Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange (eds.)

WHAT IS BIBLE?
CONTRIBUTIONS TO BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGY

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BIBLE, THEOLOGY, AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Christine HELMER

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept “Bible” is one that is all-too-familiar in scholarly discourse, so familiar that, as the editors suggest, it might have become a problem. When the term Bible is deployed as noun and adjective in a variety of contexts with multiple referential possibilities, it is time to take stock. A term that has become too familiar must be reexamined as to its capacity to refer to a content or object with a certain degree of precision. The success of interpersonal communication is, after all, predicated on the usefulness of concepts to refer to content in ways that are agreed upon by those engaging in communication. In order to facilitate meaningful discourse in the fields of biblical studies and theology, central concepts of these disciplines must be examined from time-to-time. It is time for “Bible” to be taken out of circulation for a bit, so that it can be examined and understood.

When should the exercise of critical inquiry into a familiar concept be undertaken? The theologian would respond to this question in view of the concept’s “formation,” which means the stages that a concept undergoes as predicates are assigned to it. Concepts are determined by their predicates. Predicates are assigned to concepts in a process that develops in history and with language. The term “Bible” has a particular history, as Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange claim in the “Introduction” to this volume. The Greek plural τὰ βιβλία (“the books”); derived from the neuter singular τὸ βιβλίον was translated into Latin as biblia (-orum) as a neuter plural noun (“the books”). The feminine singular biblia (-ae) emerged around — but supposedly not before — the eleventh century. Its meaning as “the book” in the sense of a collection of authoritative Christian books was later stabilized, particularly by Luther. Luther’s designation came to be a familiar term in the German language; “die Bibel” is actually “die Luther-Bibel.” The concept continued to be assigned more
predicates as its original languages were discovered and as it was translated into vernacular languages. History and language added specifications to the term as it was distinguished by its predicates to suit specific referents.

Difficulties arise when a familiar concept is taken to refer to many objects simultaneously or when it becomes supersaturated with conflicting predicates. Where once it was taken to refer to a single entity in order to pick it out from other referential possibilities, the too familiar concept is taken to refer to too much. The predicates that accrue to the concept in order to help determine its particular features have become too numerous. They collide into each other. The concept loses its ability to refer univocally. Does Bible refer to the Christian Bible that includes two testaments or the Tanak? Does it refer to a list of books or to a term grounding authority? Does it refer to a book revealed from a divine source or is it a collection written by individuals or groups that were then collated together, first piecemeal, then in larger aggregates? By multiplying predicates, the concept has become equivocal. Who would know the difference?

Concepts are the theologian's (and philosopher's) métier. When symptoms of equivocation arise, the theologian (or philosopher) rushes to help. The tools for curing the concept are, as Plato claimed, “classification and division.” The concept must be examined to determine the genus under which it can be best classified as a species. Is Bible to be subsumed under a theological genus or under a historical genus? The relevant classification will have implications for the way in which the document is subsequently studied. The concept's conflicting predicates must be divided by distinct terms that render the relevant content by more precise terms. Should the term canon be used instead of Bible, or scripture? With careful classification and division, the equivocal concept can be rendered stable enough and deployed again with a degree of precision.

The achievement of a clear and distinct idea is the goal of theological (and philosophical) work. The process of classification and division can render a term more transparent in its history of formation and more intentional in its use. It might result in discarding the term entirely, replacing it by other more precise concepts. At the very least, the exercise of classification and division can facilitate the interdisciplinary effort at mutual understanding. There is the intersubjective responsibility to interpret one another correctly if academic exchange is to proceed with good faith about a common topic. It is in the intersubjective process intending clarification that equivocation is discovered at all. Once discovered, it can be analyzed; once analyzed, mutual understanding about a clear and distinct topic can be restored.

The conceptual resource that I bring to the concept “Bible” as we examine it together is the distinction between an analytic judgment and a synthetic judgment. To rehearse the distinction: an analytic judgment is a judgment (of the sort “s is p”) in which the predicate is contained in the subject. The classic example of an analytic judgment is the proposition “All bachelors are unmarried.” The predicate “unmarried” is already included in the definition of the subject term, “bachelors.” The predicate does not add any knowledge to the determination of the subject term, in other words, that is not already contained in it. A synthetic judgment is a judgment in which the predicate adds to the determination of the subject term. This “addition” can be regarded as any empirical information that adds another predicate to the concept. For example, the subject term “daisy” in the judgment “the daisy is purple” is expanded by the predicate “purple.” Daisies tend not to be purple, so that the supplementation of this color into the possible range of colors for daisies means that some empirical investigation has taken place that determines this to be the case. An empirical case of a purple daisy has then added this new color to the palette of daisy colors.

I propose to show how the term “biblical” in its adjectival use modifying “theology” has come to be taken in the field of biblical theology in an analytic sense. Biblical is taken to be already contained in the definition of theology; an analytic judgment is enacted each time biblical is used adjectivally for the noun theology. This usage symptomizes a problem that is evident not only in biblical theology, but in the disciplines of theology and the study of religion as well. The problem that all three disciplines share is, as I will argue, the loss of subject matter. When the reality of religion is lost, biblical theology, theology, and religious studies become split from each other and lose their ability to be challenged by the subject matter in the first place. I turn first to a brief historical description of biblical theology in order to show how the term “religion” was taken in an original ambivalent sense. This foundational ambivalence left open the possibility of taking “biblical theology” as an analytic judgment bereft of a connection to historical religion.

2. Origins

The origins of a discipline set, to some extent, the parameters guiding the discipline’s development. The term “biblical theology” was first proposed by Gabler at his famous inaugural address in 1787 that defined the
new field. From then on, the relation between “Bible” and “theology” in the discipline of biblical theology was oriented by a key ambiguity between two meanings. A first sense of biblical theology would take, according to Gabler’s proposal, a more historical orientation. The task of Biblical Theology I would be to study the theology that is conveyed by the historical authors of the biblical books. This theology “in the Bible” was articulated out of particular historical contexts and arose with particular theological interests. A second sense of biblical theology would be oriented by Gabler’s own historical context. At this stage in the Enlightenment, the conceptual distinction between eternal religious truths and historical religious truths could still be drawn. The task of Biblical Theology II, according to Gabler, would be to discern the eternal religious truths from the historical material, and thereby construct a theology based on these truths. This second aspect of biblical theology would present a theology of religious ideas that had transhistorical validity. By stipulating the task of biblical theology to include two distinct parts—1) the historical task of investigating the historical theological ideas articulated by biblical authors; 2) the abstraction of eternal religious truths from the historical material—Gabler’s two-pronged orientation for biblical theology established a foundational tension. His efforts to bridge the new historical study of the Bible and the older theological use of the Bible for its proof texts (dicta probantia) did not resolve the tension between history and eternity. They established an inherent tension that has haunted the discipline ever since.

Further developments in the history of the discipline recast the original tension in newer terms, but did not succeed in dissolving it. The early Enlightenment distinction between history and eternity could not be maintained in the face of increasing pressure by the historicist turn in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Religion and theology were both moved solidly into the historicist paradigm. Religion was identified exclusively as a historical phenomenon, while theology would represent divine doctrine in historical terms. The historicist turn reoriented the two original tasks of biblical theology by blurring the original boundary between history and eternal truths. Both tasks of biblical theology were determined as historical disciplines. As Gerhard Ebeling noted in his famous essay on biblical theology in 1955, biblical theology still retained a central ambiguity, yet now solely on historical grounds. One task of biblical theology was to determine the theology contained in the Bible; the other task was to articulate a theology informed by biblical interpretation. The first represented biblical theology as articulated by biblical authors, while the second determined the degree to which a theology historically located as a present-day enterprise was faithful to the biblical witnesses.

Was theology to be entirely integrated into the historicist paradigm? It seems to me that a development in the field of biblical theology has resulted in another determination of the terms “biblical” and “theology.” The terms have come to be related to each other in an analytic relation, not a synthetic one. Biblical theology is no longer organized as a synthesis between two methodologically independent steps. Rather, biblical theology is an analytic term in which the meaning of “biblical” is entailed in the concept of “theology.” Theology, not history, seems to have become the primary conceptual framework for viewing the Bible.

I turn in the next section to investigate the analytic terms in which biblical theology is currently taken. My intention is to show that the analytic seems to have erased the historical orientation of the field as proposed by Gabler. In subsequent sections I address this erasure of the historical as a key problem not only of biblical theology, but also of theology and of religious studies. The loss of the “historical” seems to currently haunt all three disciplines. In the final section of this paper I attempt a triage, showing how a recovery of the historical might re-orient all three disciplines into closer conversation about the subject matter that they actually have in common.

3. Analytic

The way in which “biblical theology” is taken as an analytic judgment is a development in the recent history of this discipline. In this section, I show how the analytic relation between canon and church seems to be what “biblical theology” is taken to mean.

A dominant paradigm in Christian biblical theology – I refer here to a biblical theology that has significant influence in Christian churches and

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a corresponding academic biblical theology — is one that takes the term to be an analytic relation between canon and church. According to this understanding of biblical theology, the concept “biblical” is taken to denote “canonical,” while theology is taken to refer to the “theology for the church.” Biblical denotes canonical, and with this denotation, the criteria for what is deemed to be canonical are implied, notably, “authoritative as a unity for the Christian tradition.” The term theology is determined by the particular sense of canon. Theology is an intellectual endeavor that seeks to articulate and organize biblical statements in their function as determinative for the church’s beliefs and morals. Canonicity is a functional ecclesial term; a canon functions as canonical in a particular context and community. Theology explains why the canon functions as authoritative text in the church. When we gather the elements together — the theological stipulation of canonical criteria that highlight the canon’s function for and in the church — we get the analytic relation of canon and church.

Current proponents of this model see Brevard Childs’s work to have set the foundations of this meaning of biblical theology. Childs proposed the canonical approach to the Bible in order to bridge the historical-descriptive task of studying the different “voices” and theological claims about the reality to which these voices attest. It was the Bible’s final form, Childs argued, that functioned throughout the history of Christianity as the normative text for the articulation of Christian doctrine and morals. The Bible’s “final form” was taken to be the significant textual level for biblical theology. Childs worked out a canonical approach (that he insisted was not a method) as his proposal for biblical theology that would investigate the ways in which the canon was shaped by “rendering the material historically … by means of which the tradition was actualized.” The Bible contained canonical impulses that shaped textual developments in the direction of the final form deemed normative in the Christian church. The historical study of canonical shaping entailed theological commitments by the sheer analytic relation that Childs assumed between the Bible’s final form and the church that took the Bible as its authoritative text.

Childs’s biblical-theological proposal has been taken in different ways that have abandoned the historical direction of his canonical approach. Yet it is perhaps the hint at the analytic relation between canon and church that is taken most seriously by his most faithful interpreters. When Childs’s theological commitment to the “one selfsame reality” of the Christian Bible’s final form is pressed into a dogmatic-theological corner, the historical contributions of his vision are erased from view. The resulting model for biblical theology is governed by a strict canon-church analytic.

One important example in this regard is the series established by Brazos Press as the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. The series preface, written by series editor R. R. Reno, comments on the doctrinal and theological orientation of the commentary. “This series of biblical commentaries was born out of the conviction that dogma clarifies rather than obscures. The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible advances on the assumption that the Nicene tradition, in all its diversity and controversy, provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian Scripture.” Reno goes on to define the classical Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the dogmatic-theological formulation of the regula fidei, as “the lens through which to view the heterogeneity and particularity of the biblical texts.” Authors were “chosen because of their knowledge for and expertise in using the Christian doctrinal tradition. And thus it is to theologians and not biblical scholars that we have turned. ‘War is too important,’ it has been said, ‘to leave to the generals.’” Although the aggressive military metaphor seems to be directed against the “consensus that classical Christian doctrine distorts interpretation,”

3 “It is a primary task of Biblical Theology to explore theologically the relation between this reality testified to in two different ways.” By “two ways,” Childs means the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Christian Bible as they “witness to the one Lord Jesus Christ, the selfsame divine reality.” B. S. Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 86, 87.

4 “The whole point of focusing on scripture as canon in opposition to the anthropocentric tradition of liberal Protestantism is to emphasize that the biblical text and its theological function as authoritative form belong inextricably together” (ibid., 72).

5 Ibid., 71.

6 “The term canon points to the received, collected, and interpreted material of the church and thus establishes the theological context in which the tradition continues to function authoritatively today” (ibid.).

7 R. R. Reno, “Series Preface,” in Genesis (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Ada, Mich.: Brazos, 2010), 11, 12. Brazos Press itself has the explicit intention as stated on the website: “Brazos Press fosters the renewal of classical, orthodox Christianity by publishing thoughtfully, theologically grounded books on subjects of importance to the church and the world. We serve authors and readers from all major streams of historic Christian tradition, recognizing that the renewal of Christian orthodoxy transcends many traditional boundary lines and poles.” Online at http://www.brazospress.com/MediaAudiences/dimond.aspx?id=9FC25E4F6245E5B5ADA5410350B227DF94EA&type=genmod&Con Pages&gId=C23333A801E4F2901CSC4WCFA10DC67.

the articulation of the series' aim and choice of authorship upholds the canon-church analytic. A theological interpretation of the type that conforms to the Nicene tradition is assumed to guarantee the transhistorical unity of the Christian church. Doctrine is promoted to orient interpretation of the Bible that is "vast, heterogeneous, full of confusing passages and obscure words, and difficult to understand." Theological interpretation thus orients biblical diversity to doctrinal unity that in turn reproduces "the same [divine] pedagogy of the Christian tradition from Gregory the Great through Bernard and Bonaventure, continuing across the Reformation differences in both John Calvin and Cornelius Lapide, Patrick Henry and Bishop Bossuet, and on to more recent figures such as Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar." A very select list of theologians in the Christian tradition underlines a normative theological tradition in the service of church unity.

What is the underlying assumption in this canon-church analytic? I think that an equivocation is at the heart of the issue, namely that the Bible is taken in the ecclesial terms of the Christian canon. This equivocation reflects a predominantly Protestant view that the Bible is the origin of the church and not vice versa. The either/or between Bible and church was first featured in Martin Luther's debate with Johannes Eck in 1517 in Leipzig. In this disputation Luther developed an idea that God through the word is the creator of the church. Luther's original commitment was carried through as a central identity marker of Protestant self-definition against a Roman Catholic position that saw a much more fluid historical relation between canon and church. The dominant equivocation in Christian biblical theology between Bible and canon is such that the Bible's value as Bible is established only when it functions as a canonical text in the church.

This equivocation sets, or in my estimation, restricts, the research agenda for biblical theology. If biblical theology is taken to mean a study of the canon as entailed by the church, then theological questions will be restricted to questions implied by the primary analytic. The mandate of the new Journal of Theological Interpretation echoes the series preface to the Brazos theological commentaries and makes explicit the canon-church analytic: "A theological hermeneutics of Christian Scripture concerns the role of Scripture in the faith and formation of persons and ecclesial communities." The theme of the journal's inaugural volume is one of a few predictable topics in the purview of theological interpretation, in this case, "the unity of scripture." Of course, it is theology's métier to analyze concepts that unify a manifold. In the case of the new journal, the church-canon analytic sets the range of concepts that can legitimately investigate the subject matter. Concepts are pertinent that secure a reading of the Bible as the Bible is read as authoritative text that speaks "God’s address" to "God’s people." Furthermore, theological interpretation is taken to dovetail with an ecumenical agenda. Theological concepts pertinent to establishing church unity on the basis of a normative reading of the Bible's unity are already available in the classic Christian doctrinal tradition. Biblical theology in this vein must appropriate hermeneutical strategies from the early church, for example allegory and typology, that allow for a unified reading of both testaments in terms of key Christian theological ideas.

Yet the question of unity is always posed at the expense of diversity. By making unity the central category determining the canon, unity is preserved at the cost of flattening a rich biblical semantics to one canonical level. Proponents of this method advocate the superiority of a pre-critical hermeneutic as a necessary strategy for preserving the one canon that is analytic with the one "Christian community." The polemic is directed against the historical-critical diversification of historical and theological options that are deemed irrelevant to Christian faith. Christian believers believe in Christ's atoning sacrifice regardless of whether the consensus in New Testament criticism holds that sacrifice for sin is purported to have been a much later interpolation of the meaning of Christ's death. Historical criticism is correlated with the splintering of the Christian community into diverse interpretative factions; the unity of the church calls for a unity in its foundational text.

Yet a critical look at the question of unity shows that unity legitimates a theological position of normativity and authority. The theology "for the church" is not a theology that includes distinct populations. Rather, this theology assumes a specific interpretation of the canon that serves church interests, whether they are the support for a male heterosexual clergy or against ecclesial rights for women and queer people. Theological concepts

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9 Ibid., 10, 11.
11 Ibid., 2, 3.
that function as transhistorically normative and authoritative are already deemed to be transhistorically valid in the canon. The result is the canon-church analytic that becomes the prerogative of a dominant group of theologians whose vocation of faithfulness to their church dictates the appropriation and interpretation of the canon for an ecclesiastically normative and authoritative position. Biblical theology that is reduced to the canon-church analytic ends up both flattening various theological options into one normative interpretation and holding theological creativity captive to ideas taken as revelatory of God's wishes for the world.

4. REDUCTIONISM

This biblical-theological reductionism has a strange analogy with a reductionism that is currently prevailing in the discipline of religious studies. The loss of the subject matter of religious studies has been diagnosed by Robert A. Orsi in a recent essay entitled “Abundant History.” Orsi pinpoints the cause of epistemological reductionism in the study of religion to rest with the parameters of modern historiography. Historiography has helped religious studies access its subject matter as a historical phenomenon. Religion is available to the lens of social, cultural, political, anthropological analysis, and as such, it becomes a phenomenon about which interdisciplinary discussion can easily take place. In the process of pressing religion into the terms of modern historiography, however, the religious dimension is erased. Current reductionist models of religion by religious studies scholars or by the current media atheists debunking the myth of religion on neuroscientific or other naturalist grounds all yield the same result: the loss of religion as the subject matter of religious studies by modern historiography.

What has happened? Religious studies is a relatively new academic discipline. In the United States, religious studies departments were created in the 1960s in secular institutions of higher learning. Their creation was related to the gaining of intellectual independence from the dominance of theology that had framed the study of religion since the origins of the discipline in the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher’s model for theology serves as its original blueprint and developments in circumscribing the disciplines of theology and religion have taken place on Schleiermacherian grounds. In the blush of youth, the study of religion was all too eager to partake of the feast at the academic table. The requirements for the dinner invitation were clear. The academic table disinvites a scholarly positioning of “subjective faith” that allegedly taints the objectivity criterion of respectable academic discourse. Subjective faith had been under attack since the Enlightenment (or this is how the story goes); faith was to be eliminated from reason because superstition or miracles or any other religious term deemed either above or contrary to reason could not be admitted to serious academic study. Religious studies sought to pad its academic credentials by radically excising theology from the field. Theology was held responsible for guarding subjective faith since the Enlightenment, and its excision was necessary for religious studies to be established on strict empiricist grounds.

I give an example of the reductionism operating in religious studies. Religion is regarded as the study of particular historical phenomena. The study of the Marian apparition at Lourdes for example is the study of the social and political factors informing Bernadette’s vision of the Immaculate, while tracing the social and political implications of this vision into the contemporary period. But Bernadette’s actual experience is a religious relationship involving communication and a physical apparition that self-identifies her at a designated site. If a scholar is sensitive to the inevitable erasure of the religious dimension of religious experience, then she must hold open the possibility of the religious dimension of a religious phenomenon that is irreducible to any other descriptive category. The question for the future of the discipline remains open at this juncture: what are the methods, tools, and strategies required when the subject of religion is determined in this experientially irreducible way?

What is the analogy between the canon-church analytic of biblical theology and contemporary religious studies? The reductionism of religion to phenomena worthy of discussion at the academic table is analogous to a reductionism that can be detected in the field of biblical theology. While the distinct religious element in historical phenomena is reduced to its historical, social, political, and cultural elements in the study of religion, the distinct religious element in biblical theology is erased in favor of a theologically normative and authoritative concept. Biblical


16 I have in mind Ruth Harris’s superb book on the topic, Lourdes: Body and Spirit in a Secular Age (London: Penguin, 1999). Her introduction betrays a fascination with the religious dimension of her experience at Lourdes that she seems not to want to use as an interpretative tool in her historical description of Bernadette and Lourdes (xv).
Theology's rush to identify Bible with canon subverts the distinct biblical religious elements by theological determination. When theology overlays the canon with ecclesial functionalism, it transforms the religious element into its function for the theology of the church. Although theology and religious studies reflect the epistemological bifurcation between conceptual and empirical studies, they represent the flip sides of the same academic ideology. Both in my estimation have lost the religious aspect of their subject matter: religion as distinctly religious.

Let me take a very brief look at the field of biblical studies that provides the historical material for biblical theology. In the rush to interpret the book above books in the terms of a book among books, biblical studies has moved in the direction of religious reductionism. Like religious studies, biblical studies has insisted that its subject matter is no different than the subject matter of any other field of academic investigation: religion is a social-cultural phenomenon. There is no such thing as religion in the Bible or in history in the sense of a sacred referent. I have heard scholars equate the Bible with the Norton Anthology of English literature and have heard scholars use the Bible as a resource for an anthropological reconstruction without exhibiting any awareness that the book documents religion, religious experiences, religious relationships, religious discourses, and religious concepts. The defensive posture that biblical studies and religious studies have taken on as a strategy for gaining academic credibility has meant a loss of the specialness that characterizes their subject matter in the first place. The price paid for academic legitimacy is the surrendering of religion's special subject matter.

How is this reductionism related to theology? It seems to me that the exclusion of theology as a legitimate discipline in religious studies' departments can be correlated with the religious reductionism in biblical and religious studies. Theology has always raised the question of religion from the perspective of personal belief or conviction. Yet in its effort to articulate claims that have a functional effect in the church, theology has taken refuge in its status as an exclusively prescriptive discipline. Theology has been affected by the increasing reductionism in empirical studies but it is also responsible for its uncritical retreat into a martial normativity. The bifurcation since the 1990s between the empirical and the normative disciplines entails the loss of theology as a critical academic enterprise. Theology has lost both religion as its subject matter and its relation to critical academic inquiry. And biblical theology, as I have discussed above, has chosen to throw in its academic b-pozz with theology. The result is twofold: the bifurcation between biblical/religious studies on the one hand and theology on the other on empirical/conceptual grounds has left little possibility for conversation between the two areas. Yet what is funding this bifurcation seems to be the loss of religion for all three areas of biblical, religious, and theological study.

5. Religion

What is the way ahead? I propose that all three disciplines I have mentioned — religious studies, biblical studies, and theological studies — must find conceptual possibilities and empirical means to recover their common subject matter of religion. In religious studies, for example, Ann Taves in her most recent book points the way ahead by recovering the vocabulary of specialness to open up a discourse for talking about the distinctiveness of religion.17 There is something "special" in psychological terms about religious experience that is irreducible to any other kind of experience. Robert Orsi's proposal for "abundant history" pursues the question of "the more" in terms of recovering the notion of "real presences" as the unique way in which religious relationships generate the presence of religiously particular objects that have agency as subjects. Another proposal for recovering the subject matter in religion from the perspective of religious studies is the deployment of a new vocabulary to open up distinctive regions of religious experience: Orsi in his contribution to the Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies explores Rudolf Otto's term "the holy" in a critical way in order to propose a vocabulary that isolates the unique element in religious studies.18

Biblical studies can contribute to the quest for recovering religion by posing the question of the relation between a sacred text and religion. The literary elements constituting the Bible, the historical transitions from scripture to Bible, and the ways in which diversity characterizes the sacred text are all questions having to do with the religious aspects of the Bible. Other proposals include studies of the production and reception of the text in relation to extra-biblical claims about the relationship of God to God's people through word and real presence. And human agency in

relationship to divine word and action can be studied in order to articulate a sociology of revelation or an anthropology of religious experience.

Theology, first and foremost, must recover a method of critical inquiry in order to facilitate a recovery of religion as its subject matter. Religion has in the theological tradition always been theology’s subject matter, yet the normative theological categories imposed from the outset into religion are no longer helpful in a situation of intense bifurcation between the conceptual and the empirical disciplines. A dose of critical inquiry would help theology gain a non-normative innocence so that it would cast its own distinctive light onto religion. Theology is an imaginative discipline. It can open creative conceptual possibilities for viewing religion, such as “real presence,” or can envision a metaphysics of religious relationships, or can reconstruct a theological epistemology of religious experiences. Distinct religious experiences and relationships have led to the production of theology. It is now theology’s responsibility to be held accountable to its origins.

There is a consequence for biblical theology in recovering religion as the subject matter common to religious studies, biblical studies, and theological studies. The new configuration of these three related disciplines can help transition biblical theology from its current impasse as an analytic to a synthetic discipline. The study of the Bible can add knowledge to biblical theology, rather than be entailed by theological knowledge. As a synthetic discipline, biblical theology does not need to relinquish its study of the uniqueness of the canon to religious institutions. Rather, it can frame the uniqueness question from the perspective of its subject matter. Religion is what is unique about the Bible. And from this assumption, biblical theologians need not be anxious about whether or not their studies guarantee a canonical mapping onto church interests, but can be comfortable with the diverse religious expressions in the Bible that have led to a diverse number of theological options, both intra-biblical and beyond. To conclude: biblical theology must be put under its correct genus, not theology, but religion, while religion must serve as the genus for the disciplines of religious studies, biblical studies, and theological studies. Only by this shift, can these disciplines be both critical and constructive, and as such, they can make vibrant and lively contributions to both academy and religious institutions.

CONCERNING DEUT 14

Udo Rüterswörden

In my paper I attempt to provide a case study in a crucial point of Old Testament thinking. As is well known, the passage concerning clean and unclean animals in Deut 14:3–21 has a parallel in Lev 11:1–46. The nature of the relationship between these two texts has been variously understood. There are three models:

3. It is not possible to determine the direction of dependence as both texts contain surplus material in relation to each other. This would mean that both texts derive from a common source which was then literally expanded in two independent directions.

The reciprocal relations between these two texts are indeed extremely complex and extend into the realm of text criticism: the Septuagint classifies the birds differently.¹

In order to set some parameters we will take a slight detour by looking at the term used for “type” or “kind”: ἔργα. This term occurs four times in Deut 14, in vv. 13, 14, 15, and 18. In Lev 11 the word “kind” occurs in vv. 14, 15, 16, 19, 22, and 29.

In Deut 14 the typological term ἔργα is only used in relation to the birds. Its use here is not only meaningful within its context, it is essential to it. This is because both of our texts, Deut 14 and Lev 11, represent a piece of Old Testament biology, or to be more precise: morphology, and this long before Aristotle. The distinction between those animals which may be eaten and those which may not is based upon two morphological traits, both of which must be present for the animal to be edible. To quote: “Every animal that parts the hoof and has the hoof cloven in two, and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat” (Deut 14:6).²

¹ C. Nihan, From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus (FAT 2/25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 289.
² Translations according to RSV.