

Biblical Theology at Trinity School for Ministry: A Brief Description

Biblical Theology provides the central focus of our curriculum and our life together at Trinity. Noting that scholars have used this term in a variety of ways over the years, we provide this brief statement to articulate our basic understanding of Biblical Theology. For a fuller expression of Biblical Theology which is in general agreement with our understanding see *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, InterVarsity Press, 2000). Our brief description will make use of Brian Rosner's introductory article, "Biblical Theology," in this volume.

The writings of the Bible come from a variety of authors who wrote over a large span of time, in different places, using a variety of genres and at different stages of the unfolding drama of redemption. Biblical Theology recognizes this diversity, but affirms that there is an organic unity in the canon amidst this diversity, such that the Scripture does speak with a unified voice regarding God and the divine purposes. As Rosner puts it,

... we engage in our task as biblical theologians from within a living tradition of the Christian church. Biblical theology is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole and, to achieve this, it must work with the mutual interaction of the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the various corpora, and with the interrelationship of these within the whole canon of Scripture. Only in this way do we take proper account of the fact that God has spoken to us in Scripture. (3)

So we make use of the tools of historical-grammatical exegesis, but we do so from within the Church, with the presuppositions of faith expressed in the canonical texts themselves. We seek to allow each part of Scripture to make its own contribution to the whole, while at the same time, in keeping with classic Anglicanism, we also seek not to, "so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another" (Article XX). That is, the diversity is enriching rather than contradictory. In this way, "biblical theology explores the Bible's rich and many-sided presentation of its unified message. It is committed to declaring 'the whole counsel of God ... [in order] to feed the church of God' (Acts 20:27-28)" (Rosner 10).

This approach to the Scriptures is grounded in that of Jesus and the writers of the New Testament. St. Luke tells us that after His resurrection Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, ... interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24.27). The writers of the New Testament continued this same understanding, for, as Rosner notes, "The books of the NT connect Jesus with the OT in a variety of ways, seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, the ideal to which individuals and institutions aspired, or the climax of God's dealings revealed in various types" (10). Thus, our understanding of Biblical Theology finds the unity of Scripture in Christ as both the center and the goal of God's acts of creation and redemption to which the Bible bears divinely revealed witness.

This view of Scripture is at odds with the teaching of a number of scholars who do not believe there is a unity to Scripture. Many of those in leadership in mainline churches have been trained in the view that the Bible is radically self-contradictory, and, accordingly, they do not believe Scripture can provide authoritative guidance for us. Rather, we are left to pick and choose which bits we find helpful to express what we believe.

In contrast, our understanding of Biblical Theology puts us in line with the Church throughout history, including classic Anglican faith and practice. It also helps guard against misuses of the Bible such as proof-texting, playing off the Old Testament against the New, and moralizing in ways that are at odds with the gospel. This view does not mean that all issues of interpretation become clear; there are a number of topics on which members of the Faculty disagree with one another. But this approach to Scripture does ground and make clear the foundational issues of the gospel, and provides a fruitful context in which to explore disagreements over other issues.

Thus, Biblical Theology plays a vital role in giving the school and our graduates clarity and confidence in the message of the Bible for our lives and ministries, while also helping us recognize the areas in which faithful disagreement and dialog are appropriate. Biblical Theology helps us appropriate and promote through teaching and preaching “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20.27), and not just our own favorite themes. Biblical Theology provides criteria by which to discern God’s work throughout Church history, as well as in our own day. Biblical Theology enables us to grasp the major themes of Scripture which are essential for doing Systematic Theology and Apologetics. It helps us see the pattern of life to which God calls us in Christ, thereby providing essential content and perspective for pastoral care of individuals and for guidance of communities of believers in their worship, life and mission. Biblical Theology helps us trace out the mission of God from Creation to New Creation, providing the revelation we need to understand our identity and purpose in life, both as individuals and corporately as the Body of Christ.

Thus, at Trinity Biblical Theology provides the central focus of our curriculum and our life together through providing the interpretive key to Scripture so that we might be guided by God through its revelation.