Räisänen has a history of raising conflicts. His style is often provocative and many scholars and ministers have reacted to his proposals as to attacks. Already his dissertation on Mary startled Finnish scholarship, which had not yet agreed on how to use the new historical-critical methods in Gospel studies. Later his article *Authority* provoked a heated discussion over biblical inspiration. *Paul and the Law*, in turn, compelled dozens of Pauline scholars to write responses to his claims. Finally, in *Beyond New Testament Theology* (1990), Räisänen revitalized the Wredean history-of-religion theory that questions the very writing of traditional New Testament theology. At least for Räisänen himself, the project is changed. An intense debate over New Testament theology followed and has continued to the present day. The question about New Testament theology is probably the most important in the treatment of Räisänen’s hermeneutics. How does Räisänen’s theory on the emergence of early Christianity relate to the numerous monographs that have been published in recent years? How should one write New Testament theology?\(^1\)

### 6.1. Reading Gabler

For a long time, during the twentieth century, New Testament theology was a somewhat neglected field of study.\(^2\) There are several reasons

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\(^2\) Still in 1992 Robert Morgan in his *ABD* article assumes that the days of textbooks in New Testament theology are over. “Increased specialization even within NT scholarship has rendered the old textbook format of NTT questionable. It has become less likely that one scholar’s summary of his or her exegetical conclusions will excite the interest that Holtzmann’s did.” Morgan, *ABD* VI (1992) 483. At that time no one could anticipate that the next two decades would see almost forty new monographs on New Testament theology. Cf. also Reumann referring to Collins’ expression: “In America, it has long been common opinion that ‘Biblical theology is a subject in decline.’ ” Reumann, *Aufgabe*, 73; but he remarks that his own view has been more optimistic.
for this. One only needs to read Albert Schweitzer’s comments on the quest for the historical Jesus in order to remember how Jesus, during the preceding century, had been excluded from the study of theological issues. It is only logical that in such a situation no unified presentation starting with Jesus’ message and focusing then on Paul and the apostolic letters could be expected to appear. Historical-critical scholarship was not very interested in constructions but prioritized partial reconstructions. Its adherents attempted to dissolve even those seemingly unified compositions that one would find in texts and their narratives. Existentialism then completed the picture and separated meaning from texts. Scholars writing on New Testament theology or biblical theology would often be treated as pre-scientific conservatives or even biblical fundamentalists.

Nevertheless, biblical theology had always been there. The term itself is old. Johann P. Gabler, of course, established its use when he posited it as a counterpoint to dogmatic theology. As a historical task, in Gabler’s opinion, biblical theology was partly working in the same field as the emerging historical investigation of the Bible. The exact nature of Gabler’s theory remains to be seen later. The historical-critical reception of his approach started to create problems and, by the end of the nineteenth century, historical investigation had mostly made the construction of biblical theology impossible.

The discussion on the subject may sometimes be somewhat confused, though, because in the United States, especially after the Second World War, biblical theology also became a title for an entire movement. Several scholars began to oppose liberal theology under this kind of rubric. In the United States around 1940–1960, thus, biblical theology represented a view that put emphasis on the unity of the Bible and even its distinctive Hebrew way of thinking and expressing religious issues. It severely opposed both liberal theology and secular philosophy. As the Biblical

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3 Schweitzer, *The Quest*, 398. The investigation of biblical theology has always been closely connected with or influenced by the study of the historical Jesus.
4 As we have noted before, and as Kümmel’s *Investigation* shows, twentieth century Protestant New Testament scholarship was interested in sources and especially the genesis of the Gospel tradition. Interest in the “background” surpassed interest in the texts themselves.
5 Gabler’s ideas will be treated in detail below. For a general overview, see Reventlow, *ABD VI* (1992) 485.