Interpreting God's plan: biblical theology and the pastor (Explorations 11)

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Origins and Unresolved Tensions

Donald Robinson

Synopsis

The paper outlines the early development of a course in biblical theology at Moore college. The course arose from the influence of C. H. Dodd, Oscar Cullman and Gabriel Hebert on the author's own thinking about the nature of theological education. The seven-segment course was marked by the division of the biblical story into three distinct yet unified stages. The paper further reflects on issues such as mission in the New Testament, the relationship of Jew and Gentile and some of the 'loose' ends that require further exploration.

A personal account

I have been invited to say something about how a course in what became designated Biblical Theology was developed at Moore College in the 1950s, what influenced this development, how the subject was actually presented, and what may have been distinctive about the presentation. I would like also to indicate what seem to me now to have been some loose ends in the concept of biblical theology as it emerged from the course which evolved over about twenty years from its beginning.

The somewhat personal nature of the way I shall be telling this story is partly unavoidable. Some of my mode of telling also reflects the relative isolation of Australia from wider theological discourse in the period under review. Perhaps it may all be allowed under the guise of a minor exercise in local historical theology!
It was my privilege to be a member of the teaching staff of Moore College during the last two years of the principalship of T. C. Hammond (1952-53) and thereafter under both M. L. Loane (1954-58) and D. B. Knox (from 1959 until 1972). In 1952 and for a few years thereafter there were only two full-time teachers apart from the principal and vice-principal. All the students were Anglican ordinands who prepared for the Licentiate in Theology examination of the Australian College of Theology over a two-year period. My teaching subjects in this connection were Church History (briefly), OT and Liturgiology. However, an additional first year had been introduced at the end of World War II to provide a foundation for the Licentiate of Theology course, especially in biblical knowledge. Students of Deaconess House also attended lectures in this first-year course. One subject in that course was known as Special Doctrine, which at that time was an introduction to the biblical doctrine of the atonement.

**Development of a course**

When I was assigned by Principal Loane to teach Special Doctrine it was agreed that I would take the doctrine of the church rather than of the atonement, as this had been the subject of my own ‘special doctrine’ study in Part III of the Theological Tripos at Cambridge a few years earlier. There was no prior thought that I would develop a course in biblical theology, nor had it occurred to me that there was such a discipline in the theological curriculum. I must have been familiar with the term ‘biblical theology’ being used in connection with the approach to the message of the Bible to be found in the writings of people like A. G. Hebert,1 Norman Snaith,2 or G. Ernest Wright.3 But, although I appreciated what was coming from such scholars, I was not a disciple in any particular school. I was a thoroughgoing believer in the inspiration and integrity of the Bible as a whole, and generally welcomed the emphasis on the essential unity of the Bible which was evident in writers like those mentioned. I was also aware of some convergence of conservative and more liberal attitudes (in terms of biblical scholarship) in this area, as illustrated in R. V. G. Tasker’s *The Old Testament in the New Testament.*4 It is perhaps worth noting that Tasker had been a student under Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, whom Gabriel Hebert described as ‘the great protagonist in England’ of biblical theology,5 and that Tasker, like Hebert, had been influenced by the writings of Canon W. J. Phythian-Adams.6

But probably the strongest influence at that time on my own thinking as to what gave the Bible theological coherence came from C. H. Dodd. I had been much impressed with *The Parables of the Kingdom*7 and *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*8 even before I began my theological training, and at Cambridge I had attended his lectures and his New Testament Seminar. His *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology*9 appeared about the time I began lecturing in 1952. Another book which influenced me formatively was Oscar Cullman’s *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Concept of Time and History.*10

Such were some of the influences of which I was conscious when I began to lecture in Special Doctrine. But it was especially the idea of the church of God, or more precisely the people of

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1 Eg *The Throne of David* (London: Faber, 1941).
8 London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936.
9 London: Nisbet, 1952, based on the Stone Lectures given at Princeton Seminary in March 1950. I recall my friend Brevard Childs, whom I first met in North America in 1947 and who went to Princeton as I went to Cambridge, writing to tell me of the impact of these lectures.
10 London: SCM, 1951. John Marsh’s *The Fulness of Time* (London: Nisbet, 1952) was also exploring this theme at that time.
God, which at that time for me gave coherence to the story of the Bible, and which led to the subject I chose for my Special Doctrine. My Cambridge supervisor, C. F. D. Moule, had drawn my attention to an older book with the title *The People of God* by a Canadian scholar H. F. Hamilton, and I recall picking up a copy of it in Sydney in 1951. The significance of the covenant that God made with his people Israel was highlighted by many of the writers I have mentioned as being a crucial key to the structure of the biblical story, and this was reinforced by an article by James Packer on the pervasive presence of the covenant idea in Scripture, which appeared in the early stages of our course.  

One distinguished member of the 'biblical theology school' was in fact in Australia throughout the decade of the 1950s, and it is right to record the contact we at Moore had with him. Fr Gabriel Hebert of the Society of the Sacred Mission, author of the above-mentioned *The Throne of David*, was teaching at St Michael's House, Crafers, South Australia, from 1950 until 1961. I was in frequent contact with him after meeting him at a small conference of Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics at St Paul's College in Sydney in 1952. We discussed many matters of biblical interpretation, as well as general questions of the nature of Scripture including its inspiration and infallibility. At the conference at St Paul's College, I had read a paper on 'The Evangelical Doctrine of Holy Scripture' to which he responded. His own mature view of biblical theology had recently been set out in his book *The Bible from Within*. It is not easy for me to trace any direct influence of his views on the contents of our course, although, as I shall show, we had a close affinity in one important feature of our hermeneutical principles. But there was an important aspect of his approach to theology and theological study which I did take note of and incorporated in our first-year course from an early stage. That aspect is set out in a lecture he gave to the Melbourne College of Divinity in July 1955. The study of theology, he urged, is engagement with God 'as living, real, and active—as he has revealed himself'. In other words, God is subject, and not merely object, for the student of theology. Theology is indeed 'what we may rightly say about him', but theological study is part of our discipleship as we prepare to minister. The preparation of *ourselves* is as important as our formal studies. We must come to terms with God in his word, which means entering into the scriptural story. I incorporated part of this lecture into my own lectures, and also devoted a section to 'The character of God', which I admit was a piece of systematic theologising based on the biblical evidence in general.

In January 1957 Fr Hebert gave lectures to a Brisbane Clergy School on 'Christ the Fulfiller: A study in Biblical Types'. In these he propounded an outline of the contents of the Bible in three stages somewhat similar to that which I was developing in the Moore College course. I shall say more about this when I come to explain the contents of this course.

It is, however, appropriate to add here that some of us in Australia were in discussion with Fr Hebert about the doctrine of Scripture more or less continuously from 1952 to 1960. I have mentioned the paper on 'The Evangelical Doctrine of Holy Scripture', which he had taken up with me in 1952. His book *Fundamentalism and the Church of God* was published by the SCM Press in June 1957. It attracted wide attention and was replied to in March 1958 by James Packer with his *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* published by IVF. Hebert was particularly critical of the attitude of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship and its *New Bible*
Commentary to Scripture. Some of us at Moore were fairly closely associated with the IVF. I myself was in the vulnerable position of being the IVF's commentator on Jonah! Hebert thought the New Bible Commentary was weak and timid in exegesis, that it lacked a full world view, an integrated biblical theology, and an adequate view of the church. My point in rehearsing all this is that our Biblical Theology course was being fashioned in the midst of an on-going debate with Dr Hebert himself—of a most charitable and constructive kind, I should say—on these very questions. In fact, some of the draft chapters of his book were submitted to some of us for comment before publication, and the Preface acknowledges 'conservative evangelical friends here in Australia . . . who have helped me much by the loan of books and in discussion'. This encounter certainly made me more sensitive than I might otherwise have been to the context in which the search for the theology of the Bible needed to be conducted. Having said that, I do not think there was ever any danger of our brand of conservative evangelicalism espousing a use of Scripture which took statements or verses out of their biblical contexts, which was alleged to be a characteristic of Fundamentalism. Hebert fully recognised that the hermeneutical principles we were expounding at Moore were taking proper account of the Bible's own structure. It is appropriate to mention, too, that in his discussion of the doctrine of Scripture itself Dr Hebert wrote appreciatively of Archdeacon T. C. Hammond's booklet Inspiration and Authority.

Before looking at what was meant by biblical theology in the course actually devised and taught in the first year at Moore in the 1950s and 60s, it should be made clear that, notwithstanding the atmosphere of thought and debate I have just described, the course itself was a simple introductory course for new students looking towards the Anglican ministry. The aim was to assist them in their approach to theological study in general, and to the study of the Bible in particular. It began by asking what was the nature of the Christian ministry, and why certain subjects were included in the college curriculum. A distinction was drawn between the study of the Christian religion in its various aspects (including credal doctrines, church history, Prayer Book) and the study of the Bible in its own terms to discover what it is all about. The practical intention of the course was stated as being 'to stimulate the student's general reading of the Bible'. There was a certain tension here. While there were a number of 'givens' in the theological curriculum, we were entering the Bible on a journey of exploration and discovery, without knowing what it would tell us. It would speak for itself, whether or not we knew what to do with it in the end. My job, I used to say, was to land the students on the moon: they might have to find their own way back to earth!

A description of the course

In its earlier years, under the broad title of 'An introduction to the study of the theology of the Bible' there were four segments:

a. The nature of theology and the Bible
b. The dominant themes of the Bible, especially the people of God and the covenant
c. The sacraments as covenant instruments
d. Principles of biblical interpretation.

As I have indicated, there was some preliminary skirmishing related more to the college course as a whole than to this particular subject. We discussed the purpose of the college and the scope of its curriculum, including the relation of systematic or dogmatic theology to biblical theology, and the relation of both to pastoral theology.

By the end of my time, this preliminary discussion was followed by an expanded presentation in seven segments:

1. The character of the Bible: its scope and structure. This included an outline of the Bible's historical scope and spread,

17 Fundamentalism and the Church of God, 60. I recall his writing to me after he had come across T. C. Hammond's In Understanding Be Men and commenting: 'a real theologian'. Some lively and very good-humoured discussions took place between Hammond and Hebert during visits by the latter to Moore College.

18 In later years I drew on Martin Thornton's The Function of Theology (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), and especially his definition of pastoral theology as the drawing out of the practical implications of revelational theology—whether expressed biblically or dogmatically—in ministering to the Christian flock or individual.
and, although we did not speak much about the canon of Scripture as such, we used the basic canonical categories of 'the law and the prophets' and 'the gospel and the apostle'. Without embarking on literary criticism, we drew attention to different literary genres and the need to be aware of writers’ intentions.

2. The people of God. This theme was identified as prominent and pervasive, and as central to God’s response to the human condition. Associated with it are the various ‘covenants’ God made with those whom he chose. Covenants in general were examined, and then the particular features of those made with Noah, Abraham, and Israel at Mt Sinai.

3. The significance of ‘Abraham and his seed’. God’s promise to ‘bless’ Abraham was seen as the hope of ‘salvation’, and the whole biblical story as the outworking of that promise. It was fulfilled historically, via the redemption and exodus from Egypt, in the possession and enjoyment of the land of Canaan, reaching its climax in the kingdom of David and the son of David, Solomon.

4. The particular features of the two great episodes: exodus/redemption, and land/inheritance. Each has its cluster of incidents and symbols. The Exodus includes judgments on Pharaoh, the passover, passage of the sea, the manna, the rock and the cloud, the theophany and engagement with God at Sinai, the covenant, the law, the tabernacle, priesthood and worship: the trials and victories. The Land incidents include the crossing of Jordan, the conquest of Jericho, the allotting of inheritance, the kingship (God’s rule), David, Jerusalem, full conquest and dominion over the land, the peace, glory and wisdom of Solomon, the temple, all peoples and all kings come to Solomon.

5. The prophets’ view of promise and fulfilment in the period of decline and collapse of the historical experience of salvation in the land and in the subsequent exile. Their projection of the themes of Exodus (a new redemption) and the Land (a new inheritance, a new David, Jerusalem, and temple) into the coming ‘day of the Lord’.

6. The NT claim that all this is fulfilled in Christ. The use of the Exodus and Land themes, and their attendant features, to explain the work of Christ. Also, the tension within the NT between what was already fulfilled and what remained to be fulfilled in a yet future—though imminent—day of the Lord; the tension between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’.

7. Principles of biblical interpretation. Based on the foregoing understanding of what the Bible is ‘about’, we enunciated a biblical ‘typology’ using the three stages in the outworking of God’s promise to Abraham, that is, (a) the historical experience of the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham through the exodus to the kingdom of David’s son in the land of inheritance, (b) the projection of this fulfilment into the future day of the Lord, by the prophets, during the period of decline, fall, exile and return, and (c) the true fulfilment in Christ and the Spirit in Jesus’ incarnation, death, resurrection, exaltation and in his parousia as judge and saviour in a new heaven and new earth.

The three-stage division

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the foregoing concept of biblical theology was the division of the biblical story into three stages between Abraham and the parousia of Christ, ie from the promise to Abraham to the realisation of the promise in the kingdom of Solomon: from the decline of the kingdom to the end of the period of the prophets: and from the coming of Christ to the consummation of the age, or the period of the NT. The old-style Dispensationalists had various ways of dividing the Bible into periods. The seven dispensations of the Scofield Reference Bible, 19 for instance, were designated as ‘the ordered ages which condition human life on the earth’. 20 From the call of Abraham to the giving of the law (Exodus 19:8) is the Dispensation of Promise, and from the giving of the law to Calvary is the Dispensation of Law. This is followed by the

19 This was an edition of the Authorised Version ‘with a new system of connected topical references to all the greater themes of Scripture . . .’ C. I. Scofield, Scofield Reference Bible (London: Oxford University Press), 1917. It was familiar to many Australian evangelicals, not least when its sale was subsidised by a Sydney businessman prominent among the Brethren.
20 See the Scofield note at Ephesians 1:10.
Dispensation of Grace and then, at the return of Christ, the Dispensation of the Kingdom when the covenant with David is realised. However, I do not think this kind of Dispensation-alism had any influence in the circles that were looking for biblical structures in the 1940s and 1950s. I think my own awareness of the climactic significance of Solomon’s kingdom was due to three observations:

1. the terms of the revelation God gave to David concerning his son in 2 Samuel 7;
2. the sheer ‘glory’ of Solomon and his kingdom as described at length in 1 Kings 3 to 10, including the homage he received from all the people and kings of the earth and his own blessing the Lord ‘that he hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant’ (1 Kgs 8:56); and
3. Psalm 72, ‘Of Solomon’, which also celebrates Solomon’s reign in superlative terms, concluding with a reference to God’s promise to Abraham that ‘all men shall be blessed in him’, implying that the king is Abraham’s seed (cf Gal 3:16) and the focus of blessing to the world.

Although not initially aware of anything in the biblical theologians quite like the three-fold division I was proposing, it was some comfort to find that Gabriel Hebert had a somewhat similar division in his Christ the Fulfiller, which he also set out in his chapter on ‘The Bible and God’s Saving Purpose’ in his Fundamentalism and the Church of God in 1957.21 Hebert’s consequent idea of biblical typology was also congenial. We may not read any symbolic meaning we like into biblical incidents or features. Rahab’s scarlet cord, which secured her salvation at Jericho, has been taken, since Clement of Rome, as a type of the blood of Christ, by which we are saved from destruction. It is not unedifying, but it is arbitrary and gratuitous. The true


biblical types are those ‘which appear first in the narratives, and then re-appear in the prophetic hopes of God’s future salvation, and are duly taken up in the New Testament fulfilment’.22 This hermeneutical principle was identical with what our Biblical Theology course was using.

It will be apparent from the foregoing description of the early Biblical Theology course that the NT end of the treatment was slight compared with the handling of the OT. In truth it consisted of not much more than a drawing of attention to the various terms from, and allusions to, the OT which appear in the NT by way of explanation of Jesus’ person and work. The course did little more than point out what lay behind such references to Jesus as ‘fulfilling his exodus,23 or as ‘our passover’,24 or ‘the bread from heaven’,25 or ‘that rock’,26 or ‘the living water’,27 or as ‘tabernacled among us’,28 or as offering his ‘blood of the covenant’ to his disciples,29 or as the giver of ‘rest’,30 or as ‘the son of David’,31 or as ‘something greater than Solomon’32 or ‘greater than the temple’.33 We did, however, look at the language of fulfilment—the time is fulfilled34—and were aware of the need to explicate the eschatological tension within the NT between the hour that ‘is coming’ and the hour that ‘now is’.35 This tension was much under discussion among scholars in terms like ‘realised eschatology’ and ‘inaugurated eschatology’. The 1950s saw a spate of theological studies on the Christian hope.36 While the course did not provide a very extensive treatment of this aspect, I did require the

22 Hebert. Christ the Fulfiller, 8.
24 1 Cor 5:7.
26 1 Cor 10:4.
27 John 4:10; 7:38.
28 John 1:14.
29 Mark 14:24.
30 Matt 11:28.
31 Matt 21:9; 22:45.
32 Matt 12:42.
33 Matt 12:6.
34 Mark 1:15, Gal 4:4.
35 John 4:23.
36 See, for example, J. A. T. Robinson, Jesus and His Coming (London: SCM, 1957) and the bibliography he gives on pages 9 and 13.
students to read the booklet *The Hope of Christ’s Coming*, which contained addresses I had given in the college chapel and which represented part of the thinking which belonged to an exploration of biblical theology.

But there was, as it happened, one partial elaboration of the fulfilment theme in the NT within the course, though only for a few years. This was a segment on the biblical basis of missions, and it came about in this way. About 1964, prior to the establishment of St Andrew’s Hall in Melbourne as a training centre for Church Missionary Society candidates, the Federal Council of the Society asked Moore College to provide a preparatory course for such candidates. As part of such a course it was decided to extend the Biblical Theology course to take account of evangelisation and the spread of the gospel in relation to the fulfilment theme of the NT. This provided the opportunity to extrapolate a doctrine of missions or missionary activity from the pattern of God’s salvation for all nations as revealed in the Bible’s theology. This meant examining the role of ‘the nations’ both in the Bible’s prologue (Genesis 1–11) and in the scope of the Abrahamic blessing, including the historical fulfilment in the reign of Solomon when ‘all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart’ (1 Kgs 10:24) and when all kings paid homage to him and brought him presents. Then, how did the prophets project this ‘proselyte’ principle (ie Gentiles coming to the light) into the day of the Lord, and how is it fulfilled in the operation of the gospel of God through Jesus Christ in the NT? This latter involved an examination of the ministry of apostleship and its relation to both Israel and the Gentiles: the apostolic partnership of Galatians 2:9 and the recognition of Israel’s pneumatika by the Gentile churches as set out in Romans 15:27.

Neither apostleship nor the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the NT economy of salvation were new interests of mine when this missions segment was being devised. I had written on apostles and apostleship in the *Reformed Theological Review* in 1954, and the relation of Jews and Gentiles was a growing interest in the 1950s; I had given the IVF Lecture on ‘Jew and Greek: Unity and Division in the Early Church’ in 1961 and further refined my views during study leave in Cambridge later that year. But the inclusion of a segment on missions in the Biblical Theology course necessitated an attempt to apply the biblical pattern to the present age, eg what is apostolic ministry today? and what is the role of a missionary society? The missions segment also compelled us to face the eschatological tension of the NT, as everything the NT says on the subject of mission or apostleship appears to be comprehended within the original apostolic generation, bounded by the parousia of Christ as the expectation and goal of that generation. The theology of mission as a component of the Biblical Theology course was of short duration in a formal way, but the discussion of the theology of evangelisation was to continue in a number of forms, prompted also, for example, by the Asia Evangelical Theological Consultation at Singapore in July 1970, in which I participated, and some of our biblical theology ideas found a place in such discussion.


Theology'. The lecture on 'The Gospel and the Kingdom of God' contains a reflective summary of the approach to the Bible which had constituted the framework of our course, with the kingdom of God emerging as the dominant theme. The lecture on 'Jew and Gentile in the New Testament' is a direct consequence of my reading of biblical theology, and is specifically an attempt to correct what I consider to be a distortion of biblical truth which has persisted in Christian thinking from very early times:

The popular view that God rejected the Jews and that the Gospel became a wholly Gentile matter is so far at variance with the New Testament as well as with the expectation of the Old Testament that a complete reappraisal of the New Testament is called for.

The question of the relation of Jew and Gentile in salvation history is one which rises directly from biblical theology, and is an unresolved tension among present-day theologians and Christian leaders. It has practical implications in connection with the establishment of the State of Israel and especially the claim that the land of Israel belongs to the Jews by divine covenant. Here, clearly, is a question for the biblical theologians! How much agreement is there among them? My own response to this precise question is set out in an article in St Mark's Review for Spring 1994 under the title 'Biblical understanding of Israel—the geographical entity: some prolegomena'.

Loose ends revisited

In my opening words I spoke about 'loose ends'. The concept of biblical theology emerged almost unbidden from the introductory course on the Bible which began here in the 1950s. But our treatment was far from exhaustive. One question could perhaps be put this way: Is the schema of the OT's 'promise and fulfillment', which is the framework of biblical theology as we have presented it, an adequate presentation of the Bible's message as a whole? Does it leave significant parts of the Bible unaccounted for? I believe the schema can be claimed as a plausible way of understanding or interpreting the main part of the OT, i.e. the law and the prophets (or, more exactly, the Torah, the former prophets, and the latter prophets of the Hebrew canon). But what of the rest of the OT, the writings? The second history, 1 Chronicles to Nehemiah, fits the schema well, but what of the other books? Some, like the Psalms and Proverbs, apparently attach themselves to the great figures of David and Solomon, but do they require special interpretation, and what do we make of apocalyptic on the one hand, or the story of Job on the other?

We are indebted to Graeme Goldsworthy for his wisdom regarding the place of wisdom in this connection, but let me say a word about the Psalms. Whatever else they do, they remind us that the OT pattern of promise, redemption, kingdom, etc was not play acting, not a charade. The experience of God which Israelites had was real for them, both as a nation and as individuals. The events may indeed have happened to them τυπικά (figuratively?) as St Paul says, and may have been recorded for our benefit ('upon whom the ends of the ages have come') rather than for theirs, but God was God, and faith and hope were real—so real that the Psalms have always been accepted by the Christian church as voicing the Christian response, individual and corporate, to all that God says to us in and through Christ. Thus we give our praise in the words of the Psalms for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, and, as well, for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole biblical story becomes our own, from Abraham, through redemption in the exodus, the day of temptation in the wilderness, as pilgrims through this barren land, across the verge of Jordan to the promised land, and in the fruition of God's presence and rule in the prophetic hope of the city of God and of our dwelling in the house of the Lord for ever. I do not think

40 Published as Faith's Framework (Sydney: Albatross Books, 1985) and again by New Creation Publications: Blackwood, 1996. The lectures, I should add, are chiefly an attempt to see how the theology of the NT is related to the apostolic authority of the documents which comprise it, and to see what bearing this has on the principles of NT interpretation.

41 Robinson, Faith's Framework, 97.

42 Written for the International Affairs Commission of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia, which was considering political and social implications of this issue.

43 1 Cor 10:11
I made enough of the Psalms in the Biblical Theology courses. If I may use imagery David would not have understood, here is where the rubber hits the road. Here is the pastoral application of biblical theology. Despite the formal place of the Psalter in the liturgy of our church, its practical neglect in some of our churches is not a good sign for a true appreciation of biblical theology.

I referred earlier to the thinness of our original treatment of the NT in relation to the OT. To some extent it was possible for me to expand this in later stages of the college curriculum when I began to teach NT for the Licentiate in Theology in 1959, and more so when NT Theology became part of the college fourth-year curriculum. But there remains solid work to be done which would take account of books like N. T. Wright’s *The New Testament and the People of God* or G. B. Caird’s posthumous *New Testament Theology*.

Related to this question of the integration of the whole OT in the biblical theology schema is the manner in which the NT itself is used and interpreted in the modern church. The question which used to tease me was this: are we latter-day Christians to see ourselves as still within the Christian movement as depicted in the NT, still in the ‘this is that’ era, still within the dynamics of Jew/Gentile relations, apostolic commissions, and expectations of the parousia of Christ in ‘this generation’, even though this generation has been unconscionably attenuated to now two millennia? Or are we to see ourselves as standing outside the whole biblical drama, from Abraham to parousia, accepting it as the divinely revealed paradigm in history of God’s redemptive purpose for mankind, and, dare I say it, as providing the database, or mine of revelatory information, from which systematic theologians can draw the substance of their systematic constructions to comfort and enlighten Christians in their walk with God in this world?

I only say that this question used to tease me. I would put it to friends, who did not help me much! The Christian tradition to which we all belong has undoubtedly assumed and endorsed the first answer as correct: we are still ‘inside’ the NT. On the other hand, that tradition has tended to act as if the second situation were the case! If the concept of biblical theology which I have been talking about provides a genuine understanding of the truth of God as it is revealed in Scripture, there is a lot of follow-up work yet to be done if its meaning and implications are to permeate our thinking, and the lives of our churches.

**Exploring further**

1. What do you regard as the advantages and disadvantages of Australia’s relative isolation from wider theological discourse?
2. What is the relationship between inspiration and biblical theology?
3. Assess the value of the threefold structure of biblical revelation into
   (a) Abraham to Solomon
   (b) decline of the kingdom to the prophets
   (c) coming of Christ to the consummation.
4. Is ‘promise and fulfilment’ an adequate presentation of the Bible’s message?
5. Are contemporary believers to see themselves ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the biblical drama?

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46 Acts 2:16: ‘this is that which was spoken by the prophet’.