13
Biblical Theology

PREVIOUS CHAPTERS CENTERED UPON METHODOLOGY FOR DETERMINING THE ORIGINAL INtended meaning of a text, a task that I identified in the introduction as the "third person" approach, treating the text as an object to be studied in order to discover the author's message. In this chapter we begin the switch from the text (meaning) to the current context (significance). As noted in figure 13.1, biblical theology constitutes the first step away from the exegesis of individual passages and toward the delineation of their significance for the church today. At this level we collect and arrange the themes that unite the passages and can be traced through a book or author as a whole. This is done in three steps: first, we study the theological themes in terms of individual books, then we explore the theology of an author, and finally we trace the progress of revelation that unites a testament and even the Bible as a whole (that is, the historical development of these themes throughout the biblical period). In this way biblical theology collates the results of exegesis and provides the data for the systematic theologian to contextualize in developing theological dogma for the church today.

Several scholars recently have described biblical theology as in "crisis" (see Childs 1970; Reventlow 1986 for good introductions to this topic). The current emphasis on diversity rather than unity (see pp. 14-15 above) has resulted in skepticism about the very possibility of discovering any "unified" theology. Moreover, the many works claiming to have discovered the "central" theme of the Old or New Testament have not only failed to establish a consensus; rarely do any two works even agree at all! Yet the task is not hopeless, and several strands have begun to come together at the methodological level as a way out of the impasse. This hermeneutical solution will be the subject of this chapter.

We may define biblical theology as "that branch of theological inquiry concerned with tracing themes through the diverse sections of the Bible (such as the wisdom writings or the Epistles of Paul) and then with seeking the unifying themes that draw the Bible together."[1] There are thus two types of inquiry: the search for unifying or central theme(s) behind the testaments or Bible (the task of the scholar) and the attempt to trace a particular theme (such as the Holy Spirit or perseverance) through the various stages of the biblical period (the task of every Bible student). Therefore, while biblical theology

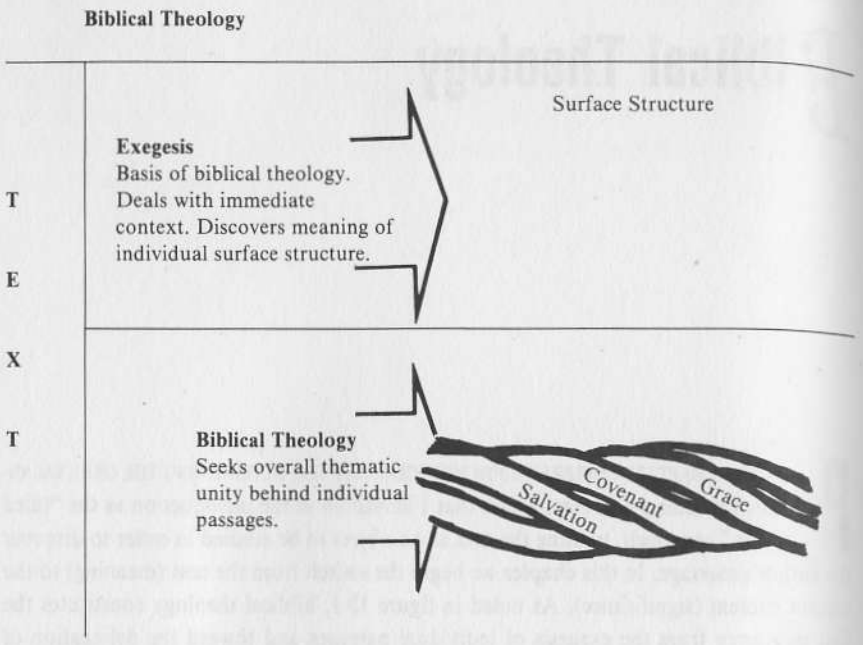

Fig. 13.1. The Task of Biblical Theology.

provides a bridge to systematic theology and the contextualization of Scripture, it remains primarily within the sphere of exegetical research because its major goal is to discover the views of the biblical period.

Relationship to Other Disciplines

Figure 13.2 displays the relationships among the various theological disciplines. In the next few pages we will look at biblical theology in relation to each of the other disciplines.

1. Biblical Theology and Exegesis. Gaffin asserts that "biblical theology is regulative of exegesis" because "the historical framework of the revelation process itself" rather than "literary relationships" determines the message of Scripture.[2] A continual tension exists within the biblical theology movement between diversity and unity, between historical-critical concerns and historical-grammatical exegesis.

Critical scholarship in this sense is often more "literalistic" than are conservative scholars in that it often assumes that any so-called contradiction or difference between biblical writers removes the basis for a deeper theological unity between them. This is unnecessary, for writers use different terms or phrases for similar biblical concepts and stress one side or another of a larger theological reality. For instance, divine sovereignty and human free will are not contradictory aspects of the process of salvation but can be harmonized at a deeper level. The same is true of faith (Paul) and works (James). While works cannot save us (Eph 2:8-9), they are the necessary result of a true faith (Eph 2:10 = Jas 2:14-16).

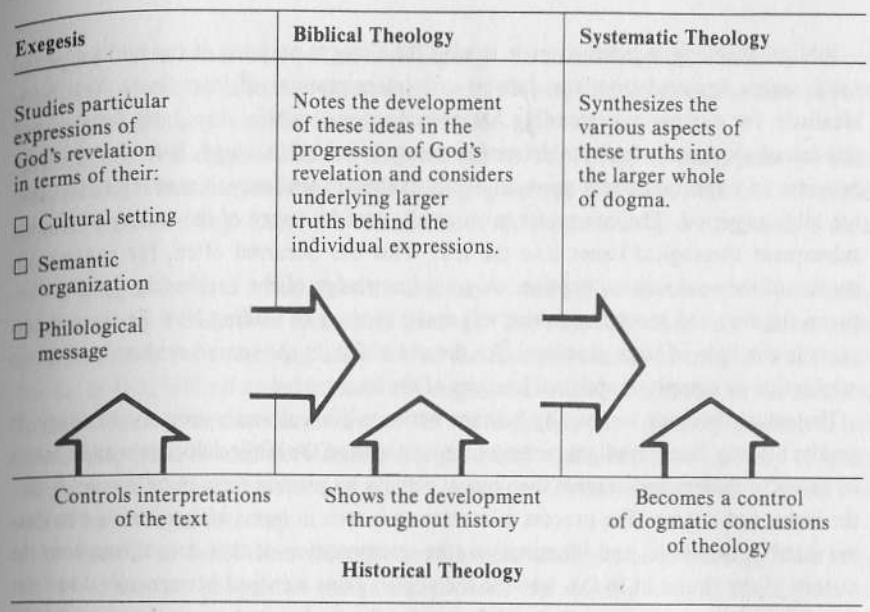

Fig. 13.2. The Relationships among the Disciplines.

Yet this is only part of the picture. There is a two-way relationship between biblical theology and exegesis. The former provides the categories and overall scriptural unity behind one's interpretation of individual passages, while exegesis provides the data collated into a biblical theology. In other words, the two are interdependent. The exegete studies the author's meaning on the basis of literary considerations (grammar and thought-development) and historical background (socioeconomic), then the biblical theologian works with the results and compiles patterns of unity behind the individual statements.

In sum, the hermeneutical spiral is now extended to include theology in a dialogue between five compartments of the hermeneutical process:[3] exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology and practical theology. Within this scheme exegesis, biblical theology and systematic theology stand together in an ongoing trialogue.

2. Biblical Theology and Historical Theology. All scholars are part of a confessional community, and that community's tradition plays virtually a normative role over the individual scholar's interpretive processes and procedures. The history of dogma traces the development of these community traditions as well as of the doctrines that they hold. As such historical theology plays a critical part in the hermeneutical enterprise, though it is conspicuously absent in most commentaries or works of theology. Yet by emphasizing the background behind exegetical or theological decisions, the history of dogma is immeasurably valuable to the interpretive discipline. The importance of church history for hermeneutics is twofold: we can see how a doctrine has developed through the periods of the church, and we can trace the origins and belief structure behind our own confessional tradition.

Biblical theology, concerned as it is with the thought-patterns of the biblical period itself, seems removed from the debates and interpretations of later times. Yet this is idealistic, for our preunderstanding has been developed within these later debates, and this can obscure our attempt to determine a truly "biblical" theology. Historical theology provides an important check upon an overly exuberant tendency to read later ideas into the biblical period. The interpreter must at all times be aware of the fallacy of reading subsequent theological issues into the text. This has occurred often, for instance, in studies of the eucharist or baptism. A good knowledge of the developing practices between the first and second centuries will make us wary of reading New Testament passages in the light of later practices, like the use of fish in the second-century eucharistic celebration or complex baptismal liturgies of the later period.

Historical theology technically belongs between biblical and systematic theology. It studies the way later paradigm communities understood the biblical doctrines and enables us better to understand current theological debates by placing them in bold relief within the history of dogma. The process of revelation is seen in terms of inspiration (the data provided in the Bible) and illumination (the interpretation of that data throughout the history of the church).[4] In this way the theologian gains a critical hermeneutical tool for determining the validity and shape of dogma for the modern age.

At the same time historical theology provides a way out of the tension between biblical and systematic theology, namely a recognition of the proper place of tradition as preunderstanding in the interpretive task. Many have noted the positive value of community understanding (tradition) in providing categories for understanding (so Gadamer). Without traditional dogmas we would fail to catch the implications of biblical passages. Yet at the same time these preformed belief systems can play a negative role when they force biblical statements into preconceived dogmatic categories. The answer is a proper "hermeneutical circle" or spiral within which the text is reconstructed on the basis of our theological system, yet challenges our preunderstanding and leads to a reformation of our tradition-derived categories. The history of tradition greatly aids in this task by placing our theological prejudices in historical perspective and thereby making them more open to influence (and correction if necessary) from the text itself.

One of the major breakthroughs in hermeneutics is the place of "community exegesis" with its twofold thrust: dialogue with the past community of faith via the history of dogma, and dialogue with the present community via both recent theological works and debate between communities. The past aspect is our concern here. Church history helps us to avoid the facile assumption that the current community understanding is inviolate and enables us to forge an openness to the original world of the text, even if it conflicts with the community desires. Historical theology accomplishes this by enabling theologians to view the larger picture (the historical development of dogma) within which both the understanding of the text and the community's position might be placed.[5]

3. Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology. Piper mentions four limitations of biblical theology: the variety of ways in which the salvific events of the Bible were interpreted within Scripture; the diversity within the biblical kerygma, both in terms of form and function; the historical nature of biblical language, which forms a barrier between biblical theology and modern man; and the subjectivity of the exegetes, which causes them to shift the original meaning in subtle directions (1952:106-11).

I argue in this chapter that the dilemma can be solved via an integration between biblical and systematic theology, thereby bridging the gap between divine revelation and human understanding. These two disciplines both supplement and complement each other.[6]

The core of the issue is this: does the diversity within Scripture remove the possibility of discovering a biblical or systematic theology? The following discussion will attempt to demonstrate the underlying unity behind the diversity within the biblical traditions/books. In fact, biblical and systematic theology are a critical component in the solution to the dilemma of modern hermeneutics. An overemphasis upon diversity has caused the liberal skepticism toward normative truth in biblical statements. The recovery of unity allows us to reaffirm the absolute nature of scriptural truth-claims and to renew the search for intended meaning.

Yet what is the exact relationship between biblical and systematic theology? In a very real sense they are inseparable and interdependent.[7] As stated above, all five aspects of the theologico-hermeneutical enterprise (exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology and practical theology) coexist in a conceptual unity. In one sense they flow in a straight line in the order presented here, as each forms the foundation for and flows into the next. In another sense the latter three provide the mental framework for exegetical and theological study (see figure 13.3). The theological preunderstanding established by one's confessional tradition is a necessary component for exegetical decisions.

In terms of method, however, each discipline also has a certain functional autonomy. This is why I discuss them in separate chapters. Biblical theology studies the individual themes behind the individual books and traditions within the Bible, seeking covering laws that integrate them into a holistic pattern. Systematic theology then contextualizes these into a logical and conceptual whole that reconstructs dogma for the modern period. As Nicole says, "Biblical theology is a foundation for systematic theology in that it provides the rich fruit of exegetical study conducted with a proper relation to the original context and the development of divine revelation" (1978:185; see 185-93). Yet many disagree at this point. Some (such as Guthrie in his *New Testament Theology)* believe that the organizing principles are derived ultimately from dogmatics. Others (such as Ladd in his *Theology of the New Testament)* take a descriptive approach, allowing the organizing principles to be derived from the text itself rather than from an external source like systematic theology. As Ward says, "The *structure,* or principle of *organization,* for a biblical theology should be determined by the literary units within the Old and New Testaments" (1977:383; italics his). I will develop this further below.

Let us consider Ladd and Guthrie as an example. One of Ladd's basic problems is a lack of synthesis (his failure to seek unifying themes that link the New Testament traditions) while Guthrie fails to allow the biblical documents themselves to determine the structure of his theology. Yet Guthrie's is the more serious error from the standpoint of

biblical theology, for his is more of a systematic theology in the guise of a biblical theology.[8] Guthrie needs to allow the biblical authors themselves to dictate the theological categories and to determine the larger unity between themselves. The best approach would be to amalgamate the methods of Ladd and Guthrie, that is, to note the diverse expressions and themes of the various New Testament strata and then to compile these in order to forge a united core of theology within the first-century church. Ladd's analytical mode and Guthrie's synthetic mode can inform and correct each other.

In sum, biblical theology is descriptive, tracing the individual emphases of the sacred writers and then collating them into archetypal themes that unify the testaments; dogmatic theology collects the material generated by biblical theology and restates or reshapes it into a modern logical pattern, integrating these aspects into a confessional statement for the church today.[9] For instance, biblical theology begins with the realized eschatology of John (salvation/eternal life as a present possession of the believer) and the final eschatology of Hebrews or 1 Peter (salvation as a future attainment). Noting that these aspects are complementary and part of a larger truth (inaugurated eschatology, which recognizes that salvation begins in the present and is consummated in the future) the biblical theologian finds both security and responsibility in the Christian life. Systematic theology takes this result and places it within a more comprehensive doctrine integrating soteriology and eschatology.

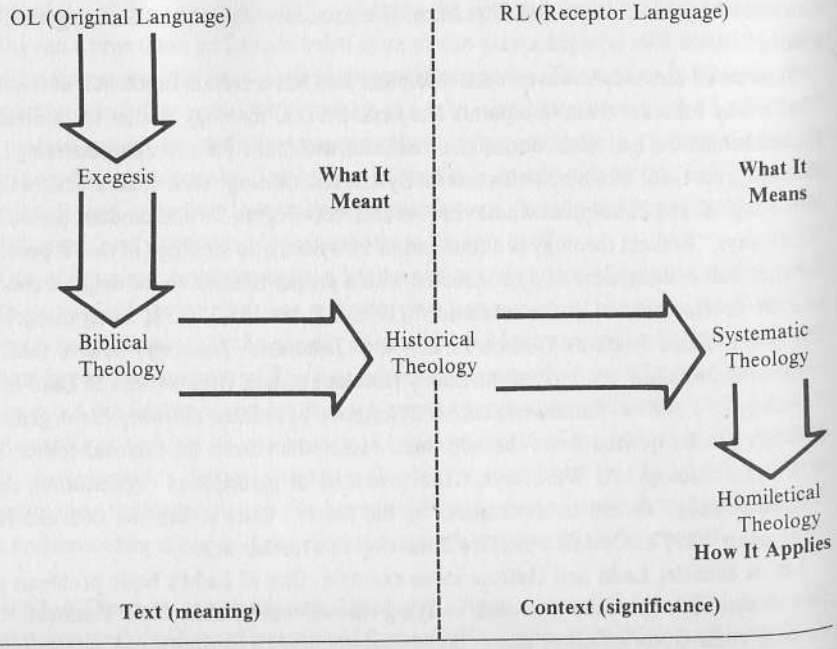

Fig. 13.3. From Text to Context.

Finally, systematic theology is the last step of the bridge between "what it meant" (the task of exegesis and biblical theology), "what it means" (the task of systematic theology) and "how it applies" (the task of homiletical theology)—see figure 13.3. Of course, this is not a totally satisfactory arrangement: biblical theologians object to being "dropped in some middle point between the text of the New Testament and modern reconstruction of the New Testament message" (Barrett 1981:5), and systematic theologians object to the denigration of their discipline into a contextual and philosophical study. In actuality any attempt to separate the tasks too greatly is artificial, for one cannot be done without the other: they are interdependent. Biblical theology must watch over the theologian to "check . . . when his enthusiasm runs away with him" (p. 7). In similar fashion the dogmatic preunderstanding of the biblical theologian interacts in a type of "hermeneutical circle" as each discipline informs and checks the other (see figure 13.4).

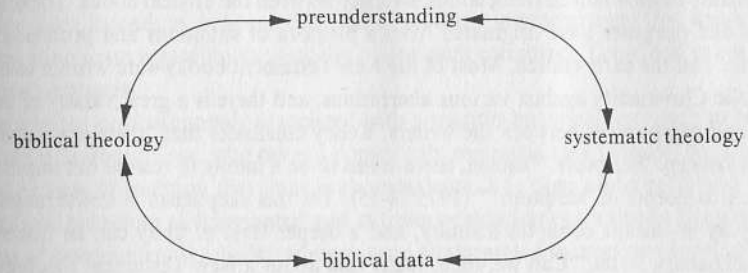

Fig. 13.4. The Interdependence of Theological Disciplines.

4. Biblical Theology and Homiletical Theology. All scholars recognize that biblical theology dare not merely describe the past thinking of the canonical authors but must demonstrate the relevance of those ideas for the modern context. Dunn stresses the "ecclesiastical level" of biblical theology, namely, the demarcation of the present implications of the canon for the church today (1982:26-27, 40-43).

Dunn argues that only this can carry influence for the modern church, since in fact every branch of the church builds more upon its own ecclesiastical tradition than upon the canon itself. While this is correct in a pragmatic sense, I would not wish to "canonize" diversity to this extent. One of the major purposes of this book is to provide methodological controls for avoiding just this error, so that interpreters can indeed allow the text to speak to their diverse theologies and thereby allow divergent traditions to interact and move together.[10] No person is *only* a biblical theologian or *only* a preacher. Everyone who reads a biblical text and seeks to discern its meaning (including what it *meant* and what it *means)* must of necessity blend the disciplines.

At the same time homiletics is further removed from biblical theology. The biblical data has been translated and interpreted by exegesis, collated by biblical theology, forward transformed into dogmatic theses by systematic theology, developed into the thought patterns of various church situations and traditions by historical theology, and

now is applied to the current situation by homiletical theology. There is no single "hermeneutical circle" but rather a spiral of interlocking spheres of dialogue. The purpose is to allow what the text "meant" to address the church anew.

Specific Problem Areas

1. Unity and Diversity. Here we are at the heart of the debate over the historical-critical method. Critical scholars doubt whether we can amalgamate individual scriptural statements into covering models of doctrine in light of the diverse streams of tradition in the biblical period.[11] Pokorny calls this an almost insurmountable problem for establishing continuity between biblical traditions. Since biblical material is circumstantial and linked to an irreversible historical development, Pokorny maintains, it becomes virtually impossible to derive a united theology (1981:1-3).

Certainly there is indeed tremendous diversity between the biblical books. The differing genres and purposes have originated from a plethora of situations and problems faced by Israel and the early church. Most of the New Testament books were written to defend apostolic Christianity against various aberrations, and there is a great variety of expressions and perspectives between the writers. Kelsey concludes that "there is no one, normative concept 'Scripture.' Instead, there seems to be a family of related but importantly different concepts of 'scripture' " (1975:14-15). Yet this skepticism is unwarranted. Diversity by no means connotes disunity, and a deeper level of unity can be discovered. Schnackenburg states, "Can we, then, really talk about a New Testament theology? We can and we must, precisely because the New Testament is a unity. . . at one in the confession of *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* God and Father (Eph. 4, 5, 6)" (1963:22; italics his; see also Marshall 1976-77:5-14; Moule 1981:234).

Guthrie in his *Theology* does an excellent job of demonstrating the unity behind the diverse New Testament expressions, as do von Rad, Eichrodt and others in the Old Testament. The basic problem is linguistic, and therefore the difficulties will be solved at the semantic level, specifically via the semantic field behind theological concepts. Are we to see conflict between the Deuteronomic, Davidic and prophetic concepts of covenant or between the Matthean and Pauline concepts of law and grace? Here we must determine exactly how the terms (such as "fulfill" in Mt 5:17 and the language of Rom 4:13-15 or Gal 3:19—4:6) are used in the surface structure and message of the text and then delineate the underlying theological principles in the deeper structure. At this deeper level we often can promulgate unity.[12]

Many note the importance of the "social history of ideas" as an arbiter in deciding questions of meaning and authority (see Woodbridge 1982:26-27). We dare not assume unity or diversity without noting such factors as background, semantic field, community influence or the sociological development of Israel and the church. Carson's seven "positive reflections" provide a proper conclusion (1983:77-95): (1) Everyone manifests some type of "unified" theological system of beliefs. (2) The data base is the entire canon, which is open to the laws of logic; theology (or claims of diversity) must arise from the sacred text, not be imposed upon it. (3) Progressive revelation should be seriously considered but again must arise from the text. (4) Biblical differences often reflect "diverse pastoral concerns" rather than divergent confessional structures. (5) Diversity also often reflects the individual styles and interests of the writers themselves. (6) Theological harmonization is valid when the underlying statements are compatible. (7) The scholar must avoid prooftexting and allow each passage to determine its own meaning and theology.

2. Tradition History. Dunn and Sanders argue that the canon-consciousness of the communities depended on each stage of the development of traditions for their self-understanding; therefore, not only the final stage but the earlier stages constitute the Word of God, and the prehistory as well as the final codified form of the text is essential for a true biblical theology.[13] There are two ways to look at the traditioning process: via a radical reconstruction of the history of the text and of the nation along the lines of Martin Noth; or a dependence upon the text as canonically conceived without such a speculative revision of history. The former type makes a biblical theology virtually impossible since it tends to produce the kind of multiple interpretations that result in an extreme skepticism regarding the viability of any such enterprise. Therefore, most utilize the latter approach.

The scholar most commonly associated with a traditio-historical approach to biblical theology is Hartmut Gese, who takes a consciously canonical tack, arguing for a closed, united process of tradition that links both testaments. For Gese tradition history is not an artificial collection of fragmented and at times contradictory traditions but a lengthy process of development in which traditions were reinterpreted to meet new contingencies. For instance, there was more than one decalogue (Ten Commandments) as the Torah was reworked in differing situations. Yet there is continuity, and later interpretations built upon rather than displaced the classic laws.[14] Gese believes that only a tradition-critical process can unite the testaments; since texts develop out of the "life processes" of the communities, only a method that encompasses both redaction and composition criticism properly can assess the theological developments. Each stage is essential to the final product and yet dependent on that final goal. This means that for Gese the Old Testament is not fulfilled until the New Testament. Gese's program has come under a great deal of criticism.[15] He seems in many ways to replace the concept of a unifying center with his theory of a tradition or revelatory process; he ignores theology in favor of hermeneutics and history. Moreover, Gese's theory depends somewhat on his view of a late closure of the Hebrew canon (at the Council of Jamnia or even later), and this has come under some disrepute of late (especially with the growing consensus that Jamnia was not the turning point many have previously thought). All tradition-critical approaches depend upon speculative reconstructions of biblical history and so are dependent upon the shifting sands of historical opinion. In sum, the biblical theologian must be aware of the traditioning process in Israel and the early church, but it is one factor among many in the exegetical arsenal and not the key component in the formation of the history of dogma in the biblical period.

3. Theology and Canon. Closely linked to the issue of tradition is canon, and it is certainly a major issue of late, as witness the number of recent works on the issue. Taking

a tradition-critical approach to the issue, Tate argues for a dynamic concept of canon that includes the stages of development as well as the final canonical product (1981:174-75). Therefore, there was no "intertestamental period" but a complex unity as the canon progressed to fulfillment. On the other hand, Childs considers canon to be a stance or perspective from which to view the Bible (1970:147). As such the canon relativizes the historical-critical method and challenges the scholar to consider the text as it is in terms of its function for the community. Therefore, "the canonical shaping . . . [forces] the interpreter . . . to confront the authoritative text of scripture in a continuing theological reflection" (Childs 1979:83).

The debate over canon and tradition in biblical theology has been both interesting and informative. Sanders objects to Childs's focus on a "final form," calling it a "canonical shape which few if any subsequent tradents heeded."[16] According to Sanders, the critic should consider not only the "freezing" of a tradition in the canonical text but also its prehistory and subsequent development. Since ancient communities read texts via tradition rather than via a "canonical" order, we must study the Bible not only synchronically (in its canonical shape, so Childs) but also diachronically (in its tradition-development). Childs responds that the results of tradition-critical research do not justify the emphasis placed upon that method, arguing that he includes the shaping process but that the final text must have priority: "The entire history of Israel's interaction with its traditions is reflected in the final text" (1980:54; see 52-60). Childs is attempting a constructive approach that will overcome the dilemma of critical scholarship and recognize the "theological role of canon."[17]

There is much to laud in the canonical methodology of Childs. His stress on the unity of the canon and the relationship of the whole of Scripture to each of the parts is similar to the "analogy of faith" of the Reformers (see below). In his Exodus commentary and monumental two-volume *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* and *Introduction to the New Testament as Scripture,* Childs shows a brilliant awareness of canonical literature and indeed of the whole array of scholarship on the bewildering number of issues involved. He has indeed managed to blend critical scholarship with a canonical approach. In doing so, however, he has had to jettison interest in the historical "intended meaning" of the biblical author in favor of a canonical interpretation. To be certain, for Childs "intentionality" addresses mainly speculative reconstructions of historical background (such as attempts to rewrite the history of the conquest of Canaan or of the prophetic period) because they skew the canonical meaning of the text (1985:35-37). Yet at the same time all referential approaches to meaning (see appendix two) are rejected as inappropriate in favor of a canonical or literary tack.[18]

The centrality of the original community (Israel and the church) in Childs's system parallels the grammatical-historical method in biblical theology. We seek the theology of Israel or the early church as we collate the individual theological strands in the testaments. Yet as McComiskey points out,

> There is an important hermeneutical problem here. Canonical criticism forces us to derive our understanding of texts like the royal psalms from the community. Thus the narrower intent of the author is expanded. . . . Does not the community reflect a hope fashioned more by historical circumstance than authoritative word?

This dichotomy between author and community must be resolved.

From this vantage point let me address briefly the subtopic of a "canon within the canon." This controversial issue is related to the problem of preunderstanding and assumes the viability of choosing certain strands of biblical theology as more "canonical" or central than others. For instance, Käsemann freely admits that his Lutheran bias has led him to favor Pauline concepts of justification over other New Testament emphases as his "canon within a canon" (1964:95-107; see also Morgan 1973:60-61). Dunn goes a step further: "Whatever the theory of canonicity, the reality is that *all Christians have operated with a canon within the canon"* (italics his).[19] Whenever we place our theological system above the text and decide dogma on the basis of prooftexts rather than on the whole of Scripture, Dunn is correct.

Therefore, we must reject a "canon within a canon" approach to biblical theology. Hasel correctly notes that it is too speculative and reductionistic to provide any basis for deciding themes in biblical theology (1978:166-67). He quotes Hans Küng in labeling it "subjective arbitrariness" because it allows a person to choose any theme desired as the center of biblical theology. A "canon within a canon" cannot deal rightly with the totality of Scripture, because it is based on the principle of arbitrary selection, which itself leads to rampant subjectivity. To summarize, the canon must be taken as a whole; it demands a perspective on the unity of Scripture that allows neither community nor scholar to predominate over the canonical text itself.

4. The Analogia Fidei and Progressive Revelation. As stated in the introduction, the "analogy of faith" or (more properly) the principle of Scripture determining Scripture is a key concept in the determination of theological meaning. Yet its relevance for biblical theology is debated. The term that describes the danger of this tool (as well as the problem of the tradition-critical or "history of religions" approaches) is Sandmel's "parallelomaia," the tendency to apply any analogous passage (or religious situation) to define the meaning or origin of a biblical idea (1962:2-13). This also can lead to an overemphasis upon the unity of biblical texts, resulting in what Carson calls an "artificial conformity" that ignores the diversity of expression and emphasis between divergent statements in the Bible.[20] Ebeling goes so far as to claim that the *analogia fidei* actually undercuts a true biblical theology, since in the end "the faith" or the interpreter's preunderstanding takes precedence over Scripture itself.[21]

Certainly the danger of our "faith" rather than Scripture controlling our interpretation is very real; however, this does not mean that we must jettison the concept altogether. In fact, we could not do so if we wanted to. One's theological perspective is too deeply ingrained for that, and I would argue that it is an aid rather than an enemy in the task of discovering meaning. Rather, we should control our theological presuppositions in two ways: change the concept to the *analogia scriptura* (Scripture rather than our "faith" as the final arbiter), and allow "community exegesis" (dialogue with the past community via commentaries and so forth and with the present communities via constant interaction) to challenge our interpretation.

A further danger is shallow harmonization, the other side of "parallelomania." In biblical theology this is often seen, for instance, when canon criticism leads one to read later texts into earlier ones, as when one sees the Old Testament as a christological case book (see further below). Kaiser calls for "the analogy of antecedent Scripture" to combat this; namely, a "diachronically conscious" hermeneutic that allows a passage to stand by itself in light of its own prehistory rather than to read back into it the future development of the theological concept (1978a:18-19). In contrast, Childs argues that the totality of canonical revelation is applicable, indeed necessary, to any given part (1970:189-91). In my opinion, the truth lies between the two options. If we apply Kaiser's principle too woodenly, there could be no concept of the "progress of revelation," and we would become tradition critics, a position already seen to have serious problems for biblical theology. On the other hand, the canonical approach easily can lead to Barr's "illegitimate totality transfer," as the whole of the biblical witness is erroneously applied to a single biblical statement or theme. The answer is a proper use of parallels. They are not determinative of meaning but simply provide possibilities for reflection and yield parameters for the options. For instance, we do not choose Matthew 24:29-31 (posttribulation rapture), Revelation 3:10 (pretribulation rapture) or Revelation 20:1-10 (amillennial position) and then interpret the others on the basis of the preferred "prooftext." Rather, we set all three passages alongside one another and seek that position which best harmonizes them.

The hermeneutical principles by which we may do this are critical. Primarily, we must assess the relative value of each theological parallel, giving the most likely passages greater weight but giving due weight to all passages dealing with the theme. We need to differentiate true parallels from seeming parallels, but at the same time we must explore all ramifications of the larger issue and place them in their proper biblical framework (see Thomas 1980:45-53). I have already explored this at the level of semantics (chap. three), and the principles there can be applied also to theological parallels. The *analogia scriptura* is a key to a proper biblical theology and an essential ingredient in a canonical approach.

5. Authority. Critical scholars denigrate the authority of biblical theology since it is perceived as a purely descriptive science. Barr states flatly,

> It is less and less likely that biblical theology can be deemed to have said the last word about anything. . . . On the one side, the authority of the Bible can no longer be taken for granted, but must be *shown* on sufficient grounds. On the other side, biblical theology cannot work in isolation; involved in historical judgments on the one hand, it is linked with logical, philosophical, and finally, systematic-theological judgments on the other.[22]

The argument is that biblical theology, dealing only with "what it meant," is descriptive; systematic theology, telling "what it means," presents the normative element in Christian truth (and even here it is normative only for that particular community of faith). In this latter sense, Nineham goes so far as to assert that the Bible as poetry has spoken to each generation but that the "authority" question is culturally conditioned and caught up with the parallel authorities of church, conscience and reason.[23] He states, "What if God, taking history very seriously, actually wants the Church in the twentieth century to be engaged in dialogue with herself" (1976:271).

"What if" statements of course state mere possibilities rather than actualities, and invite response. I would answer that God indeed does want dialogue, but not in place of an authoritative text (as Nineham would have it). Naturally, Nineham and others can do as they wish, but even the simplest perusal of biblical claims demonstrates the fact that the Bible at least demands that it be the basis of that dialogue. This God-ordained "dialogue with herself" can never occur apart from biblical standards (Nineham) nor does it continue the process of God's inspired self-revelation (Achtemeier). The church dialogues at the level of interpretation but can have only one response: obedience to God's will as revealed in his authoritative Word (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Evangelicals recognize that the human element was present—in the stages of tradition and transmission, in the codification of the tradition in the canonical books and in the church's validation of the "inspired" books via the process of canonization. However, this in no way vitiates the divine element, which was central in each of these stages. While some conservatives are perhaps too docetic when they ignore the human side, many nonconservatives are too Arian when they ignore the divine side. In spite of all the historical problems enumerated above, we are continually brought back to the bottom line: God has spoken to humanity! The biblical revelation is not so relative or culturally conditioned as to be inaccessible to modern people. The science of hermeneutics enables us to get back to the intended meaning of the original propositions, and biblical theology is part of the process whereby we allow that authoritative message to address us today.

6. History and Theology. Barr notes four problematic aspects in any attempt to anchor revelation in history (1976:746-49): (1) ambiguity regarding the nature of the revelatory events and their connection with historical causation; (2) ambiguity about the sense of "history" in terms both of the accessibility of revelation to critical historians and of its being revelation if it is accessible; (3) ambiguity regarding the relation between revelation and history, as to whether they are equal or separate and whether any criteria can be adduced to prove it actually happened; (4) difficulties in the relation between revelation and the biblical text itself, since the latter shows no awareness of such. Barr argues that the tradition-history of Israel (or the church) is the true locus and that revelation per se played no part in the development of the canon.

The problem areas that Barr notes are valid, but his pessimism is unwarranted for several reasons. The history behind the Gospels, for instance, is quite accessible to the historian, as several recent works have argued.[24] There is no true dichotomy between theology (or revelation) and history in the Gospels or in the historical books of the Old Testament. While there is historical relativity in the Bible due to the circumstantial nature of the books, the cultural environment is not the controlling factor, at least not in the minds of the authors. Inspiration (and a concomitant sense of revelation) is frequently claimed, both in the prophets and in the apostolic authority behind New Testament literature. Lessing's "ugly broad ditch" between history and truth (his statement that "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason")

was based upon the philosophical skepticism of the Enlightenment. However, the historical relativity of Scripture does not entail a relativism that destroys the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Rather, we should follow the lesson of church history and return to a "precritical" though critically informed view of the connection between history and truth in the Bible (see Hughes 1983:173-94 for an excellent discussion of this issue).

There is no reason why biblical theology must on the one hand divorce itself from the possibility of revelation in history (Barr's demand), or on the other hand demand a positivistic reconstruction of history as the basis for its work (the tradition-critical approach). Hermann calls for a "theology of history" based upon the biblical view of time and history as centered upon the interrelationship between human history and divine action.[25] While history itself betrays no revelatory aspect, God has made himself known in the midst of human history, especially via the dimension of promise-fulfillment. At the level of religious experience God's active presence in history is known. While I cannot agree with Hermann that history is ontologically incapable of being revelatory, he does provide a good basis for the union of history and theology. I would argue that since God has given his revelation in history the two are ontologically related.

Hayes and Prussner chronicle the reaction against the union of history and theology as opposed primarily to the "revelation in history" school of Wright and others (1985:241-44, 262-64). The current mode of thinking is to replace history with a view of the Bible as "story." In this way the question of historicity need not arise and the literary features of the narrative (in which the theology actually is found) can take precedence over the "event" itself. However, as stated in chapter six, the historical aspects of the biblical narrative are a part of the theology, and no such dichotomy should be made.

7. Language, Text and Meaning. Surprisingly, texts on biblical theology too seldom discuss the problem of language, except in the sense of descriptive (what it meant) vs. normative (what it means) tasks (such as Stendahl). However, the problem of language has moved to the forefront of discussion due to recent theories regarding language and hermeneutics. Henry discusses the preoccupation with this issue:

> They [scholars] have posed so starkly the "predicament" of "the modern person" to whom the meaning of the New Testament must be conveyed, they have drawn such a sharp contrast between the condition of persons today and their condition at any other time, that they have been compelled to concentrate almost all their efforts on the attempt to pry loose from the New Testament some word that is not tied to the particularity of Judaism or confused by partisan battles among the apostles. (1979:56-57)

The debate centers upon the interrelationship between the three aspects of meaning—author, text, reader. Tremendous problems occur at each link; what is the exact relationship between an author and the reader, and how does one get back to the theology of the biblical author in light of the great gap between the original setting and that of the current age? Yet I would argue that religious language is open to verification via hermeneutical criteria of adequacy and coherence. Since language contains both "dead" (static) and "live" (dynamic) metaphors, the Bible can be both propositional truth (static) and

language event (dynamic). As such, a biblical theology is a vital element in the ongoing interaction between God and this world (see the appendices for a more detailed consideration of this essential issue).

8. Old Testament and New Testament. All agree that this is the central issue for any proper biblical theology. Once again the basic problem is unity and diversity: each testament must have its autonomous place within the larger unity of Scripture. Yet the balance between the two remains difficult to attain. Many have taught that Old and New Testaments should remain separate. Marcion was the first to demand a radical dichotomy, removing from the canon not only the Old Testament but also any New Testament works related to the Old Testament. In our time both Adolf von Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann have stressed discontinuity. For Bultmann and Baumgärtel this leads to a promissory approach to biblical theology. The Old Testament is the "presupposition" of the New, and the failure of the covenant hope of Israel led to a new religion centering upon the promissory hope of justification.[26]

However, this negative tone has not been influential. Westermann responds that the negativism of such scholars shatters the value of the Old Testament as religious history (1963:122-33). Moreover, New Testament background is also loosed from its historical moorings and flounders in a sea of mythical irrelevance. To remove "fulfillment" from "promise" is arbitrary and inadequate. In the final analysis it is impossible to separate the two testaments, and any truly biblical theology must begin with the recognition of unity and demonstrate such. The simple fact that there are at least 257 quotes and over 1,100 allusions (according to the Nestle-Aland Greek text) of the Old Testament in the New shows the extent to which the latter built upon the former. In terms of vocabulary, themes, religious emphases and worship the two depend upon one another. In terms of redemptive history a clear typological relationship of promise-fulfillment exists between the testaments, and any concept of the progress of revelation in history (the backbone of biblical theology) must build upon this deeper interdependence.[27]

Toward a Methodology

The second major area of disagreement (after a unifying center) is the methodology by which we develop a biblical theology. Scholars have never attained any consensus with respect to approach. Biblical scholars have tended to prefer an analytical or descriptive approach, and theologians have always preferred a synthetic method. For instance, Ladd in his New Testament theology utilizes an analytical method that takes each book as a distinct entity, while Guthrie follows a synthetic approach that proceeds theme by theme.

The solution is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of these and other proposed methods. Stuhlmacher suggests five criteria by which one can judge a viable biblical theology (1979:163): (1) It must correspond with the religious-historical as well as the churchly aspects of Scripture. (2) There should be historical and dogmatic coherence in defining the relationship between the testaments. (3) It must unite the strands of theology between the various books and traditions. (4) It should demonstrate the link between the biblical message of salvation and the church's attestation of faith in such a way as to

reflect canonical history. (5) It should preserve scholarly expertise in the exegetical and hermeneutical disciplines. Of course, the way in which we will interpret these criteria will differ according to our own paradigm community; that is, according to the type of "critical" school to which we adhere. Nevertheless, this provides an excellent control in assessing the following methods. I would note three specifics: the method employed must be cognizant of the diversity of individual expressions; at the same time it must demonstrate the deeper unity behind those expressions; and it must trace the progression of the revelation/historical development of biblical dogma.

1. The Synthetic Method. In this method theological themes are traced through the biblical strata in relation to the various historical periods. Two different approaches are taken: some follow a history of religions approach that studies the sources and the changing theological situations (many Old Testament theologians), while others simply describe the differing theologies with little attempt to trace lines of continuity or development (many New Testament theologians). The strength of the synthetic method lies in its stress upon the unity of Scripture. It is often assumed that the themes elucidated draw together the various traditions behind the biblical writers. The thematic approach also graphically demonstrates the interconnections between the traditions. At the same time, however, the synthetic method can be artificial and subjective, since the categories can be easily imposed from outside (from theology) rather than arising naturally from within (from the text). Even when major concepts like covenant or kingdom are applied indiscriminately, the data itself can be ignored or twisted to fit the preconceived pattern.

Nevertheless, this approach has made a significant impact, for example, in Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament,* in which a unifying theme (covenant) is traced by means of "cross-sections" of the canonical literature. Eichrodt wished to be true to history yet to retain the basic unity of Scripture. His selective process was intended to avoid the control of historicism on the one hand and of systematic theology on the other hand. However, while his method gained wide acceptance, his unifying theme did not. Using a similar approach, Vriezen (1970) argues for the communion concept, Kaiser (1978) for the promise theme, and Terrien (1978) for the presence of God as the central theme.

2. The Analytical Method. Stemming from the post-Enlightenment period, the descriptive or analytical method has always been central to the task of biblical theology. It studies the distinctive theological emphases of individual books and the developing traditions in order to discern the unique message of each. Theoretically it is opposed to harmonizing the individual messages into covering or unifying themes. Dulles notes several dangers this avoids: the tendency to exert a kind of tyranny over other approaches; a romantic tendency to "canonize" biblical thought patterns, as if the modern person should think like the ancient Hebrew; and an external control over biblical thought by contemporary philosophy and theology (1965:214-15).

At the same time there are clear dangers: the analytical method can result in a mere collage of individually diverse theologies without cohesion; while this could be correct, it is hardly how the Bible or the Jewish-Christian faith perceived itself. Moreover, it can

easily degenerate into a history of religions approach, with concern only for genealogical origins rather than for the living faith that produced the documents. This in fact has been the most common form of the analytical method.

3. The History of Religions Method. As stated above, this has often been the analytical approach. Yet it is also a separate school and so deserves consideration, since it elucidates the development of religious ideas in the life of Israel and the early church. In its radical form it assumes that these ideas were borrowed from surrounding religions. In its more conservative form it traces the progress of revelation, that is the history of God's revelation in the canonical period. The key distinction is that this method centers upon history while the analytical approach centers upon theology.

The best-known proponent of this method, Bultmann, called the message of Jesus the "presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself" (1951:1:3). Theology therefore does not begin with the historical Jesus and his teaching but with the Christ of faith, which is the product of the preaching and teaching of the early church. Two aspects control Bultmann's thought—history of religions (the historical side) and existentialism (the interpretive side). For Bultmann the major stress is upon the latter, since biblical theology has meaning, "not as theoretical teachings, timeless general truths, but only as an expression of an understanding of human existence which for the man of today also is a possibility for his understanding of himself" (1951:2:251).

The basic error of Bultmann and his followers is what Hasel calls their "tunnel vision," which leads them to stress only those sections of Scripture which cohere with existentialist interpretation. As a result they often ignore works like Hebrews, James or Revelation (1978:101-2). Moreover, there are too few controls, so that their reconstruction of theology tends to leave the biblical data at the mercy of the critic. Finally, history of religion theorists often assume that any potential parallel is a precursor or source of New Testament ideas. More often than not, the parallels are analogical rather than sources of New Testament ideas. In conclusion, there is promise when the theorist sticks to the biblical data, tracing the historical development of biblical themes in light of the environment in which they developed (the progress of revelation). However, when the method steps outside the biblical framework and seeks a speculative revision of that data, it becomes too subjective to be useful.

4. Diachronic and Tradition-Critical Methods. I have already discussed the issue of tradition criticism (pp. 271-73), so I will concentrate here on the hermeneutical method used by this school. Gerhard von Rad's epochal Old Testament theology opposed a strictly historical-critical reconstruction of biblical theology on the grounds that it resulted in a negative approach. Instead he wedded history to kerygma, that is, a kerygmatic theology grounded in history. For von Rad history of tradition provides a positive key to the kerygmatic portrait of the biblical text; the developing confession of the community has greater theological relevance than a reconstructed history of that community. However, von Rad does not deny the viability of that reconstruction. Rather the devel-

oping creed has the place of primacy, and von Rad argues that the confessional formula rather than the originating event is the true task of biblical theology. He calls this "retelling" and believes that it bridges the gap between history and theology. Thereby the acts of God, or redemptive history, come to the fore. However, this very dichotomy between objective history and salvation history has occasioned most of the criticism directed against him (see Hayes and Prussner 1985:233-39 for a fine summary).

Although the developing community is important, I doubt whether it solves as many problems as it creates. Biblical theology should be erected upon a solid foundation, and the speculative theories of tradition or community development do not provide the necessary groundwork. I prefer a concept of the progress of revelation as exemplified in Vos (1948), which takes the text of Scripture at face value and does not try to impose a revisionist concept of tradition development upon it. The text itself, rather than historical-critical reconstruction, best determines the method. A book-by-book descriptive approach could be organized on the basis of the progress of revelation, and in this way a diachronic approach would be an important step forward methodologically. Here Childs's *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (and its New Testament counterpart) provides a good model.

5. The Christological Method. According to Vischer (1949) we must interpret every part of the Bible in light of the Christ event. The Old Testament tells us what Christ is and the New Testament who he is; thus we have a complete picture of Christ in the Old Testament. Hengstenberg, Barth and many modern Lutheran theologians show the popularity of the christological approach today. Indeed, the method has several advantages: it guards against an overly zealous historicizing tendency among many biblical theologians and recognizes the centrality of the Christian faith; for the Christian the whole Bible does indeed point to Jesus Christ. The analytic approach often produces an Old Testament theology that is virtually unaware of the New Testament or the prophetic purpose of the Old Testament.

However, on the whole there are greater dangers than strengths in this movement. Nearly all practitioners allegorize and spiritualize Old Testament texts to fit preconceived "types of Christ" or some such. The Old Testament as the history and record of God's salvific dealings with his covenant people Israel is lost. Subjective speculation and a reductionism reduce it to a series of prophetic acts. The intention of the text, the Old Testament as canon in its own right, and the validity of the religious experiences of the Hebrews as the chosen people of Yahweh are all sacrificed on the altar of "relevance." There must be a better way to demonstrate the continuity between the covenants.

Barr posits a "trinitarian approach" in which the Old Testament has historical priority and the New Testament christological authority, with both grounded in the unity of the Godhead—Father, Son and Spirit. When this is augmented with a promise-fulfillment perspective, the relationship between the testaments is given a much stronger foundation. The Old and New Testaments stand on their own as the record of God's covenant with his two peoples—Israel and the church—yet are united into a single Bible via the Christ-event.[28]

6. The Confessional Method. Practitioners of this approach consider the Bible to be a series of faith-statements that demand adherence and as such transcend history. Several scholars include this perspective in their systems (such as von Rad, Cullmann), but some make it the kingpin and radically oppose the analytic or historical approaches. Vriesen (1970) argues that a purely objective or neutral stance is impossible, and that only a theoretical stance like that of the original communities can understand biblical theology. Hasel mentions Otto Eissfeldt, G. A. F. Knight and Roland de Vaux as taking a similar stance (1975:40-41). The Old Testament must be understood as Christian Scripture, and theology as a science demands faith.

The major strength of this school is its cognizance of the centrality of creed and worship in biblical faith. Both testaments are certainly written by believing communities and demand assent on the part of all readers. As Jesus taught, kingdom truths are reserved for the faithful (Mk 4:10-12; Mt 13:10-17). Yet there are also distinct weaknesses. Hasel writes that Eissfeld's positions (accepted by all adherents) "are on the one hand dominated by a superseded historical positivism and on the other hand by an artificial and unsupportable separation of knowledge and faith" (1975:41-42). Like the christological method this approach reads more into the Old Testament than is actually there and tends to impose theological categories (such as Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed) upon biblical statements in both testaments. The basic premise, that one should read the text from a similar faith stance to that of the originating community, is valid; but there needs to be strong controls upon the task. Moreover, both synthetic and analytic schools also recognize this point.

7. The Multiplex Method (see Hasel 1981:181-83). As stated above, each of the approaches has certain strengths, and by combining them and allowing the text to guide us, we can minimize the weaknesses. This method is my preference. Any such attempt to build a valid biblical theology has five criteria or controls upon it: (1) The data must reflect the individual theologies and genres of the biblical literature (such as wisdom, the theology of Ruth or Esther as well as of Mark or Matthew). (2) We must work with the final canonical form of the documents (lest we drown theology in the speculative reconstructions of historical critics) and seek the interrelationship between the themes of both writers and books. (3) The task is two-pronged, beginning with the diverse theologies of individual biblical works (the descriptive or analytic side) and then delineating the "longitudinal themes" as they emerge from the individual works and unite them with others (such as Paul with James). (4) The purpose is to trace the development of individual themes and then to discover the dynamic unity and multifaceted patterns that bind the parts together; in other words, there are two tasks: the study of individual themes and the discovery of unifying themes. (5) The final product must integrate the testaments, noting both the diversity and the unity between them.

At the outset the stance taken is a confessional one, accepting at face value the perspective of the biblical writers and identifying with it. However, this does not negate a descriptive approach. We seek a "biblical" theology not a dogmatic one. The study of the diverse "theologies" of the individual traditions combines two aspects that too often

have been set in conflict with one another, a book-by-book and a historical-genetic approach. Each is valid but needs to be supplemented by the other. By itself the book-by-book approach can be artificial; for instance, does one follow the Hebrew canonical order or the early church's? Neither is completely satisfactory, for they do not yield true continuity of themes. Similarly the purely historical approach is usually dominated by alien historiographic presuppositions (such as tradition-critical or history of religions), which easily ignore the text and center upon theories of origin and development. The best solution is to combine them and allow each to correct excesses in the other. There is a basic tradition-critical unity within the books and yet a historical or chronological relationship between them.

At this point of the task the diversity of the data will dominate. Yet at the same time interlacing patterns will begin to emerge. The progress of revelation will become manifest as the individual themes begin to bridge to other works, first at the level of chronological similarity (such as the eighth-century prophets) and then between periods. As these interlocking themes appear, the relationship of the parts to the whole must always be in mind. The first task of the theologian is exegetical; the text must speak for itself. Individual statements should never be elevated to dogmatic status as assertions of the whole of dogma; instead, each should be seen in light of the context in which they appear and then collated with similar statements in the book or corpus (such as Pauline). Very seldom can a single statement be taken as indicative of the whole theological truth. Usually each relates a single aspect of the larger doctrine to particular situations and issues in the community addressed. For instance, one cannot "solve" the issue of election simply by appealing to Romans 9 or Ephesians 1. Rather, we must consult all passages dealing with God's "call" to salvation and our response. This is why exegesis and biblical theology are so interdependent. Each informs and at times controls excesses in the other. Exegesis provides the content, biblical theology the perspective for serious Bible study. As the patterns of dogma develop from the exegetical sphere, they begin to intersect with other streams in the historical development of the biblical documents. In this manner the themes appear inductively from within the scriptural data and are not imposed deductively from outside. This does not mean, however, that presuppositionless exegesis results. The very patterns detected are the result of interpretive choices and must be continuously clarified and if necessary corrected by the text itself and by competing interpretive communities. The value of challenge from opposing theories is that they drive us back to the text and allow it the final say.

8. The Problem of a Unifying Center. The final stage in the development of a biblical theology is the identification of the archetypal concept(s) or unifying themes behind the diverse documents. As the interlocking principles between the strata of the biblical period become visible, the patterns coalesce around certain ideas that bridge the gaps between the individual witnesses. However, it is very uncertain whether any single theme or concept stands at the apex of biblical theology. Many believe that the complete lack of consensus demonstrates that a cluster of ideas, rather than a single theme, unites all the others. Walther suggests thirteen motifs at the core: captivity and deliverance, God and

Son of God, gift of Torah, covenant, people of God, cultus, kingship, creation, wisdom, Spirit of God, righteousness and justice, Day of the Lord, and promise/hope (1969:222-23). Yet we must wonder whether such complex ideas are not simply lists that easily could be unified further, such as God and Spirit or covenant and kingship.

Six criteria must be met in any search for a central motif (or motifs) that binds together the other themes: (1) The motif must express the nature/character of the Godhead. (2) The theme(s) should account for the people of God as they relate to God, their world and one another. (3) The concept(s) must include the world of humankind as the object of God's redemptive love. (4) The motif must explain the dialectical relationship between the testaments. (5) The motif must contain and sum up the individual emphases of the diverse parts of Scripture, such as wisdom as well as apocalyptic or epistolary portions. (6) The theme(s) should account for other potential unifying themes and must truly unite them under a single rubric. It should explain and balance the others and not merely be imposed upon them.

Most of those motifs proposed by various scholars fail to meet these qualifications. Eichrodt and Ridderbos propose "covenant" as the central theme, arguing that it expresses the binding relationship between God and his people and contains both the legal contract and eschatological hope or promise that results. However, too many portions of Scripture (such as wisdom) do not contain it, and it does not sum up the others below. Still others propose some form of the Godhead at the core—God and Christ (Hasel), Yahweh (Zimmerli), divine holiness (Sellin), lordship (Koehler), kingship (Klein), or divine presence (Terrien). Each of these variations, however, fails to account for the diverse aspects noted in the criteria above. Existential reality (Bultmann) or communion (Vriezen) considers the other side of the divine/human interaction but likewise fails to be broad enough.

Another motif often stressed is eschatological hope, either in the sense of "promise" (Kaiser) or "hope" (Moltmann, McComiskey). The strength of this proposal is the extent to which it unites the testaments, and it does in a sense unify the other themes above. However, several portions of Scripture (such as wisdom or the Johannine corpus) have no emphasis upon this, and in many ways it is one aspect rather than the whole of the redemptive plan.

More promise is found in various forms of a "salvation history" schema of von Rad, Cullmann, Goppelt or Ladd. This position recognizes God's/Christ's redemptive activity on behalf of humankind in terms of past, present and future communion. More than the others it subsumes into itself each of the categories normally mentioned. Yet there are major stumbling blocks here as well. It is more artificial than those above, which are supported by biblical language while this is a theoretical concept without linguistic support. Moreover, Scripture does not put a great deal of emphasis upon this concept. Only in Luke does it play a major theological role. Finally, the emphasis on the "God who acts" (Wright) often separated redemptive history from real history, making it a theological category bereft of real meaning (see Hayes and Prussner 1985:241-43).

For this reason most scholars today are positing a cluster of themes. Brueggemann believes that a "two-trajectory" track is emerging in Old Testament theology, variously

defined as "visionary/pragmatic," "covenantal/sapiential" or "ethical/sapiential" (1984:5). He calls these "boundaries," or "parameters," around which a theology can be determined. Similarly, Knierim presents a twofold pattern: Yahweh's relationship to the world/its people and his relationship to reality (1984:44-45). These and other similar theories have not yet pointed the way to any consensus, but it is safe to say that most recognize that the Bible is too diverse in its interests and emphases to be summed up in a single theme.

Conclusion

The role of biblical theology in the hermeneutical task is twofold: internally it studies the diverse themes of individual books and of the testaments, organizes them into a holistic set of dogmas and then collates these into archetypal doctrines that reflect the progress of revelation; externally it provides a bridge from exegesis to systematic theology. In many ways biblical theology is the forgotten element in serious biblical research. Yet among those who have rejected the possibility of systematic theology it has also wrongfully been made the final stage of the hermeneutical process. I view biblical theology to be at the apex of the exegetical stage (discerning "what it meant") and as providing a transition to the contextualization stage (determining "what it means"). Biblical theology also provides the basis for systematic theology in that it tells us the systematic theology of Israel and of the early church. By collecting and collating the biblical material along the lines of the progress of revelation, biblical theology describes the emerging beliefs of the biblical period and theoretically organizes them in the patterns originally held by Israel and the church.

There are two types of study under the guise of biblical theology, one done by all Christians but the other pretty much restricted to the specialist. The former consists of tracing individual doctrines through the Word of God in order to determine exactly which theological statement actually fits all the data. Every church that has ever rewritten its constitution or gone through a doctrinal debate has had to do this. Issues like baptism, eternal security or the charismatic debate cannot be settled any other way. Yet churches inevitably fail to do the task adequately, for proponents seem to collect only those passages which support the position they prefer and fail to look at all the passages that bear upon the issue before formulating their statement of the doctrine. The answer is to trace the issue through each stage of Scripture and only then to organize the material and decide the issue. The key is to "bracket" our own beliefs and to allow the other side to challenge our preferred positions. This will drive us to examine the biblical data anew and to allow *all* passages on the topic to have equal weight.[29] I will examine this further in the following chapter on systematic theology.

The second type of biblical theology can be done at several levels, studying the theology of an individual book (such as Isaiah or Matthew), a corpus (Pauline theology), a testament (Old or New Testament theology) or of the Bible as a whole. Needless to say, this is a massive undertaking. The scholar must determine the individual theological emphases of each book and of each author, and then collate to determine the archetypal themes that tie together the testaments and unite them into a whole. I have discussed the viability

of such a seemingly impossible goal several times in this chapter; I believe that it is not only possible but critical in order to understand both the diversity and the unity of Scripture. Most of all, the themes that unite the various tradition strata of Scripture must emerge from below and not be imposed from above; that is, they should be drawn out of the text rather than out of the theologian's imagination and should truly sum up the other major subthemes of Scripture.