

- **Biblical Theology versus the History of Early Christian Religion**  
**Finnish Scholarship in a Debate**
- *Théologie biblique ou histoire de la religion chrétienne primitive:*  
*Un débat entre théologiens finlandais*
- *Biblische Theologie gegen Religionsgeschichte des frühen Christentums*  
*Eine Debatte in der finnischen Wissenschaft*

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## RÉSUMÉ

Les théologiens finlandais sont depuis quelques temps en débat au sujet de la théologie biblique. Deux tendances s'opposent. Les théologiens de l'université d'Helsinki (avec le professeur H. Räisänen) ont adopté une attitude plutôt radicale à l'égard de l'Écriture. La position opposée a été défendue au sein de l'université de langue suédoise de Turku, l'université d'Abo (avec le professeur J. Thurén), ainsi que dans l'Institut Théologique d'Helsinki. La discussion principale tourne autour de la nature de la théologie biblique, mais d'autres points particuliers y sont liés.

A propos de la notion paulinienne de la loi, le professeur Räisänen considère qu'il n'est pas possible de trouver dans les écrits de Paul un enseignement cohérent sur la loi. Il pense que Paul se borne à formuler, selon les circonstances, des déclarations fondées sur un principe christologique. Le professeur Thurén conteste cette interprétation provocante dans une étude où il souligne la richesse de la théologie paulinienne et met en garde contre la tentation de vouloir isoler un thème particulier dans l'ensemble des écrits de l'apôtre.

Un autre élément de ce débat concerne notre compréhension du Judaïsme. La

plupart des spécialistes finlandais se sont ralliés à la théorie développée par E. P. Sanders. T. Laato, de Turku, a ouvert la discussion en soulignant l'importance d'une bonne compréhension du synergisme judaïque pour saisir la pensée de Paul. La théorie de Sanders est-elle compatible avec les données objectives que nous avons sur le jadaïsme du second temple? La chose est contestée, comme aussi d'autres questions dans le cadre de cette controverse.

Le débat porte néanmoins surtout sur la nature de la théologie biblique elle-même. Le professeur Räisänen admet un déroulement de l'histoire du christianisme primitif qui s'oppose à la théologie biblique traditionnelle. Pour lui, le Nouveau Testament est un document humain où des expériences personnelles servent de base à des idées religieuses dans une tension dialectique entre la tradition, l'expérience et l'interprétation. Cela conduit à une programme de théologie naturelle qui aboutit à une impasse en théologie biblique.

Des théologiens finlandais s'efforcent de trouver une issue à ce genre de thèse destructrice pour construire une théologie biblique qui maintienne l'unité de la Bible et de la théologie.



## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Schon seit geraumer Zeith führt die finnische Wissenschaft eine Debatte über biblische Theologie. Das Feld hat sich in zwei Lager aufgeteilt. Auf der einen Seite haben Forscher an der Universität Helsinki (mit Prof. H. R. Räisänen) eine ziemlich radikale Haltung zur Bibel angenommen. Eine andere Ansicht entstand demgegenüber an der schwedischsprachigen Universität Turku, der Åbo Akademi (mit Prof. J. Thurén), zusammen mit dem Finnischen Theologischen Institut in Helsinki. Die Hauptfrage ist die nach dem Wesen biblischer Theologie, doch damit verbunden sind auch einige speziellere Fragen.

Im Blick auf das paulinische Gesetzesverständnis vertritt Prof. Räisänen eine Interpretation, nach welcher es nicht möglich ist, ein zusammenhängendes und konsistentes Gesetzverständnis in den paulinischen Texten zu finden. Nach seiner Ansicht schreibt Paulus nur ad-hoc-Aussagen, basierend auf einem christologischen Prinzip. Prof. Thurén beantwortete diese herausfordernde Interpretation mit einer Studie, in der er den Reichtum paulinischer Theologie herausstellte und davor warnte, ein einziges Thema aus der Gesamtheit paulinischen Schrifttums herauszulösen.

Ein weiteres Thema in der Debatte ist

das Verständnis des Judentums. Die meisten finnischen Forscher akzeptierten E. P. Sanders' Theorie vom Bundesnomismus. Die Diskussion wurde eröffnet von Dr. T. Laato (Turku), der die Wichtigkeit eines richtigen Verständnisses des jüdischen Synergismus als einem Faktor im Paulusstudium betonte. Auch im Blick auf andere Themen wurde die Übereinstimmung der Theorie von E. P. Sanders mit der Wirklichkeit des Judentums zur Zeit des zweiten Tempels angezwiefelt.

Die Hauptdebatte befaßt sich jedoch mit dem Wesen biblischer Theologie selbst. Prof. Räisänen hat ein Programm der Geschichte frühchristlicher Religion vorgetragen, in dem er traditionelle biblische Theologie verwirft. Nach Räisänen ist das Neue Testament ein Dokument menschlichen Nachdenkens, in dem persönliche Erfahrungen umgewandelt wurden zu religiösen Ideen in einer 'Dialektik zwischen Tradition, Erfahrung und Interpretation.' Dies hat zu einem Programm natürlicher Theologie geführt, welches dann als solches zu einer Sackgasse in biblischer Theologie führt.

Die finnische Wissenschaft versucht einen Weg aus dieser Art von Destruktivität zu finden und eine biblische Theologie aufzubauen, in welcher Theologie und die Einheit der Bibel bewahrt bleiben.

Finland, far from the geographical centre of Europe, has for a time been a centre for biblical radicalism in many ways. Finnish scholarship has had an increasing impact on international discussion and there has been a heated debate among Finnish scholars themselves. The Finnish debate has been rather polarized. One side has been working and writing mainly at the University

of Helsinki with the New Testament professor Heikki Räisänen. The other side has been gathering around two centres. Professor Jukka Thurén (recently retired) has been a central figure in the Swedish speaking small university of Turku, Åbo Akademi. The second centre has been the Finnish Theological Institute in Helsinki. These last two have also had a great deal of interaction and co-operation.<sup>1</sup>



A debate, in itself, may for some people be an embarrassing thing even to read about. We can, however, see the situation in a positive light. Scientific progress can be reached only with open discussion, no matter how difficult the items may be. Even a severe confrontation, when treated in a proper way, can lead to considerable progress in the interpretation of the Bible.

## Paul and the law

Finnish biblical criticism came into the headlines in the 80's when Professor Räisänen published his study 'Paul and the Law'. Räisänen was determined to show that Paul's writings were not of high theological quality and a proper basis for modern theology. His main argument was that Pauline theology was inconsistent and most of the statements ambiguous. Paul, writing about the law could not decide whether the law is still valid or whether it has been abolished. The possibility of keeping the law seemed to be ambiguous, too. Paul's attitude towards the law was both positive and negative.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this, according to Räisänen, was that Paul presented his theology by *ad hoc* formulations which were not even meant to be coherent with each other. Paul's only coherent idea was the Christological motif which was always behind his reasoning. Because of this Christological 'bias' Paul often gave a distorted picture of Judaism and conflicting statements about theology.<sup>3</sup>

This interpretation of Räisänen began to change the foundations of biblical theology. If Paul's theology were mostly constructed for *ad hoc* needs, a comprehensive summary or outline of it would hardly be possible. One could not speak of a theology of Paul but only of different thoughts of Paul.

That book raised a discussion which is well known among the New Testament scholars in Europe and in North America. Even though the problem of the complexity of Paul's terminology and some of Räisänen's other questions were consid-

ered justified, most scholars could not accept his pessimistic and even destructive conclusions. The dispute can easily be followed by reading the long prologue to the second edition of Räisänen's book.<sup>4</sup> In Helsinki, Finland, the position of Räisänen was quietly accepted since there were not many specialists in that area. Most scholars worked on the field of synoptic studies and the few Paulinists in Helsinki had not been writing about the same questions.

The main critical responses were raised by Professor J. Thurén and his pupils in Åbo Akademi.<sup>5</sup> In an article dealing with the book of Räisänen, Thurén presented a detailed analysis on the subject.<sup>6</sup> According to Thurén Paul's terminology concerning the law should not be dealt with in a too simplistic way. Paul often uses the words by exploiting their equivocal nature. The rhetorical skill of Paul should not lead us astray. His text should be considered by the goals he is aiming at.

Thurén also dealt with many details of the discussion. When treating the problems of the purpose of the law and the negative results of the law (revealing and even provoking sin), Thurén finds some simple and clear answers. Paul, describing mankind living in sinful flesh, couldn't do anything else than give the law a negative function. The law is valid because it reveals sin—no matter whether you are a Christian or not. This is why the law cannot be abolished. But the new life of men is not based on the law. It is based on redemption and faith in Christ. Believers participate in the life of the Risen Christ.

When Paul is describing the soteriological function of the law, says Thurén, he is not distorting the Jewish soteriology of his time. He is just asking his fellow Jews to make the evident conclusions which they should do according to their convictions. If they do this, it will lead their thinking *ad absurdum*, and lead them finally to Christ. In all this Paul is perhaps not easy to understand but he is always very consistent.

This kind of discussion about Räisänen's book is very helpful. We can learn



about his methodological and theological difficulties. His method of interpreting the semantics of the word 'law' is quite untenable. Räisänen does not study the semantic fields of the word in their own right but compares all different contexts without discerning their meaning. Due to this it is, of course, rather easy for him to present sentences written in different contexts as contradicting each other. We, however, should take notice of the modern semantics. It will be a most helpful tool in studying the freely associative style of Paul.

The methodological problem is connected with a theological one. Since Räisänen does not study Paul's presentations of the law in proper semantic contexts he does not take Paul's most common eschatological motif into account. In Pauline letters the law is most often given the task of revealing sin and placing a sinner under judgment.<sup>7</sup> For Räisänen this seems to be a trivial theme. He almost ignores the whole idea of sin and judgment in his treatment.<sup>8</sup> When reading such a monograph one does not wonder why the Pauline concept of the law begins to look so ambiguous. Since Räisänen has scarcely any grounds for Paul's theology of the law, he is left seeing everything in terms of Christology—thus resulting in a mis-focused Christological emphasis on the law. The coherence of Paul's thought is based, however, on several weighty themes, not only on Christology. These include his pessimistic anthropology and his anticipation of the just judgment of God. The above mentioned reasoning of Räisänen is closely linked with a second theme occurring in his interpretation.

### How to assess Judaism?

The study of biblical criticism and biblical theology is very much dependent on the understanding of early Judaism. One of the most influential theories in this field has been the idea of covenantal nomism by E. P. Sanders. This theory needs to be mentioned in the presentation of the Finnish debate as well, since it was just

professor Räisänen who introduced it to our scholarship and made it a basis for his own studies, too.

The theory of Sanders is essential in the interpretation of Pauline soteriology, since it defines the relationship of Judaism and Christianity in a strict manner. In his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) Sanders analysed the soteriological structure of early Judaism—mostly according to Mishna and Talmud—and came to the conclusion that the theology was covenantal. Jewish writers and teachers did not expect to attain salvation on the grounds of their deeds. Only God could give salvation. Judaism was not legalistic as most (European Lutheran) scholars had previously thought. Thus also Jewish nomism had to be understood in terms of this structure.<sup>9</sup>

As regards Paul, Sanders thought that he, too, had known Judaism as covenantal nomism. In his soteriology Paul did change the basis of salvation which could come only through Christ, but he did not alter the concept of covenantal nomism. This leads Sanders to his well-known slogan: 'In short, *this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity*.'<sup>10</sup> With this he laid the basis for the interpretation which Räisänen followed later, i.e. that Paul's soteriology was solely built on Christology, not on a clear distinction of different views concerning nomism.

In Pauline studies the conclusions did not always take the road of Sanders. Since Paul is evidently talking about the self-righteousness of the Jews there must be something strange in his thinking. Is he consistent with Jewish covenantal nomism, or is he actually giving a distorted picture instead? As we have seen, the latter was to be the interpretation of Räisänen.<sup>11</sup>

In Finland the first opponent of Sanders' line of study came again from Turku, this time from a young scholar, Timo Laato, who was writing his dissertation about the theory of Sanders in 1991.<sup>12</sup> Laato concentrated on the 'pattern of religion' of Judaism which Sanders had tried to investigate. According to Laato, the Jewish religion was not so simple as



Sanders would like to see it. The main problem which separated Paul from traditional Judaism was the question of anthropology. As most Second Temple writers would say that man has a free will and he must therefore keep the law of God, Paul would deny that idea with a pessimistic view of the sinfulness of man. This is why the theology of Paul, says Laato, should not be tested and defined only by the covenantal nomism but by the pessimistic anthropology which forms the basis for his soteriology.<sup>13</sup>

Now we can see that this discussion, too, can lead to progress in Biblical criticism. When studying the anthropology of Second Temple Judaism Dr. Laato has raised a relevant question concerning the concept of free will.<sup>14</sup> For every reader of the Jewish sapiential tradition from Sirach onwards the optimistic attitude towards the possibility of keeping the law is familiar. Jewish theology in the Second Temple period was synergistic.<sup>15</sup> This is an important feature and it must be taken seriously when defining the theology of Paul.

Adding to what Laato has said the theory of Sanders has even more problems. It explains the themes of eschatological salvation by sociological categories. Sanders tried to prove that the soteriological 'getting in' (attaining salvation) was understood in Judaism in terms of mercy according to the divine covenant. This is why he explained the keeping of the law as an act of 'staying in' the covenant. We might pose a question: on what grounds should the sociological 'staying in' (keeping the law in order to stay in a group) *not* be an eschatological 'getting in' (keeping the law in order to attain salvation)?<sup>16</sup> There were stated terms for the eschatological salvation in the Jewish theology.

Even though Sanders has no doubt been able to define an outline of rabbinic soteriology, he has not detected that line of Judaism which is important for the understanding of Paul. We must remember that in the Second Temple theology the judgment of God is said to be directed against the people of the covenant. No

idealistic view of a covenant can in that situation explain salvation. In the soteriology of the Jewish theology the writers do not ask who is getting in a group or staying in it. They ask who shall endure the coming judgment of God.

The benefit of this discussion is in the focusing of the research on the nature of Second Temple Judaism. For the most part it was dominated by apocalyptic thinking. The judgment of God was a horrifying reality for pious Jews. This kind of tradition fits the theology of Paul better than the simple covenantal view of Sanders.<sup>17</sup> The coherence of Paul's thought is based not only on Christology but on several themes which include his pessimistic anthropology and his anticipation of the just judgment of God.

### Beyond New Testament Theology?

The abovementioned examples of the biblical criticism of Räisänen show that from his point of view the possibilities for making a comprehensive biblical theology are rather weak.<sup>18</sup> Those examples would be without proper context, however, were they not brought together with Räisänen's theological hermeneutics. Only then shall we reach the very heart of the Finnish debate on biblical theology. The constitutive methodology and the principles of Räisänen's biblical theology are presented in his book 'Beyond New Testament Theology' (1990).

In his book Räisänen first analyses the history of biblical theology. Starting with J. P. Gabler he detects a theological tradition which tries to find 'pure' (universal) Biblical theology and separate it from ideas which are mixed with 'foreign' thoughts (Gabler). This aim is actually the same as the distinction between time-bound and timeless material in the Bible.<sup>19</sup> For Räisänen this 'pure' theology is a non-scientific, religious effort to maintain the content of the Bible in the area of scientific Biblical criticism.

Gabler's line of interpretation was later opposed by W. Wrede, who is regarded by Räisänen as the first scholar using a real



scientific approach towards the Bible. Wrede abandoned the boundaries of the canon and treated the texts in the manner of history of religion. This is why the concept of New Testament theology is wrong in principle and it should be substituted (at least according to Räsänen himself) by the 'early Christian history of religion'.<sup>20</sup> With the help of Gabler and Wrede, Räsänen formulated a distinction between two traditions in the interpretation of biblical theology and he also briefly analysed the whole history of criticism according to this distinction.

The distinction was, however, only a start for his theory. What Räsänen wanted to do was to create a method for the 'early Christian history of religion'. That method is based on an idea of a 'dialectic between tradition, experience and interpretation'.<sup>21</sup> For Räsänen early Christianity was full of different and often contradictory theological ideas. They were based on personal experiences about this world. A person who is perceiving the world tries to understand it by the 'symbolic universe' he has been taught in his community. This 'symbolic universe' is a social construction—even though religious in content—and consists of symbols and ideas with which the community has interpreted life and theology. So, according to Räsänen, the interpretation of individuals is always based on a dialectic between tradition, experience and interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

It follows that, for Räsänen, the Bible cannot be a source of divine revelation. One cannot and must not search for a 'universal' truth in it. The Bible is a document of diverse experiences which form a chain of interpretations, each made in a different context. For Räsänen the possibility of a coherent biblical theology is ruled out even in principle.<sup>23</sup>

The method of Räsänen has produced in fact a well defined theory of natural theology. Since the Bible is only a collection of interpretations of human experience, one cannot speak about revelation.<sup>24</sup> The Bible shows us how people have interpreted their experiences in different times and different situations. This is

why the content of the Bible does not bind theology, dogmatics and the Church today. We are living in an age of science and new understanding of the world. The ancient interpretations like incarnation, sacrifice, sin, atonement, resurrection and parousia have nothing to give to modern Christianity, which must find its own interpretations in the modern world.<sup>25</sup>

### Criticizing the 'apologetic' radicalism

When commenting on the theory of Räsänen we must begin with his analysis of the history of criticism. He is evidently right when saying that many writers have tried to discern a universal element in the biblical theology. It was done already before the rise of historical-critical research. What Räsänen has not seen is that the intention to discern 'pure' theology in the Bible was from D. F. Strauss onwards linked with the historical criticism of the Bible.

In historical criticism the problem of biblical theology became problematical because of the fact that the historical nature of the Bible was broken to pieces. In this situation it was a kind of 'pure' theology which came to rescue Christianity for many writers like Strauss. Radical biblical theology became 'apologetic'. However, when almost nothing was left by historical criticism (e.g. Strauss denied the incarnation, miracles and the resurrection) everything remained an eternal truth, even so.<sup>26</sup> As divine ideas they could not be falsified.<sup>27</sup>

This kind of dualism was based on neo-Kantian hermeneutics. The Kantian theory of knowledge was taken into a theological use. The concept of empirical knowledge, which is acquired by the senses, was identified with the historical study of the Bible. Since information in historical study must fit causality laws, everything supernatural was unhistorical. Now one must remember that the Kantian theory had two sides. There was also a concept of *a priori* knowledge. It was something that one did not need to prove by empirical evidence. Kant had



thought that this knowledge concerned mainly the ethical knowledge of man, but neo-Kantian theologians were bold enough to use it in justifying theological knowledge. Theology (the universal truth) was something one did not need to prove by empirical knowledge or history.

Also, in this neo-Kantian tradition the content of the Christian faith began to change. For example A. von Harnack is famous for his search after the true essence of Christianity (*Das Wesen des Christentums*). He thought that it could be found in the ethical religion of Jesus himself. Later dogmatics about sin and redemption meant a renunciation of the true teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. If we call this kind of theological hermeneutics 'pure' theology it would be proper to search after new models for interpreting biblical theology.<sup>28</sup>

This is not what Räsänen meant by 'pure' biblical theology. He was not aware of the neo-Kantian principle of interpretation. For him, the 'pure' theology was just a conservative religious enterprise which was trying to save the traditional content of Christianity. The radical neo-Kantian 'apologetic' tried to find the true essence of Christianity, too, but this line was not trying to save anything traditional. It developed into a system of 'Entmythologisierung' where the factual content of the Bible did not have anything to do with modern faith. This took many forms from the idealism of Bousset to the somewhat ambivalent neo-Kantian existentialism of Bultmann and his school.<sup>29</sup>

Räsänen himself is in a way an heir of the neo-Kantian tradition—presumably without knowing it—but his hermeneutic developed much further. When we study his interpretation theory we see that he tried to change the methodological basis of the old theory, but he did not change it enough. In fact he just turned it upside down. While the true understanding of the Bible could not come from 'pure' universal theology, he tried to search for it in the totally historical nature of the Scripture. The timeless message of the Bible was eliminated by saying that the whole Scripture was merely a set of

time-bound interpretations.

The interpretation theory of Räsänen does not follow Harnack or Bultmann. For him there is no *a priori* theological knowledge that should form the basis for biblical theology. There are only human efforts trying to understand this world and God. The theology of Räsänen is immanent. It is, as he himself has pronounced, a programme of natural theology. Everything that is said in theology is said in terms of human existence. This, in turn, means that his line of interpretation has reached a dead end in biblical theology. The programme of a 'history of early Christian religion' gives no means for interpreting the theological content of the New Testament.

### Light from the north?

What we need now is a bold new approach in biblical theology and a hermeneutical theory which is able to take the semantic information and the historical context of New Testament texts into account. In this respect the Finnish debate can be useful in the process of solving many difficult problems of New Testament criticism. Much of this work has already been done by others, of course, and there is not much left of the 'Entmythologisierung'-programme at the universities of Europe. Even though neo-Kantian dualism prevails in the interpretation of the New Testament, there are also many outstanding new projects in the area of biblical criticism.<sup>30</sup>

In the search for an interpretation theory which can avoid the fallacies of neo-Kantian 'apologetics' and restore the unity of the Bible and theology—a quest which as such seems almost ridiculous when written down but which is very true in the context of our history of investigation—the polarized Finnish discussion serves almost as a laboratory where many alternatives have been taken to their limits. The constructive work made in this process is hopefully the next contribution of Finland to European biblical criticism.



- 1 The Finnish Theological Institute, where the writer of these lines is working as a New Testament scholar, is a private Lutheran institute founded by several organizations in the Lutheran church. It focuses mainly on research and seminars.
- 2 See Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (WUNT/Mohr 1983 or Fortress 1986), 199–200.
- 3 Räisänen *Paul and the Law*, 150, 187.
- 4 See the second edition of *Paul and the Law* (in Germany, WUNT 1987) where Räisänen answers a dozen of his critics.
- 4 The theme 'Paul and the law' was also discussed in a meeting at the Theological Institute in 1994. The papers of the symposium were published in Finnish in the theological bulletin of the Institute, *Iustitia* (6/95), containing e.g. an article of Dr. Timo Laato, a pupil of Thurén from Turku.
- 6 Thurén's paper was originally a lecture given in 1984 in Denmark, 'Paulus och torah. Reflexioner kring Heikki Räisänens arbete Paul and the Law, 1983'. The paper, the title of which can easily be understood even in Swedish, was later published in 'Judendom och kristendom under de första århundraderna.' Universitetsforlaget AS/Stavanger, 1986, I, 165–192.
- 7 Rom. 1:18; 3:9; 3:19–20 etc.
- 8 This has naturally been noticed in the international scholarship, see e.g. S. Westerholm: 'Though Sanders and Räisänen both concede that Paul argues for universal sinfulness in Romans 1–3, the tenet is dismissed to the periphery of Paul's thought.' (Israel's Law and the Church's Faith. Paul and his Recent Interpreters. Eerdmans 1988, p. 160.)
- 9 Sanders *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress 1977), 59, 333, 422, 426f.
- 10 Sanders *Palestinian Judaism*, 552.
- 11 Unlike Sanders, Räisänen sees the problem already in the theology of Paul. The new approach of Sanders is said to prove Paul's thinking inconsistent and intentional (in a negative sense). Räisänen 1986, 187.
- 12 Laato, T., *Paulus und das Judentum*. Anthropologische Erwägungen. Åbo. 1991. (E.T. *Paul and Judaism. An Anthropological Approach*. South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 115. Scholars, Atlanta, Georgia 1995.)
- 13 See e.g. Laato *Paulus*, 83, 91, 96, 210f.
- 14 He was naturally not the first scholar to write about the concept of free will in Jewish theology (see e.g. G. Maier, *Mensch und freier Wille*. Nach den jüdischen Religionsparteien zwischen Ben Sira und Paulus. WUNT 12. Tübingen 1971). The contribution of Laato is in the application of the theme in the latest discussion.
- 15 This is attested e.g. by Laato and many other scholars in international discussion. See Hagner, D.A., *Paul and Judaism*. The Jewish Matrix of Early Christianity: Issues in the Current Debate.—Bulletin for Biblical Research 3/1993, especially p. 122.
- 16 An analysis about this item is in my article concerning the nature of Sanders' theory (in Finnish, *Iustitia* 6/95, mentioned above).
- 17 I would follow here the criticism of Collins (directed against Sanders): 'Since he begins his study with the rabbinic literature (which is chronologically later), it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the apocalyptic literature is not being studied in its own right, but only checked for evidence of covenantal nomism'. Collins, J.J., *Apocalyptic literature*.—Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters. Ed. Kraft and Nickelsburg. (The Bible and its modern interpreters 2) SBL, Scholars Press, 1986, see p. 359–360.
- 18 We might also mention here the differences between the pupils of Räisänen and Thurén as regards the studies of the gospels. Following the line of Räisänen, a young scholar, Dr. Matti Myllykoski has developed the method of literary criticism and finds almost nothing historical in the Passion narratives. He presented his ideas in the second volume of his dissertation (*Die Letzten Tage Jesu I–II*, 1991/1994, AASF B 256, 272) and it provoked a heated discussion in Finland. Myllykoski, concluding that Jesus was buried anonymously in a mass grave, was very pessimistic about our knowledge of the actual history of the Passover. The pupils of Thurén, in turn, have been striving for a constructive research of the gospels. Dr. Erkki Koskenniemi, for example, (writing his dissertation partly in Tübingen, Germany) has been able to show many fallacies in the 'accepted' study of the historical Jesus. The proponents of the old History of Religions school maintained that the picture of Jesus as a miracle worker was a late hellenistic concept. Koskenniemi showed that no classical source supports that theory. The stories are very 'Jewish', instead. See his dissertation *Apollonios von Tyana in der*



- neutestamentlichen Exegese*, Turku 1992 (due to be published in Germany also).
- 19 Räisänen, H., *Beyond New Testament Theology*. SCM Press, London, 1990, 4.
  - 20 Räisänen *Beyond*, 16.
  - 21 Räisänen *Beyond*, 122f.
  - 22 Räisänen *Beyond*, 129–130. This theory is based on concepts and terminology of Peter Berger. Räisänen has called it the ‘sociology of knowledge’ and uses it in theological hermeneutics.
  - 23 His theory has found its way into the Church as well. Dr. V. Riekkinen, who is in charge of biblical training in the Lutheran Church, writes in a course book for pastors: ‘On the grounds of the tradition history inside the New Testament we could even say that the New Testament does not contain the “absolute word of God” at all, there is “merely” a continuously actualized chain of concrete “words of God”.’ Riekkinen, V., *Eksegetiikan teologinen tehtävä* (*The theological task of exegetics*)—Tulkinnan kehällä. Puheenvuoroja Raamatusta ja kirkon tunnustuksesta. (Toim.) K. Latvus, K. Peltonen. Helsinki. 1992. 231–244.
  - 24 As early as in 1972 Räisänen published an article where he explicated the principles of his theory (in Finnish, *TAik* 2/1972, pp. 76–86). There he also called the chain of interpretations natural theology.
  - 25 These ideas Räisänen has published only in Finnish, mostly in his book *Uuteen uskoon* (*Towards a New Faith*), Helsinki 1993.
  - 26 The ideas of Strauss are properly presented e.g. in the monograph of W.G. Kümmel *Das Neue Testament. Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme*. 2. Aufl. Freiburg/München 1970, pp. 147 ff. especially 149.
  - 27 The analysis presented here is to be published (in Finnish) later this year in a monograph concerning the theoretical foundations of hermeneutics.
  - 28 See A. von Harnack *Das Wesen des Christentums* (a new edition: GTB Siebenstern 227, Gütersloh 2. Aufl 1985), pp. 90, 98–99, 116–117.
  - 29 The neo-Kantian line of interpretation has a long history and broad acceptance in European biblical criticism. Its more detailed analysis will be published in my monograph mentioned above.
  - 30 As regards the major works in process, I am myself very pleased with the *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Band I, Göttingen 1992) by prof. P. Stuhlmacher, for example.