Relationship between the two testaments

relating the
Old and New Testaments
in Christian biblical theology

A look ahead

- Suggested approaches
  - OT as essential Bible
  - NT as essential Bible
  - OT and NT as one salvation-history
  - OT and NT as equally Scripture

- Question of biblical-theological meaning
  - Meaning established by authorial intent
  - Meaning discovered in community
  - Meaning unfolding through redemptive history

Suggested approaches

- OT as essential Bible
- NT as essential Bible
- OT and NT as one salvation-history
- OT and NT as equally Scripture

OT as essential Bible

- The early church's problem was not what to do with the OT but rather what to do with the emerging NT.
- This view thinks that strictly speaking, only the OT is 'Scripture', and the NT is explanatory gloss (Vischer, van Ruler).
  - The two testaments speak of one God and his kingdom (van Ruler); however,…
  - We must let the OT speak for itself as prior to the NT (Barr).

OT as essential Bible (cont.)

- Problems with this view:
  - Makes Jesus sound like God's unplanned emergency measure (Baker).
  - Could leave us sabbatarians, polygamists, and Unitarians.
  - Misses how Jesus' resurrection and his post-resurrection teaching opened the church's eyes to read the OT better than before (Luke 24).

NT as essential Bible

- This approach treats…
  - the NT as essential Bible and OT as *background* for it.
  - the OT as a 'miscarriage' (*Sheitern*) of salvation-history (Bultmann), or frustrated salvation-history (Baumgärtel), which the NT corrects.
  - the OT as something the church could ultimately live without.
- It fails to deal well with…
  - the historicity of revelation and faith (cf. Gnosticism).
  - corporate vs. existential salvation (cf. Existentialism).
  - Jesus' words about not abolishing but rather fulfilling (Matt 5:17–19).
  - Paul's words plenary profitability of OT (2 Tim 3:16–17).

OT and NT as one salvation-history

- History is the medium of revelation
  - OT and NT form one gracious salvation-history (von Rad).
  - Biblical theology is the 'confessional recital' of God's redemptive acts (G. E. Wright).
  - Israel (anticipatory) and the church (fulfillment) rehearse the same sovereign grace salvation story, which is only understood at the end of the story (Pannenberg).
- Problem: General creedal focus of this approach is on *Geschichte* but can say little about *Historie.*

OT & NT as equally Scripture

- Examples: Vischer, Barth, Childs
- Both testaments witness to Christ
  - The OT looking forward through type and prophecy
    - Knight: parallels between God's acts through his 'son' Israel and his son Jesus
    - Vischer: OT typological foreshadowing; NT fulfillment
  - The NT saying Christ came 'according to the Scriptures' (e.g., κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς)
- Caution
  - Unity of OT and NT, but *not* identity
  - Neither OT nor NT is timeless revelation
  - NT fulfillment sometimes surprising

Question of biblical-theological meaning

- Meaning established by authorial intent (E. D. Hirsch, Walter Kaiser)
- Meaning discovered in community (Fish, Wittgenstein)
- Meaning unfolded through redemptive history

Meaning established by authorial intent

- Meaning is *fixed*, it's determined by an author.
  - 'Meaning' implies an author who meant something.
  - Unconscious meaning is possible, but only as an implied extension (typological?) of the intended meaning.
  - Interpretation involves 're-cognition' of the author's meaning.

Authorial intent (cont.)

- 'Significance' is *variable*, it's relational, situational.
  - Author may change his mind about significance.
  - Another reader may claim to understand the significance better than even the author did.
- You can distinguish but not separate meaning and significance.
  - An author must have intended some significant meaning.
  - Significance cannot be drawn out as arbitrary claim that cannot be connected meaningfully to the text.

Meaning discovered in community

- Stanley Fish: determinative role of community conventions for interpretation
  - Useful idea if adopted with caution:
    - Communication of meaning involves not only an author but a receptor.
    - Communication succeeds best when author and reader are from same interpretive community.
    - We might adapt this by insisting that Bible reading succeeds only when done in a 'canonical community'.
      - Early church failures in this led to Gnostic takes on the NT.
      - Modern failures in this are just as devastating.
  - Cannot displace authorial intent

Meaning discovered in community (cont.)

- Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Sprachspiele*)
  - Said community is the source of the 'rules' of its 'language-game'.
  - Analysis
    - Can't impose autonomous community 'rules' on another community's text.
    - But must enter into the *Sprachspiele* of the canonical community.
    - The OT is the only proper 'playing ground' for joining the NT language game—or the *biblical* language game.

Meaning unfolded through redemptive history

- Negative approaches to redemptive history
  - Bultmann: OT necessary for preunderstanding of NT, but…
    - … 'the OT is no longer revelation as it has been'.
    - Israel's history is no longer our history.
  - Bruner: Cannot understand the NT without the OT, but…
    - …because the OT is 'completely unaffected by the whole Hellenic spirit'.
    - But what of ANE spirit that embued the OT world?
  - Don't these existential approaches 'annihilate history' (Voeglin)?
    - Doesn't text point to a horizon of reality outside itself, outside our own existential existence.
    - Don't these existential approaches set an unrealistic chasm between *Historie* and *Geschichte*?

Meaning and redemptive history (cont.)

- Key role of typological patterns
    - God's saving activity for Israel provides the pattern for us to understand God's activity in Christ.
    - It evokes the only *Vortverständnis* for Christian faith.
    - It's God's revelatory word that brings to the OT text its imperatival power,
        - Not its supposed freedom from the Hellenic spirit or even from its ANE setting.
        - Not because of its unique Existential authenticity.
- Revelation comes through history:
    - Cannot substitute existential encounter for historical roots.
    - Must retain *real* links between *Historie* and the *Geschichte* we proclaim.