
THE ROLE OF EXEGESIS IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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Among the many ingredients that go into making a good systematic theologian is the ability to keep a large number of intellectual balls in the air at the same time. The systematician is concerned about saying something true, insightful, and in proportion with respect to other elements of systematic theology. Some account must be taken of the long history of theological study, of other attempts to articulate the same subject matter, of the bearing of contemporary thought on both the content and the form of the subject, of the systematician's biases and blind spots, and, if the systematician holds a high view of Scripture, of whether or not what is said is in conformity with the Bible—or, better, accurately reflects the content and emphases of Scripture, but in contemporary garb.

THE PROBLEM

Unlike balls whirling through the air by the juggler's skill, the various ingredients that constitute systematic theology are not independent. Drop a ball and the other balls are unaffected; drop, say, historical theology and not only does the entire discipline of systematic theology change its shape, but the other ingredients are adversely affected. Without historical theology, for instance, exegesis is likely to degenerate into arcane, atomistic debates far too tightly tethered to the twentieth century. Can there be any responsible exegesis of Scripture that

does not honestly wrestle with what earlier Christian exegesis has taught?

In the contemporary discussion about the nature of theology, there is more than one way to drop a "ball." It is as easily done by defining the ball out of existence as by simply dropping it and letting it go. For example, a theologian may simply "drop" historical theology—i.e., take as little account of it as possible; but a theologian may also define exegesis in such subjective terms that Scripture is never a canon, never more than *my* reading, which has as much and as little warrant as anyone else's reading. Historical theology has thereby been rendered entirely inconsequential to the interpretive task. Or systematic theology itself may be defined in such a way that its content is not in any sense constrained by Scripture. Scripture becomes a legitimate contributing element, but no more controlling than, say, the disciplines of historical and philosophical theology. And thus Scripture itself has been defined. It is not itself revelation; at best, it contains or hides a revelatory word.

A very high proportion of the unease in the discipline of systematic theology today is generated by the mutually contradictory definitions under which different systematians operate. Attending meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion is a bit like showing up uninvited at Babel a few minutes after God's judgment has fallen: it is enormously stimulating to listen to scores and scores of small groups of people talking their own language but somewhat disconcerting to recognize that the project on which they are said to be engaged has largely ground to a halt.

This chapter makes no pretensions about reversing Babel. The aim is more modest: to work through in an introductory way just what exegesis ought to contribute to systematic theology and the extent to which exegesis itself ought to be shaped and constrained by systematic theology. I will be defining the most important terms as I go and interacting with some alternative proposals so as to lay bare some of the points of dispute lurking behind the conflicting definitions.

We begin, then, with *theology*, what Maurice Wiles calls "the elusive subject."¹ At its most rudimentary, it is disciplined discourse about God,² and thus is properly parasitic on religion, on the experience of God. This is not, as we will see, a catastrophic capsizing in the seas of subjectivism, for even revelation is, from the human perspective, an experience of the

God who is not only "there" but who has also disclosed himself. But in a hypothetical world where everyone is an atheist, where no one ever experiences God, there could be no theology. Or, to put the matter positively, disciplined discourse about God, unless it is entirely negative, assumes that some people, at least, have come to know him in their experience, or to know something about him, or at least to know some people who claim to know him or to know something about him.

With so broad a definition, disciplined discourse about virtually any experience of the numinous can be labeled theology. By the same token, one can meaningfully speak of "Muslim theology" or "Roman Catholic theology" or "existentialist theology." Before attempting to define systematic theology, it is important to think through what might be meant by *Christian theology*. For many, Christian theology is theology (as broadly defined above) undertaken in the heritage of Christendom. Thus when Voelkel, building on the work of Wilhelm Herrmann, develops one form of existentialist theology, he sees himself as setting an agenda for the development of Christian theology within the university environment.³ Such an approach, I think, is impossibly generous. It is not *Christian* theology unless it is disciplined discourse about the God who is central in the Christian religion—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who is the transcendent Creator, the God who is personal, the God who speaks, the God who has revealed himself supremely in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now I have not yet spoken of revelation, nor of the way Christians come to receive revelation as revelation. Indeed, a great deal of contemporary Christian theology, as defined so far, directs its "disciplined discussion" to these points. For instance, in a recent book Stephen Sykes surveys Schleiermacher, Newman, Harnack, Troeltsch, and Barth with respect to the interplay found in each of these theologians between "inwardness" (i.e., inward religious experience) and the external doctrines and ecclesiastical forms of religion.⁴ He argues that the "essence of Christianity" is bound up with this tension. True enough. What he does not address, however, are *which* doctrines must be raised for consideration, and which must be dismissed as misguided or heretical. As Sykes has framed himself, Arius and Joseph Smith could both happily be admitted to the "essence of Christianity." In short, today a vastly disproportionate amount of Christian theology scurries

in circles around the threshold of the discipline. It talks about the methods, tensions, hermeneutics, and shape of Christian theology, but it does not help Christians know what to believe, and why. Some simply deny that there is any stopping place: Christian theology can be done only “on the way”⁵ through life, refusing to stop anywhere: not at negation, since that would lead to agnosticism, and not at the historical givenness of Christian revelation, since that would be to absolutize it and thus to divinize the past.

By now the problem of revelation has become acute. In the past, the “biblical theology” movement told us that revelation was in event, not in word. Others taught us that the word of God is not Scripture but operates through Scripture to make its own impact on the receptive soul. But for many, the rise of the new hermeneutic has so relativized even these minimalistic visions that many theologians either cease being *Christian* theologians, in the sense defined above, or else, aware that there must be some “givens” but nervous about articulating them, they focus endlessly on method, and thus compound the problem by catering to the pluralism of the age.

Thus there is a profound sense in which one of the purposes of Christian theology is to address the question, What should Christians believe? Even if the synthetic answers it produces can never attain the finality and authority of the revelation itself, it is exceedingly important that Christian theologians maintain this orientation. Christian theology must of course address questions dealing with what has traditionally been called prolegomena; but mature Christian theology refuses to devote all its attention to prolegomena, as if the theologian’s responsibilities have been fully met when there has been endless talk about how to “do” Christian theology but nothing discussed outside the realm of prolegomena. One might as wisely make vast preparations for an enormous enterprise that does not exist.

Robust Christianity is uncomfortable with the vague assumption that there are givens out there somewhere, when those givens are so rarely expounded. In line with the central tradition of two millennia of Christian belief, it is important to believe and teach that God has revealed himself in events and people: he is not nearly as terrorized by the scandal of historical particularity as are many Christian thinkers, nor can he possibly be seduced by the suggestion that to hold this position is to divinize the past. In space-time history he himself has

spoken through his own appointed prophets and ensured that his revelation would in due course be inscripturated so that the message of his redeeming love would be made known to the ends of the earth. Above all, he has revealed himself in the person of his Son, the unique revelation of the Father, the self-expression (*lóγος*) of God, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus became flesh, a Jew who lived at a particular time and place. By his death he displayed ultimate obedience to his Father and achieved the defeat of death by bearing the penalty that would otherwise have justly fallen on his people. By his resurrection he demonstrated that he was not the God-condemned criminal many observers thought his crucifixion proved him to be. Far from it: his sacrifice was accepted by the Almighty, and he himself was exalted to the Father’s right hand, whence he bequeathed his Spirit on his people as he had promised. Even now he rules, as the Father’s sovereignty is mediated exclusively through him until the final enemy is destroyed. All this, and much more, is entrusted to his people in the Scriptures, which not only provide the human witness to the historical dimensions of this revelation, but also themselves constitute God-breathed revelation.

That, or something like it, stands at the heart of “mere Christianity.” One could add a few more details, talk about the nature of the church, change the emphasis here and there, and still not lose the principal point: Christianity is a revealed religion. And that means that *Christian* disciplined discourse about God, Christian theology, must be discourse whose subject matter is finally and irrevocably constrained by that revelation.

Three points deserve clarification before the next step in definition can be profitably undertaken. First, although God has revealed something of himself by what has traditionally been called “general revelation”—that which is found in nature and in the conscience, however tattered, of each human being by virtue of having been made in God’s image—and although that revelation has a real if limited role to play in making God known (Ps. 19; Rom. 1), its contribution to Christian theology is necessarily limited. Indeed, even what we think about the potential of general revelation is largely controlled by God’s special revelation. Although it is entirely proper to speak of God’s disclosing himself to us in the events and people of Scripture, and supremely in the person of his Son, in practice this forces us back to Scripture, the written revelation of God,

for we have little or no access to the events and people apart from Scripture.

Second, every *Christian* theologian ought therefore frankly to delineate just where he or she perceives the locus of revelation to be. It is the malaise over that responsibility that has engendered so many discussions that skirt the principal substance. I cannot here assign space to defend my understanding of the matter, but the relation between exegesis and systematic theology cannot be explored without delineating what is to be “exegeted” (to coin a verb). I hold that the locus of God’s special revelation is the Bible, the sixty-six canonical books, reliable and truthful as originally given. Nor is this the upstart conservatism of a desperate reactionary: it is, overwhelmingly, the central tradition of two millennia of Christians.⁶

I am of course aware that this view receives short shrift in some quarters. Partly to ensure that my understanding of these issues is not obscurantist or glib, I have tried to read widely in these areas in recent years and to assist in articulating an adequate doctrine of Scripture for the end of the twentieth century—one that deals fairly with Scripture and addresses the concerns of the contemporary world of scholarship.⁷ Whatever degree of success has been achieved, others must judge; it would be a relief, however, not to have to read more remarks like those that dismiss what is the central tradition of the entire church on this matter as “a false position which cannot be defended except by those impervious to reason.”⁸

Third, the language was carefully chosen when I argued that Christian theology must be discourse “whose subject matter is finally and irrevocably constrained by that revelation.” The language is flexible enough to allow that Christian theology may include more (but certainly not less) in its subject matter than the fundamental datum of Christian revelation, but tight enough to insist that whatever further data are introduced it is the Christian revelation that must utterly control the discourse. For example, if Christian theology chooses to talk about, say, sin or the Holy Spirit, then much of the actual substance of the discourse will emerge from the revelation. Extrabiblical concepts of sin or Spirit may be examined, and various models may serve as vehicles for contemporary expression, but the substance of the discourse will derive from the datum of Christian revelation (as I understand it, Scripture). If, however, Christian theology chooses to talk about, say the potential for ecological

disaster in Puget Sound, or politics in Managua, the *control* must be with Scripture, even though the *substance* may largely derive from other sources. In other words, Christian theology properly addresses more than those subjects explicitly treated in Scripture, but where it does so it remains Christian theology only where the truths of Scripture have a bearing on the subject and remain uncompromised. Where the subject is virtually removed from Christian revelation, except in the most derivative sense (e.g., in discourse on quarks), the subject can no longer be said to be Christian theology. Conversely, where Christian revelation does have a bearing on the subject, perhaps major, but is shelved or diluted or compromised in favor of control from another discipline or authority, then at some point the discourse ceases to be Christian theology.

Biblical theology is an expression used in an extraordinarily wide variety of ways. In this chapter it is understood to be a subset of Christian theology, a subset bounded in two ways. First, its subject matter is exclusively biblical. At root, it is the result of the inductive study of the text of Scripture. Second, it organizes its subject matter in ways that preserve corpus distinctions. It is less interested in what the New Testament or the Bible says about, say, the sovereignty of God, than it is in what Paul (or Isaiah, or John) says about this subject. When such distinctions are observed, then biblical theology may be interested in probing common points or differences in perspective among the biblical corpora, but the distinctions themselves are never lost to view. This means, in turn, that biblical theology is organized chronologically, or, better, salvation-historically (another admittedly slippery term!)—both within any one corpus (e.g., What development is there in Paul?) and from corpus to corpus.

Systematic theology, then, is Christian theology whose internal structure is systematic; i.e., it is organized on atemporal principles of logic, order, and need, rather than on inductive study of discrete biblical corpora. Thus it can address the broader concerns of Christian theology (it is not merely inductive study of the Bible, though it must never lose such controls), but it seeks to be rigorously systematic and is therefore concerned about how various parts of God’s gracious self-disclosure cohere.

Perhaps it needs to be made clear that by insisting that systematic theology is organized on “atemporal principles” I do not mean that any systematician can reasonably expect that his

or her work will so transcend time and culture that it remains definitive at all times and places. There is a degree of subjectivism in all human reflection that must be faced (and which is discussed below). By saying that systematic theology is organized on “atemporal principles” I mean that the questions it poses are atemporal—not that the questioner occupies a spot outside time, but that the focal concerns are logical and hierarchical, not salvation-historical. Likewise the answers evoked by such questions are atemporal in their structure, not in any pretensions about the definitiveness or finality of their form.

Thus systematic theology asks and answers such questions as, What is God like? What does the Bible say about election? What are the necessary elements in a truly Christian marriage? How are the competing demands of justice and mercy to be worked out in the church of which I am a member? Who is acceptable to God? and so on.

Of course, any one of these questions may need breaking down into many component parts. Consider, for example, What does the Bible say about election? It will become necessary to ask what the various biblical corpora say on the subject and how these diverse emphases may be fitted together. But systematic theology will also want to know how election fits into the broader biblical framework of the sovereignty of God and what bearing it has on (or how it is shaped by) biblical teaching about personal and corporate accountability. At some point the systematician will want to learn something about how this subject has been handled throughout the history of the church, how the critical passages have been interpreted, and what the outcomes have been in every area of life, thought, evangelism, and godliness. And at each stage the systematician will want to check results against the meaning (I use the term advisedly) of Scripture.

That brings us to a definition of *exegesis*. It is the analysis of the final-form of a text, considered as an integral and self-referring literary object.⁹ Several things flow from this definition. Exegesis is not source criticism or redaction criticism, though it may contribute to both. The text on which exegesis is performed is a *literary* object. This means that, so far as this definition is concerned, one may speak of the exegesis of a metaphor, but not of a nonliterary symbol; one may speak of the exegesis of an integral, written message, but not of a series of oral reports (unless and until they are reduced to writing).

That the text is self-referring does *not* mean that the text cannot refer outside itself (in that case there could be no exegesis of historical documents, i.e., documents that refer to real events in space-time history), nor does it deny that extratextual study may have some bearing on the analysis of the text (a point made clear in its simplest form when archaeological study or the examination of comparable texts sheds some light on the meaning of a word in one particular text). Rather, it means, at the least, that the text itself must exercise control as to its meaning. Exegesis is not the listing of possible parallels, however much light such parallels may shed on the text.¹⁰

More importantly, the definition is broad enough that it refuses to identify exegesis exclusively with one particular discipline. Second-year Greek students may think of exegesis in terms of parsing, word study, syntactical analysis, and the like, but in reality exegesis is never so limited. Responsible exegesis will certainly resort to linguistic analysis, both lexis (analysis of the vocabulary) and syntax (analysis of the way words are related to each other). But it will also analyze the text at the level of the clause, the level of the sentence, the level of the discourse, and the level of the genre. It will seek to be sensitive to idiom, literary technique, metaphor, and lines of argument. It will ask how truth is conveyed in the rich plethora of literary genres found in the Bible.¹¹ It will be aware that in each of these disciplines there are competing theories that must be taken into account. For instance, a grammatical approach will soon raise questions about what grammar is, not necessarily as an end in itself, but in order better to analyze the text. In one's grammatical analysis, is it best to rely on nineteenth-century categories, simply because they are well known? Does Chomskyan transformational grammar prove enlightening? Is the verbal system temporally based, or should aspect theory be applied?

In short, exegesis is open-ended. It is not the sort of thing about which one can say, “I have completed the task; there is no more to do.” Of course, in one sense that is exactly what *can* be said if what is meant is that the exegete has come to the end of the text. The exegesis is complete, *at that level of analysis*, when the entire text has been analyzed. But exegesis itself is not a mechanical discipline with a few limited steps that, properly pursued, inevitably churn out the “right answer.” On the other hand, progressively sophisticated levels of exegetical analysis may rapidly illustrate the law of diminishing returns!

Exegetes with this view are quite happy to speak of discerning the author's intent, provided it is presupposed that the author's intent is expressed in the text. Only in this way can the intentional fallacy be avoided. There is no other access to the author's intent than in the text. Even if we accept the view that the author's intended meaning is not *exactly* the same as the meaning of the text, it can be shown that in most instances the two are so closely related that little practical difficulty arises on this account. Nor does any difficulty arise from anonymous texts: readers infer the (unknown) author's intention from what he or she wrote; indeed, at a theoretical level coherence of a text is guaranteed only by the assumption of authorial intent.¹²

Biblical exegesis is exegesis of biblical texts. The question at issue in this chapter then, is how biblical exegesis is to be properly related to systematic theology. It is important to say at the outset that every Christian who thoughtfully asks a question such as "What is God like?" and then turns to the Bible for an answer is involved with this question. If the Christian is at all disciplined in his or her thinking, he or she is, to that extent, a systematician, a systematic theologian. The person of great erudition differs only in degree. And for both, the relationship between the exegesis of the biblical text and the formulation of systematic theology is more than a theoretical question best reserved for academics with nothing better to do and a fair bit of time on their hands. The question, in the end, is how we are to talk and think about God.

What remains in this chapter is to probe some of the contemporary questions that bear on the relationship between biblical exegesis and systematic theology.

EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS

The subject of hermeneutics is currently in enormous ferment and creativity. At the risk of reductionism, it can be divided into two areas.

The first area has as its aim the explication of how to analyze a text, how, in fact, to do exegesis as it has just been defined. Older works adopt a fairly strict subject/object distinction: "I" the subject, the knower, learn the principles of how to read "it," the object, the text. One thinks, for example, of standard works like those of Terry¹³ and of Ramm.¹⁴ In such treatments the term *exegesis* is usually considerably narrower than its use in this chapter. It tends to refer to what I would call

grammatical exegesis—i.e., that part of the exegetical task that turns on knowing the languages of the original text and handling them responsibly. *Hermeneutics* in that framework then addresses all the other perceived interpretive challenges. The books of that period still deserve to be read; indeed, a few from that tradition are still being written.¹⁵

Still within this tradition in that they largely preserve the subject/object distinction are many books that tell us how to "do" exegesis but whose focus is less on the meaning of "literal" or on how to handle typology than on source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism.¹⁶ Recent developments in the same heritage have tried to plug several noticeable "holes," such as the urgent need to benefit from literary criticism¹⁷ and to integrate findings from linguistics. Such books can be quite elementary and introductory;¹⁸ others display considerable maturity.¹⁹ From the perspective of the definition of "exegesis" developed here, these topics are not all of a piece. Literary criticism contributes directly to the "final-form analysis" of a text; source criticism does not. Indeed, one may view source criticism as prolegomenon to exegesis—though in practice one cannot do source criticism without exegesis, and (sometimes) vice versa. But the point we must observe here is that all of these hermeneutical considerations operate within the framework of the subject/object distinction already outlined.

Before leaving these kinds of books, I cannot too strongly emphasize that the tools they provide the student are extraordinarily important and are ignored to the interpreter's peril. True, there have been many competent theologians without a first-class command of Hebrew and Greek, *but all things being equal*, the interpreter or theologian with a solid grasp of the original languages will prove more enriching and precise than the colleague without it. Not every theologian has even a rudimentary understanding of the contribution of sociolinguistics to semantics, or of literary theory, or of relevant historical background, and so forth; *but all things being equal*, the person with these and other competencies enjoys decided advantages. Those with the highest view of Scripture will always have the highest incentive to develop all those tools that assist in the task of understanding what Scripture says.

Far more complex, though frequently quite speculative, are those "experimental" works that bring together a number of conferees to "read" set biblical texts. The aim is to bring

different and, let us hope, complementary areas of competence to bear. One scholar will read the text—i.e., will attempt an exegesis of the text—on the basis of modern rhetorical theory; another will apply historical-critical methodology; still others will apply various social sciences (psychology, sociology, and the like).²⁰ These works stand at a crossover point: each exegete, consciously or unconsciously, is maintaining the subject/object distinction, but the very fact that the different perspectives that are being brought forward are bound up not with distinctions in the text but with differences in the various readers shows that the new hermeneutic has made its influence felt.

That brings us to the second major branch of hermeneutics, sometimes referred to, rather generically, as the “new hermeneutic.” At bottom it is based on the destruction of the subject/object model, the “I/it” model. At its most extreme, it insists that each subject is so different in the total package of “pre-understandings,” knowledge, biases, competence, and cultural values brought to the exegetical task, that each analysis of the text will be different from all others. Indeed, because human beings are in transition, my reading of the text today may be rather different from my reading of the text tomorrow. This makes the aim of the exegetical enterprise, not the discovery of the meaning of the text, but such interaction with the text that it makes an impact on me. A “language-event” takes place, generating not so much understanding of the text as self-understanding.²¹ The further development of “deconstruction” need not detain us here. It is enough to observe that it goes beyond notions of meaning in the text and of competing individual meanings to analytical procedures that generate conflicting meanings within the text and thus destroy each other. It is a kind of hermeneutical nihilism.

This modern development affects not only biblical exegesis but virtually every field in which people are interested in analyzing texts. Literature, history, sociology, psychology, anthropology—all have felt the tremendous impact of the new hermeneutic.

What has not always been observed, however, is the way these two principal hermeneutical models, these ways of doing exegesis, both mirror and contribute to two quite different views of the relationship between biblical exegesis and systematic theology. The reason is not hard to find. On the one hand, those of extremely conservative framework tend to think of

systematic theology as the synthesis of the results of all responsible and appropriate exegesis. In their view, exegesis is an entirely neutral discipline that discovers meaning in the text, or, more precisely, discovers the meaning of the text. Systematic theology then assembles the aggregate of these discovered meanings; biblical exegesis thus determines systematic theology. Among such conservatives, there is precious little place for historical theology, except to declare it right or wrong as measured against the system that has been developed out of one's own exegesis. Similarly, there is far too little recognition that the systematic theology one has adopted up to any particular point in the exegetical process exerts profound influence on the exegesis itself.²² A person profoundly committed to, say, a pretribulational view of the rapture is unlikely to find anything but verification of this view in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, no matter how “objective” and “neutral” the exegetical procedures being deployed seem to be.²³ Not only can a hermeneutically alert opponent find reason to differ with the exegesis, but he or she can usually identify the questionable steps that have led to the circularity.

On the other hand, those who have been rather too greatly influenced by the new hermeneutic do not detect any straight line of control from biblical exegesis to systematic theology, but a legitimate (indeed, unavoidable) circularity. Reading the biblical texts spawns ideas, which are banged around with other ideas until they synthesize in systematic theology. At any point in exegetical practice, one's antecedent grasp of systematic theology is part of the “grid” that filters out what one does and does not “hear” in the text and what one does and does not allow to prove influential to one's thought, even if it is “heard.” At some point the Bible becomes of marginal influence; it merely provides the linguistic pegs on which to hang a lot of systematic thinking about God, thinking whose essential shape derives from elsewhere. One cannot but be amazed that the biblical index to the German edition of Tillich's three-volume *Systematic Theology* requires a mere two pages.²⁴ In the same way, far too much of contemporary reader-response theory (variously called reception aesthetics or reception theory, from German *Rezeptionstheorie*),²⁵ is so tied to the autonomy of each individual modern reader, and so removed from the first readers and from any possibility of there being meaning *in the text*, that the subjectivism is staggering. We are not, after all, talking about various personal responses to a great novel in a

discussion group of a literature class. We are talking about literature that is historically located, literature *designed* to be read by concrete individuals and groups, literature that frequently *refers* to events and people that can be located in the historical continuum—quite apart from its claim to be *revelatory* literature.

In the real world, however, neither hermeneutical extreme has any real prospect of prevailing. Indeed, it is possible to think of the new hermeneutic as, in part, an overreaction to the opposite error, the positivism that refuses to recognize how relative and culturally conditioned our opinions are. Today very few informed thinkers unhesitatingly adopt either extreme, at least not without some caveat. At one end of the spectrum, if a conservative scholar such as Larkin insists that there is objective meaning in the text and that this meaning can be discovered, he will also make frequent allowances for the cultural bias that must be recognized and handled at every stage of the interpretive process.²⁶ But at the other end, most recognize that if the new hermeneutic is pushed to its logical extreme, the outcome is solipsism. No one will be able to commune with anyone—not even the proponents of the new hermeneutic who expect the rest of us to read and understand their books. Since that view is so manifestly ridiculous, even some deconstructionists are backing away from it. LaFargue, for instance, may still hesitate to speak of a determinate “meaning” to a text, but he is happy to talk of a determinate “substantive content” and to insist it is knowable.²⁷ Sophisticated discussions of the new hermeneutic are available, discussions that integrate the best of its insights while attempting to create models to show how it is possible for objective content to pass from the “horizon of understanding” of one person to the “horizon of understanding” of another, or from the “horizon of understanding” of a text to the “horizon of understanding” of the exegete.²⁸ Instead of a “hermeneutical circle,” there is a hermeneutical “spiral” that enables the careful interpreter to hone in progressively on what is actually there. This may involve hard work, thoughtful “self-distancing” from one’s own biases and predilections, courageous attempts to understand the other’s terminology and points of view and idioms and values. Exhaustive understanding of another is doubtless impossible for all save the Omniscience, but that does not mean all real and substantial understanding is impossible.

In much the same way, few today would see the traffic

between biblical exegesis and systematic theology as a one-way system. Indeed, long before the new hermeneutic arrived on the scene, systematians with a high view of Scripture debated the proper place of the *analogia fidei* (the “analogy of the faith”) in the interpretive process. Passages that could, at the merely grammatical level, yield two or three mutually contradictory meanings, would be interpreted according to the “analogy of the faith”—i.e., they would be interpreted in line with the structure of Christian systematic theology (“the faith”) developed on the basis of (what was judged to be) the clear and certain teaching of Scripture elsewhere. There are many potential difficulties with this sort of appeal,²⁹ most of which can be handled responsibly; but the point at this juncture is that an element of circularity in the theological task has always been recognized.

Of course, someone might argue that the very idea of “the faith” is hermeneutically primitive. “The faith” is always the faith of an individual or group. It is “the faith” of the ecumenical creeds, or of historic Protestantism, or of Tridentine Catholicism, or of the Anabaptists. Recognition of this point has helped to foster “Asian theology,” “feminist theology,” sub-Saharan black “African theology,” and so forth. Nor is it that these are all “adjective-theologies,” while what I do is just theology: it is immediately pointed out that what I do is white, male, North Atlantic, Protestant, and evangelical theology. And this reasoning has substantially contributed to the push for “contextualization,” for properly contextualized theology.

Once again both the truth and the confusion that lie behind this train of argument largely turn on definition and on prior givens. At the risk of reductionism, we may say that two quite different approaches use the same terminology. If by, say, feminist theology one refers to a self-conscious attempt to overcome demonstrable biases in earlier male-dominated theology, so that what Scripture actually says becomes clearer than it has been, and if by, say, African theology one refers to the kind of theological emphases that arise when an informed African studies the Scripture (e.g., he or she will almost certainly see more family and corporate emphases than would be discerned by the Western counterpart steeped in rugged individualism), then the benefits from these adjective-theologies (including my own) are considerable, and the church as a whole should be enriched. Systematians with comparable training but from highly diverse backgrounds can come together and check one

another *against the standard of the Scripture that all sides agree is authoritative*. Protestations notwithstanding,³⁰ such communication, though certainly not easy, is possible and productive.³¹ But if by, say, feminist theology one refers to a structure of theological thought whose essential shape is determined or controlled not by Scripture but by the agenda of some form of modern feminism, prompting feminist theologians to read Scripture in such a way that hermeneutically inappropriate questions are addressed to the text, while the answers provided by the text are heeded only selectively; or if African theology has so focused on family solidarity that suddenly ancestor worship and traditional animism are both consecrated by an ostensible appeal to Scripture, while Scripture itself sanctions neither and condemns both, then the complexities of the new hermeneutic are being deployed not to foster better understanding but to undermine the possibility of unique, normative revelation.

When various exegeses (“readings”) of Scripture are proposed, the most probing question, then, is always this: What authority status does the Scripture have for the exegete concerned? It is exceedingly important that this question not be permitted to impede reflection on the enormously complex hermeneutical questions. It is equally important to recognize that fruitful reflection on individual texts in Scripture can be undertaken by those who do not believe them to be authoritative. But if we are attempting a theoretical construction of the relation between biblical exegesis and systematic theology, the status of Scripture must be central to the debate. To word the problem more generically, no systematician has the luxury to avoid identifying what elements may and what elements may not be admitted into one’s dogmatics and specifying the grounds for these choices. When the Hanson brothers, for instance, tell us that for them the Bible is a witness to the activity and character of God, a witness of greatly varying worth,³² they set out with some care what they judge to be a “reasonable” faith. Whether what is reasonable to them will be perceived as reasonable by others cannot be probed here. I cannot altogether escape the feeling that what they do not like they find reasons to dismiss, sometimes caustically, and what they like they find reasons to approve. But what is immediately clear is that the relation between biblical exegesis and systematic theology is in their case fundamentally different from that which obtains where the Scripture is viewed as authoritative.

If it is true that both the systematician who espouses a high view of Scripture and the systematician who denies such a view alike insist that the traffic between biblical exegesis and systematic theology is not one-way, it is important to see that the hermeneutical dangers each confronts are rather different. The former is in danger of minimizing the complexity of the hermeneutical task and of illicitly transferring the authority of the text to the interpretation of the text. The latter is in danger of being ensnared by the shifting sands of the present age. While warning everyone of the hermeneutical myopia of previous generations, such an exegete (and systematician) is unlikely to notice the almost unparalleled contemporary pressures toward relativism and pluralism so profoundly antithetical to the revelation of Scripture—or worse, he or she will notice them and delight in them at the expense of the exclusive claims of God himself in his gracious self-disclosure. Nominally they will admit that solipsism is not a responsible position; practically, the pressures administered by the great god Pluralism will strengthen whatever bias the new hermeneutic has toward subjectivism until all too few will be able to declare the immutables, the nonnegotiables, in the Christian revelation. They will constantly remain uncomfortable with the unyielding disjunctives of Scripture. If it is the duty of the Christian theologian in every age to identify the contemporary manifestation of the Antichrist (cf. 1 John 2:18), i.e., to expose the pretensions of every power that opposes Christ or seeks to usurp his place, these theologians will likely fail in their duty.³³

Sometimes the more conservative exegete is daunted by the criticism of less conservative colleagues who argue that conservative exegesis is boring. It never thinks up fresh questions and therefore never hears fresh answers. It spends its time responding, rather late, to agendas generated in other parts of the theological spectrum. There are two grains of truth in the charge. The first is that some conservative exegetes, right or wrong in their exegesis, *are* boring—though in my experience that trait is not the sole prerogative of conservatives. The second is that, owing precisely to their allegiance to the authority of Scripture, they are less likely than others to think of reconstructions and interpretations that question that authority. To engage in the mainstream of contemporary debate, they must of course respond to such developments, but they are unlikely to initiate them. Yet it is the new hermeneutic that should reassure them. If it is true that they are unlikely to think

up the sorts of questions that generate scholarly excitement (however ephemeral that excitement turns out to be), it is equally true that their more liberal colleagues are unlikely to ask questions that only the interpreter who is committed to the authority of the text is likely to put forward. In other words, provided it is remembered that the line of authority/control must run from the text to the systematic construction, the systematic construction can be an ennobling, fertilizing, enriching element in the exegetical process. The Christian who is convinced that God's revelation coheres, even though we may not have enough of the parts to show how it coheres in every instance, is in a position to see analogies, conceptual similarities, theological links, and organic ties where others are still trying to plot out a debatable trajectory of a hypothetical community. This means that the evangelical exegete and theologian, however much he or she must engage in passing debates, must not devote all mental energy to what is faddish, but must accept the responsibility to ask and answer questions that only those with a high view of Scripture are likely to generate. The resulting theology will not only be creative but also, granted that it is competently done and gracefully articulated, is likely to endure much longer than its competitors.

EXEGESIS AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

The contribution of historical theology is weighed elsewhere in this volume and must not unduly detain us here. But because biblical exegesis, historical theology, and systematic theology have a bearing *on each other*, the relevance of historical theology to the way that exegesis contributes to dogmatics must be introduced.

It is possible to think of historical theology as the written record of exegetical and theological opinions in periods earlier than our own, a kind of historical parallel to the diversity of exegetical and theological opinions that are actually current. So construed, historical theology serves exegesis—and thus systematic theology—in several ways. First, it opens up options and configurations that the contemporary exegete might not have thought of, and similarly it may quickly close down what might otherwise appear to be avenues for profitable exploration. It is not only in technology that there is little point in constantly reinventing the wheel. Second, properly studied,

historical theology demands that we recognize how many exegetical and theological opinions are powerfully shaped, indeed sometimes determined, by the larger matrix of thought in their own day. Negatively, these become cautionary tales that warn us against forms of Christian thought too captive to passing concepts; positively, they may help us think through how best to articulate the Gospel afresh to our own generation. Third, historical theology often displays remarkable uniformity of belief across quite different paradigms of understanding,³⁴ even if such uniform beliefs are cast in very dissimilar molds. Thus historical theology may contribute to (though not utterly determine) the *boundaries* of systematic theology, which in turn, as we have seen, contribute to one's exegesis.

In fact, the lines of influence are more tangled. At the level of interpretation, historical theology can no more be said to be a neutral and independent discipline than can exegesis. Both are bound up with the reading, the interpretation, of texts. As it is possible, wittingly or unwittingly, to domesticate Scripture by superficial and culture-bound interpretations whose entire agenda is determined by extrabiblical considerations, so it is possible to read the texts of historical theology with a mind less committed to understanding them on their own terms than to fitting them into some pattern or thesis constructed on other grounds. Thus it is not simply the *fruits* of historical theology that have a bearing on exegesis (insofar as historical theology records earlier readings of the biblical texts) and on systematic theology (insofar as historical theology records attempts at synthesizing interpretation of biblical materials into structures whose coherence is atemporal), but *the discipline itself* provides countless analogies to the work of biblical exegesis and of systematic theology. To put the matter another way, there is no historical theology without the exegesis of historical texts.

In the same way, the "threefold cord" (Scripture, reason, and tradition) so important to Anglican life and thought is beginning to undergo a metamorphosis. Richard Hooker is usually taken as the fountainhead of this approach (although almost certainly he is building on earlier work):

What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto, is what any man can necessarily conclude by force of Reason; after these, the voice of the Church succeedeth.³⁵

Undoubtedly the balance of this threefold cord has been handled in highly diverse ways. But in a thoughtful treatment, Bauckham suggests replacing it by Scripture, tradition, and context (i.e., the context of the interpreter or the interpreting community),³⁶ where "context" is used "in the broadest sense of every aspect of a society in which the church exists"³⁷—much as others speak of "culture." In the light of recent developments on the new hermeneutic and on contextualization, it is easy to see what he is after. What is hard to understand is why he does not go farther and reduce the threefold cord to two: Scripture and context. For tradition itself, once the church escaped the first generations in which oral tradition doubtless enjoyed a status that was sometimes quite independent of Scripture, is nothing other than the accumulated interpretations of, applications from, and reflections on Scripture, whether on Scripture directly or derivatively (e.g., third- and fourth-order deductions might have only the most tenuous connection with Scripture).

All this suggests that the line of *thought* from biblical exegesis to systematic theology is neither straight nor simple, even though the line of *authority*, once the exegete is responsibly satisfied that the meaning of the text has largely if not exhaustively been perceived, must extend in only one direction. And a person who possesses such responsible satisfaction is less likely to be self-deluded in proportion as he or she becomes familiar with the heritage of historical theology.

EXEGESIS AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Biblical theology, because it is bound up with the reading of texts, is as irrevocably tied to hermeneutical complexities as are biblical exegesis and historical theology. There is little point in rehearsing those complexities again and showing how they work out with respect to this discipline. But following the definition of biblical theology advanced in the first section of this chapter, its peculiar emphasis on the individual document or the discrete corpus as the boundary for analysis generates several complex problems that have a bearing on the relation between exegesis and systematic theology. Three may be mentioned:

1. There is little agreement as to how to delineate the biblical corpora. How many epistles constitute "the Pauline corpus"? Should we think of the Pentateuch or the Hexateuch?

Was the Apocalypse written by the same John as the one whose name has traditionally been attached to the Fourth Gospel and to the Johannine Epistles?

Although disagreements among biblical scholars over such matters might well shut down the entire discipline of biblical theology or, rather, ensure that biblical theology would be practiced in separate enclaves shaped by agreement on these critical matters, in practice there is less disagreement occasioned by such matters than is sometimes supposed. Thus the large number of "New Testament theologies" and the several "Old Testament theologies" by and large break down their respective corpora more or less the same way: the differences between, say, Vriezen and Von Rad on Old Testament theology, or between Bultmann and Stauffer or Ladd on New Testament theology, have far less to do with the division of the corpora than with fundamental approaches to the Bible—including the reconstructions of historical development with which the various theologians are operating. The chief reason for this show of agreement is that even where there is a deep division of opinion as to where one corpus ends and another begins *from the perspective of the author*, there are usually agreed historical reasons for grouping them together in something like the traditional configuration. For instance, those who think the author of the Fourth Gospel is someone other than the author of the Johannine Epistles are usually quick to concede that there are notable similarities between the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John and may hypothesize that all of these documents emerged from the same community or school, even if from different authors. On the other hand, even very conservative critics who hold that there was one John who wrote not only the Gospel and the Epistles associated with his name, but also the Apocalypse, are usually quick to point out that there is such a large difference in genre between the Apocalypse and, say, 1 John that they are best treated separately.³⁸ Thus, corpus distinctions turn on more criteria than mere authorship. If the boundaries are disputed, there is usually sufficient agreement at some other level, perhaps thematic, to ensure that at points where scholars do not agree they are not simply talking past one another.

2. Far more troubling is the widespread view that the differences among the biblical corpora are not differences in emphasis, vocabulary, focus, perspective, development, pastoral situation, and the like, but mutually incompatible differ-

ences in theological structure. In an influential book, Dunn, for instance, has argued that the only Christological cohesion in the New Testament is the common conviction that the resurrected Lord is none other than the historical Jesus.³⁹ Beyond this point, New Testament Christologies prove to be mutually incompatible. Therefore the most that the New Testament canon can provide is a boundary of acceptable (if mutually exclusive) Christologies—a boundary within which the modern Christian is free to pick and choose.

As I have elsewhere discussed Dunn's book and the problem it represents,⁴⁰ it would be invidious to go over the same ground again here. Among the more troubling features of his treatment, however, are two: (1) He repeatedly deploys disjunctive modes of thought and rarely wrestles with the possibility that divergent emphases may reflect profound complementarity. (2) After so strongly insisting on the mutual incompatibility of the New Testament Christological strands, he nevertheless insists that modern readers should feel free to pick and choose among them. This is, quite frankly, astonishing. It reflects how far much contemporary biblical scholarship feels free to explore the discrete biblical corpora (however disjunctive) at the level of mere description, *without asking any thoughtful questions about the truthfulness of the material!* For surely it is axiomatic that if the New Testament Christological descriptions are mutually incompatible, they cannot all be truthful; perhaps none is. Even so, Dunn assures us we are justified in picking and choosing from among (what he perceives to be) the New Testament options. He thinks he thereby sanctions each believer to create his or her own "canon within the canon"; he has failed to see that his own logic requires that he conclude there can be no canon, none at all.

In practice, however sophisticated the attempt may be, the pursuit of a "canon within the canon" despoliates the possibility of biblical exegesis having any controlling voice in the construction of systematic theology. One could wish that Barrett were right not only when he asserts that "canonical texts are used to establish doctrine and the dogmatician requires a canon defined as precisely as possible" but also when he adds that a dogmatician "is likely to be impatient with a hazy canon within a canon which each man defines for himself."⁴¹ The fact of the matter is that when Dunn and Mackey set out to present a test case for the proper relation between New Testament theology and dogmatics,⁴² it is not

long before they conclude that the evidence that Jesus was born in Bethlehem is too slight to be relied on, that John 14:6 is a credal confession *about* Jesus rather than a claim made *by* Jesus, and that in any case it is not as exclusive as it appears, and that "internecine warfare" between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is to be abominated (contrast Paul, Gal. 1:8–9). When Humphreys writes on the atonement,⁴³ he soon tells us that notions of sacrifice and penal substitution are utterly alien to us and must be abandoned in favor of new models that moderns can comprehend—even though the metamorphosis does not preserve biblical emphases, and Humphreys himself does not thoughtfully engage with the substance of modern treatments that articulate to the twentieth-century reader the very truths he denies.⁴⁴

All of us, of course, gravitate toward a "canon within the canon," in the sense that at any given time we may feel that the truths of some particular corpus or surrounding some particular theme are especially precious to us or to the Christian community to which we belong. The difficulty arises when this focus becomes a grid that screens out other biblical truth. Genuine Christianity, however biased, culture-bound, faulty, or weak it may be in any specific expression, must embrace some kind of commitment that desires to be "re-formed" by Scripture whenever such reductionism is pointed out. Otherwise, not only Scripture, but Jesus himself, soon becomes domesticated, devoid of a cutting edge that has the potential for reshaping us. We fall into the danger of bouncing the current shibboleths off the Bible and trumpeting them to the world as if they were prophecies, when in fact we have merely christened the current climate of opinion with biblical jargon. I am quite sure that all of us fall into this trap sometimes; I am equally sure that genuine Christian commitment requires that we all attempt to correct ourselves when our own particular failings in this respect begin to surface. This is important not only so that our biblical exegesis may retain its integrity but also so that our systematic theology may retain its proportion. For it has been shown repeatedly that Christian theology is so intertwined that no Christian doctrine can be "abandoned, or subject to radical re-interpretation, without implications for other aspects of the Christian faith. That is part of the problem with the piecemeal approach to the revision of Christian doctrine with which much of the Christian church has been occupied for too long."⁴⁵ This is most definitely *not* a surreptitious defense of the status quo,

but a frank recognition of the fact that biblical exegesis, generating biblical theology, has immensely serious consequences for systematic theology, some of them quite unforeseen.

The degree of confusion over the way biblical theology is to be done has generated numerous proposals about the way forward. Stendahl, for instance, wants biblical theology to be a purely historical and descriptive discipline, without any normative status whatsoever until we proceed to the level of considering the *application* of our findings.⁴⁶ In theory, at least, that would facilitate discussion; in practice, it tends to degenerate into a stream of technical articles and books on the theology of Q and other putative sources. Partly because of the impasse, various forms of "canonical theology" have come to the fore. Best known is the work of Brevard Childs.⁴⁷ So widely influential is this approach that fundamental shifts in definition are beginning to take place. Scalise, for instance, suggests redefining *sensus literalis* to mean authoritative teaching of "canonical" Scripture as that teaching develops in the dialectic between Scripture and communities of faith.⁴⁸

But unless I have misunderstood it, at the heart of most forms of canonical theology lies an epistemological problem still largely unaddressed. In the hands of most practitioners, the move from biblical exegesis to biblical theology is a largely arbitrary affair. The "exegesis" tends to proceed along modern critical, historicist lines. The alleged sources are sorted out, considerable skepticism about a variety of ostensible historical claims is administered, ill-controlled conjectures regarding the *Sitz im Leben* of the community are pondered, various interpretive options are weighed. And then, precisely because the new hermeneutic in its more extreme forms is very close to insisting that no interpretation has more intrinsic value than any other (since on this model meaning resides in the interpreter and not in the text), canon criticism decides, somewhat fideistically, that the interpretations of the text *within* the biblical canon should be adopted as the guide to the church's life and thought. Laudably, the result is at many points a biblical theology that is not only insightful but congruent with much of historic Christianity; but the method of arriving at this point seems to be less constrained by the view that this is what the Bible says, that it is true and can be responsibly defended at the exegetical level, than that this is what the Bible says, and the church has traditionally shaped its theology by the canon, and we should

do the same, even though our historically informed exegesis cannot in all conscience support the theological interpretations of earlier canonical material provided by later canonical texts. In short, this appears to be a more sophisticated version of the "two storey" spirituality endemic to the more radical strands of Continental biblical scholarship, where "faith" is allegedly made safer by self-consciously distancing all of its objects from any possibility of historical criticism (which was, of course, one of Rudolf Bultmann's primary aims).⁴⁹ The resulting "spirituality" is frequently warm, fervent, sincere; it is also epistemologically bankrupt.

To his credit, Morgan understands the problem, but his solution simply returns us to the morass.⁵⁰ He rightly wants to begin with the witness of the biblical writers themselves; in this regard he is somewhat parallel to the proponents of canon criticism. But he then proposes that careful distinctions be made between "the good historical information which is true" (by which he means the nexus of historical data and critical judgments that enable the historian to discount certain parts of what the biblical writers say) and "the highly speculative reconstructions of modern historians, which can make no such high claims to truth or knowledge."⁵¹ The latter, he avers, are both legitimate and necessary to historical research but get in the way of constructing biblical theology. His approach, in other words, is to build all the "good historical material into modern Christology and critical interpretations of the evangelists. The conflict is thus no longer between faith and reason but between a reasonable faith and a faithless reason."⁵² But as reasonable (and faithful) as this sounds, what it must produce are discrete cadres of New Testament scholars who are largely in agreement about what they feel are the historical-critical fruits strong enough to stand in judgment of the documents, and the historical-critical fruits that must be held in abeyance as unduly speculative. At the level of merely technical scholarship, these cadres of scholars will deploy their training to defend their version of this distinction. But the enormous diversity of opinion as to where the line should actually be drawn will be shaped by the fact that the cadres themselves run the gamut from the most conservative to the most skeptical. In short, Morgan has returned us, by another route, to a canon within the canon.

Of course, these reflections do not themselves constitute a compelling reason for advocating the tighter nexus between

exegesis and biblical theology advanced here. At the end of the day, the cogency of such a position turns in large part on one's view of Scripture. But if I am to build a rationale for a particular view of the relationship between biblical exegesis and systematic theology, then the components in that relationship (here, the relationship between exegesis and biblical theology) must be defended against competing models, which have to be assessed in their own light. The widespread disarray in the field is so patent that it would be healthy to return to the fundamental questions, which have to do with *the nature and loci of revelation*: Has God disclosed himself, or not? If so, where, and by what means? Without substantive agreement on such topics, the pursuit of *methods* commonly agreed on will prove largely chimerical.

If we are rightly to assess the contribution of modern historical reconstructions, the advice of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger will prove salutary:

What we need now are not new hypotheses on the *Sitz im Leben*, on possible sources or on the subsequent process of handing down the material. What we *do* need is a critical look at the exegetical landscape we now have, so that we may return to the text and distinguish between those hypotheses which are helpful [*sc.* to understanding it] and those which are not. Only under these conditions can a new and fruitful collaboration between exegesis and systematic theology begin. And only in this way will exegesis be of real help in understanding the Bible.⁵³

3. The definition of biblical theology given in the first section of this chapter turns on the presentation of the biblical material in a structure that preserves its historical development, its organic growth, not *merely* its corpus distinctions. Better put, granted that the Bible itself is special revelation, its corpus distinctions themselves attest the history of redemption, the progress of salvation history. Evangelical thinkers have long said the same thing:

Biblical theology occupies a position between Exegesis and Systematic Theology in the encyclopaedia of theological disciplines. It differs from Systematic Theology not in being more Biblical, or adhering more closely to the truths of the Scriptures, but in that its principle of organizing the Biblical material is historical rather than logical. . . . Biblical theology is that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.⁵⁴

It is "nothing else than *the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity.*"⁵⁵

The significance of the discipline of biblical theology for the relation between exegesis and systematic theology is perhaps most strikingly seen when cast negatively. Biblical theology does not allow the systematician to forget that the Incarnation did not take place immediately after the Fall; that the Cross has massive antecedents in the sacrificial system and the Passover rites associated with the Mosaic covenant; that the "new" covenant presupposes an "old" covenant; that the dawning of the kingdom is modeled on and anticipated by the outworking of the theme of theocracy; that Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, and must be understood in those chapters, before he appears in Hebrews 5 and 7; and much more. Biblical theology forces the theologian to remember that there is before and after, prophecy and fulfillment, type and antitype, development, organic growth, downpayment and consummation.

If a systematician wants to know, say, what is meant by the "call" or the "calling" of God, in order to apply it to Christian experience today, it is inadequate merely to perform a word study on the relevant verbs and their cognates and to systematize the results. It is not simply that the call of God has different emphases in the different corpora: in the Synoptics, for instance, God's call is akin to invitation ("Many are *called*, but few are chosen" [Matt. 22:14 RSV]), while in Paul it is customarily effective ("those he called, he also justified" [Rom. 8:30]). Such distinctions could be discerned even if the biblical corpora were discrete but linked with each other by merely logical or thematic, as opposed to chronological or sequential or historical, connections. The semantic differences in the use of terms must of course be observed. But it will also be necessary to think through the call of Abraham, the call of Israel, the call of God's suffering servant, the call of the church, and to sort out how they are linked thematically, in inner-biblical connections across the progress of redemption. Only then can the careful systematician presume to venture what "the call of God" means in the Scripture, and because he or she is a systematician, as opposed to a biblical theologian, the structuring of the presentation will inevitably be logical, primarily atemporal, and with appropriate reflection as to what it means for us today. Even so, this presentation will be informed by the underlying biblical theology, and the systematician may find it necessary to make reference to the historical and sequential

distinctions—in short, to the progress of the history of redemption—as part of the systematizing of the material.

Indeed, this salvation-historical sensitivity is nowhere better reflected than in the argument of Paul in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the former, Paul is combatting those who interpret Torah as the controlling hermeneutical principle in the understanding of what we call the Old Testament: if Abraham was a good man, they argued, then of course he obeyed *Torah*—even though *Torah* was not given until centuries later. They simply assumed that he must have enjoyed some private revelation regarding its contents. But if the Pentateuch is read with salvation-historical finesse, then *Torah*, as pivotal as it is, no longer assumes the same controlling importance. In short, from a hermeneutical point of view, part of the difference between the early Christian church and the Judaism from which it sprang was over whether the Hebrew Bible was to be read atemporally or salvation-historically—or, to use the categories developed here, whether or not biblical theology was to be permitted to intrude between raw exegesis and systematic theology.

To put it another way, biblical theology, as defined in this chapter, mediates the influence of biblical exegesis on systematic theology. Within the limits already set forth, just as systematic theology partially constrains and ideally enriches exegesis, so also does it serve biblical theology. More importantly, biblical theology more immediately constrains and enriches exegesis than systematic theology can do.

EXEGESIS, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

The question may be put as to whether the exegete's personal spiritual experience can or does exercise decisive influence on the practice of exegesis and whether the systematician's personal spiritual experience can or does exercise decisive influence on the construction of systematic theology. The question cannot be avoided in this chapter, because what we mean by "biblical exegesis," by the way we read the Bible, is so largely shaped by the answer we give to it.

Under the positivism of the older hermeneutic, it was possible to answer with a firm negative. Exegesis was viewed as neutral, "scientific," objective. The new hermeneutic demands that we respond in a more nuanced way. A frankly atheistic

approach to the Bible, for instance, is certainly going to yield a different assessment as to what the Bible is actually talking about than one that is predicated on the existence of a personal/transcendent God who has supremely revealed himself in Christ Jesus. Indeed, the prevalence of frankly atheistic interpretations in the guild of biblical scholars has in recent years generated some mild protests.⁵⁶

In both theory and practice, it is possible for an atheist so to distance her own atheism from her exegesis that she can at least describe what is actually there in the text with some accuracy—in some instances (it must be admitted) with more accuracy than the believer deploys who is swamped with warm, mystical feelings but little exegetical rigor. After all, I have earlier argued that the hermeneutical circle looks more like a spiral, that we are not shut up to solipsism; and if we have argued in this way so as to affirm that the discovery of the meaning of the text of Scripture is possible, we must argue the same way when focusing less on the text than on the people who are studying it. Even so, there may be compelling reasons for thinking that some readers of the text will have a harder job discovering its meaning than others, on the ground that their horizon of understanding is so far removed from those of the biblical authors that the task of "distanciation" (the process of self-consciously recognizing one's biases and "distancing" oneself from them in order to hear the text on its own terms) becomes dangerously great. It appears, then, that the nature of the hermeneutical barriers the unbeliever must confront, from the perspective of a confessing Christian, can usefully be spelled out:

1. The sheer numbers of scholars who share the same popular beliefs, or unbelief, conspire to tilt academic societies, university posts, and peer approval along foreordained lines. Just as it may take a modicum of courage to break away from a fundamentalist heritage, it takes no less courage, indeed, much more, to break away from the juggernaut of an approach to scriptural exegesis that is fundamentally uncommitted.

2. If the Bible is nothing less than God's gracious self-disclosure, then as important as it is to understand it on its own terms it must surely be no less important to respond to God as he has disclosed himself. Can the exegesis that is formally "correct" on this or that point but is not cast in terms of adoration, faith, obedience be at heart sound? I do not mean that scholars must wear their faith on their sleeves or parade

their piety each time they take up their pen. On all kinds of technical and disputed points the most dispassionate weighing of evidence is necessary. But is such work cast in the matrix of a scholarship devoted in thought (and therefore in form) to serve the God whose revelation is being studied? To put the matter rather crudely, is there not an important responsibility to ask, each time I put pen to paper, whether what I write pleases the God of Scripture, the God of all truth, rather than worry about how my academic colleagues will react? Is exegesis perennially devoid of such flavor genuinely *faithful* exegesis? Now if such exegetical work is possible, it will flow out of lives that have *experienced* God, that have been struck with the awesomeness of his holiness, melted with the depth of his love, moved by the condescension of his compassion, thrilled by the prospect of knowing him better.

This, after all, is no more than what one should expect. The psalmist can write, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:25–26). Paul has only to refer to Jesus the Son of God, and he spontaneously adds, "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). When a contrast is drawn between getting "drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery," and being "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18), the assumption is that the Spirit, like wine, generates a "high"—but without the debauchery, the loss of control, the enslavement, the sin associated with the "high" gained from wine. The kingdom of God, which generates endless monographs, is a matter of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 4:17). When Peter tells believers that they "have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:3), he means more than that they have found Christianity to be intellectually stimulating and satisfying; he is closer to meaning that they "believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1:8).

The question is, Can responsible systematic theology, *even when it is formally congruent with Scripture*, entirely lose the taste of what is nothing more than the overflow of life in the Spirit? Can responsible biblical exegesis, *even when it rightly unpacks the "meaning" of the text*, entirely lose the flavor of the text? Is "meaning" to be utterly stripped of commitment and devotion, the very stuff of an appropriate response to the God of the Bible? And do not such matters turn, at least in part, on the

depth of one's spiritual experience, on personal identification with what some have called "the spirituality of the Word"?

3. Systematic theology, as we have seen, is concerned to put together in coherent form the results of rigorous exegesis of the biblical texts. But this "putting together" is never simply additive. The systematician is constantly making choices as to what is central, what is the organizing principle of some discussion, what links are proper or improper—and, ideally, how to cast all of this in modern guise without losing the objective meaning that is there in the text. In addition to all the dangers of subjectivity to which the exegete must give heed, the systematician opens up boundless new possibilities of serious distortion, owing to the hierarchical choices that attend the discipline. These are not simply intellectual dangers; they may be grounded in spiritual experience (or lack of it) or in moral defection. The systematician who has on several occasions engaged in sexual infidelity is likely to configure the biblical material that treats marriage and divorce a little differently from the monogamous believer whose analysis of trends in the nation's homes is profoundly pessimistic. The systematician who is inordinately proud of honors earned and books written will configure the biblical material a little differently from the systematician who, like the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, is overwhelmed by a sense of sinfulness and of the Savior's forgiveness. At what point do such differences fall under the startling analysis preserved in John 3: 19–21? "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

When it is remembered that one's systematic theology (whether it is called that or not) exerts strong influence on one's exegesis, it becomes clear that spiritual, moral experience may not only shape one's systematic theology but may largely constrain what one actually "hears" in the exegesis of Scripture.

4. All this, I take it, is a kind of unpacking of what Paul teaches: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are

spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Of course, Paul is not talking about exegesis per se, still less about systematic theology. He is, however, talking about the Gospel, the "word of the cross" (1:18), which is simultaneously "foolishness to those who are perishing" and the "power of God" to those "who are being saved." That Gospel is supremely preserved in Scripture; the reading ("exegesis") of Scripture and the correlative organizing of the results of our reading ("systematic theology") are both bound up with what we perceive the Gospel to be and with our response to it. Although Kaiser is right to warn that this verse does not sanction any pietistic, privatized form of mystical exegesis that assumes only those with the Spirit can do exegesis—detailed study of the text will not allow so narrow an interpretation, and all of experience militates against it⁵⁷—his own suggestion that this verse refers merely to the *application* of the exegesis, the willingness to adopt the message of the Gospel into one's own life, is itself without rigorous exegetical foundation.⁵⁸

To put the matter another way, just as the statement "Men are taller than women" does not mean that every man is taller than every woman, so the insistence that the "natural" person, i.e., the person without the Spirit, does not understand the things of God, does not mean that the exegesis of such a person will in fact always be inferior to that of the person with the Spirit! Quite apart from the jump from "understanding the things of God" to performing "exegesis," what is at stake, surely, is an entire way of looking at reality, and what this does to shape one's ability to listen to God, to hear what he is saying, to find oneself aligned with his mind insofar as he has revealed it to us. To use contemporary categories, Paul has deployed the argument of the new hermeneutic against all who want to domesticate the Gospel, who are more interested in being masters of the Gospel than being mastered by it. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned: the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer so changes values, proportion, perceptions, response to God himself, that the simple polarity Paul sets forth is far from being a distortion, even if it is not cast in twentieth-century categories.⁵⁹

EXEGESIS, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, AND PREACHING

From any decisively Christian perspective, disciplined biblical exegesis and thoughtful systematic theology do not exist

for themselves. They exist, finally, to serve the people of God. The message that is distilled out of such work must be preachable and preached, or (granted that God has indeed revealed himself in Scripture) the entire exercise is such a distortion of the *purposes* of revelation as to approach profanity. "Theology without proclamation is empty, proclamation without theology is blind," writes Ebeling in a much-quoted statement.⁶⁰ Garrett is not wrong when, as the first of seven answers he gives to the question "Why Systematic Theology?" he writes, "*Systematic theology is necessary as a proper extension of the teaching function of the Christian church. . . . This may be called the catechetical root of systematic theology*" (*emphasis his*).⁶¹

But there is a sense in which the best expository preaching ought also to be the best exemplification of the relationship between biblical exegesis and systematic theology. If a Christian preacher is expounding, say, Psalm 23, the first priority is to explain what the text meant when it was written three thousand years ago and to apply it, utilizing sound principles (which cannot here be explored) to contemporary life. But the second priority is not far behind. There must be some understanding of how the shepherd/sheep motif develops in later revelation, with some thoughtful reflection and application on the resulting synthesis. There may be reference, for instance, to the prophetic denunciations and promises of Zechariah 11–13, where the false shepherds are excoriated and the coming of Yahweh's own true shepherd is promised. Ultimately there will be some reference to the good shepherd of John 10, and perhaps to the undershepherds of the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1–4). It is entirely inappropriate to read all the later material back into Psalm 23. That would not only be anachronistic, it would be a miserable betrayal of the preacher's responsibility to help believers read their Bibles aright. But to tackle Psalm 23 with nothing more than exegetical rigor would be to fail at the same task, if for different reasons. As a general rule, the best expository preaching begins with the text at hand but seeks to establish links not only to the immediate context but also to the canonical context, *as determined by the biblico-theological constraints largely governed by the canon itself*. If these lines are sketched out in the course of regular, expository ministry, believers begin to see how their Bibles cohere. With deft strokes, the preacher is able to provide a *systematic* summary of the teaching to be learned, the ethics to be adopted, the conduct to be pursued, *not* by curtailing either

exegesis or biblical theology, but by deploying these disciplines on the way toward synthesis.⁶²

Similarly, when the preacher with this view of the expositor's task tackles a passage in the Gospels, the resulting sermon will not only explain the chosen passage within its context and apply it fairly (that is the least that expository preaching must do) but will also ensure that this focus within the ministry of the historical Jesus be properly related both to antecedent revelation and, especially, to subsequent revelation. After all, the Christian to whom the truth is being applied, not to mention the believers for whom it was originally written, live this side of the cross, the resurrection, and Pentecost, and therefore the inner-canonical relationships that tie the ministry of Jesus to this setting must from time to time be set out.

CONCLUSION

All the sections of this chapter, indeed many of its paragraphs, beg for expansion and copious illustration: no one is more aware of its shortcomings than I. In particular, the discussion would benefit from examples of exegesis that illustrate what is discussed in rather abstract form. Yet part of its weakness is endemic to any discussion of the systematician's task: as noted in the opening paragraphs, there are so many conceptual balls to keep in the air at the same time, with the added challenge of the fact that each ball influences all the others, that the range of discussion, even on a narrowly focused topic like that set for this chapter, rapidly extends into many other spheres.

Whatever its shortcomings, this chapter is gratefully dedicated to Kenneth Kantzer, who both in the classroom and in the counsel he offers (whether theological or personal) displays to a superlative degree the balance and poise that ought always to characterize the systematic theologian. *In multos annos!*

NOTES

¹Maurice Wiles, *What Is Theology?* (Oxford: University Press, 1976), 1–7.

²Perhaps it is worth mentioning that at the popular level the word *theology* is patient of several meanings, depending to some extent on the country where the word is used. For many in America it is virtually indistinguishable from systematic theology (defined below); in the United Kingdom it is a catch-all

expression that covers biblical study, historical theology, hermeneutics, even philosophy of religion—any discipline that can fall under the general rubric of the study of Christianity.

³Robert T. Voelkel, *The Shape of the Theological Task* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968).

⁴Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: SPCK, 1984).

⁵Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986).

⁶Cf. John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

⁷Cf. D. A. Carson, "Three Books on the Bible: A Critical Review," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983):337–67; D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); idem, *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

⁸E. C. Blackman, "The Task of Exegesis," in W. D. Davies and D. Daube, eds., *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (Fs. C. H. Dodd; Cambridge: University Press, 1984), 4.

⁹Many now resort to this or some similar definition. See, for example, M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1985), esp. 1–57.

¹⁰For all its vast erudition the fairly recent commentary by Hans Dieter Betz (*Galatians* [Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979]) is in certain respects a quite spectacular failure for this very reason.

¹¹Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 49–104, 374–83.

¹²Cf. P. D. Juhl, *Interpretation* (Princeton: University Press, 1980), esp. chaps. 1–5, 8; H. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), chaps. 1–2.

¹³Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

¹⁴Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1956). (The third edition becomes more sensitive to modern hermeneutical theory.)

¹⁵E.g., Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983); Joel B. Green, *How to Read Prophecy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984); M.A. Chevallier, *L'Exégèse du Nouveau Testament: Initiation à la méthode* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1985).

¹⁶E.g., John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

¹⁷E.g., Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

¹⁸E.g., David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

¹⁹E.g., Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989).

²⁰E.g., François Bovon and Grégoire Rouiller, eds., *Exegesis: Problems of Method and Exercises in Reading* (Genesis 22 and Luke 15), trans. Donald G. Miller (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978).

²¹For a useful introduction, cf. Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston:

Northwestern University Press, 1969); Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

²²With something of a shudder I report the opinion of one fundamentalist theologian, best left unnamed, who explained why, after completing his Th.D., he no longer read much theology: "Why should I? I already learned it."

²³E.g., Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 275–80.

²⁴Apparently this index was considered of such little value that it was not published in the first English-language edition: Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–63).

²⁵For a recent and sympathetic summary of reception theory, cf. Nigel Watson, "Reception Theory and Biblical Exegesis," *Australian Biblical Review* 36 (1988): 45–56.

²⁶William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

²⁷Michael LaFargue, "Are Texts Determinate? Derrida, Barth, and the Role of the Biblical Scholar," *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988): 341–57.

²⁸Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). For a thoughtful assessment of recent hermeneutical developments, cf. J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 325–56, 412–19.

²⁹For a recent and thoughtful assessment, cf. Henri Blocher, "L'analogie de la foi dans l'étude de l'Écriture Sainte," *Hokhma* 36 (1987): 1–20.

³⁰E.g., Daniel von Allmen, "The Birth of Theology: Contextualization as the dynamic element in the formation of New Testament theology," *International Review of Mission* 64 (1975): 37–52.

³¹D. A. Carson, "Church and Mission: Reflections on Contextualization and the Third Horizon," in D. A. Carson, ed., *The Church in the Bible and the World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987).

³²A. T. Hanson and R. P. C. Hanson, *Reasonable Belief: A Survey of the Christian Faith* (Oxford: University Press, 1980).

³³For instance, although Nicholas Lash tries to sidestep solipsism, the thrust of his writings is always toward the side of relativism; e.g., "What might martyrdom mean?" in William Horbury and Brian McNeil, eds., *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament* (Fs. G. M. Styler; Cambridge: University Press, 1981), 183–98.

³⁴Cf. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Some Observations on the History of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture," in James E. Bradly and Richard A. Muller, eds., *Church, Word, and Spirit* (Fs. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 93–106.

³⁵Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity V* (London, 1597), 8.2.

³⁶Richard Bauckham, "Tradition in Relation to Scripture and Reason," in Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery, eds., *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine* (Fs. Richard P. C. Hanson; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 117–45.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 140.

³⁸There are regrettable exceptions: e.g., W. Robert Cook, *A Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1979).

³⁹James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1977).

⁴⁰D. A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology," in Carson and Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth*, 65–95, 368–75.

⁴¹C. Kingsley Barrett, "The Centre of the New Testament and the Canon," in Ulrich Luz and Hans Weder, eds., *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments: Einheit und Vielfalt neutestamentlicher Theologie* (Fs. Eduard Schweizer; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983), 17.

⁴²James D. G. Dunn and James P. Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 1987).

⁴³F. Humphreys, *The Death of Christ* (Nashville: Broadman, 1978).

⁴⁴E.g., James Denney, *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903); John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986); Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); idem, *The Cross of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); and perhaps especially J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 3–45.

⁴⁵Nigel M. de S. Cameron, "Universalism and the Logic of Revelation," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 11 (1987): 321.

⁴⁶Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 1:418–32.

⁴⁷Of his many writings, cf. especially Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985); idem, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1984).

⁴⁸Charles J. Scalise, "The 'Sensus Literalis': A Hermeneutical Key to Biblical Exegesis," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989): 45–65.

⁴⁹For a more popular exposition of the approach, cf. Rudolf Pesch, *Neuere Exegese: Verlust oder Gewinn?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968).

⁵⁰Robert Morgan, "The Historical Jesus and the Theology of the New Testament," in L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright, eds., *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology* (Fs. George Bradford Caird; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 187–206.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 199.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today*. The 1988 Erasmus Lecture (Rockford: The Rockford Institute, 1988), 18.

⁵⁴Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 5, 13.

⁵⁵Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 15 (emphasis his).

⁵⁶E.g., Peter Stuhlmacher (*Schriftauslegung auf dem Wege zur biblischen Theologie* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975]; idem, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments: Eine Hermeneutik* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979]) insists that the interpreter must remain open to "the possibility of transcendence." We may be glad for his courage to swim against the tide, while still observing that his insistence is pretty minimal: Can anyone imagine Paul, while reading the Old Testament, urging his fellow believers to no more than openness to the possibility of transcendence? Cf. rather similarly Donald Evans, "Academic Skepticism, Spiritual Reality and Transfiguration," in L. D. Hurst

and N. T. Wright, *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology* (Fs. George B. Caird; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 175–86. For a useful discussion of many of the issues, cf. Nigel de S. Cameron, ed., *Christian Experience in Theology and Life* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988).

⁵⁷Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "A Neglected Text in Bibliology Discussions: 1 Corinthians 2:6–16," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1980–81): 301–19 (esp. 318–19).

⁵⁸Cf. the excellent discussion of Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 98–120 (esp. 113–17).

⁵⁹For a useful discussion, cf. John M. Frame, "The Spirit and the Scriptures," in Carson and Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* 213–35, 405–10.

⁶⁰Gerhard Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation* (London: Collins, 1966), 20.

⁶¹James Leo Garrett, Jr., "Why Systematic Theology?" *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 259–81. Cf. also Donald Macleod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," in Samuel T. Logan, ed., *The Preacher and Preaching* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 246–71.

⁶²Rather presumptuously, I have tried to develop this approach for the preacher in my *Expository Preaching: Priorities and Pitfalls* (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming).