Biblical Theology: Past, Present, and Future

The Reef of Biblical Theology: A Method for Doing Biblical Theology that Makes Sense for Wisdom Literature[1]

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Introduction

Biblical theology may be defined *as that branch of theological science which organizes in respect to proposition, form, symbol, and emphasis the histori-cally conditioned progress of the Divine revelation about God and His creation as deposited in the Bible.* The reef for Biblical theology is the wisdom literature of the Bible because it does not fit in the broad frameworks of the rest of the Bible.

This article places wisdom in its ancient Near Eastern perspective and then unpacks several features of this Biblical theology methodology by il-lustrating them through this Old Testament wisdom. Ultimately, the chapter places a Biblical theology of Old Testament wisdom within the overarching Old Testament Biblical theology strategy. It is at this point, if not before, that most of the Old Testament Biblical theologies hit the reef of wisdom literature. There are many Titanics and lesser yawls strewn on the ocean floor around this reef. However, there is one clear passage through this reef and that is with critical realism surfacing creation theology, so this creation the-ology will be developed to position the wisdom program within. Examples of the theological contribution will be developed within this framework.

Old Testament Wisdom within its Ancient Near Eastern Perspective

The wisdom books do not seem to fit within the dominant Old Testa-ment covenant strategy for Israel, as do the Law and the Prophets. W. G. Lambert reminds us that the piety of wisdom "is completely detached from the law and ritual, which gives it a distinctive place in the Hebrew Bible."[2] As the covenant strategy moves from the covenant grants of Noahic and

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[1]This article draws from chapter six in Douglas Kennard, *A Critical Realist Theological Method: Returning to the Bible and Biblical Theology to be the Framer for Theology and Science*. CORE Issues in Creation, vol. 6 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

[2]W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 1.

Abrahamic to the suzerainty treaty of the Mosaic covenant, much more than simply revealing God is at stake for Biblical theology. The covenant grants champion reassuring blessings which set the mindset, hopes and destinies of those so blessed. These covenants also surface obligation as Abraham circumcises his family (Gen 17). However, the suzerainty treaty of the Mosaic covenant is laden with stipulation as tied to blessing or curse (especially in Deut 28–30). However, this suzerainty covenant strategy is very foreign to the focus of Old Testament wisdom. While the wisdom psalms and second Temple Jewish religious texts refer to the Mosaic covenant strategy as *torah* to inform them and direct the meditation of the wise people (e.g., Pss 1:2; 37:31),[3] there is no indication that the Old Testament wisdom books themselves are positioned conceptually within the Mosaic covenant. For example, the use of *berit* or covenant within wisdom is best seen as referring to other kinds of relationships, like the marriage covenant that an adulteress spurns even though it is from God (Prov 2:17). Eliphaz uses *berit* as a metaphor of peace in a synonymous parallel relationship to *shalom* (Job 5:23). Job confesses that he has covenanted with his eyes not to gaze on a virgin in lust (Job 31:1). God also barrages Job with questions like, "Will you covenant with Leviathan to make him your servant?" (Job 41:4). Furthermore, *torah* in Job is a reference from Eliphaz that his own instruction is viewed by him as God's (Job 22:22). However, the dominant pattern of *torah* in Proverbs is that of parental instruction, that especially a boy's father tells his son, and the son must obey (Prov 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20, 23; 7:2; 23:14; 28:4, 7, 9; 29:18; 31:26).[4] This of course positions Proverbs as within the emphasis of ancient Near East wisdom as it communicates broadly known instruction of how creation works communicated from father to son.[5] Attempts (like Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament* and others) to capture the whole theology of the Old Testament under the rubric of covenant are doomed to fail by the reef of wisdom literature, at least in regard to wisdom's place and contribution.

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[3]E.g., Ben Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon.

[4]Hassell Bullock has produced a nice volume in *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988) but he alludes to overlapping and borrowing of wisdom from Law (31), and in two Evangelical Theological Society papers he defends this view. He seems to follow Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1962), I:433–34, and R. B. Y. Scott, "Priesthood, Prophecy, Wisdom, and the Knowledge of God," *JBL* 80 (1961): 1–15 in this view. However, the evidence of these terms in the wisdom books contexts seems to go otherwise than to connect wisdom with Law. Wisdom and Law only seem to get connected in Psalms 1, 19, 111, and 119, and the second Temple works of Ben Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, showing that wisdom and Law are not opposed to each other, even though neither seems to show evidence of being dependent on the other. Within the New Testament, wisdom and Law are intimately connected in the ministries of Jesus as sage and new Moses, and echoed in wisdom books like James. All this shows that wisdom and Law are harmonious but are grounded in different strategies.

[5]The forum of wisdom being communicated in the ancient Near East as from father to son is broadly exampled by the following few samples: *Sumerian Instructions of Suruppak*, *Babylonian Counsels of Wisdom*, *Ugaritic Counsels of Shubeawilum*, *Egyptian Instruction of Merikare*, *Instruction of Ptahhotep*, and *Instruction of Any*.

The strategy of ancient Near Eastern wisdom draws upon the common wisdom available from observing the way creation works. For example, the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*[6] gives thirty chapters for well-being with many close parallels with Proverbs 22:17–24:22. Additionally, Westermann in *Roots of Wisdom* makes nice comparisons with this broad wisdom tradition.[7] Michael Fox summarizes this ancient Near East wisdom context as follows:

> The similarities in form and content between Israelite and Egyptian didactic wisdom literature have been so well established that there can be no doubt that Israelite Wisdom is part of an international genre (which includes Mesopotamian wisdom) and cannot be properly studied in isolation.[8]

However, the similarities penetrate deeper than structure to the fundamental concepts. For example, Crenshaw develops the foundational role for justice in wisdom literature:

> The fundamental concept which underlies these instructions is *ma'at*, which may be translated as justice, order, truth. No distinction exists between secular and religious truth for this literature. God's will can be read from the natural order, social relations and political events. Life in accordance with the principle of order paid off in tangible blessings, just as conduct at variance with *ma'at* brought adversity.[9]

Some of the characteristics of the wise individual are good skills, manners and speech coupled with the discretion of when to be silent and listen.

Similarities extend to narrative wisdom as well. For example, Job has slight similarities to the Indian legend of Haris-candra in *The Mārkandeya Purāna*, though Haris-candra brings his sufferings upon himself by giving his wealth away, while Job is struck down by the sovereignty of God and the adversary in His court.[10] The Ugaritic *Story of Keret* affirms the retribution principle[11] by following the placating of the gods through ritual prayers which Job's counselors encourage (e.g., Job 11). The use of speeches and ap-

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[6]James Roger Black, *The Instruction of Amenemope: A Critical Edition and Commentary Prolegomenon and Prologue* (OCLC, 2002).

[7]Claus Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990), esp., 140–164.

[8]Michael Fox, "Two Decades of Research in Egyptian Wisdom Literature," *ZAS* 107(1980): 120.

[9]James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 214.

[10]F. E. Pargiter, *The Mārkandeya Purāna* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969).

[11]A nice discussion of the retribution principle and its corollaries is carried on by John Walton in *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 179–89.

peals in the course of narrative wisdom is common in Job, *The Babylonian Theodicy*,[12] and the Egyptian *The Protest of the Eloquent Peasant*.[13] Even Qoheleth has a high degree of similarity to Babylonian *Dialogue of Pessimism*[14] and Egyptian works, like *The Harper's Song* and *The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba* (soul).[15] This does not require that everything is the same in these expressions of wisdom. Karel van der Torn reminds us that the antithetic mode of expression between wise and fool is most emphasized within Hebrew wisdom and largely absent from Mesopotamian and Ugaritic wisdom.[16]

Even Song of Songs has some parallels in the ancient Near Eastern love poetry. There are six songs that describe the Sumerian love song of the shepherd-king Dumuzi and five of them describe the marriage and love play as it attempts to insure the fertility of the land. This narrative approach to love songs is loosely parallel to the narrative approach of the Song of Songs as it works up to the joys of procession, celebration and love making of marriage in chapters 3–4. The descriptive song form with its praise of the beloved in anatomical praise, admiration of beauty and in admiration dialog common in Egyptian psalms 31 and 54 sensitize the interpreter of Songs of Songs to the value of the lovers' praise of each other.[17] Perhaps the Egyptian patterns of *Paraclusithyron* in which the lover is at his mistress's door is loosely parallel to Song of Songs chapter 5. John Walton reminds us that like other wisdom literature, this genre also fits into the broad wisdom pattern.

In every other genre, the greatest differences have been seen when Israelite beliefs about YHWH and her monotheistic faith enter the picture. In a work like Song of Songs, that never happens. Fox insists with good reason that this is secular literature (as opposed to the literature of the Sacred Marriage Rite that was used in cultic performances). Without the element of monotheism or the perception of deity being involved, we would expect that Israelite literature would look like any other literature in the ancient Near East, and indeed, that seems to be the case here.[18] Thus, the import of the Song of Songs as contained in the canon is to affirm that the believer can engage in intimate love making with all its joys as the unbeliever can, espe-

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[12]W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 68–69; James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 438-40, 601-4.

[13]Foster, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

[14]Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 142; Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 437–38.

[15]Foster, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: An Anthology*.

[16]Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 101.

[17]Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: U. of Wisconsin, 1985), 271. Fox also translates the Egyptian love songs alluded to in the manuscript above. Cf. Louis Cohn-Haft, *Source Readings in Ancient History: The Ancient Near East and Greece* (New York: Thomas Crowell Co., 1965), 140–48.

[18]Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, 191–92.

cially if Song of Songs 5:1c is God's voice, "Eat, friends; drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers."

There are, however, clear differences with the Biblical wisdom when compared to the broader ancient Near Eastern wisdom. A clear example of the difference is seen in the absence from Song of Songs of those things so common among other ancient Near Eastern love poetry like cultic practices, gods, personified nature, drunkenness, lust, seduction, faithlessness, and jealousy. Unlike other ancient Near Eastern wisdom, Qoheleth incorporates occasional vertical refrains of God's generosity (Eccl 2:24–26; 3:12–15, 22; 7:14; 8:15; 12:9–14) amid the common cynical human perspective "under the sun." In the eighties, the upbeat refrains were emphasized in Biblical theology but as post-modernism continues to develop, the pessimism of the vanity of vanities tends to predominate contemporary Biblical theology of Qoheleth.[19] Likewise, in the book of Job, *El Shadday*'s dominance of the created order to overwhelm the retribution principle sets the book of Job apart as superior to other ancient Near Eastern theodicy texts. Of all the Old Testament wisdom texts, Proverbs is actually the closest parallel, but even here there is a greater emphasis of an orientation toward God than other ancient Near Eastern wisdom's nearly exclusive social orientation. This means that if we are to do a Biblical theology of Old Testament wisdom, then we must see a clear difference that the Biblical canonical context brings rather than identifying Biblical wisdom as identical to ancient Near Eastern wisdom.[20] That which is distinctive of Biblical wisdom needs to shine through in a Biblical theology.

Biblical

Biblical theology must first be biblical. Its source material is God's revelation as contained in the Christian canon. It is not the beliefs and practices of men described in or built upon the Bible, though it fully envisions the Bible as within its historical and cultural context. It is then a text-based theology inductively reflective of the Christian canonical text. It is the correlation of the exegesis of the Biblical text, not that which may predate or grow from the text.

Tradition Versus Scripture

One of the major debates still raging is whether the primary theological emphasis should be placed on the tradition *process* or on the final *result* of this process.[21]

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[19]This point is illustrated in some of the recent works that show increasing effect of post-modernism such as Michael Fox, *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) in contrast to Michael Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989). Cf. William Anderson, *Qoheleth and Its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

[20]Contrary to Claus Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom*.

[21]Bernard Anderson, "Tradition and Scripture in the Community of Faith," *JBL* 100

Tradition history has been one avenue in which Biblical theology has been attempted. Von Rad's Biblical theology had to do with the history of the transmission of traditions antedating the Biblical texts in their final form. His point was that at whatever level of tradition was chosen, Biblical theology was characteristically descriptive, "retelling" the story. For him, "event has priority over logos."[22] Traditio-historical theologians go even further than von Rad by emphasizing in the process of the transmission of traditions. In this process, people in a community on the move cope with the needs of their life situation, by searching for understanding of their identity and the identity of God.[23] Claus Westermann endeavors to penetrate behind the Biblical texts in order to perceive the lively process through which the community's wisdom statements develop.[24] This entire heritage is then related to contemporary experience to help a person understand where he fits in this same unfolding process today.[25] Under this view, the Biblical text becomes merely one snapshot among the myriads of slices of the history of theological views. Depending on how the text gets into its finished authorial form, this snapshot is either in Solomon's day or during the Babylonian captivity, if approached from a critical perspective. After becoming aware of the critical issues, there is a place for becoming post-critical and approaching the text with a new naiveté that appreciates claims for authorship that the text actually makes of itself, like the text substantially coming from Solomon's hand (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; Eccl 1:1, 12; maybe 12:9; Song 1:1; 1 Kgs 4:32). This orientation of authorship also connects Biblical theology to a historical-cultural context that now surrounds the narrative or other genre so that the interpreter does not allow the text to float freely in an a-historical manner.

Brevard Childs points out that one of the crises for the Biblical theology movement was "its failure to take the Biblical text seriously in its canonical form."[26] Sailhamer argued at length for finding the meaning in the text and not in the historical events behind the text.[27] Even though there is

(1981): 7. Westermann's *Roots of Wisdom* provides a good example of exploring the process which is valuable but not really Biblical theology.

[22]Von Rad. *Old Testament Theology*, 1:116.

[23]James Sanders, "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of the Canon," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 1977), 531–60; and James Sanders, "Biblical Criticism and the Bible as Canon," *USQR* 32 (1977): 157–65.

[24]Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom*.

[25]R. E. Clements, *Wisdom in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) which is a publication of the Didsbury Lectures delivered at the British Isles Nazarene College, Manchester. This volume is a nice presentation of Hebrew wisdom heritage particularly slanted for applicability today.

[26]Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crises* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 52, 102. However, Childs' *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1992) develops a Christian canonical strategy which opens the Old Testament texts up to unhelpful influence by reading New Testament texts back into them.

[27]John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 36–85. Unfortunately, Sailhamer's canonical strategy flattens the

development which lies behind the formation of canon, the focus of Biblical theology must be on the Bible if it is properly to be termed Biblical. Thus, the primary source for Biblical theology is resident *in* the words of the text, not *behind* the words in some event or "original meaning" antedating the text. Only when the Bible is valued as the source for Biblical theology is there proper recognition of the inspiration of Scripture. As such, each of the wisdom books as a whole will be explored as unified authorial projects available for literary criticism and genre study together rather than in fragmented ways. Part of the important contribution to the Biblical theology has then to identify what each part is doing within the whole. For example, the counselors of Job cannot be accepted as saying the truth of the matter in the whole account which has their counsel changing and God finally pointing out that they spoke in error. However, we know that Childs takes this canonical perspective to the completion of the canon, including the New Testament. This later perspective radically shifts the context from the authorial context to another author's context, like Paul or John's. A number of authors extend this even further to reading the Biblical text and its theology out of a Christian traditional systematic theology perspective.[28] These approaches distance the text under consideration from its own context (in which its genre makes a great deal of sense) and reframe it within a much later context that has no parallels within its genre. Better to let each of these books make their contribution in the context out of which they emerge. That is, this approach preserves within which these texts emerge rather than loose or confuse the distinctive of each text in its own context.

Historical-Cultural Context

The Bible when properly viewed is within a historical context of author and recipients. Krister Stendahl calls us to the historical-cultural context. He writes,

> The task of biblical studies, even of biblical theology, is to *describe*, to relive and relate in the terms and the presuppositions of the period of the texts what they meant to their authors and their contemporaries. To furnish the original.[29]

Biblical texts were written to address historical-cultural issues through the use of genres which made sense in their context. Brevard Childs sum-

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progression of Old Testament texts by allowing for continuing textual development of early Mosaic texts until the Babylonian captivity.

[28]Examples of this approach are a number of authors in *Between Two* Horizons, ed. Joel Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), especially Robert Wall, "Canonical Context and Canonical Conversations," 165–82, and Trevor Hart, "Tradition, Authority, and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture," 183–204.

[29]Krister Stendahl, "Implications of Form-Criticism and Tradition-Criticism for Biblical Interpretation," *JBL* 77(1958): 38.

marizes the Biblical theology movement's view of the relation of the Bible to its environment as follows:

> The Bible reflects the influence of its environment both in terms of its form and content, and therefore cannot be understood apart from the study of its common Near Eastern background. Yet in spite of its appropriations the Bible has used these common elements in a way that is totally distinct and unique from its environment.[30]

The Bible utilizes concept and writing style to communicate with the people who were familiar with them. So in an ancient Near Eastern context the Song of Songs is seen as love poetry celebrating love within marriage and the cultivation of this love in spite of the difficulties. It should not be ripped from its context to be reinterpreted as a metaphor of God's love for Israel or the church, even if such ideas were helpful to get this steamy text accepted as within the canon in the first place. It is not as though all pagan thought or worldviews are brought within the framework of the Bible by our recognition that familiar genres are utilized. In fact, I previously acknowledged the absence from Song of Songs of those things so common among other ancient Near Eastern love poetry like cultic practices, gods, personified nature, drunkenness, lust, seduction, faithlessness, and jealousy. These changes show that the Biblical books are appropriating contextual thought forms selectively for their author's purposes, not merely being reflective of their ancient Near Eastern context. Biblical theology must describe these authorial purposes as communicated within the text.

After the meaning is understood in its historical-cultural context then this meaning must be explicated for modern man. The goal of Biblical theology here is to explain clearly the meaning of the text with its authorial application as evident in the text. Issues addressed by the text need to carry their full ethical weight calling the continuation of the original audience to faith and repentance. The Bible does not describe sins and warnings merely to inform; it describes such things to change lives. However, if understanding has actually been obtained then it can and must be communicated across the historical-cultural barriers to modern man. Increased correspondence between the similarities of the original readers and the modern ones indicate an increased likelihood of the applicability of these ethical demands on the particular modern audience in question.[31] So that part of Biblical theology is to retain the same level of authoritative exhortation for the corresponding audience being addressed by the text. Which audience for wisdom is the broad range of humanity within the creation order, so there is no exclusive

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[30]Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 48.
[31]This process is explained and exampled in Doug Kennard, *The Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1999), 133–48, 184.

group like Israel or the church singled out for special instruction. Thus application is merely developing equivalence of the practice in the contemporary situation. For example, though there are few kings in today's context most of the proverbs concerning kings still carry applicational weight for those in authority. Like with all wisdom, if one finds a wise saying that informs one's context, it is not good enough to know it, one must think through how to implement this wisdom into life in a thoughtful manner.

Linguistic Context

Within this historical-cultural context one needs to approach Biblical theology with exegesis utilizing the full linguistic context. This linguistic context is first the grammatical arrangement of words within the propositions of the text. Exegesis is not a series of loosely knit words, which serve to set up word studies but rather the utilization of these words in relation to one another in the text. When a normal hermeneutic is applied to these propositions the messages of the respective segments can be obtained. In this, hermeneutics is a spiral within the authorial context, which oscillates between contextual overviews and textual particulars as it tries to clarify the meaning of the text.[32] This is a critical realist approach to the text, inductively observing the particulars which the text presents. Such induction does not try to get behind the text as one might to bridge Lessing's ugly ditch and apologetically recover the historic Solomon. Instead, such induction is committed to recovering the accounts of wisdom themselves with their theological biases, and inductively understanding these texts from the thought forms which these authors portray.

These Biblical thought forms serve as an inductive base from which to implement a textually grounded pragmatism (as Charles Peirce located an empirically grounded pragmatism) fueling the hermeneutic spiral. That is, the overview generalizations such as context, narrative themes and Biblical theology which the interpreter proposes are funded by the textual particulars in the author's context and life. The fact that Biblical theology is a generalization and correlation of multiple texts means that it is our best attempt at representing what these texts say in their thought forms. We are not trying to get behind the text to something like Hirsch's authorial intent or post-structuralism's deep structures. These, in effect, are claiming to know something prior to the text, such as something in the author's mind. Philosophically, I do not think we can obtain anything authoritative prior to the text, and for Biblical theology, it is the Biblical text which has authority and is the means of providing warrant. This warrant begins with coherent statements of the Biblical theology to be represented, for one is not properly functioning if he believes contradictory statements. The warrant for the interpretation and Biblical theology is provided by correspondence to the

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[32]Cf. Kennard, *Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization*, 124–33.

textual support. This correspondence compares one's interpretation to the text being interpreted. Such a correspondence should not be a naive opinion that one's interpretation is identical to the text as, say, a reader response or Gadamer's fusing horizons or postmodern Biblical theology[33] from each of our human existential contexts. The plausibility of this correspondence is increased by the interpretation's comprehensiveness and congruity to the textual data. The correlation of these messages together is the major ingredient for Biblical theology, which is a kind of Peircian pragmatic proposal that should be revisited for warranting and sharpening whenever appropriate textual information is found.

These propositions are united making up a larger order in the text. This order includes a logical order of argument through the book and matters of form. Matters of form are significant in two ways. First, propositions are arranged in ways meaningful within the historical-cultural context. These matters of form serve as the main arrangement of some books, such as the various forms of wisdom and love poetry. Secondly, literary style highlights certain features in the book. The logical order conveys meaning through the propositions but other vivid meaning is also conveyed through the metaphors and symbols.[34] The compelling vivid presentation of descriptions of the beloved in Song of Songs expresses the passion involved in the love making process which clearly goes beyond trying to inform an artist's description. Such symbol legitimates the passionate love speak that motivates lovers to give themselves to each other in ravishing feast. Here, textually vivid metaphors existentially connect with the reader as urged by Ricoeur's aesthetic hermeneutic, surfacing vivid existential connections with the text to enable the reader to appreciate how to read this genre.[35] Such an existential connection prompts a shared passion and motivation to understand the text and work it out into life. The goal of this kind of engagement is to surface and to retain this passion and motivation throughout the dissecting process of the levels of correspondence. Additionally, such existential connections prompt self-understandings and self-possibilities which naturally arise from a new naive reading of the text without tools of hermeneutical suspicion. Those self-understandings and self-possibilities which survive the process of warranting through correspondence need to be folded into the Biblical theology statement as well. The other self-understandings and self-possibilities which

[33]Walter Brueggemann in his *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) intentionally positions himself as developing a postmodern Biblical theology and legitimating the variety of voices form within the text and from the contemporary context as expressing intriguing testimonials of what is significant in Biblical theology. However, I think that many of the sage voices have been silenced by him to limit wisdom's contribution to theodicy and as a reminder of the role of human partner with God.

[34]Leo. G. Perdue in *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 59–63, seems to appreciate Ricoeur's aesthetic hermeneutical process for interpreting symbol and metaphorical language.

[35]Cf. Kennard, *Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization*, 120–24.

find warrant in our context but not really from the context of the Biblical author are relevant significances for our context to reflect upon but are inappropriate to be seen as material for Biblical theology or to grant it divine authority for life.[36]

The concept of context also includes the authorial perspective and emphasis, which is evident in the text. This is necessary so that the full body of material is dealt with and applied appropriately. This is not to say that major elements which are clear need excess pages of unnecessary description. It is to say that minor elements should not take over with excessive description or become the organizing principle. Additionally, the way a concept is used in the passage needs to be reflected in Biblical theology statement. Biblical theology must consist both of clear tight logic, coherence, and rhetorical elements aimed at motivating the reader to partake of the ethic and passion of the book, where appropriate. Some descriptions by their nature may be highly technical and as dry as dust but hopefully gold dust. This is not where such an explanation should stop. Biblical theology reflects a living faith, not a dead orthodoxy. Biblical concepts of knowledge extend to include the appropriation of this knowledge into proper action and feeling. A good example of this is the narrative parallel in proverbs between the enticing adulteress in the square and lady wisdom as a compelling rival metaphor to motivate young men to choose to live wisely.[37] Which option will they choose? We will only know by the life choice our students make. Perhaps metaphors like this are best to be sampled by more intimate exposition of these texts in the classroom so that the challenge with its outcomes comes alive to these students where they live.

The aim is to discover what the text meant in the context of its original author for his intended audience. The author is no longer present, nor the authorial intent, except as it is contained in the body of the text. In this, one is limited to what the text has to say about itself within its context (as best as it can be recaptured). Thus, we have a critical realism spiral process of interpreting particulars and correlating them as Biblical theology. Exegesis provides the building blocks of Biblical theology; Biblical theology is regulative of exegesis. The message can be obtained by the cooperative effort of the two. Biblical theology is not exegesis but it is wholly intertwined with it. Biblical theology must be Biblical.

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[36]Cf. Kennard, *Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization*, 133–48, 184.

[37]At this point, Perdue (*Wisdom and Creation*, 88–100) is too oversensitive to the extra-biblical context as he sees lady wisdom through goddess imagery, for the Biblical texts monotheism limits the range of acceptable options, excluding any queen of heaven as not properly Biblical. Also, Leo Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Creation Theology in the Book of Job* (Sheffield: JSOT/Almond, 1991) reflects a polytheistic post-Babylonian context for its metaphors of theology.

Canonically Christian

Biblical theology should be based on the Christian canon. Francis Watson argues that "Biblical theology is *Biblical,* that is, concerned with the whole Christian Bible; it is more than the sum of Old Testament theology and New Testament theology, understood as separate disciplines."[38] This is not to diminish Old Testament theology and New Testament theology, for they are valid Biblical theology disciplines in their own right. That is, specialists in Hebrew scholarship and others in Greek scholarship mine the gems that each Testament has to offer. However, Biblical theology hopefully interacts with both of these realms of legitimate Biblical theology disciplines to formulate a whole Biblical theology. There is significant gain in doing a whole Biblical theology. As Peter Stuhlmacher said, "the Old and New Testaments have belonged together in a most intimate way since the beginning of the Christian Church. They belong together to such a degree that the testimony of the statement cannot be adequately understood without the Old and the exegesis of the Old Testament remains incomplete without taking the New into view."[39]

Few New Testament theologians would take issue with this stance since the Old Testament becomes part of the historical-cultural-linguistic context within which the New Testament is revealed. However, some Old Testament theologians do take issue with this stance since they do not wish to import later revelational material into a passage framed by an earlier stage of progressive revelation.[40] I resonate with this concern and have taught Old Testament theology as a course in its own right as a descriptive discipline to explain these earlier stages of revelation in their own context. Even when I trace an idea through the whole Biblical canon, I wish to handle the earlier material faithfully within its own context, so that the greater perspective is added as the idea matures within the canon (say in the Prophets or the New Testament).

Another canonical concern has to do with the format of each canon and the relationship of the books to each other. For the New Testament, this concern is simple as evident by the broad agreement across Christendom for the contents of the New Testament. Occasional challenges are levied against a book, like Luther's challenge against James, but they have never been generally accepted. So this issue reduces to merely a matter of textual criticism. Since I hold to a critical text philosophy with regard to textual criticism, the

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[38]Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 8.

[39]Peter Stuhlmacher, *How to Do Biblical Theology* (Allison: Pickwick, 1995), 2. Cf. Gerhard Hasel, "Biblical Theology: Then, Now, and Tomorrow," *HBT* 4 (1982): 74; Charles Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 58–60.

[40]E.g., J. L. McKenzie, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 319; R. P. Knierim, "The Task of Old Testament Theology." *HBT* 6 (1984): 52; Rolf Rendtorff, "Must 'Biblical Theology' Be Christian Theology?" *BRev* 4 (1988): 42.

issue of the canon is mainly a matter of exclusion of later scribal additions like Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11.

The Old Testament presents additional concerns for a Christian canon since both the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) were used as authoritative Jewish and Christian canons. Early on these two different formats of the OT were merely scrolls of separate books or groups of books (like the Twelve prophets). There are slight differences between the *Samaritan Pentateuch* and the MT that are worth checking, but these differences are primarily reassuring concerning the care of both copying traditions and the fixity of the canon since they are both independent traditions from probably the ninth century BC when the northern tribes split from Judah. However, with the third to fifth century AD the independent scroll texts begin to be bound together into books, which began to raise the issue of canonicity in practical ways. The MT and LXX present a different order but in mainstream Judaism the contents were the same. While in Christian traditions that become Catholic or Anglican or Orthodox some additional books only accepted by sectarian Judaism were added to the LXX bound additions. The LXX includes as part of this continuing sectarian Jewish tradition the following books that are not part of the Hebrew canon: *1 Esdras*, *Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesisticus* (=*Ben Sirach*), *Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel* (*The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon*), *Prayer of Manasses, 1* and *2 Maccabees.* The Old Latin and editions of the Vulgate also included *2 Esdras.* These additions, except for *The Prayer of Manasses, 1* and *2 Esdras*, were accepted as the Catholic canon at the Council of Trent.[41] The New English Bible printed the Apocrypha with the downgraded books interspersed among the others.

The Eastern Orthodox churches included within their canon all of the above and *Psalm 151*, and *3* and *4 Maccabees.* As Judaism worked its way into a Mishnaic and Talmudic traditional orientation, the Apocrypha was excluded as less authoritative from the Hebrew Scriptures that became the Masoretic text.[42] That is, the Apocrypha "does not defile the hands" of the reader as the Hebrew MT does. The Protestant churches followed the Hebrew Scriptural contents and placed them in the LXX order. The Protestants excluded the *Apocrypha* following some patristic documentation such as

[41]Council of Trent (1545-1563), Fourth Session celebrated on the eighth day of April, 1546, Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures similar to earliest official indication in Canon 87 Council of Carthage A.D. 397 except Esdras was included. The Syriac canon is close to that of the Orthodox Church, especially the Slavonic Orthodox except that for them 2 Esdras only contains chapters 3–14, which is referred to as 4 Ezra. The Ethiopian canon adds 3 Maccabees and splits Proverbs into two books as compared to the Roman Catholic pattern.

[42]Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 14b; Augustine admits Jews did not accept the Apocrypha, especially Judith into their canon even though they helpfully record history (*The City of God* 18.26 in *Augustine* vol. 18 of Great Books of the Western World, edited by Mortimer Adler [Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952], 485).

Athanasius' Easter letter and the *Synod of Laodicea* (343 AD), and in reaction to Catholic acceptance and its use to teach purgatory (e.g., *2 Macc.* 12:43–45).[43] I exclude the *Apocrypha* from my Christian canon partly because my tradition has but more because I do not see that these books make claim to inspiration. Remember that inspiration and authority is the issue in canonicity. For example, *2 Maccabees* concludes, "I will bring my work to an end. If it is found well written and aptly composed, that is what I myself hoped for; if cheap and mediocre, I could only do my best."[44] Such a claim falls far short of the prophetic "Thus says the Lord." Likewise, the New Testament does not quote the *Apocrypha* with divine authority, though allusions probably influence some texts. Additionally, pseudepigraphal texts (like *1* and *2 Enoch*) that do claim inspiration, were not accepted by either the broader Jewish community or the broader Christian community, so I do not accept them as well.[45]

This dissonance of MT and LXX is made more acute because both these Old Testament versions are affirmed in the New Testament as Scripture. The continued authoritative nature of the Hebrew Scriptures is affirmed by Christ's statement that the smallest letter (*yod*) or stroke as part of a consonant letter will not pass away until all is accomplished, that is, until the Kingdom is fully realized (Matt 5:18; Luke 16:17). Additionally, the MT consonantal text is more authoritative than the vowel pointing added millennia later, reflecting Jewish rabbinic interpretation. However, Paul writes to Timothy and reminds him that the sacred writings in which he has been instructed from his youth (which in the dispersion for Jews would be the LXX) are God-breathed or inspired (θεόπνευστος; 1 Tim. 3:15–17).[46] This means

[43]E.g., The French Confession (1559) art. 3–5 in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition: Reformation Era*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), vol. 2, 376; Belgic Confession of Faith (1561) art. 4 and 6; Second Helvetic Confession (1566) 1.9; The Concept of Cologne (1591) art. 18; The Irish Articles (1615) art. 2–3; The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) ch. 1.1.2–3 in Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions and Reformed Confessions Harmonized: With an Annotated Bibliography of Reformed Doctrinal Works*, ed. Joel Beeke and Sinclair Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) and *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, ed. G. I. Williamson (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), 4; The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571) article 6 in *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, ed. Mark Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 215–16; Athanasius, "Easter Letter" in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wade (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 2nd series, 4:552, letter 39, sect. 4 and 5; Synod of Laodicea 343 AD, canon 59–60.

[44]2 Macc. 15:38.

[45]Though I acknowledge Tertullian makes a case for the acceptance of *1 Enoch* into the canon on the basis of its edification and because Jude quotes it, even though he acknowledges that neither the Jews nor the church accept it among the canon (*On the Apparel of Women*, 3).

[46]Second Temple Judaism supported the view that translations were viewed as divinely inspired Scripture, such as LXX (Philo, *Vita Mos*. 2.7; *Letter of Aristeas* 305–317) and an Aramaic Old Testament (Meg. 3a). This position was broadly affirmed by the LXX specialists who presented papers at the Institute for Biblical Research Nov. 19-20, 2004, namely: Karen Jobes, "When God Spoke Greek: The Place of the Greek Bible in Evangelical Scholarship,"

that inspiration needs to be redefined to fit the Biblical concept as: *God's superintending of human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error in the words of the original autographs His revelation to man, and that this revelation is preserved with divine authority and benefit through accurate translations and copies.* Many evangelical theologians frame inspiration just to autographs in contrast to the liberal definition of inspiration for the reader. Notice the Biblical use of inspiration does both in a particular way. Also notice that the evangelical definition of inspiration as restricted to the autograph does not reflect the issue of the continuing authority of the Biblical text. The Biblical text retains continuing authority as part of its definition of inspiration. This continuing authority of the inspiration of the LXX is how the New Testament. and the apostolic fathers treat the LXX. About 80% of the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament evidence dependency upon LXX as the authoritative text quoted. Most of the Patristic writers continued to quote from the LXX as the authoritative text or a translation of it into their own language. This also has the ramification that our English Bibles can be seen as inspired by God and thus continuing with divine authority. Thus our English Bibles, LXX and MT are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that God's person may be fully equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17).

In the field of textual criticism, Septuagint specialists still need to do considerable work but I would approach it through a critical text orientation as well. So differences in versions of the texts may well be handled as scribal emendations. However, some texts such as Jeremiah evidence multiple copies, some of which were destroyed. So that it may be possible to consider both MT and LXX versions of this book as accurate to stages of autograph.

The recent interest in the final form of the canonical text also raises interesting issues since the Hebrew canon has a different structure than the Christian Old Testament (and LXX). In both structures, the core of the Old Testament is the *Torah* or Pentateuch. The Christian LXX order emphasizes that from this covenantal base, the narrative unfolds with God's continued interaction with his people, and thus some popularity of narrative theology

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Bulletin for Biblical Research 16(2006): 219–236; Peter Gentry, "The Septuagint and the Text of the Old Testament," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16 (2006): 193-218, and Tim McLay's oral response. Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 22; Johan Lust, *Messianism and the Septuagint: Collected Essays by J. Lust*, ed. Katrin Hauspie (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 153; Sidney Jellicoe, "Septuagint Studies in the Current Century," *JBL* 88 (1969): 191-99; Natalio F. Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 322. Additionally, certain Patristics presented the LXX as authoritative Scripture (e.g., Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.* 3.21.3 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989], 1:452). Some Patristics even preferred the LXX over the Hebrew, such as when Augustine takes Jerome to task for not translating the Latin Vulgate closer to the LXX (Augustine, letter 56 to Jerome in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), series 2, 6:112.

as of late. However, the Hebrew categorizing and order emphasizes that the prophetic program echoes and answers and calls the people Israel back to the Mosaic Covenant. Both features are helpful to recognize in these texts. That is, God actively responds to his people but the agenda is that of his Mosaic Covenant.

Wisdom and the Psalms serve as an alternative program to that of the Mosaic Covenant, as was developed earlier in this chapter. This is indicated in the *Tanakh* by including them within the less authoritative *Kethubhim* or "Writings." In this configuration, the sequence of Proverbs 31, Ruth and Song of Songs contributes a focused unit on the ideal wife and the enjoyment of sex. So Ruth's different place in the *Tanakh* examples the ideal wife, while in the LXX, Ruth contributes toward the historical justification of David as king. Also, in the English and LXX Old Testament order, Psalms and Wisdom texts occupy a barrier category between the history and the prophets. Many of the wisdom texts would be seen as placed in this category as coming out from the history of Solomon the wise. Perhaps conceptually, the history tells where Israel had been and wisdom calls the faithful to live for God now, while the prophet especially includes the future hope of Israel. Either way wisdom is arranged, it serves as a helpful guide for contemporary living. However, in the Christian order, the Psalms enmeshed in wisdom are framed more as instruction, whereas in the *Tanakh*, they are more patterned prayers to perform (thus encouraging liturgy). Joining the Writings, Ruth is handled more like wisdom emphasizing generosity, and Lamentations extends the psalm laments in light of life and captivity issues.

The *Tanakh* diminishes the place of narrative theology mainstreaming Joshua-Kings as prophets in the dominant Covenant-Prophets program. Here narrative theology is carried by the narrative Babylonian exile and resolution texts (Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles). Notice that Daniel and Lamentations are framed for their prophetic emphasis in the English and LXX order, while in the Writings, Daniel is valued as a narrative that provides guidance for how the Jew is to live. Esther, a narrative book in both configurations is shocking in the absence of God from the text, both in the Hebrew and in the lack of LXX expansion so common in Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah. This lack of God in the varieties of Esther underscores the depth of God's rejection of Israel during the Babylonian captivity. Placing Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles at the end of the Writings provides a conclusion and climax to the entire canon that underscores the restoration of Israel and Temple with the establishment of the *Torah* as the norm of the community. Embedded within this establishment is a more ultimate Messianic hope after the pattern of the Davidic Covenant whereas the LXX order diffuses the Messianic hope to that of the continuing narrative saga, leaving the last statement of the prophet Malachi hoping for an Elijah who will bring about New Covenant restoration of hearts multi-generationally with God.

The Writings section sets up Jewish festival traditional readings and

Temple functioning. Psalms leads out the Writings as the main contributor to Temple worship in providing pattern prayers, in contrast to the LXX and English pattern of Psalms as instruction, being surrounded by wisdom. Ruth among the History grounds the Davidic Kingship in a line of blessing while among the Writings calls Israel to generous living. It is little wonder why Jewish tradition reads Ruth to celebrate the harvest festival of the Feast of Weeks for harvest is a theme in the book which provides the context for generosity and recovery. Furthermore, Passover utilizes Song of Songs as an allegorical love for Yahweh, a view imposed on the genre by tradition. The reflective feast of Tabernacles utilizes Qoheleth to remind that value comes through the vertical relationship with God (consistent with its refrain: Eccl 2:24–26; 3:12–15, 22; 7:14; 8:15; 12:9–14). Lamentations is the fitting choice for the Ninth of Ab fast that commemorates the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple. Likewise, the book of Esther comes to a close explaining the historical roots for the Feast of Purim, during which it is read traditionally.

The addition of the New Testament shifts the focus away from *Torah* to underscore the Kingdom (to which the covenants pointed) and the King, Lord Jesus Christ. Both arrangements of the Old Testament set this up in different ways as was mentioned above.

<div align="center">

Theology

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Biblical theology must be theology. It is a message that communicates unity and diversity. The unity is evident in the organizing principle; the diversity in the particulars and progress of the organization.

Organizing Principle

The Bible is a collection of various manuscripts, which address a multitude of issues. Most Biblical theologies are organized under a concept of center, which is a one- or few-word concept which is supposed to permeate the whole passage or section of Scripture. It is to be the focal point around which all else revolves, encompassing the particulars. However, the concept of center fails to do justice to Biblical theology in four main areas. This author advocates its replacement by the message. The message is a concise complex unity, which accurately reflects the particulars of the text and the order inherent between these particulars. Ken Barker develops this concept of message as a "center" but still retains the complex unity, which accurately reflects the particulars of the text.[47] The critical feature is not the name as much as it is the methodology and for our purposes here the names "center" and "message" help to distinguish the basic methodologies. In the four areas in which the concept of center fails, the concept of message demonstrates sufficiency.

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[47]This was developed by Ken Barker in doctoral classes like the theology of Isaiah and conversations at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1982.

First, center does not communicate clearly as does the message. The idea of a center as a one- or few-word concept is supposed to permeate the whole passage of Scripture. Examples of center include: covenant, kingdom, salvation history, and Jesus Christ. These terms are virtually meaningless as a center because whoever utilizes them imports his own meaning to them; the terms do not convey this meaning in and of themselves. To convey meaning with any clarity one needs to have a propositional statement expressing this meaning. Both the subject and the complement need to be included as the message of the passage rather than merely stating the subject and allowing others to import their own complement and thereby import their own meanings to it.

Second, the center is a philosophical impossibility, while the concept of message is philosophically possible. For Gerhard Hasel, the idea of center permeates and controls the author's writing of the passage.[48] A center is in a certain sense in the author's mind (as an authorial intent), while the concept of message is the reader's summarization of the correlation of content expressed in the passage. E. D. Hirsch proposed authorial intent as the way to obtain validity in interpretation as opposed to reader response.[49] However, the text itself provides a significant guide and warrant as the alternative to these existential and Hirschian conjectures. The center (and authorial intent) is behind and controlling the text; the message is expressed in the authorial thrust of the text. No one today can get behind the text with any warrant. C. S. Lewis was once asked about what he thought about literary critics who claimed that things were written because of a variety of authorial reasons. He thought rather poorly of them because they were almost always wrong when they claimed he wrote from a certain source for a particular intent, and they could have asked him.[50] We do not have the author to tell us what his center is or intent. Those who say that the author is God and He illuminates one to the center of specific passages do not settle the issue, they merely push it back one step into a mystical sphere. God does not tell one exegete a clear statement of what the center is.[51] He allows exegetes to understand the message of a passage as expressed in the words of the text. All that one has today is the text and thus it is only possible to arrive at meaning that can be found in the text: that is the message.

The concept of center does not reflect the text as does the message. Any

[48]Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 142. Such a philosophical impossibility exists in trying to decipher any meaning which tries to get behind the text, as Hirsch's authorial intent, or post-structuralism, or text as apologetic of history.

[49]E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

[50]C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 158–60.

[51]God nowhere promises to illume the meaning of passages to interpreters so that they would cognitively know what the passage means. For a further development and defense of this claim, see the chapters on "Thiselton-Ricoeur Hermeneutic" and " Biblical Authority" in Kennard, *Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization*, 139–42.

center is an attempt at conveying that which the book says in a simplicity; the message conveys what the book says in a complex unified whole. Any book of the Bible has complexity and divergent themes within its unity. There is none that is a simplicity; the concept of center is simplistic. Much of the Old Testament has been viewed under the centers like covenant and much of the New Testament has been viewed under the center of Christ. However, the wisdom literature of the Bible is the reef of both Old and New Testament theology. For example, Proverbs does not develop covenant but rather clearly identifies the *torah* as familial instruction rather than Law or Mosaic. Likewise, in the New Testament, James (a wisdom epistle) has virtually no Christology, while it does develop some monotheism. Even von Rad's center of God hits the reef in such Old Testament books as Proverbs, which clearly emphasize the horizontal social relationships within the creation. There is no kingdom or salvation history development in Proverbs either. To see them there is to abuse the text and land your scheme on the reef.

Finally, an accepted concept of center cannot be found. There is no center on which exegetes agree. A brief survey of twentieth-century centers shows the problem:

- Holiness (Hänel, 1931),[52]
- God as Lord (Köhler, 1958),[53]
- Israel's election (Wildberger, 1959),[54]
- Covenant (Eichrodt, 1961, 1967),[55]
- Yahweh (von Rad, 1963),[56]
- The Kingdom of God (Klein, 1970),[57]
- Communion with God (Vriezen, 1970),[58]
- The blessing/promise plan (Kaiser, 1978),[59] and
- Testimony (Brueggeman, 1997).[60]

If there ever could be agreement then these arguments could be muted a bit, but these arguments are the very reasons for why no center will ever capture the field. On the other hand, a message is easily arrived at and checked because it is ultimately tied to the text.

The messages of wisdom books can be summarized in the following

[52]J. Hänel, *Die Religion der Heiligkeit* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1931).

[53]Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster,1958).

[54]H. Wildberger, "to choose" in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed.Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

[55]Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961 and 1967).

[56]Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*.

[57]Günther Klein, "The Biblical Understanding of 'The Kingdom of God'," *Interpretation* 26 (1972): 393.

[58]Theodorus Christian Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970).

[59]Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

[60]Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament*.

inductive generalizations for your consideration and sharpening. Old Testament wisdom as a whole is summarized as: the wise man will hear, fear, and obey Yahweh and live life well according to the framework of how creation works (including the joys of love), understanding that apparent futility and suffering should not dissuade from faithfulness to God. The various components of Old Testament wisdom's message are seen as coming from respective books. For example, Proverbs can be summarized as: the wise man will hear, fear, and obey Yahweh, and live life well according to the framework of how creation works, whereas many others will be destroyed in their wicked plans. Additionally, the Song of Songs narratively and poetically illustrates the joys and pains of love while affirming erotic expressions of physical beauty. Furthermore, the message of Job is that the righteous sometimes suffer for sin, sometimes for purification and sometimes for reasons which they may never know under God's sovereignty, so that they need to remain faithful to God in whatever circumstances they find themselves. Likewise, in Qoheleth life appears to be futile in its aimless wanderings and problems under the sun, but life is a gift from God to be enjoyed to the fullest and God is to be obeyed, since He will eventually judge all men. Furthermore, in the New Testament, James exhorts Jewish believers in dispersion to maintain a consistent allegiance to God, as maturity, through the endurance of purifying trials, by readily receiving and applying the Law, by properly controlling oneself (especially one's tongue) and by humbly submitting to God's wisdom.

Organization

The content and organization developed in a Biblical theology is limited to the Biblical source material utilized. For example, when one investigates a theology of Job one does not actually obtain all or only what Job knew and believed. All we know is what the text actually reveals in its theologically constructed narrative conversational format. It is the text that surfaces the categories and warrants the generalizations of Biblical theology.

Biblical theology needs to draw its categories, themes, motifs, and concepts from the Biblical texts themselves. In the past, it has drawn too often on the concepts of systematic theology or other concepts of doctrine such as God, man, salvation. The recent situation of Biblical theology seems to maintain the same problem but only under the categories of contemporary philosophy. Such categories and presuppositions tend to bias a work. It is possible to cross-examine a Biblical text on the basis of modern philosophy or theology, as say Bultmann did, and to obtain answers about subjects that the contemporary reader desires of which the Biblical authors show no evidence that they ever thought in those ways.[61] For example, in the epistle of James there is so little material about Jesus Christ that at best it should be a minute sub-category. The issue is even made more obvious when the Old

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[61]J. Munck, "Pauline Research Since Schweitzer," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, 175–76.

Testament is considered with its Hebraic concepts and lack of Western philosophical categories.[62] Biblical theology needs to distinguish the concepts utilized within the text by observing the various components that make up the message of the books utilized within the scope of this study. Once this is done, Biblical theology needs to utilize these same concepts as the components of its content and organization.

One category to be discussed in each section of Scripture that is significant for Biblical theology is the concept of God.[63] The word "theology" suggests that God and His activity are in view. The primary interest of the Bible is not man's experience and thought; it is what God declares, demands and does. A vital study of Biblical theology cannot proceed as though God does not exist.[64] In fact, the Biblical wisdom makes significant advances in theology. Perhaps the most dramatic is the use of *Shadday* in Job. This name is only used 48 times in the Old Testament but 31 of these times come from the book of Job and from nearly every speaker as well. So that when it comes to developing the meaning of *Shadday,* the text of Job should predominate by indicating through its use, a meaning of *Shadday* as the powerful sovereign God who generously gives, creates, and destroys. Such a meaning excludes the idea of an Akkadian localized god of mountains or the narrowness of Hebrew etymology from *shadod* 'to destroy.' Additionally, Proverbs distinguishes itself from common ancient Near Eastern wisdom by being significantly more oriented toward God than the predominant social orientation. In fact, for Qoheleth, the role of God is so significant as to change the futile perspective of experience under the sun to an encouraging refrain of God providing the simple joys of life like work, food, and drink (Eccl 2:24–26; 3:12–15, 22; 7:14; 8:15; 12:9–14). These repeated choruses serve as providing a positive vertical direction for the theology through the book, which elevates above the futile horizontal or social perspective. Additionally, in the love poetry of Song of Songs, perhaps God has a speaking part (Song 5:1b), but there is a stark contrast to other ancient love poetry in the removal of the entwining cult practices and pagan gods.

The relationship between Biblical concepts should be reflected in Biblical theology. The tensions and variant emphases within and between these concepts should be maintained. One must resist the tendency to develop an artificial consistency.[65] For example, in Proverbs the concept of wisdom dominates the range of issues that are developed in the book. This predominance of wisdom is indicated by the emphasis in the introduction, the repetition of these themes, the strength of exhortation from the parents, and

[62]Gerhard Ebeling, "The Meaning of 'Biblical Theology,'" *JThSt* 6 (1955): 222.

[63]This is also the case in books like Esther which do not mention the name of God. A major ingredient to a theology of Esther should be the shocking absence of God from covenantly cursed Israel.

[64]Floyd Filson, "A New Testament Students' Approach to Biblical Theology," *JBR* 14 (1946): 23.

[65]Wayne Ward, "Towards a Biblical Theology," *RExpos* 74 (1977): 373.

the vividness of metaphor like lady wisdom. With this much emphasis, the theme of wisdom should be developed early and positioned prominently. The theme of the fear of Yahweh as the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7) extends this theme as a rider on the predominant wisdom theme. In Proverbs, the repeated contrasts between wisdom and foolishness elevate the theme of foolishness to the basic framework from the range of issues that follow. In these contrasts, the creation-based retribution principle of reaping what you sow is developed. The greatest example of this foolish lifestyle is that of the adulteress, so that theme seems to come best next in the exposition. Beyond the development of wisdom or fool, there is no clear pattern of categories that should dominate. In fact, the long section of individual proverbs accentuate a style that breaks up any overarching structure. The significant social and life issues that illustrate the wise and foolish lives require that these other topics be developed. However, the lack of a textual order leaves me to choose an alphabetical order to communicate a sense of completeness and to mirror the occasional strategy of acrostic that Proverbs chooses when it communicates a sense of completeness on a particular topic (e.g., Prov 31:10–31).

When narrative genres develop their material, Biblical theology should not simply reconfigure the theology into an ahistorical descriptive method but draw the reader into the essence of the drama to help accentuate the critical issues. Perhaps when these are developed orally in class, a sample of the vivid narrative can enable the student to enter into the poetic and nuanced issues even further. Often narrative Biblical texts have a video version (like *Prince of Egypt* for Exodus or *The Visual Bible* for Matthew, John, and Acts) to render the narrative vividly for the student. Within the accounting of the narrative overarching issues should not be lost. An example in Song of Songs is the drawing out the comparison between the love poetry of description of physical beauty, which seems to bring a wholesome balance, legitimacy and encouragement to verbal love making as said by both male and female in relationship.[66] Though this is a significant and healthy issue in the book, the narrative also serves as more than vivid glue that connects these descriptive love poems. In fact, the joys, tensions and pains in relationship are only really seen as the twists and turns of the narrative plays out. With other wisdom literature, one requires a wise sensitivity to discern how to take each part of the narrative. Additional wisdom is required to develop the self-understandings and self-possibilities that our lives might engage in juxtaposed closely to this text.

In the midst of narrative and counseling conversation, Job presents unique issues of practical theodicy as it is worked out through suffering. However, the issues are much more varied than merely theodicy. As mentioned earlier, the most significant development of *Shadday* in all the Old Testament comes from this book. Since Biblical theology is especially about

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[66]The inclusion of so much love description or physical beauty from the female perspective contrasts with ancient Near Eastern texts.

God, and the narrative begins with God in his throne room and the answer God eventually gives to Job is himself, my Biblical theology of Job begins with God. The second topic is set up in the contrast of the narrative with the adversary (*hasatan*). Development of *hasatan* is rather minimal in the Old Testament (elsewhere only in 1 Chr. 21:1; Ps.109:6; Zech. 3:1–2) but with thirteen references in Job 1–2, this is clearly the only context to develop the possibility of this descriptive raising to the status of a name. It is also the best place to develop the limitation of *hasatan* as merely one of many small emissaries in the court of the sovereign God. The narrative introduction brings a profound tension for the reader because he knows that the counsel is askew as he hears Job's friends urge him to placate Yahweh as one would for an ancient Near East god to remove the suffering within a mechanistic exposition of the retribution principle. The repeated interchanges which the narrative supplies helps to remind the reader that resisting this simplistic strategy is part of what a sufferer is to do without going to the other extreme of pridefully demanding God to answer (Elihu's counsel paints Job as falling prey here). The nature of the narrative and sheer volume of the interchanges sets Yahweh up in stark contrast, for the answer to suffering is not an answer to why Job suffers; it is that we must all know our humble place before a sovereign God who gets to do whatever He desires including the initiation and overseeing the suffering in our lives. In Biblical theology, I try to retain this gem of narrative theology, and in class it is helpful to develop by sampling selective counsel and then polemicizing it by the divine blast from the whirlwind concerning creation and Behemoth-Leviathan.

Progressive

Biblical theology reflects the history and progressive nature of divine revelation. To understand the meaning of a passage properly one needs to see and understand it within its historical and conceptual context. Where several passages are concerned, the historical progression should be reflected but this returns us to the point previously developed concerning the gems of narrative theology which do not need to be developed again. Where there is conceptual development like the wisdom program provides, the wisdom program should be nested within the conceptual framework in which it fits. Since the wisdom program has already been developed to be in the era of Solomon with subsequent sages for final arrangement, features like the Mosaic and Davidic covenants are in the context but they just do not seem to be developed conceptually within the wisdom texts.

The nesting of the wisdom program seems to fit best conceptually within creation theology. That is, the sovereign God has effortlessly brought the universe into existence out of the waters of chaos (Gen 1:2–26; 8). The order that God brought to the chaos (as indicated by separation Gen 1:4–7, 10, and by designed purposefulness *tob*, and the governance of time by the heavenly objects Gen 1:14–18; 8:22) serves to provide man with obligation to fit within this order as a player within creation. The role for man as image

of God serves to set man as God's representative on the scene as we minute-
ly picture God's creating and sovereignty at work. Some of this obligation
comes with the blessing of God to be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, and rule
the earth (Gen 1:28; 9:1–7). Other obligation comes by God's fiat fram-
ing specific obligations within this purposeful order (Gen 1:26; 2:15–17, 24;
9:2–6). There are significant benefits to be obtained in living rightly to this
order (e.g., Gen 6:8–9; 8:1). However, so often mankind departs from this
righteousness and plunges the creation order into a chaos of his own doing,
which God responds with curse or a return to chaos within the created order,
fighting chaos with chaos (Gen 3:6–21; 4:8–15; 6:2–7:24; 9:21–25; 11:1–9).
The order of the creation that remains after these judgments is a frustrating,
with futility among the order.

       This application of creation theology is made more vivid by the wis-
dom texts. If man is to negotiate his way around the creation staying within
those ways that bring success and staying clear of the pits of futility then
this person needs wisdom. The retribution principle of "you reap what you
sow" is part of this wise perspective. Proverbs joins in at this point to provide
a variety of specific wise stepping stones, which strengthen both mind and
will. For example, with regard to the specific issue of love and marriage there
are many practical guidelines within the book of Proverbs ranging from the
adulteress to avoid, to the ideal wife praised by all her family, and a host of
scattered comments between. None of these quite has the same poetic pas-
sion of Adam's recognition of the fleshness of Eve and the implications to
become one flesh for mankind (Gen 2:23–24). However, Proverbs develops
further counsel within this context of marriage that helps complement the
Genesis pattern. Here is where the Song of Songs encourages the love pas-
sion (which Adam briefly expressed), but it comes within a context that is
also tainted by tension, conflict, and pain (Gen 3:16). So the Song of Songs
reflects these elements of relationship with frustrating futility as well. This
futility within the divine order is acutely driven home by the experimental
nature of Qoheleth with periodic reminders that the divine order is still there
when one takes into account the vertical blessings that come from God. The
recognition of these blessings should motivate the wise person to enjoy the
blessings and limit the range of one's own futile experimentation. However,
sometimes the futility overwhelms the servant of God in excruciating suf-
fering. Here, Job displays God's sovereignty because the whole process of
extreme suffering is in the crucible of futility. While many judgments are
brought on by our reaping the consequences of sin and foolishness, there are
times when no explanation is given and we must still worship God and serve
him righteously; Job reminds us of this struggle.

       Wisdom nests in creation theology and conceptually develops an al-
ternative universal revelatory program for the whole of humankind, which
continues to stand as applicable to all humankind. As such, it provides a
complementary voice to the profoundly Jewish program of Law and Proph-
ets. With these issues in mind, my course of Old Testament Biblical theol-

ogy develops this wisdom theology after the creation theology and before the Jewish covenant program (which is so central to the Old Testament). Throughout the course, this wisdom program is not forgotten, for the Law and the Prophets do draw upon it. With so much of the revelatory program being God revealing himself to us, I find it helpful to conclude the course with the theology of the psalms which provides an opportunity to review wisdom theology again among a review of many of the other features of Old Testament Biblical theology. However, the psalms provide a different orientation as affirmation and outcry from the congregation draws the students into a deeper commitment of performing these prayers and possibly even to affirm to live by wisdom's guiding light.

Conclusion

Briefly put, Biblical theology should be Biblically accurate and complete, and theologically sensitive. This descriptive method traversing wisdom shows how Biblical theology can consistently be accomplished in a critical realist method without destroying itself on the reef for Biblical theology, wisdom literature.