

The Theology of the New Testament as Missionary Theology: The Missionary Reality of the Early Church and the Theology of the First Theologians

Eckhard J. Schnabel
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Society of New Testament Studies, Halle, August 2-6, 2005

What we today call “theology,” the early Christians regarded as the proclamation of God’s saving acts that leads Jews and Gentiles to faith in Jesus the Messiah and Savior, that strengthens the faith of the followers of Jesus and that reinforces the relevance of the word of God in their everyday lives. The leading men and women of the early church were missionaries and evangelists: Peter in Jerusalem, in Samaria, in the cities of the coastal plain, in northern Anatolia and in Rome; Stephen and Philip in Jerusalem, in Samaria and in the cities of the coastal plain; Barnabas in Antioch and in Cyprus; Paul in Nabatea, in Syria, in Cilicia, in Galatia, in Asia, in Macedonia, in Achaia, in Illyria, in Rome and in Spain; Priscilla in Corinth, in Ephesus and in Rome; Timothy in Macedonia, in Achaia and in Ephesus; Phoebe in Corinth and in Rome; Apollos in Achaia, in Ephesus and on Crete; Thomas probably in India, Matthew probably in Pontus, perhaps in Ethiopia, possibly in Syria; John Mark in Antioch, in Cyprus and in Rome; Luke in Antioch and in Macedonia; John in Jerusalem, in Samaria and in Ephesus. More names could be mentioned. You probably noticed that this list of names included all authors of the books of the New Testaments, with the exception of James, Jude and the unknown author of the Letter to the Hebrews.

When I raise the question of the character of the theology of the New Testament, I do not imply that the New Testament texts were written with the purpose of leading Jews and Gentiles to faith in Jesus, the saving Messiah and Kyrios. The New Testament texts are not missionary literature. Nor do I imply that the authors of the New Testament, who wrote their texts for the instruction and edification of the followers of Jesus in local congregations, intended to summarize their own missiological convictions. The New Testament texts are not missiological literature. However, in view of the fundamental and pervasive missionary reality of the life of the early church, with the leaders of the new movement themselves on the move as missionaries and evangelists, it is a plausible assumption that the New Testament

books reflect the reality of the missionary activity of the early church. This means that it should be possible to integrate the New Testament texts into the historical context of the early Christian mission. The gospels and the letters that constitute the canon of the New Testament literature were not written by academics, professionals of the spoken and written word, delineating arguments, counter-arguments, theories and hypotheses. They were not written by local believers, presenting their convictions, opinions and sentiments. They were not written by pastors, or bishops, putting pen to paper in an effort to edify, encourage and instruct believers. Nearly all the New Testament texts were written by theologians who had missionary experience, who had led people to faith in Jesus Christ, who had planted new churches, who had served as teachers and leaders of local congregations, who, very probably without exception, had traveled and visited other congregations, and who wrote their texts with numerous Christians and many congregations in mind.¹

Neither the authors of the canonical gospels nor Paul, the author of the majority of the New Testament letters, relied on the power of rhetoric when they composed their texts, as they did not rely on rhetorical competence when they preached the gospel as missionaries. They relied on the power of the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures and in the person and proclamation of Jesus. Despite all their formal-analytical differences, the texts of the New Testament were always theological works as well, written for local congregations who knew of the reality of missionary work not only from hearsay or from reports but who had been involved locally and regionally in missionary outreach. The authors of the New Testament, having had missionary experience, wrote texts that were meant to consolidate the faith of the believers in God's eschatological redemptive revelation in Jesus Messiah, explaining the Christian faith in the context of the expansion of faith in the Messiah and Savior from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

When I use the term "mission" (or missions) I refer to "the activity of a community of faith that distinguishes itself from its environment both in terms of religious belief (theology) and in terms of social behavior (ethics), that is convinced of the truth claims of its faith, and that actively works to win other people for the contents of faith and the way of life of whose truth and necessity the members of that community are convinced. This definition of 'mission' involves a threefold reality: (1) People communicate to people of different faiths a new interpretation of reality, i.e. a different, new view of God, of mankind and of salvation. (2) People communicate a new way of life that replaces, at least partially, the former way of life. (3) People integrate those whom they win over to their faith and their way of life into

¹ Cf. Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians. Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

their community. This definition may imply geographical movement. As far as the ancient world is concerned, this definition always implies the oral communication of convictions.”²

In the following remarks I will survey the structure of important descriptions of the theology of the New Testament and the theology of the Apostle Paul, before making some suggestions for a description of the theology of the New Testament as missionary theology.

1. Descriptions of the Theology of the New Testament

First, I will investigate the most important descriptions of the theology of the New Testament with regard to the question of how their authors consider, or ignore, the missionary reality of the early Christian theologians and their congregations.

Bernhard Weiß defines the task of biblical theology in the first sentences of his *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, published in 1868, as follows: “The biblical theology of the New Testament is the scientific representation of the religious ideas and doctrines which are contained in the New Testament. It assumes that the specific historical significance and the normative character of the writings which are united in the New Testament have been proved by New Testament introduction and by dogmatics. It has to represent the individuality and historically conditioned manifoldness of the New Testament forms of teaching, forms whose unity lies in the historical saving facts of the revelation of God which has appeared in Christ.”³ Weiß’ explanation of these sentences on the subsequent pages demonstrates that the reference to the historical significance of the New Testament books and to the historically conditioned diversity of the New Testament teaching relates to the historical contingency of the authors of the New Testament writings rather than to the historical reality of the life, thought and work of the first Christians which was an essentially missionary reality.

The structure of Weiß’ theology of the New Testament displays the same pattern that most contemporary New Testament theologies follow. In Part One Weiß treats “the teaching of Jesus according to the earliest tradition,” in Part Two “the original-apostolic type of doctrine previous to the time of Paul,” in Part Three “Paulinism,” in Part Four “the early-apostolic doctrinal system in the post-Pauline period,” and in Part Five “the Johannean theology.”

Reading the headings of the individual sections of these five parts, we would hardly suspect that Weiß describes the writings of Christians and of churches who

² Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:11.

³ Bernhard Weiß, *Lehrbuch der biblischen Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (7th Edition; Stuttgart/Berlin: Cotta, 1868), 1:1 [= B. Weiß, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1882), 1:1].

risked their lives in the course of their missionary work. The first section of Part Two discusses the speeches in the Book of Acts, but then goes on to discuss “the proclamation of the Messiah and the Messianic time” in the first chapter and “the mother church and the question of the Gentiles” in the second chapter, which treats in three paragraphs the church and the apostles, the final conversion of Israel and the status of the Gentile Christians in the church. Weiß discusses the conversion of Cornelius in the paragraph on the status of the Gentile Christians in the early church,⁴ but the formulation of the heading (“The position of the Gentile Christians in the church”) and the concentration on the Apostles’ Council show that he is more interested in internal developments rather than in the missionary expansion of the church. The heading of Part Three (“Paulinism”) indicates a rather theoretical interest in theological and dogmatic questions, a suspicion that is quickly confirmed by the first sentence of the introduction into this part, where Weiß writes: “In consequence of his natural speculative genius, as well as of his rabbinico-dialectic training, Paul possessed the ability and the inclination to strike out a more sharply defined form of teaching, and to work it out into an almost systematic completeness.” The terms “mission,” “evangelism” or “proclamation” are not listed in the subject index.

When we read Weiß’ work carefully, we notice that he includes, on occasion, helpful insights into the relevance of New Testament writings in the context of apostolic missionary activity. For example, Weiß notes with regard to First Peter, which he interprets as a document of the pre-Pauline period, that the paraenesis of the epistle “receives its colouring from the circumstances of the young Churches, in an essentially heathen neighbourhood, to which it is addressed.” He continues, “They have already experienced the hostility of the world which was foretold by Jesus, viz. Gentile calumny and Jewish slander on account of the name of Christ. It was now important to refute this slinking calumny by the unfolding of the Christian life of virtue in that very condition of suffering, to show that the reproach which the Church bore was really only the reproach of Christ. But the exhortation is based throughout upon the saving facts of Christianity. Naturally, these had already been proclaimed to the readers, but by those who were not apostles (i. 12); and because the strongest motive of Christian exhortation is found in the certainty of these facts, the Epistle unites with its exhortatory aim the other aim of establishing its readers, by means of its apostolic testimony, in the truth of the proclamation which had reached them (v. 12).”⁵ Also, Weiß hints at the relevance of missionary activity and reality in the first section of his discussion of

⁴ Weiß, *Lehrbuch*, 1:147 (ET 1:198-99); on the Apostles’ Council *ibid.* 148-50 (ET 199-201); the following quotation *ibid.* 201 (ET 274).

⁵ Weiß, *Lehrbuch*, 1:122 (ET 1:163-64).

Paul's theology, with the heading "the earliest preaching of Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles," surveying on 23 pages Paul's preaching before Gentile audiences.⁶ The next section, 250 pages long, is again structured in terms of systematic-theological criteria: Weiß discusses "universal sinfulness," "heathendom and Judaism," "prophecy and fulfilment," "christology," "redemption and justification," "the new life," "the doctrine of predestination," "the doctrine of the church," and "eschatology."

Albert Immer, Professor in Bern, writes in the preface of his *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, published in 1877, that a New Testament theology demands "a strictly historical treatment."⁷ The attempt to pursue an empirically "exact" historical investigation remains restricted to the history of religious ideas and to the history of traditions. Part One discusses the "religion of Jesus," Part Two the Jewish-Christian church and the first apostles, Part Three what Immer calls "Paulinism," Part Four the post-Pauline Jewish-Christian church, Part Five the movement that sought to mediate between Paul's theology and Jewish Christianity, and Part Six the movement that stood above this contrast, i.e. the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John.

Immer's "exegetical-dogmatic presentation of the teaching of Paul according to his four main letters" discusses, first, "the Jewish aspects in Paul's teaching," second "the specifically Christian aspects of Paul's teaching."⁸ Immer refers to Paul as apostle to the Gentiles in the context of his discussion of Paul's ecclesiology, specifically the "foundation of the church," but he does not advance beyond rather general remarks. Immer's description remains focused on systematic as well as religious and tradition-historical considerations.

Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann emphasizes in his *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, published in 1886, that biblical theology is a "historical discipline" which explores "the origins and the continuous outworking of the teaching whose documentary monument is the holy Scriptures."⁹ As we will see at the end of our survey, von Hofmann was the only author of a New Testament theology who strove to relate the demand for a historical description to the history of the early church without merely attempting to reconstruct the history of early Christian ideas. The heading of the main section of the book ("Der Lehrinhalt der neutestamentlichen Schrift," i.e. "The teaching of the New Testament Scriptures") suggests at first sight a systematic treatment. This impression is misleading, however. Von Hof-

⁶ Weiß, *Lehrbuch*, 1:214-29 (ET 1:292-315).

⁷ Albert Immer, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Bern: Dalp, 1877), VII.

⁸ Immer, *Theologie*, 247-57, 258-357; for the following remark see *ibid.* 319-20.

⁹ Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Nach Manuskripten und Vorlesungen bearbeitet von W. Volck; Nördlingen: Beck, 1886), 1.

mann discusses in five chapters 1. the preliminary proclamation of the realization of salvation, i.e. the promises given to Zachariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds; 2. the witness of John the Baptist; 3. the witness of Jesus during his earthly life; 4. the instruction of the disciples by the risen Jesus; 5. the teaching of Jesus' witnesses. This last section, the largest of the book (192 pages), discusses in three sections the teaching of the apostles (a) among the Jewish people, (b) among the Jewish church of Jesus, and (c) "in the area of the non-Israelite world".¹⁰ This last section first discusses "the apostolic preaching with the purpose of converting to faith in Jesus,"¹¹ before treating "the apostolic teaching within Gentile Christianity." This last paragraph constitutes with 140 pages nearly half of the book, discussing in nine chapters the New Testament letters. The general outline of von Hofmann's New Testament theology takes the missionary activity of the early church seriously, as the fundamental reality that shaped the thinking and the writing of the apostles, a focus that determines the first half of his book. The second half is a theological introduction to the literature of the New Testament, written from a historical perspective.

Ferdinand Christian Baur describes the theology of the New Testament as "a purely historical discipline" which has become free from its dependence upon dogmatic theology.¹² What is historical in Baur's book is the outline which follows the development of early Christian history, discussing, first, the teaching of Jesus and secondly the teaching of the apostles. The latter section is divided into three periods: the teaching of the Apostle Paul and of the Apocalypse, the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the smaller Pauline Epistles, and the teaching of the Pastoral Epistles and of the Johannine literature. Evangelistic activities and missionary proclamation and expansion are never discussed.

Willibald Beyschlag asserts in his *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, published in 1891, that his hermeneutics stands between "lifeless theological scholasticism" on the one hand and "the destructive criticism" of F. C. Baur on the other hand.¹³ Beyschlag learns from Schleiermacher that "criticism is an art that requires us to achieve an intellectual reproduction (*geistig zu reproduciren*) the text under consideration and to evaluate it only on the basis of such a vivid reproduction." From his teacher Friedrich Bleek, Beyschlag learns that the art of biblical interpretation cannot be exercised without "the virtue of prudence and humility, of respect for historical traditions, of differentiation between probable results and spurious inventions." This

¹⁰ Von Hofmann, *Theologie*, 137-53, 135-81, 181-328.

¹¹ Von Hofmann, *Theologie*, 184-86.

¹² Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Vorlesungen über neutestamentliche Theologie* (Edited by F. F. Baur; Gotha: Perthes 1964 [1892]), 1:25.

¹³ W. Beyschlag, *Neutestamentliche Theologie oder geschichtliche Darstellung der Lehren Jesu und des Urchristentums nach den neutestamentlichen Quellen* (Halle: Strien, 1891/1892 [1896]), IX-X, the following quotations *ibid.* X.

program of “reproducing” the text of the early Christian theologians may suggest that we could expect attention to the fact that the authors of the New Testament writings were involved in active missionary work. This expectation is, however, not met.

Beyschlag adopts the standard outline based on historical lines of development. He discusses Jesus’ teaching according to the Synoptic gospels and the Gospel of John, the early apostolic convictions (the Jerusalem church according to the Book of Acts, the Epistle of James and First Peter), Pauline theology (“der paulinische Lehrbegriff”), the advanced early apostolic teaching (the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Johannine literature), and, finally, “general Christian and post-apostolic teaching” (Synoptic gospels, Acts, Jude, Second Peter, Pastoral Epistles). Beyschlag’s presentation follows a systematic-dogmatic structure within this “historical” outline. The first book describes Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God, christology, doctrine of God, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology. Beyschlag’s description of Paul’s theology discusses the following topics: flesh and spirit, Adam and Christ, God and the world, salvation, life in the Spirit, the church, and the consummation. Beyschlag does not ignore the early Christian mission completely. In his chapter on “the church”, he discusses in the seventh paragraph the “world-historical task” of Jesus’ followers. He emphasizes that Jesus defined the disciples’ scope of missionary work both Israel and the world of the Gentiles.¹⁴ However, when Beyschlag describes the “early apostolic convictions in Book Three, he ignores the missionary work of the apostles almost completely. In chapter one, he discusses the historicity of the Book of Acts, the disciples’ viewpoint during Jesus’ lifetime, the effect of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the giving of the Spirit. In chapter two, he discusses the content of the early apostolic proclamation, particularly christology, eschatology, and soteriology, without referring to the missionary context of the early Christian proclamation. Chapter three discusses the life of the early church, without paying any attention to the commissioning of missionaries; chapter four discusses Stephen, “the question of the conversion of the Gentiles and the Apostles’ Council.”¹⁵ Beyschlag’s discussion of the theology of Paul’s letters, under the heading “der paulinische Lehrbegriff,” does not suggest that he would pay attention to Paul’s missionary work. His description of Paul’s teaching about salvation treats “the proclamation of the gospel,”¹⁶ but the focus is on a psychological description of Paul’s experience of the Spirit.

Heinrich Julius Holtzmann asserts in his *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, first published in 1897, that the New Testament is not a “doctrinal

¹⁴ Beyschlag, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 1:185.

¹⁵ Beyschlag, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 1:310-45.

¹⁶ Beyschlag, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 2:171-73.

codex” (“Lehrcodex”) whose individual assertions only need to be collected, evaluated and sorted by a description of the theology of the New Testament. Rather, Holtzmann argues, the New Testament is the result of a religious evolution that took place “under changing general and diverse individual conditions.”¹⁷ Holtzmann asserts that any description of New Testament theology, in order to be fruitful, must be written from a historical perspective, particularly a dogmatic-historical perspective as well as from a general religion-historical perspective. The outline of Holtzmann’s *Lehrbuch* follows the postulated historical development of early Christian history. The six chapters discuss Second Temple Judaism, the proclamation of Jesus, the theological problems of early Christianity, Pauline theology, deutero-Pauline theology, and Johannine theology. The missionary reality of the first Christians and their congregations is largely eclipsed. Holtzmann speaks of “messengers and itinerant preachers” (“Sendboten und Wanderprediger”) when he discusses the apostolic “instructional story” (“Lehrerzählung”) that aimed at “instruction with regard to the historical foundations of Christianity” and at “orientation with regard to the worldview, the interpretation and the application of the narrative material for faith and morals.”¹⁸

Holtzmann never discusses the international and cross-cultural activities of the early Christian leaders. He regards the Great Commission in Mt 28 as belonging to “the texts which canonize the dogmatic, constitutional and liturgical conditions of Jewish-Christian circles” and to church orders which are traced back redactionally to Jesus. Holtzmann fails, however, to describe the historical realities and the theological emphases of the early Christian mission, a term that is not listed in his subject index. When he discusses Paul’s theology, he refers to the “Gentile apostleship” of Paul in the context of a description of his conversion, focusing on Paul’s “universalism” while ignoring Paul’s missionary preaching.¹⁹ Since Holtzmann posits Luke-Acts “on the threshold of Catholicism,”²⁰ it is not surprising that he characterizes the purpose and the content of the Book of Acts as a “picture of early Christian conditions”, while ignoring the historical movement and the missiological reality of the early Christian proclamation in the cities and provinces of the Roman Empire. The present time of the author of the Book of Acts is, for Holtzmann, “the immediate product of a divine gift, not the result of the foundational activity of Jesus and of the apostles conveyed through diverse mediation and variations.” In view of such postulates it is impossible to do justice to the mission of the early church and her missionaries.

¹⁷ Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Theologie* (2 vols.; Freiburg/Leipzig: Mohr, 1897), 1:23; for the following remark see *ibid.* 23-24.

¹⁸ Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch*, 1:399; for the following comment see *ibid.* 1:378-79.

¹⁹ Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch*, 2:60-62.

²⁰ Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch*, 1:463; for the following quotations see *ibid.* 455.

George Barker Stevens, professor of systematic theology at Yale University, published his work *The Theology of the New Testament* in 1899. The first sentence of the introduction defines the goal of his presentation in terms of setting forth, “in systematic form, the doctrinal contents of the New Testament according to its natural divisions”.²¹ Stevens carries out this program in seven parts and 50 chapters. When I criticize Stevens’ work for ignoring the missionary reality of the early church, I am being generous. In his presentation of the teaching of Jesus, he limits his comments on the “duties of the Twelve” by saying that their tasks do not receive a sharp profile; he argues that the saying about the the disciples being fishers of people in Mk 1:17 and the sending of the Twelve in Mk 6:7-13 demonstrate “that they had a certain official relation to him and that it was his intention to make them his chief agents in the establishment of his Church.”²²

Adolf Schlatter asserts in the preface of the first volume of his New Testament theology, entitled *Die Geschichte des Christus*, first published in 1909, that “the ideas of the New Testament received their uniqueness from being components of the history experienced and produced by the men of the New Testament. For they brought their thoughts into a conscious and complete connection with their will and action. Through what they experienced they gave their thoughts content and basis. They used their experience as the means to fulfill their calling. This rendered what we call their teachings components of their actions and thus their history.”²³ Schlatter asserts with regard to Jesus, and also the apostles, that it is impossible “to separate a ‘message’ from his actions, since, in his case, the word and the work, the assurance and the will, form a closely connected unity.” He asserts that it is the main task of New Testament theology to make this connection visible. These considerations represent a twofold methodological advance over the previous New Testament theologies. 1. The criterion of “history” is not only applied to the general development from Jesus to the Jerusalem apostles and to Paul, but to the individual witnesses and authors of the New Testament writings. 2. The activities of the early Christians are taken more seriously, as Schlatter emphasizes the indissoluble unity of teaching and action.

When we evaluate both volumes of Schlatter’s New Testament theology — the second volume was published with the title *Theologie der the Apostel* in 1910²⁴ — we notice four things. 1. Historical events are consistently integrated into

²¹ G.B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament* (Second Edition; Edinburgh, 1906 [1901]), vii.

²² Stevens, *Theology*, 136.

²³ Adolf Schlatter, *Die Geschichte des Christus* (Second Edition; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1923), 5, the following quotation *ibid.* [= Adolf von Schlatter, *The History of the Christ: The Foundation for New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997)] 21.

²⁴ Adolf Schlatter, *Die Theologie der Apostel* (Second Edition; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1922), [= Adolf Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999)].

the account of the theology of the New Testament. In the first volume, we find sections with the following headings: Nazareth and Bethlehem; Jesus' life in Bethlehem; the success of John the Baptist; the separation from the Baptist; the calling of the first disciples; the move to Capernaum; the commissioning of the twelve messengers; Jesus' separation from Jerusalem.²⁵ 2. The missionary task and activity of Jesus and of the apostles is emphasized repeatedly. In the first volume, Schlatter devotes eight pages to the calling of the first disciples, twenty pages to the appointment of the twelve messengers, eight pages to the disciples' involvement in Jesus' ministry; in the last section on the Easter story, he discusses the Great Commission of the risen Christ.²⁶ In the second volume, two of the eight sections of Part One on "the disciples' vantage point at the beginning of their work" are devoted to missionary work, entitled "the office of Jesus' messengers" and "the disciples' commission to Israel;" the first section of Part Three which discusses Paul is entitled "the apostolic office in Paul."²⁷ 3. The unity of teaching and action is nearly completely dissolved, in the second volume, in terms of a presentation of the teaching of the apostles. Even though Part One is entitled "the disciples' vantage point at the beginning of their work,"²⁸ the following discussion is devoted to "the convictions upheld by Jesus' followers," without describing the movement of the early Christian missionary activity that resulted from the "vantage point." Schlatter discusses Paul's theology under the heading "the calling of the nations through Paul,"²⁹ without devoting even one chapter to his missionary work or his missionary proclamation. 4. The general structure of Schlatter's New Testament theology largely follows the traditional pattern: the description of Jesus' life and teaching is followed by a survey of the Jerusalem church, by a description of the convictions of the early apostles (Peter, Matthew, James, Jude, John), a description of the theology of Paul and of the authors of the later New Testament writings (Mark, Luke, Hebrews, pseudo-Peter), before summarizing the insights of the early church in the last section.

Heinrich Weinel published his work *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* in 1913, with the subtitle "the religion of Jesus and of early Christianity." In Part One he discusses Jesus' teaching as "moral religion of redemption," and in Part Two "early Christianity," with a description of "the origins," Paul, and "the Christianity of the emerging church." In connection with his discussion of Christian origins, he asserts that the converts' appreciation of the new community produced the eagerness "to draw others into this circle of holiness and of certainty of eternal

²⁵ Schlatter, *Geschichte des Christus*, 26-29, 29-33, 73-76, 115-20, 121-28, 132-34, 312-32, 362-64.

²⁶ Schlatter, *Geschichte des Christus*, 121-28, 312-32, 332-40, 534-44.

²⁷ Schlatter, *Theologie der Apostel*, 28-29, 29-35, 239-54.

²⁸ Schlatter, *Theologie der Apostel*, 11-43; for the following comment see *ibid.* 44-238.

²⁹ Schlatter, *Theologie der Apostel*, 239-432.

life as well.”³⁰ Weinel states that it is possible that the missionary activity of the early church can be traced back to the dispersion of the Jerusalem Christians as a result of persecution. He is convinced, however, that the mission of the early church is founded in the “essence of religion.” This conviction has no consequences for his description of the theology of the New Testament, however.

Julius Kaftan, whose work *Neutestamentliche Theologie* was published in 1927, asserts that “the theology of the New Testament has the task of making the New Testament understood from the historical development that forms its basis and is expressed in its writings and from the motifs that are operative in this development”, emphasizing that such a description has to be a purely historical description.³¹ Kaftan’s outline and presentation corresponds to the traditional patterns. When he discusses, in the last chapter, the question of historical relationships, he focuses on the relationship between Jesus and Paul, between Jesus and the Jews, between the universalism of John and the priority of the people of Israel in Paul, and on the role of gnosticism. The missionary realities of the early church is ignored.

Theodor Zahn published in 1928 his *Grundriß der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, one of the smaller publications of the successor of J. C. K. von Hofmann in Erlangen. Zahn emphasizes that the task of New Testament theology is not to merely present the doctrinal content of the different authors and compile the theology of the New Testament from their theological concepts.³² He asserts that the development of religious knowledge in New Testament times is linked with “historical facts, such as the existence of Jesus, his death, his resurrection, the giving of the Spirit of God, the entrance of the Gentiles into the church.” Zahn continues: “New Testament theology is only what it must be if we appreciate these facts in terms of their significance that is epoch-making, generates doctrine and transcends even the greatest individuality, i.e. a historical description of the development of the Christian religion in its primitive period, as documented in the New Testament.” Zahn discusses, in three parts, the proclamation of John the Baptist, the teaching of Jesus, and the teaching of the apostles. In Part Three, under the heading “faith in the apostolic period,” he describes the identity of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus’ eternal divinity, Jesus’ real and sinless humanity, the salvific significance of Jesus’ death, the Spirit and the work of the Spirit, the word of God as law and gospel, baptism, and regeneration. Zahn links these topics with the historical conditions of the apostolic period, but his treatment

³⁰ Heinrich Weinel, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Die Religion Jesu und des Urchristentums* (Grundriss der theologischen Wissenschaften 3/2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1913 [Third Edition 1921]), 252.

³¹ Julius Kaftan, *Neutestamentliche Theologie. Im Abriß dargestellt* (Berlin: Warneck, 1927), 8.

³² Theodor Zahn, *Grundriß der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1928), 1; the following quotation *ibid.* 2.

remains essentially systematic. In his chapter on “the apostolic preaching and teaching in Israel”, he describes, on just about two pages, the missionary proclamation of the early church.³³ Zahn’s description of Paul’s theology in chapter three is controlled by the Epistles to the Galatians and Romans and thus by internal Christian disputes and concerns.

Friedrich Büchsel’s *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, published in 1935, has the subtitle *The History of the Word of God in the New Testament*. He describes the task of New Testament theology in terms of seeing and understanding the twofold history of the Word of God as God’s revelation and as human word.³⁴ Again, despite this emphasis on history, the historical reality of the life, thought and action of the early church is largely ignored. What is “historical” in Büchsel’s presentation is the sequence of the two main parts, which discuss “the proclamation and teaching of Jesus” and “the proclamation and teaching of the apostles,” with Part Two focusing mostly on Paul. Büchsel fails to discuss the calling of the Twelve, the missionary theology and work of the Jerusalem church and its representatives, and the missionary activity of Paul. The first sentence of his discussion of Paul shows, at least, that he has not completely forgotten the reality of Paul’s ministry, when he writes: “In terms of work accomplished and success achieved, Paul surpasses all other early Christian missionaries.”³⁵ However, this assertion plays no role whatsoever for his description of Paul’s christology, anthropology, soteriology and ecclesiology, not even for the section entitled “the task in the world.”

Rudolf Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament*, the German edition published in three parts between 1948 and 1953, represents the sum of his life’s work, as Otto Merk commented in the preface to the ninth German edition published in 1984. Merk asserts that this study remains “a standard work of New Testament research, indeed of theological research per se in this century. Its conception allowed the author to place the message of the New Testament witnesses, with academic meticulousness, in the context of the responsibility of faith and thought that has been made possible by the kerygma and that human existence has to proof to be able to nurture life by linking Christianity and humanness.”³⁶ The famous first sentence of Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament* is programmatic: “The message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself.”³⁷ Bultmann continues, “for New Testament theology

³³ Zahn, *Grundriß*, 86-88.

³⁴ F. Büchsel, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: Geschichte des Wortes Gottes im Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1935), 3-4.

³⁵ Büchsel, *Theologie*, 95; for the next remark see *ibid.* 147-49.

³⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (9th Edition; edited by Otto Merk; UTB 630; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1984), IX [=R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1965)].

³⁷ Bultmann, *Theologie*, 1:1 (ET 1:3); the following quotation *ibid.* 1-2 (ET 3).

consists in the unfolding of those ideas by means of which Christian faith makes sure of its own object, basis, and consequences. But Christian faith did not exist until there was a Christian kerygma; i.e., a kerygma proclaiming Jesus Christ—specifically Jesus Christ the Crucified and Risen One—to be God’s eschatological act of salvation.” If we accept Bultmann’s premise that the historical Jesus did *not* understand his ministry and his death as salvific act and that he was neither the Messiah nor the preexistent Son of Man, this position is consistent. But even Bultmann cannot do entirely without the historical Jesus: he surveys on about 25 pages Jesus’ eschatological proclamation, his interpretation of the claims of God and his view of God, as the historical conditions of the early Christian kerygma. However, it needs to be noted that the goal of New Testament theology, consisting “in the unfolding of those ideas by means of which Christian faith makes sure of its own object, basis, and consequences,” consistently remains Bultmann’s sights. Part One, entitled “presuppositions and motifs of New Testament theology,” describes in three chapters the message of Jesus, the kerygma of the earliest church and the kerygma of the Hellenistic church aside from Paul.

It is not surprising, in this context, that Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament* is one of the first, if not the first description of New Testament theology in which the term “missionary activity” or “mission” is mentioned in the subject index. In paragraph six entitled “the earliest church as the eschatological congregation,” Bultmann relates the proof from prophecy in the early Christian proclamation to devotional, missionary and apologetic motifs, describing the early Christian faith in the imminent end as a conviction which dominated the missionary work of the early church.³⁸ In paragraph eight on the “beginnings toward development of ecclesiastical forms,” Bultmann, maintains that the church in Jerusalem initially did not embrace the mission to the Gentiles as task, and that a movement within the church rejected the Gentile mission completely, as attested in the saying in Mt 10:5-6 (“Go nowhere among the Gentiles . . .”) that was placed on Jesus’ lips. He claims that Gentiles were accepted into the church only in exceptional cases and with great reluctance, as demonstrated by the legendary stories about the Roman centurion in Capernaum (Mk 8:5-10 par) and about the woman in Syrophenicia (Mk 7:24-30). In paragraph nine, Bultmann discusses on 25 pages “the preaching of God and his judgment, of Jesus Christ, the Judge and Savior, and the demand for faith,” describing the missionary realities of the early Christian proclamation. The first sentence formulates, historically correct and missiologically germane, that “Christian missionary preaching in the Gentile world could not be simply the christological kerygma; rather, it had to begin with the proclamation of the one God.” In paragraph fourteen

³⁸ Bultmann, *Theologie*, 44 (ET 42); for the following remarks see *ibid.* 58-59, 69-94 (quotation 69, ET 65), 164.

on the Spirit, Bultmann refers to missionary work as the first area outside of the congregational assemblies that receives the effects of the *pneuma*.

In view of Bultmann's interest in form-historical questions, his concern for the missionary dimension of the early Christian proclamation is not really surprising. However, the fact that he discusses the "kerygma" of the Hellenistic Jewish Christians in Part One, under the heading "presuppositions and motifs of New Testament theology," indicates that the missionary reality is regarded as less significant for the main content of the theology of the New Testament. This supposition is confirmed in Parts Two and Three in which Bultmann discusses the theology of Paul and of John. Here, the missionary initiative and activity of the apostle Paul plays virtually no role. In paragraph sixteen on "the historical position of Paul," Bultmann refers to Paul as missionary only in the context of his description of Paul as a Hellenistic Jew who was introduced into the Hellenistic church after his conversion, where he met missionaries such as Barnabas.³⁹ Bultmann's preliminary remark on Paul's anthropology, that Paul did not delineate an academic, theoretical system, but that he always sees human beings in their relationship to God, would provide an opportunity to describe the missionary situations in which Paul speaks about human beings and the human condition. We look for such an analysis in vain, however. Bultmann implies, perhaps, that he provides the theoretical foundation and framework that Paul failed to describe. Under the heading "man prior to the revelation of faith," Bultmann describes "the anthropological concepts" of soma, psyche, pneuma, zoe, mind, conscience, and heart, and the nexus of flesh, sin and the world. Under the heading "man under faith," he describes the righteousness of God, grace, faith, and freedom.

In Part Four on "the development toward the ancient church," the missionary reality of the early church is no longer a subject. Bultmann discusses "the rise of church order and its earliest development," "the development of doctrine," "the core of the development," and "the problem of Christian living."

Hans Conzelmann's *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, published in 1967, is a step backwards compared with Bultmann's book. In Part One, devoted to the "kerygma" of the early church and of the Hellenistic church, Conzelmann discusses in paragraph four "historical problems," among them the Gentile mission that resulted from the expulsion of the Hellenists from Jerusalem.⁴⁰ However, he neither discusses the missionary proclamation nor the missionary initiatives of the early

³⁹ Bultmann, *Theologie*, 189; for the followign remark see *ibid.* 193.

⁴⁰ Hans Conzelmann, *Grundriss der Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (5th Edition; edited by A. Lindemann; Einführung in die evangelische Theologie Band 2; München: Kaiser, 1991), 48 [= H. Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1969)].

church — not in his description of the early church nor in his description of Paul’s theology.

Werner Georg Kümmel published his *Theology of the New Testament According to his Major Witnesses* in 1969. He refers several times to the missionary reality of the early church, but he does so only in side-remarks — in a comment on the Easter faith of the church, in a comment on the ecclesiological views of the church and the signs of an apostle according to Paul, in brief comments on the effects and origins of Paul’s thought, in a comment on the relationship between Paul and Jesus, in a comment on the historical location of Johannine christology, and in the summary of Paul’s theology in the last section.⁴¹ Kümmel can assert that “Paul was a theologian, but as a missionary,” but this insight plays no role in his description of Paul’s theology. He can assert that “the Synoptic Gospels are not historical narrative but missionary and kerygmatic writings” (“Missions- und Verkündigungsschriften”), but his discussion of the theology of Matthew, Mark and Luke does not demonstrate in what respects this insight is relevant.

Peter Stuhlmacher, who published his *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* in 1992/1999, describes the task of New Testament theology as “ordered description of the main content of the message and the faith of the New Testament books.”⁴² The subject indexes of the two volumes reveal that Stuhlmacher refers more frequently to the missionary work of the early church than his predecessors. He emphasizes, at the end of his description of Jesus’ proclamation, that Jesus’ consciousness of being the Messiah sent by God to die as a sacrifice for sins was the cause and the foundation of salvific emphasis of the early Christian missionary gospel.⁴³ In Part One, devoted to “the proclamation of the early church,” Stuhlmacher discusses the conditions that gave rise to the first communities of Jesus’ followers, investigating the question what motivated the mission of these churches and what their representatives believed.⁴⁴ In the first sentence of his description of Paul, Stuhlmacher characterizes Paul’s theology as “missionary theology.”⁴⁵ He summarizes the characteristic features of Paul’s ministry a few pages later by asserting that “the theology of Paul that these letters document constitutes, of course, not a

⁴¹ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments nach seinen Hauptzeugen* (5th Edition; NTD Ergänzungsreihe 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 93, 119, 122-23, 219, 229, 290; for the following quotations see *ibid.* 123, 229 [= Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament According to Its Major Witnesses: Jesus-Paul-John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973)].

⁴² Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Band 1: Grundlegung. Von Jesus zu Paulus. Band 2: Von der Paulusschule zur Johannesoffenbarung. Der Kanon und seine Auslegung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992/1999), 1:2.

⁴³ Stuhlmacher, *Theologie*, 1:143.

⁴⁴ Stuhlmacher, *Theologie*, 1:197-221.

⁴⁵ Stuhlmacher, *Theologie*, 1:221; the following quotations *ibid.* 232, 243.

systematic presentation but *a missionary theology with a universal horizon* put together, often rather quickly, in the context of practical needs.” Ten pages later he argues that “the background theme of Paul’s life is the proper relationship between the Torah and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Paul’s theology is to be understood as missionary theology.” However, the general structure of Stuhlmacher’s New Testament theology corresponds, again, to the traditional, systematic patterns. In his discussion of Paul, he begins by surveying “the sources, the chronology and the characteristics of Paul’s ministry and work” and “the origins and the starting-point of Paul’s theology,” before treating the law, anthropology, christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and ethics.

There is no time to describe in detail the descriptions of the theology of the New Testament written by Karl-Heinz Schelkle (1968-1976),⁴⁶ Eduard Lohse (1974),⁴⁷ George Eldon Ladd (1974),⁴⁸ Leonard Goppelt (1975/1976)⁴⁹, Donald Guthrie (1981),⁵⁰ Leon Morris (1986),⁵¹ Hans Hübner (1990-1995),⁵² Joachim Gnilka (1994),⁵³ George Caird (1994),⁵⁴ Georg Strecker (1996),⁵⁵ Ferdinand Hahn (2002),⁵⁶ and Ulrich Wilckens (2002-).⁵⁷

In Leonard Goppelt’s *Theology of the New Testament*, the term “mission” is mentioned in the subject index more frequently than in most other descriptions of the theology of the New Testament. However, the basic missionary reality of the early church and her leading theologians does not govern his presentation as such but surfaces in side-remarks.

⁴⁶ Karl Heinz Schelkle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments I-IV* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1968–76), [= K.H. Schelkle, *Theology of the New Testament* (4 vols.; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1971–78)].

⁴⁷ Eduard Lohse, *Grundriss der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974).

⁴⁸ George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Revised Edition; edited by D. A. Hagner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

⁴⁹ Leonhard Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Erster Teil: Jesu Wirken in seiner theologischen Bedeutung. Zweiter Teil: Vielfalt und Einheit des apostolischen Christuszeugnisses* (ed. J. Roloff, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975/1976), [= L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976/1982)].

⁵⁰ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology: A Thematic Study* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1981).

⁵¹ Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

⁵² Hans Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Band 1: Prolegomena. Paulus. Band 2: Die Theologie des Paulus und ihre neutestamentliche Wirkungsgeschichte. Band 3: Hebräerbrief, Evangelien und Offenbarung. Epilegomena* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990/1993/1995).

⁵³ Joachim Gnilka, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (HThK.S 5; Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

⁵⁴ George B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (Edited by L. D. Hurst; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

⁵⁵ Georg Strecker, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Hrsg. von F. W. Horn; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996).

⁵⁶ Ferdinand Hahn, *Theologie Des Neuen Testaments. Band 1. Die Vielfalt Des Neuen Testaments: Theologiegeschichte Des Urchristentums. Band 2. Die Einheit Des Neuen Testaments: Thematische Darstellung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

⁵⁷ Ulrich Wilckens, *Theologie Des Neuen Testaments. Band I. Geschichte der Urchristlichen Theologie 1: Geschichte Des Wirkens Jesu in Galiläa. 2. Jesu Tod und Auferstehung und die Entstehung der Kirche Aus Juden und Heiden* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002/2003).

Hans Hübner correctly argues that “Paul’s theological involvement aimed at the specific missionary situation of the early church.”⁵⁸ He goes on to assert that Paul’s letters are not missionary writings and that not one of Paul’s letters presents his missionary preaching. Hübner’s presentation owes more to Heidegger and Bultmann than to the missionary reality of the early church.

Joachim Gnilka cogently argues that for Paul, apostleship, gospel and church belonged to an inseparable unity.⁵⁹ His discussion of Paul’s anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology remains general and theoretical, however.

Georg Strecker discusses Paul’s ecclesiology in three parts: “the church as community,” “the church and the world,” and “Israel and the church.” In the section on “the church and the world” he discusses two subjects: “the indicative and the imperative in the ecclesiological context,” and “faith and the orders of the world.” He completely ignores mission and evangelism, proclamation and church growth which were all major concerns of Paul the apostle.

2. *Descriptions of the Theology of Paul*

The general failure to ignore the missionary reality of the life and the teaching of the early church in description of the theology of the New Testament is reflected in descriptions of Paul’s theology as well.

Günther Bornkamm’s book on Paul, first published in 1969, is a combination of a biography and a description of Paul’s theology.⁶⁰ In the biographical section, Paul’s missionary work is prominent, while it is mentioned only briefly in Part Two on “message and theology,” where the usual systematic subjects dominate. The same is true for several other major recent books on Paul: Joachim Gnilka (1996),⁶¹ C. K. Barrett (1994),⁶² and Eduard Lohse (1996).⁶³ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor’s book entitled *Paul* (1996) is a biography.⁶⁴ Herman Ridderbos’ *Outline* of Paul’s theology, originally published in Dutch in 1966,⁶⁵ interacts more with the hermeneutical reality of R. Bultmann’s theology than with the historical reality of

⁵⁸ Hübner, *Theologie*, 2:38; for the following remark see *ibid.* 26.

⁵⁹ Gnilka, *Theologie*, 37.

⁶⁰ Günther Bornkamm, *Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969 [1993]), [= G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (ET; London/New York: Harper, 1971)].

⁶¹ Joachim Gnilka, *Paulus von Tarsus. Zeuge und Apostel* (HThK.S VI; Freiburg: Herder, 1996).

⁶² C.K. Barrett, *Paul: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster/Knox, 1994).

⁶³ Eduard Lohse, *Paulus. Eine Biographie* (München: Beck, 1996).

⁶⁴ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁶⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), [= H. Ridderbos, *Paulus. Ein Entwurf seiner Theologie* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1970 [orig. 1966]).

Paul's theology which was a missionary reality, which he nearly completely ignores. The basic reality of missionary initiatives and missionary proclamation in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul is also largely ignored in the books on Pauline theology written by Hans-Joachim Schoeps (1959),⁶⁶ Karl Kertelge (1991),⁶⁷ Alan Segal (1990)⁶⁸ and James Dunn (1998), whose comprehensive description of Paul's theology otherwise informs competently about Paul's thinking and teaching, written on the basis of the structure of the Epistle to the Romans.⁶⁹

Georg Eichholz' outline of Paul's theology, published in 1972, focuses on Paul's missionary activity more consistently. He begins with the following sentences: "I want to begin with a chapter on Paul's view of his apostolic task. . . . We will investigate the emphases that Paul linked with his ministry as proclaimer of the good news. In this ministry he encountered people as addressees of the gospel, in this ministry he confronted people with the gospel. It was in the context of this encounter and in the context of this confrontation that human beings received their profile. We thus intend to portray Paul's anthropology from the perspective of people's encounter with the gospel."⁷⁰ After "preliminary remarks on a theology of Paul" in the first chapter, Eichholz discusses in chapter two Paul's self-understanding as an apostle, focusing on his task, his calling, his international preaching ministry, the singular emphasis of his apostolic office, his conversion, and the content of his proclamation. In chapter three he discusses "the gospel as the apocalypse of mankind," the "canon of missionary activity," and "the word of the cross as God's decision for mankind," before treating in subsequent chapters Paul's anthropology, christology, soteriology, and ethics.

J. Christiaan Beker, in his book on Paul published in 1980,⁷¹ interprets the Epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans in the missionary context of Paul's theology. He argues, first, that Paul's hermeneutics must be interpreted in terms of the complex interplay of coherence and contingency, and, second, that the coherent theme of Paul's theology is the apocalyptic subject of the dawn of the triumph of God whose victory has been inaugurated in the coming of Jesus, to be consummated in the imminent redemption of creation. In the first chapter, entitled "Paul: Apostle

⁶⁶ Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Paulus. Die Theologie des Apostels im Lichte der jüdischen Religionsgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1959), [= H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961)].

⁶⁷ Karl Kertelge, *Grundthemen paulinischer Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991).

⁶⁸ Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert. The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁶⁹ J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁷⁰ Georg Eichholz, *Die Theologie des Paulus im Umriss* (4th Edition; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972 [1983]), 14 [G. Eichholz, *El Evangelio de Pablo Esbozo de la Teología Paulina* (Biblioteca de Estudios Bíblicos; Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1977)].

⁷¹ J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

to the Gentiles,” Beker rejects the contrast of experience and theology as wrong alternatives, since experience and reflection are linked in Paul’s call to be an apostle.⁷² In the preface to the first paperback edition, J. C. Beker admits that he has not paid enough attention to the dimension of contingency which is linked with the missionary work of Paul as apostle, and he accepts R. P. Martin’s critique that his enquiry into Paul’s apologetic remains purely academic.⁷³ He accepts the criticism that he overlooked the fact that Paul’s mission in Anatolia represents the basic historical parameters for the apostle’s theological reflection, and he acknowledges that Paul’s references to his personal experience, which is missionary experience, belong to the most compelling elements of his self-defense. Beker emphasizes that despite all historical contingency and concreteness, Paul’s theology had a constant theological center to which all the convictions of the apostle can be related. It is plausible, from a methodological point of view, to begin with the contingency and to describe the coherence of Paul’s theology on the historical background of the individual letters of Paul. From a theological point of view, it is more plausible to reverse the sequence: the historically necessary application and contextualization of his message, the contingency, was, for Paul, not the *prae* — Paul’s arguments were always fundamentally theological arguments. This is the reason why he writes in 1 Cor 9:21-23: “ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.”

Jürgen Becker, in his book on Paul published in 1989,⁷⁴ with the subtitle “The Apostle of the Nations,” combines a biography of Paul, a theological analysis of Paul’s letters (at least of those that Becker accepts as genuine), and, on 84 pages, a summary of an outline of Pauline theology (“Grundzüge paulinischer Theologie”).⁷⁵ Becker’s comments on the starting-point and structure of Pauline thought demonstrate that he has not only understood the connection between missionary activity and theological reflection in Paul, but that he acknowledges this connection as a foundational hermeneutical fact. Becker asserts that one must not use Paul’s letters too quickly as quarry for proof-texts for specific theological-systematic themes. He emphasizes at the same time, however, that in the midst of all the diversity of Paul’s statements, there are basic trajectories and decisions that are maintained as

⁷² Beker, *Paul*, 8.

⁷³ Beker, *Paul*, Edition 1984, xx. See R. P. Martin, *JBL* 101 (1982) 464.

⁷⁴ Jürgen Becker, *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989 [1992]), [= J. Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1993).

⁷⁵ Becker, *Paulus*, 395-478; for the following remarks see *ibid.* 395-402, quotations *ibid.* 395, 397.

they are derived from a unified system of thought. Becker answers the question concerning the origins of Paul's theological assertions as follows: "Paul speaks from the experience of his calling and, primarily, from the experience that the impact of the gospel on the worldwide mission field provides for the churches and for himself." Becker emphasizes that Paul is a theologian who thinks and lives on the basis of the experience of the gospel, and that he thus describes the determination of people by the gospel both as divine election and as people reacting in faith, love and hope. Becker illustrates this correlation of missionary experience and theological description briefly with several basic themes of Paul's letters. When he describes the basic contours of Paul's theology, however, the missionary context of Paul's life is of mostly theoretical-academic interest, one reason being that Becker had described Paul's missionary work on the first two-hundred pages of his book and surely wanted to avoid repetitions. This means, however, that Becker does not achieve an integrative description of Paul's missionary experience and his theological thought.

Thomas Schreiner's book of Paul's theology, published in 2001,⁷⁶ is the only description that consciously attempts to integrate missionary reality and theological reflection. Reading the sixteen chapters of the book leaves an ambiguous impression concerning the success of this intention. The first chapter, entitled "the centrality of God in Christ in Paul's theology," discusses the question of the center of Paul's theology in a conversation with the suggestions of various New Testament scholars, while a conversation with the Jewish and early Christian traditions that Paul adopted, or with the theological and rhetorical requirements of his missionary work, may prove to be more fruitful. In chapter two, entitled "proclaiming a magnificent God: the Pauline mission," Schreiner describes Paul's missionary self-understanding as a result of his conversion and calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He continues with a description of the foundation of Paul's mission, which Schreiner explains as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham in the sending of Jesus the Messiah, resulting in the provision of salvation for the Gentiles. In Chapter Four, Schreiner investigates Paul's suffering as a missionary which the apostle interpreted theologically. The next two chapters discuss the transgression of the law and the power of sin, i.e. Paul's anthropology. Schreiner's description continues his conversation with systematic-theological questions, with contemporary research and with relevant Pauline texts, while ignoring the situation of the people, Jews and Gentiles, which Paul encountered as a missionary. The same can be said for chapters seven to nine on Paul's christology and soteriology. It would have been possible, for example, in the context of the discussion of Jesus as second Adam and as

⁷⁶ Thomas R Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

divine Kyrios, to posit questions suggested by reader-response analysis with regard to the missionary context in which proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ before Jews, proselytes, God-fearers, and polytheists. The same is true for chapters ten to twelve, which are devoted to Paul's ethics. The section on the "continuing struggle with sin"⁷⁷ provides some basic considerations on Rom 7–8, without making this "struggle" specific sociologically for the different groups of people who constituted the members of the churches that Paul had founded. The general missionary reality of Paul's ministry remains equally unconsidered in the last chapters about Paul's ecclesiology and eschatology.

It would be desirable at this point to enter into a conversation with research on the method and the goals of the discipline of New Testament theology, for example with the contributions of William Wrede,⁷⁸ Heikki Räisänen⁷⁹ or Peter Balla.⁸⁰ Such a dialogue would not significantly change the picture that has emerged. Methodological discussions generally deal with the relationship between theology and history, the relationship between tradition-historical reconstruction and descriptive presentation, the relation between the canonical authority of the New Testament as Scripture and the development of early Christian convictions, or the relation between unity and diversity in early Christian theology. The relevance of the missionary reality of the early Christian experience is generally disregarded.

How may we explain the consistently noted exclusion of the missionary reality in the descriptions of New Testament theology? One reason may be the fact that missiology, at least in Europe, has never been regarded as a central discipline of divinity schools or seminaries, relegated to the fringes of theological studies somewhere beyond Practical Theology. Another reason may be the fact that most professors of theology, with the exception of missiologists, did not have any personal experience of missionary or evangelistic work. Considering the fact that there are hardly any useful descriptions of Paul's missionary work, it is hardly surprising that the missionary reality of Paul's life is largely ignored in descriptions of his theology.

⁷⁷ Schreiner, *Paul*, 265-69.

⁷⁸ William Wrede, *Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1897; reprint 1986), [= William Wrede, "The Tasks and Methods of 'New Testament Theology,'" in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter*, (SBT 2/25; edited by R. Morgan; London: SCM Press, 1973), 68–116].

⁷⁹ Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1990).

⁸⁰ Peter Balla, *Challenges to New Testament Theology. An Attempt to Justify the Enterprise* (WUNT 2/95; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997).

3. *The Theology of the New Testament as Missionary Theology*

I begin with a few preliminary remarks. We learn from A. Schlatter that for Jesus, Paul and the other apostles, teaching and active ministry formed an indissoluble unity. Since the activities of Jesus and of the leading early Christians were fundamentally missionary activities, this insight must be taken seriously for both the structure and the content of New Testament theology. We learn from J. C. K. von Hofman, that the theology of the New Testament can be presented as an expression of the proclamation of the New Testament witnesses who emphasize different convictions depending on whether they preached in synagogues before Jews or in marketplaces, public lecture halls or private homes before Gentiles. We learn from T. Zahn that if we understand the task of describing the theology of the New Testament as being historical, we must honor the facts of early Christian history in their epoch-making and doctrine-generating significance. We learn from R. Bultmann that preaching, with missionary preaching as important feature, was a central element of the reality of the early church, a reality to which we owe the New Testament writings and thus New Testament theology. We learn from P. Stuhlmacher that the missionary context of the first Christian congregations in which and for whom the New Testament books were written, and the motivation of the early Christian mission constitute foundational realities that must be taken into account if we want to understand the theology of the earliest theologians. We learn from G. Eichholz that the encounter of people with the gospel, which is a fundamental missionary category, describes an important feature of the early Christian experience and reflection. We learn from J. C. Beker that we need to pay attention to the simultaneous relevance of contingency and coherence of early Christian theology, a relationship that corresponds to the nexus of revelation and application. We learn from J. Becker that the missionary experience of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ can be and should be linked with theological reflection for the life of the church, focused on faith, love and hope. And we learn from T. Schreiner that it is possible to integrate the missionary reality of the early church into the outline and the structure of New Testament theology.

The suggestion to take the missionary reality of the early church seriously in the description of the theology of the New Testament takes up a comment by P. Stuhlmacher, who included the following statement in his catalogue of *desiderata* for the task of a biblical theology of the New Testament: "It would be good if the question of the concept of missions could be pursued, as it unites the basic New Testament traditions."⁸¹ The following discussion seeks to draft the outlines of a

⁸¹ Stuhlmacher, *Theologie*, 2:348-49.

New Testament theology which takes the missionary reality of the early churches and their leading theologians seriously.

The only attempt to provide a precise date that we find in the New Testament for the beginning of the messianic movement of the followers of Jesus is Lk 3:1-2: “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” In his two-volume work, Luke combines history and theology, description and analysis. A theology of the New Testament documents that seeks to take the historical dimension and therefore the missionary realities of the early churches seriously may thus from including a brief historical survey, highlighting the most important events in contemporary Jewish, Roman and early Christian history.

It seems advisable to divide a description of the theology of the New Testament into three parts: Jesus, the Jerusalem church and the apostles. In order to make sure that the historical sequence of these main parts is not the only “historical” element, I suggest, following A. Schlatter, that one should describe in all main parts both the teaching, i.e. the theology, and the activity, i.e. the missionary activity and the life of the believers. We thus arrive at the following headings for the main parts of a description of the theology of the New Testament: The life and proclamation of Jesus; the life and proclamation of the Jerusalem church; the life and proclamation of the apostles. Since the theology of the New Testament deals both with historical events, particularly the missionary reality of the early church, and with literary texts, the main sections need to describe these three focal points: history, literature, theology. And if we take the missionary activity of the early church seriously, the description of the theological convictions of the early Christians has a threefold orientation: the missionary proclamation before Jews, the missionary proclamation before polytheists, and the instructional proclamation before Christians.

The first explication of early Christian theology was, according to Luke’s narrative in the Book of Acts, Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, which was followed by missionary proclamation. It may thus be advantageous to begin the description of Jesus’ life and teaching with a chapter on Jesus’ significance for the early Christian missionaries and congregations, with a focus on the central contents of the speeches in the Book of Acts and of the canonical Gospels. A chapter dealing with Jesus’ ministry should evaluate Jesus’ itinerant ministry before discussing such matters as his miracles, his identity, Jesus and God’s eschatological revelation, Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the missionary commission to the Twelve. Another section would analyze Jesus’ proclamation before Jews, in particular the Son of Man title, Jesus’

message of the dawn of God's kingdom, Jesus as Messiah, and Jesus as bringer of salvation. This should be followed with a section that analyzes the significance of Jesus' proclamation for Greeks and Romans, which would include a discussion of Jesus and the reality of God, the Son of God title, Jesus as Kyrios, and Jesus' return as the Judge of the world. A final section outlines the significance of Jesus' proclamation for his followers, with a description of God's eschatological revelation in Jesus' ministry and an assessment of Jesus' proclamation of the will of God, including an interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

The description of the life and teaching of the church in Jerusalem begins with a survey of the missionary and the pastoral responsibilities of the leading teachers of the Jerusalem church who were both the senior teaching pastors, elders and missionaries at the same time. The material that is to be presented in this chapter can be organized relatively easily in correspondence to the relevant historical developments of the early church: the Twelve and Jesus, the Twelve in Jerusalem, the church in Jerusalem, the missionary activities of the Twelve, the mission of Stephen, the mission of Philip and of other Jewish Christians, the church in Damascus, the church in Antioch, the ministry of James and Jude. The following sections describe the missionary proclamation before Jews, before Samaritans and Gentiles, Peter's sermons in Acts 1–10, the convictions of Stephen, the missionary proclamation of Philip in Samaria, Peter's proclamation in Caesarea, and the proclamation of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem in Antioch. A summary of the earliest apostolic teaching would naturally focus on the early Christian credo, the fulfillment of promises, the arrival of the holy Spirit, the community of the new covenant, the temple and the law. A final section would outline the literary activity and production of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, viz. the Epistle of James and the Epistle of Jude. The Epistle to the Hebrews is best discussed here as well, despite the uncertainties of authorship and destination. It is conceivable to discuss the theology of the Gospel of Matthew here as well.

The description of the life and proclamation of the apostles begins, again, with a discussion of the missionary and the pastoral responsibilities of the apostles. Before Paul wrote his letters, he was a pioneer missionary and the pastor of the emerging churches which he established and whose concerns, challenges and difficulties he discussed in his letters. On account of the fact that we have a wealth of material for the ministry and the teaching of Paul, any description of the theology of the apostles would focus on the apostle who had trained as a rabbi in Jerusalem. As Paul was a missionary before he was anything else, his theology ought to be described as a missionary theology. Analyzing themes such as God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah (the proclamation in synagogues), Jesus the Kyrios (the proclamation before pagan audiences), the scandal of the cross, human

beings and the power of sin, the power and the impotence of the Torah, and the gift of salvation, the methodological premise of this section is the notion that Paul, when he writes about the nature and the fate of people, formulates convictions which must have guided him in his missionary proclamation and which he used in his missionary preaching.

For example, regarding Paul's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah and Kyrios, it is not sufficient to describe the tradition-historical derivation of the terms "Messiah" and "Kyrios." We need to explain how the proclamation of Jesus, the crucified *Christos*, the messianic Savior, confronted Greek and Roman audiences with a faith that stood in stark contrast both to the old ideology of the *polis* with its egalitarian structures which ultimately excluded the weak and the aliens, and to the new ideology of the Imperium Romanum with its hierarchical structures that emphasized the divinity of the emperor and other members of the imperial family. Faith in and allegiance to a crucified God, a Jewish Savior of the world, was as scandalous and nonsensical as the suggestion that a new community of people might be formed in which neither ethnic nor social differences play any role, a community in which everything and everybody is focused on faith in the God of Israel and on allegiance to the crucified Savior sent by him, on sacrificial love for all fellow-believers and for all fellow-citizens, and on the expectant hope of the return of Jesus and of the restoration of a world unmarred by any imperfection.

Here is another example. In the case of Paul's ecclesiology, a discussion of the Lord's Supper should not be limited to discuss the traditions that Paul adopts and to the significance of the concept of "remembrance" as a central element of the sacrament of the eucharist. Paul's discussion of the Corinthian Christians' misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper possibly indicates his knowledge of pagan mystery cults and his ability and willingness to critically engage their religious ideology.⁸² Phenomenologically, the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the meals of some mystery religions share some analogies: when Christians eat bread that had been broken and when they drink from the cup of blessing, they have "fellowship" with the blood and the body of Christ, they make themselves aware of the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ. In the celebrations of the mystery cults, the initiated dine in the "presence" of the deity. In both situations the celebrants remind themselves of the origins of faith and identity, seeking to release the salvific power that is connected with the mythic origins. If Christians are open to influences of the rites and thinking of the mystery cults, perhaps as a result of such similarities, they may easily be tempted to understand their participation in the Lord's Supper as a means of becoming immune against all religious temptation, believing that eating the eucharistic

⁸² The material is taken from Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1346-48.

elements is the only thing that is relevant for salvation, with the result that love for brother and sister becomes secondary and is degraded to being simply one of many options.⁸³ T. Söding defines “sacraments,” in terms of their central characteristic, as “actions and objects, originally belonging to the realm of the profane, that refer, in the context of a hierophany, a self-manifestation of the divine (like symbols) to the realm of transcendent holiness and, more importantly, that convey at the same time, and effectively, the power of the transcendent, thus regenerating human (and cosmic) life.” If we accept this definition, then it is possible to speak of sacramentalistic tendencies in the Corinthian church that were influenced directly or indirectly by convictions of the Hellenistic mystery cults. When Paul speaks of the “communion” or “association” (*koinōnia*) with the crucified and risen Lord in 1 Cor 10:16, he uses a key term of the mystery religions.⁸⁴ However, he understands *koinōnia* differently: the Lord’s Supper that Christians celebrate is not concerned with “deification” that secures immortality; it aims, rather, at “strengthening the believers through the Spirit in their fellowship with the risen and crucified Lord, confirming their participation in his theocentricity and pro-existence, and introduce them into the right relationship with God, with one another and with other people.” The Lord’s Supper does not represent “the repeated realization of a trans-historical, holy and elemental event;” it is, rather, the work of God’s Spirit who “actualizes the form-giving origin in the historical event of the ministry and the self-sacrifice of Jesus, brought to universal salvific effectiveness through the resurrection of the crucified Lord by its transforming power.” Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians in this context not to become “companions (*koinōnous*) of demons” (1 Cor 10:20), i.e. he asserts that Christians cannot participate in cultic communal meals in pagan temples. Paul does not declare pagan cults “rationalistically as a figment of the mind and hocus-pocus,”⁸⁵ he does not simply de-mythologize and criticize pagan myths,⁸⁶ but he points to the danger of falling for the controlling domination of the demonic powers.⁸⁷

In the case of Paul’s ethical instruction of the believers,⁸⁸ a New Testament theology that takes into account the missionary realities of the apostle’s ministry emphasizes that teaching concerning moral behavior was imperative for Gentile

⁸³ Thomas Söding, “Eucharistie und Mysterien. Urchristliche Herrenmahlstheologie und antike Mysterienreligiosität im Spiegel von 1Kor 10,” *Bibel und Kirche* 45 (1990) 140–145, here 144 with n. 12; cf. *ibid.* 143, for the following definition of sacrament.

⁸⁴ Cf. Hans Klauck-Josef, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum ersten Korintherbrief* (NTA N.F. 15; Second Edition; Münster: Aschendorff 1986 [1981]), 260-61; Söding, “Eucharistie,” 142; cf. *ibid.* 144-45, for the following quotations.

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKK VII; Zürich and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger and Neukirchener Verlag, 1991–2001), 2:445.

⁸⁶ Thus Söding, “Eucharistie,” 144.

⁸⁷ Schrage, *Korinther*, 2:445-46.

⁸⁸ The following material is taken from Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1372-74.

Christians who had to learn the ethics of the revealed will of God in theory and in practice. In the course of his ethical instructions, Paul could refer to some of the religious and philosophical traditions of the Greco-Roman world, but in many areas he had to train the Gentile converts in new ways of behavior, for example with regard to prostitutes or with regard to homosexual activities (Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:12-19). The ethical instruction of the missionaries had immediate and inevitable social consequences. On account of religious and often on account of ethical reasons, the Gentile Christians were no longer able to visit the theater, the amphitheater or the circus, as the performances were integrated into a traditional pagan religious framework and promoted values that the new converts more often than not were leaving behind. Depending on the specific local situation, Christians could no longer visit the public baths, at least those who were scrupulous in terms of public nudity. The performance of professions that were linked with traditional social obligations, including the acceptance of many public offices, at least became difficult.⁸⁹ C. Burchard observes correctly that to become a Christian implied in some respects a loss of, or removal from, culture. Paul exhorts the Christians in the city of Rome: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). We should note, however, that Paul does not argue for an apartheid of Christians and non-Christians. He clarifies that Christians do not have to be afraid of having contacts with pagans: a Christian woman does not need to divorce her pagan husband (1 Cor 7:16), a Christian can eat the meat that is sold in the market without having scruples (1 Cor 10:25-26), Christians should ensure that unbelievers can attend their gatherings (1 Cor 14:23-24), and Erastus could stay the city treasurer of Corinth (Rom 16:23).

The *fides quaerens intellectum* of the apostles, their “faith seeking understanding,” was always a *fides quaerens conversionem hominorum*, faith seeking the conversion of people, which thus needs to be understood and described as *theologica missiologica ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

⁸⁹ Christoph Burchard, “Erfahrungen multikulturellen Zusammenlebens im Neuen Testament.” In *Multikulturelles Zusammenleben: Theologische Erfahrungen* (Edited by J. Micksch; Frankfurt: Limbeck 1984), 24-41, here 30.