographical or grammatical: better to have gained an educated "feel" for a language, an intuitive familiarity, by the patient reading of many texts over many years than to have immediate access to all the instances of a particular usage (without the context!) but to have only mediocre ability in explaining all the data. Advances in technology are both a blessing and a burden. We must walk the narrow path between technophobia and technophilia, lest technology become technocracy.

If gaining a mastery of several Semitic languages is the chief challenge confronting potential Old Testament scholars, gaining an acquaintance with the Roman, Greek and Jewish backgrounds of early Christianity represents the main challenge that would-be New Testament

³³ *Part 1. A-I*, compiled by J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie with the collaboration of G. Chamberlain (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992).

³⁴ R. Helbing's two works date from 1907 and 1928, H. St. J. Thackeray's incomplete grammar from 1909, and the convenient overview of Septuagint Greek found in F.C. Conybeare and St. G. Stock dates from 1905.

scholars must meet. These backgrounds are bewilderingly complex, so we are grateful for comprehensive overviews such as Everett Ferguson's classic *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*,³⁵ as also for closely focused studies such as Richard A. Burridge's *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*³⁶ or Darrell L. Bock's work, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus: A Philological-Historical Study of the Key Jewish Themes Impacting Mark 14:61-64*.³⁷ Of unique value is the ongoing series entitled *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, in which samples of Greek inscriptions and papyri from previous years are reproduced and reviewed.³⁸

As if first-century backgrounds were not a sufficient challenge, Martin Hengel has recently made a passionate plea for the, expansion of the chronological boundaries of New Testament studies—from the fourth century B.C. (pre-Christian Judaism) down to the third century A.D. (patristic and gnostic texts).³⁹ He speaks of these two boundaries as the "Jewish and Hellenistic antecedents" and the "early Christian effects" of New Testament texts.⁴⁰ The labours of scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "warn us again and again to break out of the oppressive narrowness of hypothesis-castles and alienating overinterpretations into the open landscape of *broader surroundings*".⁴¹ So it comes as no surprise when Hengel suggests that "every New Testament scholar should seek to find one or more areas of competence outside the New Testament".⁴² Quite apart from such

³⁵ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

³⁶ Cambridge: CUP, 1992.

³⁷ Tübingen: Mohr, 1998.

³⁸ Vols. 1-8 (1981-1997), ed. G.H.R. Horsley (vols. 1-5) and S.R. Llewelyn (vols. 6-8), now published by Eerdmans.

³⁹ M. Hengel, "Tasks of New Testament Scholarship," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996), 67-86, which is a slightly revised version of his 1993 presidential address at the Society of New Testament Studies.

⁴⁰ Hengel, "Tasks of New Testament Scholarship," 74. German scholars often distinguish between *Wirkungsgeschichte* ("effective history," "the history of the effect" of a given text) and *Auslegungsgeschichte* ("the history of interpretation"). The latter is only a part of the former, for "effective history" includes the total effect the Bible has had in shaping individual and communal ideas, societal customs and general history. See M. Bockmuehl, "A Commentator's Approach to the 'Effective History' of Philipians," *JSNT* 60 (1995), 57-88, especially 61-63.

⁴¹ Hengel, "Tasks of New Testament Scholarship," 77.

⁴² Hengel, "Tasks of New Testament Scholarship," 85.

"competence", there is need for New Testament scholars to feel reasonably "at home" in church history and in systematic and historical theology as well as in Old Testament studies. In institutions where there are several teachers in the Old or New Testament department, the danger of narrowness of focus is intensified; a person may teach only the historical books of the Old Testament or only the Gospels. The creation of departments of "Biblical Studies" often offsets the danger that attends this increased specialization, what Hengel calls "the threat of pernicious overspecialization".⁴³

In this matter of background studies, there are two particular areas that merit attention. First, in recent years we have seen the publication of a general background commentary on the New Testament by Craig S. Keener,⁴⁴ parts of an updated Wettstein,⁴⁵ and M. Eugene Boring's translation and expansion⁴⁶ of Berger and Colpe's *Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch zum Neuen Testament*.⁴⁷ Why should we not also have an archaeological commentary on the New Testament that would include papyri and inscriptions in the range of data illustrating the text? What I have in mind would be a combination, say, of A.R. Millard's *Discoveries from Bible Times*⁴⁸ and B.J. Beitzel's *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*,⁴⁹ set out in the form of a commentary with illustrations, diagrams and maps. Second, with the worldwide publicity given to the work of the *Jesus Seminar* and the first volume of their findings entitled *The Five Gospels*, it is imperative that special interest should continue to be taken in the Gospel of Thomas, the fifth Gospel alluded to in the title, with a view to identifying its date and provenance and its relation to the canonical Gospels.⁵⁰

⁴³ Hengel, "Tasks of New Testament Scholarship," 85-86.

⁴⁴ *The Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993).

⁴⁵ G. Strecker and U. Schnelle, eds., *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechentum und Hellenismus*, vols. 2. 1-2 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1996).

⁴⁶ *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament*, ed. M.E. Boring, K. Berger, and C. Colpe (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995).

⁴⁷ Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987.

⁴⁸ Oxford: Lion, 1997. This is a one-volume edition of Millard's *Treasures from Bible Times* (1985) and *Discoveries from the Time of Jesus* (1990), with slight revisions.

⁴⁹ Chicago: Moody, 1985.

⁵⁰ See G.J. Riley, "The Gospel of Thomas in Recent Scholarship," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 2 (1994), 227-52.

The study of backgrounds, however, should not be equated with exegesis. It is an essential ingredient in exegesis but not the only ingredient. I have been in seminars where some members imagined that justice had been done to the task of exegesis when all possible literary parallels to a text had been adduced and every conceivable historical setting for the text had been canvassed. Scant attention was paid to matters of textual criticism and grammar which are at the heart of exegesis.

At the 1993 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Tjitze Baarda, an expert on Tatian's *Diatessaron*, made a fascinating proposal for a massive project in New Testament textual criticism. He suggested that an editor be appointed for each New Testament book who would superintend a team of doctoral researchers. Together they would prepare a handbook in which the left-hand side of facing pages would contain the relevant phrase or sentence of the Greek text, followed by the evidence of the Greek manuscripts, patristic citations, and an exhaustive list of conjectural emendations. The right-hand page would supply the versional evidence. In an accompanying volume reasons would be given for the text preferred. Whether or not the project is under way I do not know, but the vision, while daunting, deserves to be translated into reality.

One of our many debts to the masters of the Protestant Reformation is the recognition, indeed the insistence, that at root Christian theology is grammar applied to the Biblical text. They saw that Scripture cannot be understood theologically unless it has first been understood grammatically.

It is my conviction that there are four areas of New Testament Greek grammar that afford the greatest exegetical dividends to the investor. They are the genitive case, the aorist tense, the article, and prepositions. The *genitive* is the most versatile of Greek-cases, warranting a full-scale study that not only sketches its development from ancient to modern times⁵¹ but also seeks to standardize the nomenclature of classification, avoiding the temptation to multiply categories.⁵² In the

⁵¹ Compare the older work of J. Humbert with regard to the dative case: *La disparition du datif en grec* (Paris: Gabalda, 1930).

⁵² This tendency has been particularly apparent among American New Testament scholars. For example, there is no warrant, historically or semantically, for speaking of a genitive of subordination or a genitive of production/producer, or a genitive of product.

context of recent discussion of verbal "aspect",⁵³ considerable attention has been paid to the oldest and basic Greek "tense", the *aorist*, which also has the dubious distinction of being the most misunderstood of the Greek "tenses".⁵⁴ Its name defines its function negatively: with regard to the type of action involved, this tense is ἀ-ὄριστος, "undefined", the action being presented simply holistically as occurring, with no indication in this tense itself whether the action is single, continuous, or repeated. What K.L. McKay has done for the perfect tense in three articles⁵⁵ needs to be done for the aorist in a single detailed study – trace the history of its use from the earliest times down to the second century A.D., focusing on its use in the papyri and the New Testament. A.T. Robertson describes the *article* as a distinctive Greek contribution to Indo-European languages.⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, therefore, we have an embarrassment of riches in the literature on the Greek article,⁵⁷ but surprisingly the most thorough treatment in relation to the New Testament was written almost two hundred years ago! I refer to T.F. Middleton's classic work, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article Applied to the Criticism and Illustration of the New Testament* (1808), with an important preface and notes by H.J. Rose in the second edition of 1841.⁵⁸ What the needed updating of Middleton's work might look like may be seen in D.B. Wallace's lengthy treatment in his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*⁵⁹ or in my book *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus*, in which the general and specific principles of

⁵³ See, for example, S.E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Lang, 1989); B.M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); K.L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach* (New York: Lang, 1994).

⁵⁴ Cf F. Stagg, "The Abused Aorist," *JBL* 91 (1972), 222-31.

⁵⁵ "The Use of the Ancient Greek Perfect down to the End of the Second Century AD," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 12 (1965), 1-21; "On the Perfect and Other Aspects in the Greek Non-literary Papyri," *BICS* 27 (1980), 23-49; "On the Perfect and Other Aspects in New Testament Greek," *NovT* 23 (1981), 289-329.

⁵⁶ *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 754, 756.

⁵⁷ One may mention, for example, R.W. Funk's (unpublished) PhD dissertation, "The Syntax of the Greek Article: Its Importance for Critical Pauline Problems" (Vanderbilt University, 1953).

⁵⁸ London : Rivington, 1841.

⁵⁹ Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, 206-90. See also his forthcoming volume, *The Article with Multiple Substantives Connected by Kai in the New Testament Semantics and Significance* (New York: Lang) in the *Studies in Biblical Greek* series edited by D.A. Carson.

articular usage that are outlined in Appendix I are applied to passages where θεός may refer to Jesus.⁶⁰ If we may deduce the importance of the article in New Testament Greek from the fact that it is found there almost 20,000 times, that is, once every seven words, we may similarly ascribe special significance to *prepositions* which occur over 10,000 times, with four out of every five verses having at least one.⁶¹ In this field, too, the literature is rich and the standard work old and dated – that by P.F. Regard, *Contribution à l' étude des prépositions dans la langue du Nouveau Testament* (1919). My treatment of "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament" in the Appendix to Volume 3 of *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*⁶² needs to be quadrupled in length and should include so-called "improper" prepositions as well as a historical treatment of each preposition.

But quite apart from these "Big Four" grammatical items, further attention should be given to the style of individual authors, building on Nigel Turner's fourth volume in Moulton's *Grammar*⁶³ and the creative approach of Walter Bujard,⁶⁴ all in the context of attention to "discourse analysis". And perhaps the most individual aspect of style is word-order, a sadly neglected area of study.⁶⁵ We may confidently expect that a great boost will be given to the study of New Testament Greek with the publication of the revised English edition of Blass-Debrunner-Funk and Blass-Debrunner-Rehkopf (1984, 16th edition), and the appearance of D.A. Carson's *Syntactical Concordance of the Greek New Testament*. Also, as far as I am aware, L. Rydbeck's challenge issued in 1975 has not yet been taken up – what he calls a systematical (*sic*) grammatical exploitation of the contemporary pharmacological texts collected by Galen.⁶⁶ One final wish in this area. Is it too much to hope that some

⁶⁰ Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992 (Appendix I: "The Definite Article in the Greek New Testament: Some General and Specific Principles," 302-13).

⁶¹ These statistics are drawn from Wallace, *Grammar*, 207, 357.

⁶² Ed. by C. Brown (Exeter: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 1171-215.

⁶³ *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. IV. Style* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1976).

⁶⁴ *Stilanalytische Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief als Beitrag zur Methodik von Sprachvergleichen*, SUNT 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973).

⁶⁵ There is a useful preliminary list of "Eighteen Canons of Judgment used in Determining Emphatic Word Order" in Appendix 3 (551-552) of *The Discovery Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), edited by G. Hill; see also Appendix 2, 549-50. Word order is treated briefly in chapter 20 (286-97) of S.E. Porter's *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

⁶⁶ "What Happened to New Testament Greek Grammar after Albert Debrunner?" *NTS* 21

suitably qualified scholar would write a book entitled *Modern Greek for Biblical Scholars*, comparable to Takamitsu Muraoka's *Modern Hebrew for Biblical Scholars: An Annotated Chrestomathy with an Outline Grammar and Glossary*?⁶⁷

Now for some comments on wider issues, first, critical/historical, then theological.

There are some issues that are perennial because they are central to the history of the early church. If Rudolf Bultmann has been the single greatest influence on twentieth-century New Testament study, F.C. Baur occupied the same place in the nineteenth century. Each was a mighty Colossus, standing astride the scholarly world. Baur was right in recognising the relation of Jew to Gentile and of Gentile to Jew as the central issue confronting the early church, but he was wrong in positing two conflicting factions in the early church, one Petrine, centred in Jerusalem, the other Pauline, centred in Antioch. Massive attacks have been launched during the last 150 years against the "Tübingen School" founded by Baur, and although the citadel has fallen, its flag continues to fly or intermittently flutter. A recent flutter may be seen in Michael Goulder's revival and revision of Baur's thesis, *St. Peter versus St. Paul: A Tale of Two Missions*.⁶⁸ The title says it all. Goulder promises an 800-page exegetical validation of his views.⁶⁹ The centrality of the issues involved, along with the detail of Goulder's investigation, demands an adequate response.

Another persistent issue is the relation of Paul to Jesus. It is frequently claimed that Paul, not Jesus, is the creator of ecclesiastical Christianity; his Christocentric spirituality replaced Jesus' preoccupation with the Father.⁷⁰ David Wenham addressed the issue in his comprehensive overview, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*⁷¹ and arrived at the conclusion that "Paul saw himself as the slave of Jesus

(1974-1975), 426.

⁶⁷ Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998, second edition.

⁶⁸ Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994.

⁶⁹ Goulder, *St. Peter versus St. Paul*, xi.

⁷⁰ So, for example, G. Vermes, in a lecture on "Jesus and Christianity" given at the Wesley Centre in Cambridge (UK) on March 1, 1982.

⁷¹ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Christ, not the founder of Christianity."⁷² What we need now is a series of studies dealing in detail with relevant sections in the Pauline epistles – works such as that of Michael B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1-15.13*.⁷³ I fully expect that such studies will show that Paul rightly interpreted the message of Jesus, providing a legitimate development of Jesus' teaching in the light of the cross and resurrection.

Moving on to general issues of a theological nature, I would make three very arbitrary observations and suggestions.

(1) The diversity and unity of the New Testament witness is usefully demonstrated by the treatment of various theological themes across the New Testament. Splendid examples of this approach may be seen in the recent *McMaster New Testament Studies* series, edited by Richard N. Longenecker: *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*⁷⁴ and *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*.⁷⁵ Such studies make it possible to investigate the notion of "development". Of course one needs to define this term carefully, but confusion is avoided if development is seen not as the abandonment, repudiation or contradiction of previously expressed views or as progress from simplicity to sophistication, but as the successive phases or progressive elucidation of a concept under the influence of altered circumstances and needs.

(2) Unlike some who question the possibility or the legitimacy of writing a New Testament theology, I believe that the enterprise is not only possible and legitimate but also necessary and rewarding. I would define New Testament theology as "the exposition and analysis of the teaching of the New Testament on theological subjects". The approach should be both historical ("what it meant") and confessional ("what it means"); there must be sensitivity to differing literary genres, and justice must be done to diversity within and between writers before a synthetic unity is sought. As for the organisation of material, there are two main options. Data may be treated by author, book or "school" chronologically, then by theme; or the treatment may be by theme or credal confession, then

⁷² Wenham, *Paul*, 410.

⁷³ Sheffield: JSOT, 1991.

⁷⁴ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

⁷⁵ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

by author, book or "school" chronologically. The danger of the former approach is that the unity of the New Testament can become blurred or altogether obscured. The danger of the latter approach is that it can produce simply a Scriptural buttressing of systematic theology. My own suggestion is an organisation of material first by literary genre, then by chronology, then by theme. This approach would produce an outline such as the following.

I. PROLEGOMENA

1. Definition of NT theology
2. History of NT theology
3. Recurrent problems in NT theology
4. Methodology and limitations in writing a NT theology, including criteria for determining theological themes

II. GOSPELS

1. The genre of "gospel" with special reference to Graeco-Roman biography
2. Mark
3. Luke
4. Matthew
5. John

For each gospel:

- (a) assumptions about authorship, date, occasion, structure, purpose, provenance, audience
 - (b) principal and secondary theological themes
 - (c) distinctive emphases in comparison with the other three Gospels
6. Integrative theology of the four Gospels

III. THEOLOGICAL HISTORY

1. The genre of "theological history", with special reference to ancient historiography
2. Relation of Acts to Luke (authorship, date, etc.)

3. Acts

- (a) principal and secondary theological themes
- (b) distinctive emphases in comparison with Luke
- (c) theology of Acts

4. Lukan theology summarized

IV. EPISTLES

1. The genre of "letter/epistle", with special reference to Graeco-Roman epistolography

2. Pauline epistles

- (a) Galatians
- (b) 1 Thessalonians
- (c) 2 Thessalonians
- (d) 1 Corinthians
- (e) 2 Corinthians
- (f) Romans
- (g) Colossians
- (h) Ephesians
- (i) Philemon
- (j) Philippians
- (k) 1 Timothy
- (l) Titus
- (m) 2 Timothy

For each book:

- (i) assumptions about authorship, date, etc.
- (ii) principal and secondary theological themes
- (iii) distinctive emphases in comparison with other Pauline letters

3. Pauline theology summarized

4. General epistles

- (a) James
- (b) 1 Peter
- (c) 2 Peter

- (d) Jude
- (e) 1 John
- (f) 2 John
- (g) 3 John

For each book:

- (i) assumptions about authorship, date, etc.
 - (ii) principal and secondary theological themes
 - (iii) distinctive emphases in comparison with other general epistles
5. James's and Jude's theology summarized
 6. Petrine theology summarized
 7. Theology of the Johannine epistles summarized
 8. Hebrews
 - (i) assumptions about authorship, date, etc.
 - (ii) principal and secondary theological themes
 - (iii) distinctive emphases, in comparison with the Pauline epistles and the general epistles

V. PROPHETIC APOCALYPSE

1. The genre of "prophetic apocalypse", with special reference to Jewish apocalyptic
2. Relation of Revelation to the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles (authorship, date, etc.)
3. Revelation
 - (i) assumptions about authorship, date, etc.
 - (ii) distinctive emphases in comparison with the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles
 - (iii) theology of Revelation
4. Johannine theology (Fourth Gospel, Johannine epistles, Revelation) summarized

VI. CONCLUSIONS

1. Diversity of NT theology: comparison of the preceding summaries of the nine strands of NT theology (Markan, Matthean, Lukan, Pauline, James's, Petrine, Jude's, Johannine)

2. Unity of NT theology: using customary Biblical theology headings (such as Scripture, God, Christ, humans, salvation, Holy Spirit, Church, Christian life, ethics, future)
3. The normativeness of NT theology in its relation to OT theology, Biblical theology, and systematic theology.

(3) Along with Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, Evangelicalism is positioned to be one of the dominant forms of Christianity in the twenty-first century. This means that the New Testament foundations of the distinctives of Evangelicalism must be regularly revisited.

There seems to be a general consensus about the hallmarks of Evangelicalism:⁷⁶ a focus on the centrality of Jesus Christ, and in particular his substitutionary death; on the entire trustworthiness of Scripture and its authority in all matters of faith and conduct; on the need for conversion and the primacy of the evangelistic task; and on the defence of the essentials of the faith.

This would mean that we should encourage both broadly and narrowly focused treatments of the person and work of Christ, especially his vicarious atoning death. Alister McGrath promises a three-volume work, entitled *A Theology of the Cross*, which, he says "will explore the critical and foundational theological role played by the cross for evangelicals. These volumes will not focus purely on matters of theology, but will deal with the impact of the cross on every aspect of Christian thinking and living, including the increasingly important issue of spirituality."⁷⁷ So also we need fresh studies of the doctrine of Scripture, the nature of evangelism, and the role of apologetics, written from a New Testament perspective.

Biblical

Thus far we have been considering issues that relate to either the Old Testament or the New. But of course many crucial issues involve both Testaments, and to a selection of these we now turn.

⁷⁶ See, for example, D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3; Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 22.

⁷⁷ McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*, 247, n. 27. Note also his two earlier works, *The Enigma of the Cross* (London: Hodder, 1987) and *Making Sense of the Cross* (Leicester: IVP, 1992).

For all New Testament authors, what we call the Old Testament constituted their "holy Scriptures" (ἱερὰ γράμματα, 2 Tim. 3:15). One important ingredient in Biblical theology is the use made by New Testament writers of these "sacred writings". If a New Testament focus is given to this usage, we may examine how a particular New Testament book uses the Old Testament, as in Bruce G. Schuchard's recent dissertation *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John*⁷⁸ or Gregory K. Beale's *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*.⁷⁹ If one added a study involving the Johannine epistles, a composite volume could be produced on the use of the Old Testament in the Johannine corpus. Studies on each New Testament book and on corpora within the New Testament (Johannine, Pauline, Petrine) would pave the way for a multi-volumed work dealing with the use of the Old Testament in the whole New Testament, perhaps the product of one scholar's lifetime of study. What is required is a blending and expansion of the detail of the Archer-Chirichigno volume⁸⁰ and the attention to hermeneutical issues found in Richard N. Longenecker's *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (now in its second edition)⁸¹ or in the multi-authored one-volume work edited by D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson.⁸² Or, still with a focus on the New Testament, various topics in the New can be studied with reference to parallels or antecedents in the Old, as in Claus Westermann's *The Parables of Jesus: In The Light of the Old Testament*.⁸³

On the other hand, if the point of orientation is the Old Testament, the use of one particular book can be traced throughout the New Testament, as in John F.A. Sawyer's *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity*,⁸⁴ or within one New Testament book or group of books.⁸⁵ Alternatively, the influence of one important Old Testament

⁷⁸ Atlanta: Scholars, 1992.

⁷⁹ Sheffield: JSOT, 1999.

⁸⁰ *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody, 1983).

⁸¹ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

⁸² *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988).

⁸³ Philadelphia: Fortress: 1990.

⁸⁴ Cambridge: CUP, 1996.

⁸⁵ As in D.R. Denny, "The Significance of Isaiah in the Writings of Paul" (PhD dissertation,

chapter can be assessed. One thinks here, for example, of the recent tome edited by William H. Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer, entitled *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*,⁸⁶ which updates the work of H.W. Wolff,⁸⁷ and G. Bachl,⁸⁸ or Wenceslaus M. Urassa's treatment of *Psalm 8, and its Christological Re-interpretations in the New Testament Context: An Inter-Contextual Study in Biblical Hermeneutics*.⁸⁹ There is adequate room here for significant and creative research involving both parts of the Christian canon.

A neglected literary issue that impinges on both Testaments is the matter of harmonization. Unfortunately this term has gained many negative connotations because of some notorious instances of its misuse. It would be useful to have a full-scale treatment of harmonization as a recognized literary tool that is legitimately employed by literary critics as well as historians when they face apparent discrepancies between texts dealing with identical matters.⁹⁰ In Biblical studies this tool may be appropriate to use when there are seeming differences between writers (as in the Synoptic Gospels⁹¹ or in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles) or within a single writer (as in the case of Paul's view of the law in Galatians and Romans) or between the Biblical data and extra-Biblical testimony (as in the date of Quirinius's governorship [Lk 2:2]).

Harmonization operates on two fundamental literary principles: (i) the assumption of "innocence"; (ii) the complexity of "truth".

(i) Any two accounts of the same incident or phenomenon written by independent authors or even by the same author on different occasions

New Orleans Theological Seminary, 1985).

⁸⁶ Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1998.

⁸⁷ *Jesaja 53 im Urchristentum* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlag, 1942).

⁸⁸ *Zur Auslegung der Ebedweissagung (Is 52:13-53:12) in der Literatur des späten Judentums und im Neuen Testament* (Rome: Gregorian Pontifical University, 1982).

⁸⁹ New York: Lang, 1997.

⁹⁰ See the useful brief treatments by C.L. Blomberg, "The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization", in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. by D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Leicester: IVP, 1986), 139-74; and his book, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 1987), 2-12, 113-96. There is also an important exploratory article by B.L. Martin, "Some Reflections on the Unity of the New Testament," *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 8 (1979), 143-52.

⁹¹ On the historical side we have the comprehensive tome by H. Merkel, *Die Widersprüche zwischen den Evangelien. Ihre polemische und apologetische Behandlung in der Alten Kirche bis zu Augustin* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971).

are bound to exhibit some differences; indeed, the presence of apparent or actual discrepancies is *a priori* evidence of non-collusion. Given these probable differences, it is appropriate and fair to give writers who purport to be truthful the benefit of the doubt and to begin by assuming their accuracy or consistency rather than to assume that they are "guilty until proven innocent" and thereby arbitrarily to impugn their veracity or self-consistency before the data are examined. When, for example, we confront the apparent disagreement between two works of Plato (viz. the early *Phaedo* and the later *Symposium*) as to whether or not the individual soul is immortal, we read the later work in light of the former and harmonize the two by assuming that in the *Symposium* the term "soul" (ψυχή) refers to the whole person, who is not immortal, whereas in the *Phaedo* it refers to the immaterial soul which in its rational function is immortal.

(ii) Where two or more accounts of the same incident or phenomenon seem to differ or actually do differ in matters of detail or substance, the truth is as likely to be found in both accounts as in one, for "truth" in the realm of history as in the realm of thought is more often complex than simple.

Certainly, forced harmonization is to be repudiated. For example, there is no reason to say that Jesus was baptized twice, simply because Matthew (3:17) has the voice from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son", while Mark (1:11) and Luke (3:22) have "You are my beloved Son". Better to acknowledge differences between writers' purposes or to show that harmonization is not impossible in principle or to appeal to paucity of data or to create a historical or theological "suspense account" of unresolved problems than to propound a highly improbable harmonization. But the careful use of the grammatical-historical exegetical method, with due regard for the Biblical writer's intention, will remove many imagined cases of discrepancy. So it is unnecessary, for instance, to try to reconcile the (metaphorical) references in Matthew to hell as a place of deep darkness (22:13) and as a place of eternal fire or blazing light (25:41).

Finally, under this heading of "Issues", let me highlight five topics within Biblical theology that should not be overlooked.

First, the doctrine of the Trinity is so fundamental and distinctive to Christianity that Biblically-based restatements are constantly needed.

A.W. Wainwright's classic overview, *The Trinity in the New Testament*,⁹² could profitably be expanded exegetically, with particular attention to Old Testament adumbrations such as the role of the angel of Yahweh and to intertestamental teaching concerning divine mediators.

Second, in ancient times a name was often seen as a revelation of who a person was and what he or she would accomplish; that is, both character and anticipated or actual destiny were frequently expressed in a name. A change of name could mark a change in character or destiny, witness the renaming of Jacob as Israel (Gen. 32:27-28) or of Simon as Peter (Jn. 1:42; cf. Mk. 3:17). We need an authoritative reference work on "Names in the Bible", divine and human, hypocoristic and theophoric, including *supernomina* ("double names") and *paronomasia* involving names.⁹³

Third, I believe that one of the ultimate questions in the Jewish and Christian universe is, why is it true that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22)? Given the centrality of sacrifice in both Old and New Testament economies, we can never have too many studies of different aspects of sacrificial ritual in the Ancient Near East, in Graeco-Roman religion, as well as in the Biblical texts. A model study of this type is the Lyonnet-Sabourin volume, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study*,⁹⁴ which, incidentally, has one of the few treatments of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16) as a type of Christ, showing how this theme was developed in the history of the church.⁹⁵ We now have a more popular work, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, that provides a splendid survey of the topic.⁹⁶

Fourth, few Christian doctrines are as misunderstood as the doctrine of forgiveness. How often we are exhorted with the trite adage, "Forgive and forget; let bygones be bygones". How often we are told that when God forgives, he forgets (a misinterpretation of Ps. 51:9), that love is a virtue that secures our forgiveness (a misunderstanding of Lk. 7:47

⁹² London: SPCK, 1962.

⁹³ A specialist in this field is Richard S. Hess. See his more popular article, "Getting Personal: What Names in the Bible Teach Us," *Bible Review* 13 (1997), 30-37.

⁹⁴ Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970.

⁹⁵ S. Lyonnet and L. Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice*, 269-89.

⁹⁶ Ed. by R.T. Beckwith and M.J. Selman (Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

and 1 Pet. 4:8), and that forgiveness can and must be granted even to an offender who is unrepentant (a misunderstanding of Lk. 23:34 and Acts 7:60). I was very pleased recently to discover Troy Martin's brief, perceptive article, "The Christian's Obligation Not to Forgive".⁹⁷ He rightly sees that the old adage, "Forgive and forget", has no basis in New Testament teaching, which stresses the need: (1) for the offender to be confronted and held accountable; (2) for repentance as the prerequisite for forgiveness; and (3) for transferring to God the responsibility for the forgiveness of an unrepentant offender. These points deserve development in a major tome that treats the theme of forgiveness in both Testaments and applies Scriptural teaching to Christian ethics and counselling.⁹⁸

Fifth, it is inevitable that the search for the "centre" of each Testament and of Scripture as a whole should continue. Scholars as much as laypeople are eager to comprehend the wider picture and to discover a coordinating motif in this literature that represents such variety of date, provenance and genre. In this regard I may be permitted to propose a dominant theme or unifying idea that could be seen as Scripture's centre or epicentre. If the suggestion sounds at all convincing, others might consider developing it. My proposal is that the central motif of Scripture is "God's salvation", first in Israel (the Old Testament), then through Christ (the New Testament). Expressed in another way, the central theme of the Old Testament is "God's salvation in Israel", and of the New Testament, "God's salvation through Christ". The proposal emphasizes the continuity between the Testaments; one and the same God is essentially a Saviour in both economies (Ps. 68:20; Rom. 8:28-30). But it also highlights the discontinuity, with the change of focus from locality ("in Israel") to agency ("through Christ"); in the New Testament, the "where" of salvation has become secondary, and the "how" has become primary. This stress on the subordinate role of Christ as God's agent avoids Christomonism and preserves "patrocentricity", that is, the primacy and ultimacy of God the Father in trinitarian (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:28, Phil. 2:11). Verses that encapsulate these ideas are Jeremiah 3:23 ("In the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel") and 2 Corinthians 5:19 ("God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself").

⁹⁷ *ExpT* 108 (1997), 360-62.

⁹⁸ The way ahead is exemplified in two recent works: L.G. Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), and D.W. Augsburger, *Helping People Forgive* (Louisville: Knox, 1996).

Challenges

And now, much more briefly, let me set before you some practical challenges that confront us as we enter the new millennium.

Sadly, evangelicals are not renowned for recognising their need to cooperate in strategically important joint ventures. Individual evangelical scholars often work together by sharing lists of their current research projects and by contributing to symposia that develop a theme. Perhaps the most successful recent ventures in this latter regard are two six-volume series, *Gospel Perspectives*⁹⁹ and *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*,¹⁰⁰ both emanating from Tyndale House in Cambridge, England. And in the future, commentaries prepared for computer use will doubtless involve cooperation among a wide range of specialists—such as graphics experts, educationalists, computer technicians as well as Biblical scholars. But the time has long since come when there should be formal and informal networking between national evangelical bodies of Biblical scholars and theologians – groups such as the Asia Theological Association, the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians, the (North American) Institute for Biblical Research, and the Tyndale Fellowship centred in Cambridge.

In 1982 I drafted a proposal for the creation of an International Fellowship of Evangelical Theologians (IFET), whose aim would be to foster and coordinate on a worldwide scale scholarly evangelical research, writing and publication in the areas of Biblical studies and systematic and applied theology. These aims could be achieved either by open international consultations or by annual conferences when national representatives would establish and prioritize an agenda of immediate

⁹⁹ Vol. 1 – *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R.T. France and D. Wenham (1980); vol. 2 – *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R.T. France and D. Wenham (1981); vol. 3 – *Studies in Midrash and Historiography*, ed. R.T. France and D. Wenham (1983); vol. 4 – D. Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse* (1984); vol. 5 – *The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels*, ed. D. Wenham (1985); vol. 6 – *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. D. Wenham and C.L. Blomberg (1986). A more popular summary of this *Gospel Perspectives* series is found in C.L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester/Downers Grove : IVP, 1987).

¹⁰⁰ Vol. 1 – *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. B.W. Winter and A.D. Clarke (1993); vol. 2 – *The Book of Acts in its Graeco – Roman Setting*, ed. D.W.J. Gill and C. Gempf (1994); vol. 3 – B. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (1994); vol. 4 – *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, ed. R.J. Bauckham (1995); vol. 5 – I. Levinskya, *The Book of Acts in its Diaspora Setting* (1996); vol. 6 – *The Book of Acts in its Theological Setting*, ed. B.W. Winter (1999).

and future needs in Biblical and theological research, country by country and worldwide. If money were available, research fellowships could be awarded to established scholars to carry out this agenda and a publishing arm of IFET could be created to publish the monographs or series produced and to sponsor the translation of some of these works into selected major languages. There was warm individual support for this proposal when it was aired, but the necessary corporate support was lacking. Perhaps the idea is worthy of reconsideration now by a body such as the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

Another challenge is the constant need to maintain the delicate balance between respecting the past and engaging the present. As John Stott has said, "The Christian is at liberty to surrender neither to antiquity nor to modernity."¹⁰¹ The most effective way of contributing to the present is by analysing it in the light of the past. As is often and rightly said, those who are ignorant of the past are condemned to repeat it. In the context of Biblical studies, this means using the time-honoured and time-validated hermeneutic of the grammatical-historical method, while incorporating compatible insights generated by other methods such as sociological analysis or rhetorical criticism. "New" is not always "better". The rapid rise to favour and equally rapid demise into disfavour of certain hermeneutical techniques – such as "deconstruction" – shows the value of "non-faddishness", that is, having an instinctive scepticism about trendy theories. At present one cannot foresee a long life for "postcolonialism"¹⁰² or for any form of "reader-response" theory that endorses the post-modern tenet that all interpretations of a text are equally valid.¹⁰³

Respect for the past could be shown by giving more attention to the history of interpretation of the Biblical text. Often the best preparation for the exegesis of a given passage is immersion in the patristic and Reformation commentators.¹⁰⁴ Of particular value here is the new IVP

¹⁰¹ John Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall Pickering/Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1990), xii.

¹⁰² See L.E. Donaldson, *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998); M. Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1997).

¹⁰³ See F. Watson, ed., *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* (London: SCM, 1993).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the comments on M. Bockmuehl, *SJT* 51 (1998), 277-78, 295-97.

series under the general editorship of Thomas C. Oden entitled *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.¹⁰⁵ Another way of reversing the current downgrading of the past is by republishing classic works, with an introduction that assesses the significance of the work and summarizes recent research. One example is the 1963 reprint of the 1913 edition of R.H. Charles' unparalleled volume on *Eschatology*, with an introduction by George W. Buchanan.¹⁰⁶ Another example is Michael W. Holmes' 1989 revised edition¹⁰⁷ of the classic 1891 translation of *The Apostolic Fathers* by J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer.

The final challenge I would mention relates to the task of translation – not the translation of Scripture into national languages, although that must continue, but the translation of significant works of Biblical scholarship, whether past or present, into languages of countries that lack a long and rich Christian tradition. And it is to be hoped that with the passing of the years there will be more and more cases of the translation into English, German and French of key Biblical and theological writings that were first published in the Two Thirds World.

May God find us all to be faithful, through the strength he supplies, in addressing the issues and meeting the challenges, some known and many unknown, that will confront us in the twenty-first century.

¹⁰⁵ See, e.g., *Romans* (1998), ed. G. Bray, and *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (1999), ed. M.J. Edwards. There is a companion volume by C.A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Leicester: IVP, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ New York: Schocken, 1963.

¹⁰⁷ Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989.

ABSTRACT

Many issues press for attention in biblical studies. With regard to the Old Testament (OT), the current focus on the holistic reading of texts raises the issue of the process of composition leading to the final form of a book. The question of historicity and the place of archaeology remains perennial issues. The so-called "new literary criticism" with its advocacy of an open-ended polyvalence of texts should prompt defenses of the pursuit of an author's intended meaning. Recent disturbing trends in the study of Israelite religion call for a response. We need a fresh study of Isaiah's "Servant Songs", a standard successor to Gesenius-Kautzch-Cawley, and exegetical guide to the Hebrew Bible, and a comprehensive grammar of the LXX.

In the New Testament (NT) studies, it would be splendid to have an archaeological commentary, with further study on the Gospel of Thomas, and in the area of grammar specialized studies of the genitive, the aorist tense, the article, prepositions, and the style of individual authors. Wider issues include Jew-Gentile relations in the early church, the relation of Paul to Jesus, unity and diversity in the NT, NT theology, and the examination of the NT foundations of distinctive evangelical convictions.

In biblical theology, special attention should be given to the use of the OT in the NT, the legitimacy of harmonization, the doctrine of the Trinity, names in the Bible, sacrifice, the doctrine of forgiveness, and the search for the center of each old and new Testament, and of Scripture as a whole.

Three challenges have been identified: the need for worldwide cooperation among evangelicals in strategically important research and publication ventures; the need to respect the past as well as engaging the present; and the need for the translation of the key works.

撮 要

本文旨在點出現今新舊約研究的趨勢及有待研究的課題。作者認為新舊約的背景、文法及語意研究需進一步發展。此外，他亦提出一個新約神學的研究框架，並宣稱聖經學者應致力展現聖經各經卷的和諧性；他認為聖經神學的研探，使我們對教義有正確的了解。最後，作者認為在二十一世紀，福音派學者應加強合作，共同進行大規模的研究，並要進一步發揮歷史文法釋經的優點及在釋經過程中注意經文的解釋歷史。