

## ***James Barr and the Future of Revelation in History in New Testament Theology***

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*The thesis of James Barr's magisterial study *The Concept of Biblical Theology* is that "biblical theology is a contested concept" (Barr's emphasis). One of the reasons for this is the issue of revelation in history (RIH). The article compares Barr's outlook with the outlook of scholars who are favorable toward RIH such as Hofmann and Cullmann, toward whom Barr might be thought to be fundamentally negative. In fact Barr shares many of the RIH group's convictions. At the same time, elements of a neologistic outlook inhere in Barr's work, making it unclear how RIH will fare in future studies that may follow Barr's lead. In any case both NT theology and RIH retain importance in current discussion.*

*Key Words: James Barr, revelation in history, salvation history, Heilsgeschichte, biblical theology, NT theology, J. C. K. von Hofmann, Theodor Zahn, Adolf Schlatter, Karl Barth, Oscar Cullmann*

The ravages of World War II forced Western academic theologians to become aware of two things. First, as Karl Barth had already seen by the end of the so-called Great War (First World War), liberalism had in important respects failed to interpret the Bible as the Word of God.<sup>1</sup> Second, human society and possibly even humans themselves were more depraved and bent on self-destruction than some theological anthropologies had it. Harnack's and Fosdick's grand brotherhood of man under the universal fatherhood of God was hard to stomach in breezes bearing the stench of Stalingrad, Berlin, and Buchenwald. As a result, the Bible as a whole came in for renewed scholarly attention not just as an object of antiquarian scrutiny but as a prophetic word

1. A point argued memorably by T. W. Manson, "The Failure of Liberalism to Interpret the Bible as the Word of God," in *The Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. C. W. Dugmore; London: SPCK, 1944), 92-107.

for modern people. Its moral realism and apocalyptic assessment of the destiny of earthly history rang true in a world huddling in the shadow of mushroom clouds and stirred up for decades afterward by Communism's saber rattling and the West's reciprocal arms escalation. In this desperate climate, what came to be called the Biblical Theology Movement arose, having actually begun its existence in the sometimes bleak and tumultuous setting of the 1920s in Europe. The 1950s saw the movement's high-water mark.

By the early 1960s, however, its legitimacy was being questioned, most of all in North America where, significantly, bastions of main-line liberal optimism had not seen major cities and university campuses bombed and overrun by totalitarian or occupation troops, as had their European counterparts. The Biblical Theology Movement as such never made very significant inroads, for example, at the University of Chicago, whose *Journal of Religion* published Langdon Gilkey's important initial criticism of it.<sup>2</sup> At about the same time James Barr issued his first even more devastating objections in the form of his books *The Semantics of Biblical Language*<sup>3</sup> and then *Biblical Words for Time*.<sup>4</sup> Barr was British and not a native North American, but his academic writings reflected liberal sympathies and a corresponding aversion to anything smacking of (at least a Barthian) theological emphasis. Many felt that among his most trenchant criticisms was a set of objections to the formula termed "revelation in history." In the celebrated supplementary volume to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*,<sup>5</sup> he praised this formula for what it rejected, which was liberalism's optimistic evolutionary schema. He also praised it for its rejection of traditional Christian theology's stress on revelation as propositional truths or statements. Thus, in terms of what the revelation in history rubric repudiated, Barr pronounced it "right and proper."<sup>6</sup> Yet he found fault with it on a number of scores and predicted that revelation in history would in the future diminish in importance and usefulness, so that "the formula in itself will cease to be either clear or useful."<sup>7</sup> Barr's essay "*Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology*"<sup>8</sup> was likewise largely critical of the revelation in history emphasis of Western theology at that time.

2. See Gilkey's "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *JR* 41 (1961): 194-205.

3. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

4. London: SCM, 1962.

5. Barr, "Revelation in History," *IDBSup*: 746-49.

6. *Ibid.*, 746.

7. *Ibid.*, 749.

8. *Int* 17 (1963): 193-205; Barr proposes that revelation be understood more along "the axis of direct verbal communication between God and particular men on particular occasions" (201).

A third of a century after Barr's prediction, it is clear that reports of the death of biblical theology, which were encouraged by his critique of revelation in history, were exaggerated. Moreover, revelation in history itself has proved to be more resilient than Barr projected.<sup>9</sup> His recent major book *The Concept of Biblical Theology*<sup>10</sup> provides an occasion for revisiting the question of what we should think of revelation in history today. Can we perhaps move the discussion beyond where Barr left it in the 1960s and -70s, when for some the concept fell into disfavor? While Barr's study often relates most directly to OT theology, its purview extends repeatedly to the NT (see, e.g., chap. 30), just as Barr's criticisms of biblical theology have been deeply felt in both OT and NT studies. It is therefore fitting to read his work with an eye to what it might portend for NT theologians and their future labors.

#### BARR AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: A NEW PERSPECTIVE?

If Barr's book has a single focus, it serves to show that and why "the concept of biblical theology is a *contested* concept" (605; cf. xiii; emphasis Barr's). Barr hopes to contribute to the conviction among biblical scholars and theologians that "biblical theology has proved itself as something that will be a part of the scene, both as a fully academic level within biblical studies and as a participant in the considerations of doctrinal theology" (607).

For some this will seem a surprising volte-face: wasn't Barr's *Semantics of Biblical Language* instrumental in bringing the Biblical Theology Movement to a grinding halt? Wasn't it behind the "decrease in the older emphasis on revelation in history or divine acts in history" that Barr documents in OT theologies of the 1970s (329)? Readers as various as John McKenzie, Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, Gerhard Hasel, and D. J. A. Clines understood Barr to be hostile toward the whole enterprise (cf. 235-36, 665 n. 29). Francis Watson has called Barr "biblical theology's most significant and persistent critic."<sup>11</sup> Barr admits that he has been a critic of OT theology (330; cf. 225). But now he wishes to underscore that "twentieth-century Old Testament theology has done

9. For example, a recent study observes, "For Israel to remember . . . [God's] redemptive acts is to become aware of those events of history that truly are the substance of *Heilsgeschichte* [salvation history]" (E. Merrill, "Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship," *JETS* 3 [March 2000]: 27). See also B. Green, "The Foundations of New Testament Theology," in *Interpreting the New Testament* (ed. D. A. Black and D. S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 495-96.

10. *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999). Parenthetical page numbers in this essay refer to this work.

11. *Text and Truth: redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 18.

very excellent work and has very substantial achievements to its credit" (330). Barr insists he was never averse to biblical theology itself, just to its "aberrations"; far from wishing to denigrate biblical theology as a discrete discipline stretching back for generations, he asserts, "The whole thing has been a vastly creative undertaking, without which biblical scholarship would have been very incomplete" (236). We may observe at the outset that, if biblical theology was ever thought to be otiose because of Barr's opprobrium, the ban has now been lifted.

The pace of the book is brisk and the tone often brusque. It is brisk in the sense that Barr strides rapidly across vast subject areas, confidently pointing out this or that feature of the landscape and assessing its importance before resuming his lively and wide-ranging course. It is brusque when certain people come into view, most notably Brevard Childs, but also, for example, James D. Smart, Karl Barth (71: his exegesis was "conducted in a peculiarly contemptuous and superior way"), Philip Davies, and Francis Watson (whose thoughts on Krister Stendahl are called "a grosser and more serious misrepresentation" and "rubbish," 200-201; see also, e.g., 663 n. 30). "Fundamentalists" targeted in other Barr publications generally get off easy (but see reference to Walter Kaiser on 678 and to "Fundamentalism" generally on 686 n. 68; also 578). This is not because Barr has changed his assessment of them but because in this book he tends to ignore them (though there is one favorable reference to F. F. Bruce on 368, and jabs at D. Guthrie, G. E. Ladd, and L. Morris: 649 n. 4). And it is not only a few individuals, or, say, evangelicals as a bloc, who are dismissed by Barr: he finds that in fact the whole lot of "biblical theologians have not generally been strong in logic or in philosophical reasoning" (17). Those accustomed to the *Barr contra mundum* tone marking some of his other writings will find themselves on familiar turf here.

Few books of such length and breadth of coverage can have had so brief a formal conclusion as this one: only three pages. The laconic ending serves notice that here, as in other works, Barr's forte is analysis and critique, not sustained positive presentation of his own constructive synthesis of biblical material. This is not a book that will deepen a reader's understanding of the theology of the OT itself, much less the NT.<sup>12</sup> Its value lies rather in the running commentary it furnishes on the last half-century of discussion in the field, highlighting especially Barr's own definite and colorfully argued opinions of where things have gone wrong and how work might proceed along more fruitful lines. In that sense, as Barr's discussion shapes and sharpens the think-

12. Cf. Jon D. Levenson, "Negative Theology," *First Things* 100 (February 2000): 59: "the volume devotes almost no discussion to the theology of the Bible itself."

ing of readers whose passion is to grasp and present a synthesis of the Bible's theological reflection, the contribution of this book to progress in the field should be warmly welcomed.

BARR, REVELATION IN HISTORY,  
AND OSCAR CULLMANN

Readers who are long of tooth enough to recall Barr's critique of revelation in history back in earlier years might wonder how the question of the concept's relevance can possibly be worth bringing up today. Didn't Barr pretty thoroughly demolish Cullmann's book *Christ and Time* and thus his whole salvation-historical approach?<sup>13</sup> William Abraham notes that "the most devastating criticism" of the *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history) emphasis of the Biblical Theology Movement "came from the pen of James Barr."<sup>14</sup> To this it should first be said that it is a misunderstanding to suppose that "revelation in history" sprang up with Cullmann or the Biblical Theology Movement, when in fact it is a concept common to numerous biblical writers that then enjoyed notable rearticulations, for example, in patristic writers such as Justin and Irenaeus,<sup>15</sup> in covenant theology prior to the Enlightenment and right down to the present day, in German Pietism through J. A. Bengel and others, and in the Lutheran Erlangen school of the nineteenth century. Even if Barr did raise questions for Cullmann, this can hardly have constituted an overthrow of the notion of revelation in history.

Beyond this, it is true that Barr criticized Cullmann's *Christ and Time* for illegitimate reliance on certain linguistic and lexicographical misapprehensions.<sup>16</sup> Yet according to Barr (in personal correspondence), in private conversation Cullmann conceded these weaknesses in *Christ and Time*. His more mature opus *Salvation in History*<sup>17</sup> is based on a different set of arguments.<sup>18</sup> In addition, it can be argued that Cullmann's main findings in *Christ and Time* are based primarily, not on the linguistic or lexical arguments in that book's opening chapters, but on prior historical-exegetical studies dealing with eschatology

13. In private correspondence Barr underscores that his criticisms of Cullmann's linguistic moves should not be taken as an attack on the idea of revelation in history. At the time, however, many did not note this nuance. See also n. 47 below.

14. Abraham, "Revelation Reaffirmed," in *Divine Revelation* (ed. Paul Avis; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 209.

15. See Roy Kearsley, "Christ and History: An Early Version," in *Issues in Faith and History* (ed. Nigel Cameron; Edinburgh: Rutherford, 1989), 87-101.

16. See Barr's *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM, 1969), especially chap. 3.

17. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

18. As Barr notes in "Revelation in History," 747.

and christology. As Dorman notes, when Cullmann in *Salvation in History* declines to base a "time-concept" on lexicography, this is "not so much a retreat from Barr's criticisms as it is a return to Cullmann's own [pre-*Christ and Time*] approach."<sup>19</sup> It appears that Barr has charged Cullmann with faulty use of linguistic evidence but that overall Cullmann's reading of the NT is not primarily based on such evidence.<sup>20</sup> This tends to minimize the force of Barr's arguments (in, e.g., *Biblical Words for Time*) as the ground for an all-embracing critique of Cullmann and by extension of revelation in history. Moreover, Francis Watson has recently raised questions about the validity of Barr's characterization of Cullmann, pointing to "the imprecision of Barr's polemic," to the fact that Barr "simply misreads and misrepresents" Cullmann, and to "the casualness and inattention to detail that characterizes . . . much of" Barr's attack.<sup>21</sup> Without suggesting that Watson has negated every point of Barr's argumentation, I think it is obvious that at least some scholars no longer find his arguments against Cullmann, and therefore against biblical theology's making use of the revelation-in-history motif, to possess knockdown force.

#### BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND REVELATION IN HISTORY

Before commenting further on the pros and cons of Barr's new book, I think it may be helpful to the reader if I clarify what I have in mind by the terms *biblical theology* and *revelation in history*. The very definition of biblical theology has been disputed since Gabler's putative founding of the discipline in 1787,<sup>22</sup> so any definition set forth is sure to meet with criticism. It is easy to sympathize with Barr when he devotes his entire opening chapter to "The Many Faces of Biblical Theology" (1-17). A definition propounded by Theodor Zahn seems, however, to work well for purposes of this article, in part because Zahn dates to before the era when Barr thinks things went off the rails in biblical theology:

"Biblical theology" in itself, unlike systematic, historical, and practical theology, does not designate a branch of theological science. It

19. Dorman, *The Hermeneutics of Oscar Cullmann* (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1983), 181.

20. See Cullmann's own response to Barr in *Christ and Time* (trans. F. Filson; rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 14-16.

21. Watson, *Text and Truth*, 22-23.

22. J. Sandys-Wunsch and L. Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *SJT* 33 (1980): 133-58. For discussion of the discipline, particularly in its early years, see O. Merk, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments in ihrer Anfangszeit* (Marburger Theologische Studien 9; Marburg: Elwert, 1972).

is first of all the object of a discipline and then only in an extended sense the research and presentations based on this object. The object of our discipline is, in keeping with the only admissible sense of its name, the theology contained in the Bible. Here "theology" is not to be understood in the sense of a scientific doctrine of religion, for the Bible contains no such thing. It rather reports, in all its parts, directly or indirectly, a revelation and proclamation of religious truths and a religious knowledge effected in larger circles through those truths. But nowhere in the Bible do we encounter this religious doctrine and knowledge in finished form but rather everywhere as a knowledge that develops progressively in connection with divine revelatory acts and that therefore takes different forms in different stages of its development. For that reason the only sort of presentation of biblical theology that is objective and scientific is one which describes the religious doctrine and knowledge present in the Bible in its historical development and orders its material according to the progressive course of salvation history.<sup>23</sup>

We may leave to the side here possible questions raised by Zahn's use of the words "objective" and "scientific." These expressions mark his definition as originating in a different intellectual climate from ours today. What may be found useful about Zahn's definition are the following two points:

(1) The assertion that the Bible, and to the extent that we are concerned with "New Testament" theology especially the New Testament, contains "a revelation and proclamation of religious truths and a religious knowledge effected in larger circles through those truths." "Revelation" does justice to the unique quality and redemptive efficacy of what the Bible "reports, in all its parts, directly or indirectly." "Proclamation" acknowledges the kerygmatic activity, repristinated out of OT precedent by John the Baptist and continued through Jesus and his disciples, which was fundamental to the identity of God's people in their allegiance to Jesus from the beginning and therefore a component in the historical nexus within which NT theology must be understood. "Religious knowledge" signals that NT theology must embrace both cultus and cognition; it limits itself neither to a comparative-religions phenomenology nor to an explication of timeless doctrinal concepts. Reference to "truths" marks a proper sympathy with the writers and compilers of Scripture themselves, who clearly felt, that in a crazy-quilt world of conflicting religious claims, God in Christ and his reappropriation of OT theology had shed a great deal of definitive light on the human condition and the hope of eternal life.

23. Zahn, *Grundriß der Neutestamentlichen Theologie* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: Deichert, 1932), 1.

In other words, the basic components of Zahn's terse definition stake out a domain broad and rich enough to have some hope of doing justice to the what one finds claimed by the NT writers, whether or not one shares their convictions regarding the truth of their claims. They likewise offer hope of fulfilling Barr's projection that biblical theology should and can be "a participant in the considerations of doctrinal theology" (607). By way of contrast one might point to Bultmann's definition of NT theology, which was fixated on the relative pinpoint of the believer's "new self-understanding."<sup>24</sup> This was an interesting element but one too limited adequately to nourish either historical or doctrinal understanding of the larger NT world and message. Zahn's definition is a marked improvement over Bultmann's, which seems better suited to further deliberations about psychology of religion than about either historical phenomena or doctrinal theology.

(2) The assertion that a presentation of biblical theology "describes the religious doctrine and knowledge present in the Bible in its historical development and orders its material according to the progressive course of salvation history." Once again Zahn affirms the important principle that NT theology involves verities pertaining to both faith and knowledge; a Kantian dualism that casts faith and knowledge as mutually exclusive—which for biblical writers they were clearly not—is called in question by definition.<sup>25</sup> No less important, Zahn speaks of this doctrine and knowledge "in its historical development," calling for an ordering of the material along the lines of a historical progression.

What Zahn provides is a definitional framework loose enough to devote attention *both* to the historical-phenomenal-chronological-empirical data *and* to the theological-noumenal-transcendent-kerigmatic data of NT times and writings. Both history and faith in their mutually conditioning and sequential unfolding are deemed proper objects of study and reflection, and not just one or the other, nor just a static final outcome of the process. In other words, Zahn leaves room for both "history" and "revelation" to have been elements in the first-century mix out of which the NT emerged and to which it points. This means that "revelation in history" quite naturally and properly is at the core of biblical theology as he conceives it and in fact serves as an ordering principle in the NT theology he wrote. One might contrast

24. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; trans. K. Grobel; New York: Scribner's, 1955), 2:239.

25. Informative here are pages from Zahn's predecessor at Erlangen, J. C. K. von Hofmann. As Hofmann sets forth his understanding of NT theology (*Biblische Theologie des neuen Testaments* [ed. W. Volck; Nördlingen: Beck, 1886, 1ff.]), he pointedly and repeatedly glosses *Lehre* ("doctrine") with *Erkenntniss* ("knowledge"). It appears that Zahn operates with this same general anti-idealist outlook. This outlook can be observed in Schlatter, Cullmann, Albertz, and Ladd, as well (on whom, see below).

this, for example, with the thematic rather than organic organizing principle preferred by Julius Kaftan, whose NT theology appeared at about the same time as Zahn's.<sup>26</sup> More broadly, Zahn's program stands in contrast to the *Lehrbegriffe* ("doctrinal concepts") approach that Kaftan traces back to Tübingen, F. C. Baur, and ultimately Hegel,<sup>27</sup> an approach that has repeatedly dominated NT theology and was in fact a feature of the twentieth century's most influential presentation, that of Bultmann, who in large measure reduced NT theology to the doctrine of believing self-understanding attested in Paul and parts of John's writings.

With Zahn's elementary but helpful working definition in mind, we can return to our question of the future of revelation in history in NT theology in the light of Barr's recent study. We will suggest that two words sum up the attitude that NT theology could take toward revelation in history using Barr as a guide: rapprochement and repudiation. Which route things will take is a matter to be decided only with the passage of time. All we can do is discuss them as possibilities, which we will now do in turn.

#### RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE REVELATION IN HISTORY (RIH) GROUP?

First, Barr can be taken as supporting a more tolerant attitude toward revelation in history than he is normally credited with to the extent that he rejects biblical theology in the dialectical theological mode—that is, the mode dominant among those who worked in the train of Barth and Brunner beginning in the 1920s. Barr points to three elements of this theology that he perceives as weaknesses: first, "a strong personalism and existentialism"; second, a "tendency to ignore philosophy, to regard it as an enemy of theology"; and third, a conviction that scholars could educe "a way of thought, a mental pattern . . . from the Bible" and (then apply this thought pattern in reading the Bible "with the assurance that the result would be the right interpretation of the Bible" (147).

Scholars who have made revelation in history integral to their NT theologies would largely agree with Barr's criticisms on these points. I have in mind here not only Theodor Zahn but also other NT theologians that have taken up revelation in history in a positive way in their presentations: J. C. K. von Hofmann, Adolf Schlatter, Martin Albertz, George Ladd, Karl Hermann Schelkle, Donald Guthrie, Leonhard

26.1. Kaftan, *Neutestamentliche Theologie* (Berlin: Warneck, 1927).

27. Ibid., 8: "Baur and his students took Hegel as their starting point; for him the concept [*Begriff*] was the highest and ultimate form of the intellectual and as a result also of religion."

Goppelt, and Oscar Cullmann (hereafter termed the "RIH group"). The particular sort of personalism and existentialism<sup>28</sup> traceable to Kierkegaard and Buber that Barr documents in, for example, Brunner, Bultmann, and G. Ernest Wright could not and did not find a warm reception in most members of the RIH group, because they shared Barr's view that here a philosophy of religion was *being read into* the first-century world, not exegetically *distilled from* sources native to that world. This comes to the fore explicitly, for example, in Schlatter's review of Barth's Romans commentary and in Ladd's extensive interactions with Bultmann.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, members of the RIH group did not demonize philosophy. Admittedly they did not, with the exception of Schlatter, demonstrate a professional competence in it. But one generally searches in vain among the RIH group for dialectical theology's antagonism toward human knowledge that philosophy was felt to epitomize (Goppelt might be a partial exception here).<sup>30</sup> Nor can one easily document in the RIH group a clear and culpable recourse to some biblical mental pattern that serves as the hermeneutical key for biblical theology. Barr claims that "dialectical theologians . . . exploited the contours of [a] biblical thought, which, as it turned out, was remarkably similar to the existentialism we have already seen them to support" (159). The RIH group with its lack of taste for existentialism per se remains free from such a criticism.

A second respect in which Barr can be taken as supporting a more tolerant attitude toward revelation in history than he is normally credited with is found in his defense of OT theology, presenting its findings as what I will call a system with a center. Barr notes the twentieth century's peculiar fascination with, yet rejection of, systematization of biblical thought. He concludes that biblical theology, where it thought it was doing historical-critical exegesis, was sometimes falling prey to "a culturally popular anti-system trend" (333). In one of several humorous ad absurdum flourishes that dot Barr's book, he writes (333):

28. Characteristics of this outlook, according to Barr (150): slogans like "existential decision; events rather than static entities; God in relation, not God in himself; holism not analysis; declaration rather than discussion; hostility to any idea of objectivity."

29. Schlatter, "Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," in *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology* (ed. J. M. Robinson; Richmond: John Knox, 1968), 121-25; Ladd, review of R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, vol. 2, in *WTJ* 18 (1956): 210-15; idem, "The Role of Jesus in Bultmann's Theology," *SJT* 18 (1965): 57-68; idem, "What Does Bultmann Understand by the Acts of God?" *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 5 (1962): 91-97.

30. In addition, one should treat Barr's implicit demand for biblical theologians to come to terms with philosophy with some caution: when they do let Heidegger (149) or Gadamer (510-11) influence them, Barr criticizes them for this.

In contrast to the nineteenth century, when for example Princeton theologians like the Hodges liked to talk about "the Christian system," in the twentieth century it became popular, if one admired a thinker, to declare that he was not a systematic thinker. Plato was not a systematic thinker. Neither was Aristotle. If Aristotle was not, then who was? Thomas Aquinas? No, he was not one either. Hegel? Certainly not. Barth? Of course not. The Old Testament is not systematic. Nor is the New. Nor is the Talmud. Nor is anything in patristic theology. Reality is messy and untidy, and serious thinkers are aware of this. Nothing of note and value is systematic.

Barr proposes that "structure" is better than "system" to describe the OT phenomena and presentations based on it (335). But he concludes that "the common traditional feeling that the Hebrew Bible material resists all systematization is not so well founded as one might have thought" (337) There is no reason to suppose he would think otherwise about the NT.

The same holds true for the idea of a "center" in biblical theology. Barr points out the ease and unjustness with which the idea has been ridiculed (338-39) He argues, however, that in view of major proposals such as those of Eichrodt, Jacob, Vriezen, Terrien, Smend, and others, "more or less all of them have been reasonable proposals and have represented an important element in the theology of the Hebrew Bible" (342). For Barr, as long as "system" or "structure" and "center" are working proposals for the sake of organization and presentation, they are not only permissible but necessary.

Thus we can count Barr in favor of biblical theology's presenting a system, or a least a structure, with a center. Here, too, the RIH group supports Barr's view and even exemplifies it. Let us take both an older and newer RIH theologian as examples: Hofmann and Schlatter. Hofmann's structure is clearly present and takes the form of a chronological unfolding under the rubric of "the doctrinal content of the New Testament Scripture," broken down as follows:

1. The Prior Announcement of the New Testament Appearance of Salvation
2. The Testimony of [John] the Baptizer
3. Jesus' Testimony during His Earthly Life
4. The Instruction of the Disciples by the Resurrected Jesus
5. The Teaching of Jesus' Witnesses.
  - a. Among Their People
  - b. Among the Early Jewish Church
  - c. The Apostolic Preaching in Regions beyond Israel
    - (1) The Apostolic Preaching for the Purpose of Conversion to Jesus
    - (2) The Apostolic Teaching within Gentile Christendom

We note here two things. First, there is clearly a structure. The arrangement is not random, nor is it purely thematic or dogmatic. Rather the discussion, while it seeks to present doctrinal content, is structured along the lines of a historical progression. Second, there is also a center. The center is not reductionist, as if all the doctrine pointed to a solitary truth. Nor is it illicitly dogmatic; Hofmann states that "the doctrinal statements of the Scripture are to be taken up and articulated without dogmatic prejudice of this or that sort and without critique that is determined by such prejudice."<sup>31</sup> The center is, rather, the doctrinal content present in the sources themselves. Hofmann is thus optimistic that his presentation will have unity. Yet he is loathe to prescribe what that is in advance, preferring to let it emerge as exegesis proceeds. This is very much in the spirit of what Barr states (343): "biblical theology . . . has to depend upon detailed exegesis and submit to its authority."

Structure and center are seen in Schlatter's NT theology, too. As for structure, as in Hofmann, chronology is key. Volume 1<sup>32</sup> examines

1. The Preparation for Jesus' Work
2. The Turning Point in Jesus' Life
3. The Offer of God's Grace to Israel
4. Jesus' Way to the Cross
5. The Easter Account

Volume 2<sup>33</sup> reflects a similar chronological concern as it treats

1. The Disciples' Vantage Point at the Beginning of Their Work
2. The Convictions Upheld by Jesus' Followers
3. The Calling of the Nations through Paul
4. The Share of Apostolic Associates in Doctrinal Formulation
5. The Knowledge Possessed by the Early Church

In both volumes Schlatter proceeds cognizant of the historical unfolding of the theology or theologies that he describes. While "system" is too rigid a term, Schlatter does arrive at a synthetic picture of NT theology that possesses coherence and in that sense structure. And it is a structure with a center: the life and ministry and enduring will of Jesus, as these were taken up and furthered by the leaders and the community of the apostolic churches. It is also a structure in which chronology is paramount. Barr has Schlatter on his side when he insists on "the importance of the chronological material in the Bible and

31. Hofmann, *Biblische Theologie*, 3.

32. Schlatter, *The History of the Christ* (trans. A. Köstenberger; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

33. Idem, *The Theology of the Apostles* (trans. A. Köstenberger; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

its intended 'objective' character" (167), though Schlatter also understands the limitations of chronological analysis in, for example, Gospel narrative.<sup>34</sup>

A third way in which Barr seems to support a more tolerant attitude toward revelation in history than he is normally credited with lies in his call for "Natural Theology within Biblical Theology" (chap. 27). It is important to note here that for Barr "natural theology does not deny revelation; rather, it maintains that revelation can and does take place on the basis of what is already known, of anterior knowledge" (474). By "anterior knowledge" Barr means "knowledge of something about God that is anterior to some further and perhaps more complete revelation" (473). To state Barr's position positively (470):

there is something validly known of God, revealed through his created works, which is accessible to all human beings through their being human, and which through the law 'written in the heart' forms a resource for moral decision. And even if that is not natural theology in the developed sense [i.e., the sense "seen in the Cappadocian Fathers or in the Middle Ages"], it is closer to the basis of natural theology than it is to the revelation-centered, kerygmatic, theology that has been dominant in most of the twentieth century.

Hofmann utters similar words when he notes that in Romans 1, according to Paul, "God is revealed in the creation," so that human beings at large "have a consciousness of right and wrong."<sup>35</sup> At some length Schlatter articulates the principle that Barr seems exercised to assert against the Barthians:

Therefore the disciples remained linked with all people through an inner communal bond that continually guided them in their work. Just as their vision of the Creator made them at home in nature . . . the idea of the Creator gave their dealings with others transparent courage and public visibility that were plain for all to see. The question could not arise whether there were people for whom ethical norms did not exist, so that their blameworthy behavior was not to be condemned as sin, or those for whom the promise was invalid because they were incapable of the knowledge of God. All are creatures and stand in an unalterable dependence on God. . . . [T]he concept of creation already provided the certainty that no one was in complete darkness but that the divine word illumined everyone who came into the world.<sup>36</sup>

Both Hofmann and Schlatter, as RIH theologians, side with Barr on the question of the extent to which "publicly available knowledge and

34. *The History of the Christ*, 23.

35. Hofmann, *Biblische Theologie*, 211.

36. Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles*, 30-31.

in that sense . . . natural theology" (478) are central to biblical theology. Another way of saying this is that there is at least potentially a positive relationship between history and theology. History can be and has been a vehicle for the revelatory, so that revelation does not need to be viewed as a purely otherworldly incursion, impervious to all natural modes of human apprehension. Nor must revelation be conceived as something antithetical to creation and history. The two are in fact inseparably intertwined. This insight is fundamental not only to Hofmann and Schlatter but also to others in the RIH group.

One gathers from Barr that a reason for his concern on the point of natural theology is that dialectical theology too often substituted unverifiable theological rhetoric for grounded intellectual reflection that is open, for example, to the findings of historical investigation and insights from the history of religion. Barr thinks that "there is, within the Bible, an element which points towards a theological source or reality that lies outside the Bible" (494). Yet this "does not mean pointing to something that lies outside the range and being of the one God, the God of Israel" (495). It seems that Barr finds himself in conflict with twentieth-century Barthian biblical theology on the point of the relation of God to the world and to human thought.

In this connection it is instructive to note just how close Barr's disavowal of dialectical theology's ahistoricism is to Schlatter. Commenting on the approach to the knowledge of God in Barth's *Romans* commentary, Schlatter writes:

Barth's God is "the Other," who is other than we are and other than the world is. From this arises the powerful No which he places over against the entire state of the world, including the highest and purest in human life. All that we are, possess, and achieve is therefore judged, for it is not God, not divine, and therefore stands under the law of condemnation and negation.<sup>37</sup>

The problem here, in Schlatter's outlook, is that Barth's No sets in motion a chain reaction. The first thing to be affected is one of the items of which Barr's whole book seems intent on affirming the necessity: wide-eyed and rigorous thinking. But Schlatter as a RIH thinker makes this point even more sharply than Barr does:

The "No" which Barth places on our entire life situation falls with devastating force on the act of thinking. In that God is the unattainably distant, the "Other," every thought directed to God breaks down; every religious statement, every theology, becomes basically folly, or they can speak only in perpetual self-contradictions. . . . In its exposition [of *Romans*] the church [through the centuries] has

37. Idem, "Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 123.

earnestly endeavored to determine clearly and comprehensively what the Pauline expressions are. But [Barth's] exposition rejects participation in this work. What good would it do? The religious words are after all only a covering for what is entirely incomprehensible.<sup>38</sup>

And it is not only thinking that is affected by the Barthian ahistoricism. Schlatter observes, "If the act of thinking is shattered, faith does not remain untouched, since it needs a content that is accessible to our perception, and [that] can be appropriated by us by means of solid judgment."<sup>39</sup> However wide a gap there may be between Barr and the RIH group, this fundamental agreement on the potentially positive relation between knowledge of God and natural human modes of knowing is significant.

This last point deserves amplification. On the very last page of his book (607), Barr lists as a major conclusion that "the theology of the Bible is . . . defined by a historical quantifier, expressed by the very rough formula of 'biblical times and cultures.'" On the same page he adds that the "doctrinal theology" which biblical theology is concerned with "consists in very large measure of historical theology," so that "we thus have a continuity between biblical theology and the historical component of doctrinal theology." This outlook, Barr feels, marks a departure from the dialectical theology he calls in question. It is also a departure from, for example, the very recent OT theology of Walter Brueggemann, which Barr criticizes because in it "*history altogether* is very largely ignored" (545; Barr's emphasis). Barr's sense of departure from other scholars is probably well founded, but his insistence on history's importance for biblical theology is little more than a restatement of the theory and practice of numerous RIH theologians. At least four of them—Hofmann, Schlatter, Alhertz, and Goppelt—wrote discrete NT histories,<sup>40</sup> demonstrating their commitment to the temporal nexus and development of biblical thought as ancillary to and in some ways constitutive of the doctrinal essence of it. And both Hofmann and Schlatter reflected explicitly on how history and doctrine necessarily intertwine in the construction of a biblical theology.<sup>41</sup> In other words,

38. *Ibid.*, 124.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Hofmann, *Die biblische Geschichte des neuen Testaments*; Schlatter, *The Church in the New Testament Period* (trans. P. Levertoff; London: SPCK, 1961); Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (trans. R. Guelich; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980). The first two parts of Alhertz's four-part *Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947-57) were devoted to NT history. These two parts constituted *Die Entstehung der Botschaft*: volume 1 was *Die Entstehung des Evangeliums* (1947); volume 2, *Die Entstehung des apostolischen Schriftenkanons* (1952).

41. E.g., Hofmann, *Biblische Theologie*, 1-8; Schlatter, "The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," in Robert Morgan, *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (SBT 2/25; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1973), 117-66.

Barr is instructive in canvassing the last half-century's scholarship for models of biblical theology that will give us constructive precedents for the new century. But he might have paid more attention to a body of scholarship that has long devoted attention to concerns that Barr feels are currently at the fore in the discipline. The RIH group is at least as suggestive for biblical theology as the work of NT scholar Heikki Räisänen, to which Barr devotes the whole of chap. 30 of his book.

#### REPUDIATION OF REVELATION IN HISTORY?

Above we have suggested that Barr's position at some points supports a revelation-in-history component in biblical theology of sufficient centrality that key components of his program are congruent with emphases of RIH scholars. But it would be unfair to call attention only to this possible rapprochement. For on another reading of Barr, the same dim view of revelation in history that he has registered in the past might be taken to be his recommendation to readers for the future. There are numerous passages that make one think that Barr would more happily be seen as repudiating a "revelation in history" (RIH) emphasis than supporting some reaffirmation of it. I will call attention to eight such passages. The list is illustrative and not exhaustive.

First, Barr points to problems associated with von Rad's *heilsgeschichtlich* emphasis (34-35, 47). To the extent that a RIH emphasis and von Rad's treatment are viewed as congruent, there is reason to restrict if not reject the usefulness of the rubric. Second, he suggests that perhaps "large and comprehensive volumes" treating the whole of OT theology may be less important than more-selective studies of restricted scope (52-53); this might be taken to question the legitimacy of a reading of the OT making use of revelation in history, or any other single category, as an all-embracing principle. Third, Barr is clearly not enamored of what he calls a "pan-biblical theology" because it "would have to think of a continuum including both Old and New Testament as one 'time' and culture" (4), which might be taken to preclude the sort of redemptive-historical sequence that RIH thinkers commonly claim to identify. Fourth, sometimes a RIH emphasis is thought to necessitate a *Sondergeschichte*, what Barr calls "a special or absolute distinctiveness of Israel's religion in relation to the general history of religion" (103); for Barr and no doubt others, this would constitute grounds to severely limit or even reject RIH. Fifth, Barr seems to define "revelational" in contradistinction to the history of religion that he finds intrinsic to biblical theology properly understood (116); if this understanding were to prove accurate and necessary, it would seem to rule out RIH by ruling out "revelation" itself. Sixth, Barr points out that critical source analysis of the OT "disintegrated"

the idea of "a unitary theological truth . . . one might say, God's own theology, directly expressed by the Bible" (18). If RIH is thought to necessitate this kind of "unitary" theological manifestation, then clearly Barr rules it out. We will revisit this below. Seventh, part of what appears to provoke Barr's ire about Barth is the fact that he has been used to support "conservative" theology "in the English-speaking world" (170), such as Childs's theology, for example. To the extent that RIH is part of the Barthian synthesis, Barr is clearly bound to reject it. Eighth, Barr affirms that OT theology and NT theology are "not congruent, nor even closely analogical" (186). If I understand Barr correctly, he is saying that, while they do belong together theologically for Christian dogmatic purposes, from the standpoint of academic historical work a great gulf is fixed between the two both in terms of the soteriology implied and the historical connections that exist between them: "A synthetic theological account, expressly formulated as one of the Old Testament itself, cannot necessarily cope with, or be improved by, or establish, connections with the New Testament" (185). This seems to rule out an academic reading of OT and NT together if RIH be thought to serve as a necessary uniting principle.

Here it is important, however, to note that Barr's criticism of biblical theology, as a whole or in part, is not tantamount to rejection. The opposite is in fact the case. Barr writes, "Nothing is achieved by expressions of undying commitment to biblical theology or enthusiasm for it. It is those who look critically at it who can hope to make some progress in it" (229). By this standard Barr, far from necessarily calling for repudiation of RIH by raising questions about it, may in fact be involved in a sort of purifying operation that will make practicable, if not RIH, then at least a biblical theology amenable to RIH. And in fact an important argument Barr advances is that "within Christianity, the Old Testament is related to the total work of salvation (and thereby related also to the New Testament) not only through what it is in itself but also indirectly through the tradition of interpretation which grew up from it" (279). Barr is arguing here for an understanding of OT tradition that sees its continuation into the generations following OT times proper and then its transformation and reappropriation by Jewish, Jewish Christian, and eventually Gentile Christian thinkers in the first century. In this connection Barr posits what must follow if a RIH emphasis be adopted: "if there is a 'history of salvation,' then the historical development of Jewish tradition, between the Old Testament and the time of Jesus, is part of that history of salvation" (281). We need not concern ourselves here with Barr's larger argument that extrabiblical Jewish tradition, whether intertestamental or Talmudic, should be on exactly equal footing with Old and New Testaments as a source of biblical theology. All we need observe is that Barr's call for

attention to "the historical development of the Jewish tradition" is a commonplace in RIH scholarship. At this point Barr could repudiate the RIH emphasis only at the risk of self-contradiction.

Nevertheless, it is possible to read Barr as adamantly opposed to RIH's being accorded much of a place in biblical theology. Three aspects of his book imply such opposition and suggest that Barr's proposals will, for some, militate against RIH's meeting much approval.

First, there is Barr's myopia regarding what data are relevant to the RIH discussion. It is of course not fair to criticize his book for not discussing everything, and Barr achieves a remarkable breadth of coverage. But he knows, for example, to cite Peter Hodgson in favor of a positive regard for Hegel in biblical theology (657 n. 6), or William Abraham on various points of hermeneutics and historiography. Whole chapters are devoted to people such as Räsänen and Brueggemann, for whom RIH is clearly either nonexistent or irrelevant. Unmentioned is the large body of literature relating to the discussion such as that found in Hodgson and Abraham, much of it positively inclined toward RIH. A work by Paul Gwynne, *Special Divine Action: Key Issues in the Contemporary Debate* (1965-1995)<sup>42</sup> chronicles developments in the last quarter-century. Barr's lack of attention to this discussion is a loss, because, while his arguments can be taken to repudiate RIH, Gwynne (who returns the favor and overlooks Barr) concludes that "the concept of SDA [special divine action] seems to be far from collapsing and there are good reasons for affirming its coherence and credibility."<sup>43</sup> Gwynne arrives at this conclusion precisely by consulting recent work in philosophy—William Alston, Giovanni Blandino, Brian Hebblethwaite, John Polkinghorne, Richard Swinburne—a discipline that Barr demands biblical scholarship come to terms with but largely ignores himself. That Barr and Gwynne have talked past each other is the more lamentable because both wrestle with the difference, if any, between natural and revelatory theology. We have seen this above in Barr. Gwynne makes the following statement:

Without denying the reality of a general revelation theoretically available to all human persons via creation itself and via the religious history and cultures of the whole race, Christian theology insists on the additional dimension of a "special" revelation which involves notions such as election, covenant, prophetic and biblical inspiration, God's "mighty deeds" in history, incarnation, resurrection and miracles.<sup>44</sup>

42. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1996.

43. *Ibid.*, 326. In Gwynne's treatment, RIH is not the same as SDA but is subsumed under it.

44. *Ibid.*, 8.

Gwynne is by no means alone in a sympathetic assessment of RIH's intellectual viability in contemporary academic work. To the extent that Barr has either intentionally overlooked or is simply not interested in interacting with discussion in the sizable literature accessible through Gwynne, he seems to be in favor of a lesser rather than a greater place for RIH in biblical theology in the future.

Inattention to pro-RIH literature may be slightly more culpable after the appearance of C. John Collins's *God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God's Action in the World*.<sup>45</sup> This learned treatment by someone who took up OT theology and biblical linguistics following scientific training at MIT is a noteworthy footnote to recent discussion of a number of matters relating to both RIH and biblical theology. Perhaps most notably, Collins takes us behind the familiar modernist and "scientific" world view that Barr seems to presuppose. Let us term Barr's apparent functional metaphysic nonsupernaturalism. Collins examines this outlook from more angles than Barr ever does to justify it but comes to a very different conclusion regarding which outlook does the most justice to biblical exegesis, history, philosophy, and science. Whether in the realm of "intelligent design" or of "redemptive historical miracles," Collins concludes that "supernaturalism has biblical support and . . . when carefully articulated it can hold its own" against not only Barr-type objections but others as well. While we cannot bring Collins and Barr into further dialogue here, it seems fair to say that for biblical theology to give short shrift to RIH based on Barr's inattention to recent discussion of it may prove premature.

Barr can be taken to repudiate RIH in biblical theology for a second reason: he seems to link validity in biblical theological discussion with repudiation of key affirmations of historic Christian exegesis and theology. What I mean is that, although Barr explicitly labels himself a Christian (186, 302), he seems to define this as compatible with the following: (1) the NT errs in its understanding of Gen 15:6 and Abraham's justification by faith (262); (2) the Reformation (which Childs defends as getting many things pretty much right) got things pretty much wrong (401); (3) the concept of covenant was no important aspect of early Christian belief (173; cf. 220; does Barr commit the word-concept fallacy here?); (4) Christ should not have the exclusive status accorded to him that he receives in classic Christology but, rather, the paramount-among-equal status that natural theology and a world religions outlook might grant (486-88); (5) talk of "revelation" and "knowledge of God" is somewhat foreign to the Bible itself, so that instead of revelation we should just speak of "cumulative tradition" (484-86); (6) a NT theology that "is centered in a person sent from God

45. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000.

as mediator" is of a very different nature "from a theology that can be built upon any holistic reading of the Old Testament" (186); and (7) to talk of "theology" in either the OT or NT or of "faith" in the OT is to retroject Christian dogmatics back into earlier times and texts for which "theology" and "faith" were not really present (257). More examples could be cited.

I am not suggesting that a "Christian" must positively affirm every one of these things. I am merely noting that Barr's reaffirmation of the value of biblical theology seems to entail a certain equivocation in the definition of "theology." Many would take a Christian reading of the Bible to imply endorsement, or at least not denial, of some of the above items that Barr calls in question. Of course one may study the Bible and conclude that these items are absent, false, or the outcome of bad exegesis. But it would be a strange "biblical" theology produced by a professing "Christian" that proceeded on the assumption that such central doctrines, thought to be affirmed by key biblical texts and figures such as the apostles and Christ himself, can or even must be jettisoned. At times Barr gives the impression that this is the only direction that the discipline can rightly proceed. "Christian" turns out to mean "post-Christian." Robert Morgan has alluded to a mode of interpretation in which "modern historical study is necessarily a weapon of anti-Christian argument."<sup>46</sup> This constitutes, of course, a repudiation of RIH as commonly understood, and perhaps important ideals of scholarship as well.

A third way in which Barr's work at least implicitly calls in question RIH is his insufficiently critical acceptance of historical criticism (see, e.g., 81, 83).<sup>47</sup> He "casts his lot . . . with . . . that community of interpretation that is the modern pluralistic university."<sup>48</sup> "[H]istorical-critical operations were never so damaging to theological perception

46. Morgan, "Bornkamm, Gunther (1905-1990)," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), 442.

47. In private correspondence Barr insists that he nowhere objects to RIH because of historical criticism. But it cannot be denied that his works have created the impression both that he is critical of RIH and that he operates within ideological parameters commonly connoted by the term "historical critical": in addition to references elsewhere in this essay see, e.g., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 48; V. Philips Long, "Historiography of the Old Testament," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker/Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 154 with n. 25. When Barr makes this statement: "History means only what we mean by our use of the word 'history.' . . . We do not apply the term 'history' to a form of investigation which resorts to divine agency as a mode of explanation" (*Explorations and Theology 7: The Scope and Authority of the Bible* [London: SCM, 1980], 8-9), a fundamental component of RIH scholarship (God's causal involvement in the historical nexus) appears to be ruled out by (historical-critical) definition.

48. Levenson, "Negative Theology," *First Things* 100 (February 2000): 60.

as modern fashions would have us believe" (145). "[N]o serious biblical theology has arisen where . . . truly conservative anti-critical principles have prevailed" (83). It is wrong for any theology to be "against biblical criticism" ('84). He thinks historical criticism in full Enlightenment dress has been only good for biblical theology. He cannot understand why dialectical theology ever rose up in protest over the sterility of earlier liberal exegesis, which Barr defends. But his defense involves, first, an inexplicable rejection of the plain testimony of people like Barth and Cullmann, who tell us that their liberal teachers had substituted some sort of *Kulturprotestantismus* for the gospel, which in turn necessitated a radical adjustment to prevailing liberal hermeneutics and historiography by a new generation of scholars.<sup>49</sup> Beyond this, Barr overlooks the extent to which much (not all) historical-critical exegesis, even when it is not indebted to a formal liberal dogmatics, nevertheless has tended to arrive at either no biblical theology or a neologistic biblical theology.

Rejection of biblical theology (at least as often understood) can be seen, for example, in the work of Wrede and more recently in J. M. Robinson and Heikki Räisänen.<sup>50</sup> Neologistic biblical theology is visible in, for example, Bultmann. When he speaks of "faith" in Paul, one eventually realizes that this is faith bereft of any necessary historical referent. Thus he must correct what Paul himself says in 1 Cor 15 about affirmation of the fact that the resurrection is intrinsic to Christian faith. Bultmann does not accept this. So, while he still uses the word "faith" to describe Paul's doctrine, he defines it in opposition to what Paul himself says, thus creating a de facto neologism. That is, he attributes to a biblical word a sanitized connotation that did not attach to it in the writer's own usage but that does meet the demands of a modern intellectual synthesis. The same holds true of Bultmann's talk of resurrection, inasmuch as Paul believed that Jesus' body was somehow resurrected into God's presence, while Bultmann felt this to be a scientific and therefore a historical impossibility.<sup>51</sup>

49. For Barth, see E. Busch, *Karl Barth* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). Barth's break with liberalism is perhaps most accessibly documented in J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*. For Cullmann see, e.g., "An Autobiographical Sketch," *SJT* 14 (1961): 228-33. Barth's contention that modern beliefs (of various kinds) have tended to suppress the biblical witness is patent in, for example, "Gottes Heilsplan in der Weltgeschichte: Heil in Christus als Problem für die Gegenwart," *Evangelische Kommentare* 12 (1974): 730-33.

50. See Wrede's essay in Robert Morgan, *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, 68-116, 182-93; Robinson, "The Future of New Testament Theology," *RelSRev* 2 (1976): 17-23; Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology* (2nd ed.; London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity, 2001).

51. Cf. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:295-306.

"Neology" proper refers to an eighteenth-century theological tendency in which figures such as Semler (1725-91), Ernesti (1708-81), and Michaelis (1717-91) played a leading role. What they did, it could be argued, answers very well to what Barr both praises and practices in biblical theological work that affirms a historical-critical outlook with too little attention to its postbiblical prejudices. The neologists

set to work not to deny revelation as such . . . but to attack the dogma handed down as revelation in a number of places and then ultimately to cut it down to the point . . . [that] revelation . . . approximately reached the extent of what was thought to be secured as the rational truth of religion, namely, the ideas of God, of freedom or morality, and of immortality.<sup>52</sup>

We noted above that Barr calls for biblical "theology" that appears to deny key elements of a Christian reading of the Bible. More than anything this would appear to be a function of Barr's embrace of a historical-critical way of looking at the biblical subject matter.

The neologists' hallmark was that "they could not separate critical methods from the ideology which lay behind them."<sup>53</sup> It may be suspected that Barr's proposals, to a significant degree, embody the same distinctive. The keen spirit of historical criticism that gives his work its bite and appeal may too often circumscribe the results at which exegesis and synthesis can arrive. For this reason, in the end his book may give little more encouragement to biblical theology in which RIH receives due recognition than have his writings of recent decades. Still, the tenacity of the revelation-in-history concept in past and present discussion is remarkable. For many who think the task of achieving an integrated view of NT theology, along with its OT underpinnings, still worth pursuing, an RIH emphasis may continue to prove fruitful. Either way, Barr has once more contributed substantially to the discussion sure to take place in coming years.<sup>54</sup>

52. Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1973), 164.

53. Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 258.

54. I wish to thank Professor Barr for his courtesy in helpful correspondence that did much to shape the final form of this essay.