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Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One might well ask, in the contemporary climate of academic theology, why a student whose prime focus of scholarly interest is the New Testament documents should meddle with questions concerning the foundations of systematic theology. The reasons are many, and few of them easy. We live in an age of increasing specialization (owing in part to the rapid expansion of knowledge), and disciplines that a priori ought to work hand in glove are being driven apart. More important, there is a growing consensus among New Testament scholars that any systematic theology that claims to summarize biblical truth is obsolete at best and perverse at worst. Any possibility of legitimate systematic theology presupposes that the discipline will look elsewhere for its norms, or begin from some center smaller than or different from the Christian canon.

It is important to grasp the proportions of the modern dilemma. At its center stand several close-knit assumptions: the New Testament is full of contradictions, it embraces many different theological perspectives that cannot be arranged into one system, its diversity is not only linguistic but conceptual, and it is made up of documents that come from so long a time span that major developments have rendered obsolete the theological positions of the earlier documents. The conclusion to be drawn from this cluster of propositions is that a systematic theology of the New Testament is impossible, let alone one that embraces both Testaments. In that sense, one cannot legitimately speak of "New Testament theology" but only of "New Testament theologies." The former category, "New Testament theology," may be considered an appropriate designation for the discipline of studying such theology as may be found in the New Testament, but not for referring to some supposed unified structure of theistic belief. As a result, it is not too surprising that of the ten major New Testament theologies published between 1967 and 1976, no two scholars agree on the nature, scope, purpose, or method of the discipline.¹

It is not my purpose to trace the rise of these developments. Their roots stretch far back into the Enlightenment; and my knowledge of their growth is sufficient only to assure me that I do not possess the detailed understanding of history required to untangle them. My more modest goal is to focus on a number of representative works, first with description and then with criticism, and, following this, to offer some

reflections that may be of use to the student who is persuaded that the New Testament documents are nothing less than the Word of God, yet who cannot in all integrity fail to grapple with their substantial diversity. For convenience I will limit myself largely to the New Testament, although similar analysis could be extended to the Bible as a whole. I will not address directly the question of whether a transcendent/personal God can use the languages of finite men² nor wrestle with current developments in hermeneutics that argue for disjunction between the author's intent and the reader's understanding.³ Such questions, though related to this inquiry, are of sufficient complexity to deserve separate treatment.

We may profitably begin with the enormously influential book by Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*.⁴ The question Bauer sets himself is whether the church early embraced a clearly defined doctrinal corpus that enabled it to reject false belief, or whether the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy is a rather late development. Methodologically, Bauer abandons the New Testament evidence because it is so disputed and conducts his readers on a whirlwind tour of second-century Christianity. He concludes that from the beginning so-called heretical and orthodox churches existed side by side, the latter frequently in the minority; and the reasons why the "orthodox" groups eventually won out have less to do with self-conscious theological incompatibility than with what we might call politics. The implication of all this is that even *first-century* Christianity was no different: highly diverse and even mutually exclusive beliefs were tolerated without embarrassment.

This reconstruction of early church history is very popular among New Testament scholars today. It wielded enormous influence on Bultmann and his disciples, but to one degree or another its impact was also felt in much wider circles. In an appendix to the 1964 edition of Bauer's book, G. Strecker developed the argument further and concluded that Jewish Christianity in the first century was not only diverse but was, by later "orthodox" standards, itself heretical.⁵ A similar point of view is developed in Elaine Pagels's recent book, where it is argued that the theological options of the first two centuries, finally judged heretical, were not so lightly esteemed in their own time and should therefore be explored afresh as valid options for us today.⁶ E. P. Sanders presupposes that at some point divisions between the "heretical" and the "orthodox" began to take place, but that this "shift in the consciousness of the Christian community" did not occur until the second and third centuries.⁷ Stephen S. Smalley examines the Gospel and Epistles of John and concludes that even there great diversity exists, so much so that this corpus "can hardly be regarded as consciously orthodox or heretical; it is neither one nor the other."⁸

In short, Bauer's work has established a new critical orthodoxy on this point, and recent studies tend to follow this direction.⁹ From such

a perspective, it is not difficult to exclude the possibility of a systematic theology based on the New Testament documents. One writer tells us that "the Bible is not a unified writing but a composite body of literature";¹⁰ at some level this disjunction is surely false. Another tells us that "the New Testament is a repository of many *kerygmas*, not one,"¹¹ while a third rejoices that there are many contradictions in Scripture because they constitute "an aid in establishing chronology and in discerning the use of sources or the development of traditions, and through this an aid to historical reconstruction in general."¹²

This critical reconstruction of early church history, coupled with other developments that equally depreciate the truthfulness of the New Testament have generated a host of writings exploring the nature of New Testament theology. Lost confidence in the unity of the New Testament stretches back a long way,¹³ but the results are much with us. Scholars now ask if a New Testament theology is possible;¹⁴ or they develop esoteric, narrow, and extrabiblical criteria for what such theology might include;¹⁵ or, in the case of Roman Catholics, they frankly appeal to the authority of the Catholic church as the only way out of the dilemma.¹⁶

The solution to the post-Enlightenment epistemological crisis that Gabler proposes—viz., to distinguish sharply between systematic and biblical theology, the latter alone being recognized as a historical discipline¹⁷—has largely petered out. The biblical theology movement enjoyed its heyday from roughly 1930 to 1960; but its decline has been chronicled.¹⁸ Even those who plaintively insist that the death notice is premature¹⁹ do not provide any solid solutions, for in reality the movement has always lacked unity. It was useful in encouraging nuanced study of the various corpora that make up Scripture, but it was largely incapable of forging a consensus regarding what should be preached in the churches. Its proponents could not even agree that "theology" was a proper term, since it implies a coherent system, at least within each corpus.

The malaise is profound. Sensitive Bible scholars have come to recognize that the loss of confidence in the unity of the New Testament entails some kind of pick-and-choose method when it comes to preaching; and very often it is preaching that reveals our deepest theology. Ernst Käsemann advocates a "canon within the canon,"²⁰ but there is no possibility of establishing broadly agreed criteria for delineating such a minicanon. As radical as he is, Käsemann is troubled by the loss of control and comments elsewhere, in an oft-repeated quote: "The main virtue of the historian and the beginning of all meaningful hermeneutic is for me the practice of hearing, which begins simply by letting what is historically foreign maintain its validity and does not regard rape as the basic form of engagement."²¹ The problem is that Käsemann continues to practice rape as, if not the basic, then at least a primary, form of engagement. A fairly conservative

critic like Peter Stuhlmacher wants to be open to “the possibility of transcendence” and to every method and every truth, but he cannot bring himself to accept everything the New Testament says because it includes (he argues) numerous contradictions—like that between Paul and James.²² The net result of such hesitations is a deeply disturbing subjectivity, a subjectivity that among at least some New Testament scholars has a frankly atheistic structure.²³ At the end of the day the only kind of authority the New Testament can enjoy in this climate is some kind of latitudinarian “functional” authority.²⁴

It should not be thought that there have been no positive voices. Ronald A. Ward insists that the New Testament presents a unified plan of salvation.²⁵ The New Testament theology written by Ladd has received wide circulation,²⁶ but though Ladd handles admirably the vast literature and competently traces out the main themes in each corpus, he does not attempt the promised unification of the results of his theology. Hasel’s survey of problems relative to New Testament theology is extraordinarily useful,²⁷ but when it comes to delineating the unity of the New Testament, he is surprisingly hesitant.²⁸ The center of the New Testament, he says, is simply Jesus Himself,²⁹ this statement is true but it scarcely tackles the problem before us. R. P. Martin, in a recent essay, surveys the field and opts to use “Paul and his disciples” as the central touchstone (by this rubric he manages to include the entire Pauline corpus while denying Pauline authorship to some of the epistles ascribed to him).³⁰ but when one inquires on what basis Paul is selected, the answer is, “Paul towers over the terrain of the apostolic community—in so far as we can judge from the surviving documents—as the great champion of the divine initiative in salvation.”³¹ The theme to pursue is *reconciliation*, “found principally in Paul but embracing all stages of the trajectory that runs from pre-Pauline Christianity by way of the apostle himself to his disciples in the post-Pauline period.”³² One cannot help but wonder on what basis such choices are made. No exegetical or theological defense is proffered. Why not a completely different theme?

This chapter is designed to outline the seriousness of the problem and does not give consideration to other influential contributors to the debate, such as William Wrede, Adolf Schlatter, and Rudolf Bultmann. Nor have I traced the rise of canon criticism since, unless I am greatly mistaken, it suffers at the moment, in its various forms, from the same epistemological problems afflicting much of the biblical-theology movement.

By far the most influential recent work on the topic of this chapter is the latest book by J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*.³³ Far longer and more sophisticated than its near contemporary, J. L. Houlden’s *Patterns of Faith: A Study in the Relationship between the New Testament and Christian Doctrine*,³⁴ Dunn’s book deserves special

treatment, not least because it comes from the pen of one who aligns himself with so conservative a professional association as the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Before I enter into specific criticisms of Dunn’s book and offers constructive suggestions, however, it is necessary to pause momentarily and define some terms that are variously treated by different authors. I am referring to *biblical theology* and *systematic theology*.

The vagueness of the categories is in part responsible for the high degree of uncertainty regarding what these disciplines are or should be. Warfield pointed out a long time ago that at one level “systematic theology” is “an impertinent tautology.”³⁵ Surely any theology worthy of the name is in some sense systematic. If the study is merely confusingly impressionistic or thoroughly incoherent, it can scarcely be classified as “theology” at all; and if it is theology, it must perforce be in some sense systematic. “Biblical theology” does not fare much better, for what systematician would like to think that his work is *unbiblical*?

In the light of such ambiguities, some have argued that “biblical theology” should be used to refer to any theology that seeks to be true to the Bible and to relate the parts fairly and honestly with one another, using biblical categories.³⁶ By contrast, “systematic theology” emerges from the study of Scripture when alien philosophical frameworks are utilized,³⁷ or, alternatively, when pure biblical theology is applied to some later culture and its problems and questions.³⁸ Some prefer to eliminate the “systematic theology” category entirely and to use “biblical theology” to refer to all of the above save the theology that imparts an alien philosophical framework, for the latter is considered illegitimate.³⁹ Others are comfortable with “systematic theology” but would like to displace “biblical theology” with “history of special revelation” or the like.⁴⁰

My own use of these labels may be briefly stated. First, although *theology* can relate to the entire scope of religious studies,⁴¹ I use the term more narrowly to refer to the study of what the Scriptures say. This includes exegesis and historical criticism, the requisite analysis of method and epistemology, and the presentation of the biblical data in orderly fashion. I therefore exclude apologetics and ethics, except insofar as such topics are treated in Scripture.⁴² By *biblical theology* I refer to that branch of theology whose concern it is to study each corpus of the Scripture in its own right, especially with respect to its place in the history of God’s unfolding revelation. The emphasis is on history and on the individual corpus. By *systematic theology* I refer to the branch of theology that seeks to elaborate the whole and the parts of Scripture,⁴³ demonstrating their logical (rather than their merely historical) connections and taking full cognizance of the history of

doctrine and the contemporary intellectual climate and categories and queries while finding its sole ultimate authority in the Scriptures themselves, rightly interpreted. Systematic theology deals with the Bible as a finished product.

These definitions do not avoid overlap: biblical theology must be systematic, even if it focuses on the historical place and significance of each corpus; and systematic theology, if it turns on fair exegesis, must perforce rely on historical considerations. But the distinctions I have drawn are clear enough and are not novel.⁴⁴ Warfield offers an analogy that despite its limits, is worth repeating:

The immediate work of exegesis may be compared to the work of a recruiting officer: it draws out from the mass of mankind the men who are to constitute the army. Biblical Theology organizes these men into companies and regiments and corps, arranged in marching order and accoutered for service. Systematic Theology combines these companies and regiments and corps into an army—a single and unitary whole, determined by its own all-pervasive principle. It, too, is composed of men—the same men who were recruited by the Exegetics; but it is composed of these men, not as individuals merely, but in their due relations to the other men of their companies and regiments and corps. The simile is far from a perfect one; but it may illustrate the mutual relations of the disciplines, and also, perhaps, suggest the historical element that attaches to Biblical Theology, and the element of all-inclusive systematization which is inseparable from Systematic Theology.⁴⁵

The “simile” is indeed weak at several points. All the recruits get taken up into the army; and the army qua people is not more than the sum of the recruits. By contrast, not every exegetical scrap goes into systematic theology; yet, as we will see, systematic theology may at certain points be more than the sum of the exegetical data. Numerous other distinctions spring to mind, but if the analogy, like any analogy, has its limits, it also helps to clarify the distinction between biblical theology and systematic theology.

It follows, then, that questions concerning the unity and diversity of the New Testament affect both biblical theology and systematic theology. For example, if it be argued that a particular writer or book is inconsistent, owing to oversight, later redaction, the incorporation of incompatible sources, or the like, then it is impossible to develop a biblical theology for that corpus. At most one could practice the *discipline* of biblical theology and demonstrate thereby that the corpus in question embraces divergent biblical theologies. Similarly, the possibility of developing a systematic theology turns on finding that none of the books of the New Testament are inconsistent (whether such consistency is hammered out in logical, historical, functional, or other categories). If there is insurmountable inconsistency, then the *discipline* of systematic theology may remain, but no single systematic theology qua end product would be possible. The individual sys-

tematician would become free to pick and choose whatever elements of the biblical data he preferred. The resulting system would not in any primary sense be dictated by the Scriptures themselves but would be definitively shaped by outside considerations, using the biblical data as nothing more than disparate building blocks.

Granted the internal coherence of each corpus, it is theoretically possible to develop a biblical theology for each corpus, yet fail to find the consensus needed for systematic theology. If, however, a unified systematic theology is possible, biblical theology itself achieves new dignity, for one entailment of the systematic theology would be the certainty that the contributing corpora are coherent if rightly organized in the historical framework of biblical theology.

If the definitions and relationships I have sketched in be permitted to stand, it follows that the legitimacy of pursuing a systematic theology depends on the unity of the New Testament. Such wide diversity as there is must not involve logical or historical contradiction. Conversely, if New Testament diversity is as sweeping as is often alleged, we ought forthwith to abandon the pursuit of a systematic theology, and those who write theology ought to tell us by what criteria they choose to include this or that dictum or make this or that value judgment.

CRITIQUE

What remains to be done is both negative and positive. Negatively, I propose to survey rapidly a few of the more telling responses to Walter Bauer and to interact in some detail with the recent work by J. D. G. Dunn. Positively, I propose in the next section to set forth some reflections in defense of preserving the unity of the New Testament while recognizing its diversity.

When Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* appeared,⁴⁶ most reviews were overwhelmingly positive. There were thoughtful caveats and hesitations, but few frontal assaults.⁴⁷ This changed when A. M. Hunter published *The Unity of the New Testament*.⁴⁸ Hunter argued in considerable detail that whatever diversity the New Testament embraces, its writers exhibit a basic unity in their commitment to one Lord, one church, and one salvation.

More important yet was H. E. W. Turner's 1954 Bampton Lectures.⁴⁹ Turner examined Bauer's work in ruthless detail and exposed its repeated arguments from silence, its sustained misjudgments concerning the theological positions of such figures as Ignatius and Polycarp, and its incautious exaggerations on many fronts. Turner demonstrated that the church's understanding of its theology antedates the attempt to work the Scriptures into a religious whole: “Christians lived Trinitarily long before the evolution of Nicene orthodoxy.”⁵⁰

Various brief essays have been penned more recently. I. H. Mar-

shall demonstrates that in virtually all of the New Testament documents, early or late, there is unambiguous recognition of the fact that certain beliefs are incompatible with the truth, and even damning.⁵¹ This does not prove that all such stances can be made to fit together, but it does demonstrate that Bauer's central thesis—that the very concepts of orthodoxy and heresy are late developments and motivated by less than religious concerns—are false. J. F. McCue argues persuasively that Bauer's understanding of the Valentinian Gnostics is seriously deficient.⁵² The Valentinians did *not* develop as an independent branch of Christianity but set themselves over against the orthodox. Moreover, early Valentinians use the books of the orthodox New Testament in a way that suggests they emerged from within an orthodox matrix.

Such considerations as these make Bauer's case untenable; yet his influence is broadly felt to this day—not least in the recent book by J. D. G. Dunn.⁵³ Dunn stakes out his territory for exploration on the assumption that Bauer is basically correct. "Bauer has shown," he says, "that second-century Christianity was a very mixed bag. There was no 'pure' form of Christianity that existed in the beginning which can properly be called 'orthodoxy.' In fact there was no uniform concept of orthodoxy at all—only different forms of Christianity competing for the loyalty of believers."⁵⁴ It may be doubted whether Bauer is correct in any of his main theses, but Dunn, building on this foundation, now attempts to push the inquiry back into the first century, and more or less along the same lines.

Dunn gives the first two-thirds of his book over to a discussion of diversity in the New Testament. In successive chapters he treats the kerygma ("Kerygma or Kerygmata?"), the primitive confessional formulae, the role of tradition, the use of the Old Testament, concepts of ministry, patterns of worship, the sacraments, the place of the Spirit and experience, and Christ and christology. In each chapter he is concerned to demonstrate the diversity surrounding these themes in the pages of the New Testament. The final third of the book reverses procedures and searches for whatever unity may be found among such diverse groupings as Jewish Christianity, Hellenistic Christianity, Apocalyptic Christianity, and early catholicism.

The final chapter summarizes Dunn's findings and raises some questions about the function of the canon. Dunn concludes that the diversity of first-century Christianity is very pronounced, indeed that "there was no single normative form of Christianity in the first century."⁵⁵ By this, Dunn does not mean to say only that there were various complementary theological insights and diverse ecclesiastical structures (although he affirms both of these things), but that there were mutually incompatible theologies and no consciousness of a fundamental orthodoxy/heterodoxy tension. The primary unifying feature, according to Dunn, is the common acknowledgment of the unity

between Jesus the man and Jesus the exalted one. Dunn tends to trumpet this finding as if it were a major breakthrough, a glorious discovery; but the value of even this minimal confession is rather mitigated by his observation that the mode of the unity between Jesus the man and Jesus the exalted one is rather disputed and uncertain.

The crucial question arising from all this concerns the canon. What authority can the New Testament documents exercise if Dunn's reconstruction is correct? Dunn denies that the New Testament writings "are canonical because they were *more inspired* than other and later Christian writings" (emphasis his).⁵⁶ The evidence, he argues, shows rather that early Christian communities, functioned, in effect, each with its own "canon within the canon," and therefore what the New Testament does is establish the validity of diversity. "To affirm the canon of the NT," Dunn states, "is to affirm the diversity of Christianity."⁵⁷ The New Testament may also establish the *limits* of legitimate diversity; but what Dunn self-confessedly wants to do is to serve as a sort of broker between liberalism and conservatism, challenging each side to recognize the legitimacy of the other. With this end in view he attempts to formulate the essential, the irreducible, Christian message:

Christianity begins from and finally depends on the conviction that in Jesus we still have a paradigm for man's relation to God and man's relation to man, that in Jesus' life, death, and life out of death we see the clearest and fullest embodiment of divine grace, of creative wisdom and power, that ever achieved historical actuality, that the Christian is accepted by God and enabled to love God and his neighbour by that same grace which we now recognize to have the character of that same Jesus. This conviction (whether in these or in alternative words) would appear to be the irreducible minimum without which "Christianity" loses any distinctive definition and becomes an empty pot into which men pour whatever meaning they choose. But to require some particular elaboration of it as the norm, to insist that some further assertion or a particular form of words is also fundamental, would be to move beyond the unifying canon within the canon, to erect a canon on only one or two strands within the NT and no longer on the broad consensus of the NT writings as a whole. It would be divisive rather than unifying. It would draw the circumference of acceptable diversity far more tightly than the canonical writings themselves justify.⁵⁸

I confess I do not recognize much of the Christian gospel in this summary. Instead of perceiving complementary truths in various parts of the canon, Dunn hunts for the lowest common denominator. The result is a "gospel" that makes no mention of sin, gives no thought to the incarnation or the atonement, presents Jesus primarily as a "paradigm" instead of a Savior (Why can't we have both?), and has no more authority behind it than what can be salvaged from Dunn's reconstruction of history—all of which prompts me to wonder why his reconstruction should be thought any more compelling than that

of any other scholar whose predisposition is to dismiss most of the evidence.

This is not to say that Dunn's book does not have many admirable features. Dunn displays an enviable breadth of learning, a massive knowledge of the secondary literature, and an admirable clarity and felicity of expression. Unfortunately, however, the sweep of material that impresses the reader with its breadth is simultaneously a distorting compression that, as Dunn's most perceptive reviewer has noted, "results both in indigestion and in apparently cavalier generalizations and one-sided treatments."⁵⁹ To cite but one of scores of examples: Dunn concludes, after a mere three-page discussion, that Jesus was not, in His own teaching, the object of faith—a conclusion attained by ignoring most of the evidence in the Gospels and dismissing the rest as anachronistic.

Many of the reviewers highlight not only the strengths but also the recurrent weaknesses of Dunn's book,⁶⁰ and they need not be repeated here. What might be more useful in this essay is to focus briefly on one chapter as a sample of Dunn's argument and to offer some suggestions as to possible lines of rebuttal. Rigorous detail cannot be provided in the brief compass of this section, but the shape of the confrontation can be nicely delineated.

In chapter 2, titled "Kerygma or Kerygmata?" Dunn attempts to show the diversity of *kerygmata* in the New Testament. The method Dunn adopts is to "make an aerial survey of the most important proclamations of the Gospel in the NT, concentrating on picking out the characteristic features of each kerygma [Doesn't such phraseology already prejudice the issue?] rather than attempting a fully balanced treatment of the whole."⁶¹ Dunn begins with the kerygma of Jesus. He excludes the evidence in the fourth Gospel on the grounds that it does not use the word *κηρύσσω*, *κήρυγμα*, *εὐαγγελίζομαι*, or *εὐαγγέλιον*,⁶² and thereby he eliminates a substantial part of the evidence. The kerygma of Jesus, according to the synoptic Gospels, then, is summed up in several statements. First of all, Jesus proclaimed the imminent kingdom of God but was mistaken in that His own expectations failed to materialize. Second, Jesus called for repentance and faith (in God, not in Himself) "in face of the end-time power and claim of God."⁶³ Third, Jesus offered forgiveness and participation in the messianic feast of the new age, and on this built the ethical corollary of love.

I am sure critical orthodoxy will be pleased, but the effrontery is astounding nonetheless. Dunn does not here discuss the parables with their repeated emphasis on grace (e.g., servants hired at various hours) and their picture of delay before the Parousia (e.g., wheat and tares). He is silent regarding the Lord's Supper and its forward-looking stance to His own death and the community's continued memory (before the Parousia: "till I come") of that death, specific sayings rich in pregnant significance (e.g., Mark 10:45, the so-called ransom saying),

the acceptance of obeisance, the utter lack of any consciousness of sin coupled with the willingness and ability to forgive sin, the specific references to His church in Matthew and the dozens of passages where the community is presumed to continue, and much more. Dunn treats many of these things elsewhere but he does not treat them as if they have any reference to an understanding of Jesus' kerygma. By eliminating much evidence as anachronistic and parceling up sections of the synoptic Gospels into mutually exclusive categories, Dunn arrives at his minimalistic conclusion. Nor does he explore Jesus' place in salvation history or the consequences such exploration might have in the way Jesus expresses Himself.

Dunn then goes on to consider the kerygma in Acts. Positively, Dunn states, the kerygma in Acts proclaims the resurrection of Jesus and the need for a response characterized by repentance and faith in Jesus, issuing in the promise of forgiveness, salvation, and the Spirit. Negatively, Acts is characterized by the absence of any theology of the death of Jesus and of the tension between fulfillment and consummation ("completely lacking," Dunn says),⁶⁴ and by a subordinationist christology. To encourage faith in Jesus rather than in God is already a shift from Jesus' preaching, Dunn insists; but as we have seen, he has eliminated the relevant evidence in the Gospels. True, there is *more* emphasis on faith in Jesus in Acts than in the Gospels, but this is largely due to the new perspective brought about by the cross, resurrection, and exaltation: the stance in salvation history is now a little further advanced, and it is clearer than before just who Jesus is. In fact, Acts reveals a *growing* awareness of the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection, implications progressively developed through the earliest preaching, the ministry of Stephen, the admission of Samaritans and then of Gentiles, the developing consciousness of a new relation to Old Testament law, and so forth; but such major salvation history perspectives Dunn does not consider at this point. The Spirit is promised the believer, he says, but he does not consider how this blessed gift is climactically poured out at Pentecost and how at least some further manifestations have to do with validation of the newly converted community before the Jerusalem church. How may one legitimately treat the kerygma in Acts *without* considering such things?

And is it true that Luke has no theology of the death of Christ? Dunn notes the places where Jesus' death is referred to but always finds some other explanation. Even 20:28 is dismissed because it "remains more than a little puzzling and obscure."⁶⁵ The treatment of this subject by W. J. Larkin, who gives some indication of the atonement theology presupposed in Luke-Acts, is much to be preferred.⁶⁶ And if Larkin and others are right, then 20:28 can be dropped into the text casually and without comment precisely because it was an accepted item of belief. Dunn repeatedly warns us against reading all of

Galatians and Romans into passages in Acts (e.g., Acts 5:30 and 10:39), and his warning is to the point. But he pushes this warning so hard that he adopts a methodologically indefensible stance. Must everything be said about every doctrine on every occasion? Must silence or deemphasis signify ignorance or disagreement? From the point of view of credible historical methodology, might it not be argued that allusive references to a doctrine explicitly expounded elsewhere presuppose such a doctrine as easily as deny such a doctrine? Could it be that Luke focuses more attention on the resurrection than on the atonement precisely because he is so interested in his witness theme and the part that it played in the earliest preaching? (The apostles could witness the death of Christ and the resurrected Christ but not, in the deepest sense, the atonement of Christ.) Is there no significance to the fact that the Luke who penned Acts also wrote Luke 21:28; 24:21?⁶⁷ Does not this fact prompt suspicions that some, at least, of the relative silence regarding the atonement in Acts springs *not* from ignorance or disavowal but from other considerations? And why is there not so much as a mention of Leon Morris's substantial and responsible treatment of this subject from a perspective very different from that of Dunn?⁶⁸

In the area of christology, Dunn fares no better. It is true that there is a substantial "subordinationist" strand in the christology of Acts, but Dunn's conclusions are not entailed by this fact. Equal subordinationism can be found in the fourth Gospel,⁶⁹ a document that also embraces the highest christology. One might legitimately conclude, therefore, that some early Christians, at least, saw no necessary incompatibility between the two strands. What is needed therefore is an analysis of the way these true strands complement each other.⁷⁰ Moreover it is surely illegitimate to treat the christology of Acts without again considering the flow of salvation history and the church's rising understanding of the Christ event. The question is whether or not such doctrinal development introduced categories that annulled their earlier understanding. If not, there is development, but not contradiction; growth in comprehension and theological awareness, but no clashing confessions or kerygmata. At least some attempts to analyze the earliest developments in christology have proceeded along these lines,⁷¹ but Dunn does not interact with them or show where they are in error. Why not?

The limitations of space prevent me from embarking on even a cursory response to Dunn's treatment of the kerygma in Paul and in John. The same problems abound there, coupled with two or three magnificent non sequiturs, the best of which is the following (italicized for emphasis in Dunn): "Where the very concept of and claim to apostleship was the subject of controversy, what meaning can we give to the phrase 'the apostolic faith'?"⁷²

Dunn is a very competent scholar, and I have no doubt he could defend his position a little better if he tackled in depth any of the areas

he treats in this book. Of course, I must not criticize him for not writing a book he did not intend to write, but in all fairness it must be said that this book could win only those who have already bought into the critical orthodoxy of the age without pausing to consider the alternative options that cry out to be heard on almost every page of Dunn's work. There is an important place for superficial books, but it is sad to see a superficial book claiming to present a profound argument.

POSITIVE REFLECTIONS

I do not propose to *demonstrate* the unity of the New Testament, except incidentally. To do so would require several books and far more time and skill than I have at my disposal. I propose instead to attempt something much more modest. I will simultaneously assume a high view of Scripture (based not least on Scripture's self-attestation)⁷³ and that the diversity of the New Testament documents is to be taken seriously. Beginning with these twin assumptions, I will offer a number of reflections relative to the possibility of establishing a systematic theology on the basis of such diverse documents. These reflections are neither original nor profound but they may help provide an introductory framework both for the Evangelical who is attempting to establish his theology on the Scriptures and for the non-Evangelical who seeks to understand why Evangelicals continue to hold that a systematic theology grounded on the Bible is important.

1. *First, it is important to recognize that virtually every person not an atheist adopts some kind of systematic theology.* This is not to say that every systematic theology is good, useful, balanced, wise, or biblical; it is to say nothing more than that most people adopt *some* kind of systematic theology.

Consider, for example, the person who says that he doesn't believe the Bible is the Word of God, that it is full of errors and contradictions, and that many of its teachings are at best obsolete. If he is not an atheist, he nevertheless believes *something* about God (or gods, but for convenience we will assume he is monotheistic). In his own mind he adopts a number of beliefs that he holds to be consistent. Even a dialectician thinks his beliefs are *ultimately* reconcilable.

It may be, of course, that some of his beliefs are not consistent with other components of his belief system. But no one will consciously adopt such logical inconsistencies, except perhaps in the sense that he might temporarily hold several in tension while he tries to sort them out. He may maintain a core belief system about which he entertains few doubts and a wider circle of beliefs about which he is less certain, but unless he is insane, he will press for maximum logical consistency. This is true even when he springs from a culture in which people like to think in pictures rather than in abstract propositions, for

it is a universal apperception that behind the pictures stand realities, however dimly perceived. If someone presents a structure of theology that conflicts sharply with his own system, then even if that structure is presented in pictures it will evoke a negative reaction.

What this means is that it ill suits anyone to scoff at systematic theology or to minimize its importance, for the scoffer inevitably embraces some kind of systematic theology of his own. Relevant discussion therefore does not call into question the legitimacy of systematic theology per se, but the data base on which it is built; the methods admitted to its construction; the principles that pronounce exclusion of certain information; the language and felicity in which it is phrased; and the consistency, cogency, and precision of the results.

Consider, first, the data base. What propositions about God—His nature, characteristics, functions, relationships—do we admit into our system? Where do we find them? Which ones do we exclude? How do we verify them? What place does revelation have in providing data? Is revelation merely personal, merely propositional, or is it both personal and propositional? If merely personal, how closely do human descriptions of that personal revelation correspond with the reality?

I am not suggesting that everyone thinks through his personal theology by asking himself these questions but rather that these questions lurk unrecognized behind every systematic theology. That is why sophisticated treatments like those of, say, Hodge, Litton, and Henry devote a considerable amount of attention to introductory questions of method.⁷⁴

If these reflections are valid, then a J. D. G. Dunn, for instance, has his own systematic theology. He has admitted as much in that he has attempted to determine the common core of the New Testament. He may believe other things in the New Testament and adopt them into his reconstructed core, but he cannot adopt all that the New Testament has to say, because he is convinced the full set of New Testament data is inconsistent and will not cohere historically or logically. But Dunn has his own systematic theology nevertheless. The crucial question in Dunn's attempt to write Christian theology is the basis on which he selects his data. Why do some New Testament truths, and not others, become central for him? On what basis are some traditional Christian beliefs rejected?

The point I am trying to make is that it is not the validity of systematic theology qua discipline that is called into question, but the cogency of one's critical tools. *Christian* systematic theology cannot be done without reference to the Bible, but what role should the Bible play? And should all of it play a role?

The data base of systematic theology is not the only consideration. Systematic theology, to be coherent to its contemporary culture, must use contemporary language and at least *some* of the paradigms of that culture (or offer astute reasons for rejecting them). Finite and

sinful as every human being is, there will no doubt be some diversity in the theologies of the various systematicians. But nothing is as important as the data basis that is permitted, for this is a question of authority and legitimation, not of hermeneutics. It follows that everyone who presents a case for this or that systematizing of theology owes it to his followers to explain as unambiguously as possible what he will and will not admit into his system. He may of course go much further and justify his data base, but he must at least identify it.

Dunn's work, at least in part, is an attempt to justify his extremely limited data base. Unfortunately, it is precisely at this point that his book is so weak. Dunn adopts many current, critical *shibboleths* but he does not take the time to subject them to rigorous scrutiny, or even to consider whether his approach to the canon, his literary tests, his historical reconstructions, and his failure to wrestle with the alternative options offered even by those who use the same tools may not unwittingly exclude all kinds of data that should be admitted.

2. *The data base to be urged upon systematic theologians is the entire Bible, the canonical sixty-six books; and the validity of this choice depends on the adoption of four positions.*

The *first* position is that all of Scripture is trustworthy, and this of course presupposes that Scripture is truthful. If certain parts are not trustworthy, then they should not be used as data for the systematic theology.

What is objectionable about Dunn's approach is not so much that he detects errors here or there, as false (in my judgment) as his detection is, but that apart from a minimalistic common denominator he is prepared to baptize as Christian some structures of thought that in his view are mutually contradictory. This preserves, he argues, the validity of diverse theologies. But which, if any, is *true*—that is, which corresponds to historical and spiritual reality? Which, if any, is *trustworthy*? If they are mutually contradictory on any point, not more than one, and perhaps none, is true. Defending the validity of diversity in christology, for instance, may be helpful if the various christologies are mutually complementary; but if they are mutually contradictory, a defense of the diverse reduces to a defense of diverse error and untrustworthiness.

This first position, that all of Scripture is trustworthy, can be competently defended on wide grounds: the Scriptures' self-attestation, the approach of Christ to the Scriptures, the amazing reliability the Bible manifests where it is historically testable, and so forth. Some of these grounds are produced elsewhere in this volume. My concern at the moment is simply to set forth in brief form positions on which a systematic theology of the canonical Scriptures must be based, and, implicitly, to show how opposing systematic theologies need to clarify their own approaches.

The *second* position presupposed by my approach to systematic theology is that the basic laws of logic—such as the law of noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle—are not *inventions* of Aristotle or formulations of some other *savant*, but *discoveries* to do with the nature of reality and of communication. They do no more than affirm that certain relationships obtain if communication is possible and coherent, and if any truth whatsoever may be known. If anyone denies this, I reply that the true import of his denial is the opposite of what he says; and I cannot possibly be *logically* (if I may be forgiven for using the word) refuted. The substratum of *any* communication, whether between two individuals or two ages, is simple logic, regardless of the literary genre in which the communication is embedded. The “inner logic of divine revelation,” to which some have appealed as a substitute, sounds devout, but either it is a way of saying that the relationships among divinely given truths in the Scripture must be established by Scripture (in which case it is difficult to see how this is opposed to logic) or else it is a way of appealing to fideism of the irrational variety.

It will not do to respond by citing Isaiah 55:8–9: “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” The context makes it evident that the categories do not concern competing logic systems or the like; rather, they are essentially moral. The preceding verse exhorts, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his *thoughts*” (55:7). Man’s thoughts are to be brought into conformity with God’s thoughts not by abandoning logic but by repentance.

Similarly, it is no real objection to this point to spread out the Bible’s use of paradox, hyperbole, parable, and other literary forms and devices. None of these things endanger logic in the slightest, but they do caution us as to how logic is to be applied.

Logic can produce a false answer if, for instance, the premises are wrong, or if insufficient data are considered, or if a paradox is not recognized for what it is. But such failures do not threaten logic itself so much as faulty conclusions grounded in poor premises. To pit Scripture against logic is simply incoherent. Rogers and McKim thoroughly misrepresent Calvin on this matter when they say:

Calvin knew the value of logic as one of the human sciences. . . . But the law of noncontradiction, which dialectics taught, did not, for Calvin, have precedence over the teachings of Scripture. The power of truth to persuade us through faith was a greater value for Calvin with his humanist background. He commented, for example, on Matthew 27:43, “He trusts in God, let God deliver him now. . . .” He condemned as “Satan’s logic” any interpretation that applied logic to God’s providence and then concluded that God does not love us because we suffer. Calvin accepted that God had given logic along with physics, mathematics, and other worldly

disciplines “that we may be helped . . . by the work and ministry of the ungodly.” But if logic was used to drive persons away from faith in the truths of Scripture, then it was to be categorically rejected.⁷⁵

Rogers and McKim use the phrase “Satan’s logic” as if to suggest that Calvin presents logic as if it were in the peculiar domain of Satan. In fact, Calvin says that Satan attempts to drive us to despair by “this logic,” that is, “this logical argument,” viz., that since God watches over the safety of His people it appears He does not love those whom He does not assist. Calvin calls Satan’s ruse “this logic” because it has the form of logical argument, but he then goes on to argue that Satan’s argument is false, *not on the grounds that logic must take a back seat to Scripture*, but on the grounds that the premises are inadequate. God’s love cannot be reduced to the present instant, Calvin says, and God may demonstrate His love in the long haul. Moreover, God often uses adversity to train His people in obedience. In short, Calvin argues that Satan uses a prejudicial selection of the data in constructing his argument. Rogers and McKim are mistaken when they say Calvin rejected “any interpretation *that applied logic* to God’s providence and then concluded that God does not love us because we suffer.”⁷⁶ On the contrary, the cogency of Calvin’s response depends entirely on the logic that he himself applies to the same problem, using a broader selection of data. There is not the slightest suggestion, either in his commentaries or in the *Institutes*, that Calvin ever considered logic itself as something that could, in and of itself, “drive persons away from faith in the truths of Scripture” and was therefore “to be categorically rejected.”⁷⁷ The real problem is that Rogers and McKim characteristically read historical evidence through the spectacles of their own reconstruction of history and thereby treat it anachronistically.⁷⁸

These two positions bring us to a *third*. If the Scriptures are trustworthy, and if the basic laws of logic are not inventions of dubious worth but discoveries of the basic relationships that make both coherent communication and knowledge of truth possible, then for systematic theology to be based on the Bible also requires that the documents that constitute the Bible deal with the same general topic. For instance, a written analysis of Elizabethan English and a text on the quantum behavior of quarks may conceivably be equally trustworthy, but it would be extremely difficult to develop a consistent synthesis from these two literary pieces. By the same token, a systematic theology based on the Bible requires that the biblical books be close enough in subject matter to cohere.

It is important to observe carefully the limits of this position. I am not saying that the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle of five thousand pieces and that all the five thousand pieces are provided, so that with time and thought the entire picture may be completed. Rather, I am suggesting that the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle that provides five thousand pieces along with the assurance that these pieces all belong

to the same puzzle, even though ninety-five thousand pieces (the relative figures are unimportant for my analogy) are missing. Most of the pieces that are provided, the instructions insist, fit together rather nicely; but there are a lot of gaping holes, a lot of edges that cry out to be completed, and some clusters of pieces that seem to be on their own. Nevertheless, the assurance that all of the pieces do belong to one puzzle is helpful, for that makes it possible to develop the systematic theology, even though the systematic theology is not going to be completed until we receive more pieces from the One who made it. And meanwhile, even some systematicians who believe that all the pieces belong to the same puzzle are not very adept puzzle players but sometimes force pieces into slots where they don't really belong. The picture gets distorted somewhat, but it remains basically recognizable.

Finally, although good systematic theology must be phrased in the language of the present and interact with and speak to contemporary concerns,⁷⁹ it must be controlled by the biblical data. "Any number of supposedly biblical theologies in our day are so heavily infected with contemporary personalist, existential, or historical thinking as to render their biblical basis highly suspect," comments one critic,⁸⁰ and the remark is even more relevant to current systematic theology. That the control should run in this direction is an epistemological requirement that depends on the revelatory status of the Bible.⁸¹ If this be not so, the kind of systematic theology being advocated here is impossible, and the attempt to develop such should forthwith be abandoned.

In short, I am concerned to show the positions implicitly adopted when an Evangelical maintains that the proper data base for systematic theologians is the Bible, the canonical sixty-six books, and to offer some brief comments on their reasonableness. From now on, by "systematic theology" I will refer only to systematic theology based on the canon, unless I explicitly state otherwise. It is in this narrow sense of the designation that the subtitle of this chapter is to be taken: "The Possibility of Systematic Theology."

My focus from this point on will be the New Testament rather than the entire canon, for no other reason than that the immensity of the problems and the literature requires that I reduce the field a little. The substantial questions concerning the *diversity* of the New Testament documents I have not yet directly addressed. To compare systematic theology with a jigsaw puzzle with many pieces not present begs a host of methodological questions, and to these we must now turn.

3. *Progressive revelation must be treated with all seriousness, but appeal to progressive revelation in order to exclude inconvenient components along that revelation's alleged trajectory is illegitimate.*

The term "progressive revelation" is a slippery one. Coined first in liberal circles to describe an evolutionary approach to understanding

the Bible,⁸² it has subsequently often been taken over and given another meaning, the meaning I wish to adopt. By "progressive revelation" I refer to the fact that God progressively revealed Himself in event and in Scripture, climaxing the events with the death-resurrection-exaltation of Christ and climaxing the Scriptures with the closing of the canon. The result is that God's ways and purposes were progressively fulfilled not only in redemption events but also in inscripturated explanation. The earlier revelation prepares for the later; the later carries further and in some way explicates the earlier.

The most dramatic canonical shift is the shift from Old Testament to New.⁸³ Yet even within the New, the amount of development is astounding. Chronologically, it covers less than a century, but it moves from Judaism and the slaughter of the innocents under Herod the Great, through the preaching of John the Baptist, the public ministry of Jesus (characterized by Jesus' personal submission to Old Testament law [though He often broke with tradition], along with a host of His sayings that could adequately be comprehended only after His death and resurrection),⁸⁴ the early Jerusalem church, the progressive self-consciousness within the church that recognized the obsolescence of the temple and, because of the gift of the Spirit, the admission of believing Gentiles into a common fellowship with shared Savior and God, the rapid evangelization of the Mediterranean world, and the growing rift between Judaism and Christianity.

Of the various models used to describe this development, the organic one (seed leads to plant) is no doubt the best analogy.⁸⁵ We are dealing with the growth of a single specimen, not transmutation into new species. It follows that systematic theology is possible, in the same way that the botanical description of a tree is possible. That there is growth and development in revealed truth within the canon requires, not the abolition of systematic theology, but treatment that is sensitive to the nature of the object being studied.

Even so, there are certain characteristics of the diversity in the New Testament that have to be borne in mind. Just as certain parts of the seed are not taken up in the plant it produces, so certain parts of the old covenant under which Jesus lived are not continued under the new covenant He inaugurated (e.g., Mark 7:19; much of Hebrews). Any systematic theology cannot escape such historical considerations. Inasmuch as it is the systematician's concern to synthesize in *contemporary* terms the truth of Scripture, he must summarize not only what God has required in the past, but especially what He requires in his own present. In that sense he must take special pains to discover how the earlier revelation relates to its later fulfillment and applies to himself and his contemporaries.⁸⁶

A second characteristic of New Testament diversity lies in the fact that even after the Spirit-age begins at Pentecost the full implications of this new age take some time to be understood (as Jesus Himself

suggested they would; cf. John 16:12–15);⁸⁷ and this understanding comes only in degrees, unevenly, haltingly, cautiously. The significance of the descent of the Spirit on Cornelius and his household (Acts 10–11), both to Peter and to Luke, is that the charismatic phenomena accompanying this baptism validated the reality of Gentile salvation to the Jerusalem church. But this does not prevent the circumcision crisis from precipitating the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). According to Paul, both Peter and Barnabas failed on one occasion to live up to their own confessed understanding of the gospel (Gal. 2). Such events tend to support notions of human fallibility and sinful inconsistency, rather than the notion that there were highly diverse parties in the church with major doctrinal differences. It is not only in the present that people sometimes fail to live up to their best insights or refuse to see the entailments of their professed positions.

Can there be development within the writings of one particular author? One must distinguish between the development of a writer's subject matter, which he records and interprets (e.g., Luke–Acts), and the development of the thought of the writer himself.⁸⁸ The best test case of the latter is Paul. Most writers follow in the line of an influential pair of essays by C. H. Dodd⁸⁹ and affirm unhesitatingly that they can trace development in Paul's thought. The most careful of them, however, confess that there are formidable hurdles to overcome if any real objectivity is to be attained.⁹⁰ Quite apart from questions of authenticity, it is not easy to date all of the Pauline correspondence with certainty. Many of the epistles' different emphases stem from diverse pastoral concerns (a point to which I will return). Moreover, it is important to recognize that Paul had been a believer for a solid fifteen years or more before he penned the first letter recognized as canonical, and that is time enough to develop some pretty stable beliefs. All of Paul's canonical writing took place in a single span of fifteen years, long after he had become a mature teacher, and that is not a lengthy period in which to develop major new theological shifts.

There is little reason to doubt that Paul sees himself growing in understanding and maturity, including theological maturity (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8–12; Phil. 3:12–16). But there is not the slightest evidence that Paul perceived himself to be abandoning any position he had formerly maintained in his writings.⁹¹ It remains important that we interpret Paul by Paul,⁹² not only for the sake of systematic theology but also for the sake of understanding Paul.

What must be avoided are the simplistic reconstructions of earliest church history that manufacture straight-line developments everywhere and then force the only primary data we have, the New Testament documents themselves, into some Procrustean bed. Attempts are made, for instance, to show how Paul moved from a futurist eschatology to a realized eschatology,⁹³ despite the fact it has been repeatedly shown that both elements are there from the beginning.⁹⁴ It

is still common to argue that Acts must be late because Luke so nicely exemplifies *Frühkatholizismus*, even though it has been convincingly argued that Luke–Acts betrays both “early catholicism” and “enthusiasm.”⁹⁵ Theology, like life, is complex. Most of us have learned to live with the “already/not yet” tension in the New Testament; why, then, do we find it so difficult to accept the “early catholicism/enthusiasm” tension? If Acts is taken seriously, there is order and discipline, not to mention recognized elders, from the earliest years of the church.

The problem for the Evangelical systematician is already difficult enough when he confronts the diversity of the New Testament without having to face the dogmatic reorganization of the evidence along the lines of critical orthodoxy. While various critics are accusing him of constructing a rigid systematic theology that forces him to distort his exegesis, he may perhaps be forgiven if he finds that his critics are reconstructing church history and developing what I have elsewhere called “histmatics,”⁹⁶ thereby distorting their exegesis far more seriously.

More difficult to assess is the kind of development in Paul suggested by Murray J. Harris in his published works.⁹⁷ Harris thinks 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 is a watershed in Paul's theology, reflecting change in his eschatological thinking because of a brush with death in Asia (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8–11). He now no longer thinks of the resurrection in terms of a corporate phenomenon experienced by all deceased Christians at the Parousia, but in terms of a personal transformation of each Christian at death so as to receive a “spiritual body” comparable to Christ's at that time.

This, of course, is very different from what Paul has expressed in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. With some hesitation, I would argue that it is an inadmissible example of “development” in Paul. Considerations that bear on my judgment include the following: (1) The New Testament presupposes a real continuity between Jesus' prepassion body and His postresurrection body. Otherwise why the stigmata, and where did the dead body go? Inasmuch as Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of the harvest, how different from Jesus' resurrection may the harvest be? (2) Was the Asian experience as traumatic as all that? Second Corinthians 11 makes it clear how often Paul faced suffering and death. Is it likely therefore that one more such experience could effect so major a change in the thinking of a mature and seasoned theologian? (3) Surely the “not . . . but” construction in 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 is a Semitic way of expressing fundamental preference rather than absolute antithesis. (4) Is it possible that the crucial verses, 2 Corinthians 5:3–5, are included by Paul to cover himself against the Corinthian errorists, already confronted in 1 Corinthians 15, who might still be prone to think of verse 2 in immaterial terms? (5) If we grant that 2 Corinthians 10–13 was written after 2 Corinthians

5, then there is evidence that Paul still held to an anthropology that could conceive of human existence apart from the body (2 Cor. 12:1–10), even if it was not the ultimate mode of existence. (6) The exegetical evidence in 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 makes Harris's view possible; it by no means requires it. But Harris's view faces not only the above challenges, but a question from the vantage of systematic theology. The progress of revelation in this instance is interpreted by Harris to involve so massive a change of view that Paul's earlier teaching (esp. in 1 Thess. 4) was *wrong*. That earlier teaching did not simply point forward, serve as a shadow pointing proleptically to the reality in another covenant, or constitute a part of the truth now being fully developed; rather, it was in error. For all these reasons, I am reluctant to side with Harris without seeing much more exegetical warrant.⁹⁸

I have tried to show how the systematic theologian must be aware of questions concerning progressive revelation and I have suggested a few things that might serve as helpful limits. One fairly common application of progressive revelation I confess I reject. This is exemplified by David Kelsey.⁹⁹ It attempts to plot the development in theology reflected in Scripture (usually on the basis of a doubtful critical orthodoxy) and then uses the *patterns thus developed*, not the Scripture itself, as normative. In fact, the events of Scripture are inseparable from their interpretation,¹⁰⁰ and the "patterns" Kelsey and others detect are so subjectively grounded that it is difficult to imagine how they could achieve normative status as anything more than interesting paradigms.¹⁰¹ Progressive revelation must be taken in all seriousness, but appeal to progressive revelation in order to exclude inconvenient components along that revelation's alleged trajectory is illegitimate.

4. *The diversity in the New Testament very often reflects diverse pastoral concerns, with no implications whatsoever of a different credal structure.*

It is easy to find *formal* inconsistencies and contradictions in the New Testament. "Carry each other's burdens," Paul says to the Galatians, "and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). This does not prevent him from advising them, a few verses farther on, that "each one should carry his own load" (Gal. 6:5). Most commentators have no trouble explaining how these verses could come from the pen of one man within one paragraph, and what they mean.¹⁰²

When we move to two different epistles by the same author, however, the situation is rather different. There is still, for instance, a tendency to pit Galatians against 1 Corinthians. In two of the more recent treatments, those by Drane and Richardson,¹⁰³ much more allowance is made for the distinctive pastoral problems Paul is facing in the two cities; but even so, Drane in particular is still inclined, in my judgment, to see rather more of a change in Paul's thinking than the evidence allows. Drane sees an early Galatians denouncing attempts to

impose law-keeping on Gentile believers. Unfortunately, Drane suggests, some of Paul's converts developed this theme too far, and in the permissive city of Corinth they sank into licentiousness and immorality based on a crude antinomianism. This, according to Drane, prompted Paul to write 1 Corinthians, which imposes far more rules than the Paul of Galatians could have envisaged. In fact, Paul was in danger of overreaction. Later, however, Paul penned 2 Corinthians and Romans and found the right balance.

This analysis presupposes that Galatians and 1 Corinthians are unbalanced and cannot be taken to reflect Paul's mature thought. From a methodological point of view, I would be curious to know how Drane would support his structure over against one that explains the differences in terms of the pastoral problem confronting Paul. This is not to deny that Paul's personal understanding of the dangers might not have improved with experience; but it is to deny that Paul would later have withdrawn any word from Galatians or 1 Corinthians if he had had to face those same problems again. The clues Drane finds to distinguish between the two paradigms (e.g., he argues that the Corinthians had read the epistle to the Galatians) I do not find entirely convincing.

Unfortunately, there is not space to probe this question in detail, but it is important to remember that, as one writer puts it, the epistles "are occasional documents of the first century, written out of the context of the recipients."¹⁰⁴ F. F. Bruce has traced a number of tensions in Paul's letters¹⁰⁵ and, although his synthesis is not convincing in every case, he approaches the diversity with methodological sensitivity.¹⁰⁶

Part of the problem, I suspect, is that Paul, like Jesus before him, tends to absolutize the language used in addressing the current problem. Granted that Matthew 6 and Luke 18 retain authentic material, it is intriguing to note that in the former passage Jesus seems to be arguing for brief prayers that avoid both pomp and repetition, while in the latter passage he tells a parable with the express purpose of showing his disciples "that they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). Formally, the two stand in mutual contradiction. In reality, the Matthean passage addresses itself to those whose prayers are merely for show, and to those who think that by their much speaking they can manipulate God. By contrast, the Lukan passage addresses itself to the sins of the doubting and the apathetic. There is no real contradiction whatsoever once the circumstances being addressed are properly understood. Jesus, preacher that He is, regularly uses strong, antithetical language to tackle *each* side of a complex question.¹⁰⁷ One of the values of systematic theology, therefore, is that Jesus' or Paul's approach to a host of issues is likely to receive more balanced scrutiny than by the reductionist methods of those who pit Jesus against Jesus and Paul against Paul.

The question of the diverse circumstances that call forth New Testament writings becomes more controversial yet when author is compared with author—Paul with James, for instance, or John with Paul. Not all New Testament diversity can be accounted for by appealing to diverse circumstances; but a surprising amount of it is surely influenced by such considerations. If the “faith of Abraham” is used by Paul to teach that people are justified by grace through faith and by James to teach that faith without works is dead, it does not necessarily follow that the two authors are ignorant of the other’s work or in disagreement with it.¹⁰⁸ In the areas of eschatology and christology, C. F. D. Moule has cogently argued that varied circumstances have prompted much of the New Testament diversity.¹⁰⁹ His work, though widely cited, is still far too infrequently used and treated with the seriousness it deserves.¹¹⁰ What we need, as E. E. Lemcio has put it, only half facetiously, is the rise of a new sensitivity to “Circumstantionsgeschichte.”¹¹¹

Even confessional formulae must be inspected in this light. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul can affirm that “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” In 1 John 4:2–3 John insists, “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh [or, as I would prefer, “that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh”] is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.” The two confessions are not mutually exclusive, nor do they reflect divergent groups of Christians whose christological statements have developed along rather different and perhaps mutually exclusive paths. Rather, in the Corinthian situation with its claims from many lords, the Pauline formulation was both necessary and sufficient. In John’s historical context, in which docetists were attempting to divide Jesus from Christ, the Johannine formulation is both necessary and sufficient. But Paul’s formulation is inadequate to exclude heretics in John’s situation, and John’s formulation is inadequate to exclude heretics in Paul’s situation. Both formulations—and a number of others, for that matter—are *necessary*; but it does not follow that any one of them is *sufficient* in every context (notwithstanding the simplistic use of the confession “Jesus is Lord” by some elements of the WCC!).

W. L. Lane argues that such diversity (he does not use this particular example) reflects a changing theological expression based on a given creedal structure.¹¹² There is a sense in which he is right, even though I am unhappy with his terminology. But one must go beyond that observation to note that our *only* access to the assumed credal structure of the earliest church is the New Testament documents. Because this is so, and also because those documents are themselves inspired, it will not do to try to recover the early creedal structure while ignoring that structure’s specific and diverse exemplifications. Rather, it is precisely at this point that systematic theology is necessary, not only for an adequate exposition of the Christian faith in

contemporary terms but also as the only adequate tool to handle the confessional diversity in a responsible way and thereby sketch in the creedal structure.¹¹³

The alternative is ironic. From all sides New Testament scholars are warned against trying to find a systematic theology in the New Testament. In fact, what these critics are doing is establishing a large number of systematic theologies in the New Testament and then pitting them against each other. A confession is isolated from the historical setting that limits its *sufficiency* (but not its *necessity*) in other settings and is built into a large structure that is set over against some other manufactured structure. Part of this procedure depends on dubious historical reconstructions, something I have already briefly discussed in this chapter, but part of it turns on an irresponsible approach to historical data, an approach that, while decrying systematic theology, is busily systematizing the diversity it finds instead of being sensitive to the mutually complementary nature of the occasional documents that constitute the New Testament.¹¹⁴

5. *The diversity in the New Testament documents very often reflects the diverse personal interests and idiosyncratic styles of the individual writers.*

No one of any theological sophistication argues that the Holy Spirit’s work in inspiring the Scriptures imposed a literary sameness on all the parts. John still sounds like John, Matthew like Matthew, and so forth.

The same phenomena afford us another view of the unity and diversity problem. The language, style, and interests of the individual writers are all to some extent idiosyncratic; and one must therefore be very careful about arguing that such and such a New Testament writer does not believe this or that simply because he does not mention it or perhaps emphasize it. This is especially important when we remember what New Testament scholars have been telling us all along, viz. that the New Testament writers are not attempting to write systematic theology. Would we attempt to delineate the entire theological structure of some modern religious thinker on the basis of two or three occasional monographs called forth in part by his own focused interests and in part by some pressing pastoral concern?

Terminology may differ from writer to writer. As is well known, Matthew uses “call” to refer to a general invitation to the lost, whereas Paul uses “call” to refer to an effectual action by God; but whereas the terminology differs, this does not itself constitute evidence that Paul denies that God invites the lost or that Matthew disbelieves in election.

Brice Martin has compared Matthew and Paul with respect to the relationship between Christ and the law.¹¹⁵ His major conclusion is that Matthew and Paul are utilizing two quite different sets of categories and that they therefore constitute noncontradictory, non-

complementary, but compatible, perspectives. His exegesis is not always convincing and he underplays the importance of other considerations (such as the role of salvation history). Worse, it is difficult to see exactly what “noncomplementary but compatible perspectives” means. If both are dealing with the same God and the relationships of men with that God, their perspectives must be complementary in some ways. Martin has imposed alien philosophical categories on the material. Yet, once stripped of such antithetical language and softened by other considerations, his argument still has a point: different New Testament writers may focus on different aspects of truth and from quite different perspectives, whether for apologetic or personal reasons, and such diversity must be taken into account.

Part of the contemporary dilemma lies in the fact that many New Testament scholars who decry systematic theology are busy *over-theologizing* (if this barbarism may be forgiven) the New Testament. Every utterance, every epistle, every literary scrap, must be prompted by explicit *theological* concerns. These concerns (it is alleged) override historical considerations and personal interests. A New Testament writer is always engaged in refuting some theological opponent. Few allow for the possibility that one of the reasons why a particular pericope is admitted may be because the writer found the story interesting. It is with a sigh of relief that we turn to Morna Hooker’s cheeky article, “Were There False Teachers in Colossae?”¹¹⁶

I do not mean to argue that the New Testament writers are but seldom refuting false notions or that the inclusion of this or that list of material is to be accounted for purely on the grounds of idiosyncratic preference. I mean, rather, to point out that the rich diversity of the New Testament—diversity in genre, style, confession, perhaps liturgy, even content and focus¹¹⁷—must not be interpreted solely in the categories of antithetical *theological* formulations. The evidence itself cries against it. But when such evidence is taken into account, it is difficult to see why a deep underlying theological unity is impossible, or even unlikely.

6. *On the basis of these reflections it must be insisted that there is no intrinsic disgrace to theological harmonization, which is of the essence of systematic theology.*

In fact, one might even argue that there is disgrace attached to the failure to make the attempt. Are the assumptions of critical orthodoxy all that unshakable? There was more communication in the ancient world than we sometimes recognize and much more fundamental agreement among the apostles and apostolic writers than is often allowed. The modern notion of well-high hermetically sealed communities doing their own theology and touching up their own traditions in splendid isolation, all to produce some New Testament document by multiple authors, is gross exaggeration; and to the extent

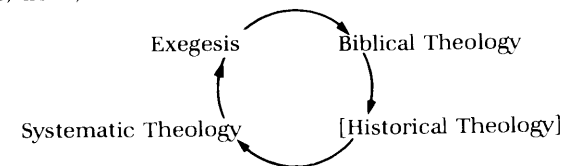
it reflects any truth at all, we must frankly admit, with Hengel,¹¹⁸ that we know virtually nothing of such communities. On the positive side, there is evidence that a beginning New Testament canon was recognized very early, during the fifties, when many eyewitnesses were still alive.¹¹⁹ This suggests greater agreement and harmony among the early Christians than is commonly affirmed.

Critics of systematic theology, of course, are afraid that these arguments will force the New Testament documents into an artificial conformity. That danger is certainly present. But in one sense the approach I have been following encourages theological exploration that, far from being rigid and narrow, encourages work not otherwise possible. “There is . . . a sense in which every New Testament writer communicates to Christians today more than he knew he was communicating, simply because Christians can now read his work as part of the completed New Testament canon.”¹²⁰ This is not an appeal to *sensus plenior*, at least in any traditional sense. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that with greater numbers of pieces of the jigsaw puzzle provided, the individual pieces and clusters of pieces are seen in new relationships not visible before.

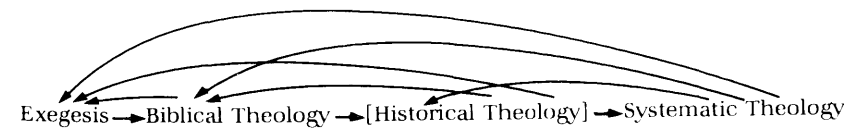
What, then, is the proper place for the *analogia fidei*, the “analogy of the faith”? Can we safeguard our exegesis from an untoward usage of systematic theology? The answer, I fear, is, “Not entirely.” It would be convenient if we could operate exclusively along the direction of the following diagram:

Exegesis → Biblical Theology → [Historical Theology] → Systematic Theology

(The brackets around the third element are meant to suggest that in this paradigm historical theology makes a direct contribution to the development from biblical theology to systematic theology but is not itself a part of that line.) In fact, this paradigm, though neat, is naïve. No exegesis is ever done in a vacuum. If every theist is in some sense a systematician, then he is a systematician *before* he begins his exegesis. Are we, then, locked into a hermeneutical circle, like the following?



No; there is a better way. It might be diagrammed like this:



That is to say, there are feedback lines (and more lines going forward, for that matter). It is absurd to deny that one's systematic theology does not affect one's exegesis. Nevertheless the line of final control is the straight one from exegesis right through biblical and historical theology to systematic theology. The final authority is the Scriptures, the Scriptures alone. For this reason exegesis, though affected by systematic theology, is not to be shackled by it. Packer is right when he argues:

The maxim that exegesis and biblical interpretation are for the sake of an adequate systematic theology is true, yet if one stops there one has told only half the story. The other half, the complementary truth which alone can ward off the baleful misunderstanding that a particular rational orthodoxy is all that matters, is that the main reason for seeking an adequate systematic theology is for the sake of better and more profound biblical interpretation.¹²¹

Even so, it is important, first, to recognize that the final control is in the Bible, and the Bible alone, and, second, to be self-consciously aware what kind of appeal is being made at each stage of the enterprise, in order not to confuse the lines of control.

If anyone objects that this is giving far too significant a place to systematic theology, I insist that in one sense my strongest opponent is doing the same thing, and perhaps less self-critically than I, for he has adopted his own kind of "systematic theology" in adopting various notions about how the New Testament can or cannot fit together. Often, in fact, such a critic will be particularly vulnerable to his own structured thought precisely because he doesn't believe it influences him unduly. My model is valid only if Scripture is trustworthy, but for various reasons I believe that it is. My concern, then, is to legitimate the harmonization implicit in systematic theology and show that such harmonization, properly handled, enriches biblical interpretation without distorting it.

There are one or two specific dangers in appealing to the *analogia fidei* that should be mentioned. Quite apart from the question of the ultimate line of control, one must beware of handling the *analogia fidei* anachronistically. This does not mean that for every revelatory text one should develop an *analogia fidei* based exclusively on earlier revelatory material¹²² (although such a method has its own usefulness in tackling certain problems), for that would mean no really new revelation could ever be admitted. It means, rather, that the *analogia fidei* should be used cautiously as an outer limit and as a final consideration,¹²³ rather than as the determining device.

A second illicit procedure is that exemplified by P. K. Jewett in his book *Man as Male and Female*.¹²⁴ As Jewett develops his appeal to *analogia fidei*, it becomes clear he is in fact operating with a "canon within the canon." He isolates (at least to his own satisfaction) the

central teachings of the Scriptures on his chosen subject and on that basis excludes Paul's argument in 1 Timothy 2:11–15 on the ground that it does not cohere with the *analogia fidei* he has constructed on the basis of his now-limited canon. This is a novel appeal to *analogia fidei* indeed, one that is methodologically indistinguishable from the approach of Ernst Käsemann or anyone else who chooses to go with a restricted canon.¹²⁵ If Jewett wishes to follow that line of argument, that is his business; but it is illicit to christen it with the *analogia fidei* argument, which traditionally assumes that the canon is the given. In fact, one of the methodological advantages of working with systematic theology is that, rightly executed, it eliminates the pick-and-choose kind of theologizing that enables the theologian to say pretty much what he wants to say. Systematic theology carefully handled can help ensure us that we still hear the Word of God, and not just the pre-selected answers to carefully limited questions.

In short, with care, there is no disgrace to the theological harmonization that is of the essence of systematic theology, but there are numerous pitfalls to be avoided.

7. *Systematic theologians should be careful to note how various truths and arguments function in Scripture and they should be very cautious about stepping outside those functions with new ones.*

"When considering apparently divergent passages, it is important to look at the purpose of the wording before pronouncing on the details of the language."¹²⁶ That advice is sound not only in exegesis but also in systematic theology.

Two or three rapid examples will flesh out the force of this reflection. It is as illicit to conclude from the fact that women were last at the cross and first at the tomb that therefore they should be ordained as elders as it is to conclude from the fact that all of the Twelve were men that therefore women should not be ordained as elders. Again, although the New Testament confesses that Jesus Christ is simultaneously God and man and that God cannot be tempted, it does not necessarily follow that Jesus Christ cannot be tempted.

There are two reasons why we need to be extraordinarily hesitant about stepping outside the example of Scripture in such matters. First, to ascribe certain functions to various truths or events in Scripture even though Scripture does not make use of those same truths and events to develop such functions may involve us in a prejudicial selection of data from the data base. We may fail to learn how certain truths function at a *pastoral* level, or we may unwittingly draw a conclusion that contradicts some of the primary data.

The second reason lies in the fact that a number of fundamental Christian beliefs involve huge areas of unknowns. Take, for instance, the Incarnation, or the Trinity, or the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. In each of these areas, it is possi-

ble to demonstrate that there is no necessary logical contradiction; but it does not seem possible at the moment to provide an exhaustive account of how these fundamentals of the faith cohere. We are dealing with the suprarational¹²⁷ (but certainly not with the irrational or the illogical), with a painful shortage of information at crucial points. But it is surely worth observing, for instance, that God's sovereignty functions in Scripture to engender confidence in His people (e.g., Rom. 8:28) and to ensure final judgment, but it never functions to reduce man to the status of an irresponsible robot. Similarly, man is encouraged to believe, choose, obey, repent, and so forth, but his responsibilities in these areas never function in the Scriptures (as they sometimes do in other Jewish literature) to make God fundamentally contingent.¹²⁸

These cautions, I hasten to add, do not call into question the value of logic. Rather, they highlight the complexity of the data and the fact that certain data we might desire are not to be found in Scripture. To limit oneself primarily to copying the functions found in Scripture is to adopt a methodological control that will ensure that one's systematic theology is a little more biblical than might otherwise be the case.

CONCLUSION

The one thing I am here to say to you is this: that it is worse than useless for Christians to talk about the importance of Christian morality, unless they are prepared to take their stand upon the fundamentals of Christian theology. It is a lie to say that dogma does not matter; it matters enormously. It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is virtually necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe. It is hopeless to offer Christianity as a vaguely idealistic aspiration of a simple and consoling kind; it is, on the contrary, a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism. And it is fatal to imagine that everybody knows quite well what Christianity is and needs only a little encouragement to practise it. The brutal fact is that in this Christian country not one person in a hundred has the faintest notion about what the church teaches about God or man or society or the person of Jesus Christ.¹²⁹

So writes Dorothy Sayers, and I think she is basically right. This chapter has dealt with technical articles and critical judgments, but in the final analysis what is at stake is not some purely academic dispute, but what we preach.

I am not persuaded, either by Bauer or by Dunn, that the early church was characterized by such tepid toleration and unconcern for truth that it would have put up with basic theological liberalism. As I read the evidence, I perceive great diversity in emphasis, formulation, application, genre of literature, and forms of ecclesiastical administration. But I also perceive that there is a unity of teaching that makes

systematic theology not only possible but necessary, and that modern theology at variance with this stance is both methodologically and doctrinally deficient. It is difficult to conceive how systematic theology of the sort defended in this chapter is possible unless the New Testament documents (and the Old Testament documents as well, for that matter) are true and trustworthy; and it is difficult to conceive how the same documents can be true and trustworthy without finding systematic theology both possible and necessary.

There are many questions surrounding the unity and diversity of the New Testament that I have not broached here, not least the relationship of the New Testament to the Old; but if the main lines of the argument are sound, then Evangelicals have every reason to ignore the demurrals and get on with writing systematic theology and training systematic theologians. And perhaps such highly desirable goals constitute sufficient reason for a student of the New Testament to step outside the area of his relative expertise.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:
THE POSSIBILITY OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

D. A. Carson
pages 65–95

¹Cf. G. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 9–10.

²Cf. R. L. Reymond, "Some Prolegomenous Issues Confronting the Systematic Theologian," *Presbyterion* 4 (1978): 5–23; J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 197–226; Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 5 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976—), vol. 1.

³Cf. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* 4:463–66; D. A. Carson, "Hermeneutics: A brief assessment of some recent trends," *Themelios* 5, no. 2 (1979–80): 12–20; and especially A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

⁴W. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1934). The English translation was based on the second edition (1964) and was edited by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁵Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, pp. 241–85.

⁶Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random, 1979).

⁷E. P. Sanders, ed., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 1: *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. ix.

⁸Stephen S. Smalley, "Diversity and Development in John," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970–71): 276–92, esp. 279.

⁹E.g., R. A. Kraft, "The Development of the Concept of 'Orthodoxy' in Early Christianity," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 47–59.

¹⁰James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 157.

¹¹M. J. Suggs, "The Christian Two Way Tradition: Its Antiquity, Form, and Function," in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, ed. D. E. Aune (Supplement to *Novum Testamentum* XXXIII; Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 62–74.

¹²Nils A. Dahl, *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), p. 159.

¹³Cf. the collection of essays edited by G. Strecker, *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975).

¹⁴E.g., W. Lohff, "Zur Einführung: Über die Möglichkeit, Theologie im Überblick darzustellen," *Wissenschaftliche Theologie im Überblick*, ed. W. Lohff and F. Hahn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974), pp. 5–12.

¹⁵E.g., D. Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975); R. T. Voelkel, *The Shape of the Theological Task* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968). Cf. also R. Morgan, *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1973), esp. pp. 1–67.

¹⁶E.g., A. Ziegenhaus, "Die Bildung des Schriftkanons als Formprinzip der Theologie," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 29 (1978): 264–83.

¹⁷J. Gabler, *De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus* ("On the proper distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology and the correct delimitation of their boundaries"). First delivered in 1787, this essay is available in a German translation in D. Merk, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments in ihrer Anfangszeit* (Marburg: Elwert, 1972), pp. 273–84, and in G. Strecker, *Problem*, pp. 32–44. Cf. the sensitive treatment of Gabler in Hendrikus Boers, *What Is New Testament Theology?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 23–38.

¹⁸In particular, cf. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

¹⁹E.g., James D. Smart, *The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979). Others besides Smart are optimistic; e.g., Klaus Haacker et al., *Biblische Theologie heute* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977).

²⁰E. Käsemann, "Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?" in *Das Neue Testament als Kanon*, ed. Ernst Käsemann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), pp. 124–33. Käsemann does want more scriptural control than some of his contributors, but he draws no clear lines.

²¹E. Käsemann, "Zum Thema der urchristlichen Apokalyptik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 59 (1962): 259.

²²Cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Schriftauslegung auf dem Wege zur biblischen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975). Part of this work has been recorded in English as *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, tr. Roy A. Harrisville (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). Idem, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments: Eine Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979).

²³Cf. E. Rudolph, "Die atheistische Struktur der neuzeitlichen Subjektivität," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 21 (1979): 119–38.

²⁴Cf. especially David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). Such authority rests not in what Scripture says (i.e., its content) but in its patterns. Which pattern or selection of patterns is chosen is entirely incidental. See the discussion in Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:470–75.

²⁵Ronald A. Ward, *The Pattern of Our Salvation: A Study of New Testament Unity* (Waco: Word, 1978).

²⁶George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

²⁷Hasel, *New Testament Theology*.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 217–19.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 216. Cf. also H. Riesenfeld, "Zur Frage nach der Einheit des Neuen Testaments," *Erbe und Auftrag* 53 (1977): 32–45.

³⁰R. P. Martin, "New Testament Theology: Impasse and Exit," *The Expository Times* 91 (1979–80): 264–69.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 267.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 268.

³³(London: SCM, 1977).

³⁴(London: SCM, 1977).

³⁵B. B. Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 7 (1896): 243; reprinted in *The Necessity of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Jefferson Davis (Washington: University Press of America, 1978), p. 99. All further quotes are from the latter.

³⁶So, among others, Elmer A. Martens, "Tackling Old Testament Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 123–32; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Future of

Biblical Theology," *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 179–94.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸This appears to be the working assumption of Hasel, *New Testament Theology*.

³⁹R. B. Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1975–76): 281–99; also printed in *The New Testament Student and Theology*, pp. 18–31, esp. p. 18.

⁴⁰G. Vos *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 23; John Murray, "Systematic Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 26 (1963–64): 33–46, reprinted in *The New Testament Student and Theology*, pp. 18–31, esp. p. 18.

⁴¹Such an assumption stands behind the sophisticated treatment of Bernard Lonergan, especially in his book, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). Cf. the brief exposition by William Mathews, "Theology as Collaborative Wonder: A Portrait of the Work of Bernard Lonergan, S. J.," *The Expository Times* 91 (1979–80): 172–76. Despite the value of Lonergan's work, he does not attempt to answer unambiguously the precise nature of the authority Scripture has for him and how or to what extent it circumscribes all his endeavor.

⁴²Of course, "theology" may also have a narrower sense, as in "theology proper"—what the Scriptures teach concerning God. But the usage does not interest us here.

⁴³By relating systematic theology to the Scripture, I mean to exclude vague definitions. For instance, Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbrays, 1978), laments the fact that systematic theology has been ignored in British universities and defines such theology as "that constructive discipline which presents the substance of the Christian faith with a claim on the minds of men" (p. ix). Superficially, I have no quarrel with the definition, but I wonder on what basis the "substance of the Christian faith" is to be determined.

⁴⁴See, for instance, the similar recent treatment by Roger R. Nicole, "The Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," *Evangelical Roots*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), pp. 185–94.

⁴⁵Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," p. 114.

⁴⁶Cf. n. 4, *supra*.

⁴⁷A convenient collection of these is found in an appendix to the English translation (cf. n. 4, *supra*).

⁴⁸(London: SCM, 1943).

⁴⁹H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations Between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray, 1954).

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 28.

⁵¹I. H. Marshall, "Orthodoxy and heresy in earlier Christianity," *Themelios* 2, no. 1 (1976–77): 5–14. The comparative "earlier" in Marshall's title is in reaction to Bauer who "had the effrontery to label the second century as 'earliest Christianity'" (p. 6).

⁵²J. F. McCue, "Orthodoxy and Heresy: Walter Bauer and the Valentinians," *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979): 118–30.

⁵³Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*; see n. 33, *supra*.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 373.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 386.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 377.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 376.

⁵⁹R. T. France, in *Themelios* 5 (1979–80): 30–31.

⁶⁰In addition to the review by France (cf. n. 59), cf. in particular the reviews in the following journals: *Theology* 81 (1978): 452–55; *Theology Today* 36 (1979): 116–21; *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1978): 629–31; *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 135–37; *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 18 (1980): 111–13.

⁶¹Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 13.

⁶²Ibid., p. 390, n. 4.

⁶³Ibid., p. 16.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶W. J. Larkin, "Luke's Use of the Old Testament as a Key to His Soteriology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 325–35. Cf. also A. George, "Le sens de la mort de Jésus pour Luc," *Revue Biblique* 80 (1973): 186–217; R. Glöckner, *Die Verkündigung des Heils beim Evangelisten Lukas* (Mainz: Matthias Grünwald, 1975), pp. 155–95; F. Schütz, *Der beidende Christus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969) pp. 93–94; and G. Voss, *Die Christologie des lukanischen Schriften* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972), section 7.

⁶⁷Cf. I. H. Marshall, "The Development of the Concept of Redemption in the New Testament" *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. R. Banks (Exeter: Paternoster, 1974), pp. 153–69.

⁶⁸Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), esp. pp. 63–143.

⁶⁹Cf. especially C. K. Barrett, "The Father is greater than I" (Jo 14, 28): Subordinationist Christology in the New Testament," in *Neues Testament und Kirche*, ed. J. B. Gnilka (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), pp. 144–59.

⁷⁰I have attempted this for the christology of the fourth Gospel in one chapter of my *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Some Aspects of Johannine Theology Against Jewish Background* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, and Nashville: John Knox, 1980).

⁷¹See in particular I. H. Marshall, "The Development of Christology in the Early Church," *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967), pp. 77–93; cf. also C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977).

⁷²Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 24.

⁷³Cf. chapter 1 by W. Grudem in this book.

⁷⁴Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1872), esp. 1:1–188; Edward Arthur Litton, *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Philip E. Hughes (London: James Clarke, 1960), esp. 1–40; Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*.

⁷⁵Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 90–91, citing *Commentary on Matthew* at 27:43 (Calvin Translation Society edition) and *Inst.* II.ii.16.

⁷⁶Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, p. 91.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸This is not a harsh or unfounded charge; see the detailed review article by John Woodbridge, *Trinity Journal* 1 NS (1980): 165–236. Moreover, Rogers and McKim constantly try to give the impression that distinctions re contradictions appear relatively late in the history of the church. In fact, it is not difficult to find passages like this one, where Justin rebukes Trypho for responding with a passage that almost suggests a contradiction: "If you spoke these words, Trypho, and then kept silence in simplicity and with no ill intent . . . you must be forgiven; but if [you have done so] because you imagined that you could throw doubt on the passage, in order that I might say the Scriptures contradicted each other, you have erred. But I shall not venture to suppose or to say such a thing; and if a Scripture which appears to be of such a kind be brought

forward, and if there be a pretext [for saying] that it is contrary [to some other], since I am entirely convinced that no Scripture contradicts another, I shall admit rather that I do not understand what is recorded, and shall strive to persuade those who imagine that the Scriptures are contradictory, rather to be of the same opinion as myself" (*Dial.* 65). Justin then goes on to give his own explanation of the troubling passage.

⁷⁹Evangelical theology is heretical if it is only creative and unworthy if it is only repetitious," comments Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* 1:9.

⁸⁰A. Dulles, "Response to Krister Stendahl's 'Method in the Study of Biblical Theology,'" *The Bible in Modern Theology*, ed. J. P. Hyatt (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), pp. 210–16, esp. p. 214. Cf. also the warnings offered by K. Lehmann, "Über das Verhältnis der Exegese als historisch-kritischer Wissenschaft zum dogmatischen Verstehen," in *Jesus und der Menschensohn*, ed. R. Pesch and R. Schnackenburg (Freiburg: Herder, 1975), pp. 421–34.

⁸¹Cf. among others, Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* 1:213–72.

⁸²On the development of "progressive revelation," cf. J. I. Packer, "An Evangelical View of Progressive Revelation," in *Evangelical Roots*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), pp. 143–58.

⁸³Cf. especially Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

⁸⁴This is particularly clear in John's Gospel; cf. D. A. Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin*, 33 (1982): p. 59–91.

⁸⁵See, for instance, C. F. D. Moule, *Christology*; R. N. Longenecker, "On the Concept of Development in Pauline Thought," in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 195–207.

⁸⁶This has been marked out in painstaking detail for the Sabbath/Sunday issue; cf. D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

⁸⁷Carson, "Understanding Misunderstandings."

⁸⁸This distinction is overlooked by Longenecker, "Development in Pauline Thought," pp. 200–201.

⁸⁹C. H. Dodd, "The Mind of Paul: Change and Development," *BJRL* 18 (1934): 69–110; idem, "The Mind of Paul: A Psychological Approach," *BJRL* 17 (1933): 91–105.

⁹⁰E.g., Longenecker, "Development in Pauline Thought."

⁹¹This, of course, is disputed, especially by those who attempt to find major dislocations in the texts. See, for instance, J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of I Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965), on which I will say more in the next reflection.

⁹²Cf. C. F. D. Moule, "Interpreting Paul by Paul: An Essay in the Comparative Study of Pauline Thought," *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World*, ed. Mark E. Glasswell and Edward W. Fasholé-Luke (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 78–90.

⁹³Charles Buck and G. Taylor, *Saint Paul: A Study of the Development of His Thought* (New York: Scribner, 1969).

⁹⁴Most recently by John W. Drane, "Theological Diversity in the Letters of St. Paul," *Tyndale Bulletin* 26 (1976): 3–26.

⁹⁵So Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, pp. 356–58, even though he uses the same contrast elsewhere; A. Sand, "Überlegungen zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion über den 'Frühkatholizismus,'" *Catholica* 33 (1979): 49–62; and I. H. Marshall, "'Early Catholicism' in the New Testament," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 217–31. Cf. E. Earle Ellis, "Dating the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1979–80): 487–502, esp. 499–500. Ellis insists that the thesis/antithesis/synthesis model is equally

inappropriate in the modern reconstruction apocalypticism/delay of the Parousia/salvation history. Probably all three positions developed at the same time.

⁹⁶D. A. Carson, "Historical Tradition and the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?" in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 2, ed. David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), pp. 85–145.

⁹⁷Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians 5:1–10: Watershed in Paul's Eschatology?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 32–57; idem, "Paul's View of Death in 2 Corinthians 5:1–10," *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 317–28. The restriction to published works is necessary, because in a private communication dated August 27, 1981, Dr. Harris told me that he no longer holds that Paul moved from believing that the spiritual body is received at the Parousia to the belief that the receipt occurs at death, nor does Harris now hold that Paul substitutes the notion of communion with Christ after death for the notion of sleep in the grave. In that sense, he can no longer speak of 2 Corinthians 5 as a "watershed" in Paul's eschatology. These changes will be thoroughly discussed in his forthcoming book *Raised Immortal*.

⁹⁸Harris himself does not admit to a change in Paul's view such that Paul's earlier belief was in error; cf. Harris's treatment of this question in his chapter "Paul's View of Death in 2 Corinthians 5:1–10," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 317–28, esp. pp. 322–23. But I am not convinced that he has successfully overcome the problem.

⁹⁹David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

¹⁰⁰On this most debated of themes, cf. most recently Donald Nicholl, "Historical Understanding," *The Downside Review* 97 (1979), pp. 99–113.

¹⁰¹Cf. the trenchant critique in Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* 4:470–75.

¹⁰²Even J. C. O'Neill (*The Recovery of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* [London: SPCK, 1972]), though he denies that these verses come from Paul, is not interested in denying that they come from one particular (and unknown) glossator.

¹⁰³John W. Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist?* (London: SPCK, 1975); and Peter Richardson, "Pauline Inconsistency: 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 and Galatians 2:11–14," *New Testament Studies* 26 (1979–80): 347–62. On Drane's work, see especially the reviews by R. N. Longenecker, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 461–62 and by M. Silva, *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1977–78): 176–80.

¹⁰⁴Gordon D. Fee, "Hermeneutics and Common Sense," *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 167.

¹⁰⁵F. F. Bruce, "'All Things to All Men': Diversity in Unity and Other Pauline Tensions," in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, ed. R. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 82–99.

¹⁰⁶Compare E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 433, 518–23, who holds that though Paul is not a systematic thinker, he is a coherent thinker. I am not entirely happy with the distinction, since I am unsure how much the unsystematic (but not incoherent) factor finds its genesis less in Paul qua thinker than in the occasional nature of his writings. But even if Paul's thoughts are believed to "cohere," that is an adequate position from the viewpoint of this chapter.

¹⁰⁷I have pointed this out at length in *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

¹⁰⁸Cf. especially Richard N. Longenecker, "The 'Faith of Abraham' Theme in Paul, James and Hebrews: A Study in the Circumstantial Nature of New Testament Teaching," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 203–12.

¹⁰⁹C. F. D. Moule, "The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Christological Terms," *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1959): 247–63; idem, "The Influence of Cir-

cumstances on the Use of Eschatological Terms," *Journal of Theological Studies* 15 (1964): 1–15.

¹¹⁰E.g., Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 25 and n. 12.

¹¹¹In private conversation.

¹¹²W. L. Lane, "Creed and Theology: Reflections on Colossians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (1978): 213–20. Cf. also Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, pp. 359–60.

¹¹³One may wonder if R. P. Martin, "New Testament Theology," p. 266, takes these considerations into account adequately when he writes, "The use of the NT as a manual of systematic theology or a book of ecclesiastical rubric is no longer viable. 'Concepts of doctrine' (*Lehrbegriffe*) are not what the NT documents contain, though it is certainly a different question when we ask if we can in fact extrapolate Christian beliefs from what they comprise." In one sense, of course, the New Testament is *not* a manual of systematic theology. It does not come to us in that form; and systematic theology is therefore a derivative discipline. But it is not fair to the evidence to go so far as to say that the New Testament does not contain "concepts of doctrine." Quite the contrary: it contains not only a rich profusion of doctrines, but even sweeping "concepts of doctrine." What it does *not* contain is a very systematic treatment of these things.

¹¹⁴J. C. Hurd (*The Origin of First Corinthians* [Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1965]) offers a fine example of a really radical historical reconstruction in the service of demonstrating Pauline inconsistency. He uses 1 Corinthians to explore Paul's earlier dealings with the church in Corinth and concludes that the Corinthians had remained closer to the original Pauline gospel than Paul himself had done. According to Hurd, when Paul first came to Corinth, he maintained that a man should not touch a woman (1 Cor. 7:1). He encouraged celibacy and insisted that all things were lawful (10:23) and there was no harm in eating food offered to idols. Because believers all have knowledge (8:1), Paul behaved like one outside the law (9:21). He taught that baptism and the Lord's Supper hold death in check and would continue to do so until the end, expected very shortly. He said nothing of the resurrection from the dead, and he permitted women to go without veils. Then, according to Hurd, Paul changed his mind on a number of points, and these changes were reflected in the "previous letter" (cf. 5:9). It was written to enforce the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15: 29; 21:15), which now forbade eating meat offered to idols. Paul now required veils and urged separation from immorality. He recommended marriage as a safeguard against fornication and for the first time urged caution in the matter of speaking in tongues. Small wonder, argues Hurd, that the poor Corinthians were confused! Paul, therefore, wrote 1 Corinthians, a balanced missive that tried to sort it all out. Hurd says it is good to have this balance, but it would be nice to have the earlier enthusiasm as well. This entire reconstruction is thoroughly implausible. It supposes that Paul, after more than fifteen years of extensive ministry, was still sorting out the most elementary aspects of the faith and in fact reversed himself over a period of perhaps two years. Paul makes no mention of the Jerusalem Council. Moreover, it is difficult to believe that a man as pastorally sensitive as Paul would (even supposing so substantial a shift in his own thinking) impose those changes on new converts by a letter that could only have been confusing. Methodologically, Hurd has built his entire case on his reading of 1 Corinthians; and there are far more believable ways to explain the diversity found there, not least the one that pictures Paul as not only dealing with a host of issues brought up to him but also carefully handling the disunity and divergent opinions about all these matters found within the Corinthian church. Paul is therefore pastorally concerned not only to provide answers but to do so in such a way that he heals the breaches caused by the polarized opinions. This is not only a solid explanation for the kind of argumentation found in the epistle, but a further piece of evidence to confirm the pastoral (rather than merely theoretical) concerns that often prompted the apostle Paul to write. Moreover, many of the particular problems behind 1 Corinthians can be plausibly related to an overrealized eschatology and the entailed "enthusiasm"; cf. A. C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977–78): 510–26.

¹¹⁵Brice L. Martin, "Matthew and Paul on Christ and the Law: Compatible or Incompatible Theologies?" (Ph.D. Diss., McMaster University, 1976); idem, "Some reflections on the unity of the New Testament," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 8 (1979): 143–52.

¹¹⁶Morna D. Hooker, "Were There False Teachers in Colossae?" *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. B. Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), pp. 315–31.

¹¹⁷Cf. R. P. Martin, "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. H. Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 220–51.

¹¹⁸Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of the Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1979).

¹¹⁹Cf. the important article by J. Carmignac, "II Corinthians iii. 6. 14 et le Début de la Formation du Nouveau Testament," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977–78): 383–86.

¹²⁰James I. Packer, "Preaching as Biblical Interpretation," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 198.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 188. Further on the *analogia fidei*, cf. R. C. Sproul, "Biblical Interpretation and the Analogy of the Faith," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), pp. 119–35; and in its connections with biblical theology, cf. Daniel P. Fuller, "Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith," in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 195–213.

¹²²Contra W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 16, 18, 19, 190, 196, 219, 267. Kaiser prefers to speak of the analogy of antecedent Scripture.

¹²³Cf., among others, Robert L. Thomas, "A Hermeneutical Ambiguity of Eschatology: The Analogy of Faith," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (1980): 45–53.

¹²⁴P. K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

¹²⁵E.g., in the area of New Testament ethics, cf. E. Schweizer, "Traditional ethical patterns in the Pauline and post-Pauline letters and their development (lists of vices and house-tables)," in *Text and Interpretation*, ed. Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge: University Press, 1979), pp. 195–209.

¹²⁶C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), p. 60.

¹²⁷Cf. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1978–79), 1:18: "At the same time the truth of faith cannot be translated into a finalized, coherent system which denies the mystery and paradox in faith. This is because the truth is suprarational as well as rational. Our human system must always be one that is open to revision in the light of new insights into the Word of God and the human situation. It can never be a closed, airtight, logically consistent, perfected system of truth." I can live with this judgment, provided "logically consistent" is being applied to a "perfected" and "airtight" system that presupposes, implicitly or explicitly, that God has revealed all there is to know—i.e., that we have all the pieces to the puzzle. In that case, our use of logic will fall under the fact that we labor under a false premise and correspondingly distort the evidence, trying to force pieces from the puzzle into slots where they don't properly fit. I reject the statement if it is written in defense of a logically inconsistent system.

¹²⁸I have dealt with this problem at length in *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*.

¹²⁹Dorothy L. Sayers, "Creed or Chaos?" in *The Necessity of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Jefferson Davis (Washington: University Press of America, 1978), pp. 15–32.