

**Bangor University**

## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **From "Unity" to "Dialogue" in the theology of the New Testament : a methodological and hermeneutical proposal**

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*Award date:*  
2012

*Awarding institution:*  
Bangor University

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**From “Unity” to “Dialogue” in the  
*Theology of the New Testament***

**From “Unity” to “Dialogue” in the  
*Theology of the New Testament:***

**A Methodological and Hermeneutical Proposal**

## Summary

The thesis discusses the use of the literary genre *Theology of the New Testament* (TNT) to overcome the diversity in New Testament theologies uncovered by post-Enlightenment biblical-critical methods. Following an initial sketch of the problem caused by NT diversity, an overview of various strategies roughly classed as deleting diversity or unifying diversity is presented. Attention then turns towards a review of TNTs published since 1990 using their approach to NT diversity as the thematic focus. TNTs are examined according to the extent that they are able to both preserve textual alterity and integrity whilst rendering NT polyphony theologically fruitful. The conclusion of this review suggests that any kind of unity relating to the NT canon can plausibly only be located either prior to the texts in some postulated shared hermeneutical presuppositions of the NT writers and/or in the the act of theological construction by the contemporary reader. The dialogical TNT model is advanced as the best option for theologically interacting with NT diversity.

The second part of the thesis provides an ethical, hermeneutical, and theological justification for the dialogical TNT model with reference to Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics and Bakhtinian theory. The contribution of the model is then discussed in relation to three key issues facing the TNT: its relation to *Theologieggeschichte* as a competing model; its relation to systematic theology and the question of biblical normativity; and its relation to the transformation of the TNT genre within the recent *Biblical Theology of the NT* genre. Ultimately, the usefulness of the TNT genre as adequate for the constructive task of Christian theology is called into question, since the dialogical model regards the quest for a NT “unity” that can define a stable Christian identity as hermeneutically redundant and theologically limited.

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## Acknowledgements

Writing a doctoral dissertation places one in the paradoxical position of being hugely indebted to a large number of people for their support and encouragement, whilst retaining sole responsibility for the quality of the work produced. The initial impetus to pursue doctoral studies was given by Dr. Keith Warrington, whose supervision throughout the research period has been characterised by graciousness, encouragement, openness towards theological creativity, and a fine eye for detail. Perhaps the highest accolade one can give is to note that the extent of his influence extends beyond the confines of this piece of academic research into the very formation of my character as a theologian and Christian believer.

Regents Theological College provided an inspiring environment for research with both faculty and students displaying an interest in the progress of the investigation. The regular doctoral seminar offered a helpful and varied forum for critical exchange and encouragement. I am particularly grateful for those participants who took the trouble to read preliminary sections of my work and offer constructive feedback. The faculty of Regents have been supportive and understanding throughout. They have my eternal gratitude for relieving me of some of my duties during the final year of research, despite the fact that their own workloads were burdensome enough already. The technical support offered by Dr. Richard Allsopp was also appreciated. Beyond Regents, special thanks are due to Prof. Dr. Christoph Stenschke for taking the trouble to send me his relevant journal articles.

Family and friends bear the brunt of the gruelling process of doctoral research. Simo Frestadius and Aogu Tateyama offered encouragement and light relief along the way. My own parents, Rev. Graham Clay and Edna Clay, started me on my theological journey by introducing me to Christ and showing me what it means to be his disciple, whilst my parents-in-law, Richard and Inge Lotz, made a significant contribution to developing my German language ability. Both sets of parents followed the project with interest and were much relieved when the end was in sight. Above all, my beautiful and long suffering wife, Beate, sacrificed the most for this project. The disappearance of her hard-earned money in fees and the purchase of obscure books, together with the fact of being left to care for our boisterous baby son day and night without a meaningful break towards the end of the project incur a debt towards her that I cannot repay. To her and Jonas, I dedicate this project. Papa will now have a lot more time to play!

## Abbreviations

*BBR* - Bulletin for Biblical Research.

*BI* – Biblical Interpretation.

BTNT – Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments.

*CBQ* - Catholic Biblical Quarterly.

*CTJ* - Calvin Theological Journal.

*EvangTheol* - Evangelische Theologie.

*ExpT* - Expository Times.

*HTS* - Hervormde Theologiese Studies.

*IJST* - International Journal of Systematic Theology.

*JBL* - Journal of Biblical Literature.

*JBTh* - Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie.

*JETS* - Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society.

*JR* - Journal of Religion.

*JSNT* - Journal for the Study of the New Testament.

*JTI* - Journal of Theological Interpretation.

*KuD* - Kerygma & Dogma.

*MJT* - Midwestern Journal of Theology.

*NTS* – New Testament Studies.

*SJT* - Scottish Journal of Theology.

*SNT* – Studien zum Neuen Testament.

*ThZ* – Theologische Zeitschrift.

TNT - Theologie des Neuen Testaments.

*TrinJ* - Trinity Journal.

*TS* - Theological Studies.

*TynBul* – Tyndale Bulletin.

*WTJ* - Westminster Theological Journal.



*What was simple at the outset will end  
in disproportionate complexity.*

- Zhuangzi, Book 4<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Hochsmann and G. Yang (eds. and trans.), *Zhuangzi*, (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006) 105.

## Chapter One

### 1. *Focus and Structure: Introduction*

The opening quotation of Zhuangzi is a more than apt description of this project. Given the vast and varied number of theological projects conceived in relation to the biblical canon, this study was originally conceived as an attempt to discern the theological “unity” of the New Testament (NT). However, after reviewing some of the literature and gaining a degree of orientation regarding contemporary attempts to extract some kind of “unity” from the NT canon, it soon became clear that this was an ethically, hermeneutically, and theologically troubling project. Nietzschean questions soon reared their sceptical head: “Why establish the ‘unity’ of the NT beyond doubt? Whose interests would such a ‘unity’ serve? Once found what should be done with this ‘unity’?”

An encounter with philosophical hermeneutics only served to further deepen reservations about the hermeneutical viability of such a project. As a result, the quest for theological “unity” slowly turned into the quest for a hermeneutical model appropriate to the diversity and polyphony of the NT. This model needed to be less ethically troubling in its treatment of NT texts than the current attempts to find NT unity, whilst retaining or even increasing the capacity to work *theologically* with the NT canon. The resulting study thus relates to hermeneutical and methodological problems facing NT theology. The dialogical model advocated here is not new but hopefully this study serves to clarify its significance and suitability for NT theology. Further orientation as to the nature of this project is elucidated below.

#### 1.1. *Clarifying the Focus: What this Investigation is not.*

NT theology is a vast subject area. This sub-section seeks to make clear precisely what the following study is *not* about in order to ensure that readers are not misled or

disappointed once they arrive at the conclusion. This procedure also helps serve to clarify what the project *is* about when it is presented below.

From the outset it should be noted that although the issues relating to unity and diversity within the biblical canon are deeply significant for current conceptions of both OT and NT theology, the focus here is explicitly on NT theology. No doubt an alternative approach may have been desirable if one accepts the two-part canon as essential for *Christian* theology. However, a critique of attempts to write a Theology of the Old Testament (TOT) or a *gesamtbiblische* theology (complete Biblical Theology) has been disregarded due to a need to avoid the project becoming unwieldy. Many of the fundamental hermeneutical issues surrounding the production of a TOT, Theology of the New Testament (TNT) or Biblical Theology are similar and much of what will be said is transferable to these other debates. However, the larger discipline of Biblical Theology will not slip entirely from view. In the penultimate chapter, the dialogical TNT model being advocated here will be considered in terms of its distinction from recent attempts to write a “Biblical Theology of the New Testament” and this will necessarily lead into a brief discussion of its implication for the conception of a Biblical Theology. A further consequence of the focus on NT theology is that this study is also not intended to be an apologetic for the “unity” of the Bible in the manner of recent writers such as Duane Christensen, Thomas Söding, and Walter Kaiser.<sup>2</sup> Chapter three does briefly introduce some of the hermeneutical strategies such writers have employed to defend theological “unity” in order to orient the reader. However, this study calls into question the theological value of such strategies.

This study is also not intended to be an exegetical analysis of the NT writings in order to assess the possible amount of unity to be found amongst the NT texts. It is not disputed that exegetical details are important and James Dunn’s landmark study *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* still remains an excellent first port of call for those

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<sup>2</sup> D. Christensen, *The Unity of the Bible: Exploring the Beauty and Structure of the Bible*, (New Jersey: Paulist, 2003); T. Söding, *Einheit der Heiligen Schrift?: Zur Theologie des biblischen Kanons*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2005); W. Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).



interested in the exegetical details.<sup>3</sup> However, an exhaustive exegetical investigation is rejected on the grounds that it would merely serve to cover the same ground as the available TNTs and, in fact, be simply a reproduction of one of the current modes of writing a TNT. Instead, this project is concerned primarily with hermeneutical models for working theologically with the NT.

One final clarification is necessary. Much ink has been spilt in the debate over the extent to which Early Christianity was a homogenous movement which consistently espoused a clear orthodoxy. The claim of the so-called “Bauer thesis” that Early Christianity was originally doctrinally diverse with ‘orthodoxy’ only being a later development out of an original irreconcilable pluralism has been both widely adopted and strongly contested.<sup>4</sup> The “Bauer thesis” debate by definition moves beyond the boundaries of the NT canon and encompasses discussion over the status of non-canonical texts in addition to following the process of canonization into the fourth century CE. This study does not offer a *historical* investigation into the development of Early Christianity. However, it does discuss some historical reconstructions and pays substantial attention to the relationship of the TNT with the task of “Theologiegeschichte.” Thus, in chapter six, the relationship between the historical and theological tasks will be considered. However, in contrast to the “Bauer thesis” debate, this study focuses on the 27 texts of the NT canon and the *theological* and *hermeneutical* issues raised by the attempt to construe these particular texts as a single, unified theology.

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<sup>3</sup> Dunn’s work is now available in a third revised edition: J. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, (London: SCM, 2006<sup>3</sup>; 1977).

<sup>4</sup> For the original thesis see W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, eds. R. Kraft & G. Krodel, trans. P. J. Achtemeier, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). For some contemporary proponents of Bauer’s basic thesis see G. Lüdemann, *Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity*, Louisville: WJKP, 1996) and B. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, Oxford: OUP, 2001). For a recent strong rebuttal of the Bauer thesis and critique of its influence on contemporary study of Early Christianity see A. Köstenberger, M. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity*, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010). For the reverse claim that an initial point of “unity” gives rise to diversity see J. Becker, “Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums – Theologie des Neuen Testaments – Frühchristliche Religionsgeschichte” in C. Breytenbach and J. Frey, (eds.), *Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 115-133.

## 1.2. Clarifying the Focus: What this Investigation is.

Having clarified what this work is *not* about we can turn to the task of elucidating the nature of this investigation. This work is concerned with the particular task of NT theology. Consequently, a terminological distinction is drawn between *NT studies* and *NT theology* for sake of clarity. *NT studies* is conceived as encompassing all areas of research related to the NT, whether historical, philological, theological, hermeneutical or interdisciplinary studies. The term *NT theology* refers here narrowly to the theological interpretation and use of the 27 NT writings (whatever the presuppositions of the theologian), although the results and methods found within NT studies unavoidably impinge upon such work.

The scope of this study may be yet more narrowly defined in that it focuses on a specific question related to NT theology, namely the quest for the “unity” of the NT primarily within a *specific literary/academic genre* produced by the NT scholar – *The Theology of the New Testament* (TNT). Consequently, the popular abbreviation “NTT” (New Testament Theology) used by some American scholars,<sup>5</sup> which blurs the distinction between the general task of exploring NT theology and the literary works that attempt to produce a comprehensive NT theology, has been abandoned. Thus, whilst the writing of a TNT may be conceived of as the *summa* of a NT scholar’s work or even as the crowning glory and goal of NT studies, the distinction between the overarching discipline NT studies, the sub-discipline NT theology, and the specific task within NT theology of writing a TNT, should not be confused.

Yet more precisely, this thesis investigates the treatment of the diversity of the NT writings within the TNT genre. Of course, the TNT genre is itself hardly monolithic and the structure, methods and goals tend to reflect more the approach and convictions of the individual author rather than a basic commonly accepted convention. The role of the

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<sup>5</sup> For examples, see C. Kavin Rowe, “New Testament Theology: The Revival of a Discipline: A Review of Recent Contributions to the Field”, *JBL* 125.2 (2006): 393-419; D. Carson, “Locating Udo Schnelle’s *Theology of the New Testament* in the Contemporary Discussion”, *JETS* 53.1 (2010): 133-41.

quest for “unity” in the production of a TNT and its implications for NT diversity will be investigated. In terms of terminology, it should be noted that “unity” is a slippery concept, which often occurs within the discipline of NT theology as a rhetorical device and dogmatic assumption rather than as a clearly defined analytical term. In fact, as the following investigation will demonstrate, in some cases, it is extremely difficult to understand exactly what a writer envisages when they use the term. In a similar manner, the definition of “theology” varies from author to author, sometimes meaning the theology of the NT writers and other times meaning the theology constructed by means of the NT or via systematic theology. It is also sometimes used very broadly as being almost synonymous with “worldview” or “philosophy” and other times used narrowly as in the dogmatic distinction between theology “proper” and christology or pneumatology. The meaning of these terms is thus very fluid and each author’s usage must be considered on its own terms.

Not only does this project review attempts to construct a theology of the NT, it also attempts to achieve a number of constructive goals. Firstly, an attempt to offer a hermeneutically plausible location for NT unity is made. This is followed by the analytical clarification of the dialogical TNT model as a theological method. Since the dialogical TNT model currently lacks sufficient hermeneutical and ethical justification, an attempt to provide this will be made using the theoretical resources of philosophical hermeneutics and Bakhtinian theory. Following this, a discussion of the contribution of a dialogical TNT model to three critical problems facing NT theology will be offered. These three areas include the relation of the TNT to the *Theologieggeschichte* as a competing model, the role of the TNT vis-à-vis systematic theology and the question of biblical normativity, and the transformation of the TNT genre within the recent Biblical Theology of the NT genre.

### 1.3. *The Structure of this Work.*

The structure of this work breaks down as follows. Chapter one introduces and clarifies the focus and structure of the present investigation. Chapter two sets out the rationale for this project by identifying the problem of the unity of the NT as a key issue within the contemporary discipline of NT theology, specifically the TNT genre. It explains and justifies the particular focus of this particular investigation on the unity and diversity problem in the light of alternative pressing issues relating to the TNT. This chapter also introduces the methodology adopted in the investigation and outlines the contributions this work makes to the current debate.

Chapter three offers a sketch of the problem of NT diversity. It explains what is meant by “diversity” and draws on suggestions by Levenson and Wolters as to why Christian theology traditionally perceives diversity as a problem to be overcome. Following this, various strategies for coping with biblical diversity are outlined, ranging from those which effectively delete biblical texts or passages to those which attempt to transcend diversity through more constructive hermeneutical or historical means.

Chapter four offers an analysis of almost all TNTs published since 1990 (the remainder are dealt with in chapter eight). It is divided into six main parts. Part one briefly considers a single example of a (Biblical) TNT which utilizes the idea of a scriptural centre to articulate theological unity. Part two discusses TNTs which discern a limited unity within the NT, whilst part three focuses on TNTs concerned to establish a thoroughgoing “fundamental-theological” unity. Part four discusses TNTs which effectively abandon any attempt to outline a unity of the NT. Part five closes the review of TNTs by discussing the dialogical TNT models which have been offered. The closing section offers an interim assessment of the discussion concerning “unity”. It outlines a proposal for locating unity in the presuppositions of the NT writers and in the act of theological construction by the contemporary TNT writer. It then advocates a preference for the dialogical TNT as a theological model for working with NT polyphony and offers a number of analytical theses concerning such a model.

Chapter five attempts to remedy existing deficiencies in current attempts to hermeneutically justify the dialogical TNT model, which have led to its inconsistent application. It uses the insights of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics to provide ethical and hermeneutical justification for using a dialogical model. It also reviews the work of biblical theologians who have used Bakhtinian theory to move towards a similar model and attempts to show how Bakhtin's work forms a useful theoretical and terminological supplement to the foundations supplied by philosophical hermeneutics. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of some theological implications.

Chapter six considers the debate over the relation between the TNT and other *religionsgeschichtliche* models. It reviews the treatment of NT diversity in a number of attempts to write a *Theologiegeschichte* and demonstrates that a *Theologiegeschichte* does not necessarily provide a more ethical treatment of the texts than the TNT. A discussion of history and historiography is offered in order to demonstrate that the *Theologiegeschichte*, just like the TNT, is an interpretive discipline and subject to hermeneutical constraints. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the TNT and *Theologiegeschichte* are not competitors as they retain different goals and methods. *Theologiegeschichte* is heuristically useful for assisting the reading of NT texts in the dialogical TNT but both the TNT and *Theologiegeschichte* should allow themselves to be subject to the critique of contemporary Theory.

Chapter seven critiques a number of different models for relating the NT to systematic theology. In particular, the "bridge" model of the TNTs relationship between exegesis and systematic theology and the attempt to circumvent these distinctions in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement are discussed. This leads into a discussion on the normative role of the TNT with the conclusion being drawn that normativity relates to the *process* of theologizing with the NT texts rather than to an abstract articulated statement derived from the text. The findings cohere with the dialogical TNT model, which views itself as part of the ongoing constructive theological task and therefore is already within the domain of systematic theology. Furthermore, it is

argued that the dialogical model is methodologically flexible enough to accommodate and integrate insights from both within and outside the theological disciplines.

Chapter eight discusses the transformation of the TNT genre in the recent development of the Biblical TNT genre (BTNT), due to its attempt to resolve the issue as to how the OT might function in biblical theology. The three current works in the BTNT genre are critiqued and suggestions as to how a dialogical TNT model may be more effective in allowing the OT a theological voice are advanced. Ultimately, the dialogical TNT model is seen as naturally transgressing the traditional boundaries of the TNT genre in order to establish a more appropriate Christian theological model. The final chapter then offers conclusions to the work as a whole.

## Chapter Two

### 2. *Rationale, Methodology, and Contribution.*

This chapter begins by providing a rationale for the following investigation. Following the rationale, the methodology that will be utilised to explore the topic will be clarified. Finally, the specific contributions to the current state of research made by this work will be detailed.

#### 2.1. *Rationale: Why This Study?*

Recent treatments concerning the vexed question as to how exegetical insights may exert an influence within the wider field of theological studies, inter-disciplinary academic discourse and even on public discourse as a whole, suggest that there is an apparent crisis within the biblical disciplines. The results of recent exegetical investigation are often marginalised or ignored by other theological disciplines engaging directly with matters of ecclesial or societal concern such as systematic and practical theology.<sup>6</sup> Whilst such

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<sup>6</sup>For a German take on the relation of academic theology to society and the university as a whole, see W. Frühwald, “Die Pluralisierung der Theologie oder Theologie in Universität und Gesellschaft heute” in E. Garhammer (ed.), *Theologie, wohin?: Blicke von außen und von innen*, (Würzburg: Echter, 2011) 15-34. Garhammer’s volume notably contains essays relating to all key theological disciplines except New Testament – a major omission! A collection of essays on the place of Scripture in the contemporary university from an Anglo-centric perspective may be found in D. Lyle Jeffrey and C. Stephen Evans, (eds.), *The Bible and the University*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). Apart from the many considerations of the relation of biblical exegesis to systematic theology which will be discussed later, attempts to address the loss of societal relevance of biblical studies with the development of a cultural studies paradigm for NT studies, based in large part on the discourse theory of Michael Foucault, have been elucidated by E. Reinmuth, “Neutestamentliche Exegese, Theologie und Gesellschaft” in C. Claußen and M. Öhler (eds.), *Exegese und Dogmatik*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2010) 9-26, and M. Döbert, *Posthermeneutische Theologie: Plädoyer für ein neues Paradigma*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009). However, the value of Döbert’s work is limited by his polemical caricaturing and misunderstanding of philosophical hermeneutics (see p.26), as well as his inadequate consideration as to the role of method in the task of biblical interpretation, given his rejection of a positivistic ‘historical-critical’ approach (and its variants) due to its alleged attempt to provide a singular meaning of the biblical texts.

The best overall analysis of the current situation facing NT studies has been supplied in the form of 12 theses by Joachim Kügler who, amongst other insights, claims that the task of NT exegetes is not to provide the single correct meaning of a biblical text but rather to help interpreters to better read the texts whilst simultaneously fulfilling the ‘prophetic function’ of defending the “non-finality” (“Nichtfestlegbarkeit”) of any textual reading, see J. Kügler, “Die Gegenwart ist das Problem!: Thesen zur Rolle der

assessments may reflect current realities to a greater or lesser degree, they at least draw attention to the need for ongoing reflection and clarification of the task of NT studies. Indeed, the fact that exegetical insights are not being mediated beyond the boundaries of the biblical disciplines implies that something may be awry with the traditional conception of biblical theology.

Matera rightly notes that “New Testament Theology is often viewed as the culmination and goal of exegesis” through which exegetes seek to make their results available to those beyond the confines of their discipline.<sup>7</sup> At the same time he points out a current crisis of identity within NT Theology concerning its “task, method, and goal”.<sup>8</sup> This crisis is not something discerned by Matera alone nor is it limited to NT theology. It encompasses the entire field of biblical theology.<sup>9</sup> Leaving aside the various introductions and prolegomena included in recently published TNTs, a steady stream of books and articles

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neutestamentlichen Bibelwissenschaft in Theologie, Kirche und Gesellschaft” in U. Busse (ed.), *Die Bedeutung der Exegese für Theologie und Kirche*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2005) 10-37.

<sup>7</sup> F. Matera, “New Testament Theology: History, Method, and Identity”, *CBQ* 67 (2005): 1-21, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Matera, “New Testament Theology: History, Method, and Identity”, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Apart from actual attempts to write a *gesamtbiblische* Biblical Theology some work has been done since the 1980s to try and clarify the discipline. Two standard texts relating to the discipline of Biblical Theology are J. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*, (London: SCM, 1999) and C. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). James Mead has also provided an accessible survey of the discipline in *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes*, (Louisville: WJKP, 2007). A multitude of perspectives on the task and methodologies of Biblical Theology and/or OT Theology are accessible in the following essay collections: P. Hanson *et al.*, *Einheit und Vielfalt Biblischer Theologie*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986); W. Brueggemann, *The Book that Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); C. Dohmen and T. Söding, (eds.), *Eine Bibel – zwei Testamente*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995); P. Hanson *et al.*, *Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995); H. Sun and K. Eades, (eds.), *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); H. Hübner and B. Jaspert, (eds.), *Biblische Theologie: Entwürfe der Gegenwart*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999); S. Hafemann (ed.), *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, (Leicester: IVP, 2002); B. Janowski (ed.), *Kanonhermeneutik: Vom Lesen und Verstehen der christlichen Bibel*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007); M. Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); H. Assel, S. Beyerle, and C. Böttrich, (eds.), *Beyond Biblical Theologies*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012). See also C. Scobie’s key articles: “The Challenge of Biblical Theology”, *TynBul* 42.1 (1991): 31-61; “The Structure of Biblical Theology”, *TynBul* 42.2 (1991): 163-194. This is not to take into account the ongoing reception and critique of the canonical approach advocated by the late B. Childs; for example see, B. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). For an overview of Childs’ work see D. Driver, *Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian: For the Church’s One Bible*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) and for examples of critical engagement with Childs, see M. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?: The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1991); C. Xun, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context: Brevard Springs Childs Methodology of Biblical Theology*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).



have devoted themselves in recent years to attempts to survey the current state of research and/or set forth their own methodological proposals concerning NT theology and/or the TNT genre.<sup>10</sup> This investigation seeks to address some current concerns and make a coherent hermeneutical and methodological contribution to clarifying the task, method and inter-disciplinary relevance of the TNT.

## 2.2. Rationale: Identifying the Problem.

In his survey article *Über Probleme und Trends bei neutestamentlichen Theologien*, Barth articulates clearly what most interpreters identify as the three major problems with which the writer of a TNT must grapple. These are:

1. The position of the historical Jesus in relation to NT theology.

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<sup>10</sup> Above all note the essays collected in the significant volume C. Breytenbach and J. Frey, (eds.), *Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). Of mixed value are the various articles collected in C. Rowland and C. Tuckett, (eds.), *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) and in T. Penner and C. Vander Stichele, (eds.), *Moving Beyond New Testament Theology: Essays in Conversation with Heikki Räisänen*, (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2005). Other key recent works include M. Bird, "New Testament Theology Re-loaded: Integrating Biblical Theology and Christian Origins", *TynBul* 60.2 (2009): 265-291; R. Morgan, "New Testament Theology Since Bultmann", *ExpT* 119.10 (2008): 472-480; M. Wolter, "Probleme und Möglichkeiten einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments" in R. Buitenwerf, H. Hollander, and J. Tromp, (eds.), *Jesus. Paul and Early Christianity: Studies in Honour of Henk Jan de Jonge*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 417-438; Kavin Rowe, "New Testament Theology: The Revival of a Discipline"; Matera, "New Testament Theology: History, Method, and Identity"; P. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Community and Communion*, (London: SPCK, 2005); G. Sellin, "Zwischen Deskription und Reduktion: Aporien und Möglichkeiten einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments", *EvangTheol.* 64.3 (2004): 172-186; R. Morgan, "Historical and Canonical Aspects of a New Testament Theology", *BI* 11.3/4 (2003): 629-639; G. Barth, "Über Probleme und Trends bei neutestamentlichen Theologien", *KuD* 48 (2002): 261-275; D. Via, *What is New Testament Theology?*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); H. Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie? Eine religionswissenschaftliche Alternative*, (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000); J. Riches, "Neutestamentliche Theologie und kulturelle Anthropologie" in H. Hübner and B. Jaspert, (eds.), *Biblische Theologie: Entwürfe der Gegenwart*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999); P. Balla, *Challenges to New Testament Theology*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997); J. Donahue, "The Literary Turn and New Testament Theology: Detour or New Direction", *JR* 76.2 (1996): 250-275; A. Adam, *Making Sense of New Testament Theology: "Modern" Problems and Prospects*, (Macon: Mercer University, 1995); R. Morgan, "New Testament Theology" in S. Kraftchick, C. Myers Jr., and B. Ollenberger, (eds.), *Biblical Theology: Problems and Perspectives: In Honor of J. Christian Beker*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995) 104-130; H. Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme*, (London: SCM, 2000<sup>2</sup>, 1990); J. Donahue, "The Changing Shape of New Testament Theology", *TS* 50 (1989): 314-335. For a useful but now dated summary of the issues, see G. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

2. The diversity and unity of NT theology.
3. The nature of the basic task: Theology or History-of-Religion.<sup>11</sup>

Matera also identifies these three major issues and adds a fourth, namely the identification of a correct method of writing a TNT, granted that one accepts its validity as a theological task.<sup>12</sup>

Fundamental to all three problem areas identified by Barth is the relationship between history and theology which has dogged theology ever since the Enlightenment. Consequently, any attempt to resolve one of the issues has immediate consequences for how one responds to the others. The complexity and sheer breadth of the issues raised prevents the problems being fully dealt with in general survey articles or cursory introductory prolegomena to TNTs. Instead, an in depth investigation into a single particular area stands a better chance of fully resolving the problems contained therein. Achieving hermeneutical and methodological consistency and clarity regarding a single problem area will hopefully provide guidance in solving the related matters.

### *2.3. Rationale: Justifying the Focus.*

The decision to focus on Barth's second problem area, namely, the issue of diversity and unity in the NT requires justification and clarification. The key points for justification are as follows:

1. The unity-diversity problem has become the dominant issue in recent TNTs, affecting method and structure in an unparalleled fashion. The prime example for this is the bipartite structure of Hahn's TNT, the two volumes of which are

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<sup>11</sup> Barth, "Über Probleme und Trends bei neutestamentlichen Theologien", 261.

<sup>12</sup> Matera, "New Testament Theology: History, Method, and Identity", 15-21.

entitled ‘Die Vielfalt des Neuen Testaments’ and ‘Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments’.<sup>13</sup>

2. The unity-diversity problem is a key motivation in the debate concerning the discussion of the basic task of NT interpreters. In essence, the debate concerning the unity of the NT is the fundamental battle ground on which the theology versus history debate is currently being fought. For example, Räisänen’s significant attack on the TNT and defence of the Wredean programme of a *Religionsgeschichte* of primitive Christianity is strongly motivated by his perception of the unity-diversity issue.<sup>14</sup> Thus, engaging the unity-diversity issue will necessarily lead to a consideration (and proposed resolution) of the third problem area raised by Barth.
3. The first problem area raised by Barth concerning the question of the relation of the proclamation of Jesus to NT theology is fairly narrowly focused and less foundational than the latter two problems. Furthermore, this issue receives little treatment in some Anglo-Saxon TNTs and is thus less well-suited for investigating the field as a whole.
4. The way interpreters conceive the unity-diversity issue is fundamental to the way in which they conceive the function of the TNT in relation to other theological disciplines. In particular, the question of scriptural normativity in relation to systematic theology is a major issue. Clarification of the problem will lead to a

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<sup>13</sup> F. Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments I: Die Vielfalt des Neuen Testaments*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005<sup>2</sup>, 2002) and *Theologie des Neuen Testaments II: Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005<sup>2</sup>, 2002). (Works which fall into the category of Theology of the New Testament are, after their initial introduction, subsequently footnoted as TNT plus volume number; for example, Hahn, TNT:I). See also the review article by C. Stenschke (kindly supplied by the author) which investigates the treatment of the issue of diversity and unity in four recent TNTs – “Strong Cases for the Unity of New Testament Theology: A Survey of Four Recent English New Testament Theologies”, *Religion and Theology* 17 (2010): 133-161.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Räisänen’s explanatory note on “do[ing] justice to the diversity of Early Christianity” in H. Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 5-6.

revised assessment of the theological role and suitability of the TNT as a literary genre and therefore has implications for the practice of theology as a whole.

5. Despite the fact that ‘text’ is a fundamental category related to the unity-diversity debate and the production of a TNT there has been a general lack of sustained philosophical consideration of the concomitant hermeneutical and ethical implications.<sup>15</sup> However, the question of method, additionally raised by Matera, cannot be fully answered unless one engages in such philosophical reflection. Exploration of these issues has the potential to lead to philosophically grounded methodological proposals for the TNT that are ethically justifiable and hermeneutically coherent, rendering the TNT more satisfying for the contemporary reader and more relevant for those working in other theological and academic disciplines.

In summary, the unity-diversity issue provides a focused interrogative lens for understanding the explicit and implicit hermeneutical and methodological assumptions driving the current production of TNTs. Exploring it will also enable the critical development of a hermeneutically, methodologically, and ethically justifiable approach to the TNT. Proposals for resolving the unity-diversity issue will necessarily issue in proposed solutions to other questions currently affecting the task of NT theology, in particular, the relationship between theology and *Religionsgeschichte*, as well as the relationship between NT studies and other theological (and non-theological) disciplines.

#### 2.4. *Presuppositions and Methodological Overview.*

This study is essentially concerned with the *hermeneutical* and resultant *methodological* questions raised by the treatment of NT diversity within the TNT genre. There are four key presuppositions guiding the analysis in this investigation.

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<sup>15</sup> Esler’s *New Testament Theology* is a notable exception.

Firstly, this is a hermeneutical investigation into theological disciplines conducted from a *Christian* point of view. This perspective does not imply that other theological perspectives are unwelcome or unnecessary. In fact, the dialogical model advanced in this work values inter-disciplinary (and interreligious) conversation in relation to the interpretation of the NT texts. However, the assumption that engaging in the theological task is important and should be conducted by means of prioritising the canonical biblical texts as normative resources is a Christian, and specifically Protestant, assumption.<sup>16</sup>

A further presupposition is that the NT canon is comprised of 27 *texts*. Following Wischmeyer, a text is defined using de Beaugrande's and Dressler's seven criteria of textuality, each of which it must fulfil.<sup>17</sup> "*Cohesion*" refers to the organisational connections present on the surface of the text which are dependent on grammatical forms and structures.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, "*coherence*" refers to the connection between multiple textual units of meaning produced by the reader/hearer in their reception of the text.<sup>19</sup> Both of these categories highlight the significance of literary unity for the concept "text".

*Intentionality* refers to the fact that a text is produced by authors with a particular communicative goal in respect to their intended audience. The position of this study, vis-à-vis intentionality, must be further clarified since the notion of authorial intention plays a key role in some TNT models, such as Esler's, and is also transposed into a theological "meta-category" in relation to the use of divine authorial intention to justify the extraction of a theological unity from the NT. Wischmeyer believes that the use of the category of intentionality by the discipline of textual linguistics is a key argument for acknowledging the accessibility of authorial intention so hotly debated in literary

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<sup>16</sup> For a survey of the recent development of the Protestant scriptural principle in relation to the claims of reason and method see: J. Lauster, *Prinzip und Methode: Die Transformation des protestantischen Schriftprinzips durch die historische Kritik von Schleiermacher bis zur Gegenwart*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> O. Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments: Ein Lehrbuch*, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2004) 178-179. The criteria were originally presented in R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler, *Einführung in die Textlinguistik*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1981) in which pages 1-14 introduce the basic concepts which the rest of the work elucidates.

<sup>18</sup> Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik...*, 179.

<sup>19</sup> Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik...*, 179.

studies.<sup>20</sup> However, Wischmeyer seems unaware of the distinction between “*intentio auctoris*” and “*intentio operis*” drawn by Eco and accepted here.<sup>21</sup> The attempt to discern the *intentio auctoris* is dependent on the text and presumes that the intention disclosed by means of the text corresponds to the actual intentions of the author. However, the actual intentions of the original author(s) are unrecoverable and (unless one adopts a circular argument) unverifiable apart from the text (in the case of non-living authors). Furthermore, the fact that what a text *appears* to intend to do according to later readers may not be what the author *originally intended* the text to achieve suggests that the terminology *intentio auctoris* implies a more certain knowledge about the circumstances of the production of the text than is actually the case. The terminology *intentio operis* is more appropriate in referring to the intentionality of a text since it allows an argument about textual intention and goals to be formulated on the basis of the textual evidence, in particular its cohesion and coherence, whilst avoiding the unverifiable inference that the intentions thereby discerned were explicitly operative in the original author’s act of textual production.

Further criteria include “*acceptability*”, which refers to the attitude of the receiver of the text who expects to encounter a cohesive and coherent text that is in some way relevant or useful; “*informativity*” which simply infers that the text, regardless of the degree of boredom it induces, must at least in some way function to inform the reader; “*situationality*” which refers to the fact that the receiver of the text must (imaginatively) conceive it as relating to a particular communicative situation; and “*intertextuality*” which refers to the relationship between texts and a text’s dependence on other similar texts.<sup>22</sup>

Each of the 27 writings of the NT canon is able to fulfil the seven criteria of textuality noted above and may thus legitimately be regarded as a “text”.<sup>23</sup> Wischmeyer underlines the significance of understanding the NT canon as “texts” noting that they are subject to

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<sup>20</sup> Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik...*, 180.

<sup>21</sup> On *intentio operis* and its link to *intentio lectoris* see the work of U. Eco in U. Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, (ed. S. Collini; Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 64-65.

<sup>22</sup> Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik...*, 180-181.

<sup>23</sup> See Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik...*, 184.

the same hermeneutical rules and conditions for the enabling of understanding as all other texts.<sup>24</sup> This assertion is fundamental to the later attempt to utilise philosophical hermeneutics and Bakhtinian theory to justify the dialogical TNT model. Unless the NT canon is subject to the same rules of understanding as all other texts (which also validate the different exegetical methods which may be applied to the texts), the attempt to formulate a TNT model without reference to a special theological hermeneutic in order to promote inter-disciplinary collaboration is in vain.

The third and fourth presuppositions guiding this work flow from the definition of a text as a cohesive and combined literary work with a particular intentionality. Firstly, this work presumes that *textual alterity* should be respected and protected by the interpreter. Any method which serves to reduce the distinctiveness of a text or override its contextual specificity is both hermeneutically and ethically suspect. The same applies to the category of *textual integrity*, where it is presumed that methods which encourage deliberate or actual infringement of a text's literary, and therefore semantic, integrity are hermeneutically and ethically inadequate. Furthermore, the concomitant assumption in relation to these criteria is that a TNT which fails to respect the diversity of the NT voices inevitably diminishes the level of theological resources necessary for the ongoing theological task. The concern for diversity is thus not only an ethical or hermeneutical imperative but a theological necessity. For structural reasons, these latter presuppositions are given further justification within chapter five, which seeks to provide a hermeneutical foundation for adopting the dialogical TNT model. The reader may wish to first turn to that chapter for a fuller account of the hermeneutical standpoint of this work in relation to philosophical hermeneutics, though the outline of the presuppositions offered here is adequate for understanding the arguments made from the outset.

These four presuppositions form the hermeneutical criteria guiding the critical assessment of the literature. However, the basic method of this study is that of the critical literature review. Since the study covers a wide range of issues in NT studies, critical interaction is necessarily limited on most occasions to key or exemplary sources related to the issue

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<sup>24</sup> Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik...*, 184.

under discussion. However, when the works under discussion relate to TNTs or related genres such as *Religionsgeschichte* of Early Christianity and Biblical TNTs, exhaustive inclusion of works published since 1990 has been attempted.

Chapter three opens with a brief sketch of the problem of NT diversity and discussion as to why this issue is so important within Christian theology. It then proceeds to document some ways in which Christian theologians have historically attempted to either delete NT diversity or locate a theological unity in relation to the NT texts. The review of literature here is highly selective and meant for illustrative purposes.

An exhaustive critical literature review is offered in chapter four. The review operates thematically by surveying the treatment of the unity-diversity question within all TNTs published since 1990. At the same time, the literature review is arranged by methodological approaches to the issue in order to demonstrate the range of options available in relation to the thematic. This facilitates understanding of both how various approaches to the issue of NT unity affect the construction of a TNT and whether writers are operating with a methodology that allows them to do justice to the diversity of the NT canon. The guiding question in this part of the investigation is to discover which of the recent TNT models, if any, is adequate to the task of giving voice to the diversity of the NT texts.

There are two reasons for adoption of the 1990 cut-off date: firstly, the publication of Räisänen's *Beyond New Testament Theology* in 1990 marks the inauguration of a new phase in the clarification of the task and method of the TNT,<sup>25</sup> and secondly, the post-90's era saw the rapid expansion of the TNT genre within English-language scholarship so that it no longer remains a primarily German concern. The chapter concludes by

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<sup>25</sup> A consideration of the history of attempts to write a TNT and, as part of that history, a discussion of the unity-diversity issue has been done elsewhere and need not be repeated, see J. Frey, "Zum Problem der Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments" in Breytenbach and Frey, 3-53; Hahn, TNT:I, 1-28, especially 22-28; Hahn, TNT:II, 1-36. A useful compendium relating to the TNT and containing significant essays dating from 1787-1974 is G. Strecker, ed., *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975).



analyzing the possible locations of NT unity (if any) as indicated by the TNTs under review and clarifying the dialogical TNT model by means of a series of thesis statements.

The results of the foregoing review suggest that a dialogical TNT model may be the most effective means of preserving the distinctiveness of the NT texts whilst simultaneously rendering them fruitful for the theological task. However, the current attempts to use the dialogical model provide an inadequate justification for its most valid appropriation. Chapter five therefore seeks to fill the theoretical aporia left by previous practitioners of the dialogical model and provide a foundational account of the hermeneutical standpoint undergirding the dialogical TNT model. It adopts the theoretical standpoint of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics and justifies this in the light of Esler's rejection of Gadamerian hermeneutics as a suitable foundation for NT theology. The insights of philosophical hermeneutics are used to provide hermeneutical and ethical foundations for the dialogical TNT with some theological implications being drawn. To supplement this approach, a critical literature review of scholars who have used the insights of Bakhtinian theory to ground biblical theology is provided, and consequently the insights gained from philosophical hermeneutics are augmented through the selective application of Bakhtinian theory and terminology.

By philosophically grounding a dialogical TNT model that is adequate to the task of engaging diverse canonical voices, the way is opened up for a reconsideration of the TNT's theological task. Three distinctive questions related to the currently disputed issue of the task and purpose of the TNT will be addressed and resolved. Chapter six provides a critical literature review of attempts to produce a *Theologiegeschichte/Religionsgeschichte* as an alternative project to a TNT. It will consider their treatment of NT unity and diversity and their assumptions concerning their work's relation to a TNT. An account of the nature of historical investigation with reference to writers involved in recent discussion concerning NT theology will be offered. The discussion will lead to a clear distinction between the historical descriptive task of the *Religionsgeschichte* and the constructive theological task of a TNT. At the same time, the claim that

*Religionsgeschichte* is more historically “objective” and less interpretive than a TNT will be questioned.

Chapter seven attends to the recent and growing debate concerning the role of Scripture in the theological task. A critical literature review of some key positions on the relation of exegesis to theology will be offered, in particular the notion that biblical theology is a “bridge” to systematic theology as well as the claims of the so-called “Theological Interpretation of Scripture” movement. A clarification of the dialogical TNT model’s position in relation to competing models will then be given.

Chapter eight considers the question of biblical theology and, in particular, the rise of the *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*. A critical review of the three recent works within this genre will introduce the way they integrate the OT into the TNT. The position of the dialogical TNT in relation to the OT will then be explored. In advocating a model for constructing Christian theology that seeks to embrace a plurality of canonical voices without subsuming their uniqueness, the dialogical TNT model will run up against its own limits in its desire to take the canonical witnesses seriously. As a result, the very notion of the usefulness of a TNT for the theological task will be questioned and the idea of a dialogical theology of the Bible instead advanced.

## *2.5. Contribution to Current Discussion.*

The following investigation makes a number of contributions to the existing debate. These include:

1. An investigation of key proposals that scholars have made regarding the existence and location of the ‘unity’ of the NT.
2. The first fully comprehensive survey of all TNTs published since 1990 as well as a consideration of major methodological proposals often neglected by scholars. In

addition, this is the first investigation to undertake a complete survey using the lens of the unity-diversity issue as a critical tool.

3. A hermeneutically coherent proposal concerning the location of NT 'unity' that takes into account both the individual diversity of the NT texts and their theological function as canon.
4. A justification and modification of the dialogical TNT model first advocated by Caird and developed in various ways by Vouga and Isaak. Whilst this model has met with some brief statements of approval despite the limitations imposed by Vouga's conception, no scholars have tried to develop the model further or fully considered its hermeneutical implications.<sup>26</sup> An attempt will be made to provide a sounder hermeneutical, ethical and theological basis for the adoption of the dialogical model than has hitherto been provided, in particular through selective use of the insights of philosophical hermeneutics and Bakhtinian theory.
5. A clarification of the role of *religionsgeschichtliche* approaches to Early Christianity in relation to the TNT will be offered and thus also the issue of the relation of history to theology in the task of NT theology. The dialogical TNT model will be demonstrated to be an adequate response to some concerns of Räsänen over the TNT genre.
6. A re-evaluation of the relation between the biblical text and systematic theology. In this regard, various contemporary conceptions as to the role of the biblical text in relation to the task of systematic theology will be critiqued. The dialogical TNT model will be demonstrated as being better able to maintain the maximum autonomy of the biblical text vis-à-vis the interests of other theological disciplines, whilst also supporting the creativity and autonomy of interpreters in their theological task, than other approaches. Such a constructive theological approach allows the interpreter to meaningfully interact with other theological and

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<sup>26</sup> For example, Rowe, 401.

non-theological disciplines, whilst at the same time maintaining an explicitly theological stance.

7. An assessment of the limits of the dialogical TNT in relation to biblical theology. The dialogical TNT will be defended in relation to the recent attempts to write a Biblical Theology of the New Testament but, at the same time, its inherent limitation of the theological task will be critiqued. This, in turn, will call into question the desirability of the TNT genre as a mode of theological thinking.

The contributions to the current discussion detailed above are in large part original contributions to the debate, though they are naturally inconceivable without the previous insights and labours of theologians and philosophers that have shaped the contours of the field(s) under discussion. Furthermore, not only is the consideration of the relevant TNT literature since 1990 the most complete of its kind but also, the scope of the investigation is extremely broad. This is made possible through the adoption of the problem of unity and diversity as the critical lens through which the various TNT proposals are to be assessed. Finally, whilst the dialogical TNT model is, of course, not itself an original contribution to the debate, its further philosophical justification and clarification in relation to the areas mentioned above is wholly original. No doubt the assessment of the TNT and its relation to the theological task will not be embraced by all but the hope is that it at least forms an internally consistent and coherent proposal.

## Chapter Three

### 3. *The Problem: An Introductory Sketch.*

This chapter seeks to provide a brief orientation in relation to the discussion concerning the diversity of the texts found in the NT canon. Since NT diversity is frequently perceived as a problem to be overcome, some of the various strategies employed to such ends are discussed. Finally, the claim that overcoming theological diversity within the NT canon is a matter of fundamental existential concern for Christian theology and an inevitable part of attempts to define the nature of Christian identity will be considered.

#### 3.1. *The New Testament: Cathedral or Construction Site?*

Theissen argues that Early Christianity was “a simmering chaos” of multiple groupings comprising a “plurality of streams”, each with its own idiosyncratic contribution to the burgeoning movement. However, behind the visible plurality of Early Christianity Theissen discerns a hidden unity constituted by a semiotic system which developed out of the foundational common theological axioms shared by all or most of the first Christians. Theissen thus goes on to claim that Early Christianity may be metaphorically viewed as a unified cathedral to which each of the diverse streams contributed.<sup>27</sup>

Räisänen responded to Theissen by asking if it really was possible to discover a metaphorical cathedral within such “simmering chaos” without reducing the diversity of Early Christian theologies to a banal level of unifying abstraction. For example, Räisänen critiques Theissen for unifying the various NT eschatological conceptions regarding the imminent coming of Christ and the presence of the eschatological age to a basic semiotic axiom entitled ‘the renewal motif’ without trying to reconcile their divergent tendencies. He also rejects Theissen’s cathedral metaphor as seductively misleading insofar as it suggests an evaluation of early Christianity that reflects later ecclesial influence. Instead,

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<sup>27</sup> G. Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion*, (London: SCM, 1999), 17-18, 306-307.

Räisänen, following Luz, suggests that the theological development of early Christianity is more like a building site than a cathedral, in which multiple chapels are being constructed alongside each other with varying degrees of development.<sup>28</sup>

The discussion between Räisänen and Theissen encapsulates, in a microcosm, some of the key hermeneutical and methodological problems associated with the possibility and plausibility of writing a Theology of the New Testament today. Recent attempts to write a TNT express clearly the tension between the diversity of the NT texts as irrevocably disclosed by post-Enlightenment exegetical methods and the desire for a unified theology that can function normatively for faith and praxis. In fact, the problem of the unity and diversity of the NT canon is currently the central obstacle to be negotiated in the movement from historical description of NT theologies to theologically normative interpretation of the NT canon. Consequently, the TNT genre remains contested territory in which the unity-diversity issue is a key problem.

### 3.2. *The Problem: The Diversity of the NT Texts.*

In his broad survey of the discipline of Biblical Theology, Mead makes the obvious but neglected point that the English word “Bible” derives from the *plural* Greek words “*ta biblia*”.<sup>29</sup> As such, the term “Bible” indicates that a collection of books whilst, as Mead astutely notes, suggesting nothing as to the nature of their content.<sup>30</sup> He then goes on to observe that even those interpreters who maintain that there is “some kind of unity in [the Bible’s] basic message” still acknowledge the presence of tension between texts to a greater or smaller degree.<sup>31</sup> Barton similarly defines the NT as an uneven collection of

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<sup>28</sup> H. Räisänen, “Eine Kathedrale aus dem Chaos? Ein Gespräch mit Gerd Theißen über Einheit und Vielfalt der urchristlichen Religion” in P. Lampe and H. Schwier (eds.), *Neutestamentliche Grenzgänge: Symposium zur kritischen Rezeption der Arbeiten Gerd Theißens*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 51-64. Räisänen draws on Ulrich Luz’s article reprinted in the same volume: “Der frühchristliche Christusmythos: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Gerd Theißens Verständnis der urchristlichen Religion”, 31-50, especially pages 31-34.

<sup>29</sup> Mead, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Mead, 75.

<sup>31</sup> Mead, 75.

distinctive writings evidencing a complex diversity, rather than “some simple and uncomplicated text [(singular)] with strong internal unity.”<sup>32</sup> Well known examples of this kind of inter-textual tension include differences between the four Gospels, the relationship between Acts and the Pauline epistles, and the faith-works debate “between” James and Paul.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.2.1. “Diversity” and “Contradiction”.

The rhetoric of “diversity” and “unity” is sometimes polemically set up as a contrast between “unity” and “contradiction.”<sup>34</sup> The denial of contradictions in the canon then functions as rhetorical justification for proceeding to assert the presence of a unified theology in the NT texts. However, “diversity” and “contradiction” are not equivalent terms. Bird suggests that:

“since ‘diversity’ has come to mean inconsistency, violent divergence, and outright hostility, I prefer to speak of ‘complexity’ in the early church so as to include friendly rivalry (e.g. between the beloved disciple and Peter in the Gospel of John), gracious disagreements (e.g. over matters that are adiaphora in Rom. 14:1-15:7), as well as variegated viewpoints that are different but not mutually exclusive (e.g. christologies of Paul and John).”<sup>35</sup>

However, it remains doubtful as to whether replacing “diversity” with “complexity” is preferable since “complexity” may be taken to imply difficulty. Simply insisting that the term “diversity” be understood as referring to difference, whether great or small, and not be reduced to “contradiction” alone (though it may include it) seems clarification enough.

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<sup>32</sup> J. Barton, “Unity and Diversity in the Biblical Canon” in (eds.) J. Barton, M. Wolter, *The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003) 11.

<sup>33</sup> cf. Mead, 75.

<sup>34</sup> See the section below on Schreiner’s TNT.

<sup>35</sup> Bird, 280-281.

In terms of diversity at the level of ideas, Graf has helpfully charted the possible approaches to diverging NT statements (such as James and Paul on works and faith) currently adopted by NT interpreters. Significantly, the same interpreter can adopt different strategies in relation to various examples of NT diversity as long as such approaches are consistent with their theological presuppositions. These approaches fall into three main categories and include:<sup>36</sup>

### 1. Decision

- a. *Alternatives*: Statements contradict each other and a choice must be made.
- b. *Confrontation*: Statements contrast each other and thus reveal the specific profile of each particular theological conception.

### 2. Subordination

- a. *Regressive*: Statement A is a backwards step in relation to statement B.
- b. *Revelation History*: Statement A is located at a prior stage in process of divine revelation to humans than statement B.
- c. *Salvation History*: Statement A is located at a prior stage amongst the epochs of salvation-history than statement B.
- d. *Hierarchical*: Statement A is central (“Mitte der Schrift”), statement B is a marginal motif.
- e. *Corrective*: Statement A can lead to misinterpretations, which statement B seeks to prevent.

### 3. Coordination

- a. *Dialectic/Complementary*: Diverging statements seem contradictory but are really paradoxically related poles of the same issue.
- b. *Aspective*: Diverging statements simply indicate different aspects of the same issue.

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<sup>36</sup> The following summary is dependent on Graf’s work. For a full overview and summary chart with examples see D. Graf, *Unterwegs zu einer Biblischen Theologie: Perspektiven der Konzeption von Peter Stuhlmacher*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 271-302.



c. *Situative*: Diverging statements are related to divergent original contexts and thus retain their corresponding significance for different situations.

d. *Existential*: Diverging statements are the product of the tensions produced by the human condition (e.g. “*simul iustus et peccator*”).

e. *Harmonic*: Apparent contradictions lie in the interpreter’s misunderstanding of one or both statements.

The foregoing summary suggests that “contradiction” is too simplistic a term to summarize all the different ways in which the relation between different theological statements may be expressed. The contrast between *either* regarding statements as contradictions *or* as “unified” is a false one. “Diversity” rather implies appreciating the nuance of individual theological statements and the possibility of determining the relationship between these nuances in a wide variety of ways.

However, to restrict the consideration of diversity to the level of the theological statement is to miss the broader diversity of the 27 NT texts. NT theological statements are never abstract claims but are always found within a broader literary context, which is itself one selection out of a number of possible literary genres. Theological statements are thus a contribution to the *intentio operis* of the literary work as a whole, and are themselves determined by their embedment within that context. Furthermore, each NT text is unique in terms of its historical context and structural details, which shape its particular unique rehearsal of theological themes and ideas. Consequently, the term “diversity”, regardless of the actual degree to which each individual scholar assigns its presence within the NT canon, may be acknowledged as a hermeneutical fact based on the NT textual evidence. It reflects the anthropological and cultural factors that led to the production of the texts – diverse authors with diverse influences situated in diverse cultural, geographical, and historical/chronological locations. The impact of these factors already affects the production of “micro-level” NT theologies.

### 3.2.2. *Micro-Level Diversity.*

The sense that the NT canon is marked by diversity shapes “micro-level” constructions of biblical theology. There is no consensus amongst scholars as to which NT texts should be treated together to form discrete and coherent collections or whether a textual corpus is internally theologically coherent. Take the Pauline epistles for example. Even where a broad consensus exists amongst scholars as to an adequate textual basis for their task, this does not guarantee agreement on the degree of coherence they find amongst the texts. Schnelle bases his synthesis of Pauline theology around a centre, namely “the eschatological presence of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ”,<sup>37</sup> whilst Reymond explicitly critiques all attempts to find a centre to Pauline theology (although he then rather comically offers a five line definition of what is central to Paul’s thought).<sup>38</sup> Dunn considers the quest for an axiomatic centre to Pauline theology as too inflexible and praises Beker’s model of “coherence within contingency” that allows for a degree of flexibility within Pauline thought whilst postulating a coherence based on an “apocalyptic interpretation of the death and resurrection of Christ”.<sup>39</sup> Hübner’s position on development in Pauline thought is yet more extreme.<sup>40</sup> He freely admits that to talk of theological development also means to speak of the “*Inkonsistenz*” of diverse and, to a degree, contradictory theologies within the different letters.<sup>41</sup> He thus speaks of Paul’s ‘theologising and his theologies’ (“*sein Theologisieren und seine Theologien*”).<sup>42</sup>

This level of disagreement is not present only within the ranks of Pauline scholars. Whether Luke should be treated synthetically alongside the Synoptics is now increasingly viewed by some as being inappropriate as Luke-Acts becomes the increasingly accepted

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<sup>37</sup> U. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, (trans. E. Boring; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 389. For a recent overview of the quest for a centre to Pauline theology see M. Pretorius, “The theological centre of Pauline theology as it relates to the Holy Spirit”, *HTS* 62.1 (2006): 253-262.

<sup>38</sup> R. Reymond, *Paul, Missionary, Theologian: A Survey of his Missionary Labours and Theology*, (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), 308.

<sup>39</sup> J. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 23; cf. J.C. Beker, “Paul’s Theology: Consistent or Inconsistent”, *NTS* 34.3 (1988): 364-377.

<sup>40</sup> See H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus. Ein Beitrag zum Werden der paulinischen Theologie*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

<sup>41</sup> H. Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments II: Die Theologie des Paulus*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993) 28-29.

<sup>42</sup> Hübner, *BTNT*: II, 29.

theological monolithic textual group, as a host of recent studies indicate.<sup>43</sup> Of course, such an approach is not without its critics.<sup>44</sup> The decisions made in relation to textual corpora can affect whether one writes a theology of the Synoptic Gospels, Luke, Acts, or Luke-Acts and how the texts are to be treated within a TNT.<sup>45</sup> The recognition of canonical diversity also means that a synthetic approach to the four Gospels is often avoided, though attempts to discern the “historical Jesus” try to fill the vacuum left by the lack of theological unity.<sup>46</sup> In short, micro-level theologies of the NT are by no means uncontroversial in terms of their selection of textual groupings and claims to the internal coherency of a particular textual corpus. If NT diversity causes such a problem at even this ‘micro’ level of theological investigation, the question as to why insistent attempts to pursue unity at the ‘macro’ canonical level continue unabated must be raised.

### 3.3. *The Problem: The Unity of the NT as a Fundamental Existential Problem.*

Levenson maintains that “the effort to construct a systematic, harmonious theological statement out of the unsystematic and polydox materials in the Hebrew Bible fits Christianity better than Judaism because systematic theology in general is more prominent and more at home in the church than in...the synagogue.”<sup>47</sup> Whereas Jewish attempts to systematize focus on the *halakhah*, Christianity’s decision that “the particular *practises* of the Hebrew Bible are not incumbent upon Christians”<sup>48</sup> led it to direct its energies towards systematizing *beliefs*.<sup>49</sup> In short, Christianity was predisposed from the

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<sup>43</sup> Three fairly recent examples which clearly treated Luke-Acts as an integral work are: P. Borgmann, *The Way According to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke-Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); P. Pokorný, *Theologie der lukanischen Schriften*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); R. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (2 vols.), (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990; 1994).

<sup>44</sup> M. Parson, R. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); P. Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts: A Reassessment of the Evidence*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> See M. Bird, “The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion”, *JSNT* 29 (2007): 442.

<sup>46</sup> See M. Strauss, *Four Gospels, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> J. Levenson, “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology” in J. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, The Old Testament, and Historical Criticism*, (Louisville: WJKP, 1993), 51.

<sup>48</sup> Levenson, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Levenson, 51-52.

very beginning to place the emphasis on *theology* when interpreting texts rather than *ethics*.

Wolter suggests that the tension between theological unity and diversity is not merely a problem that began with the closing of the canon. Rather, it lies much further back in the search for a distinct Christian identity. He states:

“...die intensive Suche nach einer sprachlich wie existentiell ausdifferenzierbaren und einheitstiftenden ‚Mitte‘ der christlichen Identität und die Unmöglichkeit, sie eindeutig und verbindlich zu bestimmen, bereits von Anfang an integraler Bestandteil der geschichtlichen Existenz der christlichen Gemeinden war. Die Spannung zwischen Einheit und Vielfalt wäre demnach nicht ein erst mit dem Kanon gegebenes Problem, sondern eine fundamentale und unaufhebbare Gegebenheit der geschichtlichen Existenz des Christentums überhaupt.”<sup>50</sup>

The tension within Early Christianity was not only between competing versions of what Christianity was and could look like, it was also exacerbated by an awareness of the disjuncture between the pre- and post-Christ Scriptural texts and the need to show that the OT texts pointed towards Christ.<sup>51</sup> The consequence is the primarily Christian hermeneutical assumption that a passage could or should be interpreted meaningfully in the context of a *testament* or canon. This raises the question asked by Brocke:

“Kann es sein, daß sich hinter der christlichen Suche nach einer ‚Einheit der Schrift‘ oder nach ihrer ‚Mitte‘ verbergende Problem kein exegetisches und auch kein methodisches, sondern ein christlich-existentielles ist?”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> M. Wolter, “Die Vielfalt der Schrift und die Einheit des Kanons” in eds. J. Barton and M. Wolter, *The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 52-53.

<sup>51</sup> Levenson, 55-56.

<sup>52</sup> E. Brocke, “Von den ‚Schriften‘ zum ‚Alten Testament‘ - und zurück?” in (ed.) R. Rendtorff, *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990) 585; cited by Wolter, *Die Vielfalt...*, 51 n.30.

The search for the “unity of Scripture” is the existential quest to define one’s own believing identity. Levenson suggests that this tendency finds its nadir in Protestant theology, which would explain the fact that the TNT genre and the quest for a centre to the NT have been dominated by German Lutheran biblical scholars. He claims that one “cannot overestimate the connection” between the Reformation dogma *Sola Scriptura* and the study of biblical theology.<sup>53</sup> In viewing Scripture as a “source of renewal” and the “polarization of scripture and tradition”, it became increasingly important to state Scriptural doctrines “precisely and purely.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Protestant theology focuses on Scripture as the “word of God” (singular) as opposed to Judaism, which views the texts as “a *problem* with many facets.”<sup>55</sup> The resultant “‘Protestant dynamic’...does not allow for much of a differentiation between one’s own theology and that of one’s Bible.”<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, the quest for the unity of Scripture is revealed as a quest for one’s own theology, for what one should believe. A Christian hermeneutical approach, which thus seeks to define a single Christian identity from the theology of (i.e. inherent to) the texts, rather than defining itself *by the fact that it interacts with the texts*, cannot fail to result in a “monologisation” (mono-tonisation) of the texts, if it is to avoid schizophrenia. The diversity of the NT will therefore always be seen as a threat and as a problem to some.

But does it have to be this way? If, with regard to the quest for unity, “what Christians may perceive as a gain, Jews may perceive as a loss”,<sup>57</sup> is it possible to find a mode of grappling with NT texts that respects their diversity and avoids the loss of polyphonic richness? The possibility that NT diversity may be construed as a rich and vital theological resource that enhances rather than threatens meaningful Christian existence through textual and theological investigation is worth exploring. This thesis attempts to make a contribution to that quest. As we have seen, Wolter argues that the search for a theological centre to determine the nature of Christian identity amidst diverse conceptions is both present from the beginnings of Christianity whilst remaining a

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<sup>53</sup> Levenson, 45. See also H-J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956), especially 7-8.

<sup>54</sup> Levenson, 45-46.

<sup>55</sup> Levenson, 56 italics his.

<sup>56</sup> Levenson, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Levenson, 56.

potentially infinite hermeneutical task.<sup>58</sup> However, such a claim neither explains *why* the quest for such a unity is therefore an unavoidable factor of a legitimate Christian existence nor *why* there needs to be a universal form of Christian identity. The hermeneutical nature of NT textual interpretation and the contingent location of the interpreter/Christian imply the realization of such a dream is infinitely deferrable. Thus, this thesis sets out to challenge any view which continues to be resigned to the notion that NT diversity is problematic and should be overcome through the discovery of an essential theological ‘unity’.

#### 3.4. *The Quest for “Unity” and the Elimination of NT Diversity.*

The idea that the quest for the “unity of Scripture” reflects an existential quest to secure one’s own identity in the face of competing visions of Christianity becomes more plausible when one considers the range of strategies adopted to achieve this goal. These strategies may be broadly classified as establishing unity through the deletion of problematic texts and establishing unity through transcending individual texts. Before moving on to a critical analysis of recent attempts to resolve the unity-diversity issue within the TNT genre, a basic orientation concerning these approaches to NT diversity will be offered.

##### 3.4.1. *Establishing Unity Through the Deletion of Problematic Texts.*

###### 3.4.1.1. *Deletion Through Excision.*

The first approach to deletion involves adjudicating between texts that are inconsistent with one another and then excising those verses, passages, or books which do not support one’s adopted position. Barton notes that this is a “radical solution to the perceived problem of diversity in the canon [which] has had few proponents, even in modern

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<sup>58</sup> Wolter, 52-53.

times.”<sup>59</sup> Marcion’s attempt to excise all Jewish influence on the biblical texts is perhaps the most (in)famous example of such an approach. Marcion sought to “canonize an alternative set of Scriptures for use in his church”, which comprised an expurgated Luke’s Gospel and ten Pauline epistles (the Pastorals were excluded).<sup>60</sup>

Barton suggests that Marcion’s rejection of Christian allegorical interpretation of the OT led to his rejection of the OT as incompatible with the Gospel and as a “revelation from an evil deity.”<sup>61</sup> Since the OT had the status of *Scripture* Marcion was unable alter it, whereas his critical redaction of Early Christian texts reflects the status and function which these texts had within the early Christian communities. Since initially the oral tradition of the words of Jesus and not the Gospel text were normative, Marcion was merely attempting to remove what he considered errors from the Gospels because he shared the view of his contemporaries that they were “convenient but corrigible records”, memory aids and not scripture.<sup>62</sup> Thus to play a Marcionite “canon” off against an “orthodox canon” is anachronistic, since there was no fixed NT canon at that time.

Marcion’s significance therefore lies less in any alleged impetus he provided to the canonization of the NT texts as scripture and more in the fact of his marginalisation and lack of impact on the early Christians, who continued to retain the diversity of different Gospels (and Israel’s Scriptures), eventually establishing the four-gospel canon in the later era of Irenaeus.<sup>63</sup> This refusal to “streamline” the gospel to reflect a single viewpoint or to constrict the flexibility and adaptability of the Jesus tradition leads Barton to suggest that “diversity, even inconsistency, in the handling of gospel materials was seen at least by some in the early church as having a distinctive value, rather than being simply a problem.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> J. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (London: Continuum, 2003, 1977 (5<sup>th</sup> ed)) 57; cf. Barton’s suggestion that Luke perhaps also belongs in this category, essentially due to Luke 1:1-4, *Unity and diversity...*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> J. Barton, “Marcion Revisited” in (eds.) L. McDonald and J. Sanders, (eds.), *The Canon Debate*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 347.

<sup>62</sup> Barton, *Marcion Revisited*, 345-347.

<sup>63</sup> Barton, *Marcion Revisited*, 347.

<sup>64</sup> Barton, *Marcion Revisited*, 347.

#### 3.4.1.2. *Deletion Through Harmonisation.*

Barton rightly interprets Tatian's *Diatessaron* and all attempts at a harmonisation of the Gospels as actually examples of deletion. Tatian's desire to create a single seamless Gospel by means of eliminating all historical inconsistencies places him in the broad category of those who emend the texts to eliminate the perceived problem of diversity. Barton suggests that Tatian's *Diatessaron* "represents the only really successful attempt to deal with inconsistency through deletion."<sup>65</sup> However, despite its widespread use throughout the church, the *Diatessaron* was never accepted as a replacement for the four distinctive canonical Gospels. This need not indicate that early believers necessarily valued diversity. Rather, its widespread use hints that many early believers were inclined to believe that the Gospels really offered a single message, with the rejection of the *Diatessaron* doubtless having more to do with the presumed apostolic authority of the four Gospels than preference for diversity. Harmonising approaches to diversity are not, however, limited to the distant past since "Tatian's spirit lives on in Lives of Jesus, and...in the various Quests of the Historical Jesus, which are interested in the facts about Jesus as these can be historically established, rather than in the 'canonical' version of his life."<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the Gospel harmony genre continues to be sold by both popular and, somewhat ironically, evangelical publishers.<sup>67</sup>

#### 3.4.1.3. *Deletion Through Criterion.*

Also falling into the deletion/alteration category are those who use a criterion to judge the validity of any biblical text. Major exemplars of this approach are unsurprisingly found within the Lutheran tradition, given Luther's famous employment of "Christ" as the criterion for determining canonical works:

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<sup>65</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 15. See the recent attempt by D. Holdaway, *The Life of Jesus: More Than a Prophet*, (Lancaster: Sovereign World, 2006).

<sup>67</sup> O. Daniel, *A Harmony of the Four Gospels*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996<sup>2</sup>); R. Luebbert, *Jesus for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Unified Gospel*, (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011) which claims it "demonstrates the unity of the four Gospels" (xi); R. Thomas and S. Gundry, *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels*, New York: Harper Collins, 1988.



“Und darin stimmen alle rechtschaffenen heiligen Bücher überein, daß sie allesamt Christum predigen und treiben. Auch ist das der rechte Prüfstein, alle Bücher zu tadeln, wenn man siehet, ob sie Christum treiben oder nicht, sintemal alle Schrift Christum zeiget...”<sup>68</sup>

Luther consequently rejected Esther, James, Hebrews, and Revelation on the basis of the employment of his criterion – a move now referred to as *Sachkritik*. In protest against such vague appeals to “Jesus Christ” as the canon within the canon, Schrage would later call on scholars to distinguish between *Christus iustificans* and *Christus pro nobis* as valid criteria for Christian theology.<sup>69</sup> However, it is Käsemann who most decisively employs *Sachkritik* to argue for a “Kanon im Kanon” in relation to the NT. Käsemann distinguishes between the material canon of 27 NT texts and the actual canon, which is identical to the Gospel. He states:

“Die Spannung von Geist und Schrift ist konstitutiv. Das heißt, daß der Kanon nicht einfach mit dem Evangelium identisch und Gottes Wort nur insofern ist, als er Evangelium ist und wird.”<sup>70</sup>

To determine this “Kanon im Kanon”, Käsemann discerns a Christological criterion which he considers as the centre of Scripture:

“...die Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen [ist] jene Mitte der christlichen Verkündigung und darum ebenfalls der Schrift, auf welche unter keinen Umständen verzichtet werden darf.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> M. Luther, “Vorrede auf die Epistel S. Jacobi 1522” in H. Bornkamm (ed.), *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 216.

<sup>69</sup> W. Schrage, “Die Frage nach der Mitte und dem Kanon im Kanon der Neuen Testament” in J. Friedrich (ed.), *Rechtfertigung (Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann)*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1976), 439.

<sup>70</sup> E. Käsemann, “Begründet der neutestamentlichen Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?” in E. Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen: I*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 223.

<sup>71</sup> E. Käsemann, *Das Neue Testament als Kanon: Dokumentation und kritische Analyse zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 405.

The devastating consequences of using a scriptural centre to determine the canon in the canon are exemplified by Käsemann's polemical criticism of the later biblical texts as part of a degenerative falling away from the Pauline Gospel into "Frühkatholizismus."<sup>72</sup> The absurdity to which the "Kanon im Kanon" approach can lead is illustrated by Schulz, for whom only Pauline theology is considered as genuinely Christian theology while even the Gospels are condemned as "eine überflüssige, letztlich unbegreifliche und vor allem theologisch überholte Spielart der Evangeliumsverkündigung."<sup>73</sup>

Ferdinand Hahn suggests that the concept of a *Mitte der Schrift* should be distinguished from the idea of a *Kanon im Kanon*.<sup>74</sup> The latter view uses a criterion to disregard marginal material within the NT canon, whereas the *Mitte* searches for a "unifying" convergence that unites the texts. Wolter makes a similar distinction, describing the *Kanon im Kanon* approach as "kritisch" and the *Mitte der Schrift* approach as "einheitsstiftend".<sup>75</sup> Undoubtedly some recent interpreters have tried to discern a centre to Scripture in order to provide cohesion to the disparate biblical material.<sup>76</sup> However, the danger is that the emphasis on the importance of the "Mitte" can easily slide into affirming it as the "Sache", which then legitimates the use of the scriptural centre for Sachkritik. Since the biblical texts do not themselves make clear a scriptural centre, the lack of any inherent safeguards to protect from personal whimsy or prejudice in discriminating between texts and theological statements renders both the *Mitte der Schrift* and *Kanon im Kanon* approach(es) highly unsatisfactory.

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<sup>72</sup> See E. Käsemann, "Paulus und der Frühkatholizismus" in E. Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen: II*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 239-253. For a thorough analysis of Käsemann's theological program see B. Ehler, *Die Herrschaft des Gekreuzigten: Ernst Käsemanns Frage nach der Mitte der Schrift*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986).

<sup>73</sup> S. Schulz, *Die Mitte der Schrift*, (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1976) 226; cited in Hahn, *TDNT: II*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> Hahn, *TDNT: I*, 24-25; *TDNT: II*, 9-10.

<sup>75</sup> Wolter, *die Vielfalt...*, 51.

<sup>76</sup> Recent examples include: J. Hamilton, "The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology", *TynBul* 57.1 (2006): 57-84; J. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); H. Schürmann, "Jesu Basileia-Verkündigung und das christologische Kerygma als Mitte der Schrift" in H. Schürmann, *Wort Gottes und Schriftauslegung: Gesammelte Beiträge zur theologischen Mitte der Exegese*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 233-239. For the contributions of Stuhlmacher and other TNT writers see below.

#### 3.4.1.4. *Conclusion: Deleting NT Diversity.*

By accepting the canonical status of the 27 NT texts as a fundamental presupposition for the Christian theological task, the deletion of NT canonical diversity in an attempt to establish a unified theology is considered here as fundamentally wrong in principle. Not only are the methods employed susceptible to arbitrary interpretive interests but they are also hermeneutically inadequate and ethically inappropriate as they substitute the richness of the diverse canon for a narrow monologic account of Christian theology and identity.

#### 3.4.2. *Establishing Unity Through Transcending Individual Texts.*

The presupposition that biblical texts are divine revelation renders the deletion approach to biblical diversity unacceptable to many interpreters. Consequently, historical research into the development of the NT canon and the apologetic defense of its appropriateness in relation to Early Christianity and normativity for Christian faith are often closely related to the search for the unity of the NT.<sup>77</sup> However, as an assumed presupposition for the TNT and attempts to discover Scriptural unity the canon debate will not be discussed further. Rather, some of the strategies used to render the polyphonic NT canon into a theological unity will be briefly outlined below.

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<sup>77</sup> The voluminous literature on the issues associated with “canon” cannot be referenced here. For the claim that the NT texts suggest an implicit movement towards canonisation see: H. Eckstein, “Die implizite Kanonhermeneutik des Neuen Testaments” in B. Janowski, (ed.), *Kanonhermeneutik: Vom Lesen und Verstehen der christlichen Bibel*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007), 47-68. For a view of canonical unity as a “trans-historical reality” grounded in human experience that cannot be identified with the material NT texts themselves see: C. Helmer, “Transhistorical Unity of the New Testament Canon from Philosophical, Exegetical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives” in C. Helmer and C. Landmesser, (eds.), *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives*, (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 13-50.

#### 3.4.2.1. *Unity Through Reconciliation.*

Barton suggests that the difference between “harmonization” and “reconciliation” is that whereas a Harmony of the Gospels constructs a single unified account out of the diverse material, resulting in the *transformation* of the individual Gospels into one narrative, “reconciliation” proceeds by claiming that “inconsistencies between biblical texts are only apparent.”<sup>78</sup> Barton cites the example of the confusingly entitled *Evangelienharmonie* by Andreas Osiander,<sup>79</sup> which “does not correct one Gospel by another but simply adds together all the data in all the Gospels, so that Jesus cleanses the Temple three times, and heals four blind men.”<sup>80</sup> Modern attempts at “reconciliation” include, for example, demonstrations both of the historical accuracy of all the Gospel accounts such as the Temple cleansing and the resurrection, and of the theological compatibility of various texts, most notably the Pauline epistles and James.<sup>81</sup> “Reconciliation” thus denies the existence of tensions and diversity within and among the texts.

#### 3.4.2.2. *Unity Through Theological “Meta-Categories”.*

For some theologians, acknowledgement of NT polyphonic diversity without attempted resolution into a unified whole appears to undermine any theology articulated in terms of unifying meta-categories such as “Gospel”, “Word of God”, and “revelation”. However, there are not only purely theological reasons for overcoming biblical diversity. Also, the contemporary quest for a unified theology within Scripture appears particularly urgent to some theologians in the light of ecumenical concerns for the unity of the church<sup>82</sup> and the

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<sup>78</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 18.

<sup>79</sup> For the most accessible and critical, albeit selective, edition, see Andreas Osiander der Ältere, *Schriften und Briefen 1535 bis 1538*. Edited by G. Müller and G. Seebass, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1985).

<sup>80</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 18. See for example, J. McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor*, (Carlisle: Authentic Media, 2005, 1981) and the *Tektonics: Apologetics Ministries* website, which offers articles reconciling various biblical contradictions. Accessed at: <http://www.tektonics.org/gk/jamesvspaul.html> on 05.06.2009.

<sup>82</sup> Söding, 5, 56-102.

securing of Christian identity in a pluralist culture by means of normative doctrine.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the employment of various presuppositional meta-categories to justify particular treatments of NT texts may occur singly or, as is more often the case, form a complex theological grid through which texts are read.

Origen uses the meta-category of “Gospel” to justify a “*spiritual*” *hermeneutical approach* which, having noted the discrepancies amongst the Gospels, transgresses the literal sense in order to extract their inner truth which is “not to be sought for in the outward and material letter.”<sup>84</sup> In discussing the contradictions that he discerns in the Gospels and between the Epistles and Acts, Origen acknowledges the existence of redactive concerns shaping the production of the texts to suit the author’s “mystical aims”<sup>85</sup> but links this to a desire that “the spiritual truth was often preserved, as one might say, in the material falsehood.”<sup>86</sup> The “spiritual Gospel” which transcends the “somatic Gospel” of the bare “historical” accounts is thus viewed by Origen as the unifying message behind NT diversity.<sup>87</sup> Origen’s treatment of NT plurality is therefore justified by the notion of “Gospel” as an overarching rhetorical and dogmatic category. This, in turn, is backed up by the doctrine of pneumatological inspiration, which allows Origen to elide the differences between the NT texts by attributing them to a single divine auctorial source.<sup>88</sup> Thus the underlying unity is not a matter of interpretive construction but “corresponds to something that is and *always was* true to their content.”<sup>89</sup> Unity is thus

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<sup>83</sup> R. Morgan, “Can the Critical Study of Scripture Provide a Doctrinal Norm?”, *JR* 76.2 (1996): 230-231.

<sup>84</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John X.2*. Original text translated by A. Menzies and published in A. Menzies (ed.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Volume IX*, (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1896). The revised and edited version by Kevin Knight, which is cited here is accessible at: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1015.htm>. Such a hermeneutic is not a thing of the past but has been employed recently by Wilckens in his TNT (see below).

<sup>85</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John X.4*.

<sup>86</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John X.4*.

<sup>87</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John 1.9-10* See E. Lauro, *The Soul And Spirit of Scripture Within Origen’s Exegesis*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005) for a detailed account of Origen’s exegetical strategy including a discussion of the relation between the ‘psychic’ and ‘pneumatic’ sense of Scripture.

<sup>88</sup> Origen, *Peri Archon*, cited in H. de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, (trans. A. Nash), (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 223. The theological claim that Scripture is ultimately the product of God as the single divine author/authoriser need not necessarily imply the search for a unified theology within the NT texts; see: N. Wolterstorff, “The Unity Behind the Canon” in Helmer and Landmesser, 217-232.

<sup>89</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 20 italics his.

*discovered* as the genuine textual intent which transcends their “literal” sense, rather than *imposed* by interpretation.<sup>90</sup>

Childs also adopts the meta-category of “Gospel” and couples it with a *canonical approach*. He acknowledges the biblical diversity uncovered by the historical-critical method but also demands, in the name of theology, that “the text should be *read* as unified – whatever the historical facts about its origin may be.”<sup>91</sup> In relation to the Gospels, whilst redaction criticism legitimately attempts to investigate the unique shape each author has given their Gospel, Childs argues that to fully draw out the implications of “the canonical shape of the Gospels...the Gospel’s unity [must] be pursued with equal vigour.”<sup>92</sup> However, the rhetoric of unity appears as little more than a meaningless dogmatic postulate as evidenced when Childs writes:

“The unique feature of the Gospel’s unity is that the unity is asserted, but never established in a fixed literary form. According to the canonical shape the unity must be determined from reading the four, but no one definitive entrance – neither literary, nor historical, nor theological – has been established by the shape of the canonical text. Fluidity, therefore, is constitutive of the canonical shape of this corpus...The unity of the Gospel lies within its fourfold witness, but each new generation of readers is challenged to discern that unity.”<sup>93</sup>

Childs seeks to overcome the diversity of the NT texts through appeal to theological meta-categories. As Barton notes:

“the ‘canonical’ approach is a hermeneutic of the text...rather than a critical observation about it. It is issued in the imperative, not the indicative mood.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 20-21.

<sup>91</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 21 italics his.

<sup>92</sup> B. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1994<sup>2</sup>, 1984), 153.

<sup>93</sup> Childs, *New Testament as Canon*, 155-156.

<sup>94</sup> Barton, *Unity and diversity...*, 22.

Thus, “unity” can only be achieved by the canonical approach through systematically negating the historical in order to discern the message of the scriptures in order to open “a way to God which overcomes the historical moorings of both text and reader”.<sup>95</sup> The phenomenological diversity of the texts is rendered monologic by the use of “canon” as an imperative to overcome obligations to the historical alterity and literary integrity of the texts.<sup>96</sup>

Kaiser employs the entire gamut of meta-categories and unifying strategies within his programme to demonstrate the unity of Scripture. These range from endorsing the practice of harmonization<sup>97</sup> to asserting the structural, historic, prophetic, doctrinal, spiritual, and kerygmatic unity of the Bible.<sup>98</sup> Above all, he employs a *salvation-historical approach* based around the acts of divine promise and fulfillment in order to construct a coherent narrative from the biblical texts. Kaiser argues that the messianic promises are not randomly scattered but form “one continuous pattern, purpose, and unified presentation of the Messiah and the messianic era”<sup>99</sup> which runs through the ten periods of OT history before the promises begin to be fulfilled in Jesus.<sup>100</sup> The selectivity and harmonisation involved in the construction of a single story line running from Genesis to Revelation renders this approach unsatisfactory due to its inability to take into account the nuances and diverse perspectives of both OT and NT texts and subsequent marginalisation of texts deemed peripheral to the main narrative.<sup>101</sup>

The three approaches to unity, briefly sketched, all seek to transcend the polyphonic nature of the NT texts by recourse to hermeneutical strategies, justified by the use of meta-theological categories. In the case of Origen and Childs, this involves the deliberate admission that the “literal” or “historical” meaning of a text is not necessarily its true

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<sup>95</sup> Childs, *New Testament as Canon*, 52.

<sup>96</sup> See Childs comments on history in: *New Testament as Canon*, 51.

<sup>97</sup> Kaiser, *Unity...*, 35-46.

<sup>98</sup> Kaiser, *Unity...*, 20-24.

<sup>99</sup> Kaiser, *Unity...*, 82-83.

<sup>100</sup> Kaiser, *Unity...*, 82-83. See also W. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> Kaiser notably does not reference 1-3 John, Jude, Titus, Philemon, Haggai, Nahum, Jonah, Esther, Proverbs and Ruth in his attempt to demonstrate the unity of Scripture, see Kaiser, *Unity...*, 235-243.

theological meaning, whilst Kaiser rejects the existence of irresolvable biblical contradictions and thus sees no problem in harmonizing the diverse biblical texts into a seamless narrative of God's soteriological activity.

### 3.4.2.3. *Unity through Historical Investigation.*

Though he never asks *why* a TNT is theologically so important, Balla argues that "New Testament Theology as a discipline can be maintained only if there is a certain degree of unity in the theology of the early Christians."<sup>102</sup> He thus views NT theology as a historical task designed to unearth the original unity behind the NT texts.<sup>103</sup> Rather than beginning with an examination of the theologies of Paul, John or the Gospels, Balla shrewdly proceeds by rejecting the idea of development in early Christianity,<sup>104</sup> disputing the existence of contradictory theologies in the NT,<sup>105</sup> and arguing that the various claims to have discovered the "centre of Scripture" suggests that they "point to important themes which may have played some significant role in (at least part of) early Christianity".<sup>106</sup> This leads Balla to suggest the possibility of discovering a "'creed"... to which all "orthodox" Christians adhered".<sup>107</sup>

However, Balla rightly notes there are no extant examples of a complete, early Christian creed, with scholars relying on reconstructions derived from biblical, mainly Pauline, texts. Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of evidence available to help in the construction of a genuinely convincing hypothesis.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, Balla cites Luz's suggestion that creeds were one of the 'Einheitsförende Kräfte' within early Christianity as support for his basic contention:

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<sup>102</sup> P. Balla, "Are We Beyond New Testament Theology?" in Penner and Vander Stichele, 36.

<sup>103</sup> P. Balla, *Challenges to New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Justify the Enterprise*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 46. "Conservative" scholars enthusiastically embraced Balla's work, for example: R. Yarborough, "Review: Challenges to New Testament Theology", *TrinJ* 19.1 (1998): 125-126; R. Tyler, "Review: Challenges to New Testament Theology", *Restoration Quarterly* 42.3 (2000): 188-189.

<sup>104</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 149, 165-166.

<sup>105</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 166-196.

<sup>106</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 199.

<sup>107</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 199.

<sup>108</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 200.



“[Luz] writes in connection with 1 Cor 15,3 (p.67): “Der Text zeigt uns jedenfalls klar, daß es in der Kirche sehr früh gemeinsame Bekenntnistexte gegeben hat ... Natürlich fällt im Neuen Testament auch auf, wie verschieden diese alten Bekenntnisformeln im einzelnen formuliert sind ... Aber es gibt keine Gründe, die darauf schließen lassen, daß es irgendwo ein Christentum ohne formulierte Bekenntnisse gegeben hat”.”<sup>109</sup>

However, Luz’s statement seems to militate against Balla’s assertion of a shared creed amongst early Christians since he explicitly points to the diversity of creedal formulations within the NT. To assert the unlikelihood that Christianity existed without creedal formula is by no means the same as saying that all “orthodox” Christians shared the same creed. Balla thus appears to have over-interpreted Luz’s statement to suit his argument. Given the scarcity of evidence, Balla is finally forced to change tack and argue that the alleged “creedal elements” in the NT, while not indicative of a common creed, are nevertheless indicative of a shared “basic theology”.<sup>110</sup> Balla then attempts to demonstrate this “basic theology” on the basis of the *nomina sacra*- a maximum of fifteen words such as *Christos* which are abbreviated in Greek and Latin texts for no other apparent reason than their theological significance<sup>111</sup> - but his overall argument is weak. Balla “tentatively” concludes that the attempt to historically describe *the* theology of the NT is legitimate on the basis that there “may [!] have existed a basic, creed-type theology to which all those Christians adhered, whose writings are gathered in the New Testament...that may [!] (at least partly) be reconstructed by us from “creedal elements” in the New Testament”.<sup>112</sup>

Such sparse results from one’s investigations are telling. Baird’s conclusion that Balla’s discussions concerning unity and the canon are “overstated and largely unconvincing”

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<sup>109</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 200 n. 46; citing U. Luz, “Unterwegs zur Einheit: Gemeinschaft der Kirche im Neuen Testament” in C. Link, U. Luz, and L. Vischer, (eds.), *Sie aber hielten fest an der Gemeinschaft...: Einheit der Kirche als Prozeß im Neuen Testament und Heute*, (Zürich: Benziger, 1988), 65-67. The omissions in Balla’s citation are his own.

<sup>110</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 205-206 including n.55.

<sup>111</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 206.

<sup>112</sup> Balla, *Challenges...*, 209.

must be upheld.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, Balla's willingness to reduce the complexity of texts to creedal formulae in order to discover the "unity" of early Christian theology both distorts the theology of the texts themselves and implies that diversity is a problem to be overcome. The idea that the canon's rich diversity could stimulate NT theology conceived as a constructive *theological* exercise in Christian theological thinking seems far removed from Balla's approach to the TNT.

#### 3.4.2.4. *Conclusion: Establishing "Unity" Beyond the Texts.*

The desire to establish a theological "unity" that lies beneath or within the NT canon results in the implementation of hermeneutical strategies that infringe on the integrity of the texts themselves. Both historically oriented approaches to retrieving the fragments of an original theological unity and hermeneutical approaches using theological meta-categories to legitimate a disregard for the unique voice of an NT text in the name of an overarching theology fail to value NT polyphony as significant theological resource.

#### 3.5. *Conclusion: Dealing with Diversity.*

The foregoing chapter sought to outline the fundamental problem that lies at the heart of quests for the unity of the NT. The question as to whether the NT canon resembles a "beautiful cathedral" or a "building site" introduced the debate by means of easily understood metaphors, though the dictum that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" should caution against too easily accepting one perspective or the other. After considering some basic facts about the composition and contents of the NT canon, an attempt to move beyond a simple unity-contradiction polarity was made. With the help of Graf's elucidation of the various ways to juxtapose divergent theological statements, an acknowledgement of the complexity of understanding NT diversity became apparent. However, this was further complicated by noting that Graf's model deals only with the

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<sup>113</sup> W. Baird, "Review: Challenges to New Testament Theology", *Encounter* 60.4 (1999): 586.

diversity of statements abstracted from their context, but neglects broader issues of literary and structural diversity as a whole. Further examples of the problem of NT diversity were adduced by noting the variety of disagreement evident in attempts to produce “micro-level” theologies of the NT, let alone full scale TNTs.

This raised the question as to why Christian theologians feel it necessary to discern a unified theology within the diverse canonical texts. Drawing on the work of Levenson and Wolter, it was suggested that the driving force behind such attempts is the existential need to define Christian and therefore one’s own identity. Christianity’s early predilection for theology as opposed to ethics is suggested by Levenson to result in the shifting of the primary locus of the construction of identity from behaviour to beliefs. The marginalization of tradition by the Reformers accentuated and accelerated this existential quest, explaining why the bulk of contributions to the TNT genre have been offered by Lutherans, with Catholic interest arising after Vatican II. The existential quest thesis gave rise to the question as to whether it would be possible to re-think how the construction of Christian identity is achieved and the use it makes of the biblical texts. This question must be revisited at the end of the work.

Given the drive for finding theological unity, a brief survey of approaches to the diversity of the biblical texts was offered. Strategies which resulted in the deletion and/or marginalization of texts were addressed first. Such approaches are deemed inadequate in principle due to their infringement on the integrity of the canon and their impoverishing hermeneutic of reducing NT diversity. Similar results were found when considering strategies to discern the “unity” of the NT. In these cases, unity could only be achieved by infringing on key aspects of the NT texts, whether marginalizing the “plain” or “surface” meaning of the text, ignoring their historical alterity, sidelining texts or passages that do not cohere with an imposed structural narrative grid, or dissecting them in the quest for *nomina sacra* or creedal formulae.

The chapter thus introduces the key problem of NT diversity, its relation to Christian identity, strategies designed to mitigate the problem, and the ethical and hermeneutical

concerns raised by such procedures. With this in mind, an analysis of the TNT genre can take place.

## Chapter Four

### 4. *The “Unity” of the NT and the TNT.*

This chapter will discuss almost all TNTs published since 1990<sup>114</sup> and their various approaches to the issue of theological “unity” will be assessed. The consequences for the treatment of the NT texts of the hermeneutical approaches adopted will be evaluated, with a particular focus on the degree to which all canonical voices are heard and the extent to which their particular literary integrity and contextual alterity is preserved.

The lack of any generally accepted guidelines for writing a TNT mean that each writer’s approach may be fairly idiosyncratic, determined by their position on a multitude of issues such as the goal and audience of a TNT. Thus, whilst TNTs are placed into a category for heuristic convenience, this does not adequately reflect the full nuance of each writer’s individual position. However, in broad terms, TNTs engage the issue of unity/diversity in one of five main ways. These include: the quest for a scriptural centre; the quest for limited unity; the quest for a fundamental theological unity; the abandonment of the quest for unity; and the dialogical TNT.

#### 4.1. *Stuhlmacher: The Search for a Scriptural Centre.*

For Stuhlmacher, the task of a BTNT<sup>115</sup> is not only historical-descriptive, in that it seeks to give the multiple NT witnesses their unique voice(s) in a manner which corresponds to the NT texts,<sup>116</sup> but is also systematic-theological, insofar as it remains open to the Gospel’s claim of divine revelation and is thus orientated towards the Church in its

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<sup>114</sup> One exception is the basic thematic introduction to NT theology found in J. Julius Scott Jr., *New Testament Theology: A New Study of the Thematic Structure of the New Testament*, (Fearn: Mentor, 2008), which makes no new contribution to the issues discussed. Furthermore, with the exception of Stuhlmacher’s work, the BTNT genre will be discussed in the penultimate chapter.

<sup>115</sup> For a consideration of the relation of Stuhlmacher’s BTNT to the OT see the final chapter.

<sup>116</sup> P. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments I: Grundlegung, von Jesus zu Paulus*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005<sup>3</sup> rev.; 1992), 11.

experience of life and faith.<sup>117</sup> Thus, a BTNT elucidates the NT within the horizon of the entire biblical canon in order to grasp “die Bedeutung des neutestamentlichen Christusbotschaft für Glaube und Leben der Kirche(n).”<sup>118</sup> It is, then, both an exegetical and theological-hermeneutical task.

At the end of his BTNT, Stuhlmacher attempts to synthesize the diverse results of his study in order to work towards dogmatic theology by attempting to discern a scriptural centre.<sup>119</sup> For Stuhlmacher, the centre of Scripture must proceed from the NT because it is here that the goal of revelation-history is reached.<sup>120</sup> He claims that despite the diversity of the NT, the central statements of NT writers exhibit “ganz erstaunliche Gemeinsamkeiten”.<sup>121</sup> This is clear from the fact that the NT writers testify to one God, who reveals himself through his Son, through whom the salvation of the world is carried out,<sup>122</sup> and also that the apostles proclaimed *one* gospel,<sup>123</sup> consisting of the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>124</sup> Stuhlmacher can therefore maintain that there exists “*eine Glaubenslehre, die über den Differenzen der verschiedenen Traditionszeugen des Neuen Testaments steht.*”<sup>125</sup> Consequently, one can affirm the existence of a scriptural centre: “Die neutestamentlichen Zeugen haben sich gemeinsam einer theologischen Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit verpflichtet gesehen, die ihnen in Christus vorgegeben war. Diese Wahrheit hat sie geeint, aber nicht zur Uniformität gezwungen.”<sup>126</sup>

Stuhlmacher thus concludes that it is possible to formulate a statement that encapsulates the centre of Scripture, while at the same time the full understanding of this truth is not limited to the statement but must be elucidated by biblical dogmatics and can only be

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<sup>117</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: I, 12-13.

<sup>118</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: I, 13.

<sup>119</sup> P. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments II: Von der Paulusschule bis zur Johannesoffenbarung*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 305.

<sup>120</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 307.

<sup>121</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 308.

<sup>122</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 308-309.

<sup>123</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 309.

<sup>124</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 310.

<sup>125</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 311 italics his.

<sup>126</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 311 italics his.

fully grasped through participation in church life.<sup>127</sup> This scriptural centre is “reconciliation”.<sup>128</sup>

“Das von Jesus gelebte, von Paulus exemplarisch verkündigte und von der johaneischen Schule durchgeistigte eine apostolische Evangelium von der Versöhnung (Versöhnung) Gottes mit den Menschen durch seinen eingeborenen Sohn, den Jesus Christus, ist die Heilsbotschaft für die Welt schlechthin. Sie lehrt zu verstehen und zu bekennen, daß der eine Gott, der die Welt geschaffen und Israel zu seinem Eigentumsvolk erwählt hat, in der Sendung, dem Werk, dem Sühnetod und der Auferweckung seines Sohnes für die endzeitliche Rettung von Juden und Heiden eine für allemal genug getan hat. Wer an dieses Evangelium glaubt, den Jesus Christus als Retter und Herrn anerkennt und seiner Weisung in der Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden folgt, gewinnt Anteil an der Basileia tou Theou, die dieser Christus schon gegenwärtig repräsentiert, am Jüngsten Tage durch das Endgericht hindurch durchsetzen und zur Ehre seines himmlischen Vaters aufrichten wird.”<sup>129</sup>

Stuhlmacher recognizes that to place the doctrine of reconciliation at the centre of Scripture is considered by some as “exegetisch und theologisch gleich unzulässig”, due to only occasional NT references and its initial introduction by Paul, and that such scholars would prefer to speak of a “Christus-geschehen” or “God’s love in and through Christ” as the centre.<sup>130</sup> However, Stuhlmacher maintains, both on exegetical and historical grounds, that his view is not only defensible but that it is advisable to cling to the more precisely definable biblical witness concerning reconciliation instead of substituting for it “hermeneutisch scheinbar gefälligere Beschreibungen des Heilsgeschehens” such as the vague and inadequate expression “[die] Liebe Gottes in Christus.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 321.

<sup>128</sup> Stuhlmacher also considers the idea of reconciliation as the centre of Scripture in terms of the historical debate between Protestants and Catholics over the role of justification in the NT, see BTNT: II, 312-317.

<sup>129</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 320-321 italics removed.

<sup>130</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: I, 34.

<sup>131</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: I, 35.

Stuhlmacher's scriptural centre is notable in that it expressly draws on the three traditional pillars of the Lutheran TNT – Jesus, Paul, and John, whilst other texts are not referred to at all. Furthermore, in his attempt to devise such a scriptural centre, based around six key themes – confession of the one God, the one Gospel of Christ, the proclamation of the death of Jesus as atonement for sin, the resurrection and the expectation of the second coming and final judgment, the call to love God and one's neighbour, and the significance of the Holy Spirit for the Church – Stuhlmacher fails to provide evidence from all his main witnesses in each area. Graf has also noted that even the cited verses do not always provide the evidence which Stuhlmacher claims they do.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, Räisänen points out that maintaining “Versöhnung” as the scriptural centre ignores the fact that it is a marginal theme in the Synoptics. Indeed, Räisänen observes that Stuhlmacher himself sketches major differences between texts such as Matthew and Paul on righteousness and the love command in John and the Synoptics, whilst sometimes overemphasizing the degree of unity, for example as manifested in the command that all the main textual witnesses including the Synoptics hold that Jesus was “wesensgleich” with the Father.<sup>133</sup>

The narrowness of the scope of Stuhlmacher's work as a whole may be gauged by the fact that multiple texts, such as Hebrews, 2 Peter and Jude, are seen to be inferior to the Pauline texts. This is most explicit, as one might guess, in the treatment of James. Stuhlmacher suggests James has a misguided view of Pauline doctrine, the latter of which is much closer to the truth of the Gospel as embodied in Jesus than James thinks. As a consequence:

“[Because the original Pauline teaching is consistent with the core of Jesus' message] “ist es *unmöglich*, den Jak[obus] im Kanon gleichberechtigt neben die paulinischen Lehrbriefe zu stellen; er kann diese höchstens ergänzen und auf seine Weise kommentieren.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Graf, 293, 293 n. 1827.

<sup>133</sup> See Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 42-43.

<sup>134</sup> Stuhlmacher, *BTNT: II*, 69 italics his.



In this case, the difference between the *Mitte der Schrift* and the *Kanon im Kanon* approach is almost elided. The scriptural centre as defined by Jesus, Paul, and John as interpreted by Stuhlmacher become the criterion for assessing the validity of the theology of more marginal biblical texts. Stuhlmacher's approach allows the *Mitte der Schrift* to create an effective *Kanon im Kanon* and texts which fall outside this effective canon are only allowed a voice if they say what Stuhlmacher thinks they should say. The richness of diversity is thus sacrificed to a biblical dogmatic norm.

In the final paragraphs of his work, Stuhlmacher maintains the need for genuine interaction between biblical exegetes and dogmatic theologians and complains that exegetes too often “die dogmatische Arbeit von sich weg...schieben und für unwichtig...halten”.<sup>135</sup> Stuhlmacher himself offers nothing explicit in this regard, perhaps feeling that his “discovery” of the *Mitte* is a sufficient contribution to the dogmatic task. He leaves the theological import of his recognition of the importance of reconciliation, as well as its existential significance for church faith and praxis, unexplored.

#### 4.1.1. *Stuhlmacher: Conclusion.*

Stuhlmacher's work is a good example of how the quest for the “unity” of the NT leads to the theological marginalization of canonical texts that do not cohere with the theological “centre” defined by the interpreter. The search for a unifying scriptural centre implicitly, or, as in Stuhlmacher's case, explicitly, can mutate into a form of *Sachkritik* that effectively negates its own desired goal. Furthermore, the idea that any concisely defined theological formulation can encapsulate the theological witness of the full range of NT texts and “objectively” define its “centre” in a non-arbitrary manner is suspect. In Stuhlmacher's case, Lutheran presuppositions guide his selection and interpretation of the biblical texts. Finally, the theological usefulness of Stuhlmacher's scriptural centre is debatable. Exactly what the dogmatic theologian or practical theologian should do with Stuhlmacher's scriptural centre is unclear, whilst its contemporary relevance to any

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<sup>135</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT: II, 349.

discourse taking place outside of ecclesiological circles is greatly limited by the fact that it is formulated in language drawn directly from the biblical texts themselves and remains uninterpreted.

#### 4.2. *Limited Unity Amidst NT Diversity.*

The TNTs discussed here attempt to move beyond a mere analysis of the diverse perspectives contained within the NT towards defining a degree of theological unity. However, they do not attempt to construct a complete unified NT theology but instead are content to locate key areas of similarity between the texts.

##### 4.2.1. *Marshall: Missional NT Theology.*

In his methodological deliberations, Marshall notes the “considerable variety and diversity among the books that compose the New Testament.”<sup>136</sup> This fact leads him to exclude two possible approaches to writing a TNT: firstly, the indiscriminate “harvesting” of texts to create a theological edifice that harmonises the NT witnesses and ignores context and nuance; secondly, the imposition of a systematic theological framework onto the NT without any evidence that such a framework was in the minds of the NT writers.<sup>137</sup> Marshall also goes on to reject the “conference method” selected by Caird<sup>138</sup> on the basis that the description misleads since the participants cannot respond to each other’s assertions.<sup>139</sup>

Marshall’s own approach to reconciling the tension between NT Theology and NT theologies is to approach the task in two stages. The first stage is analytic and concentrates on single documents or groups of documents while asking how the distinct theologies contained within came into being and are expressed in them:

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<sup>136</sup> I. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*, (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 21.

<sup>137</sup> Marshall, 24. Marshall jibes that most people who adopt the latter approach are firmly convinced that “their framework is that of the New Testament”.

<sup>138</sup> For Caird see below.

<sup>139</sup> Marshall, 25.

“Clearly the starting point must be to set out the thought expressed in the various documents, each for its own sake, before attempting any comparisons and detecting any tensions.”<sup>140</sup>

The second stage is then to “enquire as to the existence and character of a possible synthesis.”<sup>141</sup> This process will enable the demonstration of both unity – the “common belief expressed in the documents”, and diversity – the individual development of such beliefs, as well as demonstrating the possibility of harmony among them and the degree of its extent.<sup>142</sup>

What conclusions, then, does Marshall reach? For Marshall, the NT attests to a theological core common to all writers: redemption. He suggest that all writers accept the four stages captured in this notion of redemption: the human situation as sinful and in need of redemption; the “saving act” of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the new life mediated by the Spirit to those who believe which is experienced individually and communally; and, finally, the consummation of God’s redemptive act in the parousia, final judgement, destruction of evil, and “establishment of the new world.”<sup>143</sup> These common beliefs operate within a shared Jewish framework of viewing the world as divinely created, of viewing history as a relationship between God and humanity and as fundamentally apocalyptic, and of accepting the validity of the Jewish Scriptures.<sup>144</sup>

Marshall develops his elucidation of the theological theme of redemption in conjunction with his view of the primary purpose of the early Church, and consequently their texts, as missiological.<sup>145</sup> For Marshall, the central theological motif of redemption both implicitly and explicitly comes to expression in texts shaped by missiological concerns. Thus, Marshall views the shared understanding of God and humanity as the “context of

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<sup>140</sup> Marshall, 30-31.

<sup>141</sup> Marshall, 31.

<sup>142</sup> Marshall, 31.

<sup>143</sup> Marshall, 717-718.

<sup>144</sup> Marshall, 718.

<sup>145</sup> cf. 34-36, especially Marshall’s assertion that “New Testament Theology is essentially missionary theology” (34).

mission.” Jesus Christ and the “saving event” are the “center of mission”, while the “community of mission” relates to the shared understanding concerning “the renewed Israel”, “the response of faith”, the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the church, and its ethics expressed in the love commandment. Finally, “the consummation of mission” focuses on the “fullness of salvation” and deals with eschatology.<sup>146</sup> Mission thus provides an abstract enough umbrella to cover a wide variety of texts, which may actually have totally different concerns in view.

At this point, the inadequacy of Marshall’s methodology shows itself. He attempts to move from an analytic structure to a synthetic statement or, more simply, from diversity to unity.<sup>147</sup> Such a procedure necessarily establishes the diversity of the texts and keeps this in constant view throughout, affecting any attempt to formulate a unified theological statement that is not too abstract. His methodology also takes the broad diversity of the NT writings and condenses it into a core concern, redemption.<sup>148</sup> Marshall claims all NT writers would “be prepared to recognize [redemption interpreted through a missiological lens]...as being close to the essential core of beliefs that inform their individual theologies”<sup>149</sup> but still warns against flattening out the NT theologies since “the unity is expressed in diversity.”<sup>150</sup> He clarifies this by saying that “considerable differences in religious ethos [...] are compatible with a basic identity in experience” and that the same judgements concerning something may be expressed in different conceptual terms.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, for Marshall, underlying the diversity of the NT is a common experience and judgement concerning that experience which receives a variety of expressions in both ethos and conceptual terminology.

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<sup>146</sup> Marshall, 718-726.

<sup>147</sup> cf. Marshall, 707-708. “The thesis that we have been testing here is that we can proceed through a recognition of the diversity in the documents to a recognition that there is a fundamental unity between them.”

<sup>148</sup> Marshall alleviates this “narrowing” to a degree in that he places it within a “Jewish framework of thought” but this framework merely forms the backdrop and not the substance of the core theology.

<sup>149</sup> Marshall, 726.

<sup>150</sup> Marshall, 726.

<sup>151</sup> Marshall, 730-731.

Marshall's approach seems hermeneutically problematical. To construe a "common experience and judgment" lying behind the NT texts is misguided since "experience" is precisely something unique to each individual. The diversity of the NT texts rather suggests a diversity of experience amongst the writers in relation to the singular "event" of Christ, most notably suggested by Paul's description of himself as one "untimely born" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Such perspectivalty suggests that, rather than viewing the texts as embracing a common theology to the extent that Marshall claims, it is the "event" of Jesus Christ and not the individual theological articulations of its significance which may "fundamentally" unite them.

#### 4.2.2. *Thielman: A Christ-centred Theological Unity.*

Thielman's TNT bears remarkable structural similarities to that of Marshall.<sup>152</sup> Introductory methodological deliberations are followed by analytic investigation of groups of text (e.g. the four gospels, the Pauline letters) with each section ending with a discussion of the theological unity of the texts in each group. Both works conclude with a discussion of the unity of the NT. However, a major structural difference is that while Marshall prefers a separate section for the Johannine literature including Revelation, thus giving him four major analytic sections, Thielman disperses the Johannine material between his "Gospels and Acts" section and the "Non-Pauline letters and the Revelation of John" section, leaving him with only three sections. In this way, Thielman's model successfully manages to break free from the dominant bi-theological (Pauline, Johannine) and tri-theological (Synoptics, Pauline, Johannine) approaches to the TNT which both end up, whether intentionally or not, giving the impression that the non-Pauline/Johannine epistles are a mere addendum to the NT theological edifice.

Thielman's work is marked by a great appreciation of canonical diversity and a nuanced approach to attempts at theological synthesis. He goes to great lengths to establish the

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<sup>152</sup> F. Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

necessity of a plurality of Gospels.<sup>153</sup> He also argues coherently that despite differing emphases they do evidence a certain theological unity – they are “four diverse witnesses to the one gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>154</sup> This unity is not primarily in terms of a unified theology but in terms of a common set of four questions which each Gospel writer sets out to answer.<sup>155</sup> However, these questions are not set out in the Gospels themselves but really form a hermeneutical framework which allows Thielman to produce a differentiated synthesis of the theology of the Gospels and Acts.<sup>156</sup>

Thielman claims that it was Paul who “worked out the theological implications of this gospel most fully.”<sup>157</sup> He then offers what is essentially a Pauline theology, which, after discussing the “the significance and coherence of Paul’s theology” as well as the “center” of Pauline theology,<sup>158</sup> proceeds to an epistle by epistle analysis,<sup>159</sup> culminating in a synthetic account of the “common emphases and central convictions of Paul’s letters.”<sup>160</sup> Strikingly, the section fails to relate Pauline theology to anything found outside of the Pauline canon. The same procedure occurs for Hebrews-Revelation which, after an analytic account of the individual texts, discusses only the coherence and unity of the writings amongst themselves. Thielman finds the unity of Hebrews-Revelation in their defence of “the church’s vision of reality against attacks on that vision from different directions”<sup>161</sup> but does not relate this unity to the rest of the NT.

In the final section of his work, Thielman maintains that five important issues emerge when considering the convergence of the NT writings: “the significance of Jesus, faith as a response to Jesus, the outpouring of God’s Spirit, the church as the people of God, and

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<sup>153</sup> Thielman, 45-46.

<sup>154</sup> Thielman, 181-216.

<sup>155</sup> Thielman, 181-216. The four questions are: “What is the historical significance of Jesus? What can account for his rejection? What is the meaning of his death? What response should he receive in the present?” (181).

<sup>156</sup> see Thielman, 215-216.

<sup>157</sup> Thielman, 216.

<sup>158</sup> For Thielman, “God’s graciousness towards his weak and sinful creatures” is the centre of Pauline theology (see Thielman, 232 (italics removed)).

<sup>159</sup> Thielman assumes Pauline authorship for all letters of the so-called Pauline school.

<sup>160</sup> See Thielman, 219-479.

<sup>161</sup> Thielman, 677.

the consummation of all things.”<sup>162</sup> He goes on to provide a balanced account of these areas, drawing on all parts of the NT canon and closes with the claim that the theological vision of the NT is “Christ-centred”, as evidenced by the fact that the New Testament begins logically with Jesus and closes in anticipation of his return.<sup>163</sup>

Whilst Thielman’s work is judicious throughout and carefully differentiates between the various NT texts, he does suggest a problematic hermeneutical approach to theological tensions between texts. Thielman dismisses out of hand the possibility that the NT texts may contradict each other, claiming that although there are times when “the best historical re-construction of the text seems to yield a meaning that is contradictory to the canon’s dominant theological tendency”, an adequate response is “to view the apparent divergence as theologically insignificant.”<sup>164</sup> Whilst rejecting harmonization and a *Kanon im Kanon* approach as legitimate options in resolving the problem of theological diversity in the NT since they would “impoverish our understanding of God”,<sup>165</sup> Thielman claims that “the basic insight of faith can warrant the conclusion that the theological emphases of the New Testament documents are not ultimately contradictory.”<sup>166</sup> In short, Thielman’s belief in the NT as “God’s Word”<sup>167</sup> allows one to adopt a “responsible fideism” in relation to the issue of biblical unity.<sup>168</sup> Thus, he concludes the diversity of the canon testifies to “the mystery of God’s greatness” and indicates the limitations of human reason, which cannot fully unify canonical diversity and must instead rely on faith which believes in an ultimate eschatological deferral of the appreciation of their unity.<sup>169</sup>

Thielman offers a relatively nuanced approach to the exegetical task of discerning theological unity in Scripture. However, his dogmatic postulate of the “unity” of the canon due to divine authorship leads him to adopt a disturbing hermeneutical position. He clings tenaciously to the notion of an ultimate inherent biblical unity (although

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<sup>162</sup> Thielman, 681, cf. 681-725.

<sup>163</sup> Thielman, 725.

<sup>164</sup> Thielman, 38.

<sup>165</sup> Thielman, 38.

<sup>166</sup> Thielman, 41.

<sup>167</sup> Thielman, 39.

<sup>168</sup> Thielman, 39.

<sup>169</sup> Thielman, 40-41.



eschatologically deferred) despite the problems raised by the texts themselves as evidenced by the interpreter's own reading. Consequently, he demands a *sacrificium intellectus* rather than the re-examination of one's approach to theological and hermeneutical presuppositions.

#### 4.2.3. Matera: The "Diverse Unity" of the New Testament.

Matera attempts to write a TNT based on two assumptions. Firstly, that "there is a rich diversity in the way that the New Testament writers express the experience of salvation the first believers enjoyed because of God's salvific work in Christ" and secondly, that "there is an underlying unity in the diverse theologies of the New Testament."<sup>170</sup> For Matera, this underlying unity is based on two elements, which revolve around soteriology since "apart from soteriology, there would be no need for Christology, ecclesiology, Christian ethics or eschatology."<sup>171</sup> The first element is "the experience of salvation in Jesus Christ",<sup>172</sup> which, though differing between persons (and consequently between NT writings), provides a certain theological unity.<sup>173</sup> The second element is the (meta-) "narrative about salvation",<sup>174</sup> which is composed of five elements including: humanity's predicament of alienation from God, its reconciliation to God through Christ, the consequent founding of a believing community, which lives after the pattern of Christ, and has an eschatological focus and hope.<sup>175</sup> This narrative "does not occur, in its entirety, in every single New Testament writing", but the "underlying drama" provides a foundation for all texts.<sup>176</sup> It is surprising that Matera can make such an unverifiable

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<sup>170</sup> F. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Unity and Diversity*, (Louisville: WJK Press, 2007), xxviii.

<sup>171</sup> Matera, TNT, xxx. The dogmatic basis of Matera's project is revealed in his explicitly statement that the five categories which "summarise the master story of the New Testament...correspond to the theological categories of (1) Christian anthropology and soteriology, (2) Christology, (3) ecclesiology, (4) ethics, and (5) eschatology." (xxx).

<sup>172</sup> Matera, TNT, 478.

<sup>173</sup> Matera, TNT, 479.

<sup>174</sup> Matera, TNT, 479.

<sup>175</sup> Matera, TNT, 479-480.

<sup>176</sup> Matera, TNT, 480.

assertion whilst simultaneously admitting the silence of some texts in relation to parts of his narrative.

The diversity of the NT texts is explained by the diverse starting points of the writers. Whereas the Synoptics start from Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the Pauline tradition begins with the "gospel about Jesus Christ",<sup>177</sup> while the Johannine tradition proceeds from the incarnation.<sup>178</sup> What Matera categorises as "other voices" in the NT (Hebrews, James, the Petrine Epistles, Jude and Revelation) each have a unique starting point that complements "the three great traditions."<sup>179</sup>

Does Matera succeed in his goal of presenting "an overview of the diverse unity of the theology of the New Testament"?<sup>180</sup> An honest assessment of his work compels one to suggest that Matera has succeeded in highlighting the diversity of the NT at the cost of its unity as reflected in his claim that "diverse unity" is "the only unity of the New Testament".<sup>181</sup> The majority of the work deals with the four separate traditions in exclusion from one another – the Synoptic tradition first, followed by the Pauline tradition, the Johannine tradition and "other voices". The conclusion of the work (unsurprisingly entitled "The Diverse Unity of New Testament Theology") comprises 58 pages and attempts to demonstrate the unity of the NT.<sup>182</sup> Matera uses as section-headings the five elements which comprise the soteriological narrative,<sup>183</sup> though he notes that this "implied master story" is not fully present in all NT texts.<sup>184</sup> However, it quickly becomes apparent that the conclusion is simply a reprise of what has gone before, with each of the five section-headings being treated under the sub-headings of the Synoptic tradition, the Pauline tradition etc. with no attempt at integration. The final

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<sup>177</sup> Matera, TNT, xxix.

<sup>178</sup> Matera, TNT, xxx.

<sup>179</sup> Matera, TNT, xxix-xxx. Although Matera's notion of the Synoptic, the Pauline and the Johannine traditions as "the three great theological traditions within the New Testament" (xxix) raises fears of the marginalisation of the "other voices", his work is relatively balanced with the Synoptic and "other voices" sections comprising roughly 100 pages each, the Johannine section 75 pages, and the Pauline section 160 pages.

<sup>180</sup> Matera, TNT, xix.

<sup>181</sup> Matera, TNT, 480.

<sup>182</sup> Matera, TNT, 422-480.

<sup>183</sup> Matera, TNT, 428.

<sup>184</sup> Matera, TNT, 427.

paragraph of each “other voice” section does attempt to provide an integrative summary though this threatens to degenerate into banality. One example should suffice. After discussing the ecclesiology of the NT traditions, Matera can only state that the NT writers “agree on one point: the church has come into existence through Christ’s death and resurrection.”<sup>185</sup>

The failure of Matera to discover the “unity” of the NT should have been clear to him from the outset. In an earlier essay which compared the Christologies of Paul and John, Matera was forced to conclude that they were diverse and could not be harmonized. Indeed, he stated:

“Paul and John represent two Christologies, one that focuses on the scandal of the cross and the power of the Resurrection, the other on the scandal of the Incarnation and the life-giving revelation that the Son brings from the Father. The two cannot be harmonized, nor were they meant to be. They are the results of unique experiences of Christ. Each Christology reveals something about God, the human condition, and the benefits of Christ, which the other does not, and perhaps cannot reveal. These differences remind us that the mystery of Christ is multifaceted and cannot be explained in only one way.”<sup>186</sup>

Matera would have done well to have closely followed the logic of his own exegetical conclusions. Ultimately, Matera’s paradoxical “diverse unity” seems more diverse than unified and, while he provides a useful compendium to the diversity of the NT, the underlying unity he portrays is wafer thin. Indeed, if one were sceptical, one could suggest that Matera’s repeated appeals to “diverse unity” are simply a rhetorical diversion which aim to absolve him, by means of a vacuous phrase, from the recognition that he has failed to achieve his goal of producing a genuinely integrated portrayal of the unity of the NT.

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<sup>185</sup> Matera, TNT, 458.

<sup>186</sup> F. Matera, “Christ in the Theologies of Paul and John: A Study in the Diverse Unity of New Testament Theology”, *TS* 67.2 (2006): 237-256; 255-256.

#### 4.2.4. *The Thin Unity of the NT: Conclusion.*

The authors treated within the foregoing section are united by a common methodological approach. Each writer approaches the NT by first recognizing the diversity of NT writings and elucidating this diversity. This takes place by considering NT texts or text groups individually before proceeding to a synthetic statement. Attempts to proceed from diversity to unity then follow. When “unity” is offered, it is couched in fairly vague terms and also, in the case of Matera and Marshall, by means of dubious claims to have constructed a theological narrative which is supposed to undergird all 27 texts. However, claims to have found a unified theology *within* the NT rely on hermeneutically problematic judgments concerning the original experiential source of the unity (Marshall), rationally problematic claims relating to the eschatological deferral of the revelation of the full unity of the NT (Thielman), or rhetorically vacuous assertions as to the “diverse unity” of the NT in the face of contrary exegetical findings produced by the author (Matera).

### 4.3 Unity as a Fundamental-Theological Task.

The following section explores TNTs which view the uncovering of a unified theology within the NT as a *fundamental theological task*.<sup>187</sup> The two-stage TNT models of Hahn and Wilckens are considered first, due to their methodological significance for recent discussion. Then, consideration will be given to the detailed methodological proposals set out by Thüsing and Söding as well as to the idiosyncratic TNT of Niederwimmer. Finally, although English-language TNTs do not use the terminology of fundamental theology, the method and presuppositions of the thematic TNTs by Scott Jr. and Schreiner imply functional similarities to explicitly fundamental-theological approaches, and are therefore discussed here.

#### 4.3.1. Hahn: The Two-Stage Model and “Unity”.

##### 4.3.1.1. Hahn: The Influence of Schlier.

The two-stage TNT model, introduced with the publication of the first volumes of both Hahn’s and Wilcken’s TNTs in 2002, was an important innovation in the TNT genre. Hahn’s attempt was best received and was rapidly hailed as a groundbreaking work.<sup>188</sup> Notably, Rowe hailed Hahn’s TNT as “the most significant *Theologie* to emerge since Bultmann’s.”<sup>189</sup> Hahn’s attempt to recover a sense of the unity of NT Theology clearly drew its inspiration from Schlier, who in distancing himself from the *theologiegeschichtlich* approach to NT theology advocated by Wrede, appealed to the fact that the name of the discipline referred not to “eine[r] Summe verschiedener Theologien, sondern hat *eine* und *die* Theologie des N.T. im Auge”.<sup>190</sup> Schlier argued

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<sup>187</sup> For more on “Fundamentaltheologie” see the chapter on TNT and Systematic Theology.

<sup>188</sup> Hahn, TNT:I; Hahn, TNT:II. The significance of Hahn’s achievement is indicated by the publication of *Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, edited by Breytenbach and Frey, which collected a series of papers aimed at further elucidating issues relating to the task of a TNT and sought to engage positively with Hahn’s work.

<sup>189</sup> Kavin Rowe, 394.

<sup>190</sup> See H. Schlier, “Über Sinn und Aufgabe einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments” in ed. G. Strecker, *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975)

that it is only by grasping the unity of the Theology of the NT can the discipline raise itself to the level of genuine *theology*.<sup>191</sup>

“Je mehr [die Darstellung] ohne Übereilung und ohne die nächste Verschiedenheit der theologischen Konzeptionen zu übersehen und zu überspringen in die Einheit der Theologie des N.T. eindringt, desto mehr wird sie Theologie werden”.<sup>192</sup>

For Schlier, the link between “unity” and “theology” is, however, not located in the interpretive act of the NT theologian but rather found in the texts themselves. The NT interpreter must, like the dogmatician, merely recognise and draw out the unity lying concealed within the texts.<sup>193</sup>

Schlier argues that progression beyond the diverse writings of the NT towards a theology of the NT as a whole is not only demanded by the name of the discipline (NT Theology) but is also a dogmatic requirement:

“Diese Einheit, die eine letzte Widerspruchlosigkeit der verschiedenen theologischen Grundgedanken und Aussagen einschließt, ist, theologisch gesehen, eine Voraussetzung, die mit der Inspiration und Kanonizität des N.T. bzw. der Heiligen Schrift zusammenhängt.”<sup>194</sup>

Schlier’s appeal to the dogmatic categories of canonicity and inspiration leads him to posit a realm of meaning in which there is an *ultimate lack of contradiction*. Forty years later, Hahn sought to fulfil Schlier’s demand for a unified theology of the NT.<sup>195</sup>

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328. Also included in Strecker’s volume is Schlier’s 1963 essay, “Biblische und Dogmatische Theologie” 425-437. Schlier overlooks the fact that the name of a discipline should be determined by the nature of the subject matter rather than simply pre-determining how one approaches the subject matter in advance.

<sup>191</sup> Schlier, 330.

<sup>192</sup> Schlier, 328.

<sup>193</sup> Schlier, 328 “diese verborgene Einheit möglichst aus ihrer Verborgenheit heraus[...]holen und erkennen...”.

<sup>194</sup> Schlier, 339.

<sup>195</sup> Hahn, TNT: II, 806. For further discussion of Schlier and Hahn see: C. Breytenbach, “Zwischen Exegetische und systematischer Theologie: Ferdinand Hahn’s Auffassung von der Einheit der “Theologie

#### 4.3.1.2. Hahn: *The Task and Structure of a TNT*.

For Hahn, theology is fundamentally “ein Nachdenken über den als verbindlich anerkannten Wahrheitsanspruch, speziell den Wahrheitsanspruch der christlichen Botschaft”.<sup>196</sup> In contrast to a “religionswissenschaftlich” approach, which concentrates on the multiplicity of religions in their historical development as observed “von außen”,<sup>197</sup> theology is neither disinterested nor neutral but is a “reflektierte Explikation des Glaubensgrundes”.<sup>198</sup> Hahn thus divides his TNT into two volumes of roughly equivalent size – a *Theologieggeschichte des Urchristentums*, concentrating on the diversity of the NT, followed by a *Thematische Darstellung*, focussing on the unity of the NT.<sup>199</sup> He spends much time justifying the latter volume whilst the *Theologieggeschichte* receives little justification at all.<sup>200</sup>

Hahn claims that:

“In der Theologieggeschichte des Urchristentums ... ist die ganze Vielfalt der urchristlichen Verkündigung und Theologie zu berücksichtigen. Dabei sind

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des Neuen Testaments” in P. Müller, C. Gerber, and T. Knöppler, (eds.), “...was ihr auf dem Weg verhandelt habt”: *Beiträge zur Exegese und Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Festschrift für Ferdinand Hahn zum 75. Geburtstag*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 206-209.

<sup>196</sup> F. Hahn, “Eine religionswissenschaftliche Alternative zur neutestamentlichen Theologie? Ein Gespräch mit Heiki Räisänen” in F. Hahn, *Studien zum Neuen Testament: 1*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 156. The views in this paragraph are repeated using much the same language in section 1.2.2. of F. Hahn’s “Das Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments in seiner Vielfalt und Einheit: Zu den Grundproblem einer neutestamentlichen Theologie” in *Studien zum Neuen Testament: 1*, 164.

<sup>197</sup> Hahn, *Eine religionswissenschaftliche Alternative...*, 152.

<sup>198</sup> Hahn, *Eine religionswissenschaftliche Alternative...*, 156.

<sup>199</sup> Hahn’s approach was prefigured in OT studies by Rolf Rendtorff who divided his *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Ein kanonischer Entwurf* into two volumes. The first volume was entitled *Kanonische Grundlegung*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999), and considered appropriate text complexes according to their relation to the history of Israel, whilst the second volume, *Thematische Entfaltung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001), offered a thematic theology of the OT.

<sup>200</sup> Both volumes contain substantial introductory sections critiquing the various TNTs which have been produced. Hahn, while finding value in certain attempts, fails to find a single satisfactory attempt which adequately portrays the unity of the NT.

die einzelnen Schriften und Schriftkomplexe in ihrer jeweiligen Eigenart zu behandeln”.<sup>201</sup>

However, he is quick to point out that this does not fulfil the task of a TNT:

“Damit ist aber die unerläßliche Frage nach der Zusammengehörigkeit und Einheit des urchristlichen Zeugnisses nicht beantwortet.”<sup>202</sup>

For Hahn, the *Theologieggeschichte* involves tracing the entire breadth of early Christian tradition in order that one may discern which elements and motifs are of significance. He asserts that Jesus’ message and activity and the disciples’ witness to the Easter-event gave rise to diverse proclamation-traditions which influenced each other to varying degrees or were even directly linked and were later consolidated in particular theological outlines, each of which merits individual attention.<sup>203</sup> These outlines include those of Paul, the Pauline school and hellenistic Jewish-Christianity. The Synoptic Gospels, despite commonalities, each offer a unique theological conceptuality, whilst John’s gospel theologially reworks the Jesus tradition in a very independent manner.<sup>204</sup> Importantly, Hahn affirms that the pre-literary traditions and the NT textual traditions clearly show how diversely the Christian message was articulated and passed on, even in the earliest period.<sup>205</sup> Hahn recognises that such diversity “enthält durchaus die Tendenz zu divergierender Ausbildung christlicher Identität”<sup>206</sup> and thus possibly leads to differing confessional forms. He also claims that this fact can offer “ein legitimes Modell für eine vielfältige Interpretation der christlichen Botschaft in der Kirche”,<sup>207</sup> though this model must be dependent on the fact that “gleichzeitig die Gemeinsamkeit und Einheit des

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<sup>201</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 22.

<sup>202</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 22.

<sup>203</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 763.

<sup>204</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 763.

<sup>205</sup> Hahn avoids terms such as “development” (*Entwicklung*) and “to develop” (*entwickeln*) in describing his *Theologieggeschichte* (see TNT:I, 763-764), preferring to use the terms “carrying on” (*Fortsetzung*) and “to arise” (*ergeben*). Such rhetoric minimises the suggestion of any modification of tradition and thereby supports his attempt to uncover an unchangeable core of NT doctrine that forms the stable unified basis of Christian faith.

<sup>206</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 763.

<sup>207</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 763.



Zeugnisses bedacht wird.”<sup>208</sup> For Hahn, a *Theologieggeschichte* is “unerlässlich”<sup>209</sup> but only as necessary preparation for the unity of the NT: “Erst wenn die ganze Vielfalt aufgezeigt ist, kann nach der Einheit weitergefragt werden.”<sup>210</sup> The results of a *Theologieggeschichte* are the raw material that must be integrated into a portrayal of NT unity.<sup>211</sup> Hahn’s methodology is to move from diversity to unity, from particularity to commonality.

#### 4.3.1.3. *Hahn: Methodology and Results of TNT: I.*

Following the methodological introduction, Hahn explores the historical Jesus, the reception of the Jesus-tradition in the Early Church, and a consideration of the nature of the oldest Christian communities.<sup>212</sup> The rest of the *Theologieggeschichte* contains a discussion of the various textual corpora comprising the NT, arranged according to a mixture of chronological and genetic factors. The treatment of Pauline theology is followed by discussion of the deutero-Pauline epistles and Hellenistic Jewish-Christian texts independent of Paul including James, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Revelation. Discussion of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts precedes a section on Johannine theology, with the volume closing with a treatment of the late NT texts, Jude and 2 Peter, as well as the Apostolic Fathers.

Hahn treats the NT texts in relation to their respective textual corpus but proceeds thematically rather than according to the literary structure of the NT texts. Thus, in the discussion of Pauline and Johannine theology, Hahn uses references from any of the relevant texts in relation to a particular theme. When treating a single text such as Matthew’s Gospel, Hahn “proof texts” the relevant theme under consideration (such as “Himmelsreich”)<sup>213</sup> without regard to the literary structure of the work itself. The

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<sup>208</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 764.

<sup>209</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 764.

<sup>210</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 764.

<sup>211</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 770.

<sup>212</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 30-178.

<sup>213</sup> Hahn, TNT:I, 527-528.

resulting effect is a summary of key theological themes found in a particular text but with little sense of its literary, narrative, and rhetorical structure. Whilst consideration of each textual corpus is preceded by a potted history of research, and occasionally some brief considerations as to authorship, origin, genre, and structure, the volume does not read like a fully fledged *Theologieggeschichte*<sup>214</sup> but rather as a basic compendium of independent research summaries and key themes of each text.

#### 4.3.1.4. *Hahn: Methodology and Results of TNT: II.*

Hahn begins the volume II by reflecting on the “fundamental-theological” need to establish the unity of the NT. This task is more than “rein exegetisch” and moves towards the domain of systematic theology.<sup>215</sup> Since “Fundamental Theology” is concerned with “die Grundlage aller Theologie” NT theology has a “fundamentaltheologische Funktion.”<sup>216</sup> In short, “(e)s geht um das ursprüngliche und bleibend maßgebende Glaubenszeugnis.”<sup>217</sup> Paradoxically, the search for this “normative” unity of the New Testament builds on the diversity outlined in the *Theologieggeschichte*. It searches “nach der gemeinsamen Intention der vielfältigen Zeugnisse” and reflects on what binds together the NT texts despite their tensions and even contradictions.<sup>218</sup> Through comparing the diverse traditions of Early Christianity, Hahn hopes to discern common theological structures within the NT canon.<sup>219</sup> These will then be considered as “original” and “normative”, though why this should be the case is not clear.

Hahn’s approach to this task is to adopt a thematic discussion of NT theology consisting of five main parts, which correspond to the traditional dogmatic categories of Scripture, Revelation, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. Each of these sections breaks down into multiple units. Hahn takes great care to avoid accusations of indiscriminate

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<sup>214</sup> See the examples in the chapter on *Theologieggeschichte*.

<sup>215</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 2.

<sup>216</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 2.

<sup>217</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 2.

<sup>218</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 23.

<sup>219</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 23-24.

proof-texting and harmonisation in his discussion of particular themes. Every time a different NT textual corpus is brought in to address a theme it occurs in a separate numbered paragraph. This allows Hahn to both gather together all the material relevant to a particular theme whilst also acknowledging the diversity or idiosyncrasy of particular NT texts. As such, it starts to move in the direction of the dialogical TNT model discussed below.

Given the diversity of material Hahn explores, the question arises as to how successful his attempt to find unity is. If one considers his initial discussion of the New Testament use of the OT,<sup>220</sup> one begins to note a pattern that resurfaces throughout volume II. In it, Hahn categorises the various uses of the OT by the NT writers. Matthew and Hebrews are characterised by “eine explizite Form von Schriftheologie”, which uses the OT to either anchor the Jesus tradition by use of “Reflexionszitate” (Matthew) or interprets the OT as a means of explicating Christology (Hebrews).<sup>221</sup> Paul, 1 Peter, and Luke-Acts are characterised by the use of the OT within their theological argumentation, while Mark, John and James are much less explicit in integrating OT texts into argumentation.<sup>222</sup> 2 Thessalonians, Revelation and 2 Peter use the OT only implicitly,<sup>223</sup> whilst Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles and the Johannine Epistles, on a sliding scale of use, contain barely any explicit or even implicit references to the OT.<sup>224</sup> Hahn notes that promises of a messianic forerunner are found exclusively within the four Gospels,<sup>225</sup> while promises of a bringer of salvation can be found in the Pauline *Hauptbriefe*, the four Gospels, Revelation, Hebrews, and 1 Timothy.<sup>226</sup> Texts linked to the promise of sharing in salvation and the salvation community are primarily found in the Pauline *Hauptbriefe* with isolated references in Hebrews and Acts. The citations found in 1 Peter always occur in relation to ethical exhortation.<sup>227</sup> Texts related to eschatological consummation are primarily cited in the Pauline *Hauptbriefe*, Hebrews, the four Gospels and Revelation,

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<sup>220</sup> This discussion occurs in Hahn, TNT:II, 38-142.

<sup>221</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 54.

<sup>222</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 55-56.

<sup>223</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 57.

<sup>224</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 57-58.

<sup>225</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 91-92.

<sup>226</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 93-98.

<sup>227</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 98-100.

though Revelation is particularly unique in its use of OT and Early Jewish material.<sup>228</sup>  
Hahn concludes his overview by stating:

“Obwohl die im Urchristentum aufgegriffenen alttestamentlichen Textstellen nicht für sämtliche Überlieferungsstränge des Neuen Testaments vorausgesetzt werden können, ergibt sich aus den Belegen doch, daß Verheißungstexte in den meisten Schriften und oft in großer Zahl herangezogen worden sind. [...] Abgesehen von der verschiedenen Zahl und Gewichtung von Zitaten bestehen jedoch im Neuen Testament keine wirkliche Unterschiede; für das gesamte urchristliche Zeugnis sind die Verheißungen des Alten Testaments von grundlegender Bedeutung.”<sup>229</sup>

While such a collective characterisation of the evidence may reflect the quantitative interpretation of the data, Hahn’s own presentation suggests that some parts of the NT have no interest in OT promises at all, while those that do cite OT texts for unique purposes. Promises linked to the life of Jesus and John the Baptist are primarily the domain of the four Gospels, while promises linked to salvation-participation and the salvation community are found primarily outside the Gospels. Furthermore, Hahn argues from silence in order to iron out the divergences in OT use by NT writers when he claims that variations or lack of citation might reflect a lack of access to some OT texts rather than concluding that their absence may be due to the theological tendencies of the writer.

Hahn sums up the hermeneutical NT use of the OT in the phrase “*interpretatio Christiana*.”<sup>230</sup> However, whilst this may legitimately cover the various presuppositions and methods of primitive Christian hermeneutics, it should not be illegitimately extended to include the *results* of these hermeneutical procedures. On the basis of Hahn’s own discussion, there is no singular ‘Christian Interpretation’ of the OT. The evidence is too fragmentary and unevenly concentrated in various text complexes to warrant such a claim. Furthermore, even Hahn notes that an OT event can be treated in a positive or

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<sup>228</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 101-102.

<sup>229</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 105-106.

<sup>230</sup> cf. Hahn, TNT:II, 111-128.

negative manner, according to the author's theological argument and intent.<sup>231</sup> Consequently, whilst "*interpretatio Christiana*" may refer generally to a hermeneutical *presupposition* of Scriptural usage by many of the NT writers, it does not refer to a standard, defined and unified interpretation of the OT which was accepted by Early Christianity as a whole.

Hahn's technique of exploring all the evidence and then seeking to discern a unity tends to lead to generalised assertions, which are only a "unified" theology in the vaguest sense of the term. For example, Hahn employs the term "revelation" as a totalising concept under which its diverse manifestations and portrayal by the biblical authors are effectively ironed out. He states:

"Die vordergründig stark divergierenden Aussagen über die Art der Offenbarungsereignisse lassen gleichwohl erkennen, daß es sich jeweils um Widerfahrnisse handelt, die ihren Ursprung in Gott selbst haben. Die unterschiedlichen Dimensionen verweisen auf eine Offenbarungsgeschichte, in der [...] sich Gott den Menschen zuwendet."<sup>232</sup>

The same kind of approach to "unity" is taken in relation to the notion of "the reign of God." Hahn claims that:

"Jesu eigene theozentrische Botschaft ist zwar christologisch erheblich modifiziert worden, was auch Konsequenzen innerhalb der Pneumatologie, Ekklesiologie und Soteriologie hatte, ist aber in ihrer Grundstruktur und entscheidenden Intention beibehalten und weitergeführt worden."<sup>233</sup>

However, even Hahn's desire to find unity cannot prevent him from acknowledging four themes which exemplify not only tension but even contradiction between NT writers. These include: the Pauline and Lukan statements concerning the possibility of a natural

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<sup>231</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 121.

<sup>232</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 165.

<sup>233</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 191.

knowledge of God;<sup>234</sup> the question of the role of the Law in relation to the Christ event, which required the NT writers to formulate theologies appropriate to their context, leading to varying assessments of the Law;<sup>235</sup> the role of faith and works in Paul and James, though Hahn suggests that there may be less tension than initially apparent;<sup>236</sup> and finally, the incompatibility of the various eschatological statements in the NT, which evidence “nicht nur einen breiten Spannungsbogen, sondern ein hohes Maß an Gegensätzlichkeit.”<sup>237</sup>

Despite acknowledging such diversity, Hahn claims in the final paragraph of his TNT that Schlier’s demand for a portrayal of the inner unity of the NT is “nicht nur berechtigt, sie läßt sich auch durchführen”,<sup>238</sup> but also that such unity is not immediately accessible but must be demonstrated.<sup>239</sup> He concludes that: “Das Neue Testament erweist sich dabei durchaus als ein in sich geschlossenes Ganzes, ermöglicht aber gleichzeitig eine weitergehende theologische Reflexion und Erkenntnis und fordert zu stets neuem Nachdenken auf.”<sup>240</sup> However, that the NT is an “in sich geschlossenes Ganzes” is precisely the kind of judgement one cannot make based on a realistic assessment of Hahn’s own evidence. The diverse, angular, and sometimes contradictory nature of its theological texts, and the occasional nature of much of its contents do not allow it to be presented as a balanced, symmetrical, rounded completeness except at a high level of abstraction.

#### 4.3.1.5. *Hahn: The Unity of the NT as a Fundamental Theological Task.*

Hahn has consistently intimated that he sees the production of a unified TNT as a fundamental theological task since only the witness of Scripture allows us to say exactly

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<sup>234</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 804.

<sup>235</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 804.

<sup>236</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 804.

<sup>237</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 804.

<sup>238</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 806 .

<sup>239</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 806.

<sup>240</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 806.

what Christian faith, proclamation and community are.<sup>241</sup> However, for Hahn, establishing the required “Einheit der Theologie”<sup>242</sup> involves drawing a distinction between *Grundgeschehen*, *Grundzeugnis*, and *Grundüberlieferung*.<sup>243</sup>

According to Hahn, the *Grundgeschehen* refers to the revelatory act of God in Jesus Christ and its soteriological implications. It precedes and grounds all theology and forms the basic content of all theology. However, this *Grundgeschehen* is only accessible by means of the *Grundzeugnis* of the first disciples. This *Grundzeugnis* relates to the life and work of Jesus, his resurrection, Pentecost, and the effect of the salvation-event on the disciples themselves and is only found in the early confessional statements of Early Christianity. The NT reveals that the basic *Grundzeugnis* received much elaboration and explanation. Hahn suggests that this theological reflection upon the content of faith and proclamation led to a *Grundüberlieferung*, which was diverse and yet related back to the common *Grundzeugnis*. Thus, just as the *Grundgeschehen* and *Grundzeugnis* “unmittelbar aufeinander bezogen sind”,<sup>244</sup> so also the *Grundzeugnis* and theological reflection upon it - the *Grundüberlieferung* - are closely related. For Hahn, the task of a TNT is to clarify, for the purpose of fundamental theology exactly what, in the light of the *Grundzeugnis* and the diverse *Grundüberlieferung*, the common *Gesamtzeugnis* of Scripture is.<sup>245</sup>

Hahn’s analysis is deeply flawed. Firstly, if access to the *Grundgeschehen* only takes place through the *Grundzeugnis*, this renders such access dependent upon historical-criticism, which attempts to isolate such early confessional statements from the NT texts. Furthermore, these statements are only available as part of the NT documents which leads to the question as to whether, even if one could separate all alleged confessional

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<sup>241</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 34. Hahn’s main essays relating to the TNT to the discipline of Fundamental Theology are collected in F. Hahn, *Studien zum Neuen Testament I: Grundsatzfragen, Jesusforschung, Evangelien*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). They include *Exegese und Fundamentaltheologie* (1975) 47-67; *Urchristliche Lehre und neutestamentliche Theologie* (1982) 83-135; and *Vielfalt und Einheit des Neuen Testaments. Zum Problem einer neutestamentlichen Theologie* (1994) 138-149.

<sup>242</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 35.

<sup>243</sup> This distinction was first made in Hahn’s essay “Exegese und Fundamentaltheologie”. We will focus on the updated summary of his position as found in the second volume of his TNT.

<sup>244</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 35.

<sup>245</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 35.

statements of primitive Christianity from the texts, we would have an “original” confession or one adapted to the purposes of the NT author.

This leads to a second problem. Hahn’s model appears to demean the *Grundüberlieferung* on the basis of its nature as “theologische Reflexion und Explikation” and posits the chimerical *Grundzeugnis* as the true witness, untainted by the distortions of “theological reflection”. He attempts to protect the *Grundgeschehen* from diverse theological interpretations by placing the *Grundzeugnis* as an impenetrable barrier between *Grundgeschehen* and *Grundüberlieferung*. Thus, diverse interpretations are only allowed to flow from reflection on the mediated witness of the confessional statements and not directly from reflection upon the event itself. However, the claim that a confession of faith (*Grundzeugnis*), which transmits theological content through the medium of language, can flow directly from an event (*Grundgeschehen*) without recourse to theological reflection is mistaken. In reality, there is *no* access to the *Grundgeschehen* without the medium of theological reflection. The so-called confessional statements of Early Christianity, if they are indeed genuinely recoverable, are themselves evidence of theological reflection upon the meaning of the *Grundgeschehen*. Hahn’s desired distinction between an untainted *Grundzeugnis* and an interpretive diverse *Grundüberlieferung* is an attempt to justify his elucidation of a unified *Grundzeugnis* of the NT as the permanent basis of theology. However, the reality is simply that the *Grundüberlieferung*, in its diversity, is precisely the *Grundzeugnis* of Christianity and cannot be distilled into a pre-reflective unified essence of NT theology.

#### 4.3.1.6. *Hahn: Convergence or Presuppositions?*

Hahn problematically uses the term “Konvergenz” in relation to the commonalities he finds in the NT.<sup>246</sup> This gives the false impression that the NT writers began from divergent standing points and moved towards each other as they theologised.<sup>247</sup> However,

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<sup>246</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 803.

<sup>247</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 803.



Hahn states that there are two primary components which are decisive for the inner unity of the Early Christian message: “Die urchristliche Botschaft hat ihr entscheidendes Kennzeichen darin, daß sie den Gottesglauben und die Verheißungstradition des alten Bundes voraussetzt.”<sup>248</sup> Thus, the logic of Hahn’s own investigations implies that the decisive components of any attempt to grasp NT unity are *presuppositional* to the theological activity of the NT writers. As a “presupposition”, such unity is logically prior to the linguistic articulation of the actual NT theologies themselves. However, since Hahn never precisely defines exactly what he means by “unity”, its location shifts depending on Hahn’s rhetorical needs, sometimes being located within the biblical texts, other times within a *Grundzeugnis*, and also at a presuppositional level. However, by locating “unity” within presuppositions rather than at the level of textual articulation, it would be possible to set out a broad framework within which NT theologising is conducted rather than attempt the reconciliation of the diverse NT theologies to reconstruct *the* NT theology.

#### 4.3.1.7. Hahn: Summary Assessment.

Given the vast systematic and dogmatic scope of his project, Hahn is at least consistent in trying to prevent his work from degenerating into a series of “proof-texted” claims. Whilst the integrity of the NT texts is not fully respected, Hahn continually offers honest assessments concerning NT unity and diversity although his predisposition towards discovering unity that is serviceable for the cause of fundamental theology leads him to turn very generalised and abstract claims into an “inner unity”. The main flaw lies in Hahn’s hermeneutical model which confuses the likely shared general presuppositions of the NT writers that informed their unique theologies with a fundamental theological unity. Furthermore, Hahn fails to offer a truly workable model for interacting theologically and historically with the NT texts. Hahn’s *Theologieggeschichte* fails to meet the constructive requirements of the genre by neglecting analysis of theological development and limiting the evidence to canonical and “orthodox” texts. The

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<sup>248</sup> Hahn, TNT:II, 805.

*Thematische Darstellung* offers a useful compendium to the approach to various dogmatic themes within the NT texts but unfortunately remains within the theological horizon of the NT texts, leaving the task of constructing a theology meaningful for the contemporary reader to the systematic theologians.

#### 4.3.2. Wilckens: TNT as a “Spiritual” Task.

In a remarkable coincidence, the first instalment of Wilckens’ mammoth TNT was published in 2002, the same year that Hahn released the first volume of his project. Like Hahn, Wilckens adopted a two stage model of an initial *Geschichte der urchristlichen Theologie* designed to acknowledge the diversity of the NT texts,<sup>249</sup> followed by *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments als Grundlage kirchlicher Lehre*, which would aim to elucidate a theological unity of the NT texts.<sup>250</sup> Originally Wilckens had aimed to culminate his TNT with an original third stage *Historisch-kritischen Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Bibelexegese*<sup>251</sup> which would provide the clarification and justification for his approach in the first two stages but this was later abandoned.<sup>252</sup> By virtue of its structure (projected and actual) one can note from the outset that Wilckens, like Hahn, adopts many critical insights of biblical scholarship in relation to the diverse

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<sup>249</sup> Wilckens’ project was published over seven years and underwent some revision in terms of projected volumes and their parts. The first volume eventually consisted of four books: U. Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: I.1. Geschichte der urchristlichen Theologie: Geschichte des Wirkens Jesu in Galiläa*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2005<sup>2</sup>, 2002); U. Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: I.2. Geschichte der urchristlichen Theologie: Jesu Tod und Auferstehung und die Entstehung der Kirche aus Juden und Heiden*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007<sup>2</sup>, 2003); U. Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: I.3. Geschichte der urchristlichen Theologie: Die Briefe des Urchristentums: Paulus und seine Schüler, Theologen aus dem Bereich judenchristlicher Heidenmission*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2005); U. Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: I.4. Geschichte der urchristlichen Theologie: Die Evangelien. Die Apostelgeschichte, die Johannesbriefe, die Offenbarung und die Entstehung des Kanons*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2005).

<sup>250</sup> The second volume consists of two books: U. Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: II.1. Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments als Grundlage kirchlicher Lehre: Das Fundament*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007); U. Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: II.2. Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments als Grundlage kirchlicher Lehre: Der Aufbau*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009).

<sup>251</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 61.

<sup>252</sup> Wilckens’ latest book scheduled for publication in 10.2012, which is not linked to his TNT, may be a scaled down version of what he originally intended: *Kritik der Bibelkritik: Wie die Bibel wieder zur Heiligen Schrift werden kann*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, forthcoming).

NT texts but simultaneously rejects the idea that the theological task is complete without a demonstration of NT unity.

#### 4.3.2.1. *Wilckens: Presuppositions and Approach.*

Wilckens is unapologetic about the theological, ecclesial, and personal interests permeating his TNT. In the preface to the first volume, Wilckens' refers to his own wartime experience as a sixteen year old in which he came to faith and a hope in the God who can bring life to the dead.<sup>253</sup> The themes of the reality of God and his resurrection power run throughout the whole TNT. It affects his presentation of current historical-critical exegesis in Germany as being unduly attached to 19<sup>th</sup> century presuppositions leading to the reduction of the NT texts to merely human reflections about God.<sup>254</sup> It is also responsible for the attempt to move the resurrection from being viewed as an interpretation of the NT writers to a historical fact that grounds all their theological reflection: ““Gott *hat* Jesus von den Toten auferweckt”, ist nicht als das älteste theologische “Interpretament” urchristlichen Glaubens zu beurteilen, sondern als dessen Grund.”<sup>255</sup>

Given this commitment to the reality of God as the horizon of the NT texts, Wilckens begins his TNT with a doxological meditation on Romans 11: 33, 36, which he terms “Gottes-Staunen.”<sup>256</sup> Indeed, since for Wilckens genuine theology cannot simply be talking about NT texts and God but rather “anbetender Rede vor Gott”,<sup>257</sup> systematic theology must be doxological in character. Whereas volume one of his TNT concentrates on “Nach-Erzählen” of the divine acts of God, volume two focuses on “Nach-Denken” over the inner connections and unity of the biblical witness.<sup>258</sup> This corresponds to an attitude of “wonderment” (*Staunen*) over the God who acts which runs throughout

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<sup>253</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, v-vi.

<sup>254</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 21-25.

<sup>255</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 28.

<sup>256</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 1-2.

<sup>257</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 65.

<sup>258</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 63-65.

volume one and then turns into prayerful “praise” (*Lobpreis*) as the narrative structure is abandoned and synthetic theological categories employed.<sup>259</sup>

After the opening doxology, Wilckens’ first move is to discuss the relationship of the OT to the NT. This seems a surprising move at first but Wilckens is keen to highlight that both Testaments bear witness to the same God.<sup>260</sup> This “Grundvoraussetzung” of every TNT means that focussing only on the direct citations and allusions to the OT in the NT (as Hübner does) rather than on the OT as a whole is held to be inadequate by Wilckens.<sup>261</sup> He maintains that the TNT needs to retain constant “visual contact” (“Blickkontakt”) with the OT, since it presumes the identity of the God of Jesus Christ with the God of Israel.<sup>262</sup> Despite this claim, Wilckens refrains from any detailed consideration of the OT until his substantial discussion of the “Theo-logie des Alten Testaments” in volume II.1.<sup>263</sup>

Following the establishment of the link between the OT and NT, Wilckens moves on to consider the problems facing the TNT genre. He argues that Gabler’s establishment of the genre in the Enlightenment meant the beginning of investigating the biblical canon according to the separation of OT and NT. By virtue of this sundering of the canon the rejection of the doctrine of the unity of divine inspiration was able to undermine the stance of the Reformers. Wilckens argues that the use of “historical-critical exegesis” was an instrument used to produce a “purely rational” dogmatics suited to the contemporary believer.<sup>264</sup> Drawing on a “Wort-Gottes” theology, Wilckens seeks to redress the direction of the TNT by critiquing historical-criticism itself. His basic criticism is that current historical-critical exegesis allows its results to be determined by its worldview in

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<sup>259</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 63-65.

<sup>260</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 2-3.

<sup>261</sup> Wilckens thus classifies Hübner’s approach (see below for Hübner) as simply “eine wichtige Vorstudie für eine Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments” (TNT I.1, 48), whilst also acknowledging his BTNT as “großartig” (Wilckens, TNT I.1, 13 n.22). Overall Wilckens’ seems to have been much influenced by Hübner’s theological approach which also used the unity of God between the Testaments and a focus on divine revelation as categories through which to discern a unity amongst the diverse theological texts of the Bible.

<sup>262</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 2-14.

<sup>263</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 86-174.

<sup>264</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 14-18.

advance. This is especially the case in relation to the resurrection of Jesus, whereby interpretation is frequently not based on rigorous exegetical grounds but on the assumptions of the interpreter.<sup>265</sup> Wilckens aims to take an antithetical approach which acknowledges that the NT texts do not just speak about God (“über Gott”) but rather recognises that the reader of the NT “in den Aussagen *über Gott* der Wirklichkeit *Gottes selbst* begegnet.”<sup>266</sup> Such an approach can utilise the historical-critical method without letting it prevent the texts’ claims being heard as divine claims themselves. For Wilckens, the abandonment of a “purely historical” approach (in the rationalist sense of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) means that “alle üblicherweise vorgetragenen Gründe gegen die Wirklichkeit der Auferweckung Jesu alles andere als *exegetisch* zwingend sind.”<sup>267</sup> Thus, Wilckens’ combative style is designed to clearly draw the battle lines between his TNT and those of his predecessors.<sup>268</sup> The emphasis falls decidedly on theology rather than history.

The emphasis on theology marks Wilckens’ programmatic description of what his TNT will attempt. Of previous attempts he finds the work of Stuhlmacher noteworthy though he critiques him for his failure to truly produce a fully-fledged NT theology rather than a “Mitte der Schrift.”<sup>269</sup> Wilckens rejects Berger’s approach in the *Theologiegeschichte* since it lacks a fully developed theological element and does not take the implications of the development of canonical boundaries seriously enough.<sup>270</sup> Theissen’s semiotic *Religionsgeschichte* is perceived as being able to offer a theoretical foundation for the TNT but also lacks a truly theological element by leaving the experiential element of the “Wirklichkeit Gottes” in the NT down to the choice of the reader to pursue.<sup>271</sup> In contrast to all these works, Wilckens refuses to pursue “Religionsgeschichte” at the expense of theology. Following the “critical” *Theologiegeschichte* of volume I, Wilckens develops a systematic NT theology in volume II, which attempts “in der Pluralität urchristlicher *Theologien* nach der ihnen zugrundeliegenden *gemeinsamen Theologie* ernsthaft zu

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<sup>265</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 21-28.

<sup>266</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 1 italics his.

<sup>267</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 42.

<sup>268</sup> See the comments made by C. Böttrich in: “Kritisches Forum: Ulrich Wilcken’s “Theologie des Neuen Testaments”, *EvangTheol.* 64.3 (2004): 232-233.

<sup>269</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 46.

<sup>270</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 48-49. For Berger see below.

<sup>271</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 49-50. For Theissen see below.

suchen.”<sup>272</sup> However, the discovery of “unity” is presupposed even before the “search” has begun, since in his introduction Wilckens already proclaims the common source of the unity of early Christian theology:

“Die Einheit und Gemeinsamkeit urchristlichen Glaubens und urchristlicher Theologie hat in der Wirklichkeit Gottes ihren eigentlichen Grund.”<sup>273</sup>

The constant refrain of the “reality of God” will thus function throughout as a meta-category which allows the diversity of theologies to be considered as a single divine revelation and thus as sharing a unified theology. In this sense, Wilckens is writing a fundamental theology that establishes the revelation of the one God through the biblical witnesses. This concern with revelation and the adoption of doxological discourse is linked to Wilckens’ concluding personal note to the methodological prolegomena to his TNT. For him, following the painful discovery that former students who were now young pastors had more or less abandoned exegetical work on the Bible due to its perceived lack of relevance, writing his TNT as a doxological witness to the reality of God was also an act of repentance.<sup>274</sup> Sympathetic readers will no doubt find the theologically highly charged and personal confessional tone of Wilckens deeply refreshing. The more sceptical may feel that the work lacks appropriate academic rigour and suffers from an overly polemical undertone. More important though, is the way Wilckens actually treats the NT texts.

#### 4.3.2.2. *Wilckens: Methodology and Results of TNT: I.*

The first volume of Wilckens’ TNT is a strange mixture of history and literary analysis. The first two parts offer description of the environment in which Jesus was active, a historical reconstruction of Jesus’ life and works, and a description of the founding of the early Church based on Acts. By their very nature, these parts require the selection of texts

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<sup>272</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 54 italics his.

<sup>273</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 55 italics removed.

<sup>274</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.1, 66.

from the Synoptic Gospels and Acts to aid in the reconstruction. The latter two parts of volume one turn their attention to the texts themselves. They proceed by mixing chronological factors with factors of literary and theological influence in order to determine the sequence of the texts being treated. Thus, volume one part three begins with Paul but is followed by the epistles from the Pauline school and the later NT, with the exception of the Johannine letters. Volume one part four considers the Gospels and Acts, the Johannine letters, and Revelation. Strikingly, despite his theological commitments, Wilckens chooses to include a section on the hypothetical sayings source Q alongside his treatment of Mark.<sup>275</sup> The theological commitment to establish as much continuity between the historical Jesus of Nazareth and the theologies of the NT as possible thus legitimates the use of hypothetical reconstructions from canonical materials whilst simultaneously rejecting the inclusion of non-canonical texts as part of the *Theologiegeschichte*.

The treatment of the NT texts is quite inconsistent throughout volume one, parts three and four. At times, Wilckens offers a potted commentary proceeding section by section through a particular text. The almost 80 pages long treatment of Romans is the prime example of this.<sup>276</sup> Other texts are treated thematically. For example, Matthew is treated synthetically under seven thematic headings such as “Jesus als Lehrer” and “Theologie und Christologie.”<sup>277</sup> The contours of the work as a whole are lost entirely in the process, James, the Petrine epistles, and Jude being treated rather summarily.<sup>278</sup> For example, the main focus of discussion with reference to James is on the “works-faith” issue in relation to Paul. Ultimately, Wilckens finds James wanting as an epistle. In a surprising deployment of “Sachkritik”, Wilckens criticises James’ theological argumentation since he fails to argue for the “grenzenlose Kraft der Liebe des gekreuzigten Christus” or point out that Christ has freed believers from sin and empowers them to start anew in love.<sup>279</sup> Wilckens concludes: “Das alles darf ein seelsorgerlich-mahnender Prediger eigentlich

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<sup>275</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.4, 1-49.

<sup>276</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.3, 165-241.

<sup>277</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.4, 51-87.

<sup>278</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.3, 356-389.

<sup>279</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.3, 365.

nicht fehlen lassen.”<sup>280</sup> To criticise James for not being Pauline enough suggests that for all Wilckens’ commitment to one God and the unity of divine revelation, his theological approach is overly determined by his existing theological concerns (essentially Pauline) and too little by a willingness to embrace the diversity of the texts themselves in their function as canon. Such a position is no doubt affected by Wilckens’ assessment of the historical factors leading to the late inclusion of the “early Catholic” epistles in the canon and the validity of Luthers’ marginalisation of the book of James elucidated in the closing section of volume I on the development of the canon.<sup>281</sup>

#### 4.3.2.3. *Wilckens: Methodology and Results of TNT: II.*

Wilckens begins the second volume of his TNT with an extended reflection on the theological justification for the attempt to read the NT texts as a theological unity. For Wilckens, the NT testifies to one Gospel and, inseparable from the OT, forms a whole which speaks of the one “Heilsgeschichte.”<sup>282</sup> The unity of the NT does not lie “behind” or “above” history, whether in relation to Jesus’ life or the multiple forms of the Early Church’s proclamation. Rather, the “unity” lies in the divine action within history.<sup>283</sup> However, Wilckens still maintains that a systematisation of the theologies of the NT is possible so long as the arrangement of topics inductively springs from exegetical observations rather than being imposed from outside and the reality of God remains central to all deliberations.<sup>284</sup> For Wilckens, the unity of the Godhead is the presupposition of the TNT. One divine action through one Jesus Christ forms the one centre of all proclamation and faith and thus legitimates the discernment of a unified theology.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.3, 365.

<sup>281</sup> Wilckens, TNT:I.4, 304, 331-332.

<sup>282</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 1.

<sup>283</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 2.

<sup>284</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 2-3.

<sup>285</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 3 n.1.



“Eine solche ‘Harmonisierung’ [of the NT theologies] ist nicht nur methodisch erlaubt, sondern eben auch theo-logisch geboten.”<sup>286</sup>

Wilckens is aware of the dangers of a “falsche Harmonisierung” which misuses NT statements for the purposes of the theological reconstruction of the interpreter rather than for the actual purposes intended in the texts. However, to avoid this danger, he claims that his focus is not simply on the content of the NT theologies but the manner of thought (“Denkweise”) by means of which their divine truth is able to be acknowledged by contemporary readers. Wilckens’ dogmatic-theological approach thus also has apologetic intent.

Wilckens concurs with Hahn that the notion of a canon and the unity of divine revelation indicate that the NT texts are to be grasped as a “lebendiger Einheit.”<sup>287</sup> There is a productive tension in Scripture - the “one Gospel” is only available by means of the four canonical Gospels.<sup>288</sup> However, the perception of the unity of the Gospel is ultimately a divine gift rather than an academic task. Using the common “choir” metaphor Wilckens claims:

“Die Einheit des Evangeliums im vielstimmigen Chor der Schriften wahrzunehmen, war und ist die Gabe des Heiligen Geistes, der im Zeugnis der Schriften und in ihrem gottesdienstlichen Hören ein und dasselbe ist.”<sup>289</sup>

Wilckens thus attempts to move the quest for the “innere Einheit”<sup>290</sup> away from the realm of rational methodological investigation into the realms of divinely bestowed insight. Correspondingly, Wilckens argues for the integration of a theological and “spiritual” hermeneutic to supplement the approach of “philologisch-historische Exegese.”<sup>291</sup> He states:

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<sup>286</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 3 italics removed.

<sup>287</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 5-7. Wilckens calls Hahn’s TNT “epochal” (TNT II.1, 5).

<sup>288</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 35, 38-40.

<sup>289</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 35-36.

<sup>290</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 2.

<sup>291</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 60.

“Die historische Aufgabe der Auslegung [bietet] einen Reichtum an Chancen, im Neuen Testament immer wieder Neues zu entdecken, wie auch an Möglichkeiten, dem Gesamtbild sozusagen Farbe und Form zu geben. Die Chance “kanonischer Exegese” besteht darin, die einzelnen Schriften mit ihrem Eigentümlichkeiten und die individuellen Theologien mit ihrer jeweils besonderen Stoßrichtung *einander ergänzen* zu lassen.”<sup>292</sup>

Linking back to Wilckens’ confession of the TNT as an act of repentance, the attempt to “transcend”<sup>293</sup> the different parts of the NT for the sake of the theological whole is deemed as pastorally necessary.<sup>294</sup> Operating dualistically, Wilckens refers to the “geistlichen Gehalt[.]” of the biblical texts,<sup>295</sup> which requires a pneumatically empowered interpreter who can move beyond the “literal” sense of the texts to penetrate to the theological centre.<sup>296</sup> The modern recovery of the medieval “fourfold sense of Scripture” is Wilckens’ hermeneutical program to achieve this goal.<sup>297</sup> Throughout Wilckens’ work as a whole but particularly here, Bultmann’s approach to the TNT and the hermeneutical task is the central polemical target.<sup>298</sup>

After arguing for the need for a pneumatic exegesis to effectively work theologically with the NT, Wilckens spends the rest of volume two writing what is in effect a biblical dogmatics. Volume two part one effectively treats the Trinity with a discussion of the revelation of God in the OT preceding treatment of God’s action in Jesus, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and a closing section on the Holy Spirit. Volume two part two builds on this by considering matters primarily in relation to ecclesiology such as the sacraments, prayer and the Gospel, as well as chapters on ethics (Christians and the Law) and eschatology. Almost every chapter closes with a doxological statement or prayer. The volume closes the TNT as a whole with further reflection on “Gott als Drei-Einheit”,

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<sup>292</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 57 italics his.

<sup>293</sup> See Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 59.

<sup>294</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 68.

<sup>295</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 68.

<sup>296</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 61.

<sup>297</sup> See Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 60-85, which culminates in a sixfold doxology to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>298</sup> For example, Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 68-70.

followed by a reprise of the doxology which opened the TNT.<sup>299</sup> The approach throughout generally involves a mixture of proof-texting relevant biblical texts to facilitate the construction of a thematic dogmatic, coupled with short passages which treat unique perspectives of an NT text with integrity; for example, Jesus' interpretation of the Law in Matthew's gospel.<sup>300</sup> Overall, the relation of volume two, which comprises the dogmatic section, to volume one of Wilckens' TNT remains tenuous. Both volumes could quite easily have been published as separate projects given their separate methodologies.

#### 4.3.2.4. *Wilckens: Summary Assessment.*

The consequences of Wilckens' hermeneutical approach to the TNT are immense. He constructs a series of fundamental dualisms between the Academy and the Church, historical-critical method and spiritual exegesis, and talk "about" God and listening "to" God. Theological meta-categories dominate his hermeneutical approach to the biblical texts. Despite his recognition of the diversity of the NT texts, multiple theological presuppositions serve to relativise this finding (for example, "one Gospel", "Mitte der Schrift", "Heilsgeschichte", "Wirklichkeit Gottes", "Handeln Gottes", and "revelation"). These presuppositions lead to the claim that the Bible is "unvergleichbar mit allen Büchern sonst"<sup>301</sup> and legitimates the use of pneumatic exegesis that can discern the "inner unity" of the Scriptures and produce a biblical dogmatics.

Such an approach moves Wilckens' unified theology into an ecclesial realm, a pietist enclave lying beyond the claims of universal rational discourse. The adoption of a special hermeneutic for the NT means the devaluation of the norms of textual and literary interpretation found throughout the *Geisteswissenschaften*. This prevents Wilckens' work from making any contribution to interdisciplinary discourses or allowing work in other

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<sup>299</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.2, 340-348.

<sup>300</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.2, 169-173.

<sup>301</sup> Wilckens, TNT:II.1, 1.

disciplines to feed into the theology which he constructs. The doxological and dogmatic approach employed (deliberately) enhances this alienating effect.

Whilst volume one tries with some success to acknowledge the historical diversity of Early Christianity, Wilckens ends up silencing textual plurality and diversity in the theological task rather than exploiting it. The dogmatic proof-texting approach which comprises much of volume two bears little or no relation to the first volume of the TNT and absorbs the NT texts into a single pneumatically inspired fundamental theology. The literary integrity and theological diversity of the NT texts are sacrificed in the process. Furthermore, Paul and the Gospels become the central texts determining the fundamental unified theology of the Church with other NT texts left marginalised. The unity that Wilckens discovers in the NT texts is only made possible by the use of hermeneutical and dogmatic tools that legitimate the transcendence of the actual texts in the name of a fundamental theology.

#### 4.3.2.5. *Hahn and Wilckens: Conclusion.*

Hahn and Wilckens offer innovative two-stage TNT models in order to answer what they perceive as a fundamental-theological necessity – the demonstration of the unity of NT theology. The theological concerns driving both projects lead Hahn to miss the logical conclusions of his investigations concerning the unity of the NT at a presuppositional rather than explicative level, whilst Wilckens retreats from the accountability of public academic discourse into a private ecclesial sphere in which the theological unity of the biblical texts is disclosed by virtue of a divine pneumatological gift.

Both TNTs fail to adequately carry out the first stage of their project with the *Theologiegeschichten* essentially being portrayals of the historical Jesus and a literary survey of the NT canon, rather than a full blown exploration of Early Christianity as a background phenomenon for interpreting the NT texts theologically. It is perhaps precisely this weakness which leads to such little interaction between the first and second

stages of both projects. Except for fear of academic scorn for writing volumes on the unity of the NT, it is difficult to see why Hahn and Wilckens actually invested so much time on the first stage of their respective projects when the “dogmatic” sections can stand alone.

It is quite remarkable that in works of over 1,000 pages, it is rare for a NT text to be considered as a literary integral whole and interpreted with a clear view as to its likely historical context. The biblical texts are often treated piecemeal with the textual surface being skimmed for support in relation to a particular theme. The result is a descriptive theology that remains within the linguistic and theological horizons of the NT texts and therefore fails to genuinely interpret the texts for the contemporary reader. Above all, far from supplying a firm and stable foundation for the construction of a theology, the TNTs of Hahn and Wilckens are indebted to misleading hermeneutical assumptions about the nature of human interpretation and the proper role of Scripture in the theological task.

#### 4.3.3. *Thüsing: Criteria for a NT Theology.*<sup>302</sup>

##### 4.3.3.1. *Thüsing: Unity as a Canonical Imperative.*

Thüsing argues that the question of a “verborgene Einheit” within the diversity of the NT is a “fundamental postulate” which no TNT which seeks to be theologically relevant can ignore. Therefore, a TNT must consider both the theological distinctiveness of the diverse NT witnesses and search for their hidden unity.<sup>303</sup> The grounds for such a search do not lie within the individual NT writings themselves but in the fact that the Church has

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<sup>302</sup> W. Thüsing, *Die neutestamentlichen Theologien und Jesus Christus: Grundlegung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments I: Kriterien aufgrund der Rückfrage nach Jesus und des Glaubens an seine Erweckung*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1996); *Die neutestamentlichen Theologien und Jesus Christus: Grundlegung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments II: Programm einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments mit Perspektiven für eine Biblische Theologie*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1998); *Die neutestamentlichen Theologien und Jesus Christus: Grundlegung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments III: Einzigkeit Gottes und Jesus-Christus Ereignis*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1999). Thüsing’s project will henceforth be referenced as TNT:I, TNT:II, and TNT:III.

<sup>303</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 32.

declared that the writings contained within the canon are normative. Since this normativity relates to the canon as a whole, faith and obedience cannot be orientated towards isolated sayings of the NT but must encompass the totality (“Ganzheitlichkeit”) of the Gospel in order that a fixation on real or apparent discrepancies within the diversity of the texts cannot hinder the ability of the texts to fully unleash the “Dynamik” of the Gospel as grounded in the eschatological act of the only God.<sup>304</sup> Thus, Thüsing argues that:

“Die Vielfalt darf der Kraft des Evangeliums nicht hemmend entgegenreten. Vielmehr vermag sie, sofern sie trotz aller Diskrepanzen *Reichtum und Fülle* ist, gerade am *Dienst der Theologie des Neuen Testaments an der Verkündigung der Großtaten Gottes* mitzuwirken.”<sup>305</sup>

Thüsing thus offers ecclesial and dogmatic justification for finding a hidden unity behind the NT writings rather than relying on the claims or purposes of the writings themselves. Whilst he maintains that the diverse writings contribute to an understanding of the one Gospel, he also sees in this diversity a threat that could undermine the effectiveness of the Gospel.

#### 4.3.3.2. *Thüsing: Uncovering Hidden Structural Unity.*

Thüsing draws up a list of criteria that he locates in the totality of the canon in order to define what a truly Christian NT theology is. His first volume is devoted to detailing this “Ursprungsstruktur des Christlichen” based around his programmatic statement that:

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<sup>304</sup> For Thüsing, *Theozentrik* is the central category of NT theology which lies behind everything that may be said Christologically. See: W. Thüsing, *Gott und Christus in der paulinischen Soteriologie: Per Christum in Deum. Das Verhältnis der Christozentrik zur Theozentrik*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1986<sup>3</sup>, 1965); W. Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979<sup>3</sup>); W. Thüsing, “Das Gottesbild des Neuen Testaments” in W. Thüsing, *Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 59-86.

<sup>305</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 32-33 italics his.

“Maßstab der Legitimation von christlichen Theologien ist weder allein der irdische Jesus und seine ‘Sache’ noch allein der Erhöhte, sondern der Jesus des neutestamentlichen Glaubens, der der Irdische (also letztlich der Gekreuzigte) und der Auferweckte in Identität ist.”<sup>306</sup>

Hidden away in a footnote, Thüsing makes an astonishing claim:

“Hiermit ist zunächst nur gesagt, daß die in diesem Band zu erarbeitenden Kriterien – die “Ursprungskriterien” – auch über das Neue Testament hinaus relevant sind, *also dauernd Kriterien bleiben.*”<sup>307</sup>

Thüsing thus claims to have found the criteria by which to judge the accuracy and completeness of all theological conceptions *for all time*, from those of the NT right up to the present day. For this reason, Thüsing defines the nature of his work as *fundamental-bibeltheologisch*<sup>308</sup> since it proceeds from the threefold faith presuppositions which underlie all theological work: faith in the continuing validity and effect of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth; faith in the resurrected and exalted Christ who is one in identity with Jesus of Nazareth; and acknowledgement of the OT as the soil in which the roots of NT faith could take hold.<sup>309</sup> It is *fundamental* since it is concerned with the transition from the “Ursprung” of Christian faith reflected in the foregoing presuppositions to the concrete expressions of NT faith, a transition which forms the basis of all further theologising.<sup>310</sup> For Thüsing, if one can correctly define the “Ursprung” of all faith one can then also go on to examine the legitimacy of all theological conceptions.

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<sup>306</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 28. Thüsing’s first “Kriterienreihe” depends on a great deal of reconstruction concerning the original intention and “Sache” of Jesus. This raises questions as to how long the results of Thüsing’s TNT would have lasted had he completed it. Thüsing was remarkably sanguine concerning the ability of contemporary exegetical studies to find historical results for his model that would stand the test of time (cf. 29ff.).

<sup>307</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 48 n.31 italics his.

<sup>308</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 46.

<sup>309</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 45.

<sup>310</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 45-46.

Thüsing's methodology means that he distinguishes between the "Rückfrage nach Jesus" and the "Legitimationsfrage". The task of the *Rückfrage* is to first retrieve the *intention* of Jesus as extracted from the Synoptic Gospels and then use it as the criterion for the *Legitimationsfrage*. For example, Thüsing argues that Jesus' statement "I am the true vine" in John 15:1 was never actually said by Jesus. However, he claims to be able to assess its theological legitimacy by measuring the degree to which the statement "I am the true vine" accords with the *intention* of Jesus as retrieved by his *Rückfrage*.<sup>311</sup> The amount of conjectural historical reconstruction necessary to carry out such a programme is mind boggling and, as noted above, Thüsing's optimism in trying to extract timeless theological criteria from the results of historical investigation and reconstruction is hopelessly naïve.

For Thüsing, these criteria and their relevant content<sup>312</sup> allow one to judge the adequacy of all theological conceptions in terms of expressing the totality of what is Christian. Adherence to these criteria is the standard not only for all later theological conceptions but also the NT writings themselves. At this point, Thüsing adapts his language to avoid speaking of *legitimising* the NT writings, since this would conflict with their canonical status. Instead, he speaks of questioning their "Tragfähigkeit" (literally 'load-bearing capacity') within both the entire NT witness and for future theology.<sup>313</sup> However, the result is still that the NT writings are to be interrogated as to their adequacy, according to an ideal standard apparently derived from the canon.<sup>314</sup> Thus, an abstract unity comes to determine the value of given diversity whilst rendering the individuality of each conception secondary. Remarkably, Thüsing claims that a believer could live "spiritually" by simply focussing on the "Ursprungsstruktur" as "the whole *en nuce*" although the aim of his method is to encourage believers to return to the texts.<sup>315</sup> Thus, the question arises as to which texts his "Ursprungsstruktur" is actually suited for. Here, one comes upon the most disastrous consequence of Thüsing's approach.

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<sup>311</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 43-44.

<sup>312</sup> For full details see Thüsing, TNT:I, particularly pages 208-211.

<sup>313</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 91.

<sup>314</sup> Frey also points out the abstract nature of Thüsing's criteria which are used to determine the unity of the NT and the worthiness of all theological conceptions. (see Frey, "Zum Problem...", 37).

<sup>315</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 144.



#### 4.3.3.3. *Thüsing: Discriminating Amongst Texts.*

Given Thüsing's rhetoric concerning doing justice to the "Gesamtzeugnis" of the NT, finding the hidden unity underlying the NT documents, and avoiding the *Mitte der Schrift* and *Kanon im Kanon* approaches, one could be forgiven for assuming that his own method would not blatantly discriminate between the texts of the NT.<sup>316</sup> This is, however, far from the case. Thüsing claims that in order to carry out his project he must select various theological conceptions out of the NT in order to provide some focus. Unsurprisingly, he selects the Pauline and Johannine theologies as his main focus on methodological-hermeneutical grounds,<sup>317</sup> namely because these theologies contrast each other and are complex enough to provide thoroughgoing theological structures which may be usefully viewed in relation to the "Ursprungsstruktur." Thüsing goes on to presuppose the results that he maintains his investigation will provide when he notes that the Pauline and Johannine conceptions have divergent thought-structures and yet converge in the intention of their witness. For all these reasons, they can offer further orientation in regard to proceeding with the analysis of the theological conceptions of the other NT writings.<sup>318</sup> However, it is questionable as to whether a procedure based on prioritising Pauline and Johannine theology, as providing orientation in relation to Thüsing's abstract "Ursprungsstruktur", can ever really allow the diverse "minor" NT theologies to truly speak for themselves on an equal footing with others.

In terms of other NT theologies, Thüsing suggests the Synoptic Gospels (and Acts) take pride of place amongst the other NT writings because they offer the opportunity to see how the Jesus tradition was modified in the light of resurrection faith. He suggests that, through an investigation into the redactional interest of each Gospel writer, one is able to raise the question as to the "historical Jesus" and set the results of this investigation in

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<sup>316</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, For *Gesamtzeugnis* and *verborgene Einheit* see *passim*, for *Mitte der Schrift* and *Kanon im Kanon* see 169-174.

<sup>317</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 112.

<sup>318</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 112-113.

dialogue with the “Ursprungsstruktur.”<sup>319</sup> After this, the deuteropaulines are to be considered, with the emphasis falling mainly on Ephesians and secondly on Colossians. Although Thüsing maintains that they are less theologically relevant, he suggests the Pastoral letters could be considered, as well as 1 Peter. He also finds Hebrews worthy of consideration, whilst Revelation deserves a “skizzenhafte Behandlung” since otherwise a significant part of the NT witness would be missing.<sup>320</sup> Significantly, there is no mention whatsoever of a consideration of James, 2 Peter and Jude. That this is the case is demonstrated by Thüsing’s diagram of his approach which also lacks mention of 1 Peter, unless this is included among the deuteropaulines.<sup>321</sup>

Objections must be raised if James, 2 Peter and Jude are not deemed worthy of consideration in a project which seeks to discover the unity of the NT witnesses. Thüsing’s definition of theology as “Logos von Gott, als Verkündigung des einzigen Gottes”<sup>322</sup> betrays a Johannine and Pauline bias, whilst his more general definition of TNT as “die Rede des Neuen Testaments von Gott” seems to collapse, despite Thüsing’s best intentions, into Christology when one considers his “Ursprungsstruktur”.<sup>323</sup> This definition of a TNT (based on the etymology of ‘theo-logy’<sup>324</sup>) reflects a typical prejudice towards more abstract theological ideas focussing on communicable information about God – death, resurrection, salvation, redemption – and divorces such content from theological reflection orientated towards social and ethical issues.<sup>325</sup> Thüsing’s textual preferences reflect a predilection for theology as a system-building enterprise in which John, Paul and the Synoptics contribute to the fundamental-theological task of creating a stable theological basis for all future theological systems of doctrine. Thüsing’s attempt

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<sup>319</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 113.

<sup>320</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 113.

<sup>321</sup> cf. Thüsing, TNT:II, 146. Thüsing also fails to cite any scripture verses from 2 Timothy, 2 John and 3 John throughout his entire 3 volume work, whilst Titus (one verse cited) and 2 Thessalonians (2 verses cited) are barely represented.

<sup>322</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 23.

<sup>323</sup> cf. Thüsing, TNT:I, 208-211.

<sup>324</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 23.

<sup>325</sup> This bias is reflected in the problematic division of NT studies into NT theology and NT ethics, see: F. Horn, “Die Nachfolgeethik Jesu und die urchristliche Gemeindeethik” in Breytenbach and Frey, especially 287-292. For a recent attempt to overcome the theology-ethics divide where it is most manifest amongst scholars – in treatments of Pauline thought – see: J. Lewis, *Looking for Life: The Role of ‘Theo-Ethical Reasoning’ in Paul’s Religion*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2005).

to provide a foundation for a TNT thus ultimately thwarts his attempt to genuinely consider the NT in its “Ganzheitlichkeit”.

Furthermore, in a manner reminiscent of Hahn’s distinction between *Grundzeugnis* and *Grundüberlieferung*, Thüsing’s attempt to recapture the “Ursprung” of Christian faith means that he must postulate a caesura between the “Ursprünge” and the actual NT so that the “Ursprung” can be grasped in its true force.<sup>326</sup> In order to preserve the purity of the “Ursprung”, Thüsing methodologically brackets not only the doctrinal statements of the Church but also the ‘later’ NT texts out of consideration, since one is unable to derive the original criteria from these later documents.<sup>327</sup> By so doing, he effectively undercuts the normative role of the NT canon since the later NT theologies can only be legitimated on the basis of an abstract historically reconstructed intention of Jesus.

Thüsing seeks to play down the implications of his approach for the NT canon with vague rhetorical appeals. He claims that the quest for the hidden unity of the NT writings is an attempt to display the NT message in its “Ganzheitlichkeit” and “Einfachheit” so that the Gospel as the *dunamis theou* can be seen in its fullness.<sup>328</sup> This *Ganzheitlichkeit* is made visible through structural comparative methods so that the reader encounters “das Ganze” which the “Makrotext” of the NT wishes to bring to our attention. This “Ganze” can then be brought into dialogue with the discipline of systematic theology as we construct theologies adequate to today.<sup>329</sup> However, the exact nature of this abstract “Ganze” is never clarified. Furthermore, Thüsing’s method is extremely complex, practically unworkable, and dependent on a variety of hermeneutical circles to construct “the whole”. Thüsing thus admits that his project sounds “utopian” though he maintains that it is still necessary.<sup>330</sup> However, the God-like “bird’s eye view” necessary to grasp

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<sup>326</sup> Thüsing oscillates between the use of the singular “Ursprung” and the plural “Ursprünge” in his argument. The use of the plural seems to refer to both the historical Jesus and the resurrection experience of the disciples, whilst the singular seems to cover the entire “Jesus-event” see Thüsing, TNT:I, 43-46.

<sup>327</sup> Thüsing, TNT:I, 45.

<sup>328</sup> Thüsing, TNT:II, 33.

<sup>329</sup> For detailed sketch of this whole procedure see Thüsing, “Zwischen Jahwehgläubigkeit und christologischem Dogma: Zu Position und Funktion der neutestamentlichen Exegese innerhalb der Theologie” in Thüsing, *Studien...*, (3-22) especially 17.

<sup>330</sup> See Thüsing, *Zwischen Jahwehgläubigkeit...*, 22.

“das Ganze” is unobtainable. A complete theology that incorporates the diverse historical nature of all theological conceptions in a single unified theological view is unobtainable. Whilst Thüsing’s rhetoric of “narrative theology”,<sup>331</sup> hermeneutical circle, dialogue, and *Geschichtlichkeit* suggest careful nuance, his ultimate desire to anchor a “complete” fundamental-theology firmly in the rock of the reconstructed intentions of Jesus of Nazareth, safe from the vicissitudes of history, is a hermeneutically impossible project.

#### 4.3.3.4. *Thüsing: Conclusion.*

Thüsing’s work exhibits extreme complexity but also hermeneutical naïvety in its attempt to show the hidden unity that lies within the diversity of the NT in order to provide a firm foundation for a “total theology.”<sup>332</sup> His attempt to provide a fundamental-theological foundation for theology relies on the shaky foundations of the historical reconstruction of Jesus’ intention. Furthermore, Thüsing’s claim to be able to elucidate the criteria by which all theologies, including the NT, may be tested raises the critical question as to how the NT canon should function in relation to theology. His approach implies that the NT itself is somehow deficient in its failure to provide a clear and logically articulated norm by which to judge various theologies. The fundamental-theological desire for an unassailable theological criterion fails to take seriously the interpretive nature of all theologising as well as the possibility of canonical diversity functioning as a beneficial theological resource.

Most damaging in terms of respect for canonical diversity is Thüsing’s methodology of extracting criteria through the marginalisation and occasional silencing of some of the NT texts, which is in effect the adoption of a *Kanon im Kanon* approach, appeals to “Ganzheitlichkeit” notwithstanding. As such, any criteria that Thüsing derives cannot genuinely reflect the NT canon as a whole. Instead, he selects theological criteria from texts which best suit his purposes. At times, Thüsing articulates some possible

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<sup>331</sup> For Thüsing’s definition of ‘narrative theology’ cf. *Zwischen Jahwehgläubigen...*, 15-16.

<sup>332</sup> Thüsing, TNT:III, xi.

presuppositions of the NT writers but his repeated attempts to uncover an “inner unity” located within the writings themselves leads him to use them as criteria *against* the NT canonical texts rather than as a hermeneutical explanation for the commonalities amidst the legitimate diversity.

#### 4.3.4. Kurt Niederwimmer: *The NT as a Fundamental-theological “Sinn-Einheit”*.

Niederwimmer’s TNT has been neglected in the general reviews of the genre conducted in recent years, perhaps because it at first appears to be merely a modification of Bultmann’s approach to the TNT from a Roman Catholic perspective. Niederwimmer’s proposal for the TNT genre was published in the article ‘Erwägungen zur Disziplin “Theologie des Neuen Testaments”’<sup>333</sup> and this is essentially reprinted as the prolegomena for Niederwimmer’s TNT.<sup>334</sup> Niederwimmer’s programmatic introduction will first be considered followed by an overview of the construction and result of his TNT.

##### 4.3.4.1. *Niederwimmer: Theological Construction and NT Diversity.*

Niederwimmer programmatically acknowledges the diversity of the NT texts, concluding that the NT does not provide in and of itself a complete, unified, systematic and explicit theology but rather a diversity of theological doctrinal outlines.<sup>335</sup> For Niederwimmer, this fact necessarily renders any form of ‘biblicism’, which attempts to ender the NT as the foundation of Christian life and praxis without the need for theological mediation, impossible.<sup>336</sup> Niederwimmer suggests that the diversity of the NT texts may be explained by simply pointing out the different presuppositions from which the biblical

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<sup>333</sup> K. Niederwimmer, “Erwägungen zur Disziplin “Theologie des Neuen Testaments”” in K. Niederwimmer, *Quaestiones theologicae: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 226-233.

<sup>334</sup> See K. Niederwimmer, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments: Ein Grundriss*, (Vienna: Evangelischer Presseverband, 2004<sup>3</sup>, 2003) 8-16.

<sup>335</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 10.

<sup>336</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 12.

writers developed their theologies. He notes that, for example, whereas Paul comes from a Pharisaical background and is strongly influenced by apocalyptic ideas, John is more influenced by the language and ideas of the wisdom tradition. On the other hand, the writer of Hebrews is an educated Hellenistic Jew who attempts to understand Christian faith through the lens of “Alexandrian” ontology.<sup>337</sup> Whilst such presuppositions necessarily affect the way the biblical writers present their theologies, Niederwimmer draws a distinction between the varying linguistic ‘packaging’ of their theologies and a common ‘intention’ behind the diverse theologies. This common intention is seen in the fact that all writers, despite differences, *intend* to bear witness to one and the same revelation, namely Christ. Niederwimmer admits that the NT does not (and can not) positively disclose this common intention in its current form. Rather the unity to be found in the linguistically diverse texts must be recognised and delineated by the interpreter. In other words, the unity of the NT theologies is “ein Produkt der Anstrengung der interpretierenden Vernunft”.<sup>338</sup>

Niederwimmer’s acknowledgement of the hermeneutically constitutive role of the interpreter in the discernment of a NT theology is subtle. By noting that Paul, John and the writer of Hebrews intend to explicate one and the same revelation, Niederwimmer does not thereby fall into the trap of claiming that they necessarily share a common theology. Rather, the distinction between the foundational Christ event and the resultant theological explications of that event is preserved. This allows the NT interpreter to gain access to the Christ event via a number of different hermeneutical lenses – Paul, John and Hebrews – and forces the interpreter to construct, rather than extract, a theology.

Two other features of the NT texts cause Niederwimmer to develop his notion of a constructive, mediating role for the NT interpreter. The first is that the NT contains theological themes which are implicitly stated but not explicitly mediated, (i.e. systematically and fully elucidated). This includes, for example, the transformation of ‘unitary monotheism’ into ‘trinitarian monotheism’. Niederwimmer points out that

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<sup>337</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 10.

<sup>338</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 10.

although the NT texts do not explicitly thematise this transition, it was precisely the fact that the Early Church was bound so closely to the scriptures that caused it to develop a full blown doctrine of the Trinity. In short, the Church moved theologically beyond the NT texts in order to do justice to the content of the NT witness. This demonstrates that mere citation of NT verses on its own cannot do full justice to the theological import of the NT texts.<sup>339</sup>

Secondly, Niederwimmer points out the difference in the level of theological reflection contained in NT texts, which works itself out in the choice of literary form and genre made by the NT writers.<sup>340</sup> Niederwimmer draws a distinction between ‘revelation’, ‘intentional mediation’, and ‘systematic (discursive) mediation’ found in the NT texts.<sup>341</sup> Only the latter has the right to be called ‘theology’ when the boundaries of theology are properly defined.<sup>342</sup> The consequence of this is that Niederwimmer condemns attempts at NT theology which simply place the various NT theologies alongside each other without any attempt at mediation. Such a practise fails to distinguish between different grades of theological reflection and runs the risk of setting up false alternatives, for example by juxtaposing the Matthean attitude towards the law (intentional mediation) with the Pauline attitude (systematic mediation).<sup>343</sup> In addition, Niederwimmer notes that certain texts such as Ephesians may represent borderline cases in which it is difficult to decide to which grade of theological reflection they belong.<sup>344</sup>

Whilst attention to literary form and genre are necessary for any responsible account of NT theology, the implications of Niederwimmer’s definition of theology and its application to the texts of the NT are immense. Niederwimmer marginalises any NT text he adduces to be ‘non-systematic’ thus rendering narrative texts (with the exception of John’s Gospel) unworthy of sustained meaningful consideration on their own terms. Niederwimmer’s justification of his constructive interpretive approach in terms of

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<sup>339</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 10-11.

<sup>340</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 11-12.

<sup>341</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 14 n.6. See 13-14 for a fuller explanation.

<sup>342</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 14 n.6.

<sup>343</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 12.

<sup>344</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 14 n.6.

*Sachkritik*<sup>345</sup> is thus simultaneously correct in that the NT texts may be interpreted in dialogue with one another concerning the object ('Gegenstand'/'Sache') under discussion but also thoroughly wrong in retaining the prejudice that a 'systematic' mediation of the 'Sache' is necessarily more theologically appropriate (i.e. 'sachgemäß') than a narrative or poetic mediation. Whilst such an assessment of the theological value of the various NT texts to is no doubt to some degree a legacy of Bultmann's influence (see below), Niederwimmer is undoubtedly correct in his central claim that the NT texts mediate the revelation of the Christ-event by means of distinct linguistic forms and genres, thus requiring the exercise of interpretive reason for the disclosure of any NT theology: 'Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments hat nicht lediglich deskriptiv, sondern *konstruktiv* vorzugehen.'<sup>346</sup>

Aware that his notion of a constructive TNT raises the age-old question as to the unity of the NT, Niederwimmer concludes his prolegomena with a few observations. Firstly, he rejects the idea that the interpreter should be content to remain with the positive form of scriptural tradition and merely outline a plurality of doctrinal views.<sup>347</sup> Secondly, whilst he accepts the notion of 'Kanon im Kanon' as indicating the highest statement in a hierarchy of truths, Niederwimmer rejects its use as a selective criterion to the effect of "Kanon *gegen* den Kanon".<sup>348</sup> Instead, Niederwimmer resorts to theological categories and declares that the NT as the revelatory document of Christian faith has a unity of meaning ("Sinn-Einheit"), which cannot be mechanically retrieved from the NT by means of a "computer" (!) but rather results as a thesis during, and as a consequence of, the act of interpretation.<sup>349</sup> Niederwimmer thus acknowledges that at this stage of his work, he is not able to deduce a 'Mitte der Schrift' which is the 'driving motif of the whole' and captures the unity of the NT since that would presuppose the TNT he is about to write. However, in a dramatic shift and rather oddly, Niederwimmer brushes this acknowledgment aside and goes on to boldly propose in the very next sentence a threefold (!) centre to the NT: the mystery of the incarnation, the mystery of the Trinity,

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<sup>345</sup> cf. Niederwimmer, TNT, 12.

<sup>346</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 13.

<sup>347</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 15.

<sup>348</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 15 italics his.

<sup>349</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 15.



and the mystery of the Church.<sup>350</sup> Furthermore, Niederwimmer claims that these topics reflect the intentions of the NT texts (who treat them with varying clarity) and consequently he redefines the very task of his TNT. Not only is his threefold scriptural centre no longer a tentative postulate to be tested, it is now the task of the TNT to allow the threefold centre of the ‘Sinn-Einheit’ of the NT to become visible through the act of interpretation!<sup>351</sup>

It is instructive that for all Niederwimmer’s attention to the constructive role of the interpreter in the NT, when it comes to the question of the location of the unity of NT theology beyond the constitutive revelatory Christ-event he ultimately fails to locate NT theological unity solely in the act of interpretation. Instead, a fundamental-theological assertion concerning the status of the NT texts as revelation is used to indicate that the NT is a ‘Sinn-Einheit’, though how this totality relates to Niederwimmer’s previous statements concerning NT diversity is left unexplored. The claim that the NT is a ‘Sinn-Einheit’ is in turn used by Niederwimmer to justify his dramatic shift from constructive interpreter of the diverse NT texts to theological revealer of a threefold scriptural centre that appears to be remarkably congenial to Roman Catholic dogmatic concerns – the three mysteries of the incarnation, the Trinity and the Church.<sup>352</sup>

In short, Niederwimmer’s account of the constructive role of the interpreter in the production of a TNT is internally unstable. He acknowledges the hermeneutical realities imposed by the NT texts in all their diversity. However, in the last resort, Niederwimmer reduces the role of interpretive reason to the uncovering and excavation of a unity of meaning *already located and waiting to be found* in certain NT texts rather than allowing it a constitutive role in the production of unified theology that lies beyond the texts themselves.

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<sup>350</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 15-16.

<sup>351</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 16.

<sup>352</sup> Compare Schreiner’s scriptural centre of “Magnifying God in Christ” as perceived from a Reformed point of view! Note Schreiner’s comments in his TNT, 13-14.

#### 4.3.4.2. *Niederwimmer: TNT as a History of Theological Development.*

Of all recent TNTs, Niederwimmer's cleaves most closely to the model inherited from Bultmann's classic work. It could have been otherwise. Niederwimmer claims that the NT texts "sind überhaupt nicht *nebeneinander* zu stellen, sondern sachlich durch Interpretation miteinander zu vermitteln".<sup>353</sup> However, rather than utilising a structure which enables the various texts to dialogue concerning common themes, Niederwimmer adopts Bultmann's model of historical theological development, albeit with some modifications. As a result, Niederwimmer commences his work with a reconstruction of the proclamation of Jesus - a feature which is, of course, only a presupposition of the TNT proper.<sup>354</sup> This is followed by two chapters dealing with the early development of Christian theology in relation to the meaning of the Easter experience and the development of early Christology (chapter 2) and the experience of the Spirit, the development of the church, and early Christian rites (chapter 3). Of course, these concerns cannot be adequately delineated without consideration of the texts Niederwimmer later treats as genuine theologies, in particular the Pauline texts, and so a clear distinction between these chapters which contain many examples from the undisputed Pauline epistles and what follows is not possible.

Whilst Niederwimmer does not wish to demean the texts he categorises as "intentional mediations", even referring to them as the "*condicio* [sic] *sine qua non*" which provide the presuppositions and content of the systematic mediations, it is clear that the texts classed as "systematic" are deemed worthy of the main attention for that very reason.<sup>355</sup> Moving beyond Bultmann, Niederwimmer surveys the theology not only of Paul and John but also of Hebrews. Each textual corpus is treated separately with little attempt to relate the theologies to each other. Instead, they appear to be viewed as providing complementary perspectives on the significance of the Christ-event with Paul delineating its ethical aspect, John its cosmological aspect and Hebrews its cultic aspect.<sup>356</sup> The final

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<sup>353</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 12 italics his.

<sup>354</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 18.

<sup>355</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 172 n.1.

<sup>356</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 173.

sections of the TNT also represent a modification of Bultmann's work insofar as Niederwimmer seeks to treat Early Catholicism and the 'stabilisation' of the Early Christian community as a positive development rather than as a falling away from the radical beginning of Christianity.<sup>357</sup> Rather than closing with a conclusion, Niederwimmer treats the issue of martyrdom, claiming that it is the martyrs who maintain the "fire" of Christianity's beginnings and who are "der beste Kommentar zum Neuen Testament" insofar as they realise the reality of the eschaton within their own historical existence.<sup>358</sup>

Niederwimmer's lack of a conclusion is revealing. Far from returning to the allegedly hypothetical unity of the TNT set out in his opening paragraphs in order to assess the validity of his hypothesis, it appears Niederwimmer feels the matter needs no further discussion. It is questionable, however, as to whether an approach that uses the notion of theological development as a structural meta-narrative can ever adequately outline a "Sinn-Einheit" of the NT unless it departs from the developmental schema.

#### 4.3.4.3. *Niederwimmer: Conclusion.*

Niederwimmer's TNT functions well as a biblical apology for the appropriateness of Roman Catholic doctrine and practise, insofar as it implies them to be the logical outcome of Early Christian theological development. At the same time, it retains serious defects, not least the actual (as opposed to theoretical-rhetorical) treatment of most of the 27 canonical texts. Most of the texts are used as proof-texts for the construction of a theological history rather than treated as legitimate theological voices in their own right. As such, Niederwimmer's work would be better entitled *Theologegeschichte des Neuen Testaments* with the emphasis ironically falling on the act of historical re-construction rather than on its purpose as a theologically constructive work.

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<sup>357</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 366-370.

<sup>358</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 441. Niederwimmer's closing sentences use present tense verbs in relation to Christian martyrdom, leaving the reader unclear as to whether he still retains his historical mode of theological enquiry or whether he is referring to martyrs throughout the ages.

This in turn raises the question as to the possible relationship of Niederwimmer's TNT to systematic theology. Niederwimmer is very unclear about this issue, choosing to discuss the relationship between biblical and dogmatic theology in terms of the relation between Scripture and tradition in a short footnote. He notes a threefold relationship: Tradition precedes Scripture; Tradition is fixed in Scripture; and Tradition is the explication of Scripture.<sup>359</sup> Whether the TNT (and/or Biblical Theology)<sup>360</sup> has a critical role vis-a-vis tradition seems unclear. Taken as a whole, Niederwimmer's TNT seems rather to provide an historical apologetic for the trajectory taken by Church tradition as it moves from the oral tradition of Early Christianity through to the establishment of the one Church. In summary, for all of Niederwimmer's opening claims, the end result appears to be a work of historical description designed to legitimate the theological development of the Church.

#### 4.3.5. *Schreiner: A Thematic TNT.*

Schreiner's TNT is distinguished from the works of Hahn, Wilckens, and Thüsing in two ways.<sup>361</sup> Firstly, Schreiner does not use the language of fundamental-theology to rationalise his task though he clearly views the role of a TNT as providing a foundation for the contemporary theological task. Secondly, influenced by the work of Schlatter, Schreiner rejects the two-stage model and offers a spirited defence of a thematic approach to a TNT.<sup>362</sup>

##### 4.3.5.1. *Schreiner: Justifying a Thematic Approach.*

Schreiner notes the strengths of an analytic approach over against a systematic approach to a TNT. Whereas a thematic approach necessarily reduces the distinctiveness of each of

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<sup>359</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 9 n.3.

<sup>360</sup> Niederwimmer, TNT, 8.

<sup>361</sup> T. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008).

<sup>362</sup> Schreiner, 11.

the NT writings, the analytical approach allows each one to appear with their distinctive profile. The analytic approach also reduces the opportunity for the marginalisation of certain NT writings (such as Jude) whereas a thematic approach runs the risk of subsuming them under alien theological categories or ignoring them altogether. Thus, Schreiner is clearly aware that his chosen thematic approach is in more danger than the analytic approach of failing to do justice to the entire NT canon.<sup>363</sup>

Nevertheless Schreiner maintains that: “The coherence and unity of NT theology are explained more clearly if a NT theology is presented thematically.”<sup>364</sup> Unfortunately, Schreiner does not define exactly what he means by “coherence” and “unity.” He also directs a mild polemic against those who “think that there is no such thing as a unified NT theology.”<sup>365</sup> Schreiner asserts:

“Of course, those who think that there are contradictions [between different NT theologies] are probably not much happier about a NT theology that focuses on individual writers and writings. After all, if the whole of the NT contains contradictions, there is no reason to think that individual writers are spared from such.”<sup>366</sup>

However, the assertion that, for example, John and Matthew have different eschatological views which cannot be completely harmonised, and are therefore, in a sense, contradictory, in no way implies that each discrete writing contradicts *itself*. It is one matter to apply the principle of non-contradiction to one’s interpretation of a particular text; it is a different matter entirely to apply it to the entire NT canon. This suggests dogmatic presuppositions are at work in implying the canon is a macrotext whose singular meaning is that intended by a divine author. It should also be noted that Schreiner sets up a rhetorical opposition between “unity” and “contradiction” rather than

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<sup>363</sup> Schreiner, 10.

<sup>364</sup> Schreiner, 10.

<sup>365</sup> Schreiner, 11.

<sup>366</sup> Schreiner, 11.

between “unity” and “diversity”, which polemically functions to distract the reader from considering the impact of broader NT diversity on the quest for “unity”.

Schreiner responds to concerns that the thematic approach is in constant danger of “domesticating the text and squeezing out the diversity of the NT”<sup>367</sup> by suggesting that a thematic TNT provides guidance for appropriately interpreting particular pieces of (textual) evidence by providing a meta-narratological framework in which they may be situated and evaluated.<sup>368</sup> This hermeneutical observation is pertinent but the fundamental issue is whether Schreiner’s projected “meta-narrative” whole (based on a redemptive-historical approach) offers the best framework for adjudicating the appropriateness of interpretations of the biblical texts or whether a narrative constructed by a *Theologiegeschichte* is more heuristically compelling in its ability to cast light on the meanings of biblical texts.

Schreiner suggests the inherent inadequacy of the analytic approach to a TNT is that no NT document claims to be the “theology” of its writer.<sup>369</sup> Consequently, he maintains that:

“It is somewhat distorting then, to write a theology of, say, Jude or James. We can hardly claim that they have packaged the whole of their theology into such short letters....[E]ven in Paul’s case we do not have a complete map of his convictions.”<sup>370</sup>

Schreiner is clearly using the term “theology” in a narrow sense related to systematic argumentation and completeness. Thus, he claims that whilst four Gospels were deemed necessary to capture the significance of Jesus Christ, these writings are theological reflections on the work and words of Jesus, and not “theologies” of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Since the NT writings are fragmentary in nature, Schreiner concludes that a

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<sup>367</sup> Schreiner, 11.

<sup>368</sup> Schreiner, 11.

<sup>369</sup> Schreiner, 11-12.

<sup>370</sup> Schreiner, 11-12.

thematic approach to NT theology is “invaluable because it attempts to capture the whole of what is taught by considering all twenty-seven books.”<sup>371</sup> However, Schreiner’s argument turns on his narrow definition of theology which makes modern models of systematic and biblical theology normative for what “real” theological work should look like. He thereby diminishes the theological value attached to the 27 individual documents in favour of a theological construction that turns them into a coherent whole.

#### 4.3.5.2. *Schreiner: God as the Centre of the NT.*

Schreiner suggests that the root source of the endless diversity of perspectives on the centre of the NT lies in the nature of “God himself”, who is an inexhaustible “subject matter”,<sup>372</sup> and not in the finitude of human hermeneutical beings. By locating diversity in “God himself”, Schreiner effectively manages to unify all discourse on NT theology on the basis of its relation to the object of its reflection. He claims the NT is “radically God-centred”; concluding that “...the NT is about God magnifying himself in Christ through the Spirit.”<sup>373</sup> “Magnifying God in Christ” is the “grounding theme of NT theology.”<sup>374</sup> Although other themes may capture interest, one should not miss the wood for the trees – God is central in NT theology, as Schreiner’s fifty page section on the topic seeks to show.<sup>375</sup> However, Schreiner suggests that this basic idea “leads to abstraction if it is not closely related to the history of salvation, the fulfilment of God’s promises.”<sup>376</sup> While God’s “ultimate purpose” is not the fulfilment of his plan but rather that he would be magnified in Christ, the fulfilment of his plan is the route to such a goal. This means that Schreiner must indicate how the NT fulfils the OT since, for him, “redemptive history is fundamental...to grasping the message of the NT.”<sup>377</sup> Consequently, he places his NT

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<sup>371</sup> Schreiner, 12-13.

<sup>372</sup> Schreiner, 13.

<sup>373</sup> Schreiner, 13.

<sup>374</sup> Schreiner, 120. For criticisms of this centre see: B. Witherington, ““For God so loved Himself?” Is God a Narcissist?”. Accessed at: <http://ben.witherington.blogspot.com/2007/11/for-god-so-loved-himself-is-god.html> on 06.03.2009.

<sup>375</sup> cf. the section entitled ‘The Centrality of God in New Testament Theology’, Schreiner, 119-167.

<sup>376</sup> Schreiner, 14.

<sup>377</sup> Schreiner, 14.

theology within a narrative framework based around the idea of promise-fulfilment leading to the interconnection of narrative and dogmatic elements in the structure of his theology.

#### 4.3.5.3. *Schreiner: Narratological and Dogmatic Unity.*

The establishment of the necessity of the OT context for a TNT allows Schreiner to subsume his entire work under the rubric of “promise-fulfilment” and create a definite sense of narrative progression in the TNT as a whole and coherence amongst the disparate material.<sup>378</sup> The TNT is thus divided into four main sections which outline Schreiner’s meta-narrative:

“Part 1: The Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises: The Already-Not Yet.

Part 2: The God of the Promise: The Saving Work of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Part 3: Experiencing the Promise: Believing and Obeying.

Part 4: The People of the Promise and the Future of the Promise.”<sup>379</sup>

Underlying this narratological structure is a clear dogmatic structure. As such, Part 1 (chapters 1-3) corresponds to an introduction to issues of soteriology and eschatology. Part 2 quite distinctly conforms to an investigation of the Trinity as its sub-headings show. Chapter 4 deals with the doctrine of God the Father, whilst chapters 5-12 focus on Christology and soteriology, with the final chapter simply entitled “The Holy Spirit”, thus concerning pneumatology. Part 3 (chapters 14-16) then corresponds to hamartiology, soteriology and under the headings “The Problem of Sin”, “Faith and Obedience”, and “The Law and Salvation History”. Finally, Part 4 (chapters 17-19) treats ecclesiology and ethics in the chapters “The People of the Promise” and “The Social World of God’s

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<sup>378</sup> Schreiner, 24.

<sup>379</sup> Schreiner, 7-8.



People” and returns to eschatology in “The Consummation of God’s Promises”.<sup>380</sup> Though there is naturally some overlap between sections, it seems clear that Schreiner’s thematic TNT is very much akin to a biblical dogmatics reworked into a redemptive-historical narrative structure. The biblical material is thereby given the appearance of “unity” and “coherence” which, in turn, is the logical outworking of Schreiner’s fundamental postulate underlying his TNT.

#### 4.3.5.4. *The Meta-Category of ‘Word of God’ as a Unifying Postulate.*

Schreiner closes his TNT with the statement:

“The goal of my NT theology is to acknowledge that the NT claims to be a word from God. As such, the NT is authoritative and consistent. Hence it really is possible to write a NT theology, even though no NT theology can ever plumb the depths of the message contained therein.”<sup>381</sup>

However, the notion that the NT is “a word from God” is not only a “goal” but also the presupposition of Schreiner’s work. His fundamental understanding of NT theology as “rooted in the word of God that is unified and coherent”<sup>382</sup> allows Schreiner to proceed with his thematic approach (in the form of a narrative dogmatics). However, Schreiner’s understanding of the “word of God” and its implications remains, despite his best efforts, unconvincing due to contradictory claims concerning the unity of meaning in the biblical texts.

Schreiner confesses that the presupposition that NT texts should be studied in their historical context is one to which he adheres, maintaining that “the raw data of the text must not be squeezed into some pre-formed mold.”<sup>383</sup> He thus needs a strategy to bridge

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<sup>380</sup> See Schreiner, 7-8.

<sup>381</sup> Schreiner, 888.

<sup>382</sup> Schreiner, 888.

<sup>383</sup> Schreiner, 885.

the gap between his “raw data” and his theological presuppositions so that they do not appear to unduly “squeeze” the “raw data.” Schreiner’s answer is the meta-category of Scripture as the “Word of God” and the claim that “one of the crucial matters [in doing biblical theology] is whether we pay attention to the divine intention in reading Scripture.”<sup>384</sup> However, in his elucidation of what this actually means, his argument becomes increasingly incoherent.

According to Schreiner, the divine intention of Scripture is not accessed mystically or via private revelation but is inseparable from the words of the text. He does not wish to do away with historical study because “understanding the meaning of the human authors is fundamental to biblical theology and foundational to grasping God’s meaning.”<sup>385</sup> However, he draws a clear distinction between the “human meaning” of the texts and “God’s meaning”. Those who only concern themselves with the “word of human authors” will “naturally conclude that these human authors disagree with one another, that there is no unified word.”<sup>386</sup> It is only in the transcendent meta-category of “God’s meaning” that the unity of Scripture becomes visible. This is because when the diverse authors of Scripture and their multiple intentions are considered “we realize that God was superintending the whole process, and that there is a divine intention that is realised through the historical process.”<sup>387</sup>

It is significant that despite his claims to present a “unified, coherent, Word of God”, Schreiner still treats all NT text groups separately. Synoptic Gospels, Pauline and Johannine literature form separate sections, while even the General Epistles and Revelation are treated separately amongst themselves (with the exception of 2 Peter and Jude). Even Schreiner must take into account the “raw historical data” that necessitates such differentiation, despite his thematic approach. As such, it seems that “human meaning” deals with the specific meaning of each unique text, whilst “God’s meaning” is actually the redemptive-historical framework which Schreiner uses for the narrative-

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<sup>384</sup> Schreiner, 886.

<sup>385</sup> Schreiner, 887.

<sup>386</sup> Schreiner, 887.

<sup>387</sup> Schreiner, 887.

dogmatic structure of the text. “God’s meaning” is the rhetorical justification for Schreiner’s hermeneutic. Such rhetoric shuts down the theological conversation regarding the NT texts. If “God’s meaning” is recoverable from the diverse biblical texts, and Schreiner has found it and disclosed it to the reader, is not the criticism and/or rejection of Schreiner’s interpretation the same as rejecting the divine meaning of Scripture? Since it seems plausible to assume that the average reader lacks the hubris to challenge “God’s meaning” Schreiner effectively manages to insulate himself from criticism by identifying his narratological-dogmatic framework with divine discourse.

#### 4.3.5.5. *Schreiner: The Role of Biblical Theology.*

Drawing on Krister Stendahl’s famous distinction,<sup>388</sup> Schreiner views biblical theology as playing some sort of mediating role between history – “what the text ‘meant’” – and theology – “what the text ‘means’”. However, Schreiner does not thereby accept Stendahl’s view that biblical theology is concerned merely with historical description.<sup>389</sup> Instead, he approvingly cites Scobie’s claim that: “Biblical Theology stands *somewhere between* what the Bible ‘meant’ and what it ‘means’.”<sup>390</sup> However, if this is really the case, the exact location of biblical theology is therefore an impenetrable mystery. A theology which neither provides us with what the text “meant” (in reality an infinite reconstructive task) and what the text “means” (which is the only meaning available to us as finite beings) is a delusion.

Schreiner’s view of biblical theology as “a mediating discipline”, and a “bridge” between exegesis and systematic theology also raises the question as to the kind of mediation envisaged. For Schreiner, biblical theology acts as a guardian against philosophical and contemporary interests being imposed upon the text. He praises Gabler, the founding

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<sup>388</sup> cf. K. Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary” in G. Buttrick, (ed.), *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible A-D*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 418-432.

<sup>389</sup> Schreiner, 871.

<sup>390</sup> Schreiner, 886, citing Scobie, *Challenge...*, 50-51.

father of biblical theology,<sup>391</sup> for seeing that biblical theology should inform systematic theology, which is “too often...captured by ideological or philosophical agendas that have domesticated biblical teaching”.<sup>392</sup> The main way that biblical theology fulfils this function, he claims, is due to its diachronic nature, in which it “emphasizes the biblical timeline, the development of redemption history” and takes into account “the progress of revelation in Scripture”.<sup>393</sup> Schreiner makes clear that the biblical theological task is neither to attempt to apply Scripture to the contemporary world, nor to take account of historical theology. He claims that biblical theology “corresponds to the interests of the texts themselves” (presumably “God’s meaning” of the texts rather than the “human meaning”), and best serves systematic theology when it considers the whole Bible from a descriptive, historical point of view and as a unity.<sup>394</sup>

On the other hand, Schreiner views systematic theology as a “culminating discipline” which “expresses one’s worldview and how it applies to the contemporary society”.<sup>395</sup> Biblical theology provides “fundamental building blocks” for that worldview; indeed, systematic theology only has an “authentic” voice to the degree that it is grounded in biblical theology.<sup>396</sup> Schreiner states:

“The ultimate goal of studying the Bible, then, is to form a systematic theology, for applying the Bible to today is where the rubber meets the road. Biblical theology, however, keeps systematic theology from imposing alien thought forms upon the system.”<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> P. J. Gabler, *Oratio de iusto discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae, recondisque recte utriusque finibus* (Altdorf, 1787) in Th. J. Gabler and J. G. Gabler, (eds.), *Opuscula academica 2* (Ulm: 1831); trans. O Merk and reprinted as *Von der richtigen Unterscheidung der biblischen und der dogmatischen Theologie und der rechten Bestimmung ihrer beider Ziele* in G. Strecker (ed.), *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975) 32-44.

<sup>392</sup> Schreiner, 868.

<sup>393</sup> See Kaiser, 18.

<sup>394</sup> Schreiner, 882-884.

<sup>395</sup> Schreiner, 884.

<sup>396</sup> Schreiner, 884.

<sup>397</sup> Schreiner, 884.

Systematic theology is an applicatory discipline with an “atemporal” focus.<sup>398</sup> However, Schreiner gives no guidance as to exactly how a “historical and descriptive” biblical theology based on a redemptive-historical timeline can actually be assimilated by an atemporal systematic theology without distorting it in an acceptable manner.

Ultimately, Schreiner’s approach is hermeneutically and methodologically untenable due to its failure to adequately address the theological significance of the contingent nature of all biblical interpretations. This is epitomised in a footnote dealing with postmodern hermeneutical approaches to biblical theology, in which Schreiner accuses Joel Green of promoting “hermeneutical nihilism” whilst quoting him in a misleading manner. In the original article, Green does not say that NT readings are “‘valid,’ ‘depending on who is doing the reading’”<sup>399</sup> but that “texts are capable of a range (though not an infinite number) of valid meanings, depending on who is doing the reading, from what perspectives they read, and what reading protocols they prefer.”<sup>400</sup> Schreiner’s attempt to locate biblical theology in a “pure” realm somewhere between past, historically-conditioned, “human” meanings and contemporary, applicatory meanings is to try and place his interpretation of NT theology beyond the reach of criticism and outside the realm of infinite interpretation which characterises the human quest for understanding. However, his concern over postmodern relativism, appeal to the meta-category “word of God”, the narrative-dogmatic structure of his work, and his methodological recognition of the diverse character of NT texts by means of his consistently analytic treatment of texts and text groups all serve to illustrate that Schreiner is subject to the same constraints of finitude and historical particularity as all other interpreters.

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<sup>398</sup> Schreiner, 882-883.

<sup>399</sup> For Schreiner’s version of Green, see 870 n.19.

<sup>400</sup> J. Green, “Scripture and Theology: Failed Experiments, Fresh Perspectives”, *Interpretation* 56.1 (2002): 8.

#### 4.3.5.6. *Schreiner: Conclusion.*

Lying behind Schreiner's appeal for a thematic approach to biblical theology as a means to reverse the fracturing of NT theology into a collection of diverse and contradictory texts, is a mass of dogmatic presuppositions. By placing the diverse material of the NT into a narrative-dogmatic framework Schreiner tries to show the unity and coherence of the NT. That even within this framework individual NT texts must be treated separately due to their diverse perspectives suggests that this framework, which relies heavily on the postulate of a "word of God" lying beyond the particular human word of the NT authors, is a hermeneutical device which aims to produce a coherent unity from diverse texts.

Furthermore, it is disturbing to find Schreiner essentially equating biblical theology, which lies between the historically contingent and particular meanings of the past and present, with the "word of God". Schreiner's failure to break away from Gabler's traditional model of biblical theology, viewed as existing for the purposes of applicatory systematic theology, leaves him with no genuine location for his biblical theology. Consequently, he is forced to use meta-categories to abstract the significance of biblical theology out of particular history and into an ideal realm where the divine intent behind Scripture is clearly accessible to all those who accept Schreiner's presuppositions. The idea that this accords with "the interests of the texts themselves" is only possible because Schreiner views the historical alterity and contextuality of the texts as of limited importance in relation to their true divine meaning. Ultimately, the "unity" and "coherence" of biblical theology is so key for Schreiner because it provides the only justification for biblical theology when envisioned as existing between exegesis and systematic theology.

#### 4.3.7. Conclusion: Unifying the NT?

Attempts to demonstrate a fundamental unity amongst the NT texts are always bound up tightly with dogmatic assumptions concerning divine authorship of Scripture, the unity of the canon and theology, and/or the unity of the Church. The main concern seems to be with recovering an original theological purity which lies behind subsequent interpretations. The extraction of theological unity is accomplished with a broad variety of critical and hermeneutical tools. Whether through the historical recovery of the core of Early Christian belief (Hahn and Thüsing), the adoption of interpretive strategies that claim to access the divine meaning (Wilckens and Schreiner), or recourse to simple dogmatic assertions concerning the theological unity of the texts (Söding, Niederwimmer, Scott), the NT as canon composed of 27 texts is implicitly regarded as existentially and theologically inadequate in its existing form.

Nevertheless, all writers (with the exception of Scott) had to admit the fact of NT diversity at the outset. Indeed, their individual projects would be unnecessary were it not for this phenomenological fact. Consequently, there was no other option than to programmatically incorporate an investigation into the diversity of the NT into their work as a whole, whether through a two-stage model, a series of comparisons between theological conceptions, or the analytic treatment of texts within a redemptive-historical narrative. However, attempts to move beyond diversity to finding a unified theology *within* the texts or on a theological plane that supposedly reveals the true intent of the texts could only succeed through the employment of various dogmatic and rhetorical strategies and/or infringement on the literary integrity of the texts themselves.

The most successful model discussed above in terms of clearly articulating NT diversity and seeking to preserve this awareness in the quest for unity is Hahn's two-stage approach. However, his *Theologiegeschichte* is inadequately developed and heuristically weak in encouraging more appropriate readings of the NT texts. A better option is to recognise the *Theologiegeschichte/Religionsgeschichte* as an independent discipline in its own right which offers heuristic models for appropriate and innovative reading of the

NT texts rather than attempting to make it the foundation stage of a TNT. This would also release the historian from the constraints inherent in the theological task such as the limitation to canonical boundaries and “orthodox” texts.<sup>401</sup> Hahn’s thematic portrayal preserves diversity but his preoccupation with locating unity *within* the texts leads him to make generalised statements unsupported by his own evidence. Recognising that commonalities might be related to theological presuppositions informing the articulation of theologies avoids the need to make sweeping generalisations concerning a unified theology or posit a reflectively pure *Grundzeugnis*. This then paves the way for locating the unity of theology in the interpretive act of constructing theology by dialoguing the diverse texts with one another.

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<sup>401</sup> See the chapter on Theologiegeschichte.



#### 4.4. *Abandoning 'Unity': Theologies of the New Testament.*

Some TNTs abandon the task of trying to discern a “unified” theology in the NT writings entirely. However, neither do they embrace the alternative of the *Theologieggeschichte*, either in its attempt to sketch out the historical interrelationships within Early Christianity or in its desire to transcend canonical boundaries. Whilst these works generally take an analytic approach to the NT texts, they may either offer a discussion on the issue of “unity” and/or employ various strategies to give their account a sense of coherence.

##### 4.4.1. *Strecker: Redaction-history as Theology of the New Testament.*<sup>402</sup>

Strecker maintains that despite the fact that the NT writers did not construct an abstract theological or philosophical system to express their ideas, the message of the NT still contains a systematic structure. In an implicit polemic against Friedrich Schleiermacher and his “liberal” heirs, Strecker suggests that Christian faith as laid out in the NT is not merely a “feeling of dependence” but implies “structures of believing comprehension” whether recognised as such by the writers or not.<sup>403</sup> It is these structures which Strecker intends to make explicit in his TNT. However, Strecker rightly makes clear that despite his following convention and calling such an undertaking *Theology of the New Testament*, it cannot be presupposed that the NT forms a theological unity from which “the” Theology of the New Testament can be produced. Rather, the NT canon contains “a multiplicity of theological conceptions”, which are “to be investigated according to their own structures of thought, in relation to their own historical and literary contexts.”<sup>404</sup> Strecker’s sensitivity to the contextual nature and resultant diversity of the NT is thus evident in his approach to the texts.

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<sup>402</sup> G. Strecker, *Theologie des neuen Testaments*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996); translated by M. Eugene Boring and published as G. Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament*, (Louisville: WJKP, 2000). All future references are to the English translation.

<sup>403</sup> Strecker, 2. The influence of the dialectical theology movement on Strecker is made explicit later in the introduction where he refers to Bultmann, and particularly Barth (cf., pp.8 and 19) and no doubt accounts for his implicit polemical stance towards ‘liberal’ theology.

<sup>404</sup> Strecker, 2-3.

Rather than seeking to reconstruct a history of Early Christian religion or theology Strecker wishes to draw attention to the theological affirmations of the NT writers. This is to be achieved by “a diachronic and synchronic correlation of the textual tradition.”<sup>405</sup> Strecker views the NT writers as “redactors” of theological traditions with the result that the full force of their theological affirmations can only be understood in the light of the sources/traditions on which they are dependent.<sup>406</sup> The result of this approach is that Strecker becomes dependent on a host of hypothetical reconstructions of the background sources of the theologies of the NT. This is most clearly seen in his introduction to Pauline theology. A full 68 pages are devoted to a consideration of the sources and “history-of religions presuppositions” of Pauline theology before one arrives at a 138-page exposition of the theology itself.<sup>407</sup>

Strecker’s view of the NT as a “historically-conditioned construct that participates in all the relativities of history...” means that the question of the canon immediately becomes an issue for him.<sup>408</sup> Strecker’s response is both pragmatic and theologically grounded. His limitation of his TNT to the NT canon is firstly a matter of space and practical considerations. Secondly, the canon has a critical function as “the oldest document of Christian faith” and thus a presupposition of the church’s theory and praxis and the founding document of Christian dogma.<sup>409</sup> However, Strecker’s main justification of his restriction is a hermeneutical one with dogmatic overtones. The NT is significant because it “has something to say to the present” through its “claim and demand” on “contemporary Christian self-understanding”.<sup>410</sup> The Bultmannian flavour of Strecker’s approach becomes apparent in this use of language. Underlying Strecker’s rationale is an existentialist hermeneutic which claims that Strecker’s TNT shares exactly the same intent as the NT writings themselves: the journey from knowledge of the texts, to

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<sup>405</sup> Strecker, 3.

<sup>406</sup> Strecker, 3.

<sup>407</sup> cf. Strecker, 19-216.

<sup>408</sup> Strecker, 3.

<sup>409</sup> Strecker, 3.

<sup>410</sup> Strecker, 3-4.

acknowledgement of the texts, and ultimately to confession (*Erkennen – Anerkennen – Bekennen*).<sup>411</sup>

The resultant tension in Strecker's work between history and contemporary relevance reveals itself in the dialectic he finds necessary for the task of a TNT. A TNT should draw out both the historical and eschatological dimensions of the NT, that is, its relation to the past and to the present. By placing the theological statements of the NT in their correct historical context, Strecker claims that a TNT "*gibt dem Text, was des Textes ist*".<sup>412</sup> On the other hand, Strecker does not merely want to reprimatinate biblical theological conceptions but rather wants to translate NT concepts into those which reflect contemporary thought structures. Consequently, a TNT "*wird nicht den Text buchstabieren, sondern interpretieren*".<sup>413</sup> However, Strecker's division of the task of a TNT into two moments – history and eschatology, past and present, "what belongs to the text" and "interpretation of the text" – is not actually carried through within his theology itself. Rather, he claims that a historical-critical analysis of the NT texts makes one aware of the eschatological demand of the NT.<sup>414</sup> Such a reconciliation of historical reconstruction with contemporary eschatological demand is only made possible by recourse to the Bultmannian concepts of kerygma and the believing self-understanding of the NT writers which opens up existential possibilities for us today.<sup>415</sup>

Since Strecker rules out viewing the NT texts as a unity, his structure naturally inclines him to treat all NT writings within his TNT. Though he clearly prioritises Paul and engages in the usual treatment of relegating the so-called Catholic Epistles to the end of his TNT he does offer each text a fair hearing on his terms.<sup>416</sup> His TNT is thus a compendium of theologies of the NT considered through the lens of their individual

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<sup>411</sup> Strecker, 4. This point was already used by Strecker to sum up his programmatic essay in 1974, of which the later introduction to his TNT was simply an updated revision see: G. Strecker, "Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments" in ed. G. Strecker, *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975) 1-31.

<sup>412</sup> Strecker, *Das Problem...*, 31 italics his.

<sup>413</sup> Strecker, *Das Problem...*, 31 italics his.

<sup>414</sup> Strecker, *Das Problem...*, 31.

<sup>415</sup> cf. Strecker, 7-8.

<sup>416</sup> Unusually, James is treated last of all, Revelation having been treated in the 'Johannine School' section, though this may simply reflect the common Lutheran disregard for the epistle.

source and redaction-histories. Strecker's rejection of the attempt to achieve any degree of theological unity amongst the writings simply leaves one, despite Strecker's embrace of Bultmannian existentialist hermeneutics, with a historical interpretation of an array of diverse theologies with their contemporary significance assumed. For Strecker, though they are analytically separate moments, descriptive interpretation of the texts is *the same thing in practise as* elucidating its contemporary significance. Such a position always runs the risk of either eliminating the text's main strength – its alterity – and/or of failing to genuinely translate the significance of the text in contemporary language beyond the language-horizons of the text. Strecker falls decisively into the latter camp.

#### 4.4.2. *Gnilka: From Reductionism to Plurality.*

Gnilka's TNT delays consideration of the question as to the unity of the NT until his concluding observations. However, the prolegomena discusses another key area of concern – the relationship between NT and dogmatic theology. For Gnilka, both disciplines stand in tension with one another as independent disciplines. NT theology demonstrates its independence from dogmatic theology in that it chooses to approach the biblical texts without the use of concepts derived from a given philosophy. Exploring the themes which are found in the NT texts rather than those provided from other disciplines, NT theology has the potential to breathe new life into traditional dogmatic patterns of thought. At any rate, the tension between the two disciplines should lead to “a deeper recognition of the truth”.<sup>417</sup> The questionable nature of Gnilka's assumptions – are NT interpreters really able to shake off all philosophical baggage when interpreting texts? Is it really possible to explicate NT texts in a meaningful way without the use of contemporary concepts? – and his lack of clarity concerning the actual process of a fruitful dialogue between dogmatic and NT theology raises doubts as to the efficacy of Gnilka's TNT.

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<sup>417</sup> J. Gnilka, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 14.

Gnilka claims to take seriously the fact that all biblical texts are genuinely theological works worthy of consideration and thus includes sections on the theological conceptions of the synoptic gospels. However, he also devotes space to consideration of the *Vorgaben* of the NT texts such as Q and the early Passion account.<sup>418</sup> The entire TNT is structured along chronological lines, beginning with the theology of Paul, followed by the Synoptics, Johannine theology, post-Pauline theology, Revelation and the Catholic epistles. However, despite Gnilka's recognition of diverse theological conceptions within the NT, these are presented more as schools of thought rather than by text. Only Q, the Passion account, Mark, Matthew, Hebrews, 2 Thessalonians, Revelation, 1 Peter, and James are treated as independent theological conceptions. Furthermore, 2 Thessalonians and James merit independent treatment only as excurses, with the excursus on James appended to the end of the TNT on the basis that "[er] steht sicherlich am Rande neutestamentlicher Theologie."<sup>419</sup>

Gnilka's concluding discussion as to the unity of the NT notes that his TNT uncovered a number of different theological models due to the diversity of the texts. These should not be systematised as this would impinge on the richness of the theologies brought to expression in the texts. In fact, Gnilka goes so far as to state that due to the clear differences between texts any systematisation "auch gar nicht möglich ist, ja sich verbietet".<sup>420</sup> The major differences include tensions between present and future eschatologies, between the doctrine of justification found in James and Paul, and between the ecclesiological model advocated in Pauline texts and the Pastoral epistles.<sup>421</sup> When, therefore, Matera and Rowe point out that Gnilka has offered "a description of the theologies *in* the NT rather than a theology *of* the NT"<sup>422</sup> this is to be seen as a logical consequence of his observation that:

"das einende Band in der Verschiedenheit der Dokumente ist nicht in diesen selbst, sondern in ihren Vorgaben zu suchen. Es ist das Kerygma von Tod

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<sup>418</sup> Gnilka, 133-146.

<sup>419</sup> Gnilka, 444.

<sup>420</sup> Gnilka, 454.

<sup>421</sup> Gnilka, 462.

<sup>422</sup> Matera, "New Testament Theology...", 8 italics his.; Rowe, 400.

und Auferweckung Jesu...Darum läßt sich sagen, daß es letztlich auch das Prinzip, die Quelle ist, aus der die neutestamentliche Theologie in ihren zahlreichen Ausfaltungen entstanden ist”.<sup>423</sup>

Gnilka’s recognition of NT diversity leads him to locate a unity outside of the texts in the kerygma of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which each NT author seeks to expound according to their individual and unique faith-experience.<sup>424</sup> This pre-suppositional approach allows Gnilka to concede the legitimacy of the diversity of the NT texts. At the same time, Gnilka impinges somewhat on a strict conception of NT diversity by treating texts according to schools of thought rather than as individual theological contributions in their own right, even marginalising texts according to his chronological structure. Further limitations of Gnilka’s work lie in the fact that its relationship to the theological task beyond the descriptive elucidation of NT theologies remains badly thought through and subject to the standard platitudes of exegetical scholars vis-a-vis dogmatic theology. Gnilka makes no attempt to demonstrate the significance of his TNT for the constructive theological task. As such, his descriptive work remains within the conceptual horizon of the biblical texts and fails to fulfil the critical function in relation to dogmatic theology initially envisaged.

#### 4.4.3. Schnelle: NT Texts as “Sinnbildung”.

For Schnelle, the question of unity and diversity belongs to the central set of problems regarding portrayals of a TNT.<sup>425</sup> He rejects all attempts to provide a unified theology of the NT by recourse to a scriptural centre as an a-historical abstraction that fails to do justice to the NT textual evidence. With Käsemann and Stuhlmacher particularly in view, Schnelle points out that neither the Pauline doctrine of justification in Galatians and Romans nor the Pauline doctrine of reconciliation adequately encompass the extent of

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<sup>423</sup> Gnilka, 462-463.

<sup>424</sup> cf. Gnilka, 463-464.

<sup>425</sup> U. Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 38.

Pauline theology, let alone form the centre of the entire NT.<sup>426</sup> Regarding Luther's idea that Jesus Christ is the "Mitte der Schrift" and thus the criterion for all Christian theology, Schnelle points out that such a criterion is meaningless insofar as it relates to all texts and thus ultimately dissolves itself ("sich selbst aufhebt").<sup>427</sup> The criterion "Jesus Christ" is either so vague as to be meaningless or its content is already determined by the prioritisation of certain (usually NT) portrayals of Jesus Christ – in Luther's case, Paul's. This renders it a biased and ineffective criterion for a TNT that takes serious account of the nature of the canon and the multiplicity of valid voices therein.

The question of unity and diversity in the NT is linked to the fact that the NT exists as a canon. According to Schnelle, the NT canon is a well-founded historical (*geschichtlich*) reality which sets the boundaries of the NT and is a "historisch wie theologisch überaus sachgemäßes Ergebnis eines jahrhundertlangen Formierungs- und Selektionsprozesses."<sup>428</sup> However, Schnelle claims it is crucial to note that:

"Die für den Prozess der Kanonisierung zentrale Frage nach Vielfalt und ihrer Begrenzung ist nicht die Frage der einzelnen ntl. Schriften!"<sup>429</sup>

Consequently, Schnelle draws a distinction between a theology of the NT *canon* "als eine notwendigerweise exegetische und kirchengeschichtliche Aufgabe"<sup>430</sup> and a theology of the NT *writings* (or TNT).<sup>431</sup> Schnelle, however, offers no methodological suggestions or parameters as to how the former task should be undertaken.

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<sup>426</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 39-40. Note also the lack of the term "justification" as a title or subtitle within Schnelle's thematic portrayal of Pauline theology (*Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Boring, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 387-605; German original: *Paulus: Leben und Denken*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). Although Schnelle does of course treat the issue, particularly in his letter by letter analysis – on Galatians see *Apostle*, 277-301; on Romans see *Apostle*, 317ff – it seems that he has made a conscious decision to offer a broader paradigm for understanding Paul's theology.

<sup>427</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 40.

<sup>428</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 42.

<sup>429</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 41, italics removed.

<sup>430</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 42, italics removed.

<sup>431</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 42.

Schnelle chooses to pursue the latter course and thus employs the notion of NT theology as “*Sinnbildung*” (“meaning-formation”) to describe a *functional* unity amongst the NT texts.<sup>432</sup> Each NT author is engaged in the hermeneutical process of re-telling and interpreting “*ihre* Jesus-Christus-Geschichte” from the point of view of their own personal story and the concrete situation of their church community in an attempt to construct meaning (*Sinnbildung*). Thus, a “*Prae der Vielfalt*” necessarily results so that “es *die* neutestamentliche Theologie im Singular gar nicht geben (kann).”<sup>433</sup> Each NT writing is independent and characteristic of the context and situation of its author and it is out of this particular *Sitz im Leben* (life setting) that it must be interpreted.<sup>434</sup> Consequently, Schnelle sees ‘unity’ as a “statischer Totalitätsbegriff” which levels out and homogenizes difference.<sup>435</sup> The concept of a unified NT theology is not only alien to the NT authors but has no basis in the NT texts themselves or in the history of Early Christianity which is “alles andere als die Geschichte einer einheitlichen Bewegung!”<sup>436</sup>

However, Schnelle does not see diversity as “identisch mit grenzen- und konturloser Pluralität.”<sup>437</sup> The canonization process itself witnesses to both the appropriateness of diversity and to the boundaries of such diversity in interpretation of the “Ursprungsgeschehen” of Christianity. Thus, the diversity in the NT exists on a clear foundational basis (“*Grundlage*”), namely, “*die Erfahrungen mit Gottes endzeitlichem Heilshandeln an Jesus Christus in Kreuz und Auferstehung*”<sup>438</sup>, which for Schnelle is equivalent to saying that “Jesus von Nazareth ist die Basis und der Ausgangspunkt aller neutestamentlichen Theologie.”<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> For Schnelle’s argument concerning NT theology as *Sinnbildung* see his TNT 15-29 and 42-46. See also his earlier *Apostle Paul*, especially 34-46 and 598-604, as well as U. Schnelle, “Neutestamentliche Theologie als *Sinnbildung*” in E. Becker, (ed.), *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2003) 135-145.

<sup>433</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 40, italics his.

<sup>434</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 40.

<sup>435</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 41.

<sup>436</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 41.

<sup>437</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 40.

<sup>438</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 40-41, italics his.

<sup>439</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 47. Thus, Schnelle rejects Bultmann’s discontinuity model between the proclamation of Jesus and the theology of the NT writings and adopts a continuity model that recognises the appropriateness of distinguishing between pre- and post-Easter where necessary but maintains that “das Wirken and die Wirkungen Jesu stehen am Anfang der Theologie des Neuen Testaments und sind zugleich ihr Kontinuum.” (34). For the full discussion see 30-34.



Consistent with the above, Schnelle rejects a synthetic account of the theology of the NT writings as methodologically flawed. Adopting an analytic arrangement, he extensively treats Jesus and the transition to a post-Easter Christianity (47-180) and follows this with a broadly chronological arrangement encompassing Paul (177-334), the *Logienquelle*, Synoptics and Acts (347-489), the deutero-Paulines (503-563), 1 Peter (564-576), James (577-593), Hebrews (593-613), Jude and 2 Peter (614-618), the Johannine writings (619-711) and Revelation (712-733).<sup>440</sup> Within these sections, Schnelle treats some textual groupings synthetically such as the Pauline corpus which treats the Hauptbriefe and 1 Thessalonians,<sup>441</sup> the Johannine corpus which treats John's Gospel and 1 John with barely a mention of 2 and 3 John, the Pastoral Epistles, and Jude and 2 Peter.

Schnelle achieves a sense of coherence within his TNT by organising the treatment of textual groupings under the dogmatic headings of theology, Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, anthropology, ethics, ecclesiology, eschatology, and place in the history of theology. However, Schnelle bizarrely denies that his structure is influenced by dogmatics; rather, he states that the schematic structure arises from the results of textual investigation and "historical development".<sup>442</sup> The dogmatic structure allows a degree of flexibility for each text to display its full uniqueness in all thematic areas whilst not mistaking this uniqueness for the character of the whole.<sup>443</sup> Schnelle's approach is not to simply proof text but to trace the development of a theme throughout a specific text, which enables many texts to be considered in their literary integrity. The analytic approach protects their alterity and creates the opportunity for clear comparisons to be made between the various texts in terms of their approach to the key dogmatic themes. Unfortunately, Schnelle's inconsistent use of a synthetic approach makes the final outcome of his work less valuable than it could be, insofar as some texts are either marginalised within a larger synthesis or presented as addressing issues which they do

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<sup>440</sup> Schnelle modifies the chronology in order to place texts with similarities in content next to each other. See Schnelle, TNT, 44 n.43.

<sup>441</sup> Perhaps in Paul's case because Schnelle did not wish to repeat the letter by letter account followed by a synthesis which formed the structure of his earlier work *Apostle Paul*. In that work, the letter by letter account occupies pages 171-357, while the synthetic account is longer than in his TNT (387-603).

<sup>442</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 46.

<sup>443</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 46.

not address by implication of being included in a synthesis of texts. To protect the uniqueness of each text it may have been better to treat each text separately but note clearly where that text fails to make a contribution to one of the particular dogmatic themes under discussion.

In keeping with his methodological presuppositions, Schnelle offers no final theological synthesis, no summary and no conclusion to his TNT as a whole. The individual theologies are left to stand alone and isolated, unified only by the shared object of their reflection - Jesus of Nazareth, their shared functional purpose – “Sinnbildung”, and thematic concerns. This abrupt finish leaves one questioning the *theological* purpose behind Schnelle’s work. As a compendium of the theological views of the NT texts it fulfils a descriptive and explanatory task. However, the role of Schnelle’s TNT in relation to the NT text’s task of “Sinnbildung” is left inexplicit. A conclusion that would point the reader in the direction of fertile areas of contemporary appropriation of the NT texts would have bolstered the rationale behind producing such a work. Schnelle’s TNT is a suitable heuristic guide to various aspects of the theologies contained within the canon but Caird’s critique applies:<sup>444</sup> the hard work of dialoguing the models and constructing a viable theology for the contemporary reader remains to be done.

#### 4.4.4. Weiser: “Unity” as Irreducible to Theological Statements.

Weiser’s TNT is unusual insofar as it forms the second half(!) of a theology of the NT, the first half of which was never published as it was scheduled to be written by the Roman Catholic exegete, Helmut Merklein, who died in 1999. Furthermore, despite being subtitled “*Die Theologie der Evangelien*”, Weiser’s work neither maintains that the Gospels are reducible to a single theology, nor restricts itself to a consideration of the Gospels.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> For Caird, see the chapter on the dialogical TNT.

<sup>445</sup> A. Weiser, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments II: Die Theologie der Evangelien*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993). The volume scheduled to be written by Merklein appears to have been scheduled to cover all texts not traditionally linked to any of the writers of the Gospels.

The great strength of Weiser's TNT is his assertion of the *theological* quality of the Gospels. They are not to be viewed simply as raw material for the re-construction of the proclamation of Jesus but are themselves the product of reflective editorial work, that is, theological activity and thus fully justify being referred to as theologies.<sup>446</sup> Weiser's rejection of a constrictive definition of theology as requiring the theoretical clarity of doctrinal statements (his main targets are Rudolf Bultmann and Dietrich Ritschl) leads to his embrace of the possibility of theology taking a narrative form. This allows him to take the Gospels seriously as theological works which may be investigated in relation to their "current form", that is, synchronically.<sup>447</sup>

Despite Weiser's commitment to synchronic readings of the Gospels he pulls back from full commitment to this ideal in two ways. Firstly, he begins his TNT investigations with a section on "die Theologie der Redenquelle" in which he discusses Q as hypothetically reconstructed from the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>448</sup> The necessity of this first step seems only to be suggested by Weiser's adoption of prevailing academic norms rather than by his own definition of the theological task itself as investigating the texts in their "*jetzt vorliegenden Gestalt*".<sup>449</sup> Secondly, whilst Weiser goes on to offer an exposition of the theologies of Mark and Matthew, in the case of Luke and John he merges theological consideration of the Gospels with that of Acts and the Johannine epistles respectively. In both cases a discussion of the unique structure and narrative flow of each of the texts culminates in a synthetic portrayal of the theology of Luke-Acts and John-Johannine Epistles.<sup>450</sup> Consequently, Weiser only manages to actually offer a synchronic theological reading of two of the Gospels – Mark and Matthew – in a manner that can fully draw out the uniqueness of the text's theology.

Weiser completes his TNT by seeking to move beyond the theological diversity of the texts studied towards the question of the "*tragende Einheitsgrund*" which forms the basis

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<sup>446</sup> Weiser, 13.

<sup>447</sup> Weiser, 14-15.

<sup>448</sup> Weiser, 21-43.

<sup>449</sup> Weiser, 15 italics his.

<sup>450</sup> For Luke-Acts, Weiser, 117-152; for John-Johannine epistles, Weiser, 153-202.

of the NT texts and from which they develop.<sup>451</sup> His claim is that the unity underlying the NT theologies is not a “sächliches etwas” but rather the person and history of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>452</sup> Weiser thus implies that the underlying unity of the NT is not reducible to a doctrinal statement or claim but is rather found in a dual foundation that underlies all Early Christian theology: the life and work of the earthly Jesus and the experience of the risen Christ. Neither one of these foundational aspects may be legitimately played off against each other since they are only accessible together, since the NT witness has already irreducibly rendered a pure separation of the two perspectives impossible.<sup>453</sup> Citing Thüsing’s legitimation criteria, Weiser cautions the reader that the historical question as to who Jesus *was* may only be answered in conjunction with the question as to who Jesus *is*, as the crucified and risen one.<sup>454</sup> Weiser then spends the final pages of his work producing a potted biography of the historical Jesus before briefly elucidating the impact of the risen Christ on the Early Church.<sup>455</sup>

In summary, Weiser’s TNT offers valuable methodological suggestions in relation to the rehabilitation of the Gospels as genuinely theological works and the locating of the unity of Early Christianity in the presuppositional event of the person and history of Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time, it remains unsatisfactory both in terms of inconsistency in implementing its chosen approach and because every chapter functions as an isolated unit. Various theologies stand alongside each other with little internal reference. Furthermore, whilst the final chapter legitimates the diverse theologies sketched previously in the work, it has little explicit connection to the content of the preceding chapters. As a description of some NT theologies Weiser’s work has much to offer, but it does not move beyond this.

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<sup>451</sup> Weiser, 218 italics his.

<sup>452</sup> Weiser, 218.

<sup>453</sup> Weiser, 218.

<sup>454</sup> Weiser 218-219.

<sup>455</sup> Weiser, 219-226.

#### 4.4.5. *Abandoning “Unity”*: Conclusion.

The TNTs discussed above are best categorised as “Theologies of the NT” due to their commitment to the distinctiveness and integrity of each text, which precludes synthetic treatment of the NT canon as a “unity.” Due to the rejection of “unity”, the TNTs offer alternative strategies to provide legitimacy and coherence to their presentation whether methodological (Strecker’ existential and redaction-critical approach), structural (Schnelle’s dogmatic themes), functional (Schnelle’s identification of the purpose of NT texts as “Sinnbildung”), or by means of a discussion as to the unifying presuppositional events which give rise to the NT theologies (Gnilka, Schnelle, Weiser). However, all the above TNTs fail to implement stringently their methodological recognition of NT textual diversity and/or emphasis on the theological value of the Synoptic Gospels and engage in synthetic treatments of certain texts.

Whilst the TNTs have heuristic value in relation to reading certain NT texts with an eye for their particular theological nuances, the rejection of the quest for a “unified theology” within the texts also means that no genuine move towards a constructive theology of contemporary value is made. Schnelle does suggest the possibility of using the texts as a resource within contemporary interdisciplinary discourse:

“...die Sinn-Kategorie der Theologie als einer führenden Sinnwissenschaft [eröffnet] die Möglichkeit, auf der Basis ihrer maßgeblichen Überlieferung mit anderen Sinnwissenschaften in einen kritischen Diskurs zu treten.”<sup>456</sup>

However, there is no attempt to establish such a critical interdisciplinary discourse within Schnelle’s work, which ends somewhat abruptly. In summary, the failure of these TNTs to complete the theological task lies in the inadequacy of their model which, whilst preserving textual and theological integrity to a large degree, fails to find a way to make such diversity theologically fruitful.

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<sup>456</sup> Schnelle, TNT, 17.

#### 4.5. *The Dialogical TNT.*

There is an alternative approach to the unity-diversity issue in relation to a TNT that lies beyond the attempt to recover the unity of the NT or the restriction to an analytical approach that respects diversity by treating the texts separately. Three scholars in particular – Caird, Isaak, and Vouga – have sought to create a dialogical TNT model in an attempt to balance more finely the tension between NT unity and diversity. Such a dialogical model is not dependent on assuming the actual historical occurrence of dialogue between writers/texts of the NT canon as advocated by some NT exegetes.<sup>457</sup> Rather, dialogical TNT models attempt to construct a conversation between the NT texts on the basis of shared thematic *topoi*.

##### 4.5.1. *Caird: TNT as an Apostolic Conference.*

Caird's posthumously published TNT was remarkable for its original conception of the TNT as an apostolic conference in which the biblical texts were to be brought into dialogue with one another. In a jibe at the Platonic pretensions of some TNTs' claim to recover the lost theology shared by all NT writers, Caird claims that:

“...there is no such thing as New Testament theology. It is not an entity waiting to be discovered by industrious and perspicacious scholars. No perfect pattern of it is laid up in heaven, to be contemplated by the learned, and then brought down to earth for the release of the captives in this world's cave of illusion. New Testament theology is nothing more than a book which

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<sup>457</sup> For example, E. Wong uses Bakhtinian dialogical theory as the foundation for an analysis of intertextual relations between Paul and the Synoptics which allows him to postulate varying degrees of Pauline influence (though not necessarily direct) on the Gospel writers, in *Evangelien im Dialog mit Paulus: Eine intertextuelle Studie zu den Synoptikern*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011). D. Smith argues that the influence of the theoretical Q source on the Synoptics may be better attributed to the influence of some Pauline epistles, in *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul: The Influence of the Epistles on the Synoptic Gospels*, (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2011).

some scholar chooses to write, an attempt to describe in some sort of orderly fashion what the writers of the New Testament believed...<sup>458</sup>

This programmatic acknowledgment of the diversity of the NT writings led Caird to reject a number of methods for writing a TNT.<sup>459</sup> The dogmatic approach is deemed unsatisfactory for a number of reasons including the fact that it confuses the categories of revelation and doctrine and that it tends to assume that the matters most important to the dogmatist are also the matters most important to the NT writers.<sup>460</sup> The chronological approach is disregarded due to what Caird sees as the inherent problems in even producing a widely accepted NT chronology of events and texts, let alone the intractable questions surrounding the issue of historical development and inter-textual influence.<sup>461</sup> A kerygmatic approach which searches for a core apostolic theological unity is inadequate because it inevitably marginalizes some texts such as Jude, lacks convincing evidence for a common early creed, and ignores the thematic diversity amongst NT texts.<sup>462</sup> The alternative option of an author by author (or analytic) approach is also rejected by Caird on the grounds that whilst it respects textual diversity, the sections on Paul and John tend to dominate the book because of the amount of material related to them. Furthermore, Caird suggests it is a “lazy” method since “it leaves all the most important work of collective comparison still to be done.”<sup>463</sup>

As an alternative to these models, Caird advocates a dialogical approach that he terms, “The Conference Table Approach”.<sup>464</sup> The model aims to “engage [the NT writers] in a colloquium about theological matters which they themselves have placed on the agenda.”<sup>465</sup> The model itself is derived from the account of the apostolic conference recounted by Paul in Galatians 2:1-10. This meeting between Paul and the apostles in Jerusalem did not result in “a creed, or agreed statement of faith,...[or an] attempt to

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<sup>458</sup> G. Caird, (Completed and edited by L. Hurst), *New Testament Theology*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 4.

<sup>459</sup> For Caird’s view of diversity in a nutshell see his criticism of “the Keygmatic approach”, Caird, 15-17.

<sup>460</sup> Caird, 5-6.

<sup>461</sup> Caird, 8-14.

<sup>462</sup> Caird, 15-17.

<sup>463</sup> Caird, 18.

<sup>464</sup> Caird, 18.

<sup>465</sup> Caird, 18.

reach unanimity.<sup>466</sup> It resulted rather in mutual acknowledgment of the value of each other's distinctive ministries to Jews and Greeks respectively. For Caird, this implies that the NT provides its own criterion in the matter of NT unity: witness to the same Jesus and God the Father, rather than the fact that the texts share the same theological ideas.<sup>467</sup> The conference model thus seeks to interrogate the NT witnesses on various theological themes insofar as each witness is able to contribute to that theme. Inevitably, the portrayal of each witness will be affected to some degree by the interpreter's predilections, whether it be for Paul or John, but the method still ensures that the texts the interpreter finds most difficult are ensured their own voice.<sup>468</sup> The advantage of such a model is that the texts are simultaneously preserved in their uniqueness whilst also being compared with one another. In Caird's view, such an approach renders a service to the systematic theologian by helping him evaluate the significance of the data.<sup>469</sup> Caird does note a potential weakness insofar as he accepts that some textual groupings may be treated synthetically, such as the Pauline literature. This naturally raises the question as to which texts should be included in synthetic groupings.<sup>470</sup> Caird circumvents the issue by claiming that the synthetic treatment of some textual groupings is irrelevant as long as every text is allowed to make its contribution.<sup>471</sup> However, the degree to which this is attainable in a synthetic analysis is questionable. The risk of "proof-texting" a view ostensibly attributed to Paul, for example, that is not found in any one particular text or, alternatively, misrepresenting texts by looking at them through the lens of another, remains a danger within Caird's model.

A further caveat concerning Caird's TNT also relates to his use of synthesis, only this time on a thematic level rather than in the treatment of a textual corpus. Caird's work evidences inconsistencies in that whilst some topics are treated analytically, with each relevant text's views on the subject being presented separately, at other times Caird writes a section which is essentially a biblical dogmatics. For example, his treatment of

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<sup>466</sup> Caird, 23.

<sup>467</sup> Caird, 24.

<sup>468</sup> In Caird's case, the difficult NT text is Matthew, cf. Caird, 21 n.38.

<sup>469</sup> Caird, 22.

<sup>470</sup> Caird, 18-19.

<sup>471</sup> Caird, 18-19.



“the experience of sin”<sup>472</sup> or “Satan”<sup>473</sup> or “the Antichrist”<sup>474</sup> are synthetic presentations of the topics drawing on relevant bible verses as ‘proof texts’, rather than analyses of the treatment of these topics within the relevant texts themselves. This inconsistency in Caird’s approach prevents his “conference table” TNT model from realizing its full potential for preserving the uniqueness of each NT writing whilst simultaneously allowing them to contribute to the theological dialogue. Furthermore, Caird’s “conference table” model also fails to fully redress the issue of the neglect of the ‘minor’ NT texts insofar as Philemon is referenced only once, 2 John twice, and 3 John is not consulted at all.<sup>475</sup> Consequently, Caird’s vision of a TNT in which the diversity of each text remains unassimilated to other texts and thus contributes to a rich theological dialogue remains to be realised.

#### 4.5.2. *Isaak: TNT as a Theological Conference.*

Isaak’s recent TNT has yet to make an impact on scholarly discussion, though it no doubt merits attention. Isaak explicitly seeks to develop the conference table model set out by Caird and is the first English-speaking writer to do so.<sup>476</sup> He divides his TNT into essentially three main parts: a programmatic discussion of the nature of NT theology and the TNT,<sup>477</sup> an overview of the various theologies of the biblical writers,<sup>478</sup> a discussion concerning various dogmatic themes.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Caird, 87-90.

<sup>473</sup> Caird, 107-111.

<sup>474</sup> Caird, 111-115.

<sup>475</sup> cf. Caird, 478-482.

<sup>476</sup> J. Isaak, *New Testament Theology: Extending the Table*, (Eugene: Cascade, 2011) xi, 19. Isaak fails to refer to Vouga’s dialogical TNT despite the fact that it was published earlier, (F. Vouga, *Una teología del Nuevo Testamento*. Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2002). For Vouga, see below.

<sup>477</sup> Issak, 1-54.

<sup>478</sup> Isaak, 55-223.

<sup>479</sup> Isaak, 238-349.

#### 4.5.2.1. *Isaak: Justification of the Conference Model.*

Isaak initially justifies the adoption of the conference table model by highlighting the weaknesses of three existing models for writing a TNT. According to Isaak, the thematic model attempts to take the biblical material and synthesize it under doctrinal headings, thus providing the raw material for the future work of the systematic theologian. Isaak cites Schreiner's TNT as an example of this approach.<sup>480</sup> Although this model functions directly in the service of the Church, Isaak sees its weaknesses in the tendency to "confuse doctrines *about* God *with* God"<sup>481</sup> and the arbitrary imposition of doctrinal/philosophical categories onto the texts in a manner that distorts or neglects some NT voices.<sup>482</sup> Whilst the first criticism is imprecise – Schreiner, for example, claims to be concerned with recovering the divine Word of God (rather than God) in the construction of his theology<sup>483</sup> – the latter criticism is too vague. The use of philosophical/dogmatic categories in itself is not a problem. Indeed, Isaak also discusses the biblical texts using thematic categories found in systematic theology, including Christology, revelation, theology, anthropology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.<sup>484</sup> The issue is rather the manner in which the biblical texts are treated and conclusions drawn in relation to the topic under discussion.

Isaak also rejects the historical or chronological model of writing a TNT, citing Strecker and Schmithals as two scholars indebted to a "developmental-historical model".<sup>485</sup> He suggests the model faces "vast" problems including uncertainty in establishing an NT chronology, the literary and rhetorically persuasive nature of the NT texts that prevents easy establishment of "genetic linkages" between the text's message and its original sources/community, and the model's negation of the element of "novelty" in Early Christianity due to its commitment to the historical and cultural conditioning of the NT

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<sup>480</sup> Isaak, 10.

<sup>481</sup> Isaak, 11.

<sup>482</sup> Isaak, 11.

<sup>483</sup> Schreiner, 887.

<sup>484</sup> Isaak, 238-349.

<sup>485</sup> Issak, 12.

contents.<sup>486</sup> Whilst Isaak's criticisms of the developmental model are justified, he rightly acknowledges that the interpretation of the NT texts must take into account their production within a "particular historical era".<sup>487</sup> Isaak's solution is to resolve the tension between "novelty" and "culture" in the NT writings by reference to the "symbolic world" of the Early Christians which needed to be reconfigured in the light of the Christ-event.<sup>488</sup>

The final model rejected by Isaak is the "history-of-salvation" approach. He places Marshall, Thielman, and Matera in this category, which is marked by the belief that the diverse NT texts are coherently held together by their witness to the divine history of redemption.<sup>489</sup> Salvation-history is thus an overarching narrative matrix of God's gradual redemption of humanity (which still awaits its final eschatological completion) into which the various NT (or biblical) writings are placed. Isaak highlights two key problems with such an approach. Firstly, it risks distorting or even completely neglecting texts by either forcing them into a single narrative framework or abandoning them if they do not fit the preconceived structure. Secondly, and insightfully, Isaak notes that the salvation-history model "is often unaware that it tends to ignore the hermeneutical challenge of contemporary significance".<sup>490</sup> The model uses the texts to reconstruct God's redemptive actions in the past and point towards a future yet to come but never moves beyond this "historical" horizon to suggest how an NT text is currently significant for the reader beyond the provision of information concerning redemptive history.<sup>491</sup>

Isaak's solution to the deficits he sees in existing models attempts to "take advantage of the best of the thematic, historical, and theological models".<sup>492</sup> This is no doubt an ambitious task. Isaak begins by suggesting that in order to protect against distortion from alien philosophical or dogmatic categories, NT theology "must be firmly rooted in the language of the writings themselves".<sup>493</sup> Whilst such caution is understandable, care must

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<sup>486</sup> Isaak, 13-14.

<sup>487</sup> Isaak, 17.

<sup>488</sup> See the section on "New Testament Theology as a Historical and Theological Discipline", Isaak, 23-53.

<sup>489</sup> Isaak, 14.

<sup>490</sup> Isaak, 15.

<sup>491</sup> Isaak, 15.

<sup>492</sup> Isaak, 16.

<sup>493</sup> Isaak, 16.

be taken that such a demand does not in itself become a new dogma which explicates biblical theology only using terms deriving from the Bible. The fact that NT theologies are written in modern languages and not the original idiom of the biblical texts already means that an act of translation has occurred, with words receiving new nuances and losing others. Any contemporary interpreter has already transposed the language of the NT texts into a new idiom as they write their theology. This should not be seen as problematic. Hooker points to the dynamic nature of NT theology itself as Christological terms such as “Messiah” and “Son of God” shifted in meaning or became more or less relevant as Christianity spread beyond its original Jewish context across the wider Roman Empire.<sup>494</sup> A commitment to hearing the NT texts on their own terms as much as possible is vital but this need not restrict the creative use of language in constructive theologizing. There is an irony in Isaak’s repeated concern to avoid the pitfalls of dogmatic imposition. By virtue of his own “rootedness” in the language of the NT writings, the dialogue he produces in the second part of his TNT ends up being framed with reference to traditional dogmatic categories such as ecclesiology and eschatology. Such an outcome is not unique to Isaak (as Vouga will amply demonstrate below). The fact that dogmatic/systematic theology, for all the alleged weaknesses biblical scholars regularly indict it for, originally developed in dialogue with both Scripture *and* tradition suggests that both disciplines may share categories viewed as “arising” from the texts.<sup>495</sup>

In an acknowledgement of the importance of diversity, Isaak also suggests that “all the theologies represented in the NT writings” must be heard.<sup>496</sup> This commitment to upholding NT diversity, which is so marked in all dialogical TNT models, flows from Isaak’s conviction that it is in the “space” created by the “back-and-forth dialogue” between NT theologies that genuine theological reflection and construction may take place.<sup>497</sup> Isaak simply asserts this claim but never grounds it philosophically.<sup>498</sup> However, this lack of philosophical clarification leads to the major weakness of Isaak’s TNT – he

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<sup>494</sup> M. Hooker, “The Nature of New Testament Theology” in Rowland and Tuckett, 77-80.

<sup>495</sup> On the relation of Scripture and tradition, see Kelly, 29-51.

<sup>496</sup> Isaak, 16.

<sup>497</sup> Isaak, 21.

<sup>498</sup> The task of hermeneutically grounding such claims will be taken up below as more robust foundations for a dialogical model are advanced.

sometimes confuses the act of theological construction with the act of theological description. Isaak rightly notes that the NT is “already a theological construction” in which different voices may be discerned and should not be coerced to “sing in unity”.<sup>499</sup> However, there is tension in his use of metaphor for whilst the texts are diverse voices he maintains they are still part of a single “choir” which creates a combined “symphonic effect”, which is presumably a single symphony.<sup>500</sup> This reluctance to cease clinging to an inherent unity amongst the polyphony of the texts is reflected in a lack of careful terminology. For all the programmatic emphasis on diversity, Isaak talks about the NT in the singular as “a theological witness”, a “narrative”, “God’s Word” and as the self-revelation of God, “the Master of the Universe”.<sup>501</sup> He thus claims that “NT theology searches for the unified theology underlying the whole” since each text is a witness to divine activity,<sup>502</sup> implying that an NT theology is something to be recovered/discovered in the texts rather than constructed by the interpreter from the diverse texts. This culminates in the claim that there is a central conviction which *all* the NT writers share, namely:

“God’s people gathering activity has now taken final shape around Messiah Jesus in communities of the Spirit of the risen Lord, through whom God’s mission to disarm the powers and to move all creation forward toward completion is being accomplished.”<sup>503</sup>

Such a statement essentially amounts to the claim to have discerned the theological centre of the NT. Unsurprisingly, Isaak’s centre indicates the same weaknesses that plague Stuhlmacher’s “Mitte der Schrift”. The alleged centre is so broad, encompassing themes such as Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, missiology, and eschatology, that it gives the appearance of capturing the full extent of the NT witness. However, it is arguably only the Pauline corpus as a whole which could justifiably be regarded as reflecting every aspect of the postulated central conviction, as betrayed by the choice of

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<sup>499</sup> Isaak, 16.

<sup>500</sup> Isaak, 21.

<sup>501</sup> Isaak, 18-21.

<sup>502</sup> Isaak, 16.

<sup>503</sup> Isaak, 52 italics removed.

terminology such as “disarm the powers” and “move all creation forward toward completion”.<sup>504</sup> Isaak’s elucidation of a centre to the NT made before the “conference discussion” even begins indicates a curtailment of the scope of possible discussion. Attention will be focused on standard theological *topoi* such as Christology and ecclesiology rather than attempting to extend the traditional scope of the TNT.

#### 4.5.2.2. *Isaak: The Treatment of NT Diversity.*

The tension between Isaak’s commitment to respecting NT diversity and the notion that theological unity undergirds the texts leads him to adopt a methodological approach based on the astonishing claim that an NT theology which respects diversity should begin with the quest for the “theological centre or vision guiding each NT writing.”<sup>505</sup> Consequently, NT texts are discussed in order to ascertain one or more key themes which form their “centre”. Furthermore, this methodological decision is not consistently carried out for Isaak chooses to discuss four main groups of texts rather than always focusing on individual NT texts.

Isaak begins the second main section of his TNT by considering the “theological vision of the Pauline corpus” due to the chronological priority of the Pauline writings.<sup>506</sup> Following a relatively lengthy discussion over Pauline authorship,<sup>507</sup> Isaak turns to the question of the centre of the Pauline writings, in which he also includes “post-Pauline” writings such as the Pastoral epistles.<sup>508</sup> Proceeding with a selection of postulated “centres” from Luther to the present day, Isaak concludes by offering his own proposal that “apocalyptic eschatology” is the centre of Pauline theology.<sup>509</sup> It is only after this that attention really turns to the NT texts themselves as the meaning of “apocalyptic

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<sup>504</sup> cf. Colossians 2:15 and Romans 8:21.

<sup>505</sup> Isaak, 16.

<sup>506</sup> Isaak, 55-56.

<sup>507</sup> Isaak, 61-69.

<sup>508</sup> Isaak, 67-69.

<sup>509</sup> Isaak, 69-76.

eschatology” in terms of Paul’s gospel<sup>510</sup> and the Christological implications<sup>511</sup> are explored. The discussion proceeds synthetically as Isaak constructs his Pauline theology by proof-texting appropriate passages from various epistles depending on the topic at hand. The result is a Pauline theology that is not based on sustained reading of any actual NT text and is summarized in the thematic statement that “the cross-resurrection announces that Jesus has inaugurated both the end and the end-time process of cosmic transformation, which is the guarantee of the total transformation still to come.”<sup>512</sup>

Isaak’s discussion of the other NT texts is more consistent with his vision of NT diversity. Grouping the texts under the rubrics of the Synoptic Gospels, the Johannine Traditions (including Revelation), and the Remaining Canonical Witnesses (Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, Jude), Isaak divides his treatment of each individual text (with the exception of 2 Peter and Jude who are treated together) into two sections: Theological Vision and Thematic Implications. The theological vision sections are essentially potted histories of interpretation which conclude with an opening theological statement as to the distinctive position of the text under discussion. For example, the theological vision section in relation to Matthew’s Gospel covers the scholarly development from source criticism to redaction criticism, contrasts the narrative structure of Matthew and Mark, and speculates on the likely Sitz im Leben of the original Matthean community – all within three pages.<sup>513</sup> The statement on the theological centre of Matthew’s Gospel which concludes the section is thus an assertion rather than the conclusion of sustained investigation of the text.<sup>514</sup> This assertion is then built on in the following thematic implications section which selects three key areas to explore: Matthew’s presentation of Jesus by means of prophetic proofs from the OT,<sup>515</sup> Matthew’s presentation of Jesus by means of royal titles,<sup>516</sup> the relation between Israel and the church.<sup>517</sup> These areas are discussed in relation to selected Matthean texts and, when parables are discussed, through

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<sup>510</sup> Isaak, 76-91.

<sup>511</sup> Isaak, 91-95.

<sup>512</sup> Isaak, 95.

<sup>513</sup> Isaak, 121-123.

<sup>514</sup> Isaak, 124.

<sup>515</sup> Isaak, 124-125.

<sup>516</sup> Isaak, 125-126.

<sup>517</sup> Isaak, 126-130.

comparison with the other Synoptic accounts. The section concludes without a summary and discussion moves on to Luke's Gospel.

Isaak's approach to the biblical texts is highly selective. Key theological themes (or centres) are articulated with little attention to the detail of the texts themselves. The basic approach involves proof-texting pre-identified theological themes. The general approach may thus be categorized as reductionist. NT texts are reduced to one or two key theological ideas which they bring to the "conference table" rather than as potential bearers of meanings that could disrupt expectations as to the theological topics that should be discussed or the very nature of theology itself. This reductionist approach is underscored by the "conference intermission" section which summarises the foregoing discussion under two key observations, namely that "all the NT contributors" are convinced that "sin's deceptive rule" is the fundamental problem with the world and that God has not abandoned his creation but is soteriologically active.<sup>518</sup> Notably, the discussion of these points is predominantly reinforced by textual references to the Pauline corpus, whilst Matthew's Gospel does not receive a mention – a factor not surprising given the way Isaak approached the Gospel. In short, the reader has the sense that Isaak always had an implicit macro-theological narrative structuring his approach to the TNT and that whenever the theological implications of a text or group of texts are discussed, the conclusions reflect Isaak's own theological presuppositions rather than the results of textual analysis itself.

#### 4.5.2.3. *Isaak: The TNT as a Constructive Theological Project.*

At the close of the "conference intermission" chapter, Isaak begins outlining his conception of "constructive biblical theology" which will shape the final main section of the book. If the preceding outline of the various theological centers of the NT writings was descriptive, the following discussion of major theological topoi such as Christology,

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<sup>518</sup> Isaak, 224-227.



Revelation, and Pneumatology is deemed constructive.<sup>519</sup> Isaak critiques the notion that the descriptive findings of biblical theology should be handed over to the systematic theologian in order to complete the theological task. For Isaak, the “systematic theologian’s project” is “dangerous” since it presumes its abstraction from the results of biblical theology to be “balanced...and relatively bias free” whereas all too often it is distorts the NT witness through imposition of “philosophical, political, or social preferences.”<sup>520</sup> Furthermore, systematic theology may be “ill-conceived” since it fails to recognize “the multivalent character” of the NT writings, reducing “the text’s dynamic theological witness” into “something iconic, inert, and lifeless”.<sup>521</sup> However, Isaak fails to cite a single representative systematic theology to illustrate his claims.

Isaak’s response to his caricature of systematic theology is to portray “biblical theology” as the solution. Isaak returns to the choir/symphony set of metaphors to illustrate how NT polyphony should be respected in the act of theological construction. In fact, Isaak goes so far as to claim that it is precisely in the “theological space” created between the divergent testimonies of the NT witnesses that “successive faith communities are authorized to do their theological reflection and appropriation” with NT supplying the overall parameters of the discussion.<sup>522</sup> This embrace of diversity and “theological space” as a positive resource for a constructive theology is most welcome. However, Isaak’s antagonistic framing of the debate as systematic versus biblical theology is unhelpful and poorly defined. Whilst Isaak ostensibly rejects the “bridge model” (exegesis – biblical theology – systematic theology), in practice he actually implements the whole process himself rather than handing over his biblical theology to a systematic theologian. The only genuine difference is that he renames systematic theology as “constructive theology”. Furthermore, Isaak’s assessment of his own work is hermeneutically inadequate since his treatment of the theological centres of the NT texts is itself already an act of constructive theology (and not mere description), just with reference to more

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<sup>519</sup> Isaak, 229.

<sup>520</sup> Isaak, 228.

<sup>521</sup> Isaak, 228.

<sup>522</sup> Isaak, 229, 351.

limited textual resources than his later discussion based around systematic *topoi*. In short, his entire TNT is a constructive theological project and should be acknowledged as such.

Isaak's lack of methodological clarity is evidenced by the fact that the "constructive theology" sections of the TNT function essentially as a biblical dogmatics with no clear links back to the "descriptive" sections on NT theologies. It would be quite possible to read from chapter 8 on Christology (page 239) to the end of the book without having first read the opening two thirds of the TNT. For example, chapter 9 on Revelation contains only a handful of biblical references.<sup>523</sup> It begins with a discussion as to the distinction between general and special revelation, before proceeding to explore the identity and function of Scripture and the various hermeneutical possibilities in bridging the gap between the biblical texts and the contemporary world. In so doing, Isaak critiques literal, "principlizing", and "transcendental" approaches to rendering the biblical witness relevant for today, and instead advocates an "analogical" approach which seeks to "extend" the "impact" or "effect" of "God's reign" on the earliest communities to contemporary faith communities by analogical means.<sup>524</sup> Isaak's hermeneutical argument is open to criticism, though this cannot be dealt with here. The key point is that Isaak's section on Revelation treats hermeneutical and dogmatic matters with few passing references to the NT texts – a practice which he scathingly attributed to systematic theology.

#### 4.5.2.4. *Conclusion: Isaak's Conference Model.*

Isaak's TNT is a positive contribution to the genre. His development of Caird's conference table model rightly construes NT theology as a constructive theological task, which is continually "in process" as faith communities read and re-read the NT in order to shape their theology and values through interaction with the biblical text.<sup>525</sup> The processual nature of the NT task is highlighted by Isaak's innovative move in which each

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<sup>523</sup> Isaak, 255-269.

<sup>524</sup> Isaak, 262-269.

<sup>525</sup> Isaak, 17-18.

chapter of the TNT ends with a series of questions and exercises designed to provoke the reader to engage more actively with the issues discussed. Whilst such an approach may no doubt be attributed to the nature of the classroom environment in which Isaak's TNT developed,<sup>526</sup> it also functions as a welcome statement of intent. Isaak's TNT addresses one of the criticisms of the TNT genre raised by one of his major influences, Luke Timothy Johnson,<sup>527</sup> that TNTs seem to shut down further theological conversation.<sup>528</sup> Isaak clearly wishes to provoke it and is thus to be commended.

At the same time, Isaak's TNT suffers from a lack of clear definitions in relation to theological tasks, hermeneutical precision in relation to the exact role of NT interpreter in constructing an NT theology, and methodological rigor in carrying out a dialogical model of NT theology. The distinctive voices of the biblical texts are often subsumed under broader theological rubrics or sometimes disappear altogether in the construction of Isaak's biblical dogmatics towards the end of the book. In short, there is a lot of shared theological vision but no real genuine conversation initiated amongst the NT texts since Isaak never takes the time for an extended analysis of any single NT text. Thus, Isaak's method works against him in actually producing the genuinely diverse and constructive theological dialogue he wishes to initiate. Ultimately, despite the rhetoric concerning NT diversity, it is ironic that in his desire to preserve the interests of the three TNT models he initially critiqued – thematic, historical, and theological<sup>529</sup> – Isaak lost sight of the most valuable asset to a genuinely dialogical NT theology – the intricacies of the texts themselves.

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<sup>526</sup> Isaak, xv-xix.

<sup>527</sup> cf. Isaak, xvii, 38-41.

<sup>528</sup> L. Johnson, "Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense?" in Rowland and Tuckett, 94.

<sup>529</sup> Isaak, 16.

#### 4.5.3. Vouga: A Postmodern TNT.

Despite having previously written a *Theologieggeschichte* in German<sup>530</sup> which he views as the basis for his TNT,<sup>531</sup> Vouga's TNT was the first in the French language since 1893/1894.<sup>532</sup> It is the only TNT discussed here not originally written in German or English.

##### 4.5.3.1. Vouga: The Task of a TNT.

For Vouga, the task of a TNT consists of interpreting and presenting in a systematic manner the theological statements of the NT. Vouga adopts an existential hermeneutic on the basis that since every statement about God is also a statement about man, theology propositions are not *speculative* but are rather *existential* in character.<sup>533</sup> From this first presupposition Vouga derives a second presupposition, namely that the NT texts should therefore be read and understood as if they were written "*para nosotros*".<sup>534</sup> Reading the texts from a distance is abandoned in a favour of an existential hermeneutic of striving to comprehend the "*Sache*":

“...el punto de vista adoptado por la lectura no es el de la distancia, sino más bien el de un esfuerzo por comprender aquello que pretenden transmitir”).<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Originally published as F. Vouga, *Geschichte des frühen Christentums*, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1994) it was also translated into Czech. A revised version was published in French as *Les premiers pas du christianisme. Les écrits. Les acteurs, les débats*, (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1997), and was also translated into Italian and Spanish in 2001.

<sup>531</sup> F. Vouga, “Relevanz der neutestamentlichen Aussagen in der Gesellschaft und in der Kultur” in E. Becker, 78. Whereas the *Theologieggeschichte* sketched the diverse trajectories of Early Christianity, Vouga's TNT deals with the fundamental question raised by his earlier volume: the question concerning the unity and identity of the Gospel.

<sup>532</sup> cf. Vouga, *Relevanz...*, 79. Vouga's TNT was published as *Une théologie du Nouveau Testament*, (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001) and translated into Italian and Spanish. Here the latter version will be discussed (as TNT): F. Vouga, *Una teología del Nuevo Testamento*, (Estella (Navarra): Editorial Verbo Divino, 2002). A German translation of Vouga's work is due to be published by Francke Verlag in July 2013.

<sup>533</sup> Vouga, TNT, 21.

<sup>534</sup> Vouga, TNT, 22 italics his.

<sup>535</sup> Vouga, TNT, 22.

From this hermeneutical standpoint Vouga deduces two consequences. Firstly, a TNT does not explicitly discuss the historical conditions related to the production of the NT writings but rather presupposes such investigations in the genres *Introduction to the NT* and *History of Early Christian Literature* as “una condición necesaria para la comprensión del mensaje esencial de los textos”<sup>536</sup> Secondly, unlike a *Theologieggeschichte* a TNT does not attempt to reconstruct the development of the diverse early Christian groups but rather seeks to give an account of the contemporary relevance of their understanding of Christian faith.<sup>537</sup> Vouga’s conception of a TNT thus shares a certain apologetic interest with that of Bultmann insofar as it seeks to make the faith of the Early Christians existentially relevant for today. However, Vouga’s distinction of a TNT from *Theologieggeschichte* allows him to make a methodological innovation which Bultmann, given his commitment to the historical developmental model as a strategy to combat the *Normaldogmatik*, was unable to adopt.<sup>538</sup>

#### 4.5.3.2. Vouga: A Postmodern Methodology.

For Vouga, there are two hermeneutical problems which lie at the heart of a TNT: Firstly, the relation between the essential statements of the NT and the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, and secondly, the pluralistic nature of the NT interpretations of the Christ-event.<sup>539</sup> It is really the latter question which most concerns Vouga and he formulates his distinctive position on the unity-diversity issue right at the outset of his work:

“La diversidad de teologías neotestamentarias es *un elemento constitutivo de la unidad del cristianismo de la época apostólica*, de modo que unidad y diversidad no pueden ser consideradas como contrarias, sino que deben ser

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<sup>536</sup> Vouga, TNT, 22.

<sup>537</sup> Vouga, TNT, 22.

<sup>538</sup> On Bultmann’s TNT model, see the epilegomena in: R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958<sup>3</sup>), 585-599.

<sup>539</sup> Vouga, TNT, 22

tomadas como dos momentos de una dialéctica que constituye la particularidad de la definición que el cristianismo ofrece de sí mismo.”<sup>540</sup>

Vouga makes such a claim on the basis that the NT texts are subjective appropriations of the same Christological “Gründungsereignis.”<sup>541</sup> The historical and individual nature of each interpretation necessarily results in a diversity of interpretations though all are dependent on the singular Christological event, which is the shared pre-suppositional basis of reflection.<sup>542</sup> Vouga thus concludes that, firstly, a diversity of interpretations is the appropriate (“sachgemäß”) form of the unity of Christianity and the NT. Secondly, the necessity of the subjective hermeneutical task grounds the self-definition of the NT canon and Christian unity as “offener Konflikt der Interpretationen.”<sup>543</sup>

Vouga consequently rejects TNT models which minimize either unity or diversity. The “classic” model minimizes diversity by ordering the material systematically and dogmatically in line with the great confessions of Christian faith and theological loci such as the doctrine of God, Christology and pneumatology. The “modern” model undermines a sense of canonical unity by focusing on the historical development of Early Christianity. Its main structural categories are historical such as “the first Jewish and Hellenistic communities”, “Paul” and “later developments after Paul and John” as evidenced by F.C. Baur’s and Bultmann’s TNTs. In contrast, Vouga feels the issue of unity and diversity is best served by the adoption of a third model. The “postmodern”

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<sup>540</sup> Vouga, TNT, 22 italics his.

<sup>541</sup> F. Vouga, “Die Aufgaben der Theologie des Neuen Testaments: Verstehen als interdisziplinäre Kunst der Interpretation” in ” in Breytenbach and Frey, 167. “[Die Texte] verstehen sich als verschiedene Interpretationen desselben Gründungsereignissen”.

<sup>542</sup> Vouga, Aufgaben, 167-168. Vouga also briefly points to a number of other common presuppositions which he holds the primitive Christians to have shared. Though these may be disputed in part or in detail, particularly his suggested presuppositions derived from Hellenism, the basic outline seems reasonable. From the Jewish influence on Early Christianity, Vouga derives three presuppositions: 1) monotheism as faith in one God; 2) the interpretation of reality as a creation; 3) acknowledgement of the authority of ‘Scripture’. And from Hellenistic humanism and philosophy were derived: 1) the belief in the existence of a consensus regarding moral teaching amongst the major philosophical schools and religions; 2) the conviction that the life of the individual after death forms part of any soteriological conception. (Vouga, TNT, 472).

<sup>543</sup> Vouga, Aufgaben, 168.

model juxtaposes the presentation of the diverse NT writings and groups of writings.<sup>544</sup>

He states:

“La estructura postmoderna *yuxtapone* la presentación de los diversos escritos (Marcos, Mateo, Hebreos, 1 Pedro) y corpus (Lucas-Hechos, Pablo, Juan).”<sup>545</sup>

Vouga’s abandonment of the large structural arrangements of previous TNTs is one of his outstanding contributions to the TNT genre. Vouga re-conceptualises the NT canon as a mosaic of theological sketches. Consequently, Vouga writes a series of mini-dialogues between various NT texts. For example, the first section of his TNT concerning the Gospel breaks up as follows (my translation):

I. The Revelation of the New Age: The Gospel (Paul and Mark); The Kingdom (Mark, Matthew and Luke); Righteousness (Paul and Matthew); Election (Paul and 1 Peter); II. The Truth of the Gospel: The Gift of the Holy Spirit (John, Paul and Luke); The New Creation (Paul and Revelation); Death and Life (John and Paul); III. The Reality of the New Existence: Salvation (Luke and John); Liberation and Purification (John and Hebrews); Forgiveness (Paul, Matthew and Luke); Reconciliation (Paul and Ephesians).<sup>546</sup>

On the one hand, this approach provides Vouga with the great advantage of not having to rely on too many hypotheses as he himself recognises:

“Der Gewinn liegt in der Sparsamkeit an Hypothesen: Die Texte werden unabhängig von Fremdsystemen gelesen.”<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Vouga, TNT, 23.

<sup>545</sup> Vouga, TNT, 23 italics his.

<sup>546</sup> Vouga, TNT, 35-123.

<sup>547</sup> Vouga, Aufgaben..., 167.

The juxtaposition of texts without reference to an overriding hermeneutical key (such as the *Kanon im Kanon*) which is able to provide a constitutive theological unity among the diverse texts means that the texts are reduced to a series of individual competing voices. In order to do justice to the canonical nature of the texts Vouga seeks to use the notion of the “conflict of interpretations” (derived from Paul Ricoeur), which is the “innere Prinzip des neutestamentlichen Kanons”, as the formative principle of his TNT.<sup>548</sup> Vouga thus takes seriously the polyphonic nature of the NT canon and attempts to find a way of portraying the plurality of NT interpretations in systematic and continuous form.<sup>549</sup>

At the same time, the division of the TNT into multiple mini dialogues requires a degree of coherence so that the content may be meaningfully assimilated by the reader. Vouga provides this with a dogmatic arrangement of material. He arranges his mini-dialogues into five major sections – the Gospel (Revelation), Christian existence, Christology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology. Thus, Vouga’s TNT appears to resemble a postmodern NT dogmatics. However, unlike Caird, who occasionally lapses into synthetic accounts of various *topoi*, Vouga consistently maintains a clear dialogical structure which explicitly ensures that NT texts are not assimilated to one another but contribute their own unique perspective.

#### 4.5.3.3. *Coherence through Existential Meta-Narrative.*

Vouga reinforces the sense of coherence within his project with the creation of an existentialist meta-narrative based around the themes of subjectivity and temporality. His TNT is an attempt “die Theologie von der Selbstdefinition des christlichen Glaubens und von der Zeitlichkeit der glaubenden Existenz her zu verstehen.”<sup>550</sup> Vouga expressly attributes the insight that the NT texts are to be read existentially and not as speculative systems of thought to Bultmann.<sup>551</sup> He defines his existentialist interpretation as

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<sup>548</sup> Vouga, *Aufgaben...*, 167.

<sup>549</sup> Vouga, *Aufgaben...*, 167.

<sup>550</sup> Vouga, *Aufgaben...*, 170.

<sup>551</sup> Vouga, *TNT*, 467.



understanding the texts as a word that is simultaneously “liberation”, “promise”, and a “call to responsibility.”<sup>552</sup> The theme of the NT texts is the subjective self-understanding of the individual hearer/reader.<sup>553</sup> For Vouga, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is *the* event within occidental Hellenistic and Jewish history which “*trastorna la percepción que el sujeto humano tiene de sí mismo*”.<sup>554</sup> The word of the Gospel first addresses the individual as a ‘Thou’, that is, as an acknowledged and responsible subject.<sup>555</sup> It is thus in the confession of faith, defined by Vouga as the decision required by the Gospel in favour of God over against “others”, that “*el individuo se constituye como sujeto responsable y como «yo» autorreflexivo.*”<sup>556</sup>

This meta-narrative of the constitution of self-reflexive subjectivity allows Vouga to link the existential reading of the text by the reader to the original existential encounter with the Gospel. However, for reading the text to become a transformative event in which ‘I’-‘Thou’ dialogue creates access to new existential possibilities Vouga invokes the traditional doctrine of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The task of interpretation is based on the promise of a presence (the Spirit) that changes the encounter into an “event”, and is subjectively decisive insofar as it is the transformative power of a ‘new creation’ for which dialogue with the text gives occasion.<sup>557</sup> As such, Vouga develops an existential pneumatological hermeneutic based on the constitution of a new self-reflexive subject through the Gospel. This enables him to claim a continuity between what the NT writers were doing, what he himself is doing in interpreting the texts, and what the reader of his TNT is doing. He thus provides a meta-narrative to justify his dialogical and existential approach to his TNT.

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<sup>552</sup> Vouga TNT, 467.

<sup>553</sup> Vouga, TNT, 467.

<sup>554</sup> Vouga, TNT, 23 italics his.

<sup>555</sup> Vouga, TNT, 23. The accuracy of this claim will not be disputed here. Suffice to say that a mythology of the development of subjectivity projected back to the beginnings of Christianity arouses suspicion on account of its location of modern notions in pre-modern times, as well as its neglect of OT appeals to individual responsibility and narratives of divine-human address.

<sup>556</sup> Vouga, TNT, 473.

<sup>557</sup> Vouga, TNT, 32-33.

This meta-narrative is combined with the notion of temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) to provide a continuous narrative flow to Vouga's TNT. The first section is entitled *The Event of the Word: The Gospel* and focuses on the singularity of the salvation event. This event is not only the foundational experience for the formation of the personal identity of the believer, but is also of temporal significance since it is the moment in which human history is split into two parts. The incarnation is also temporally significant insofar as it is the point in which eternity becomes bound up with the contingency of history.<sup>558</sup> The second section, *The Rise of the Subject: Christian Existence*, deals with the temporality of the new existence made possible by God's revelatory event, which is expressed in faith, hope and love. The "hope" section particularly picks up the theme of temporality insofar as Vouga characterises it as the self-expression of faith as obedience in the present time and certainty in the face of the future. The ensuing section on *The Christological Foundation: The Proclamation of the Resurrection and Death of Jesus* focuses more on the new existential relation of the subject towards God, themselves, others, and society enabled by the death of Jesus. His death and resurrection are, however, temporally significant insofar as they challenge the limits of human finitude. *Fidelity to the Absolute Singularity: Reflection Concerning the Church* deals with the communities enabled by the newly constituted self-reflexive and therefore responsible 'I'. These communities are places in which the unconditional recognition of the other allows a network of truly experiential 'I'-'Thou' relationships to be constructed. Taking up the temporal motif, the fifth section *The Fulfilment of Time: The Last Things* picks up on the eschatology of the Early believers. Consciousness of human finitude demands reflection concerning the meaning of life and reality whilst also providing the structure in which a responsible life characterised by decision and the desire to be fully present can flourish. The promise of a final consummation through a second event of absolute singularity indicates the transformation of worldly reality into a fulfilment beyond death.<sup>559</sup>

Vouga's phenomenological meta-narrative of the temporal subject is designed both to structure his account of NT theology whilst rendering it simultaneously capable of

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<sup>558</sup> Vouga, *Aufgaben...*, 170-171.

<sup>559</sup> Vouga, *Aufgaben...*, 171-173.

appropriation by the contemporary reader. However, as Eduard Lohse pointed out in relation to Herbert Braun's existentialist reading of the NT, NT theology is concerned not only with the individual subject but also with the world outside of the subject.<sup>560</sup> The existentialist meta-narrative as set out by Vouga adduces texts for the support they lend to the narrative of the phenomenological development of subjectivity. It is doubtful whether this existential narrative actually arises from the NT texts themselves or whether the phenomenological narrative is the deeper truth forming a hermeneutical grid through which the texts are interpreted.

#### 4.5.3.4. *Vouga: Intersubjective Dialogue as the Universal and Pluralistic Form of Unity.*

In his final deliberations on the unity of Christianity, Vouga claims that the attempt to construct a unified Christianity and define its proper identity grounds the formation of the canon. He asserts that from a "fundamental" point of view the "Gospel of God" manifested as "poder de liberación, *implica una clara distinción entre el Evangelio de Dios y las tradiciones humanas.*"<sup>561</sup> On the other hand, a "historical" point of view suggests that the post-Pentecost development of the church necessitated the construction of a fictitious unifying story of the church's origins in order to ward off threats to church unity. This projection of an original Christian unity affects both the historiography of the book of Acts and the search for institutional unity that characterises many Christian writings of the late first and early second century.<sup>562</sup>

Vouga claims that the result of this development was threefold. Firstly, diversity amongst primitive Christians was reduced as far as possible to tolerable dimensions. Secondly, that which could not be reduced to tolerable dimensions was forgotten by allowing it to escape the Church's field of vision and restricting knowledge of it.<sup>563</sup> Finally, the forces

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<sup>560</sup> E. Lohse, *Grundriß der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998 (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), (1974)), 14.

<sup>561</sup> Vouga, TNT, 467-468 italics his.

<sup>562</sup> Vouga, TNT, 468.

<sup>563</sup> Note however, that Vouga does not state what this forgotten diversity was or could have been!

of unifying orthodoxy invented heresy as a means of excluding opponents.<sup>564</sup> Vouga thus rejects the claim of an original unity within Early Christianity in favour of diversity. Unity is seen as a later imposition upon the historical record and thus Vouga denies that a historical approach to the NT writings is able to apprehend an original Christian unity. At the same time he tries to retrieve a sense of unity through the application of his existential hermeneutic to the concepts of universalism, pluralism and inter-subjectivity.

For Vouga, the universalism of Christianity derives from the Gospel of the unconditional acceptance of human beings by God, independently of their qualities.<sup>565</sup> This universalism is counter-balanced by the fact that the Gospel of the unconditional acceptance of human persons independently of their qualities also naturally implies the acceptance of each person *with their qualities* (“*con sus cualidades*”)<sup>566</sup> and thus an embrace of the necessity of pluralism. Furthermore, the nature of the NT writings themselves as responses to the event of Jesus Christ point towards the necessarily pluralistic nature of Christianity: Christianity is always *existential interpretation* of God’s revelation in Christ. The fact that one hears the Gospel as liberation, promise and call to responsibility “para mí” presupposes a creative dimension to the Gospel which legitimates interpretation of such revelation. However, since all interpretations relate back to the same historical Christ event their diversity gives rise to the need for dialogue. Thus, Vouga arrives at his model of the conflict of interpretations concerning the Christ event resulting in “open dialogue” as “*la forma apropiada de la unidad del cristianismo*.”<sup>567</sup> This, in turn, leads to his definition of Christian faith as a:

“relación intersubjetiva entre el Dios que se ha revelado en Jesucristo y la subjetividad del individuo. Por esta razón no puede ser reducida a las simples dimensiones de la adhesión a una formulación de consenso o a un compromiso ortodoxo.”<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Vouga, TNT, 468.

<sup>565</sup> Vouga, TNT, 467-468 italics his.

<sup>566</sup> Vouga, TNT, 469 italics his.

<sup>567</sup> Vouga, TNT, 469-470 italics his.

<sup>568</sup> Vouga, TNT, 470 italics removed.

Since for Vouga, Christianity inevitably takes the form of an inter-subjective relation the search for the truth of the Gospel cannot take any other form than that of a dialogue. Adding yet another layer of thought to his existential hermeneutic Vouga seeks to ground this assertion dogmatically in the very nature of the Trinity. The aseity of God grounds the unity of Christianity, whilst its diversity springs from the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead and the historical nature of the Christ event. Just as in the Trinity, Christianity is characterised by non-oppositional unity and diversity which constitute the complementary common dimensions of a pluralistic universalism. Consequently the diverse NT canon mirrors the unity-diversity tension in the Trinity, since the conflict of diverse interpretations grounds and continues to ground the unity of Christianity.<sup>569</sup>

The conclusion to Vouga's entire TNT is a recapitulation of his entire meta-narrative of the development of the subjective individual. This existential-psychological reinterpretation of dogmatic and biblical theology reaches a crescendo in the final re-statement of Vouga's entire assessment of the unity of Christianity:

“El reconocimiento del Otro como un «tú», la confesión común del Dios que transforma la subjetividad en nueva creación y el diálogo que lleva a la comprensión de la revelación de Dios en Jesucristo son la forma visible de la unidad de cristianismo.”<sup>570</sup>

#### 4.5.3.5. *Vouga: Reconciling Unity and Diversity with the Postmodern TNT.*

Vouga rejects any attempt to unify Christianity from a 'historical' point of view. Instead he substitutes an existentialist meta-narrative of subjectivity alongside an interpretation of Pauline theology as consisting of “justification by grace alone independent of human qualities” as a means to provide a unified coherence to the theologies of the diverse texts. The quest for unity thus moves away from the exegetical content of the NT itself and the

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<sup>569</sup> Vouga, TNT, 471.

<sup>570</sup> Vouga, TNT, 473 italics removed.

history of its development towards a hermeneutical and theological explanation of the relation of NT unity and diversity.

Vouga's TNT contains a complex of multiple dogmatic and existentialist categories designed to provide coherence to his undertaking. Most of these approaches seem unconvincing insofar as they are merely associative, as in the case of Vouga's comparison of the unity and diversity of Christianity with the Trinity, or the relocation of the issue of unity into a phenomenology of the believing subject which has little to do with the NT texts themselves and is itself of questionable accuracy. Furthermore, Vouga's existential hermeneutic, which is strongly influenced by Calvin, Kierkegaard, and Bultmann, makes it difficult to see how this TNT may engage with broader interdisciplinary concerns than those of the "individual believing subject." A broader philosophical framework which offers a more adequate hermeneutical approach for engaging NT diversity as an ongoing constructive interdisciplinary theological task is desirable.

Vouga's undoubted triumph lies in the creation of a genuinely dialogical model that allows each NT text to maintain its own distinctive voice and contribution, without being subsumed into an amorphous theological whole. For the first time this TNT model allows the dialogical process of theologizing with the NT texts to become explicit. The moves an interpreter makes with any particular NT texts can be easily seen in relation to the use of other texts and the argument relating to the topic under discussion. The strict dialogical treatment of the diverse NT texts under the banner of a "conflict of interpretations" is thus a hugely welcome step insofar as it neither assimilates nor isolates the NT texts as other models have done. The thematic arrangement of the dialogues diffuses critiques of proof-texting and synthesizing texts made against other thematic models by allowing the elucidation of a theme in relation to an individual text's literary integrity whilst also being juxtaposed with another text.

A couple of other features mar Vouga's work. The strange insertion of a chapter on the NT theologies of Baur and Bultmann between the sections on ecclesiology and

eschatology appears entirely random and without justification.<sup>571</sup> Most surprising is that no less than *five* members of the NT canon are omitted from the TNT, namely, Philemon, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, 2 Timothy and Jude. That these texts make no contribution whilst the four Gospels, Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians make up the bulk of the TNT seems to make a mockery of Vouga's rhetorical claims to understand the theology of the NT as a many-sided dialogue conducted by the NT texts.<sup>572</sup>

#### 4.5.4. Conclusion: *The Dialogical TNT Model.*

In principle, the dialogical TNT model offers a vision for the treatment of the NT texts that allows for the presentation of the distinct theological point of view of each text whilst also providing a forum for those theological views to be meaningfully discussed. The major contribution of Caird, Isaak, and Vouga to the realization of such a dialogical model should be recognized. However, all of the foregoing examples have compromised the integrity of the model at key points. The inconsistent application of the model by Caird and Isaak sometimes results in a form of biblical dogmatics via synthesis. Vouga is most consistent in his approach to dialoguing the texts but the individualistic approach of his existential hermeneutic which generates coherence for his TNT detracts from its constructive theological significance.

Despite the promise of a dialogical model that can do justice to NT polyphony, all of the TNTs neglect some of the minor NT writings within their works. The place of privilege is still retained by Paul in all three works in a manner which fails to seriously challenge his hegemony in the construction of a TNT. This neutralizes the potential of the dialogical model's full embrace of NT diversity. The dialogical TNT model has enormous potential to expand the traditional range of *topoi* discussed within the TNT but the above works fail to fully relate NT diversity to the task of theological construction. The most pressing lack is the need for a clear philosophical framework which can articulate the significance

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<sup>571</sup> See Vouga, TNT, 401-415.

<sup>572</sup> Vouga, Aufgaben..., 169.

of NT diversity for the hermeneutical task of constructive theology and thus properly undergird a dialogical TNT model. Furthermore, a clear explanation of the relation of the dialogical TNT model to three key problem areas in NT theology should be given in order to clarify the contribution such a model can make and resolve confusion/intermingling with other TNT models. These key areas are the relation of the dialogical TNT to the historical task of describing Early Christianity, to other theological disciplines such as systematic theology, and to the task of Biblical Theology.



#### 4.6. *Interim Assessment: Introduction.*

The following interim assessment will seek to draw together the findings from the foregoing literature review. It will begin with a summary of findings regarding the quest for the “unity” of the NT within the TNT model. Suggestions will then be advanced as to the best way to think of NT “unity” in the light of previous discussion. Finally, a series of theses in relation to the dialogical TNT will be advanced in order to clarify the model for the later chapters.

##### 4.6.1. *Interim Assessment: “Unity” and the TNT.*

The preceding discussion offers a clear indication that the quest for the “unity” of the NT is a key driving force behind the production of NT theologies in recent years. Even in cases where this quest has been abandoned, the writers feel compelled to justify why they have not adopted such an approach in order to legitimate their particular TNT.

A wide variety of strategies can be implemented in order to convey to the reader the theological “unity” of the NT. These include dogmatic justification through reference to terms such as “Word of God” and “Revelation”, the discerning of a Scriptural centre, the use of an existentialist or redemptive-historical narrative structure, the assertion of a functional unity to the NT texts, the use of a pneumatic hermeneutic that reveals a “deeper” meaning to the text, the use of synthetic and proof-texting approaches, the assertion of common creedal formulae or presuppositions underlying the theologies, and the marginalisation of “minor” texts.

Attempts to survey the diversity of the NT and then offer suggestions as to unity either result in vague theological abstractions that lack content or, where the writer is keen to retain a degree of differentiation, an admission that tensions and even contradictions on some topics remain. It may be only a little exaggeration to state that where a “unity” is articulated, it has a strongly Pauline hue.

The meaning of the term “unity” was often semantically unclear in the TNTs. Its location and nature were left unarticulated leading to paradoxical assertions of “diverse unity” and claims that “unity” had been demonstrated even where contradictions had been admitted (Hahn). What is clear is that the concern to provide a linguistic articulation of an original Early Christian unity reflects a degree of hermeneutical naivety. Firstly, it should be noted that any linguistic articulation is already contextualised interpretation and never offers direct access to the “founding event” of Christianity itself. Secondly, the attempt to retrieve a linguistic “unifying” statement as a stable theological foundation is subject to the (insuperable) limits and constraints of historical method, literary skill, and material evidence. Thirdly, the efficacy of establishing an articulable “unity” remains unclear, since it would inevitably become immediately subject to the contest of interpretations that is a feature of human finitude. The most effective attempts at discerning “unity” were therefore those that suggested the possibility of limited general pre-suppositional assumptions prior to, but informing, the diverse theologies of the NT.

It is striking that no particular TNT was able to avoid implementing an analytic approach to some, if not all, texts. Even where the argument for unity was strongest (Hahn, Wilckens, Schreiner) either a two-stage model was adopted or texts were treated separately under thematic headings. This tacit acknowledgement of the irrevocable disclosure of NT diversity by “historical-critical” approaches suggests that any attempt to wilfully return to a pre-Enlightenment biblical hermeneutic of Scriptural unity is destined to fail, however much dogmatic artillery is employed to legitimate such strategies. Consequently, the TNT models which most seriously engage with NT polyphony for theological purposes are best placed to inform the task of constructing a theology.

The two most successful TNTs are probably those of Vouga and Hahn. Hahn’s two-stage model is certainly an impressive TNT. However, by subsuming two distinctive literary genres – *Theologieggeschichte* and TNT – within one work, Hahn constrains the method and goals of the *Theologieggeschichte* in an unhelpful manner. A clear distinction between the two genres allows the *Theologieggeschichte* to function fully according to the

norms of historical research and thus more richly contribute to the task of informing the reading of the NT texts. Hahn's second volume offers much material in a manner similar to Vouga but the lack of genuinely dialogical approach restricts its significance. Hahn's approach is not the most effective manner of securing NT polyphony within a TNT. Overall, Vouga's model is the most promising in terms of respecting textual alterity and literary integrity whilst contributing to the theological task, though the weaknesses in his particular approach have been noted.

All of the TNTs fail to make any significant contribution to the task of constructive theology and, despite limited rhetoric, leave the theological work to the systematic theologians. Indeed, many writers are expressly dismissive of the task of systematic theology and suspicious of its relation to the biblical texts. However, the concern for biblical "purity" so marked in many TNT results in a descriptive style which remains on the surface of the language of the NT texts. A remarkably limited range of exegetical methodologies is employed, suggesting the presence of a positivism which believes that NT theology can simply be "objectively" observed and described. This naivety results in repeated claims to be employing thematic schema which "arise" or are "derived" from the texts themselves. However, more often than not, the desire for completeness in presenting the theology of the NT means the TNT utilises dogmatic categories but refuses to explicitly acknowledge them as such.

A notable consequence of such apparent denial of the employment of dogmatic categories is the narrowness of the theological horizons of the TNTs. Whilst few would dispute the importance of the typical areas covered, many other themes such as friendship, generosity, and politics are continually neglected. Until this defect is remedied and theologians seek to deliberately expand the conversation into areas with which other disciplines are concerned, the production of TNTs will have little impact beyond disciplinary boundaries. Consequently, the effort required to produce works of such exegetical skill and theological concern will continue to lack adequate reward.

#### 4.6.2. *Interim Assessment: The Location of “Unity”.*

The foregoing section concluded that the quest for *the* theology of the NT, which lies hidden in the NT texts and waits to be uncovered by historical, literary, and theological investigation, should be abandoned. Instead, alternative ways of thinking about the location of NT “unity” are required. Consequently, a re-evaluation as to the possible locations of NT ‘unity’ which reflects the findings of the foregoing investigation will now be offered.

##### 4.6.2.1. *Locating Unity in Common Presuppositions.*

A consideration of the TNT genre has suggested that attempts to discern unity in the NT at the textual level are either forced to make claims about unity which are not based on all the canonical texts or have to render the distinctive theologies to such a high level of generality and abstraction that the unity discerned becomes more of a series of dogmatic slogans or topoi rather than a genuine theology. In the latter case, as soon as one starts to specify more of the content of vague unity one inevitably ends up making statements that can by no means apply to all canonical texts. However, the fact that an abstract coherence among the NT texts may be asserted suggests that a level of unity (or better: commonality) may be discerned. Crucially though, this is not a unity at the textual level but rather at the level of shared theological presuppositions informing the individual theological text. However, even here one may run into problems given the brief and occasional nature of texts such as Philemon and 3 John. In order to avoid over-defining the specific nature of the presuppositions in dependence on a particular textual corpus of the NT, it seems fairly safe to say that, with the possible exception of being able to prove this for Philemon, all NT texts involve theological reflection through two presuppositional lenses.

The first presupposition is that such theological reflection is conducted with reference to Israel’s Scriptures. This phrase is deliberately left vague so as not to anachronistically

assert the existence of the OT canon, to restrict the texts to the MT, or to exclude texts which were later not recognised as canonical texts such as 1 Enoch. Although 2-3 John and Philemon may not specifically cite or allude to OT texts,<sup>573</sup> all NT texts cite or allude to Scriptural or related Jewish texts and it is these texts which form their general interpretive horizon. This is not to say that all NT writers utilise the same hermeneutical strategies in relation to their texts, just to point out the Jewish Scriptural texts form part of the interpretive thought horizon of the NT writers.

The second presupposition is that the event of Jesus of Nazareth – the *Grundgeschehen*, or Christ-Event – is theologically transformative. Although, as Landmesser points out, “no text of the New Testament exhaustively describes the Christ event”, this common presupposition runs through all the texts.<sup>574</sup> Furthermore, despite the richness in interpretation of what it means, the Christ-event may viewed as kind of “meta-criterion overarching their interpretations.”<sup>575</sup> Landmesser makes clear that “the content of this criterion is to be distinguished from the criterion itself.”<sup>576</sup> This presuppositional criterion of the Christ-event may of course be developed and linked to notions such as the presupposition of monotheism, though this would need to be demonstrated on the basis of each canonical text.

The simplicity and obvious character of these two presuppositions may appear banal but that is precisely their point. They allow for a degree of general commonality between the writers to be established which can scarcely be refuted, whilst at the same time re-locating NT unity away from the inner textual and theological coherence of the diverse NT texts. At the same time, the general nature of these presuppositions allows for the broad degree of flexibility and diversity within the task of theological reflection, which one finds in the NT. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the assertion that there is a

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<sup>573</sup> See G. Beale and D. Carson, (eds.), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), which offers no entry for Philemon and limited ones on 2-3 John. However, there is a list of possible allusions in Philemon in H. Hübner, *Vetus Testamentum in Novo Receptum 2: Corpus Paulinum*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997). The related volume which will include material on 2-3 John is not yet published.

<sup>574</sup> C. Landmesser, “Interpretative Unity of the New Testament” in Helmer, *One Scripture...*, 183.

<sup>575</sup> Landmesser, *Interpretative Unity...*, 183.

<sup>576</sup> Landmesser, *Interpretative Unity...*, 184 n.59.

presuppositional unity amongst the NT writers is not the same as insisting on the existence of an Early Christian creed, rule of faith, or a pre-reflective *Grundzeugnis*. These are linguistic articulations of doctrine and thus themselves interpretations of the Christ event and its significance. In contrast, the two presuppositions suggested here are lenses through which the NT writers articulated their theologies. They are perhaps best thought of as methodological (theologising in dialogue with Israel's Scriptures) and experiential (individual reflection on the significance of the Christ-event).

#### 4.6.2.2. *Locating Unity in the Act of Interpretation.*

An oft-cited and approved dictum regarding NT theology was offered by Ebeling, who in answering the question, "What is biblical theology?", distinguished between "die in der Bibel enthaltene Theologie" and "die der Bibel gemäße Theologie."<sup>577</sup> Helmer regards this distinction as "the fundamental ambiguity haunting the field [of biblical theology]."<sup>578</sup> However, there are two fundamental problems with Ebeling's distinction. The first problem is that the phrase "die in der Bibel enthaltene Theologie" implies that there is a single homogenous theology contained in the Bible which it is possible to describe, whereas the polyphonic biblical texts actually offer a variety of theologies. The second problem is Ebeling's use of the definite article "die" in the phrase "die der Bibel gemäße Theologie", which occludes awareness of the lack of final definitiveness provided by any reading of the biblical texts. In short, Ebeling's observation lacks hermeneutical nuance. A more precise reformulation of the options facing biblical theology is the distinction between "die in der Bibel enthaltene Theologien" and "eine der Bibel gemäße Theologie." The choice thus does not lie between two single theologies (historical descriptive versus constructive) but between description of the plurality of theologies contained in the Bible and the construction of a theology which claims to have appropriate support from the biblical text (however that is achieved).

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<sup>577</sup> G. Ebeling, "Was heißt 'Biblische Theologie'?" (1955)" in G. Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube: I*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967), 69.

<sup>578</sup> C. Helmer, "Introduction: Multivalence in Biblical Theology" in C. Helmer, (ed.), *The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meanings*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 1.

The second possible location of unity thus lies not within the NT theologies themselves but in the act of interpretation. A theology of the NT (in the singular) cannot be the theology of the NT writers but only a theology produced by the interpreter in interaction with the NT texts. This idea was clearly put forward by Johnson when asked to write an article entitled ‘Does a Theology of the Canonical Gospels Make Sense?’<sup>579</sup> Johnson investigated what it would actually mean to connect the notions “theology” and “canonical gospels” together and whether the two notions are suitably linked by the preposition “of”. He concluded that the reduction of four Gospels to *a theology* involves unification, abstraction and the stifling of diversity. Johnson went on to offer a forceful critique of the attempt to write a TNT suggesting that it may contribute more to closing down theological conversation than opening one up.<sup>580</sup> He states:

“I resist the term ‘theology of the canonical Gospels’, because it suggests that the qualities I have isolated either represent what the Gospels are about, or adequately summarize any one of them individually, or all of them together. This would be, I think, an inappropriate reduction.”<sup>581</sup>

Consistent with his conclusions, Johnson moves in a quite different direction to the attempt to produce “a theology of the canonical Gospels”. He suggests:

“A better question is, ‘what theology does the canonical tradition support, and with what theology is it incompatible?’ Asking the question this way does not force us to ‘find’ a theology in the actual compositions, but enables us to think about the theological premises and perceptions out of which the compositions arise and to which they give support, or, conversely, what theological premises and perceptions they would, taken individually or collectively, fail to support.”<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> Johnson, 93-108.

<sup>580</sup> Johnson, 94.

<sup>581</sup> Johnson, 106.

<sup>582</sup> Johnson, 106.

For Johnson, investigation of the biblical texts should lead to an open-ended conversation about the kind of the theology the texts can support, that is, “eine schriftgemäße Theologie.” Such a position rightly recognises the distance of a “theology” from the biblical text *and* allows for a critical literary and historical approach to the texts that respects their diversity. The texts are seen as a resource and dialogue partner rather than as containing *the* theology which must be inductively discovered and believed. Such a position can actually be viewed as crucial for the healthy and ongoing existence of living Christian faith communities. Wolter suggests that it is precisely the diversity of the NT canon which allows it to function as an infinite theological resource for constructing Christian identities without it being dissipated or compromised through too close an attachment to one particular interpretive context. He writes:

“Die Pluralität des Kanons halt vielmehr bleibend fest, dass christliche Identität sich in unterschiedlichen Plausibilitätsstrukturen kontextuell ausdifferenzieren kann und muss, um soziale Identität gewinnen zu können, ohne sich dabei an einen individuellen Kontext auszuliefern oder in ihm aufzugehen.”<sup>583</sup>

Christian identity requires the interpretation of the NT texts but every interpretation necessitates a sense of coherence to be compelling. To create such a degree of coherence from diverse texts implies infinite attempts to take all details into account since the limitations of any interpretation necessarily occlude aspects of the texts.<sup>584</sup> That this process is also stimulated by different contexts in which diverse identities are shaped implies that “a Scripturally appropriate theology” will look different in different contexts and should do so. Therefore, the task of the NT theologian is to continually re-interpret the NT texts to help shape a contextual theology that increasingly takes account of as much of the variety of theological voices found in Scripture as possible.

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<sup>583</sup> Wolter, *Die Vielfalt...*, 62.

<sup>584</sup> See Landmesser, *Interpretative Unity...*, 182-185.



#### 4.6.3. *Interim Assessment: Affirming the Basic Principles of the Dialogical TNT Model.*

By locating “unity” in a few common presuppositions of the NT writers *and* in the act of constructive interpretation, the need for *historical* investigation to discern an essential Early Christian theological unity beneath the surface of the NT texts is set aside. Instead, the path is cleared for conceiving the TNT as a *theological* task that constructs a theology in dialogue with the NT canon. The best model to achieve this goal is the dialogical TNT, of which Vouga’s is the most accomplished to date. The following set of thesis statements draws its inspiration from his model and seeks to bring to analytical clarity the fundamental methodological features of the dialogical TNT model.

*The dialogical TNT works thematically but maintains the literary integrity and hermeneutical alterity of the texts.* The range of themes is not limited to the traditional set of biblical theological/dogmatic themes as pursued in Vouga’s TNT such as Christology and soteriology. Any topic provides a legitimate investigative forum, though naturally NT texts will offer more insight on some matters than others. The kind of topics which have previously been neglected within TNTs include matters related to political theology such as attitudes towards the state, and theological ethics such as generosity and reciprocity, humility, work and the human condition. In fact, an entire range of questions deriving from both theological and non-theological disciplines await to be addressed to the NT texts. However, these thematic concerns are not allowed to dominate the text or synthesise the NT into a uniform view on a topic. Rather, through considering what an NT text in its entirety may reveal about a particular issue and bringing this into dialogue with another NT text, itself considered in its literary integrity, multiple nuances and productive tensions previously hidden or overlooked may be brought to light.

*By maintaining the literary integrity of an NT text as a key interpretive feature, the dialogical TNT allows for a range of exegetical methods to be employed by the theologian.* A natural consequence of the attempt to discern an original unity within the NT is the lack of deployment of a range of exegetical methods. Many interpreters use the default “historical-critical” method or even a “biblicistic” approach to the texts. The

dialogical model always focuses on texts as an integral whole and thus allows for a broad range of approaches, such as socio-rhetorical, feminist, or history-of-reception methods. Methods may be employed to the degree that they help cast light on a text's contribution to a particular topic of discussion.

*The dialogical TNT makes explicit the argumentative process.* A model which exploits diversity and acknowledges the constructive role of the interpreter in the theological task encourages the theologian to be explicit about their presuppositions, hermeneutical and theological, and allow their interpretive moves to be seen precisely as such. By reading texts separately and constructing a dialogue that eventually reaches some kind of final statement which reflects the view of the interpreter, the possibility of advancing one's own theological views under the guise that they are what the texts "really" say is greatly diminished. Abandoning a synthetic approach to the texts also functions as a check and balance on the interpreter's selectivity and blind spots in relation to what they think/would like the texts to say.

*The dialogical TNT offers a model that can be implemented meaningfully by a single interpreter with regard to a limited number of texts or themes.* The range of theological topics to be discussed is practically infinite. Consequently, the idea that even a multi-volume TNT can exhaust the task of NT theology let alone accomplish it with a sense of finality is misguided. Interpreters should accept their limitations and investigate the topics and areas most pressing for them. The dialogical TNT is thus a collaborative model which allows various interpreters to address their own concerns or any theological lacunae which they perceive. This does not mean that no attempt to cover all traditional topoi in one volume in the manner of Vouga should be made; simply that NT theology encompasses a much broader range of possibilities including single volume treatments of a particular theological issue.

*The dialogical TNT requires the specific theological presupposition of the canonical status of all of the NT texts.* As a model that simply seeks to take into account the

phenomenological and hermeneutical factors affecting textual interpretation,<sup>585</sup> the dialogical TNT is merely a method of constructing theology. As such, it could function as a theoretical model for constructing theology in relation to any adopted textual canon. However, the dialogical TNT is proposed here as a solution to the contemporary problem within NT theology as to how to construct *Christian theology* from the 27 diverse texts of the canon. Rejection of the NT canonical basis for theology would mean moving away from this goal and engaging in a different type of discourse.<sup>586</sup>

*The dialogical TNT can function in an interdisciplinary manner.* There is, in principle, no limitation to the number of dialogue partners who may be brought to the table on a particular issue. Vouga and Stiewe have already offered good examples of how such interdisciplinary work may be done. In *Das Fundament der Kirche im Dialog*, the various NT models for understanding the nature of the Church are compared with those of various churches such as the Church Constitution of the Second Vatican Council and the Waldensians as well as with the ideas of theologians such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, and Barth. The approach and many of the sources are distinctively Protestant (Lutheran and Reformed) as befits the authors but contributions beyond this restricted horizon are also considered.<sup>587</sup> Vouga and Stiewe's project remains mostly within the confines of the theological disciplines but nevertheless remains a worthy contribution.<sup>588</sup> Crucially, whichever disciplines and thinkers are brought to the table the fundamental point of the dialogical TNT is that the NT texts remain the key dialogue partners under interrogation. The dialogical TNT utilises interdisciplinary work to allow the NT texts to reveal

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<sup>585</sup> See the following chapter.

<sup>586</sup> See below for a discussion of the problem area involving the relationship between the TNT and Theologieggeschichte, in which the notion of canonical boundaries has played a key rhetorical and methodological role in attempts to undermine the academic status of theological work on the NT.

<sup>587</sup> M. Stiewe and F. Vouga, *Das Fundament der Kirche im Dialog: Modelle des Kirchenverständnisses im Neuen Testament und in der konfessionellen Rezeptionsgeschichte*, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2003).

<sup>588</sup> A volume which highlights some possible directions of future interdisciplinary work by NT scholars, albeit with contributions of uneven quality and without a consistent methodological approach, is the following Festschrift for J. Gnllka: T. Schmeller, (ed.), *Neutestamentliche Exegese im 21. Jahrhundert: Grenzüberschreitungen*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2008).

previously hidden aspects that can inform the task of theological construction, rather than eclipsing the normative function of the NT texts themselves.<sup>589</sup>

#### 4.6.4. *Interim Assessment: Conclusion.*

Three fundamental claims have been made thus far. Firstly, that the quest to extract or discern a “unified” theology within the NT texts tends to infringe on the integrity and alterity of the NT texts. The resulting neglect of NT theological polyphony and diversity is the inevitable consequence of such reductionist TNT models. Secondly, it is better to re-evaluate the location of theological “unity” (and avoid such terminology) in non-linguistic phenomena since these are always determined by interpretation. Thus, “unity” is better perceived as a set of “presuppositions”, which function methodologically in shaping the way the NT writers theologise with reference to Israel’s Scripture and experientially in tracing their theological activity in some way to the Christ-event. Finally, the dialogical TNT is advocated as the most hermeneutically effective TNT model for engaging in a theologically constructive way with the polyphony of the NT canon. The rest of this study seeks to elucidate and clarify this claim.

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<sup>589</sup> On normativity, see below.

## Chapter Five

### 5. *The Justification of the Dialogical Model: Introduction*

Vouga uses Ricoeur's notion of the "conflict of interpretations" as a slogan to define his postmodern TNT model but neither explores the meaning of the phrase nor uses Ricoeur's philosophical work to provide a more robust theoretical underpinning to his TNT.<sup>590</sup> However, it is precisely such a theoretical underpinning which is required by the dialogical model in order to demonstrate the significance and value of the manner in which it treats the NT texts. In contrast to Vouga, Ricoeur's hermeneutical work will not be used here to provide a theoretical grounding for the dialogical TNT model. Rather, attention will be focussed on the possibilities provided by "Philosophical Hermeneutics". Indeed, Ricoeur was himself influenced to a degree by Gadamer,<sup>591</sup> though he remained critical of some aspects of philosophical hermeneutics.<sup>592</sup>

The current chapter will explore the contribution that philosophical hermeneutics can make in helping to justify the adoption of the dialogical model as a fruitful way of conducting NT theology. The insights of this 20<sup>th</sup> century continental philosophical movement have had a considerable effect on the disciplines categorised as "Geisteswissenschaften" and continue to exert an increasing influence today.<sup>593</sup> After providing a brief orientation in relation to philosophical hermeneutics, this chapter will then critique the rejection of philosophical hermeneutics as providing a viable model for

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<sup>590</sup> Vouga, *Aufgaben...*, 167.

<sup>591</sup> A. Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, (London: Continuum, 2009), 37.

<sup>592</sup> Porter and Robinson, 128.

<sup>593</sup> For a basic introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics see: J. Grondin, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991); L. Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics*, (Chesham: Acumen, 2006); G. Figal, "Philosophische Hermeneutik – Hermeneutische Philosophie. Ein Problemaufriß" in G. Figal, *Verstehensfragen: Studien zur phänomenologisch-hermeneutischen Philosophie*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 1-10; K. Joisten, *Philosophische Hermeneutik*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009). For recent theologically concerned introductions to hermeneutics which pay substantial attention to philosophical hermeneutics, see: A. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); M. Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?: Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); P. Pokorný, *Hermeneutics as a Theory of Understanding*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); S. Porter and J. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

doing NT theology by Esler. Attention will then turn to a discussion of the contribution of philosophical hermeneutics to the ethical, hermeneutical, and theological justification for the dialogical TNT model.

### 5.1. *Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Brief Orientation.*

The contemporary school of thought classified as “Philosophical Hermeneutics” is generally regarded as developing from the hermeneutical thought of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002).<sup>594</sup> More precisely, the publication of Gadamer’s first major philosophical work *Wahrheit und Methode* in 1960 functions as the founding text of the movement.<sup>595</sup> However, philosophical hermeneutics is not limited to discussion of the ideas contained in *Wahrheit und Methode* and there are a number of innovative interpretations which clarify and extend Gadamer’s thought.<sup>596</sup> Furthermore, Gadamer’s ideas have been taken up and independently developed by a wide range of thinkers, including figures such Vattimo,<sup>597</sup> Figal,<sup>598</sup> Risser,<sup>599</sup> and Di

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<sup>594</sup> For biographical accounts of Gadamer’s life and works written by his former pupils see: J. Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Eine Biographie*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999); D. Di Cesare, *Gadamer: Ein philosophisches Porträt*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>595</sup> H. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960 (6<sup>th</sup> rev. edition 1990)). For introductions to *Wahrheit und Methode* see: J. Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. K. Plant, (Chesham: Acumen, 2003); G. Figal, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Wahrheit und Methode*, (Berlin: Akademie, 2011<sup>2</sup>). The significance of *Wahrheit und Methode* is illustrated by the number of essay collections published to mark its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and discuss its enduring relevance: J. Malpas and S. Zabala, *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years After Gadamer’s Truth and Method*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010); G. Figal (ed.), *Internationales Jahrbuch für Hermeneutik. Schwerpunkt: 50 Jahre Wahrheit und Methode*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); R. Dottori (ed.), *The Dialogue/Das Gespräch/Il Dialogo. Yearbook of Philosophical Hermeneutics. 50 Jahre Wahrheit und Methode: Beiträge im Anschluss an H.-G. Gadamer’s Hauptwerk*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); and the forthcoming volume C. Dutt (ed.), *Gadamer’s philosophische Hermeneutik und die Literaturwissenschaft: Marbacher Kolloquium zum 50. Jahrestag der Publikation von Wahrheit und Methode*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012).

<sup>596</sup> For example: J. Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (New York: SUNY, 1997); C. Ringma, *Gadamer’s Dialogical Hermeneutic: The Hermeneutics of Bultmann, of the New Testament Sociologists, and of the Social Theologians in Dialogue with Gadamer’s Hermeneutic*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1999); P. Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Basic Interpretation with Some Theological Implications*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); N. Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (New York: SUNY, 2006).

<sup>597</sup> G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); G. Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1997); G. Vattimo, *Art’s Claim to Truth*, (New York: Columbia University, 2008). For some critical comments concerning Gadamer see G. Vattimo,

Cesare.<sup>600</sup> Given the scope of philosophical hermeneutics the current chapter will not pretend to aspire to provide an exhaustive discussion. Instead, reference will be made primarily to the work of Davey, since it offers the most insightful and coherently organised discussion of philosophical hermeneutics available, and will draw on other writers eclectically when appropriate.

Before proceeding directly to the discussion concerning the philosophical hermeneutical justification for the dialogical TNT model it is necessary to clarify the precise nature of philosophical hermeneutics in order to avoid misunderstanding. Two fundamental issues must be elucidated. Firstly, it is vital to note that philosophical hermeneutics is not merely concerned with the interpretation of texts. Rather, philosophical hermeneutics is concerned with the hermeneutical nature of human existence as whole, though it naturally does reflect on the process of textual interpretation as a feature of human experience. Philosophical hermeneutics maintains some basic ontological assumptions regarding the finite nature and linguistic being of human existence in the world, which have repercussions in relation to epistemological questions concerning the nature of truth and human understanding, including those related to the understanding of texts. Some of these points will be explored below.

Secondly and consequently, philosophical hermeneutics is not concerned with establishing a method (let alone the “correct” method) for reading a text in the manner of typical hermeneutical approaches employed by biblical interpreters such as the historical-grammatical approach, narrative criticism, reader-response criticism and so forth. In fact,

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*The Responsibility of the Philosopher*, (New York: Columbia University, 2010), 51-60. For explorations of Vattimo’s indebtedness to Gadamer: S. Zabala, “Introduction: Gianni Vattimmo and Weak Philosophy” in S. Zabala (ed.), *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University, 2007), 3-34; J. Grondin, “Vattimo’s Latinization of Hermeneutics: Why Did Gadamer Resist Postmodernism?” in S. Zabala (ed.), *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University, 2007), 203-216; T. Gubatz, *Heidegger, Gadamer und die Turiner Schule: Die Verwindung der Metaphysik im Spannungsfeld zwischen Glaube und Philosophie*, (Würzburg: Ergon, 2009).

<sup>598</sup> G. Figal, *Gegenständlichkeit: Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*, (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2006).

<sup>599</sup> J. Risser, *The Life of Understanding: A Contemporary Hermeneutics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2012).

<sup>600</sup> D. Di Cesare, *Utopia of Understanding: Between Babel and Auschwitz*, (New York: SUNY, 2012).

philosophical hermeneutics arose as a defence of the *Geisteswissenschaften* against reductionist positivist claims that “truth” could only be established by use of the correct “scientific” method.<sup>601</sup> In the introduction to *Wahrheit und Methode* Gadamer programmatically announces his resistance to the attempt to turn the phenomenon of understanding into a scientific method:

“Die folgenden Untersuchungen knüpfen an diesen Widerstand an, der sich innerhalb der modernen Wissenschaft gegen den universalen Anspruch wissenschaftlicher Methodik behauptet.”<sup>602</sup>

Rather than simply establishing another method for textual interpretation, philosophical hermeneutics is fundamentally phenomenological reflection upon the nature of human understanding.<sup>603</sup> It is “an interpretation of interpretation, a prolonged meditation upon what “happens” to us within “hermeneutic experience” when we are challenged by texts...”<sup>604</sup> At the same time, philosophical hermeneutics is not simply descriptive but also, as a consequence of in depth reflection on human interpretive experience, attempts to set out a vision of hermeneutical understanding that is both ethical and critical.

## 5.2. *Philosophical Hermeneutics: Critiquing Esler’s Critique of Gadamer.*

Esler has written the most extensive theoretical proposal for a model of doing NT theology to date.<sup>605</sup> He references a dazzling array of philosophers, theologians, and theorists as he seeks to build the foundations for a theological approach that both applies

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<sup>601</sup> Thiselton goes so far as to suggest that Gadamer’s original work could have been more aptly entitled “Truth or Method” in A. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 2 – an interpretation which Gadamer himself rejected, see H. Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, trans. and ed. R. Palmer, (New Haven: Yale, 2001), 41.

<sup>602</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 1.

<sup>603</sup> cf. G. Figal, “Gadamer als Phänomenologe” in Figal, *Verstehensfragen*, 277-290; Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other*, 40-49. An extended treatment of the extent of Gadamer’s indebtedness to Heidegger’s phenomenology offered in R. Coltman, *The Language of Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Heidegger in Dialogue*, (New York: SUNY, 1998).

<sup>604</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 1.

<sup>605</sup> P. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community*, (London: SPCK, 2005). (All references to this work are simply footnoted as “Esler”).



the NT to contemporary life and celebrates the notions of inter-cultural communication and inter-personal communion in reading the texts. It seems everyone from Aquinas<sup>606</sup> to Zizioulas<sup>607</sup> is drawn in to help Esler make the controversial case for the possibility of interpersonal communion between the author of the biblical text and the contemporary reader in the act of interpretation.<sup>608</sup> Esler's overall thesis concerning interpersonal communion need not be rebutted here. Neither will attention be paid here to Esler's rejection of both TNTs that seek to derive theological norms from the NT and the thematic focus of systematic theology in an attempt to argue for a "formative" reading of the NT texts that allows their historical voice to be directly applied to contemporary situations.<sup>609</sup> The relation of the TNT to systematic theology will be discussed in a later chapter. Instead, attention will be focussed on Esler's rejection of philosophical hermeneutics as a suitable theoretical underpinning of his theological project in the guise of a critique of Gadamer and embrace of Schleiermacher.

### 5.2.1. *Esler's Critique of Gadamer Concerning Conversation and Alterity.*

Esler regards the wide influence of Gadamer's notion of *Horizontverschmelzung* ("fusion of horizons") as "regrettable",<sup>610</sup> accusing Gadamer's description of the fusion of horizons of three key failings. These are that the fusion of horizons:

"entails a model of dialogue fixated on agreement as the point of dialogue, the hegemonic supplanting of the historical other and a disregard for the frequency with which those socialized in one culture can take steps to understand people socialized in another."<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Esler, 250-251.

<sup>607</sup> Esler, 59-60.

<sup>608</sup> Esler, 278-279.

<sup>609</sup> Esler, 6-7, 273-275.

<sup>610</sup> Esler, 275.

<sup>611</sup> Esler, 116.

Esler's rejection of Gadamer's account of human understanding is thus ultimately based on the conclusion that Gadamer is unable to truly preserve the alterity of the conversational partner (in this case a historical text) in a meaningful way. In turn, any perceived attack on alterity in relation to a historical text is unacceptable for Esler precisely because the entire premise of his model of interpersonal communion is based around the claim for the need to grasp original authorial intention as fully as possible in the interpretation of the NT texts. The historically sensitive interpreter must regard the original author of the text as "a real human person...which necessitates doing all that we possibly can to hear that voice sounding forth to the full extent of its ancient otherness, yes, its strangeness from us."<sup>612</sup> Consequently, Esler seeks to resuscitate Schleiermacher's hermeneutics on account of the fact that Schleiermacher is concerned with both written *and* oral discourse<sup>613</sup> – a feature congenial to Esler's idea that engaging the biblical texts is like conversing with a living person rather than dissecting a dead tradition - and because Schleiermacher emphasises the need for empathy in trying to understand authorial intent by establishing "the same relationship between himself and the original author as existed between the author and the original audience".<sup>614</sup>

Esler's concern for the preservation of alterity is laudable and necessary, though his case for the recovery of authorial intent is unacceptable from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. However, in relation to the issue of alterity, Esler's critique of Gadamer is unfortunately misguided and superficial. Esler begins his attack by claiming that, for Gadamer, a "true conversation" only takes place when the two parties are trying to reach agreement and that this thus "excludes many important kinds of conversation."<sup>615</sup> Furthermore, Esler states that such an idea is either at best "sentimental" in maintaining

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<sup>612</sup> Esler, 147.

<sup>613</sup> Esler, 137-146.

<sup>614</sup> Esler, 135. Esler's critique of Gadamer's reception of Schleiermacher (120-122) will not be explored here but no doubt has some merit as recent reassessments of the relationship also suggest, see for example, A. Bowie, "The philosophical significance of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics" in J. Mariña (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 73-90; K. Gjesdal, "Herder, Schleiermacher, and the Origins of Modern Hermeneutics" in B. Frischmann and E. Millán-Zaibert, (eds.), *Das neue Licht der Frühromantik: Innovation und Aktualität frühromantischer Philosophie*, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), 200-212; K. Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 155-184.

<sup>615</sup> Esler, 77.

that “we are only truly speaking to one another if we are trying to reach agreement”, or far worse, an indefensible “hegemonic assertion of sameness over difference...‘You’re only free to agree’.”<sup>616</sup> However, Esler’s critique fails when one notes that Gadamer is using the term “conversation” in two separate ways which Esler renders indistinguishable. Gadamer distinguishes an everyday conversation in which a person seeks to understand the horizon of another person in a purely informative sense – the example Gadamer uses is of a doctor questioning a person in relation to their illness – from a more technical sense of a “true” conversation in which the two parties are discussing a matter (“Sache”) in order to come to an understanding of the matter at hand (for example, the incarnation).<sup>617</sup> In the first case, the doctor who questions the patient is simply seeking information about the situation of the other person but is not putting him/herself and his/her understanding “at risk”. In the “true” conversation, both parties are seeking to understand the other’s point of view in a way which puts them “at risk” of having to revise their own understanding of the subject matter.<sup>618</sup> The technical idea of a “true” conversation makes more sense when one remembers that Gadamer is primarily concerned with the possibility of discerning “truth” beyond the parameters of scientific method as the title *Wahrheit und Methode* indicates.

However, Esler builds on his error by castigating Gadamer for allegedly claiming that “a text or person thus understood in its or his or her otherness and with which or whom we do not agree cannot be speaking the truth.”<sup>619</sup> Such a reading clearly reflects a failure to understand Gadamer at all, which Esler compounds by quoting selections from *Wahrheit und Methode* that appear to utterly disregard the importance of the alterity of the text such as “the text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim that it is uttering something true.”<sup>620</sup> Esler’s righteous anger at “a politics of discourse where the other matters if and only if I can successfully enforce my will during the dialogue by

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<sup>616</sup> Esler, 77 italics removed.

<sup>617</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 308-309.

<sup>618</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 308-309.

<sup>619</sup> Esler, 78.

<sup>620</sup> Esler, 78 quoting H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), 270.

persuading him or her to agree with me”<sup>621</sup> reaches comedic heights as he fulminates against the “preposterous confidence in the infallibility and indefectibility of one’s own opinion [which] could generate such beliefs.”<sup>622</sup>

Embarrassingly for Esler, if he had read one more sentence after the final one he quotes on this particular issue,<sup>623</sup> he would have noted that Gadamer calls into question “ob diese Beschreibung das hermeneutische Phänomen wirklich trifft.”<sup>624</sup> Gadamer’s point is precisely that a model for approaching historical texts which, like the everyday conversation between the doctor and the patient, presumes that the individual horizons of text and interpreter can remain intact and based around a purely informative exchange surrenders the possibility of a genuine encounter with the truth claims of the text and does not accurately reflect what takes place in the hermeneutical event. Gadamer replaces such a model with the notion of the fusion of horizons but again, Esler fundamentally misunderstands what Gadamer has in mind.

### 5.2.2. *Esler’s Critique of Gadamer Concerning the Fusion of Horizons and History.*

For Gadamer, *Horizontverschmelzung* can function as a model for understanding how a contemporary interpreter interacts with a text. The key to understanding the model lies in acknowledging that “the essentially historical character of human understanding...is the principal component of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics.”<sup>625</sup> Both text and interpreter are always historically situated and consequently the interpreter’s horizons are constantly shifting. At the same time, it is impossible for the interpreter to abandon their historical situation and insert themselves, free of all historical determination, into the historical situation of the original production of the text. Rather, the contemporary interpreter must continually “project” the historical horizon of the text in order to respect

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<sup>621</sup> Esler, 78.

<sup>622</sup> Esler, 78.

<sup>623</sup> Esler, 78.

<sup>624</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 309.

<sup>625</sup> P. Dybel, “The Concept of Historicity of Understanding in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: On the Example of the Notion of Tradition” in A. Wierciński (ed.), *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, (Berlin: LIT, 2011), 469.

the text's alterity, but each time the interpreter encounters and interprets the text as something meaningful, the nature of their future projections of the past horizon of the text shifts somewhat. Consequently, the horizon of the interpreter is continually being reconfigured as the interpreter places at risk their pre-judgments ("Vorurteile") through attentive reading of the text.<sup>626</sup>

Commenting on the fusion of horizons, Esler claims that the "hegemonic dimension" of Gadamer's interpretation "emerges here with crystal clarity."<sup>627</sup> He criticises Gadamer for the claim that the present horizon of the interpreter "overtakes" the historical horizon of the text with the result that "the objective reality of the past has disappeared."<sup>628</sup> Here we reach the critical flaw in Esler's thought which renders Gadamer's hermeneutics unintelligible to him – the failure to recognise the irreducibly hermeneutical, while historical and finite, nature of human existence. Esler criticises the view that "time is no longer a primarily a gulf to be bridged but is actually 'the supportive ground of process in which the present is rooted'"<sup>629</sup> since it means we "cannot appreciate the past on its own terms" and the meaning of a text is "'partly shaped by our own place in a tradition which reaches the present'."<sup>630</sup> Ironically, in the very same essay Esler states that if required to account for the attractiveness he finds in his own model he "can only answer that it comes from some deep part of how I see the world that goes back to my upbringing."<sup>631</sup> Furthermore, not only is Esler's model for reading the NT texts shaped by his own biography but he also acknowledges his indebtedness to Stendahl's descriptive model of biblical theology set out in 1962<sup>632</sup> and that Martin Buber's *Ich und Du* published in 1923<sup>633</sup> offered a "foundational idea" for his approach.<sup>634</sup> It thus seems that Esler, despite his own intentions, actually offers himself as a prime example of how the reading of

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<sup>626</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 305-312. See also the discussion in Ringma, 49-54.

<sup>627</sup> Esler, 79.

<sup>628</sup> Esler, 80.

<sup>629</sup> Esler, "New Testament Interpretation as Interpersonal Communion: the Case for a Socio-Theological Hermeneutics" in Rowland and Tuckett, 61, citing Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 264.

<sup>630</sup> Esler, *New Testament Interpretation*, 61, citing A. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament, Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 306.

<sup>631</sup> Esler, *New Testament Interpretation*, 56.

<sup>632</sup> Esler, *New Testament Interpretation*, 54-55.

<sup>633</sup> Incorrectly referred to as "*Ich und Dich*" in Esler, *New Testament Interpretation*, 56.

<sup>634</sup> Esler, *New Testament Interpretation*, 56.

biblical texts is shaped and supported by one's own experience and encounter with tradition(s).

Esler's belief that there is an "objective reality of the past" mistakes the fact that events took place in a non-repeatable past with the belief that these past events are directly accessible to the contemporary interpreter. However, "history" is itself a human construction under constant review. As Gadamer points out:

“Das historische Wissen kann nicht nach dem Vorbild eines objektivistischen Wissens beschrieben werden, denn es ist selbst ein Prozeß, der alle Charakteristika eines geschichtlichen Geschehens besitzt...Der Objektivismus ist eine Illusion.”<sup>635</sup>

Consequently, Esler's misunderstanding of Gadamer's position leads him to impute Gadamer with a lack of concern for historical alterity and a hegemonic will to power in the question of truth. This is the total inversion of Gadamer's actual project which is deliberately designed to show the limitations of human understanding in encountering the past and the need to carefully protect alterity due to the sovereign desire of method to establish an objective reality over which the interpreter can have dominion. Gadamer's notion of conversation towards agreement is predicated precisely on recognising and seriously engaging the claims to truth made by historical voices rather than objectifying them as mere sources of information about the past. Ironically, such an understanding could have actually lent support to Esler's goal of rehabilitating inter-personal communion in doing NT theology rather than undermining it.

As has been shown, Esler's critique of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is premised on multiple misunderstandings of both the goal of Gadamerian hermeneutics and the nature of human hermeneutical experience. Contra Esler, philosophical hermeneutics is able to both provide a robustly ethical approach to engaging with

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<sup>635</sup> H. Gadamer, *Das Problem des historischen Bewußtseins*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 42.

diversity and alterity as well as hermeneutical support for an effective model of conducting NT theology.

### *5.3. Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Ethical Justification for the Dialogical Model.*

The following section begins by setting out the ethical concerns of philosophical hermeneutics. It then goes on to discuss the way in which a dialogical TNT model adequately meets the ethical requirements of philosophical hermeneutics. A final caveat returns again to address the ethical concerns raised by Esler over the goal of dialogue in philosophical hermeneutics.

#### *5.3.1. Philosophical Hermeneutics as an Ethical Disposition.*

Kaul and Van Laak suggest that genuinely hermeneutical experience is in and of itself ethical in nature since it always acknowledges the ongoing task of communication in the effort of human understanding:

“Dieser ethische Kern der hermeneutischen Erfahrung, die prinzipielle Moralität des hermeneutischen Weltverhältnisses, ist aber kein Besitzanspruch von Wahrheit oder Sinn, sondern stets eine kommunikative Aufgabe.”<sup>636</sup>

The communicative nature of understanding implies the importance of an ethical disposition for philosophical hermeneutics, as Davey emphasises when he claims that “hermeneutic experience is inseparable from an ethical recognition of the other and otherness.”<sup>637</sup> Whilst this may not be immediately evident in the relation between text

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<sup>636</sup> S. Kaul and L. Van Laak, “Einleitung” in S. Kaul and L. Van Laak, (eds.), *Ethik des Verstehens: Beiträge zu einer philosophischen und literarischen Hermeneutik*, (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007), 12.

<sup>637</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 9.

and reader with its stress on the role of the interpreting subject, the fact is that understanding always takes place “through the mediation of another.”<sup>638</sup> It is not the act of an isolated subject. Yet before interpretation can take place, the very possibility of understanding at all is “dependent upon a prior acquisition of language practises.”<sup>639</sup> In order to encounter and understand an “other”, one must already have one’s own “horizon of meaning” constituted on a linguistic basis. This guides one’s “initial conceptions of self and world” by means of “fore-understandings” (*Vorverständnisse*) but is also open re-evaluation as fore-understandings are challenged through the disruptive encounter of the other.<sup>640</sup> Consequently, philosophical hermeneutics replaces the myth of the autonomous rational subject who pretends to unfettered objectivity with an account of an interpretive subject who always remains in debt to the history, tradition, community, and language which enable them to have a horizon at all.

The significance of alterity for philosophical hermeneutics should now start to become clear. Philosophical hermeneutics is not simply concerned with acknowledging alterity for purely sentimental reasons but rather because alterity is essential to the task of understanding itself. Encountering “sameness” or attempting to impose “sameness” on another means that the opportunity for the moment of “revelation” in which existing horizons are challenged by the unexpected and unfamiliar is lost.<sup>641</sup> Only the encounter with what is “other” provides the opportunity for the event of understanding, which is simultaneously a moment of self-transformation as existing horizons of meaning are revised.<sup>642</sup> Understanding is thus not a case of “identity” but “is always understanding-differently.”<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>638</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 9.

<sup>639</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 9.

<sup>640</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 9.

<sup>641</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 5.

<sup>642</sup> It should be noted that the term “understanding” is being used throughout this discussion not in a broad generic sense but in a technical revelatory sense of “perceiving and making sense of what previously lay outside one’s purview”. See Davey’s comments in *Unquiet Understanding*, 5.

<sup>643</sup> H. Gadamer, “Letter to Dallmayr” in D. Michelfelder and R. Palmer, *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, (New York: SUNY, 1989) 96.



This account of the necessity of alterity for the hermeneutical event of understanding indicates the need for two interrelated ethical practises. The first ethical stance required of the interpreter is the cultivation of sensitivity to the voice of the ‘other’. Risser claims that “the distinguishing feature of Gadamer’s hermeneutics...is that it is a hermeneutics of the voice.”<sup>644</sup> Accordingly, interpreting a text is to bring it to voice, to help it speak clearly, which correspondingly implies the need for openness towards its voice. A genuine dialogue “is dependent upon being able to turn toward the other and to be open in order to be addressed by the other.”<sup>645</sup> In the case of historical texts this cannot be simply a passive stance but actively requires that one “seeks otherness within the historical.”<sup>646</sup> This is not simply a matter of securing the text’s alterity through method but of entering into the formative process of becoming increasingly sensitive interpreters through experience.

The correlative ethical practise to the cultivation of sensitivity for alterity is the refusal to domesticate the “other” with totalitarian rationality. Neither “assimilation” of the historical into one’s own horizon or the attempt at “immersion” of oneself within the historical horizon of the text is able to “do justice to the integrity of the world lying beyond the self [of the interpreter].”<sup>647</sup> Instead, philosophical hermeneutics challenges the interpreter to “strengthen the “living voice” of an ancient text so that it becomes less obscure and “more itself.”<sup>648</sup> Only this way can the alterity of the text continue to offer transformative possibilities by asking questions of the interpreter.<sup>649</sup> A framework for protecting the text’s alterity may begin by replacing the subject-object dualism which offers a distorted account of the relation between reader and text with the idea of the text as “Gegenstand” rather than “Objekt”. The text is then not an “object” to be dissected by

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<sup>644</sup> Risser, *Voice...*, 172.

<sup>645</sup> Risser, 181.

<sup>646</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 7.

<sup>647</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 7.

<sup>648</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 8.

<sup>649</sup> M. Rivero, “Fusion of Horizons as Horizontic Differentiation: *Eumeneis Elenchoi*’s Work” in Wierciński, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, 615.

the interpreter but an oppositional force, a resistance, literally “that which stands against.”<sup>650</sup>

### 5.3.2. *The Dialogical TNT as an Ethical Model.*

New Testament interpreters have not always adopted positions amenable to the ethical concerns addressed by philosophical hermeneutics. For example, Morgan, a regular contributor to discussions concerning NT theology, claims that:

“[t]exts like dead men and women have no rights, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers and interpreters choose...Any suggestion that a text has rights is a deception concealing someone else’s interests.”<sup>651</sup>

However, Morgan’s claim may be resisted by appeal to the notion of a text as a communicative act. Viewing the text as a “voice” implies an ethical claim in relation to the interpretation of all, including NT, texts.<sup>652</sup> Wischmeyer notes that:

“Der Anspruch, den Texte haben, laesst sich auch als Recht der Texte formulieren: Alle Texte hatten dasselbe Recht, nämlich angemessen

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<sup>650</sup> The difficulty in translating such terminology into English is illustrated by the translation of G. Figal’s, *Gegenständlichkeit: Das Hermeneutische und die Philosophie*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) into English as *Objectivity: The Hermeneutical and Philosophy*, trans. T. George, (New York: SUNY, 2011) despite the fact that the English word also translates “Objektivität”, which is precisely the term Figal was deliberately avoiding.

<sup>651</sup> R. Morgan with J. Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 7. Craig Bartholomew notes that Morgan’s actual view is more nuanced than this single quote suggests in *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*, (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998), 219 n. 61.

<sup>652</sup> Ricoeur defines a text as “any discourse fixed by writing” in P. Ricoeur, “What Is a Text? Explanation and Understanding” in P. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, (London: Continuum, 2008) 101. That establishing the parameters of a “text” can be an extremely complex task, not least on account of diachronic and translational factors such as in the case of writings that circulated as a collection—the Book of the Twelve in the OT being a good example – is a factor left to one side here. This essay simply adopts Ricoeur’s simple definition though of course it is generally the individual NT writings which are always in view. For more, see O. Wischmeyer, “Was ist ein Text?: Zusammenfassung des Kolloquiums und Perspektiven für die Interpretation neutestamentlicher Texte” in O. Wischmeyer and E. Becker (eds.), *Was ist ein Text?*, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2001), 211-225.

interpretiert zu werden. Und eben dies Recht stellte die neutestamentlichen Texte in eine Reihe mit allen anderen Texten, entschränkte den exegetischen Rahmen und lenkte zugleich das interpretatorische Interesse anderer Fächer auf diese Texte.<sup>653</sup>

An appropriate ethics of the text recognises the contextual particularity of the communicative act of the text. As such, an ethically justifiable approach to the NT texts requires that the interpreter demonstrates awareness of a text's historical context to the degree that he/she is able. As philosophical hermeneutics makes clear, the text may not be merely assimilated to one's own theological standpoint or rendered as homogenous with other texts. Instead, the differential between text and interpreter and among various texts becomes the site of understanding and productive transformation.

It is precisely this ethical demand that implicitly leads even those NT exegetes who are searching for theological unity to methodologically include an analytical approach to the diverse NT texts. The dialogical TNT model takes the ethical imperative of respect for the uniqueness of each text as a methodological impulse – the NT texts are set in conversation with one another in order to construct a theology. This is explicitly not a harmonisation or homogenisation of the texts since the resulting theology is not retrieved from the texts as evidence of an 'inner unity' but is produced in the act of interpretation, drawing on each text insofar as it may contribute to a particular issue under discussion. Moreover, the dialogical model leaves the NT texts "intact" rather than subsumed as raw material into a synthetic theology so that an infinite re-engagement with the texts as dialogue partners is methodologically presumed.

The dialogical model thus demands ethical interpretive practises by virtue of its method. Awareness of and sensitivity to alterity are the factors that make the actual construction of a dialogue between NT texts possible. Indeed, the model most fully rewards the most skilful interpreters who best meet its ethical requirements. Furthermore, given the relation between openness to alterity and self-transformation, cultivating an ethical sensitivity for

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<sup>653</sup> O. Wischmeyer, "Einführung" in Wischmeyer and Becker, 3.

the diverse voices of the NT texts is most likely to result in truly transformative theological engagement.

### 5.3.3. *Dialogue as Conversation.*

Returning to Esler's ethical concerns over agreement as the goal of dialogue discussed above, a caveat must be issued. Vattimo and Zabala also criticise the notion of dialogue within philosophical hermeneutics, noting that it is derived from Plato's dialogues. For them, the problem with Platonic dialogue is that "in most of Plato's dialogues truth is not an outcome but is always presupposed by those who opportunely interrogate the others."<sup>654</sup> Dialogue in Plato is about submitting to a truth discovered by someone else about the real nature of things so that one may be led out of the darkness of the cave and into the light of truth. Thus dialogue is actually an act of violence.<sup>655</sup> In place of the dialogic model, Vattimo and Zabala suggest adopting the model of "conversation" as a disruptive event that threatens dialogic attempts to enforce truth. "Conversation" discards the notion of "truth" from the outset because it is not something we "conduct" but "a situation in which we become involved as it develops".<sup>656</sup>

The foregoing critique of Gadamerian dialogue fails to take account of how Gadamer actually portrays dialogue. Gadamer uses the metaphor of "conversation" to depict both oral interaction between two people as well as the relationship between interpreter and text, although he notes the obvious fact that the text-reader conversation is different in kind.<sup>657</sup> Furthermore, "true" conversation is not at all about enforcing violent submission upon text or listener but "eine Verwandlung ins Gemeinsame hin, in der man nicht bleibt, was man war."<sup>658</sup> Consequently, the appeal to an "event" model of conversation actually captures what is intended in the Gadamerian notion of dialogue. The event of

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<sup>654</sup> G. Vattimo and S. Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx*, (New York: Columbia University, 2011), 24.

<sup>655</sup> Vattimo and Zabala, 24-25.

<sup>656</sup> Vattimo and Zabala, 25-26.

<sup>657</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 384.

<sup>658</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 384.

conversation/dialogue results in self-transformation – neither party may remain what they once were. This is also true in the conversation between interpreter and text since the transformation of the interpreter inevitably means that the text is also transformed for him/her – it will never confront the interpreter in exactly the same way again. In conclusion, despite the appeal of re-labelling the TNT model as “the conversational model”, the designation “dialogical model” will be retained but must be understood in a genuinely Gadamerian sense. Such a hermeneutical model offers the resources not only to deal with the diversity of the NT texts but also with the broad range of questions, contexts, disciplines, and methods which may feed into the act of constructive theologising with the NT texts, an insight noted in Briedis’ discussion of theological hermeneutics as informed by the work of Gadamer:

“[A] conversational approach to hermeneutics has an enormous potential in an ecumenical and multicultural context.”<sup>659</sup>

A final provocation on the nature and goal of dialogue should perhaps be briefly noted here. In an innovative and introductory work, Dolgopolski recently explored the relation of the “art of Talmud” (as distinguished from the text “Talmud” but originally encoded within it) with the four “philosophical arts of logic, hermeneutics, semantics, and rhetoric.”<sup>660</sup> Whereas other Western forms of rational discourse strive for agreement, Dolgopolski’s claim is that the art of Talmud offers an alternative to such a philosophical goal by enshrining “the art of disagreement.”<sup>661</sup> The preservation of genuine disagreement (which is difficult to achieve since it admits no resolution) becomes a genuine path of human interpretation.<sup>662</sup> This challenging insight and its complex philosophical and exegetical elucidation cannot be explored further here. However, the claim that genuine disagreement admits and requires no resolution stands as a possible

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<sup>659</sup> M. Briedis, “Theological Hermeneutics: Interpreting “The Lost Garden Of Immediacy”” in *Santalka. Filosofija*. 15.1 (2007): (25-36), 35.

<sup>660</sup> S. Dolgopolski, *What is Talmud? The Art of Disagreement*, (New York: Fordham University, 2009) 233.

<sup>661</sup> Dolgopolski, *What is Talmud?*, Passim, but especially 233-240.

<sup>662</sup> Dolgopolski, *What is Talmud?*, 240.

future challenge to all TNT models, including the dialogical model's articulation of its aims.<sup>663</sup>

#### *5.4. Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical Justification for the Dialogical Model.*

This section explores the claims of philosophical hermeneutics concerning the nature of human hermeneutical experience and seeks to demonstrate how the dialogical TNT model takes advantage of such insights. Two key areas are explored: the exercise of productive reason in the process of understanding and the infinite nature of the hermeneutical; and the relation between plurality and nihilism in the interpretive task.

##### *5.4.1. The Productive and Infinite Nature of Understanding.*

The notion of the fusion of horizons indicates that the hermeneutical task always involves the productive engagement of the interpreter. Gadamer points out that:

“Der wirkliche Sinn eines Textes...ist immer auch durch die geschichtliche Situation des Interpreten mitbestimmt...Daher ist Verstehen kein nur reproduktives, sondern stets auch ein produktives Verhalten.”<sup>664</sup>

The claim that understanding is a “productive activity” in which interpretation is shaped by the interpreter's context is highly significant in two major ways. Firstly, it implies that interpretation of the NT texts is an infinitely renewable task since even the interpreter's contextual location shifts over time. In short, a diversity of textual readings amongst interpreters is unavoidable and even a single reader's set of interpretations may shift over

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<sup>663</sup> The necessary elucidation of this theme will continue in the forthcoming and related work: S. Dolgopolski, *The Open Past: Subjectivity and Remembering in the Talmud*, (New York: Fordham University, forthcoming 2012).

<sup>664</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 301.

time. Secondly, it highlights the inadequacy of a hermeneutic of retrieval in which the interpreter is viewed as simply extracting the original meaning intended by the biblical author out of the text. A hermeneutics of retrieval neglects to acknowledge the historicity of every encounter between text and reader and instead presumes that an interpreter can escape the confines of their own context and insert themselves into an “original” context of the text.

The hermeneutic differential between NT text and interpreter is thus essential for the task of productive interpretation. It is precisely this differential that creates new opportunities for understanding beyond the finite subjective horizon of the interpreting subject. By seeking “otherness within the historical”<sup>665</sup> the interpreter negatively allows their expectations regarding a text to be disrupted which results in the positive opening up of “different interpretive possibilities” that previously lay beyond their finite scope.<sup>666</sup> However, the subject matter is never exhausted in a single act of interpretation. Instead, every interpretive act lays the foundation of the possibility of understanding “more” (or ‘differently’) in the future.<sup>667</sup>

The productive and contextual nature of the interpretive process implies that the task of understanding is infinite.<sup>668</sup> The horizons of human finitude are always “under review”. However, to note that the hermeneutical task is infinite is not the same as claiming that an interpreter may arbitrarily impute any meaning they like to texts, as should be clear from the discussion of alterity. Rather, as Figal suggests, texts provide a “play-space” for interpreters within the confines of which an interpretation takes place.<sup>669</sup> He states:

“Whenever works appear to us as texts in that they can and must be read, then the freedom of interpretation is the silence of the texts. For this reason the freedom of interpretation is far from being an indeterminate openness. An

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<sup>665</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 9.

<sup>666</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 14.

<sup>667</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 14.

<sup>668</sup> See D. Di Cesare, “The “Other” in Philosophical Hermeneutics” in Wierciński, 552.

<sup>669</sup> The relation between “play” and “ethics” in Gadamer’s philosophy has recently been more fully explored by Monica Vilhauer in *Gadamer’s Ethics of Play: Hermeneutics and the Other*, (Plymouth: Lexington, 2010).

indeterminate openness cannot be represented. Representations are possible only when something determinate is present, which must, insofar as it is determinate, give direction to the representation.”<sup>670</sup>

A text thus simultaneously constrains interpreters by limiting interpretive possibilities through its determinate structure whilst also inviting interpretive freedom through its “silence”. The relationship between the determinate structures of the text and the productive act of interpretation indicates that the constructive task of NT theology is simultaneously infinite but never arbitrary. The danger for NT theology is thus the desire to reduce understanding to an act of retrieval (i.e. reproduction) rather than of interpretive freedom (i.e. production) that exploits the tension provided by alterity. As Davey notes “the spectre of nihilism arises whenever the movement of understanding is threatened.”<sup>671</sup>

#### 5.4.2. *The Threat of Nihilism.*

Davey defines a nihilistic outlook as “the supposition that there are or ought to be ways of thinking and seeing purged of every element of historical and cultural determination.”<sup>672</sup> Such nihilism tends to manifest itself in demands for “objectivity and methodological rigor.”<sup>673</sup> As such the search for a “final interpretation” of any text implies nihilism. In relation to the TNT this manifests itself in the belief that there is a pure unified theology, retrievable from the NT texts, which transcends all such cultural and historical determination.<sup>674</sup> Thus the claim that a theology recovered from the NT texts by a TNT could fulfil the fundamental-theological function of creating a permanently stable foundation for theological thought and church praxis is fundamentally nihilistic in its desire to escape the responsibility of interpretation given with the human condition. As such, the desire for a TNT to provide a stable foundation is not only

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<sup>670</sup> G. Figal, *For a Philosophy of Freedom and Strife: Politics, Aesthetics, Metaphysics*, trans. W. Klein, (New York: SUNY, 1998) 5.

<sup>671</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 182.

<sup>672</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 18.

<sup>673</sup> Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, 18.

<sup>674</sup> McLean explores the link between historicism and nihilism in biblical studies in B. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2012); see especially 11-98.



hermeneutically naive, it actually poses a danger to a vital theology that is ethically and culturally responsible. In contrast, conceived as a conversation that never arrives at closure, the dialogical TNT model retains the necessary hermeneutical flexibility to contribute ever anew to the task of theological construction.

#### *5.4.3. Plurality as Promise and the Dialogical TNT.*

If such the foregoing analysis is correct it seems clear that recognising and preserving the diversity of the NT texts is vital to the theological task. Diversity and plurality are a gift and promise rather than threat to NT theology. Consequently, the dialogical model seeks to maximise the “play-spaces” of alterity available for the productive task of interpretation by explicitly juxtaposing rather than assimilating the NT texts. The diversity of perspectives contained in the NT provides an enriched differential that can facilitate a theological understanding that continually exposes and transcends the interpreter’s finite horizons. The rendering of the dialogue into theological statements may ultimately result in a “monologization” as the interpreter constructs their theology. However, the assimilation of a diversity of theological perspectives to a single unity forecloses interpretive possibilities and impoverishes understanding unless envisaged as a provisional act of subjective construction that may always be disrupted by future readings of individual texts.

The dialogical TNT model thus attempts, as far as possible, to minimise violence towards the voice of the text. It also recognises the impossibility and nihilism implicit in a hermeneutics of retrieval and acknowledges the significance of the productive role of the interpreter in constructing theology in dialogue with the texts. This constructive approach to theology moves beyond the quest for a mythological unified theology located within the NT texts to a dialogue with the texts concerning what shape a contemporary theology may legitimately take.

Thus, as James Dunn suggests, the NT interpreter is ‘theologising’ with the NT texts;<sup>675</sup> that is, continually returning to the NT texts to discover if they are able to give support or disrupt and call into question the interpreter’s own theology. Although ‘the relative stability of the text still functions as a norm for the way it is appropriated and understood and interpreted,’<sup>676</sup> the NT theologian works with a ‘*living tradition*’ that rejects the Reformation dichotomy of tradition and Scripture.<sup>677</sup> The NT text is ‘*norma normans*’ for this living tradition, but not as ‘something fixed and final, whose meaning is...beyond dispute’ but rather as ‘a reference point to which recourse is made again and again...’<sup>678</sup> Consequently, for Dunn it is not Paul and John alone who write NT Theology but the contemporary theologian who chooses to theologise “newtestamently.”<sup>679</sup> NT Theology is thus a *theological* task of interpreting the NT in terms of the horizons of relevance given by virtue of one’s *Sitz im Leben*, which is itself determined by contemporary factors and tradition.

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<sup>675</sup> J. Dunn, “Not so much ‘New Testament Theology’ as ‘New Testament Theologizing’” in Breytenbach and Frey, 225.

<sup>676</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 246.

<sup>677</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 245.

<sup>678</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 246.

<sup>679</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 246. Dunn employs a literal translation of the German adjective “neutestamentlich” to try and convey the means and manner in which something is done.

### 5.5. *Excursus: Bakhtin, Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Dialogical TNT.*

Before proceeding to the theological rationale for a dialogical TNT model, the use of Bakhtinian theory and its relationship to philosophical hermeneutics must be considered. Indeed, the frequent mention of a “dialogical” model and the implications of a converse “monologic” model may already have suggested the influence of Bakhtin on the hermeneutical methodology adopted here. The extent of this influence and the reasons for adopting philosophical hermeneutics rather than Bahktinian theory as the primary hermeneutical theory for the dialogical TNT model should be explained. Furthermore, a discussion of the use of Bakhtin by previous proponents of Biblical Theology will be offered as well as a consideration of some aspects of his work relevant to this project.

#### 5.5.1. *Bakhtin: Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies.*

The work of Bakhtin (1895-1975) has been slowly appearing in English since the 1970s.<sup>680</sup> Whilst Bakhtin’s explorations of the works of Dostoevsky have received much attention in the English speaking world, the work of his final years captured in short essays and the fragmentary nature of Bakhtin’s personal notebooks contain stimulating ideas which are fruitful for the dialogical TNT model being developed here.

In terms of Bakhtin’s own relation to philosophical hermeneutics, it should be noted that although Bakhtin had read some of Heidegger’s work,<sup>681</sup> it seems that he was unfamiliar with Gadamer’s oeuvre before his death in 1975. Given that Bakhtin’s final work was the notebook jottings now gathered together and translated under the title *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*<sup>682</sup> – a project that bears some relation to Gadamer’s *Wahrheit und Methode* – this lack of contact appears as a philosophical tragedy akin to

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<sup>680</sup> Three texts are of significance for the following discussion: M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, (ed. M. Holquist; trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; Austin: University of Texas, 1981); M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, (ed. and trans. C. Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984); M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, (ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; trans. V. McGee; Austin: University of Texas, 1986).

<sup>681</sup> Bakhtin references Heidegger in *Speech Genres*, 149.

<sup>682</sup> Contained in Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 159-172.

the case of Nietzsche's lack of familiarity with Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, the fact that Bakhtin achieved his insights independently of Gadamer suggests the possibility of independent verification and nuancing of the dialogical TNT model in matters where the ideas of these two theorists are deemed compatible.

For all his significance in literary and cultural studies, the discovery of Bakhtin by biblical scholars has been gradual, developing mainly from those working with OT texts and gradually permeating NT studies.<sup>683</sup> Given that Bakhtin developed his theories primarily in relation to Russian literary texts, most particularly the novels of Dostoevsky, it is little surprise that they have been exploited primarily in relation to biblical narrative texts.<sup>684</sup> However, a limited number of scholars have applied Bakhtinian ideas to the discipline of Biblical Theology. The contributions of these four scholars will now be explored.

#### 5.5.2. Olsen: *Biblical Theology as "Provisional Monologization"*.

Olsen briefly draws on Bakhtin's conceptions of truth as "dialogic" and the "unfinalizability" of discourse as he elucidates a new model for thinking about Biblical Theology.<sup>685</sup> Bakhtin had stressed the infinite dialogical nature of human existence: "The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogue."<sup>686</sup> Dialogue requires more than one person engaged in a communicative act in which "truth happens not as an abstract proposition

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<sup>683</sup> The standard introduction is now B. Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2000). See also the articles collected in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32.3 (2005) and R. Boer (ed.), *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2007).

<sup>684</sup> Recent OT examples include: B. Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel*, (London: Continuum, 2003); C. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imagination*, (Oxford: OUP, 2003); A. LaCoque, *Esther Regina: A Bakhtinian Reading*, (Evanston: Northwestern University, 2008). NT examples include: J. Barnet, *Not the Righteous But Sinners: M.M. Bakhtin's Theory of Aesthetics and Reader-Characterisation in Matthew*, (London: Continuum, 2003); G. Webb, *Mark at the Threshold: Applying Bakhtinian Categories to Markan Categorisation*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008); R. Nadella, *Dialogue Not Dogma: Many Voices in the Gospel of Luke*, (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

<sup>685</sup> D. Olsen, "Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization: A Dialogue with Childs, Brueggemann and Bakhtin", *BI* 6.2 (1998): 173-175.

<sup>686</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 293.

but as a dialogue “event”.<sup>687</sup> This contrasts “monologic truth.” Monologic truth is propositional and abstracted from particular “real life” dialogic events. Olsen states:

“Monologic truth...tends to be part of a larger abstract system of coherence and unity that ignores the rich specificity and complexity that is part of true human life. Monologic truth, even if dialectical or complex, is theoretically capable of being spoken and held by one individual.”<sup>688</sup>

Olsen uses these categories to challenge Brueggemann’s critique of Child’s biblical theological approach as reductionist and hegemonic in its reduction of the biblical texts to a single theology.<sup>689</sup> Olsen suggests that any attempt to produce a biblical theology be regarded as “a necessary but provisional monologization.”<sup>690</sup> Since Christian tradition and the NT canon itself are not “monolithic” it is no surprise that the Christian reception of the NT “exhibit[s] significant variability.”<sup>691</sup> As Olsen notes:

“Scripture is always in dialogue with some tradition in the act of interpretation.”<sup>692</sup>

The result is that Olsen deems Brueggemann’s critique of the impact of Child’s Reformed presuppositions on his Biblical Theology inappropriate. Rather, such a “biblical-theological monologization” is written within and for a specific context. This legitimates the activity but also eventually leads to any specific monologization becoming obsolete.<sup>693</sup>

Whilst Olsen’s concept of “provisional monologization” is very helpful as an explanation of what theologians are doing when they construct a “theology” from the biblical texts, it

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<sup>687</sup> Olsen, 174.

<sup>688</sup> Olsen, 174.

<sup>689</sup> Olsen, *passim*; For Brueggemann’s critique see: W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 92.

<sup>690</sup> Olsen, 174.

<sup>691</sup> Olsen, 177.

<sup>692</sup> Olsen, 178.

<sup>693</sup> Olsen, 179-180.

has its weaknesses. Olsen is mainly concerned with the dialogue between interpreter (and their tradition) and the biblical text and places insufficient emphasis on the diversity of textual voices already present within the NT canon. This lack of attention to the polyphony of the biblical canon leads him to accept a laissez-faire approach to biblical-theological interpretation which legitimates the constructive role of the theological interpreter but at the expense of overlooking the ethical responsibility of the interpreter towards the alterity and integrity of the biblical texts. Consequently, Olsen lacks criteria for determining the success and limits of a particular “biblical-theological monologization” since the presuppositions and context of the writer legitimate the results in advance. Whilst Olsen notes that every monologization is “provisional”, he offers no way to determine its adequacy in relation to the object of interpretation – the polyphonic NT canon.

### 5.5.3. Newsom: *Biblical Theology and “Dialogic Truth”*.

The tension between the demands of theologians for a theological centre or series of prominent themes biblical themes as the raw material for the theological task and the biblical scholar’s sensitivity to the diversity and nuances of the biblical texts forms the starting point of Newsom’s deliberations.<sup>694</sup> Whilst Newsom acknowledges that theologians rightly wish to appropriate the biblical texts for the construction of theology, she maintains that:

“the quest for system and unity often results in practise in a sharp distinction between center and periphery, if not in the outright disqualification of those texts which resist the biblical theologian’s systematization.”<sup>695</sup>

Newsom suggests Bakhtin’s distinction between monologic and dialogic forms of truth provides an alternative to such exclusionary strategies. Monologic truth is characterised

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<sup>694</sup> C. Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth”, *JR* 76.2 (1996): 290.

<sup>695</sup> Newsom, 291.

as a statement that is propositional, able to be grasped by a single consciousness and repeated by multiple individuals without thereby sacrificing its truth, and tends towards incorporation into a larger unified system.<sup>696</sup> In contrast, dialogic truth cannot be restricted to the confines of a single consciousness, is dependent upon the presence of a minimum of at least “two unmerged voices” to shape the conversation, does not “drift toward the systematic”, but functions as a truth-event, which is inconclusive and infinitely open to the future.<sup>697</sup>

Newsom notes that the Bible is not a polyphonic text in the same sense as in Bakhtin’s theory. For Bakhtin, it is the single individual author who writes the polyphonic voices into their literary work.<sup>698</sup> However, she maintains that the approach of discerning polyphony in biblical texts is a helpful strategy, noting possibilities for Job and the patriarchal narratives. More significant is her claim that Bakhtin’s model may be useful for “engaging the whole Bible theologically rather than simply one of its component books.”<sup>699</sup> In this case, whilst Bakhtin’s model is heuristically fruitful and provides suitable terminology, it moves away from the literary concerns of Bakhtin himself.

Newsom suggests that just as Dostoevsky deliberately wrote different voices into his novels without trying to resolve them into a single monologic viewpoint, the biblical theologian could “author” dialogues between the biblical texts themselves.<sup>700</sup> She suggests “bringing texts together and forcing them to quarrel”<sup>701</sup> in order to create what Bakhtin termed “the live-event”<sup>702</sup> in which dialogic truth happens. Whilst Newsom is concerned that the historical alterity of the texts are preserved in the dialogical act, she also suggests that the goal is not simply to describe the “historical perspective of the text.”<sup>703</sup> Rather she vaguely asserts that a conversation should be constructed which seeks

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<sup>696</sup> Newsom, 292.

<sup>697</sup> Newsom, 293-294.

<sup>698</sup> Newsom, 296-297. For Bakhtin’s analysis in relation Dostoevsky’s work see Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Newsom also notes the possibility of developing a pneumatological hermeneutic by way of analogy in which the Spirit authors the diverse texts but does not explore this further.

<sup>699</sup> Newsom, 304.

<sup>700</sup> Newsom, 304-305.

<sup>701</sup> Newsom, 305. “Forcing them to quarrel” draws on Bakhtin’s phraseology in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 91.

<sup>702</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 88.

<sup>703</sup> Newsom, 305.

to trace the “assumptions, experiences, entailments, embedded metaphors, and so on...to a point at which it intersects the claims of the other.”<sup>704</sup>

Newsom’s proposal offers a significant advance in constructing a new model of biblical theology by means of Bakhtian theory. Unlike Reed, who utilises the ideas of polyphony and dialogue to frame the intertextual analysis of the reception of the OT in NT texts,<sup>705</sup> Newsom moves the application of the dialogic truth model beyond the focus on polyphony within an individual biblical text and onto an inter-textual plane in which texts function as voices within a polyphonic canon. However, although her concern to preserve polyphony is laudable, Newsom’s suggestions as to the construction of the actual dialogue are too vague to be workable. Exactly how and where diverse perspectives should eventually intersect is a mystery unless there is the intervention of interpretive choices on the part of a theologian which temporarily resolves the divergent perspectives. Here Olsen’s notion of “provisional monologization” is more helpful as it allows the interpreter the freedom to articulate a single theology by means of interaction with the biblical texts, “freeze-framing” and resolving the truth event of dialogue, whilst not confusing this articulation with the perspectives of the texts themselves.

#### 5.5.4. *Claassens: Biblical Theology as “Dialogue”.*

Claassens builds on the work of Olsen and Newsom and seeks to refine further a dialogical model for Biblical Theology.<sup>706</sup> Claassens sees the conception of dialogic truth as relevant on two distinct levels. Firstly, she follows Newsom in suggesting that by juxtaposing “various voices in the biblical text, they become dialogical.”<sup>707</sup> Secondly, Claassens notes that since “the word or utterance is *integrally* dialogical in nature,”<sup>708</sup> theological claims are part of an infinite theological task. As an example Claassens

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<sup>704</sup> Newsom, 305.

<sup>705</sup> See W. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin*, (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 77-113.

<sup>706</sup> L. Claassens, “Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology”, *JBL* 122.1 (2003): 127-144.

<sup>707</sup> Claassens, 133-134.

<sup>708</sup> Claassens, 129.



indicates the work of van Wijk-Bos who suggested that the variety of biblical images for God indicates the human inability to totally grasp who Yahweh is.<sup>709</sup> Van Wijk-Bos states:

“In considering how we may rightly speak of God, the discussion can never be closed, for as we are right about God’s name we are wrong at the same time.”<sup>710</sup>

Claassens’ phraseology is sometimes imprecise. Texts do not “become dialogical” on account of the interpreter’s activity. Rather, the distinction between a biblical text, which although constructed as a monologic work is *inherently* dialogical on account of its linguistic nature before an interpreter even arrives to read it, and the construction of a dialogue by the interpreter to create the “event” of dialogic truth, is key since the former fact adds legitimacy to the latter act. Furthermore, Claassens’ repeated use of the term “the biblical text” does not always make clear whether she means dialogue constructed between two or more biblical texts, the existing diverse voices within a single biblical text with no clear reference to other texts, or the reception of one text within another.<sup>711</sup>

However, Claassens insightfully notes that diachronic models of dialogue which focus on the response of a biblical text to those which precede it are limited not only by the often limited chronological evidence but also establishes a “unidirectional” dialogical relationship.<sup>712</sup> Instead, she advocates a model in which the theologian constructs and observes a dialogue in which the texts mutually respond to each other.<sup>713</sup> The parallels to the dialogical TNT model advanced here are striking and deserve to be heard:

“Instead of focusing on how the biblical text developed diachronically, the biblical theologian acts as the orchestrator of this dialogue, bringing various biblical voices on the same theme together on a synchronic level, thereby

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<sup>709</sup> Claassens, 134 n.38.

<sup>710</sup> J. Van Wijk-Bos, *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity*, (Louisville: WJKP, 1995), 99.

<sup>711</sup> See Claassens, 134.

<sup>712</sup> Claassens, 135.

<sup>713</sup> Claassens, 135.

creating the space where a dialogue might ensue...Important to note is that the synchronic nature of the conversation does not mean that no attention is given to the historical and cultural particularity of each voice....Each text comes to the conversation with its own perspective, which includes its particular historical and literary context.”<sup>714</sup>

Claassens’ care for the alterity of the biblical texts resonates with the ethical concerns of philosophical hermeneutics. This concern derives from Bakhtin himself, who held that “foreignness” or “outsideness” is essential for “creative understanding.”<sup>715</sup> He maintains:

“A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning...”<sup>716</sup>

Consequently, both Bakhtin’s theory and Gadamer’s hermeneutics imply that the preservation and recognition of alterity by the interpreter is essential in order for real understanding to develop. However, Bakhtin’s emphasis is more on the non-assimilation of the interpreter to the horizons of the text rather than on the valuing of the alterity of the text per se.<sup>717</sup> This emphasis on the interpreter perhaps explains why Claassens is worried about the potential of distortion in the construction of a dialogue by the power interests of the theologian.<sup>718</sup> Whilst this is naturally an ever present danger, the emphasis on textual alterity as an ethical obligation and awareness of the contextual role of the interpreter presents some safeguards against distortion to those who shape their hermeneutic praxis with reference to philosophical hermeneutics.

Claassens uses three Bakhtinian ideas to support claims that the scope of a biblical theology should be interdisciplinary. Bakhtin argues that literary works must transcend the restriction of their significance simply to their meaning for a particular epoch by

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<sup>714</sup> Claassens, 135-136.

<sup>715</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 6-7.

<sup>716</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 7.

<sup>717</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 7.

<sup>718</sup> Claassens, 142.

entering what he terms “great time”.<sup>719</sup> This does not mean that works should be read without attention to their original context but simply that works continue to be transmitted and read because they continue to mean for contemporary readers. In the process, new questions are addressed to the text, which the original writers could not envisage, and so new meanings come to be disclosed by the text.<sup>720</sup> Claassens suggests that contemporary theological concerns such as liberation theology help to disclose new meanings embedded potentially within the biblical text.<sup>721</sup> Bakhtin terms this latent meaning “semantic treasures.”<sup>722</sup>

This idea is linked by Claassens with that of the “outsider” who addresses “foreign” questions to the text.<sup>723</sup> Claassens suggests that Jewish interpreters may play the role of “outsiders” in shaping biblical theology on account of their “family resemblance” to the Christian tradition.<sup>724</sup> Whilst this is a welcome move towards an interdisciplinary approach to biblical theology it seems unnecessarily restrictive. Claassens justifies her approach by (mis)quoting Bakhtin as stating that “dialogical relationships are absolutely impossible without logical relationships” between the different texts.”<sup>725</sup> However what Bakhtin actually says is:

“Dialogic relationships are absolutely impossible without logical relationships or relationships oriented toward a referential object, but they are not reducible to them, and they have their own specific character.”<sup>726</sup>

Consequently there seems little reason to restrict interdisciplinary theological work to a Jewish-Christian dialogue with the texts. Obviously, Islamic theology is also concerned with biblical texts and the kinds of *topoi* dealt with in biblical theology. However, Bakhtin’s point implies that any discipline which has the same object in view as biblical

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<sup>719</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 4.

<sup>720</sup> Claassens, 136.

<sup>721</sup> Claassens, 136.

<sup>722</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 5.

<sup>723</sup> Claassens, 136, 140.

<sup>724</sup> Claassens, 138-140.

<sup>725</sup> Claassens, 137.

<sup>726</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 184.

theology is suitable for the construction of a dialogic truth event. Whilst Claassens seems to restrict the “object” to the actual biblical texts themselves, Bakhtin’s point surely relates to the themes which will be discussed in dialogue with and between texts, whether “God”, “wealth” or any other *topos*. Any perspective on the given topic from any discipline is thus legitimately part of the dialogue.

Finally, Claassens notes that given the “unfinalizable nature of the dialogue, the number of conversation partners could indeed be unlimited.”<sup>727</sup> She sensibly suggests that limits must be placed on the dialogue, fully aware that “the dialogue continues” beyond the artificial boundaries.<sup>728</sup>

In summary, it is remarkable to see how similar an approach to biblical theology produced by an OT scholar through the lens of Bakhtinian theory is to the approach of the dialogical TNT grounded upon Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics advocated here. Despite the occasionally differing emphases noted above, the development of the dialogical model by Olsen, Newsom, and Claassens affirms the overall direction of the current project and provides helpful terminology for articulating the concerns and methods of a dialogical TNT that supplements that provided by philosophical hermeneutics.

##### 5.5.5. *Esler: Bakhtin and the TNT.*

Esler stands alone as a scholar who has sought to incorporate Bakhtinian theory into the debate concerning the TNT. However, Bakhtin’s dialogical theory is briefly used to support his inter-personal model for NT theology though Esler makes scant reference to Bakhtin’s own works.<sup>729</sup> Instead, he draws heavily and exclusively on the work of Newsom discussed above but appears unaware of the contributions of Olsen and

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<sup>727</sup> Claassens, 141.

<sup>728</sup> Claassens, 141.

<sup>729</sup> Esler, 267-272.

Claassens. Esler rehearses Newsom's arguments<sup>730</sup> but draws vague conclusions. Esler specifically links Bakhtin's model of dialogic truth to the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. He maintains that it provides a model for reconciling the diversity of the NT texts with the unity of divine authorship: "the locutionary speech acts of the biblical authors constitute the illocutionary discourse of God."<sup>731</sup> This serves to justify Esler's critiques of Childs' approach to biblical theology as "monologic",<sup>732</sup> somewhat ironically given Olsen's work discussed above, and to support Esler's case for theologising in a manner consonant with NT polyphony.

Esler also briefly suggests that Bakhtin's model offers a useful model for intertextuality in the NT such as Matthew and Luke's interaction with Mark, as well as for understanding the dialogue between the contemporary reader and text "and those who produced them."<sup>733</sup> Esler's use of the concept of dialogic truth is thus limited to a consideration of the historical literary relations between texts, the hermeneutical encounter of the modern reader with texts (and their authors), and as a theological model for understanding canonical polyphony. However, he does not take the step of advocating a dialogical TNT, which juxtaposes texts on the grounds of their common referentiality. In his concern to establish the possibility of *actual* interaction with the texts' original author, the notion that it is the interpreter who *constructs* the dialogue between texts would mean undermining Esler's central goal.

#### 5.5.6. *Bakhtin and the dialogical TNT.*

The foregoing discussion indicates clearly that the work of Bakhtin offers significant resources for envisioning the task of the TNT as dialogical.<sup>734</sup> This is not to say that Bakhtin would have endorsed the dialogical TNT model as a method for constructing

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<sup>730</sup> Esler, 267-269.

<sup>731</sup> Esler, 271.

<sup>732</sup> Esler, 268.

<sup>733</sup> Esler, 271.

<sup>734</sup> The TNT is specifically in view here rather than the more general terminology of "Biblical Theology" encountered in the work of the writer's discussed above.

theology or that his theory is even concerned with the deliberate juxtaposition of texts as a method for creating the event of understanding. However, as Olsen, Newsom, and Claassens in particular imply, various aspects of Bakhtin's theory such as "dialogic truth", "monologic truth", "outsideness", "unfinalizability", and "great time" may be interpreted in such a way as to sanction, and provide the terminology for, a dialogical TNT model.

However, beyond a concern with the actual methodical procedure of the dialogical TNT, Bakhtin's theory can be read as reinforcing the ethical and hermeneutical presuppositions supplied by philosophical hermeneutics and outlined above which underlie, and thereby legitimise, the dialogical TNT model. Some key similarities have already been observed and will not be repeated. For example, the contribution of the notion of "outsideness" as an ethical category has been noted. Furthermore, certain hermeneutical phenomena observed by Bakhtin are clearly related to categories available from philosophical hermeneutics, including "dialogic truth" and the significance of "dialogue" or "conversation", "monologization" as a constructive interpretive act, "unfinalizability" which philosophical hermeneutics links to the finitude of the interpretive subject, and "great time" which is a notion not unlike Gadamer's "*Wirkungsgeschichte*".<sup>735</sup>

In addition to these points, Bakhtin's later works also offer a few more insights pertinent to the current project which have not yet been discussed. Whilst, as we have seen, Bakhtin offers some support to the commitment to preserving literary alterity with his notion of "outsideness", in *The Problem of the Text*<sup>736</sup> Bakhtin offers resources for an ethical commitment to the literary integrity of a text. Bakhtin notes that any text (written or oral) is a semiotic system and classifies it as an "utterance".<sup>737</sup> Bakhtin refers to the utterance "as a *semantic whole*."<sup>738</sup> This implies that to fully grasp the meaning of a text it must be considered *as a whole* and not by a selective interpretive process. This is the

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<sup>735</sup> This latter point is simply noted but would lead to a detour if explained more fully in relation to Bakhtin and Gadamer.

<sup>736</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 103-131.

<sup>737</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 103-104. Bakhtin's semiotic notion of a text is much more complicated since it is neither an object and includes human activity (107), but here the focus will be limited to written texts.

<sup>738</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 122.

case because such a “whole utterance” is an unrepeatable act, which may be “quoted” but never “reproduced.”<sup>739</sup>

The notion of text as utterance may be developed in relation to hermeneutics. As part of a semiotic system, understanding an utterance is always a dialogic process.<sup>740</sup> Just as in Gadamer’s notion of *Horizontverschmelzung* the interpreter is always implicated in the productive task of creating meaning, so Bakhtin claims that utterances “cannot be understood from outside. Understanding itself enters as a dialogic element in the dialogic system and somehow changes its total sense.”<sup>741</sup> There is no neutral place for the interpreter to stand, which will disclose the meaning of the utterance. Rather, understanding is the product of dialogical relations in which the interpreter is implicated.

A final observation in relation to the quest for NT unity derived from Bakhtin’s work will suffice. Whilst Bakhtin notes that “the text lives only by coming into contact with another text (a context)”<sup>742</sup> he is careful to avoid the extremes of asserting that either texts contradict each other or they are unified. He states:

“One cannot...understand dialogic relations simplistically and unilaterally, reducing them to contradiction, conflict, polemics, or disagreement. *Agreement* is very rich in varieties and shadings. Two utterances that are identical in all respects (“Beautiful weather!” – “Beautiful weather!”), if they are really *two* utterances belonging to *different* voices and not one, are linked by dialogic *relations of agreement*. This is a definite dialogic event in the interrelations of the two, and not an echo. For after all, agreement could also be lacking (“No, not very nice weather,” and so forth).”<sup>743</sup>

Bakhtin’s category of “agreement” has the flexibility to preserve the identity and content of the different voices, whilst noting the agreement in relation to the object under

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<sup>739</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 128.

<sup>740</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 125.

<sup>741</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 126.

<sup>742</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 162.

<sup>743</sup> Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 125.

discussion. Two statements reinforce each other but as distinct utterances they are not simply saying the same thing twice. In terms of the dialogical TNT, semantic relations may sanction the “provisional monologization” of the textual dialogue into a single theological statement as part of the constructive task, but this is a clearer account of what is phenomenologically happening than simply asserting the “unity” of the two original statements.

#### *5.5.7. Conclusion: Bakhtin and Philosophical Hermeneutics.*

The foregoing discussion suggests the utility of selected Bakhtinian insights to bolster the hermeneutical and ethical case for a dialogical TNT. It justifies the juxtapositional and thematic method selected and offers appropriate terminology to elucidate the dialogical method and its presuppositions. At the same time, Bakhtin’s theory lacks the scope of the project of philosophical hermeneutics. It remains a fragmentary account of the nature of human understanding. Furthermore, it lacks the rigorous account of human finitude and historicity provided by philosophical hermeneutics, as well as extended consideration of the hermeneutical factors involved in the interpretation of historical texts.

Thus, whilst reading the later fragments of Bakhtin is stimulating and offers much help in clarifying the dialogical model, philosophical hermeneutics remains more persuasive as a full account of the nature and praxis of human understanding and the resultant ethical and hermeneutical obligations that arise from such an account. Consequently, integrating relatively random insights from Bakhtin’s theory into a philosophical hermeneutical justification without paying overly much attention to Bakhtin’s original literary concerns seemed both easier and to result in a more robust account than to attempt the reverse. Furthermore, even if the selective appropriation of Bakhtin’s theory for all its terminological richness is deemed unpersuasive, the justification of the dialogical TNT by philosophical hermeneutics retains its force.



### *5.6. Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Theological Justification for the Dialogical Model.*

For some TNT writers who engage in NT theology for ecclesiological reasons the implications of the emphasis on diversity, alterity, and the productive role of the interpreter may be disconcerting. It is not untypical to justify the quest for retrieving a unified theology from the NT by drawing on the dogmatic category of revelation and the related notion of the Bible as the ‘Word of God’.<sup>744</sup> For example, Schreiner adopts a hermeneutical stance that starts from the notion that since the term “Word of God” is a singular term, just as God is a singular “Ultimate Author” of the NT, the content of the NT must also be ultimately univocal, reflecting the singularity of divine authorial intent. The assertion of a methodologically and theologically prior “unity” to the NT canon may be considered as an attempt to construct a theological “meta-text” that overrides the priority of the individual NT texts themselves. However, this is not the only ethically problematic aspect of such a position. In addition, the focus on the univocality of Scripture as the “Word of God” inevitably implies a claim concerning the (divine) legitimation of the theology produced by the interpreter. If an interpreter justifies their “unified” theology on the basis of the unity of divine authorship of the canon which contains the “Word of God”, on what basis should one distinguish the unified theology extracted from the texts by a biblical theologian from the “Word of God” itself? Disputes then no longer merely concern the implications and adequacy of human theological constructions but become claims about the nature and content of divine revelation as such. Consequently, the theologian is able to immunise their TNT project against criticism by shifting it from the level of rational human (and fallible) discourse onto a higher ontological plane, in which it assumes quasi-revelatory status. Furthermore, the belief that one is simply retrieving the divine word of revelation rather than constructing a theology may well lead to a lack of open acknowledgement concerning the actual aims and interests of the interpreter.

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<sup>744</sup> For an obvious recent example, see Schreiner, TNT, 888.

A step towards the theological direction of the dialogical model was already taken with the development of “symphonic theology” by Poythress in 1987. Whilst identifying himself with “Inerrantist Evangelicals”, Poythress maintained that:

“The differences between biblical writings by different human authors are also *divine* differences. God uses a multiplicity of perspectives in communicating to us. We may thus view the differences between the emphases in the four Gospels as divinely ordained. Hence we do not need to postulate some underlying single harmonistic account as more appropriate.”<sup>745</sup>

Since “no category or system of categories gives us ultimate reality”<sup>746</sup> no single theological presentation fully or adequately captures the full extent of divine communication. However, Poythress is unable to go as far as the dialogical model in fully locating the unity of theology in the act of the interpreter. He weakens his acknowledgement of perspectivity by suggesting that “Harmonization is possible in principle,”<sup>747</sup> perhaps because at bottom he remains indebted to the notion of ultimate divine authorship of Scripture thus implying the unity of the divine “Word”.<sup>748</sup> In short, Poythress’ theological presuppositions prevent him from fully embracing the radical implications of a truly incarnational view of Scripture. The NT texts are “fully human” products only up to the extent that the single divine intention allows. However, despite the limitations one should acknowledge Poythress’ progress in this area.

In contrast to attempts to use the “Word of God” as a limiting factor in NT diversity, the dialogical model is premised on the belief that such a position is methodologically flawed. The term “Word of God” when referring to the canon should be defined in relation to the known material object (*Gegenstand*) rather than vice versa. A similar phenomenological approach is advocated by Enns in his arguments for an incarnational

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<sup>745</sup> V. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1987), 86.

<sup>746</sup> Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*, 82.

<sup>747</sup> Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*, 86.

<sup>748</sup> Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*, 22.

view of Scripture. In defending a more flexible view of Scripture<sup>749</sup> than that held in some evangelical circles he argues that the key is not whether flexibility (one could here read “diversity”) is *desirable* but simply whether it actually *exists*. If it does exist then there is no dogmatic problem to face. As Enns points out:

“The reason I do not have a problem is that the biblical phenomena leave me no choice in the matter. If I may put it this way, it is my commitment to biblical authority that leads me to accept diversity and explore its significance.”<sup>750</sup>

Thus the dogmatic concept of the “Word of God” may be better defined as a polyphonic [or better: polyvalent] rather than as a univocal word – a diverse divine word that communicates fully through thoroughly contextualised and individual texts. The “Canon” then appears less like an attempt to define a univocal monologic “Word of God” than as the attempt to delineate the boundaries of appropriate theological polyphony. The dialogical TNT model therefore reinterprets such dogmatic presuppositions in the light of the phenomenological experience of the NT texts as polyphonic, and thereby claims to do more justice to the nature of divine revelation through human experience than monologic models. Furthermore, a TNT model based on the notion of polyphony is not constrained by synchronic concerns to work from a definitive “final” text which is treated as God’s univocal word but may instead embrace diachronic approaches to the texts insofar as they may be rendered fruitful for the task of theological construction.

There are three further advantages to a theological model that embraces the constructive role of the theologian in engaging with the NT texts. Firstly, the acceptance of NT polyphony as theological gift and task both legitimates and relativises the role of critical reason in the theological task. It legitimates the critical reason of the theologian by virtue of its acknowledgement of the inescapable necessity of the task of theological

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<sup>749</sup> The specific point refers to the Mosaic Torah but the argument works by extension to Scripture as a whole.

<sup>750</sup> P. Enns, “Interaction with Bruce Waltke”, *WTJ* 71 (2009): 98. See also Enns’ brief comments on treating the Synoptics as a “puzzle to be solved” in P. Enns, “Preliminary Observations on an Incarnational Model of Scripture: Its Viability and Usefulness”, *CTJ* 42 (2007): 233.

construction. On the other hand, it relativises any claims to theological finality and thus challenges any attempt to impose a definitive interpretation. Secondly, the constructive task of theology is able to take place without the implicit marginalisation of biblical texts, topics, or passages to a lesser status. Attempts to extract *the* theology of the NT whether by reference to a scriptural centre or discerning the “underlying unity” inevitably imply that some texts are more central, hence more than others. The dialogical TNT model is able to acknowledge that any such marginalisation reflect the priorities of the theologian rather than that of the texts or “divine revelation” itself. Finally, since the dialogical model embraces the constructive nature of the TNT and the historical situatedness of the theologian it is also encourages open acknowledgement of the aims and interests driving the interpreter’s theological claims. The theologian’s contextuality is not a limiting factor to be overcome as part of a historicist approach but the very source of the “ability to reflect on the significance of biblical texts for life in the present.”<sup>751</sup>

### *5.7. Conclusion: The Dialogical Model as Constructive Theology.*

The dialogical TNT model initiated by Caird, and developed by Isaak and Vouga lacked a sufficient theoretical basis. This chapter attempted to remedy that deficiency by utilising the insights of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics to provide a robust theoretical foundation for the dialogical TNT model. Philosophical hermeneutics was able to offer substantial ethical and hermeneutical justification for the dialogical TNT, which in turn led to some observations regarding the theological implications of canonical diversity.

Although Esler rejected the use of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as a suitable basis for a TNT model, his account was shown to be a fundamental mis-reading of Gadamer and philosophical hermeneutics more generally. Ironically, the reading of Gadamer offered here both supported some of Esler’s claims in relation to the relevance

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<sup>751</sup> McLean, 4.

of the text for today and offered a better account of the significance of Esler's own experience in writing his TNT than his own philosophical position.

Philosophical hermeneutics was demonstrated to supply an ethical justification for the TNT model due to its emphasis on the importance of preserving the alterity (and concomitant literary integrity) of the text. This is crucial since it is precisely alterity that gives rise to the possibility of understanding and thus self-transformation. Philosophical hermeneutics thus requires an ethical disposition towards the texts on the act of the interpreter that squares well with commitment of the dialogical TNT model to fully engage and preserve the polyphony of the NT canon.

The hermeneutical contribution of philosophical hermeneutics lies primarily in its highlighting of the productive nature of the act of interpretation and the infinitude of the interpretive task. Both these insights stem from the fact of the contextual finitude and historicity of human existence, which remain limits that cannot be transcended. The dialogical TNT model capitalises on these insights by rejecting the quest for a unified TNT to provide a "stable" or "final" foundation for theology as deeply nihilistic in its rejection of the limitations of the human condition. Instead, the plurality of the biblical texts is celebrated as an infinite resource in the ongoing task of constructing and re-constructing theology. The NT texts thus function as a norm to which recourse is repeatedly made in the act of "theologising".

The excursus into Bakhtinian theory and its use in relation to biblical theology served to highlight the fundamental coherence between some of its key ideas with those of philosophical hermeneutics. A number of OT scholars have moved towards advocating a dialogical model for biblical studies based on notions such as "dialogic truth" and "polyphony". Claassens' work, which reflects the latest development in the field, proposes a model remarkably close to the one advocated here in its attempt to dialogue texts in relation to thematic concerns and utilising interdisciplinary insights. However, the latter aspect was seen to be particularly weak with its limitation of dialogue partners to those directly concerned with the Hebrew texts themselves. In closing, the limitations

of Bakhtin's theory in relation to its more limited ethical scope and its primary focus on polyphony in individual literary texts were highlighted and it was suggested that philosophical hermeneutics offers a broader model for justifying the dialogical TNT. Bakhtinian theory both eclectically supports this foundation and supplies useful terminology for articulating the methods and presuppositions of the dialogical model. In particular, the notion of the text as an "utterance" which has semantic meaning as a whole bolstered the case for ethical importance of literary integrity.

The emphasis on ethical responsibility and hermeneutical plurality led to a critique of attempts to secure a unified theology within the NT texts by means of appeals to divine revelation and "the Word of God". Such strategies blur the boundary between human and divine discourse, rendering critique somewhat problematic. Instead, a phenomenological approach to the canon which viewed it as marking out the boundaries of appropriate theological polyphony was advocated. This legitimates the role of the interpreter whilst simultaneously rendering any construction of a theology a "provisional monologization" of the dialogic Word.

Having secured the dialogical TNT as an ethically and hermeneutically justifiable model, attention now turns to its role in addressing the first of three major issues within the recent TNT debate.

## Chapter Six

### 6. *Between History and Theology: Theologieggeschichte and the TNT.*

The quest for the ‘unity’ of the NT and the resultant TNTs has received criticism from a number of scholars. A number of these opponents, Räisänen being the most prominent of them, have called for NT studies to move in a different direction. Critical of the theological interests that shape the production of TNTs and what they see as the resultant distortion of the NT texts, these scholars advocate the production of a different literary genre known variously as *Theologieggeschichte* or *Religionsgeschichte*. The title of this genre betrays something of the general outlook of such scholars in that they advocate an approach to NT studies based on a distinction between the *historical* task and the *theological/dogmatic* task.<sup>752</sup> The power of such claims may already be measured by consideration of the fact that the recent two-stage TNT models regarded as innovative (Hahn and Wilckens) are so by virtue of the fact that the opening volume of their work presents a *Theologieggeschichte* which is foundational for the later discussion of the unity of the NT in the second volume.

The following section will begin by briefly considering Wrede and the origins of the *religionsgeschichtliche* project before discussing the treatment of NT unity and diversity in four major recent works within this genre. Attention will then turn to an assessment as to whether the *religionsgeschichtliche* approach offers a genuine alternative to the TNT project. The issue of theology versus history and the nature of historical interpretation will be discussed before a final evaluation of the possible relation of the *religionsgeschichtliche* approach to the dialogical TNT will be offered.

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<sup>752</sup> This discussion is also taking place within OT theology. For example, see the essays collected in JBTh 10 (1995): *Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments*, as well as B. Janowski, “Biblische Theologie Heute: Formale und Materiale Aspekte” in C. Helmer, (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation: History, Context, and Reality*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 17-32; J. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*, (London: SCM, 1999), 100-139.

### 6.1. Wrede: *From Dogmatics to History*.

The programmatic impulse behind the turn to *Religionsgeschichte* amongst NT scholars was inaugurated by Wrede in his 1897 essay, *Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentlichen Theologie*.<sup>753</sup> Wrede, in turn, wrote his essay with Gabler's groundbreaking *Oratio de iusto discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae, regundisque recte utriusque finibus*<sup>754</sup> in mind. For Wrede, Gabler's injunction in 1787 to separate dogmatic from biblical theology had not been satisfactorily filled even over one hundred years later. Wrede thus critiqued the then reigning state of affairs in NT Theology and programmatically set out a way in which to achieve his ideal of a strictly historical discipline fully independent from the influence of dogmatic theology either on its methods or results.

As part of his critique of the prevalent *Lehrbegriff* method of conducting NT theology, itself drawn from dogmatic theology, Wrede complained that “es dem Stoff eine Gleichförmigkeit aufdrängt, die der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit nicht entspricht und seine Lebensfarbe vernichtet.”<sup>755</sup> Furthermore, the individual NT texts themselves do not actually provide a way of distinguishing between that which was significant and that which was only secondary to the author's concerns.<sup>756</sup> Thus, the *Lehrbegriff* method leaves open the danger of distorting the meaning or flattening the individual characteristics of the text.

According to Wrede, the NT writings do not form a coherent special group with distinct characteristics that mark them out in contrast to other Early Christian literature. Neither are they a chronologically coherent set of texts with a clear boundary between them and

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<sup>753</sup> W. Wrede, *Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentlichen Theologie*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeek & Ruprecht, 1897); reprinted in Strecker, *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 81-154.

<sup>754</sup> Gabler, 32-44. For an analysis and summary of Gabler's groundbreaking and disputed contribution to the rise of biblical theology and the contemporary task of the TNT see M. Sæbø, “Johann Philipp Gabler at the End of the Eighteenth Century: History and Theology” in *On the Way to Canon: Creative Tradition History in the Old Testament*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 310-326.

<sup>755</sup> Wrede, 94.

<sup>756</sup> Wrede, 117.



the Apostolic Fathers (e.g. 1 Clement is older than some NT writings). In fact, the chronological spread of the NT writings leads to a diversity of content due to the development of Early Christianity and the changing nature of the circumstances in which it found itself.<sup>757</sup> From the acceptance of the fundamental significance of historical development, it logically flows that it is “unbedingt erforderlich [...], über die Grenzen des Neuen Testaments hinauszugehen”, if one is to convey an accurate picture of the content and progression of Christian faith and thought.<sup>758</sup> Thus, the task demanded of a NT theology is, “daß sie, soweit das irgend möglich ist, die Entwicklung und die Entwicklungen [of Early Christianity] klarzustellen sucht.”<sup>759</sup>

Wrede’s commitment to investigating the NT texts in relation to the question of the historical development of Christianity inevitably leads him to the conclusion that both parts of the title *NT Theology* are wrong. The NT is about *religion* not theology, and the NT is no longer an appropriate category given his rejection of the concept of the canon. A more appropriate name for the NT enterprise is “urchristliche Religionsgeschichte bzw. Geschichte der urchristlichen Religion und Theologie.”<sup>760</sup> Wrede concedes that his concept of a purely historical discipline may therefore no longer be considered as NT Theology but maintains that the title should be determined by the subject matter and not vice versa.<sup>761</sup>

A number of scholars have recently sought to carry out Wrede’s programme of a fully historical, non-dogmatic account of primitive Christianity. Such historical accounts of early Christianity generally conscientiously refute the claim to be *NT Theology* (in the sense critiqued by Wrede) and as such fall outside the bounds of this study.<sup>762</sup> However,

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<sup>757</sup> Wrede, 86-87.

<sup>758</sup> Wrede, 132. For Wrede’s critique of the validity of the canon, see 85.

<sup>759</sup> Wrede, 118.

<sup>760</sup> Wrede, 153-154. Ashton points out that Wrede’s retention of the term “theology” in addition to “religion” in his suggested disciplinary title is “unfortunate because it has allowed the confusion between the two quite distinct disciplines of history and theology to persist.” See J. Ashton, “History and Theology in New Testament Studies” in Rowland and Tuckett, 1.

<sup>761</sup> Wrede, 154.

<sup>762</sup> For a general evaluative overview of such studies from 1975-2002 see G. Lüdemann, *Primitive Christianity: A Survey of Recent Studies and Some New Proposals*, (London: T&T Clark, 2003). See especially pages 7-60.

four scholars, three of whom explicitly declare their allegiance to Wrede's historical programme, deserve to be considered in terms of how they respond to the unity and diversity found within the NT.

## 6.2. Berger: *Theologieggeschichte and Explosive Plurality*.

Berger's *Theologieggeschichte des Urchristentums*, published in 1994 with an enlarged second edition following in 1995, was the first ever work to bear such a title.<sup>763</sup> Berger explicitly states that: "Der hier vorgelegt Entwurf versteht sich auch als konsequente Ausführung des von W. Wrede aufgestellten Programms, d.h. es geht um eine geschichtliche Entwicklung."<sup>764</sup> In view of the surprising amount of overlap between various Early Christian theologies, Berger seeks for a new model (apart from models of exclusively literary dependence and/or reception history) to explain such unity and divergence. He rejects a priori the concept of continuous development and postulates a fundamental assumption of "Kontakt vor Kontinuität"—that is, Early Christian theology is a dialogical process based around human interaction.<sup>765</sup> Consequently, Berger also rejects any systematic model which sets out to explain such theological development by means of an overarching narrative; for example, the "Verweltlichung" model, the dialectical model of Baur, the "Rejudaisierung" or "Reapokalyptisierung" model, and the model which relates development to the inherent force of the Easter-event.<sup>766</sup> Rather, Berger uses the analogy of a tree to describe Early Christian theological development. The trunk consists of common Christian tradition, which cannot simply be explained on the basis of general Jewish-Hellenistic influences. The knots in the trunk are analogous to the various geographical locations in which Early Christianity took root. The branches are the various geographically and culturally influenced developments which proceed

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<sup>763</sup> K. Berger, *Theologieggeschichte des Urchristentums*, (Tübingen: Francke, 1995?) 3.

<sup>764</sup> Berger, 3.

<sup>765</sup> Berger, 4.

<sup>766</sup> Berger, 4.

from these knots but still share the same trunk. The branches culminate in “fruit” which correspond to the Early Christian theological outlines.<sup>767</sup>

The overall effect gained from consideration of the Early Christian sources is like that of an explosion – increasing divergence proceeding from a focal central point. Unity and diversity within Early Christian theologies is thus more adequately portrayed in a dynamic rather than static model.<sup>768</sup> For Berger, the “fast ungläublichen Offenheit zur Variation der Botschaft von Jesus” lies in the priority of the “personal principle” before the “doctrinal principle.”<sup>769</sup> In other words: “Einheit wird eher in der gemeinsamen Orientierung an der Person Jesu und in der Gemeinschaft mit ihm und miteinander gesucht als in einer Lehre oder einem festen Bekenntnisgut.”<sup>770</sup> Such a perspective seems to preclude any hope of achieving a unified theology from the NT. Given that the geographical and thus cultural diversity of Early Christianity accounts for its theological diversity, the cohesive elements between various theologies are, for Berger, to be simply explained on *traditionsgeschichtlich* grounds. The essentially diverging nature of Early Christianity explains the presence of so many “opponents” within its writings. According to Berger, the “opponents” in any given text are usually older Christian positions which are being critiqued as part of an attempt to shape the expression of Christianity in a particular locale.<sup>771</sup> Consequently, their theological positions should thus also be fairly represented in any *Theologiegeschichte*.

Berger maintains that the phase of divergence in Early Christianity is later counteracted by a several phases of convergence. This is a deliberate attempt to unify its various expressions. The first convergence phase attempts to solidify the diverse traditions by means of ecumenical letters and the collection of Early Christian writings (as the beginning of the NT canon formation process) among other means. The second convergence phase results in Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, the beginnings of systematic theology

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<sup>767</sup> Berger, 5.

<sup>768</sup> Berger, 5.

<sup>769</sup> Berger, 5.

<sup>770</sup> Berger, 5.

<sup>771</sup> Berger, 6.

and the creation of statements of faith.<sup>772</sup> Thus, whereas Early Christian unity was originally predicated on the basis of the wandering *Vollmachtsträger* who preached using an array of common terminology and traditional elements, this was later replaced by the exchange and collection of documents, culminating in the canon, with Rome playing a decisive role. Thus, Berger states that unity was ultimately “nicht mehr auf der Basis der Mündlichkeit, sondern auf der Basis der Schriftlichkeit”, which is the same as saying that: “Die Einheit durch mündliche Vollmachtsträger wird abgelöst durch die Einheit auf der Basis gemeinsamer Schriften.”<sup>773</sup> The new unity of the Church grew at the same time as the unity of the canon, with each conditioning the other.<sup>774</sup>

However, the growth of such a unity should not be taken to imply the possibility of discovering an inherent prior unity of the NT. The NT texts themselves reflect the diversity of their original specific *Sitz im Leben*. The NT canon itself is formed not because of the similarity of the documents but because of diversity and the need for a normative collection of texts that reflect and limit that diversity. However, Berger does come close to suggesting the possibility of attempting to construct a theology on the basis of the NT texts. This would not be a TNT but a theology that is rather *supported* or *informed* by the NT documents. Berger in no way implies the possibility of *discovering* such a theology to be inherent in the texts themselves but suggests that the original sense of Early Christian unity perhaps stems from common elements of the tradition communicated by the *Vollmachtsträger*, though these were interpreted in differing ways. However, whilst a TNT may simply try to fall back on the “gemeinsamen Grundstock an kennzeichnend Christlichem” that one could extract from the NT<sup>775</sup> this would fail to create a truly NT Theology that did justice to “die vielen daraus hervorgehenden, sich ganz unterschiedlich entfaltenden Theologien.”<sup>776</sup> Indeed, the reality is that even in the

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<sup>772</sup> Berger, 6-7.

<sup>773</sup> Berger, 584 italics removed.

<sup>774</sup> Berger, 584.

<sup>775</sup> See Berger’s elucidations under the broad subheadings of Early Christian Theology as Scriptural Proofs, Concerning the Early Christian Concept of God, Eschatology, Living Experiences (under which comes pneumatology), Christology, Soteriology, and the Sacraments. 16-100.

<sup>776</sup> Berger, 777.

case of Paul, where we are in possession of multiple writings by a single author, one cannot claim the existence of a theologically unified system.<sup>777</sup>

Berger's work seeks to be fair to the plurality and diversity of primitive Christianity and does not engage in any harmonizing of the texts. Räsänen particularly praises Berger's inclusive discussion of the position of the so-called *Gegner* (opponents) of the NT writers within the *Theologieggeschichte*.<sup>778</sup> On the whole, Berger's work has been well received on account of its methodological innovations rather than the specifics of the project itself, with Räsänen viewing it as more of an incentive to discussion than as a genuine *Theologieggeschichte* given its lack of structural coherence and plethora of controversial theories.<sup>779</sup>

As one might expect from a *Theologieggeschichte*, Berger's work is essentially a work of historical-theology. It seeks to define the *Sitz im Leben* of texts, within a wider heuristic framework, and offer appropriate interpretations of the texts. Berger does not seek to outline any contemporary implications or application from his work and, as such, his work is essentially descriptive. In fact, Räsänen commends Berger's refusal to engage in a "modernising" of primitive Christianity by remaining true to the historical task.<sup>780</sup> Berger's specific disavowal of the possibility of finding "the theology of the NT" inherently within the theologically diverse texts is to be welcomed. However, since Berger remains true to the historical task he is able to offer an imaginatively construed heuristic framework to enable a more critical reading of the texts that respects their alterity and polyphonic nature but does not make begin to make a contribution to the *theological* task of critically using the texts as resources for constructing contemporary meaning and modes of behaviour.

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<sup>777</sup> Berger, 777.

<sup>778</sup> Räsänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 53.

<sup>779</sup> Räsänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 55.

<sup>780</sup> Räsänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 55.

### 6.3. *Schmithals: A Thematic History.*

Later in the same year that Berger published his work (1994), Walter Schmithals published a similarly titled volume which failed to receive the same plaudits as did Berger's work, at least within Germany, although, unlike Berger's history, it was later translated into English as *The Theology of the First Christians*.<sup>781</sup> While Räisänen is eager to attribute the influence of Wrede to Schmithals' *Theologiegeschichte*,<sup>782</sup> Schmithals himself, however, makes no allusion to Wrede's work as programmatic for his own undertaking. He fails to cite Wrede's *Über Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten neutestamentlichen Theologie* throughout the entirety of his work, although he does make much use of Wrede's *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*.<sup>783</sup> Schmithals seems rather to draw his inspiration from W. Bousset's *Kyrios Christos* (1913).<sup>784</sup> Unlike Berger, Schmithals focuses almost exclusively on the NT canonical texts, primarily Paul and the Synoptics, though he does treat "orthodox" primitive Christian texts such as the Apostolic Fathers and Justin Martyr. Indeed, Schmithals reveals the ecclesiological concerns underlying his work when he concludes by stating that the canonical NT should not be challenged as invalid since canonisation was a process which "sanctioned in common the scriptures that were already highly regarded in the churches" and thus forms the basis for the unity of the church: "...when they [Christians in differing confessions] are joined by the New Testament, they are joined in the truth."<sup>785</sup> As such, Schmithals uses a historical interpretation of the canonization process to ground a theological judgment concerning the present. Though such assertions are very brief they do occur in other parts of Schmithals' work.<sup>786</sup> For example, Schmithals is concerned to point out the "historicality" of Pauline directives concerning the sexes in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, and 1 Timothy 2 and criticizes the attempt to turn

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<sup>781</sup> W. Schmithals, *The Theology of the First Christians*. (Louisville: WJKP, 1997); (trans. O. Dean Jr. from *Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums: Eine problemgeschichtliche Darstellung*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994)).

<sup>782</sup> Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 55.

<sup>783</sup> See Schmithals, 13, 26-28, 37, 39-40.

<sup>784</sup> Schmithals, ix-xii.

<sup>785</sup> Schmithals, 369.

<sup>786</sup> See Schmithals' defence of Lessing's position regarding creeds and the Gospels and his admonition for scholars to adopt it, Schmithals, 333-334.

them into “timeless, immutable norms”, which “contradict[s] their own intention and the fundamental principle of all ethical action: love.”<sup>787</sup> Consequently, Schmithals does not restrict his *Theologieggeschichte* to descriptive interpretation of the sources but occasionally also makes explicit theological judgments upon the basis of his description in a way that Berger does not.

Schmithals’ *theologieggeschichtlich* approach stands in distinct contrast to that of Berger. Whereas Berger is concerned to trace out the developmental lines of primitive Christianity, Schmithals remains skeptical concerning the evidence for such an approach. He states:

“It is a bold undertaking...to connect individual fragments in our tradition with each other in a developmental line and an even bolder one to construct such a line out of one individual fragment, especially when the traditions come to us mostly without a time or place of origin.”<sup>788</sup>

Not only is it problematic to demonstrate literary dependence or otherwise between writings or to dissect writings into various chronologically organised sub-strata, there are, according to Schmithals, significant reasons for not doing so. One is able to discern in Pauline thought, for example, that various developmental lines in Christology and soteriology, for example, intersect and cross-fertilize one another. Furthermore, Schmithals maintains that primitive Christianity maintained strong connections between major churches and theologians, making an early distinction between ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’ “unproblematic”.<sup>789</sup> In fact, focusing on separate developmental lines not only obscures this fact but also means that the individual writer, along with their particular unique emphases within primitive Christianity, is obscured in favour of a broader “development”.<sup>790</sup> Thus, Schmithals programmatically concludes that:

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<sup>787</sup> Schmithals, 354-355.

<sup>788</sup> Schmithals, ix.

<sup>789</sup> Schmithals, ix-x.

<sup>790</sup> Schmithals, ix-x.

“...the history of early Christian theology does not lend itself to being adequately grasped and offered in its totality [and therefore] the present contribution toward understanding that history is focused especially on *basic* theological themes and decisions that are *signposts* of future theological development.”<sup>791</sup>

The resultant *Theologieggeschichte* thus focuses essentially on the Synoptics and Paul, although every NT text is at least cited once. The overall structure of the work is loose. Räisänen rightly notes that it feels more like an essay collection than a coherent historical work.<sup>792</sup> Schmithals paints a diverse picture of Christianity, noting even the theological development of Paul, though he maintains that most theological development occurred in the initial phases of primitive Christianity.<sup>793</sup> Indeed, the silence of historical sources concerning the canonization process reflects the fact that there was absolutely nothing controversial to report.<sup>794</sup>

Schmithals' *Theologieggeschichte* is an attempt at an imaginative construal of primitive Christianity based on very different premises to that of Berger. Schmithals rightly exhibits concern for the uniqueness of individual texts in his desire to avoid pressing them into an unduly rigid developmental mould, that illuminates only those aspects of the text that help support the theoretical case for theological development. On the other hand, Schmithals' own focus on basic theological themes which point towards future theological developments contradicts and undermines his theoretical commitments, leading to a *Theologieggeschichte* which places an overwhelming emphasis on precisely the same texts as generally favoured by the typical TNT model – Paul and the Synoptics. Furthermore, Schmithals' general neglect of relevant sources beyond the NT, due to his assessment that the orthodox-heresy categories were a very early feature of Early Christianity, as well as his (over)reliance on the Pauline and Synoptic texts – a method

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<sup>791</sup> Schmithals, x.

<sup>792</sup> Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 55 n.253.

<sup>793</sup> Schmithals, 102-119, especially 119.

<sup>794</sup> Schmithals, 358.



criticized by Berger<sup>795</sup> – suggests his work is a less than convincing compromise between a fully fledged historical approach to early Christianity and the theological approach of the TNT model. Whilst Schmithals’ offers significant cautions related to the speculative nature of the historical enterprise in inferring development and interaction between fragmentary sources, his reconstruction of Early Christianity is much weaker than Berger’s in terms of genuinely respecting the diversity of the NT texts and explaining the diversity of Early Christianity as a whole.

#### 6.4. *Theissen: A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion.*

In a work which deliberately places itself outside the TNT genre and on the margins of the *Theologieggeschichte*, Theissen specifically alludes to Wrede’s “programme of a scientific analysis of primitive Christian religion” in the first footnote of his major work *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion*.<sup>796</sup> One of the specific strengths of Theissen’s attempt to carry out this programme is (he claims) that despite the “recognition of the plurality and contradictory nature of the theological schemes in primitive Christianity” demanded by Wrede and the consequent lack of need to discern “a uniform kerygma”, his theory of primitive Christian religion enables him to investigate “the unity in the plurality far more intensively than the programmatic recognition of the plurality suggests.”<sup>797</sup> Such a concern with the unity-plurality issue, so recognizant of the TNT genre, is, according to Theissen, not only a theological concern but also “a justified historical and religious concern.”<sup>798</sup>

Theissen explains why he chose to write a “theory of primitive Christian religion” by arguing that a descriptive analysis of NT statements concerning both God and his relationship to the world and human beings found in some TNTs, eschews “making a

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<sup>795</sup> Berger, 4 n.1.

<sup>796</sup> Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion*, 323 n.1. References will be drawn from the original English version. For the latest updated 4th edition see G. Theissen, *Die Religion der ersten Christen: Eine Theorie des Urchristentums*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008 (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)).

<sup>797</sup> Theissen, 323-324 n.1.

<sup>798</sup> Theissen, 324.

normative claim for such statements.”<sup>799</sup> For Theissen such descriptive theology is inadequate since it is unable “to cover the whole dynamic of Christian belief.”<sup>800</sup> To fully understand the “inner-most motivations” of Early Christians one must place such theological statements in their full context – “semiotic, social, psychological, and historical”<sup>801</sup> – which is not overtly ‘theological’. Theology, descriptively understood as primitive Christian faith, is not fully grasped without relation to its full life-context, necessitating the use of various semiotic and psychological models in order to elucidate it comprehensively.<sup>802</sup> Furthermore, Theissen maintains that a “confessional” account of primitive Christianity based on “the normative premise ‘God has redeemed the world in Christ and brought human life to its fulfilment’” restricts the NT to “internal church debate” rendering it inaccessible to general discussion and “many of our secularized contemporaries”.<sup>803</sup> Why this should be so, Theissen does not state. Nor does he consider whether Christian confession is a peculiar instance of this phenomenon or whether “our secular contemporaries” are actually unable to engage with any work based on a normative claim (of any faith/philosophy), a claim which many would surely refute.

Theissen thus seeks to bridge the gap to secular outsiders by utilising a semiotic definition of religion as “*a cultural sign language which promises a gain in life by corresponding to an ultimate reality.*”<sup>804</sup> He hopes to develop a theory of primitive Christian religion which allows one to take either “a view from inside” or “a view from outside” the faith and facilitates mediation between both perspectives.<sup>805</sup> The symbolic world of Christianity receives its expression through three main forms: myths, rites, and ethos.<sup>806</sup> The elaboration of these elements or Theissen’s overall project will not be

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<sup>799</sup> Theissen, 1.

<sup>800</sup> Theissen, 1.

<sup>801</sup> Theissen, 1.

<sup>802</sup> cf. Theissen, 1-18. Theissen has since continued to develop this approach to Early Christianity in texts such as G. Theissen, *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen: Eine Psychologie des Urchristentums*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007); G. Theissen, P. von Gemünden, (eds.), *Erkennen und Erleben: Beiträge zur psychologischen Erforschung des frühen Christentums*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007); and G. Theissen, *Von Jesus zur urchristlichen Zeichenwelt: Neutestamentliche Grenzgänge im Dialog*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2011).

<sup>803</sup> Theissen, 1.

<sup>804</sup> Theissen, 2 (italics his). Theissen derives his semiotic theory from the theorist Clifford Geertz.

<sup>805</sup> Theissen, 1.

<sup>806</sup> Theissen, 21.

explored further here. Rather, the focus will be on Theissen's conclusions in his chapter "Plurality and Unity in Primitive Christianity".<sup>807</sup>

For Theissen, the founding of the NT canon "did not suppress the inner plurality of primitive Christianity but preserved it."<sup>808</sup> There were essentially four basic currents in primitive Christianity – Pauline Christianity, Jewish Christianity, Synoptic Christianity, and Johannine Christianity – which the canon preserves, while demarcating itself over against "radical prophetic currents" (*Shepherd of Hermas*, the Montanists), Gnosticism, the radical wing of Jewish Christianity (*Gospel of the Hebrews*, *Gospel of Thomas*), and the radical wing of Johannine Christianity (of which no writings are extant (!)).<sup>809</sup> However, within the NT canon one can discern an "inner canon", which is "the grammar of primitive Christian faith".<sup>810</sup> Like any language, Christian discourse is governed by "internalized rules", which both allow for shared understanding and provide a "hierarchy" which governs expression.<sup>811</sup>

Although he admits it will "never [be] possible to formulate them completely",<sup>812</sup> Theissen attempts to delineate the basic axioms and motifs of primitive Christian grammar, which allowed for common understanding. Two fundamental axioms were shared by all primitive Christians. The first axiom, "monotheism", was shared with Judaism and emphasizes the singularity of God. It functions "as a negative rule of exclusion: nothing may be equated with God. [...] Everything that is the world is not God."<sup>813</sup> The second basic axiom is "*belief in a redeemer*."<sup>814</sup> Regarding this second axiom one is compelled to question whether Theissen's reluctance to state "Christ" as the specific "redeemer" within this formula is an inevitable result of his methodology or rather of his desire not to offend the "secular contemporaries". Such a lack of specific content can hardly be said to accurately reflect the beliefs of primitive Christianity. The

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<sup>807</sup> Theissen, 249-285.

<sup>808</sup> Theissen, 270.

<sup>809</sup> Theissen, 253, 257.

<sup>810</sup> Theissen, 271.

<sup>811</sup> Theissen, 271-272.

<sup>812</sup> Theissen, 273.

<sup>813</sup> Theissen, 273.

<sup>814</sup> Theissen, 273 italics his.

second axiom is “subordinated to the first and yet is unmistakably in tension with it”<sup>815</sup>, though this is resolved by “a creative use of the basic axiom of monotheism: nothing may stand alongside God – except God himself”.<sup>816</sup> For Theissen, these two fundamental axioms formed the criteria for the demarcation of “orthodox” Christianity, either by rejection of theories which challenged the unity of God (e.g. Marcionite and Gnostic ideas) or of theories which denied the full incarnation (e.g. docetism).<sup>817</sup>

The ensuing eleven motifs which Theissen sketches as part of primitive Christian “grammar” are not an inexhaustible list nor necessarily found in each current of early Christianity. They can be viewed as a “web of different characteristics”, which “unites constantly changing sub-groups, so that each feels connected with each.”<sup>818</sup> These motifs include: creation (by God) motif; wisdom (of God); miracle; alienation (from God); renewal (of this present world); representation (as in the atonement); indwelling (of God in humanity and the church); faith; agape; change of position (‘first shall be last’); and judgment (by God).<sup>819</sup> In Theissen’s view, the NT writings established themselves as the canon because they essentially correspond to this “inner canon” formed by the “grammar of primitive Christian faith.”<sup>820</sup>

Following his elucidation of the motifs, Theissen goes on to note that if one assumes such a primitive Christian ‘grammar’ developed organically then the exclusion of the Gnostics from the canon seems natural insofar as primitive Christianity had to eschew a “radical religion of redemption” due to its commitment to a balance between faith in both creation and redemption.<sup>821</sup> However, Theissen’s argument here is flawed since he categorises creation as a mere motif drawn out of the basic axiom of monotheism, not as a fundamental axiom in its own right (and thus not necessarily shared by all primitive Christians according to his scheme). If one fails to draw the inference that monotheism equals creation, the road is cleared for a more ‘radical’ notion of redemption such as that

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<sup>815</sup> Theissen, 273.

<sup>816</sup> Theissen, 274.

<sup>817</sup> Theissen, 274.

<sup>818</sup> Theissen, 272.

<sup>819</sup> For fuller explication cf. Theissen, 274-282.

<sup>820</sup> Theissen, 283.

<sup>821</sup> Theissen, 282-283.

proposed by the Gnostics. Furthermore, if one then goes on to view the notion of creation as a hangover from Judaism, then Gnosticism starts to appear as the truly radical form of redemptive Christianity of which ‘orthodox’ Christianity is a mere compromise.

Indeed, when Theissen makes a cross-check of documents excluded from the canon against his “grammar of Christian faith”, he finds that many writings seem unjustly disregarded since they respect his two fundamental axioms and share in various motifs.<sup>822</sup> Unsurprisingly, given Theissen’s prior commitment that “the canonical and non-canonical literature are in principle regarded as being of equal value”,<sup>823</sup> this fact does not appear to give him pause to call his ‘grammatical’ model into question; it appears that his model is correct while the canon is shown to be deficient. After lamenting the lack of Jewish Christian Gospels in the NT because we have thereby “lost the voices of a very impressive Christianity which was no less valuable than the Christianity close to Judaism in the Letter of James or Matthew”,<sup>824</sup> Theissen also bemoans the loss of “a valuable variant of primitive Christian faith”: “an individual Christian mysticism”<sup>825</sup> due to the exclusion of the Gospel of Thomas. However, based on an assumption that canon tended to sanction plurality, Theissen maintains that his model can relieve the deficits of the canonisation process whilst remaining in the spirit of the canon itself. In relation to the mysticism of the Gospel of Thomas, he states:

“Here a theory of primitive Christianity can reconstruct lost riches and in the light of the norms of primitive Christian faith which historically developed into a system can recognize them as ‘legitimate’. For it would have been completely in keeping with the tendency to recognize an inner plurality that can be seen in the formation of the canon also to accept a voice of individual

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<sup>822</sup> Theissen, 283.

<sup>823</sup> Theissen, 323 n.1.

<sup>824</sup> Theissen, 284. There is unfortunately no space available to critique Theissen’s speculative reconstruction of primitive Christianity, including his notions of Jewish Christianity and Synoptic Christianity.

<sup>825</sup> Theissen, 284.

mysticism in the concert of the canonical writings – and thus supplement the community mysticism of Paul and the Gospel of John from another side.”<sup>826</sup>

In the light of such conclusions, one can only conclude that despite his search for unity within primitive Christianity, Theissen may well have discerned ‘a grammar of secular academic orthodoxy’ rather than a genuine “grammar of primitive Christian faith.” Such a suspicion is reinforced not only by Theissen discovering an “inner canon” within the canon which then legitimizes his desire to confer canonical status on writings which he particularly likes but also by the concerns which lead him to lament the absence of certain writings from the canon. Theissen appears to be pandering both to political correctness by lamenting the neglect of the (more Jewish!) Jewish Christian writings within the canon and to alternative spirituality and lifestyle in his disappointment that both the “primitive Christian vegetarianism” in the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the “radical individualism” and “cosmic piety” of solitary mysticism in the *Gospel of Thomas* remained excluded.<sup>827</sup>

It is perhaps striking that an investigation to determine the ‘unity’ of the NT writings without the support of traditional dogmatic presuppositions or language and written for a secular audience, eventually leads to a portrayal of unity that both calls into question dogmatic postulates such as the canon and ends up reflecting the contemporary values of Theissen’s likely target audience. This is not to suggest that those values are inherently bad but rather to point out a curious fact. The ‘unity’ which scholars discover in the NT texts invariably tends to be one with which they feel right at home. In Theissen’s case, the specificity of the text is methodologically elided and consequently the alterity and polyphony of the NT texts is replaced by an abstract ‘grammar’ – briefly defined in key axioms and motifs - that is flexible enough to be amenable to reinforcing the values of the work’s target audience. In short, Theissen’s non-dogmatic quest for ‘unity’ disturbingly culminates in the revelation of a previously hidden ideological agenda. This coincidence

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<sup>826</sup> Theissen, 285.

<sup>827</sup> Theissen, 283-285.

of primitive Christian and contemporary values is perhaps unsurprising given the apologetic interest behind Theissen's work.<sup>828</sup>

Theissen's work is of course merely an interpretive *theory* about primitive Christianity, not a *Theologiegeschichte* or a TNT. Indeed, Räisänen praises Theissen for developing a theory which is applicable to all religions.<sup>829</sup> This is, however, its downfall. Theissen continually elides the alterity of the NT texts through the application of general theories and the reduction of the texts to terse abstractions.<sup>830</sup> Furthermore, Theissen's model of unity and diversity is not fully convincing. Räisänen points out Theissen's use of theoretical models leads to initial claims of Christian diversity as a "seething chaos", which is then reduced to a hidden theological unity which lies behind such plurality.<sup>831</sup> No doubt Theissen's semiotic theory of religion has merit in incorporating interdisciplinary insights into the study of the NT but lacks the heuristic value of Berger's model due to its level of abstraction which tends to eclipse the voice of the NT texts. However, Theissen has also made proposals concerning the future writing of a TNT which has a "more than 80% overlap" with the current project but takes a confessional and apologetic stance whilst restricting itself to the canonical texts.<sup>832</sup> Such a TNT would deliberately seek to exploit the poles of tension which are fundamental to the human condition as a whole (history/myth; particularism/universalism; radicalisation/relativisation of ethos; monotheism/faith in Christ) but receive a distinct interpretation within Christianity.<sup>833</sup> The degree to which this would be successful remains open, though one suspects that the more inductive semiotic approach to a TNT advocated by Sellin (and related to Theissen's work) perhaps stands a better chance of allowing the NT texts to be heard in all their individual uniqueness.<sup>834</sup>

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<sup>828</sup> See his conclusion, Theissen, 306-307 and note Theissen's adaptation of the language of biological evolutionism, e.g. 295-297.

<sup>829</sup> Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 65.

<sup>830</sup> See also Räisänen's comments in *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 142-146.

<sup>831</sup> H. Räisänen., *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 319 n.1.

<sup>832</sup> G. Theissen, "Widersprüche in der urchristlichen Religion: Aporien als Leitfaden einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments", *Evang. Theol.* 64.3 (2004): 187 n.4.

<sup>833</sup> Theissen, *Widersprüche...*, 199.

<sup>834</sup> See G. Sellin, "Zwischen Deskription und Reduktion: Aporien und Möglichkeiten einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments", *EvangTheol* 64.3 (2004): 172-186. See particularly Sellin's description of NT exegesis

### 6.5. Räsänen: *Religionsgeschichte Beyond New Testament Theology*.

Of all the critics of the TNT, none has been more vocal or more influential than Räsänen, who deserves praise for having stimulated a debate as to the goals and methods of NT theology. Räsänen himself makes no secret of Wrede's influence on his approach. In his *Beyond New Testament Theology*, Räsänen surveyed the contemporary state of synthetic accounts of NT theology and began to programmatically set out his position, which was "Wrede's vision in a modified form."<sup>835</sup> Räsänen seeks to offer a "religionswissenschaftliche Alternative zur neutestamentlichen Theologie...im Anschluss an die 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule'."<sup>836</sup> Like Wrede, Räsänen finds the term 'New Testament Theology' unsatisfactory in describing synthesizing accounts of the NT and related literature.<sup>837</sup> It is too narrow to adequately encompass all studies which vary dramatically according to their goal.

One of the major problems Räsänen sees in the TNT lies in the relationship between history and theology. General exegetical work on the NT and Early Christianity is "often conducted in a detached, descriptive, history-of-religions or literary-critical atmosphere." It is marked by the assumption of "considerable theological diversity within the New Testament", a lack of attempt to harmonize such diversity, a lack of obligation towards the hermeneutical task, and the avoidance of "value-laden theological categories" such as "revelation" or "inspiration."<sup>838</sup> A synthesizing account of such work would, if written in the same vein, result in the fulfilment of Wrede's vision – a purely historical synthetic account of Early Christianity that transcends the boundaries of the canon. However, Räsänen maintains that such an approach is precisely what scholars do *not* adopt when

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as requiring "differenzierte Sinnlichkeit" including his description of the NT consisting of "27 Gärten, die alle für sich gewürdigt werden wollen" (173).

<sup>835</sup> H. Räsänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 120.

<sup>836</sup> Räsänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 67; For an overview of the "history-of religions school" see G. Lüdemann and M. Schröder, (eds.), *Die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule in Göttingen: Eine Dokumentation*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

<sup>837</sup> Räsänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, xi.

<sup>838</sup> Räsänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, xii.



writing synthesizing accounts. Rather, theological agendas come to the fore. For example, “the existence of an underlying theological unity in the New Testament is postulated rather than argued.”<sup>839</sup> Even when diversity is admitted, authors attempt to theologially harmonize the differences. Furthermore, the texts are considered as God’s revelation and scholars attempt to carry out the hermeneutical task so that the texts speak into contemporary situations.<sup>840</sup> For Räisänen, this situation is lamentable; not so much because such attempts are wrong in principle but because they are ambiguous about their goals and motivations.

In response, Räisänen suggests clarifying the *societal location* of work on the NT. Firstly, NT theology “may be a legitimate part of self-consciously *ecclesial* theology.”<sup>841</sup> A Church-oriented NT Theology demands faith in the part of the one writing – it is a primarily theological task.<sup>842</sup> It thus accepts the boundaries of the canon regardless of the degree to which it legitimately seeks to discover unity or diversity within those limits. Ultimately, within an ecclesial context, a TNT can actually only be a “methodological compromise” as a consistent Christian theology would incorporate both OT and NT as comprising the Christian canon or would involve a *gesamtbiblische* theology, in which the OT is represented by the Septuagint.<sup>843</sup>

Räisänen’s second solution is that work carried out in an *academic* context should abandon the possibility of a Theology of the New Testament or a Biblical Theology. Two different projects should replace it. The first project should be a purely historical approach to Early Christianity in all its diversity. The second project involves “critical philosophical and/or theological ‘reflection on the New Testament’, as well as on its influence on our history and its significance for contemporary life.” The two tasks may be carried out separately or in conjunction but clear differentiation should be maintained at all times.<sup>844</sup> Neither of the two projects necessitates nor excludes an a priori faith

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<sup>839</sup> Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, xiii.

<sup>840</sup> Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, xii-xiii.

<sup>841</sup> Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, xviii, italics his.

<sup>842</sup> Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 91.

<sup>843</sup> Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 77-78.

<sup>844</sup> Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, xviii.

commitment on the part of the scholar.<sup>845</sup> With such a programme, Räsänen seeks to realize one of the goals of the Enlightenment. His two-tier structure would result in so-called “ecclesial” theology becoming a second-class theology, excluded from the academic arena due to its inherent “bias” and lack of objectivity.

The striking feature of this proposal by Räsänen is his failure to deny the TNT a legitimate place within rational discourse. By assigning it a role in ecclesial discourse, Räsänen betrays the fundamental dualism that infects his entire programme. This dualism divides hermeneutical discourse along the line of history/theology, academy/church, public/private, reason/faith, objective/subjective, descriptive/normative and diversity/unity. This dualism is not only untenable on hermeneutical grounds,<sup>846</sup> but reflects the false belief that there are double standards concerning rational discourse and the reading of texts. Räsänen generally gives too much credence to the possibility of a value-free interpretation. Ultimately, Räsänen fails to be radical enough since he does not perceive that the key issue distinguishing his work from the TNT is *not simply* history versus theology but rather his legitimate opposition to the ideological assertion that the critically read, theologically diverse texts *must necessarily* share a dogmatically required, inherent ‘unity’. Thus, instead of equating the TNT with theology and the *Religionsgeschichte* with history and consequently relegating theological discourse to a marginalised ecclesial discourse, Räsänen should have called for a new way of working theologically with the diversity of the NT.

In the introduction to his *Religionsgeschichte*, Räsänen sets out the differences between his approach and a TNT. As a “descriptive” project it neglects to make use of “supernatural or metaempirical concepts such as revelation, inspiration...or “Word of

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<sup>845</sup> Räsänen, *Neutestamentlich Theologie?*, 91.

<sup>846</sup> See the arguments below. For various recent critiques of Räsänen see Penner and Vander Stichele’s *Moving Beyond New Testament Theology*. Essays in this volume which critique various dualisms of Räsänen and/or his hermeneutical assumptions include: S. Stell, “The Ends of New Testament Studies and the Effects of those Ends” (61-104); J. Punt, “Decolonising and Recolonising New Testament Theology: A Postcolonial Perspective from Africa” (133-160); W. Stegemann, “Much Ado About Nothing? Sceptical Inquiries into the Alternatives “Theology” or “ Religious Studies”” (221-242); R. Barry Matlock, “Beyond the Great Divide? History, Theology, and the Secular Academy” (369-399). See also Räsänen’s measured response in H. Räsänen, “What I Meant and What It Might Mean...An Attempt at Responding” (400-443).

God”.<sup>847</sup> Accordingly, Räisänen extends the materials he surveys beyond the boundaries of the NT canon as far as texts written around 200 CE. He also refuses to allow the canon to norm his theological account, making “no distinction between “orthodoxy” and “heresy” (except as historical notions).”<sup>848</sup> Unlike some theological approaches Räisänen seeks to interpret the idea of the Early Christians in relation to their cultural milieu and thus is not focussed on “doctrines” but on “the formation of beliefs.”<sup>849</sup> Räisänen thus offers a limited diachronic introduction to each set of ideas and to his work as a whole but primarily adopts a thematic structure.<sup>850</sup> The thematic, descriptive approach “tries to do justice to the diversity of early Christianity.”<sup>851</sup> The question of NT unity is a confessional problem derived from fact of diverse witnesses in the NT canon. Räisänen points out that:

“While there is nothing inherently impossible in the question about unity being asked even in a historical perspective, the diversity seems so obvious that unity can be sought only on a rather abstract level; quite often authors of New Testament theologies end up with assertions of basic unity that stand in tension to their own presentations of the diversity.”<sup>852</sup>

The emphasis on diversity allows Räisänen to acknowledge “intellectual and moral problems in the sources” and offers “value judgments” on some aspects of “the human decisions and attitudes of those who produced the relevant texts.”<sup>853</sup> However, Räisänen offers no specific clarification of the nature of his own presuppositions underlying the value judgements he intends to make.<sup>854</sup>

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<sup>847</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 3.

<sup>848</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 4.

<sup>849</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 4-5.

<sup>850</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 5 and *passim* for examples.

<sup>851</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 5 italics removed.

<sup>852</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 6.

<sup>853</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 6.

<sup>854</sup> Räisänen also offers limited observations on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of particular Early Christian ideas, for example on Christology, see *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 225-227. For other clear examples, see his preliminary sketch essays: H. Räisänen, “Towards an Alternative to New Testament Theology: Different ‘Paths to Salvation’” in Breytenbach and Frey, (175-203); H. Räisänen, “Towards an Alternative to New Testament Theology: ‘Individual Eschatology’ as an Example” in Rowland and Tuckett, 167-185; H.

Räisänen utilizes a large variety of texts for each theme dealt with. The synthetic structure of his work renders it superficially similar to a thematic TNT, a point noted by Halvor Moxnes and conceded by Räisänen.<sup>855</sup> Indeed, the synthetic approach may be linked to traditional dogmatic topoi including eschatology (79-133); anthropology and hamartiology (134-153); soteriology (154-191); Christology (192-227); pneumatology (228-246); and ethics (247-300). Upon reading Räisänen's account one cannot help noticing that while a diversity of views are synthetically presented on a variety of topics, the texts themselves recede into the background in favour of "ideas". In a single volume work of such a massive scope as that of Räisänen's, it is inevitable and necessary for the author to cull ideas from texts, presenting a series of decontextualised 'positions' next to each, and illustrate their (lack of) dependence on one another. It is a work in which abstraction and reduction is a virtue. For this to occur, the distinctiveness and contours of a text and the full extent of one text's interrelationship with another is obscured and lost.

To be fair to Räisänen, this is hardly a criticism of the entire enterprise understood on Räisänen's own terms. He notes that the difference between his work and a TNT is that his work is interested in "what may lie behind the texts", whereas a canon-centered approach is concerned with the texts themselves.<sup>856</sup> As a result, Räisänen's *Religionsgeschichte* abandons a focus on the text qua text – a move that helps him attain his goal but with consequences for anyone attempting the theological task. In relation to Räisänen's enterprise, Samuel Byrskog points out:

"A text is, after all, more than a window to history, and it is the New Testament text, not the history behind it, which functions as the canon of the church."<sup>857</sup>

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Räisänen, "Last Things First: "Eschatology" as the First Chapter in an Overall Account of Early Christian Ideas" in Penner and Vander Stichele, 444-487.

<sup>855</sup> H. Moxnes, "From Theology to Identity: The Problem of Constructing Early Christianity" in Penner and Vander Stichele, 264-265. Räisänen, *What I Meant*, 438-439.

<sup>856</sup> Räisänen, *What I Meant*, 419.

<sup>857</sup> S. Byrskog, "Räisänen through Theissen: A Program and a Theory" in Penner and Vander Stichele, 219.

Such a statement points to the necessity of the *text* for the theological enterprise. Theology is concerned with the construction of meaning in relation to the NT texts rather than with a construal of the history and development of the ideas lying behind the texts. Whilst such a construal has heuristic value for reaching appropriately constrained readings of NT texts, it is not itself “constructive theology”. A parallel example is the same way that a history of philosophy may provide much insight into the development and meaning of philosophical ideas, while also reflecting the philosophical, cultural and religious values of the writer in its assumptions, construction and judgments. It is not, however, the same thing as a contemporary attempt at constructing a meaningful philosophy, regardless of the fact that any attempt to carry out such a task would be greatly benefited to the degree that it paid attention to both ‘histories of philosophy’ and the textual moments which provide the material for such a “history”.

A final observation concerning Räisänen’s approach indicates a surprising parallel between his *religionsgeschichtlich* model and some TNT models. Räisänen proposes a “two-stage method” of “Rekonstruktion” (history) and “Konfrontation” (Application). Whilst “Rekonstruktion” cannot be historical in the sense of purely objective, it must use the more useful criteria of “fair play” when reconstructing and interpreting historical sources rather than allowing readings of sources to be unduly influenced by prior dogmatic or ideological interests.<sup>858</sup> “Konfrontation” involves the critical engagement of the text from the standpoint of the interpreter in such a way that the difference between text and interpreter is not elided though the ideas of the Early Christians are to be judged by the ethical norm as to whether it ‘serves’ (*dienen*) or ‘harms’ (*schaden*) life.<sup>859</sup> This approach means that by the time one reaches the “Konfrontation” stage the texts must already be transformed into an unrecognizable synthesis – a set of religious ‘ideas’ (just like the ‘unity of the NT’) – before any theological value or use can be made of the text. Thus, by the time one wishes to begin to theologize, the text has effectively been eclipsed by synthetic reason.

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<sup>858</sup> Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, 81-84.

<sup>859</sup> Räisänen, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?*, For “fair play”, see 94. For “serving” and “harming” “life”, see 110.

Räisänen himself is, as usual, well aware of the eclipse of the text in the kind of summary account of early Christianity he himself has undertaken. His response is surprising. He maintains:

“Today it seems to me that a [TNT], or an account of early Christian religion, is *not* the most natural place where the insights gained through a legion of different approaches to the texts can be brought together. In other words, it is not...the place where one may expect to find a crowning synthesis of the discipline *as a whole*. [...] [T]he genre that might now come closest to achieving that goal seems to me, perhaps surprisingly, to be the *commentary*, though...one would probably need a *series* of commentaries on the same text, written from various angles, to do full justice to the subject.”<sup>860</sup>

Räisänen’s admission that full appreciation of the NT texts’ diversity is only possible within a literary genre directly focussed on engagement with the text itself rather than with the ideas/theology of Early Christianity reflects a welcome awareness of the constant tension between textual diversity and the vagueness and “fairly high level of abstraction” involved in the synthesis of theological ideas.<sup>861</sup> However, whilst the commentary genre is essential, a dialogical TNT model removes the need for a “two-stage” applicatory model and allows direct engagement with the text as essential to the task of constructive theology. By creating a dialogue between texts, rather than extracting ideas as merged into a synthetic overview, the close reading of the texts becomes foundational to the actual process of theologising.

#### 6.6. *Theologieggeschichte and TNT: Review Conclusion.*

The *Theologieggeschichte/Religionsgeschichte* seeks to preserve the diverse nature of the theologies within primitive Christianity by descriptively portraying them in their

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<sup>860</sup> Räisänen, *What I Meant*, 405-406.

<sup>861</sup> Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs*, 317-318.

historical development and/or relation to each other. Regardless of whether one moves beyond canonical boundaries (Berger, Theissen, Räisänen) or keeps to its limitations (Schmithals), the result is essentially a history-of-ideas, perhaps supplemented by sociological analysis. A marked difference between the *Theologieggeschichte* and some TNT models lies in its commitment to the diversity of the NT texts. Eschewing attempts to discern the ‘unity’ of the NT, the ‘historical’ approach emphasizes the textual diversity and theological plurality of primitive Christianity. Moreover, commitment to an allegedly non-ideological ‘historical’ approach to Early Christianity leads all except Schmithals to criticize the limiting of appropriate sources to those within the canonical boundaries. Consequently, these scholars often seek both to incorporate canonical and non-canonical Christian texts into their work and, at the same time, programmatically abolish the distinction between ‘orthodox’ and ‘heretical’ writings. Such an orthodox-heretical distinction, along with the NT canon, tends to be viewed as a later dogmatic imposition by the church, and consequently as anachronistic in writing genuine history. Such a position seems logically consistent with the self-description of the historical task of describing Early Christianity as an entire phenomenon made by the writers.

At the same time, a number of criticisms may be made. Firstly, it should be noted a developmental *religionsgeschichtlich* model must necessarily speculate about textual and interpersonal relationships based on limited documentary evidence. This simultaneously produces and limits its heuristic power for engaging the NT texts. Secondly, that whilst such models are generally more committed to establishing and preserving the diversity of theological positions within Early Christianity this is by no means the same thing as preserving the individuality, alterity and integral uniqueness of each NT text. Indeed, the focus on “ideas” or “grammar” shares a tendency to abstraction and the eclipse of the text in favour of the adopted model. Thirdly, whilst Räisänen in particular is scathing about the presence of ecclesial and theological interests in the interpretive endeavor deeming them unfit for the public academy, implicit and explicit value judgments also affect the treatment of the textual material by *religionsgeschichtlich* interpreters. Fourthly, models discussed here have failed to provide adequate hermeneutical models for how their work may be theologically fruitful. In the case of Räisänen, whilst this is not surprising given

his polemical stance towards the theological task, the lack of hermeneutical sophistication in his two-stage model and confidence in his own ability to achieve a reading of the biblical texts marked by “fair play”, implying a relative degree of objectivity vis-à-vis other interpreters, suggests a more thorough discussion of the historical task and its hermeneutical and theological relevance will help illuminate the possible relationship of such historical work to the task of constructive dialogical NT theology.

### 6.7. *Theologieggeschichte versus TNT?*

The following discussion seeks to clarify the relationship between the *Theologieggeschichte* and the TNT.<sup>862</sup> It will begin with a hermeneutical consideration of what the writing of history involves before attempting a clarification of the relationship between “history” and “theology.” This clarification will then lead on to a hermeneutically plausible suggestion concerning the relation of *Theologieggeschichte* to a dialogical TNT model.

#### 6.7.1. *On History as a Hermeneutical Task.*

Schröter has recently lamented the inattention of NT scholars to discussions concerning the theory of historical interpretation.<sup>863</sup> In his consideration of Droysen’s contribution to modern historiography, Schröter cites three aspects, which remain foundational for contemporary historiographical understanding. The first aspect is the character of historical knowledge as productive memory.<sup>864</sup> In contrast to the positivistic approach to history which claims to be a recovering and “fixing” of the historical “facts”, past events

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<sup>862</sup> For the purposes of the following discussion *Theologieggeschichte* is used as a convenient umbrella term for all *religionsgeschichtliche* models that seek to engage NT texts in order to write a history of Early Christianity.

<sup>863</sup> J. Schröter, “Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Historiographie und Hermeneutik in der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft” in P. Pokorný and R. Roskovec, (eds.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 202.

<sup>864</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 195. Schröter consistently refers to Droysen’s work *Historik*, (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977).



are accessible only as *remembered* events otherwise they would be lost. Thus, the object of historical enquiry is *not* the past but rather that which is not past, that is, that which is accessible here and now. The historian creates meaning by attempting to understand the “left-overs” of the past by placing them into relation to each other.<sup>865</sup>

When one considers the sources available to historical investigation we reach Schröter’s second aspect, namely, the selective and interpretive nature of all historical sources. As products of memory, the sources do not make the past in itself available to us, but rather offer interpretations of the past for the purpose of remembering. This may seem simple but Herschok points out that even the goal of remembering may well have been different in non-technological societies such as cultural world of the NT writers. He points to the fact that “memory in oral cultures is typically associated with actively entering into and maintaining a network of relationships [and is] an effort to insure the continued meaning and wholeness of a community...”<sup>866</sup> Memory provided the means whereby “the past was fully and practically personalized.”<sup>867</sup> Lategan also points to the dynamic nature of the remembering subject when dealing with material from the past. For Lategan, the role of memory in the creation of history is far from uniform with it being employed for various purposes such as:

“Remembering and commemorating  
Remembering and making amends  
Remembering and forgiving  
Remembering and not forgiving  
Remembering and punishing  
Forgetting and forgiving  
Never forgetting  
Choosing amnesia.”<sup>868</sup>

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<sup>865</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 194-195.

<sup>866</sup> P. Herschok, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age*, (New York: SUNY, 1999) 194.

<sup>867</sup> Herschok, 194.

<sup>868</sup> B. Lategan, “History, Historiography and Hermeneutics” in Pokorný and Roskovec, 208.

Lategan concludes that the diversity of functions which memory plays leads to “the insight that the past is more open to interpretation even when the explicit goal is to *remember* it.”<sup>869</sup> In the light of Herschok’s and Lategan’s assertions, history comes to be seen increasingly as something *humans do*, not something that happens to humans. In short, history is a necessary and unavoidable hermeneutical enterprise.

Furthermore, the historical sources are not only limited by the original selectivity exercised by the remembering subject but also, as textual sources, are limited through language. The hermeneutical consequences of this fact are immense: Schröter comments:

“Sprache ist kein Spiegel der Wirklichkeit, sondern ein die Wahrnehmung steuerndes Zeichensystem, welches bestimmte Aspekte eines Phänomens hervorhebt, andere dagegen beiseite läßt. Sprachliche Aussagen über Tatsachen stellen diese also niemals in ihrer Gesamtheit vor Augen. Vielmehr ist die Sprache ein Modell, mit dessen Hilfe wir die außersprachliche Wirklichkeit erfassen und dabei immer schon deuten. Jede historische Quelle ist deshalb immer zugleich eine Interpretation derjenigen Ereignisse, die sie überliefert. Sie vermittelt keinen direkten, sondern einen durch die Wahrnehmung ihres Verfassers vorstruktuierten Zugang zur Vergangenheit.”<sup>870</sup>

In relation to the NT texts this obviously implies that they do not allow direct access to *how things were*. The events referred to are always accessible only through the particular language of the texts which itself selectively mediates the finite perspective of the writer. Since language is involved, “history” involves both interpretation and translation. Furthermore, the historical process has already sifted the available “data” and endowed it with a certain significance with the result that it is always encountered as “significant” and never as “raw” data.<sup>871</sup> Consequently, history is never merely the reconstruction of “what actually happened” but is rather an interpretive quest for meaning that is itself

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<sup>869</sup> Lategan, 209.

<sup>870</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 195.

<sup>871</sup> J. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Jesus Remembered*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 109.

dependent on a catalogue of interpretations made available by the contingencies of the historical process itself and the interpreter's own contextual finitude. Since no historically located finite source can "tell it like it was", the historian rather seeks to make "that which was" *mean* for today.

The interpretive nature of the historical task leads Schröter, drawing on Ricoeur, to refer to the "Fiktionalisierung der Historie", which is the dissolution of the Aristotelian distinction between historiography and fiction.<sup>872</sup> Historiography can no longer be viewed as simply dealing with the "facts", while literature deals in "fiction". Although historiography is constrained by its relation to its sources, both history and fiction writing are *narrative* disciplines, which create meaning and seek to explain reality through the construction of a story. As Schröter states: "Auch das in der historischen Erzählung entworfene Modell vergangenen Geschehens ist ein auf dem Gerippe der Ereignisse basierendes, jedoch vom Historiker entworfenes Sinngefüge."<sup>873</sup> Thus, Schröter defines the similarity between historiography and fiction in the fact that both attempt "Erklärung durch Erzählung."<sup>874</sup> Such a position makes fully explicit the hermeneutical nature of historiography as *interpretation*.

Historiography cannot take place without the constructive resources of the imagination and it is this which allows the sources to speak. One might even go so far as to say that the real risk in historiography does not lie in the interpretation of the sources but rather in the danger that we come to believe too uncritically in the imaginative historical fictions we produce. However, in an attempt to preserve room for the notion of truth in relation to historical interpretation Körtner attempts to distinguish between *Fiktionalität* and *Fiktivität*:

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<sup>872</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 196.

<sup>873</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 197.

<sup>874</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 197 italics removed.

“Fiktiv sind reine Erfindungen der menschlichen Phantasie. Fiktional ist dagegen auch jeder Versuch, zu schildern wie es wirklich gewesen [ist].”<sup>875</sup>

For Körtner, historical portrayals fall under the category of *Fiktionalität* to the extent that they follow the principle of only making statements which are covered or convincingly provable from the sources.<sup>876</sup> A clear distinction between history and fiction is perhaps only possible with reference to the functional claims of a text, namely does it purport to be “history-telling (or truth-claiming)”.<sup>877</sup> Historical literature and fictional literature are “distinguishable only by their overall sense of purpose.”<sup>878</sup> Long’s view that “the chief difference between writers of history and writers of fiction is that the former are constrained by the facts of the past, while the latter are not”<sup>879</sup> has some merit but even a historical novelist who wishes to plausibly set their work in 16<sup>th</sup> century Amsterdam will not refer to laptops or NATO!

The collapse of the possibility of positivism in relation to historical results in a third aspect, which is the assertion of the *perspectival* nature of all historical interpretation, which is itself now to be viewed as similar to an *art*, that is, as a creative act of an interpreting subject.<sup>880</sup> Helmer notes that: “If the historical subject matter is expressed in language, then its study must take into account its linguistic incarnation.”<sup>881</sup> The consequences of the “semiotic turn” for the practise of constructing history are immense. As Schröter points out:

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<sup>875</sup> U. Körtner, “Zur Einführung: Offene Fragen einer Geschichtstheorie in Theologie und Geschichtswissenschaft” in U. Körtner (ed.), *Geschichte und Vergangenheit: Rekonstruktion, Deutung, Fiktion*, (Neukirchener: Neukirchener, 2007), 4. See also Stiver’s similar comments in D. Stiver, “Ricoeur, Speech-act Theory, and the Gospels as History” in C. Bartholomew, C. Greene, and K. Möller, (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 60.

<sup>876</sup> Körtner, *Offene Fragen...*, 4.

<sup>877</sup> N. MacDonald, “Illocutionary Stance in Hans Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: An Exercise in Conceptual Redescription and Normative Analysis*” in Bartholomew, Greene, and Möller, 322.

<sup>878</sup> V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). Subsequently republished in M. Silva, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, (pages 281- 429) from which I cite, 324.

<sup>879</sup> Philips Long, 325.

<sup>880</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 195.

<sup>881</sup> C. Helmer, “Introduction. Biblical Theology: Reality and Interpretation across Disciplines” in Helmer, *Biblical Interpretation*, 5.

“Wenn sich sprachliche Zeichen nicht auf *eine* Bedeutung festlegen lassen, sondern für verschiedene – wenn nicht auch beliebig viele – Interpretationen offen sind, dann bedeutet dies, daß auch historische Quellen verschiedene Deutungen zulassen.”<sup>882</sup>

As a result, the *meaning* of past events is always subject to review and open to revisionist interpretations. Thus, Schröter concludes that:

“Historische Wahrheit kann es...nur als regulative Idee geben. Sie liegt nicht in den erforschten Tatsachen selbst begründet [note: it has already been made clear that there are no historical ‘facts’ apart from interpretation], sondern ist der stetigen Revisionen unterworfenen Versuch, die Wirklichkeit als gewordene zu verstehen.”<sup>883</sup>

Schröter’s arguments thus imply that every *Theologiegeschichte* is merely hypothesis and subject to constant revision. A *Theologiegeschichte* may be deemed more or less true depending on how far, in its attempt to fully explicate an understanding of all the relevant “data”, it meets the criteria for plausibility established by the ideological and epistemological presuppositions of its audience. This in no way impinges on the historical “events” themselves since these are always only indirectly accessible to the constructor of history. However, whether one, for example, accepts the role and explanation of the resurrection within a particular *Theologiegeschichte* depends on whether one shares (or comes to share) the assumptions of the interpreter who produced it. Historical truth is thus always only *relatively* true and, as a result, the passage of time can lead to new perspectives and standpoints from which to interpret the sources.<sup>884</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 197.

<sup>883</sup> Schröter, *Historiographie...*, 197.

<sup>884</sup> For further reflections on the significance of diverse historical experience for the idea of the unity of “reality” and “history” see L. Hölscher, “Die Einheit der historischen Wirklichkeit und die Vielfalt der geschichtlichen Erfahrung” in Körtner, 23-33.

### 6.7.2. “History” and “Theology” as Hermeneutical Disciplines.

Since history is a hermeneutical discipline that manufactures “meaning” from its textual (and material) sources, the boundaries between history and theology start to blur. The significance of this fact is that any claim to superiority on the part of “history” due to an assumed increased “objectivity” or “value free” approach loses its force. As part of his critique of the hegemony of the historical-critical method within NT Theology, Adam provides further clues concerning the fictive nature of constructing histories. The production of any historiographical narrative is dependent on the ideological stance, or to use a less loaded term, presuppositions, of the author. Since meaningful history depends on a process of both identifying and differentiating – for example, Jesus must be seen to have particular features which mark him out as a specific historical individual, whilst at the same time being identified with categories that make him intelligible to the historian – there is “*a level of irreducible theoretical decision within historical writing.*”<sup>885</sup> Interpreters have to choose the categories with which they work and evaluate their sources on the basis of their prior philosophical, political and cultural prejudices. In effect, the writing of history requires hermeneutical judgment at practically every point in the venture. Adams thus suggests that since historical judgment cannot but be ideologically motivated “there is no “real history” in historiography, only ideologically grounded narrative.”<sup>886</sup> A similar point concerning the ideological construction of history is made by Greene. He notes that the historian’s own “values, prejudices, self-evaluation, academic position, ideological interests, and personal preferences” as well as their “epistemological presuppositions and preferences”, “their research skills or lack of them” and their chosen tools and methods of enquiry all affect the way that their history is constructed.<sup>887</sup> Whether a history is viewed as credible depends ultimately on its adherence to the norms of plausibility maintained within the context for which it was written and in which it is to be read.<sup>888</sup> However, the hermeneutical nature of

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<sup>885</sup> Adam, 156-157 italics his.

<sup>886</sup> Adam, 163.

<sup>887</sup> C. Greene, “‘In the Arms of the Angels’: Biblical Interpretation, Christology and the Philosophy of History” in C. Bartholomew, C. Greene, and K. Möller, (eds.), *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 232-233.

<sup>888</sup> Greene, 236.

historiography is not something to be lamented since it is the constructive resources of the interpreter's imagination which allows the sources to speak anew into the historian's context. Perhaps the real risk in historiography does not lie in the interpretation of the sources but rather in the danger of coming to believe too uncritically in the imaginative historical fictions produced.

Historiography, and thus the construction of a *Theologieggeschichte*, may therefore be viewed as an act of self-disclosure through which one's self-understanding and ideological commitments are revealed for critique by others via appeal to different interpretations of the sources. The remaking and reshaping of history does not happen because the 'story' has changed. Rather, history changes because the interpreters have themselves changed in some way. The task of history-making is infinite and far from a slow but inevitable drive to perfectly capturing the totality of historical reality at some point in the future. This is not only due to the semiotic nature of sources and the inability of words to encapsulate reality. It is also because of the fundamental instability of finite human interpreters who are constantly in the process of re-making and re-constituting themselves in dialogue with others.

Helmer therefore correctly argues that "the standoff between history and theology is untenable on hermeneutical grounds."<sup>889</sup> The similarity between history and theology is grounded in the unavoidable role of subjectivity within interpretation. Whilst the individual method(s) appropriate to each discipline can secure a culturally acceptable degree of limitation to subjective interpretation, method itself is simply an agreed cultural norm, reflecting subjective biases. She states:

“Although the study of method has raised consciousness about different ways of interpreting reality and has contributed to the scientific control of subjective factors, method itself is determined culturally; it imposes a

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<sup>889</sup> Helmer, *Biblical theology...*, 7.

subjective standpoint onto inquiry. Neither epistemology nor individual perspective shields against “the surplus of subjectivity”.<sup>890</sup>

Helmer goes on to note that “historical description is inevitably shaped by subjective mood and location” whilst theological description can play a role in uncovering the ways communities in the past have sought to understand and shape reality.<sup>891</sup> Furthermore, the history/theology dichotomy is often mirrored by a false dichotomy between description and prescription. According to Helmer, the charge of “dogmatism” is frequently brought when interpreters bring conceptual concerns to historical study. However, such a dualism is “untenable on epistemological grounds, and confuses hermeneutical prejudgement, interpretive sympathy, and subjective location with subjective imposition.”<sup>892</sup> Granted Helmer’s critique of the alleged history/theology, descriptive/prescriptive, objective/subjective dualisms, how is one best to ensure that one’s account of reality, subjective as it is, is not fundamentally distorted?

Helmer suggests that subjective engagement with the subject matter be explicitly condoned since it “succeeds in opening up dimensions of the subject matter that might be concealed by alleged descriptive objectivity.”<sup>893</sup> She also notes that since biblical theology must assume and defend a certain construction of reality – that of the biblical texts – sympathy with the subject matter and “hermeneutical honesty” is necessary.<sup>894</sup> In order to provide a degree of accountability of one’s construal of reality, Helmer rightly states:

“Yet it remains the critical standpoint of intersubjectivity to investigate where subjectivity occludes aspects of reality that must necessarily be part of its description. The trustworthiness of any discrete interpretation is itself established in the context of intersubjectivity.”<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>890</sup> Helmer, *Biblical theology...*, 7.

<sup>891</sup> Helmer, *Biblical theology...*, 7.

<sup>892</sup> Helmer, *Biblical theology...*, 7.

<sup>893</sup> Helmer, *Biblical theology...*, 8.

<sup>894</sup> Helmer, *Biblical theology...*, 8.

<sup>895</sup> Helmer, *Biblical theology...*, 7.



In effect, this means that the more dialogue takes place between both the interpreter and the text and the interpreter and other interpretations/interpreters of the text the better an interpretation is likely to be. This cannot mean that over time interpretations will become increasingly homogenous as dialogue cancels out differences of perspective, since the unique hermeneutical standpoint of the interpreter remains decisive. It does, however, mean that the limitations of each interpretation may be pointed out by others and the particular unique interpretation may therefore be enriched and developed without sacrificing its uniqueness.

In summary, the argument advanced here is that “history” is a constructive endeavour designed to interrogate the relevant texts (sources) in the production of meaning. The historian cannot escape the confines of their own subjectivity or context and thus finds themselves in the same situation as any other textual interpreter. The construction of a particular historical or theological discourse therefore depends for its plausibility on fidelity to the common methodical and ethical norms agreed by the intended audience of the work. Consequently, the polarisation of the categories ‘theology’ and ‘history’ within biblical studies is thoroughly misleading, particularly as both discourses make use of the same literary methods in the interpretation of their texts. Outside of a (now redundant) positivistic framework, neither discipline is able to assert its hegemony over the other on account of an alleged greater “objectivity”. Rather, hermeneutical and ideological transparency are required within both disciplines.

### *6.7.3. On the Relation Between Theologieggeschichte and a TNT.*

Commenting on 20<sup>th</sup> century biblical theology, Fowl summarily observes that:

“from Wrede’s explicit disregard for constructive theology to Stendahl’s drawing a line between what a text meant and what it means, to Räisänen’s desire to move beyond NT theology, the discipline seems inordinately

concerned with images of boundaries and separations designed to keep constructive theological concerns at bay until some more properly historical work can be done by the NT theologian.”<sup>896</sup>

Indeed, Wrede’s polemically strident appeal for biblical theology to be a historical discipline “im wahren, strengen Sinne”<sup>897</sup> both confuses the disciplinary boundaries between the theological and historical tasks and ignores their distinctive tasks, whilst simultaneously overlooking their common hermeneutical character in favour of a positivistic view of the role of history as being able to “objectively” discern “what really happened.” As one of Wrede’s contemporary followers, Räisänen continues to maintain a similar position by means of the polemical rhetoric of “objectivity” or “fairness” versus “ecclesial interests”.<sup>898</sup> In Räisänen’s case this results in the attempt to reproduce historical reality (“Rekonstruktion”) which then functions normatively for the attempt at “Konfrontation,” whether of a secular ethical nature or ecclesial theological nature (though the latter stage is notably absent in Räisänen’s work). However, since the foregoing arguments demonstrate the untenable nature of such a position, one may re-envision the relationship between the TNT and Theologiegeschichte in the following way.

*Both Theologiegeschichte and TNT are constructive interpretive disciplines.* The Theologiegeschichte’s (re-)constructive task is limited by method but is still an arena of interpretive freedom.<sup>899</sup> Through the selection and interpretation of historical data (texts) the historian produces fictional (*fictional*) narratives, which are meaningful for the contemporary reader whilst aspiring to cast light on past events and discern their significance. The Theologiegeschichte is obliged by method to set out the parameters of its investigation (such as Early Christianity) and consider as much of the available

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<sup>896</sup> S. Fowl, “The Conceptual Structure of New Testament Theology” in S. Hafemann (ed.), *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 229.

<sup>897</sup> Wrede, “Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten Neutestamentlichen Theologie”, 154.

<sup>898</sup> P. Pokorný rightly suggests that the key failing of Räisänen’s work lies in his “positivistische Urteil der Wissenschaft”; see his “Review: *Challenges to New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Justify the Enterprise*”, *Communio Viatorum* 42.2 (2000): 179.

<sup>899</sup> K. Backhaus and G. Häfner, *Historiographie und fiktionales Erzählen: Zur Konstruktivität in Geschichtstheorie und Exegese*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009<sup>2</sup>, 2007), 135.

evidence as is possible. In its treatment of historical texts, the *Theologiegeschichte* may try and imaginatively establish (tenuous) lines of influence or development between them and remains committed to interpreting them within their historical context (thus preserving their alterity).

*The Theologiegeschichte may offer a heuristic guide for the textual engagement conducted in the TNT.* At the same time, the TNT also constructs meaning through the reading of historical texts by means of a similar commitment to preserving their integrity and alterity. Precisely because of this fact, the theologian may make heuristic use of the results of the *Theologiegeschichte* (or other forms of historical investigation) to facilitate a better and more “ethical” reading of the texts. In this sense, historical investigation may be the “handmaid” of theology. However, at the same time, the TNT is not committed to establishing lines of relationship and influence between the texts or constructing a fictional narrative as to their development. The dialogical TNT thus refrains from an attempt at establishing a textual chronology. It may of course use such findings to instruct its own reading of the texts, for example, in the case of alleged intertextual borrowing and citation, but the TNT is primarily concerned with discussing and critiquing the ideas and arguments of the texts in their own right, in order to construct a theology that is meaningful for the contemporary reader.

*Neither the Theologiegeschichte nor the TNT is able to establish hegemony.* Whilst the TNT may make heuristic use of the historical narrative models provided by the *Theologiegeschichte* to inform its understanding of the biblical texts, and the *Theologiegeschichte* conversely obeys the demands of historical method in excluding as far as humanly possible the intrusion of explicit theological claims into its assessment of the data, this does not mean that history offers a “more true” insight which corresponds to “the real nature of things” than theology. Both historical and theological interpreters remain subject to their own ideological premises (biases) though these are managed somewhat by the constraints of method and the communal nature of discourse.

*Both Theologiegeschichte and the TNT should submit to the critique offered by Theory.* The deployment of critical theory is able to expose the ideological biases and power

interests driving the production of works in both disciplines. Even before the full range of contemporary critical tools of theory derived from Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud was available to biblical studies, one need only note the results of Schweitzer's historical investigations, which famously exposed the kinds of biases underlying 19<sup>th</sup> century historical Jesus and Pauline research to see the significance of such critique.<sup>900</sup> Contemporary theorists continue to address and expose the underlying western and neoliberal ideological bias of some recent biblical and historical interpretation.<sup>901</sup> Of course, a critique of the interests behind the writing of a *Theologiegeschichte* or TNT must also itself submit to its own critique, a process which could admittedly continue *ad absurdum* but does not counter the key point of refuting the putative "objectivity" of historical research and the need to submit *any* hermeneutical discipline to the challenge of critique.

*Neither a TNT nor a Theologiegeschichte can provide a permanently stable foundation on which to build a theological system.* The plurality of standpoints from which a *Theologiegeschichte* or TNT can be constructed suggests the relativity of every attempt to interpret the data. *Theologiegeschichte* cannot therefore be regarded as a universally valid fundamental and stable ground from which to derive a unified theology, as in the case of Hahn and Wilckens. The construal of the relation of the diverse texts and theologies of Early Christianity to each other is always subject to revision. As hermeneutical tasks, both genres are constantly in flux and unable ever to provide *the* definitive history or *the* definitive theology.

*Neither Theologiegeschichte nor TNT are immune from failure to acknowledge the polyphonic integrity of the NT texts.* This is demonstrable in, and perhaps a necessary

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<sup>900</sup> See. A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984 (9<sup>th</sup> ed), 1906); A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1911).

<sup>901</sup> For recent examples see: W. Blanton, *Displacing Christian Origins: Philosophy, Secularity, and the New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007) ; J. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Terror: Scholarly Projects for a New American Century*, (Sheffield: Equinox, 2008) ; H. Moxnes, W. Blanton and J. Crossley, *Jesus Beyond Nationalism: Constructing the Historical Jesus in a Period of Cultural Complexity*, (Sheffield: Equinox, 2010); J. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship and Ideology*, (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012); H. Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Historical Jesus*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

consequence of, the single volume synthetic/thematic approaches of Räsänen and Theissen. On the other hand, it seems clear that a developmental model such as that proposed by Berger at least has the potential to offer sustained treatment of the NT texts in their literary and theological integrity. At the same time, the theological task does not automatically condemn one to riding roughshod over the NT texts in the quest for a unified pristine theology. The dialogical TNT model incorporates the diversity of NT polyphony into its methodological approach and rejects the assimilation of texts to one another. It acknowledges that it is precisely the alterity of the NT texts and the contours of their arguments within their literary wholes that have the best chance of creating the space in which transformative understanding takes place. Thus, whilst the interpreter's ethical and hermeneutical sensitivity towards the text is the prime safeguard against its misuse for ideological interests, the narrative *Theologieggeschichte* and, to a greater degree, the dialogical TNT offer historical and theological models respectively, which protect the voices of the diverse NT texts.

#### 6.8. Conclusion.

The foregoing discussion has made clear the hermeneutical nature of historiography and refutes its claim to be simply a “descriptive” discipline which shows “how things really were”. The ideological presuppositions determining all aspects of any historiographical enterprise indicate the same need for cautiousness in adopting the conclusions of any interpreter as with any other hermeneutical enterprise. Despite the laudable commitment to respecting the integrity and diversity of the NT texts, only narrative accounts of the development of Early Christianity such as Berger's fully preserve the integrity and alterity of the NT texts, albeit by placing them into an imaginative developmental historical construct. Räsänen and Theissen offer thematic modes of interpretation which allow them to incorporate a large amount of material but renders dubious claims to either have discerned a unifying grammar (Theissen) or broad amount of diversity (Räsänen), since the actual texts in their literary integrity are frequently eclipsed by the larger

argument. Unstated ideological premises thus seem to be driving their clear and forceful presentations and arrangements of Early Christian ideas.

Claims that *Theologiegeschichte/Religionsgeschichte* are the more appropriate (academic) way of treating NT texts than the TNT has been exposed to be hermeneutically naive. The semiotic nature of texts, the status of historical texts as products of human memory and interpretation distinct from “the events themselves”, the fragmentary and selective nature of historical evidence, and the finitude and contextuality of the human interpreter indicate that historical interpretation is an imaginative act which produces fictional (*fiktional*) narratives. Thus, although history and theology are methodically distinct disciplines, there is far less distance between history and theology than much of the rhetoric suggests. As ideological interpretations of “reality” both the *Theologiegeschichte* and the TNT can make significant contributions to one’s own interpretation of reality whilst they themselves are informed by existing presuppositional visions of what “reality” is. Neither discipline is neutral nor value-free. Furthermore, neither discipline remains free from the danger of selective appropriation of the biblical texts, though the developmental *Theologiegeschichte* (in the manner of Berger) and the dialogical TNT offer models most likely to preserve the integrity and polyphony of the NT texts.

The TNT writer may make heuristic use of the findings of the *Theologiegeschichte* in orienting a reading of the NT texts, discerning thematic and actual interconnections between texts, and sharpening a sense of the particular historical context, and therefore alterity, of an NT text. At the same time, the dialogical TNT avoids the history-theology tension found in other TNT models (particularly Hahn and Wilckens) by focussing on the texts as integral literary units, focussing on the ideas and arguments of texts, and bringing texts into dialogue with each other without having to demonstrate actual historical interaction or influence. Furthermore, the dialogical TNT embraces the persistent reminder offered by *Theologiegeschichte* concerning the diversity and uniqueness of each NT text. However, it rejects the distinction between “description” and “normativity”, noting only that the TNT is normed by the process of constant referral to the canonical

NT texts, whilst the *Theologieggeschichte* is normed by the process of constantly referring to a wider body of evidence to establish its claims. As a result, neither discipline may supplant the other. The dialogical TNT may embrace the broad claims of the *Theologieggeschichte* regarding early Christianity insofar as a particular theologian sees fit. At the same time, whilst the theologian may make use of much extra material from any number of disciplines insofar as it sheds light on a particular subject matter, he/she also resist claims that accepting an (ecclesial) canon as a norm is anachronistic in the context of academic theology. Such a view reflects confusion by mistaking the investigation of Early Christianity by means of historical method with the constructive theological task. Rather, the *theological* task submits only to the theological norms demanded by the context in which theology is produced. In the current case, this means the process of constant norming with reference to the NT canon.

## Chapter Seven

### 7. *The Dialogical TNT and Systematic Theology.*

Preoccupation with the question as to how one is able to legitimately move from the biblical text to statements regarding its contemporary significance in terms of theology and ethics seems seldom to wane. Though the theological proposals of Bultmann and Childs arguably dominated the hermeneutical debate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discussion continues unabated, albeit with North Atlantic evangelicals recently setting out various proposals.<sup>902</sup> At the heart of this issue lies the relationship between biblical exegesis in all its diversity and its contemporary application, dogmatic, ethical or otherwise. Thus determining the appropriate relationship between biblical and systematic theology appears to be crucial to the debate. Scholars appear to be acknowledging this and Carson's assessment written in 1995 to the effect that specific elaboration on the relations between biblical and systematic theology 'remains a virgin field'<sup>903</sup> is no longer accurate.<sup>904</sup> However, despite an increase in attention towards defining the particular function of each theological discipline and the nature of their interrelationship no consensus is as yet to be found.

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<sup>902</sup> A good overview of the current trajectory of debate within evangelicalism can be gained from consulting: I. Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); M. Bockmuehl and A. Torrance, (eds.), *Scripture's Doctrine and Theology's Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); S. Gundry and G. Meadors, (eds.), *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>903</sup> D. Carson, "Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective", *BBR* 5 (1995):, 36. Carson may well have been overstating his case given the attention paid to the matter in works such as: G. Vos, *The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline*, (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1894); G. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); H. Kraus, *Die Biblische Theologie: Ihre Geschichte und Problematik*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970); R. Gaffin Jr., "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology", *WTJ* 38 (1976): 281-299.

<sup>904</sup> In addition to works already discussed one should note the specific treatments provided by R. Gamble, "The Relationship Between Biblical and Systematic Theology" in A. McGowan (ed.), *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006) 211-239; M. Williams, "Systematic Theology as a Biblical Discipline" in R. Peterson and S. Lucas, (eds.), *All For Jesus: A Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Covenant Theological Seminary*, (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2006) 197-233; V. Poythress, "Kinds of Biblical Theology", *WTJ* 70 (2008): 129-42. See also the important essay collections: B. Ollenburger (ed.), *So Wide a Sea: Essays on Biblical and Systematic Theology*, (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1991); J. Green and M. Turner, (eds.), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); F. Hossfeld (ed.), *Wieviel Systematik erlaubt die Schrift? Auf der Suche nach einer gesamtbiblischen Theologie*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2001).



Ben Ollenburger shrewdly suggests that: “Taken in the abstract, the question, ‘What is the relation between biblical theology and systematic theology?’ is only a distraction”, and concludes, “That helps to explain why answers to this question typically beg it”.<sup>905</sup> The TNT generally falls under the rubric of “biblical theology.”<sup>906</sup> As a result, no strict terminological distinction will be drawn in the following section. Since most writers discuss biblical theology in general, this terminology will be used except for when the implications for the dialogical TNT model are being explored. A number of models have been recently proposed in an attempt to accurately describe the relation between the TNT/biblical theology, exegesis, and systematic theology. The following chapter will explore five proposals – biblical theology as a “bridge”, the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS), biblical and systematic theology as functional specialities, TNT as normative, and TNT as redundant – before considering the significance of the dialogical TNT model for conceptualizing the relationship between biblical text and systematic theology.

### 7.1. *On Biblical Theology as a “Bridge” to Systematic Theology.*

As has already been noted, scholars such as Hahn, Thüsing and Söding claim that a TNT is “fundamentaltheologisch notwendig”<sup>907</sup> and forms the basis for all subsequent theology.<sup>908</sup> For such writers the extraction of the original unity of the Gospel from the

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<sup>905</sup> B. Ollenburger, “Biblical and Systematic Theology: Constructing a Relationship” in Ollenburger, *So Wide a Sea*, 115.

<sup>906</sup> Adam notes the variegated nuances attributed to the term “biblical theology” and points out that the term was inherently polemical from the beginning of Gabler’s enterprise. He shrewdly notes that it continues to be invoked to define one’s own enterprise “over against” other diverse approaches, such as “strictly historical (and therefore theologically anaemic) analysis”, “scepticism”, and “fundamentalism”, and to claim the status of “objective scholarship” vis-a-vis “pneumatic exegesis” and of “subjectivity” over against “theologically disinterested scholars”, see A. Adam, S. Fowl, K. Vanhoozer, F. Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 19. Such imprecision makes any attack or defence of the term “biblical theology” in and of itself meaningless. Rather, hermeneutical models and methodologies must be in view.

<sup>907</sup> Söding, 230.

<sup>908</sup> Note Hahn’s claim that “die Explikation des biblischen Zeugnisses ist ein fundamentales Anliegen aller Theologie, worauf alle sonstige theologische Arbeit basiert.” See F. Hahn, “Urchristliche Lehre und

biblical texts *is* fundamental theology.<sup>909</sup> However, the claim to be able to discover the unified and stable theology, by which all subsequent theological attempts may be judged, risks the charge of nihilism in its refusal to accept the finitude inherent in all interpretive acts.

In the Anglophone world, a related, and perhaps the most common approach to the TNT, is to view it as a “bridge” between exegetical work on the biblical text and the applicatory function of systematic theology. As already noted above, Schreiner adopts this kind of model in explaining the role of his TNT – a model which envisioned the TNT functioning in a “no-man’s land” as the mediator between historical approaches to the biblical text and theological construction. Carson and Goldsworthy are two of the most prominent Anglophone biblical scholars who have theoretically defended the “bridge” model and their proposals will now be discussed.

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neutestamentliche Theologie: Exegetische und fundamental-theologische Überlegungen zum Problem christlicher Lehre” in F. Hahn, *SNT: I*, 113.

<sup>909</sup> Such definitions of the TNT subverts or ignores the commonly accepted sense of Fundamental Theology as a discipline which aims to provide a fundamental basis for the practice of theology by means of critically testing its presuppositions by recourse to standards of rationality independent from faith itself, see particularly the first chapter of P. Schmidt-Leukel, *Grundkurs Fundamentaltheologie: Eine Einführung in die Grundfragen des christlichen Glaubens*, (München: Don Bosco, 1999), 11-23. An alternative approach to the relation between the TNT and Fundamental Theology is taken by Hübner, who makes no attempt to provide a unified TNT in the manner of Hahn. (See the following chapter for more discussion of H. Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments: I-III*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990, 1993, 1995)). Instead, he offers a more traditional fundamental theology in the form of a hermeneutical reflection on issues raised by his BTNT, such as the nature of divine revelation; see H. Hübner, *Evangelische Fundamentaltheologie: Theologie der Bibel*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005) and H. Hübner, “Neutestamentliche Theologie und Fundamentaltheologie” in A. Labahn and M. Labahn, (eds.), *Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit: Exegese auf dem Weg zur Fundamentaltheologie*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2005). It should be noted that in response to Hübner’s project, Elliott has expressed some reservations in relation to any attempt to relate biblical theology to a standard Fundamental Theology, see M. Elliott, *The Reality of Biblical Theology*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007). He suggests that “Fundamental Theology risks getting in the way of Biblical Theology, as a rival bridge to it, trying to cross the same gap” (235), since both are trying to ground theological reflection in a definitive account of divine revelation. Elliott fears that Fundamental Theology may actually “act as a buffer” between the Bible and theology, since although the standard division of theology into five areas - Old Testament, New Testament, Historical Theology, Systematic-Ethics, Practical Theology is problematical insofar as it keeps “things apart which were never intended to be separated” (259), the introduction of yet a further stage in the process – (Fundamental Theology) – between stages 2 to 4 would only increase the distance between stage 1 and stage 5 and exacerbate the situation. Elliott’s concerns are, of course, only justified if one retains a form of the traditional process model/ “bridge” model for the task of producing theology.

### 7.1.1. Carson: *Biblical Theology as a “Bridge”*.

Carson maintains that although both biblical and systematic theology are “provisional and in principle correctible” there is “an outward-tracing line from Scripture through exegesis towards biblical theology to systematic theology (with historical theology providing some guidance along the way).”<sup>910</sup> However, Carson goes on to undermine his own linear conception somewhat when he states that “in reality various ‘back loops’ are generated, each discipline influencing the others, and few disciplines influencing the others more than does systematic theology, precisely because it is so worldview forming.”<sup>911</sup> One is thus tempted to question whether Carson has inadvertently conceded the opposite of what he claims, namely, that the discipline located *furthest* from Scripture as depicted in his schema is precisely the most authoritative in practical terms. After all, what does the claim for something to be “normative” imply in actuality, other than that something is precisely “worldview forming”? Even if one does not concede this, it is still difficult to see how a biblical theology can claim extra authority over systematic theology when in practice systematic theology contributes to its very outcomes. Of course, in the “bridge” model it is precisely to avoid such a state of undue influence that the discipline of biblical theology has been created and placed between exegesis and systematic theology but to concede the effects of the hermeneutical spiral is to call into question the appropriateness of the model itself.

Carson goes on to sketch out the distinctive approaches of the two disciplines. For him, systematic theology is “synchronic”, “topical”, “logical” and “hierarchical”, while biblical theology is “inductive”, “comparative” and “diachronic”. Biblical theology traces out the redemptive historical continuum and is therefore “descriptive” and earns “its normative power by the credibility of its results.” In short, Carson concludes, “systematic theology tends to be a culminating discipline” while “biblical theology,

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<sup>910</sup> D. Carson, “Systematic theology and biblical theology” in T. Alexander and B. Rosner, (eds.), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Leics: IVP, 2000) 102. In this essay Carson reiterates the same conclusions he reached in an earlier much cited essay, “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology” in D. Carson and J. Woodbridge, (eds.), *Scripture and Truth*, (Leics: IVP, 1983), see especially 90-93.

<sup>911</sup> Carson, “Systematic theology and biblical theology”, 102.

though it is a worthy end in itself, tends to be a bridge discipline.”<sup>912</sup> This is exactly the same claim as that made by Scobie in his call for an “intermediate Biblical Theology.”<sup>913</sup> Note that Carson here scrupulously avoids using Stendahl’s influential distinction between “what the text meant” and “what the text means”,<sup>914</sup> principally because he seems not to share Stendahl’s assessment of biblical theology as “descriptive” and systematic theology as “normative.” For Carson, biblical theology is both descriptive *and* normative, which leaves one wondering which adjectives to apply to a systematic theology that pursues a “large-scale, worldview-forming synthesis.”<sup>915</sup> Furthermore, the way in which biblical theology is supposed to be a bridge discipline and the exact nature of its impact on the “culminating discipline” of systematic theology is not stated. In short, the question as to what is supposed to cross over the “bridge” from exegesis to systematic theology is not answered.

#### 7.1.2. Goldsworthy: *Progressing Beyond Biblical Theology?*

Goldsworthy took up Muller’s claim for the significance of biblical theology in his *Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-theological Foundations and Principles*.<sup>916</sup> For Goldsworthy, biblical theology is the “most neglected” area in literature on hermeneutics whilst simultaneously being one of its “most important” aspects – a claim he shares with Ferdinand Hahn.<sup>917</sup> Whilst Goldsworthy allows for a TNT to be written in a number of ways, the key thing for him is that “biblical theology is an exercise in understanding how

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<sup>912</sup> Carson, “Systematic theology and biblical theology”, 103.

<sup>913</sup> Scobie, *Challenge...*, 49.

<sup>914</sup> Stendahl, 418-432.

<sup>915</sup> Carson, “Systematic theology and biblical theology”, 103.

<sup>916</sup> G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-theological Foundations and Principles*, (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006). For Muller’s earlier work, see R. Muller, *The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991). Goldsworthy cites Muller on p. 261 at the beginning of his section entitled: “The hermeneutical role of biblical theology”. Goldsworthy recently augmented his reflections on biblical theology in the publication of *Christ-Centred Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2012) but the focus will remain here on the earlier publication since it specifically addresses the relationship between biblical and systematic theology.

<sup>917</sup> Goldsworthy, 258. On the relationship between systematic and exegesis Hahn writes that the “key position” of a NT theology has not been adequately recognised - either by exegetes or systematic theologians. See Hahn, “Urchristliche Lehre...” 117.

the diversity relates to the unity of Scripture.”<sup>918</sup> Analytical exegesis of the parts of the canon forms part of a “dialectical process” alongside diachronic theological synthesis into an entire biblical theology.<sup>919</sup> The model for such an approach to unity/diversity is a “dogmatic construct drawn from the gospel itself, in that the paradigm of unity and diversity is found in the union of God and man in Christ.”<sup>920</sup> Such an approach to the text avoids “Ebionite tendencies” to neglect “the divine element of revelation and theological meaning” whilst simultaneously avoiding a “docetist” tendency to view the texts as not truly human products.<sup>921</sup>

The evangelical desire to draw all categories of thinking from Christology, as if that is straightforward enough justification enough for them, also leads Goldsworthy to critique hermeneutical reading practises which seek to “uniformly close[...]” the “offending gap” of “theological distance” between the text and reader by means of a “pietism” or “‘Spirit-driven’ subjective theology” which “lacks any differentiation between texts.”<sup>922</sup> Goldsworthy instead demands that a Christological hermeneutic be utilised in order to assure correct understanding of oneself and God: “If we are truly to understand what a text says about ourselves, we must follow the biblical path that leads first to Christ, for he defines who and what we are in him.”<sup>923</sup> Thus, Goldsworthy maintains that it is biblical theology that provides the “macro-typology” for such a Christological hermeneutic that enables one to accurately interpret and apply the parts within the context of the whole.<sup>924</sup> Initial resistance to Goldsworthy’s approach must be noted here. Goldsworthy grounds his hermeneutical framework for biblical theology in dogmatic categories in a manner resisted in the dialogical TNT model set out above. The use of such a theologically loaded framework for the interpretation of the biblical texts may be ecclesologically appealing but runs the risk of stifling opportunities for inter-disciplinary interaction in the

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<sup>918</sup> Goldsworthy, 261.

<sup>919</sup> Goldsworthy, 261.

<sup>920</sup> Goldsworthy, 261.

<sup>921</sup> Goldsworthy, 260.

<sup>922</sup> Goldsworthy, 263.

<sup>923</sup> Goldsworthy, 263.

<sup>924</sup> Goldsworthy, 262. For an outline of Goldsworthy’s “macro-typology” of the Bible in which he relates every theme to its fulfilment in Christ, see 253-256.

task of theological construction through the use of categories which are incommensurable with those of any other kind of discourse.<sup>925</sup>

Goldsworthy goes on to try and define the nature of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology in a more nuanced way than Carson. He maintains that the typical perspective viewed the relationship as moving one way: from exegesis to biblical theology to systematic theology. Goldsworthy calls upon Murray,<sup>926</sup> Gaffin,<sup>927</sup> and Hasel<sup>928</sup> in defence of the claim that biblical theology prevents the neglect of the historical nature of revelation and forms a necessary foundation of systematic theology.<sup>929</sup> Goldsworthy, however, seeks to go beyond such views, deeming them “simplistic.”<sup>930</sup> Following Grant Osborne,<sup>931</sup> Goldsworthy argues for the existence of a hermeneutical circle in which “dogmatic pre-understanding” informs biblical theology which, in turn, modifies one’s dogmatic position, thus creating a “hermeneutical spiral” as opposed to “circle”.<sup>932</sup> Consequently, Goldsworthy maintains that: “while there is an undoubted methodological progression from biblical theology to systematics, there is also a vital input of systematics that makes biblical theology viable.”<sup>933</sup> Poythress makes exactly the same argument (using the same authors in the same sequence, though failing to attribute the notion of “hermeneutical spiral” to Osborne)<sup>934</sup> as Goldsworthy, and concludes that “the idea of systematic theology influencing biblical studies begins [...] to look much more attractive” when one considers the alternatives, namely, “hermeneutical assumptions rooted in rebellion against God” which are determined by “the spirit of the age, whether that be Enlightenment rationalism or postmodern relativism or

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<sup>925</sup> The production of an NT hermeneutic that sets NT texts in constructive, theologically relevant, dialogue with the cultural sciences (*Kulturwissenschaften*) demands the rejection of a Christological hermeneutic as an inadequate basis for non-ecclesiological discourse. See Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik...*, especially 17, 106-108, 195-211.

<sup>926</sup> J. Murray, “Systematic Theology-II”, *WTJ* 26.1 (1963): 33-46.

<sup>927</sup> Gaffin Jr., *Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology*.

<sup>928</sup> G. Hasel, “The Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology”, *TrinJ* 5.2 (1984): 113-127.

<sup>929</sup> Goldsworthy, 266-267.

<sup>930</sup> Goldsworthy, 268.

<sup>931</sup> G. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1991). See particularly, 267-269.

<sup>932</sup> Goldsworthy, 268.

<sup>933</sup> Goldsworthy, 269.

<sup>934</sup> V. Poythress, “Biblical Studies: Kinds of Biblical Theology”, *WTJ* 70 (2008): 129-42. For the argument see, 132-134.

historicism.”<sup>935</sup> Of course, one might wryly note that Poythress has inadvertently conceded a hermeneutical assumption of postmodernity, namely, that one gets out of a text what one puts in, to put it crudely. If both Poythress and Goldsworthy require that the biblical text leads to production of a systematic theology, then it is precisely systematic theology which they must feed into their interpretation to ensure such an outcome. As such, both choose to assume a reading strategy predetermined by the required results of their reading: if one presupposes the dogmatic notion of the “unity of revelation”, then one will no doubt be able to construct a biblical theology from the text, which may then be used to reinforce the original dogmatic presupposition.

Whilst Goldsworthy’s view of the interdependence of biblical and systematic theology is clear, the question remains as to why he thinks systematic theology is the necessary goal of biblical theology. His answer is intriguing: it is biblical theology itself which makes it necessary. The closure of the biblical canon means that “all the data for a biblical theology are now in.” However, the “progressive nature of revelation” means that believers do not stand in the same relationship to all texts.<sup>936</sup> Consequently, we need systematic theology to tell us “what the total redemptive and revealing activity of God means for us now.”<sup>937</sup> Firstly, exegesis focuses on the particular aspects of texts in their diversity. After this, biblical theology “looks for the unity behind the individual passages by examining the development of ideas in the progressive revelation.” In so doing, “more expansive themes which underlie the individual themes may come to light.” Finally, systematic theology “assumes the completion of revelation” and asks “what is finally to be believed about the themes of biblical truth”, thus synthesising “the findings of exegesis and biblical theology into dogma or doctrine.”<sup>938</sup>

As such, Goldsworthy shares with Schreiner the view that biblical theology is simply an intermediate stage on the way to that which is relevant today. However, whereas Schreiner focuses on systematic theology as providing guidance for how we should *act*

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<sup>935</sup> Poythress, 134.

<sup>936</sup> Goldsworthy, 270.

<sup>937</sup> Goldsworthy, 270.

<sup>938</sup> Goldsworthy, 271-272.

today (see above), Goldsworthy instead focuses more on systematic theology as deciding what we should *believe* today. In reality, both approaches effectively prevent one from engaging immediately with the text in a way that gives the text a direct voice to the present. Furthermore, the actual task of systematic theology remains very unclear in Goldsworthy's model. If biblical theology has already isolated "themes" and underlying "expansive themes" from the biblical text what exactly is systematic theology supposed to synthesize? And given Goldsworthy's evangelical convictions is it really the case that systematic theology may be the final arbiter of "what is finally to be believed about...biblical truth" without biblical theology stepping in and offering its corrections every time systematic theology rejects or "distorts" its findings? As has already been pointed out, the reduction of the biblical texts to "themes" (regardless of whether or not the methodology used for their extraction has done violence to the integrity of the NT texts) is *already* a task of constructive theology.

### 7.1.3. *Biblical Theology as a "Bridge": Conclusion.*

The foregoing analysis suggests that Carson and Goldsworthy have capitulated before Lessing's 'ugly, broad ditch' of history and allowed history to silence the voice of the text. The NT texts are treated as an object from which historical revelatory data is extracted. This data is then fed into a descriptive biblical theology which arranges the historical data into a meta-narratological structure both justified by dogmatic presuppositions and informing them. According to the logic of the model, at this point one has still not encountered anything which has contemporary relevance to how one thinks or acts, except insofar as biblical theology might modify one's dogmatic presuppositions. Only when this historical biblical theological data is synthesised by systematic theology into a contemporary atemporal dogmatics, shorn of historical particularity, is the believer allowed to act and to think...if they have not found themselves paralysed by the confusing and conflicting interpretive demands of earlier stages.



Despite the above survey, it remains deeply unclear as to why the results of biblical criticism must be synthesized into a descriptive unity by biblical theology before being handed over to systematic theology in order for their contemporary significance to be uncovered. From a Protestant Christian perspective, it seems ironic that the biblical texts in all their unique polyphony are deemed inadequate bearers of meaning with contemporary relevance, and that they must be subjected to a hermeneutic which negates their individual character in order for them to somehow attain to the normative status with which they are usually credited. Furthermore, it is also questionable as to whether a systematic theology which cannot make use of the biblical data without the intermediary of a “biblical theology” will be anything except a reflection of the hermeneutical perspective contained in the biblical theology couched in more philosophical or doctrinal language. In short, despite all the appeals to the contrary, “biblical theology” is no longer the critical interpretation of texts but the creation of a biblical “system” of univocal theological meaning, and in this already finds itself in the territory of systematic theology.

Ultimately, the “bridge” conception of biblical theology fails to do justice to both the historical and theological elements of the task of interpretation. It seeks to protect the historical nature of the biblical texts from dogmatic imposition but itself wishes to replace their historical diversity with a single theology comprised of extracted “themes” or a coherent “salvation-history.”<sup>939</sup> On the other hand, they repeatedly undermine the theological significance of the NT texts by placing them in a model in which they are removed from the component which allegedly focuses on contemporary dogmatic and ethical relevance, namely systematic theology. In contrast, the dialogical TNT maintains the integrity of the biblical texts and encourages thematic exploration without the need for assimilation to an overarching narrative. It also recognizes that it is already engaged in constructive theology with contemporary relevance and rejects an untenable “meant-means” distinction. Furthermore, by virtue of its hermeneutical presuppositions derived from philosophical hermeneutics and its inherent dialogical structure, it can theologise in

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<sup>939</sup> See Schreiner, 7-8. Part 1: The Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises: The Already-Not Yet; Part 2: The God of the Promise: The Saving Work of the Father, Son and Spirit; Part 3: Experiencing the Promise: Believing and Obeying; Part 4: The People of the Promise and the Future of the Promise.

an inter-disciplinary manner. Insights from other disciplines simply serve to enrich the range of questions and perspectives to be addressed to the text. As a result of removing the location of “theology” from text to interpreter, the TNT is able to sustain its commitment to preserving the historical alterity of the texts without fearing that the imposition of dogmatic norms will subvert the biblical witness(es). No “bridge” is therefore necessary. Fundamentally the dialogical TNT views the NT texts as a polyphonic “play-space” for exploring a range of ideas and questions well beyond the traditional purview of dogmatic theology, rather than as the guardian of a unified biblical theology to be prevented from contamination and distortion at all costs.

### *7.2. Ignoring the “Ugly, Broad Ditch”: Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Biblical Theology.*

The basic construal of the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology as consisting in a movement from “historical” and “descriptive” biblical theology to a systematic theology practiced as a contemporary systematization and contemporary interpretation of biblical theology’s results has been increasingly undermined in recent years. As attacks on the dominance of the historical-critical approach in biblical studies grow, alongside an increasing postmodern suspicion towards the construction of theological or philosophical ‘systems’, new possibilities for future directions in biblical theology are being explored. Advocates of Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS), many of whom are expressly antagonistic towards the dominance of what they term ‘the historical-critical method’ in biblical studies, seek a much closer integration of systematic theology with biblical theology.

### 7.2.1. *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture.*

TIS is, by all accounts, a highly diverse movement and difficult to define.<sup>940</sup> At the heart of the movement lies an attempt to re-integrate theology into (academic) biblical interpretation (for ecclesiological reasons). For Vanhoozer, this means “recovering biblical studies as a properly theological discipline”, which involves, firstly, overcoming “the “ugly ditch” in modern biblical interpretation between exegesis and theology.”<sup>941</sup> The “ugly ditch” is defined as various polarities by Vanhoozer – reason and faith, history and belief, religion and theology, nature and grace. In short, it is the attempt to use the biblical texts to reconstruct “history” without the aid of “faith”. The other “ditch” which TIS seeks to overcome is “the “muddy ditch” in postmodern biblical interpretation between exegesis and ideology.”<sup>942</sup> For Vanhoozer, the value of postmodern criticism lies in its questioning of historical-criticism’s claim to be “objective, neutral and value free.” With a fanciful rhetorical flourish Vanhoozer asks whether “in exorcising the spirit of faith from biblical studies, [historical critics] have not inadvertently admitted even more ideological demons into the academic house.”<sup>943</sup>

As a result of such criticism towards the dominance of the use of post-Enlightenment historical-critical methods in reading the Bible, various scholars have proposed various strategies for reading the Bible.<sup>944</sup> Perhaps the most common amongst them is the

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<sup>940</sup> “[L]ike eating ice cream with a fork” is the apt metaphor used by C. Trimm, “Evangelicals, Theology, and Biblical Interpretation: Reflections on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture”, *BBR* 20.3: (2010) 319. Other recent attempts to clarify TIS include K. Vanhoozer, “What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, K. Vanhoozer (ed.), (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 19-25; D. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); S. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, (Eugene: Cascade, 2009); R. Moberly, “What is Theological Interpretation of Scripture?”, *JTI* 3.2 (2009): 161-178; M. Bowald, “The Character of Theological Interpretation of Scripture”, *IJST* 12.2 (2010): 162-183; D. Sarisky, “What is Theological Interpretation? The Example of Robert W. Jenson”, *IJST* 12.2 (2010): 201-216; D. Treier, “What is Theological Interpretation: An Ecclesiological Reduction”, *IJST* 12.2 (2010): 144-161; J. Webster, “Editorial: Five Thoughts on Theological Interpretation of Scripture”, *IJST* 12.2 (2010): 116-117; J. Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>941</sup> Vanhoozer, *What is Theological Interpretation*, 20.

<sup>942</sup> Vanhoozer, *What is Theological Interpretation*, 20.

<sup>943</sup> Vanhoozer, *What is Theological Interpretation*, 20.

<sup>944</sup> Key programmatic statements include F. Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994); F. Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997); S. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological*

assertion that one should return to or, at least, learn from so-called ‘pre-critical’ methods of reading the Bible – a controversial point made years ago by Steinmetz<sup>945</sup> and now becoming something of a cry *de rigueur*, particularly the assertion that biblical interpretation should adopt the “Rule of Faith” as the standard for validating interpretations.<sup>946</sup> However, the theological role of the reader within some variants of TIS raises concerns. For Trimm, a key issue is the extent to which the theological presuppositions of the reader are allowed to determine the results of a “valid” reading of Scripture.<sup>947</sup> One should not simply interrogate a text through the lens of one’s theology by asking “How does my theology help me interpret this passage?”, but the text must retain a critical function of challenging the existing pre-judgments of the reader who should first ask, “Can my theology fit this text without distortion?”<sup>948</sup> Whilst generalizations are always unjust, particularly in the case of so broad a movement as TIS, one may simply note that although TIS is open about the theological and ecclesiological intention of its interpretation, it remains unclear whether it always retains a sufficient place for the transformative alterity of the biblical text.

Since TIS lacks homogeneity but also presents a competing model of theological engagement with the NT over against the dialogical TNT model, further assessment will be firstly based on explicit statements of TIS advocates concerning the relation between TIS and biblical theology.<sup>949</sup> Consideration will thus be limited to the relevant articles of Bartholomew and Treier concerning the interrelationship of the two disciplines. Following this, a selective consideration of the way TIS practitioners have treated NT

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*Interpretation*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); K. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*, (Louisville: WJKP, 2005).

<sup>945</sup> D. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of the Pre-Critical Exegesis”, *Theology Today* 37.1 (1980): 27-38. For a response by a proponent of TIS with evangelical commitments see Daniel Treier’s article, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis? Sic Et Non”, *TrinJ* 24.1 (2003): 77-103.

<sup>946</sup> Trimm, 314. In addition to the work of Fowl and Sarisky see: D. Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal*, (Louisville: WJKP, 2008) especially 47-91; D. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 39-55; R. Reno, “Biblical Theology and Theological Exegesis” in C. Bartholomew, M. Healy, K. Möller, and R. Parry, (eds.), *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), 385-408.

<sup>947</sup> Trimm, 317.

<sup>948</sup> Trimm, 317.

<sup>949</sup> TIS interpreters are committed to working with the entire canon – OT and NT – and their contributions reflect this concern. However, their arguments necessarily impinge on the task of a dialogical TNT and are thus considered here. Further elucidation on the relation between the dialogical TNT and biblical theology occurs in the following chapter.

texts based on the example of Fowl's and Thompson's commentaries in the *Two Horizons* Series will be offered.

### 7.2.2. *Bartholomew: Biblical Theology and "Inner Unity"*.

In his article on "Biblical Theology" in the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Bartholomew notes that "nowadays it is quite difficult to take the inner unity of the Bible seriously at all."<sup>950</sup> However, he goes on to claim that "discernment of the inner unity of the Bible must remain the goal and crown of biblical theology."<sup>951</sup> For Bartholomew, biblical theology is "historical" and "descriptive" and seeks to portray the "inner unity of the Bible in its own terms."<sup>952</sup> Though the practice of biblical theology as the search for the unity of Scripture began in the patristic period, Gabler's signal contribution was to establish "methodological clarity" concerning the relationship between biblical theology as "a discipline in its own right" and dogmatics.<sup>953</sup> Whilst Bartholomew critiques Gabler for his rationalism he maintains that biblical theology can flourish as a discipline provided it is distinguished from the outlook of its modern founder as well as "other alien philosophies."<sup>954</sup> Bartholomew then goes on to review the aims and goals of the Biblical Theology Movement (1945-1961), the critiques made of it by Gilkey and Barr, and the response to those critiques by Childs and Watson.<sup>955</sup> Bartholomew's arguments need not delay us here though he follows Childs and Watson in suggesting the possibility of a revitalized biblical theology.<sup>956</sup>

The third section of Bartholomew's article is dedicated to an attempted articulation of the relationship between biblical theology and TIS. He identifies five areas worthy of consideration. Firstly, Bartholomew defines biblical theology as being concerned with the

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<sup>950</sup> C. Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology" in K. Vanhoozer (ed.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 86.

<sup>951</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 88.

<sup>952</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 86.

<sup>953</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 85-86.

<sup>954</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 86.

<sup>955</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 86-88.

<sup>956</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 88.

whole Bible (“*tota scriptura*”), supplementing the Reformation ideal of *sola scriptura*.<sup>957</sup> Consequently, he maintains that biblical theology may provide a “strong sense of a macrobiblical theological context” to counter the risk of “proof-texting and selective myopia” in the use of biblical texts by TIS practitioners.<sup>958</sup> As in the “bridge” model discussed above, it would thus seem that biblical theology is again cast in the role of theology’s guardian, preventing distortion of the biblical witness by other disciplines.

Bartholomew develops this view in his consideration of the relationship between the Bible and theology. He maintains that biblical theology’s significance for TIS lies in the normative force of its attempt to show the “inner unity” of Scripture. This takes place because every reader brings “an imaginative construal [*discrimen*]... to the Bible so that it functions theologically as Scripture.”<sup>959</sup> For Bartholomew, this imaginative construal is determined by an account of the unity of Scripture: “Biblical theology as the attempt to articulate the inner unity of Scripture suggests that Scripture itself may norm the *discrimen*.”<sup>960</sup> However, despite such claims Bartholomew is ultimately ambivalent about the direction of influence between biblical theology and TIS. It is certainly not a “one-way street”. In fact, he defines the relationship as “dialectical”, since “good theology” leads “back to the Bible so as to hear it better.”<sup>961</sup> Furthermore, Bartholomew raises a question mark about the viability of biblical theology by referring to its “(im)possibility.”<sup>962</sup> Once again, the problem with viewing biblical theology as an intermediate discipline between Scripture and theology becomes apparent. Whilst biblical theology is “descriptive and historical in a way that theological interpretation and systematic theology are not”<sup>963</sup> and should thus function normatively for the latter disciplines, Bartholomew cannot accept a situation where the theological task is removed from direct contact with the biblical text or inform readings of the biblical text. The question of normativity in the theological task remains unresolved.

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<sup>957</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 88.

<sup>958</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 88.

<sup>959</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 89.

<sup>960</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 89 italics his, See Bartholomew’s conclusion, 90.

<sup>961</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 89.

<sup>962</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 89.

<sup>963</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 86.

Consideration of the issue addressed by Bartholomew's third point, namely the relation between the two testaments and biblical theology will be addressed in the next chapter. However, it must be noted that Bartholomew's commitment to the "inner unity" of Scripture renders the interpretation of the OT a significant problem, for which Bartholomew offers no constructive proposals.<sup>964</sup> Indeed, the issue is made considerably more confusing by Bartholomew's subsequent consideration of "appropriate methods for biblical theology." Here he claims that Scripture is "a great cathedral" which legitimates a variety of theological approaches.<sup>965</sup> TNTs, TOTs, and theologies of the entire Bible are all permitted, regardless of whether they are constructed "along topical, dogmatic, great ideas, redemptive-historical, story lines."<sup>966</sup> Although such "methodological pluralism" could lead to skepticism regarding biblical theology, all approaches can resource TIS so long as they adopt the postulates of canon and "inner unity".<sup>967</sup> Ironically, this embrace of methodological pluralism thus appears to exclude the dialogical TNT, despite its constructive theological commitments, on account of the demand for recognition of TIS's theological assumption of "inner unity." However, despite its regulative status the nature of Bartholomew's "inner unity" remains mysteriously undefined. Indeed, for Bartholomew it remains questionable as to "whether or not there is a main entrance to the cathedral of Scripture from which its inner unity can most clearly be discerned."<sup>968</sup> One could suggest that the need to "discern" what one has adopted as a basic tenet of one's approach to the theological task of interpreting Scripture suggests that theological rhetoric has trumped clear thinking. Bartholomew attempts to solve the problem by shifting from a focus on "unity" to that of a "center", which "would certainly be Christ."<sup>969</sup> This naturally avoids accusations of improper Christological distortion of the OT within a biblical theology, but even here Bartholomew is unsure as to how the notion of a Christological centre to Scripture can be adequately expressed.<sup>970</sup> Here the weakness of Bartholomew's methodological description of the disciplines is evident. He remains unable to articulate the goal of a biblical theology and unsure even as to its possibility,

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<sup>964</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 89.

<sup>965</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 89.

<sup>966</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 89.

<sup>967</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 89.

<sup>968</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 89.

<sup>969</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 89.

<sup>970</sup> Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology", 89.

whilst simultaneously retaining it in the role of the guardian of Scripture. The repeated emphasis on “inner unity” adopts a theological postulate which clashes with the hermeneutical reality. In this respect, Vanhoozer’s article on “systematic theology” in the same volume does the subject matter more justice when he articulates the need for a “plurivocal systematics.”<sup>971</sup> He refers to the “polyphonic Scriptures” which speak in “diverse ways” with the result that “systematic theology must resist reducing the many authorial voices and literary forms of Scripture to a single set of concepts”.<sup>972</sup> Beyond Bartholomew’s rhetoric of methodological pluralism, Vanhoozer’s conception of Scripture is starkly opposed to the goals of biblical theology set out in Bartholomew’s vision.

Bartholomew’s fifth point is that biblical theology traditionally failed to engage with the challenges of modernity and should rediscover the “comprehensive scope of the Bible.”<sup>973</sup> However, since biblical theology is a descriptive and historical discipline for Bartholomew it is difficult to see how it should carry out this task. At this point, Bartholomew switches to talk of “contemporary theological interpretation” which considers “the Bible as God’s address for all of life in our postmodern context”, by which he presumably means TIS.<sup>974</sup> How this engagement should be achieved is left unclear. The relation between biblical theology and TIS is left unarticulated on precisely this crucial point. The issue as to whether biblical theology as a historical and descriptive discipline is actually suitable for norming an engagement with Scripture that seeks to engage with “all of life in our postmodern context” is not explored.

As a result, Bartholomew’s vision of the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology often appears barely different from that of scholars such as Muller and Carson, except that the interaction of disciplines is further complicated by the inclusion of TIS (either alongside systematic theology or replacing it – Bartholomew never clarifies this point) with both remaining undefined. At best one can say that

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<sup>971</sup> K. Vanhoozer, “Systematic Theology” in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 779.

<sup>972</sup> Vanhoozer, “Systematic Theology”, 779.

<sup>973</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 89.

<sup>974</sup> Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology”, 89-90.



Bartholomew envisions a heuristic/normative role for biblical theology in shaping the praxis of TIS but how both relate to systematic theology is unclear. It is precisely this failure to address the entire theological task which hampers Bartholomew in seriously critiquing accepted definitions of biblical theology.

### 7.2.3. Treier: Unity and Dualisms.

In his treatment of the unity of Scripture, Treier describes his position as “confessional and post- (but not anti-) critical.”<sup>975</sup> Noting that the canon is both literarily and historically diverse,<sup>976</sup> Treier chides biblical theology for its “constant tendency” to marginalize some texts “in favour of an organizing theme such as salvation history”.<sup>977</sup> At the same time, he also critiques biblical theology for being more “extreme” in its recognition of diversity due to its emphasis on “human authorship” than traditional ecclesial theology.<sup>978</sup> He thus seems to be working with a rather undefined notion of “biblical theology”.

In relation to the unity of Scripture, Treier suggests that “the rule of faith”, “figural reading” and the “analogy of faith” may be useful hermeneutical strategies if used with care.<sup>979</sup> However, Treier is still concerned to avoid “artificial coherence” which too easily avoids the implications of biblical polyphony.<sup>980</sup> Treier acknowledges the significance of attempts to do justice to biblical polyphony by recourse to a Bakhtinian dialogical model of “multiple voices”, which “cohere in a dialogue that balances and expresses together truths that cannot be held all at once in a single consciousness.”<sup>981</sup> This all seems hermeneutically promising but, for Treier, the discussion of polyphony aims towards a consideration of “unity”. Hays’ model of complementary “focal lenses” is invoked but

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<sup>975</sup> D. Treier, “Scripture, Unity of” in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 731.

<sup>976</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 731.

<sup>977</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 732.

<sup>978</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 732.

<sup>979</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 732-733.

<sup>980</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 733.

<sup>981</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 733.

the model claims to establish a “complex unity”,<sup>982</sup> whilst Turner’s appropriation of Caird’s “apostolic conference model” is also noted.<sup>983</sup> Ultimately, however, Treier subverts all talk about polyphony to an underlying theological claim by asserting that “a concept of unified teaching is needed in which the complexity of revelation corresponds to the unity of divine action in history”.<sup>984</sup> For Treier, this is necessary because without such a unifying concept of Scripture, the Bible is at the mercy of the whims of its subjective interpreters.<sup>985</sup> Once again, the “unity” of Scripture is to play the role of theological guardian, determining which readings and uses of the biblical text are appropriate. However, even Treier recognises that “even when Scripture’s unity is embraced, challenges remain.”<sup>986</sup> Even whilst acknowledging the possibility which acknowledgement of “its narrative coherence or the complementarity of its concepts” cannot resolve.<sup>987</sup> Treier’s conclusion leaves the reader in the dark when he advocates employment of the biblical text in “situation-specific ways”, which means “continued exegetical interaction with theologies of a modestly “systematic” kind.”<sup>988</sup> Exactly what Treier means by this remains unclear, as his entire article suffers from a lack of clear definition as to what exactly biblical theology, systematic theology and TIS actually are. Furthermore, like Bartholomew, Treier wants to retain the theological concept of the “unity” of Scripture but ends up with an unsustainable and vague impression of what this actually means. In the hope that these issues will be resolved consideration of a later article addressing these specific issues will now be offered.

In *Biblical theology and /or theological interpretation of scripture?*, Treier considers five different possible relationships between the two disciplines.<sup>989</sup> Treier rejects both the possibility of “accepting biblical theology as usual” and “rejecting biblical theology as

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<sup>982</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 733; See R. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, (London: HarperCollins, 1996).

<sup>983</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 733; See M. Turner, “Historical Criticism and Theological Hermeneutics of the New Testament” in Green and Turner, 44-70.

<sup>984</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 733.

<sup>985</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 733.

<sup>986</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 734.

<sup>987</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 734.

<sup>988</sup> Treier, “Scripture, Unity of”, 734.

<sup>989</sup> D. Treier, “Biblical theology and /or theological interpretation of scripture?: Defining the Relationship”, *SJT* 61.1 (2008): 16-31.

usual”, with biblical theology defined as a historical discipline moving between “what the text meant” and “what the text means.”<sup>990</sup> Treier also rejects viewing TIS as equivalent to biblical theology. This means, on the one hand, rejecting a biblical theology with historical leanings which feeds through to a systematic theology that is essentially “biblical theology contextualised, or else its ‘biblical’ credentials are viewed with suspicion.” Treier sees Carson as an advocate of this position.<sup>991</sup> On the other hand, it is also a rejection of “redefining biblical theology with a literary/contemporary focus” which unabashedly utilises theology in interpretation and thus leads to difficulties in finding a role for systematic theology. Treier cites Green, Watson and Yeago amongst others, as typifying this approach.<sup>992</sup>

Treier’s solution is, in fact, to “accept[...] productive tension between biblical theology and theological interpretation of Scripture.”<sup>993</sup> While he accepts that “this view may not exist [...] in pure form, anyway”,<sup>994</sup> Treier goes on to delineate it regardless. Essentially, Treier views biblical theology as inclining towards a “historical/literary” approach, whilst systematic theology (or an interdisciplinary TIS model) takes an essentially a “philosophical/literary approach.”<sup>995</sup> In short, Treier advocates a methodological dualism in which TIS deals with “grace” and biblical theology deals with “nature.” The result is that biblical theology forces TIS “to consider ‘nature’ and resist premature closure”,<sup>996</sup> whilst TIS “opens up more conversational space, or opportunities for processes of *discovery*, between both scripture and church practise, and the Bible and the arts and sciences.”<sup>997</sup> Whilst such rhetoric is dazzling, substantial questions concerning Treier’s proposal remains. He demands that “the content of biblical theology is to be a bridge between the text and theology” with “two-way [traffic]”.<sup>998</sup> Biblical theology’s role is to establish scriptural “warrants” by means of historical and literary investigation for the

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<sup>990</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 24-25.

<sup>991</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 25-26.

<sup>992</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...” 26-27.

<sup>993</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 28.

<sup>994</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 28.

<sup>995</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 30.

<sup>996</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 29.

<sup>997</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 31 italics his.

<sup>998</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 30.

kinds of answers which TIS wants to offer in the “public square”.<sup>999</sup> At the same time, Treier claims that, because TIS addresses issues of “ultimate concern” and requires an “integrating analysis of biblical texts”, it is impossible to escape from the fact that “philosophical/theological construction is integral to the process”.<sup>1000</sup> This invocation of the need for philosophical/theological construction raises the question as to the place of systematic theology in Treier’s model but careful reading indicates that TIS has actually usurped its place. Systematic theology is silently eliminated from his model and replaced with TIS as the constructive theological discipline.

Treier concludes his essay by stating that his model has reached the point where a new question “now lies on the table for discussion”, namely “how historical inquiry functions as a foundational philosophical scheme in *theologically interested* scholarship – and whether it should[?]”.<sup>1001</sup> It thus seems clear that Treier’s model fails to achieve what Treier wants it to do because of his lack of courage in rejecting biblical theology as an intermediate discipline between Scripture and theology. There is no reason to believe that *historical description* of the NT writings can function as a warrant for contemporary theological construction. Treier’s lack of clarity and inconsistency in regard to the relationship of the disciplines is highlighted further when one looks to Treier’s *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, in which one finds little help in ascertaining clarity concerning this matter in his section on biblical theology.<sup>1002</sup> However, turning to his definitions of disciplines in the final chapter of this work, one finds the same basic definition of the relation of the disciplines as anywhere else, namely, that biblical theology unfolds “the theology of the whole Bible, depending on the degree of unity believed to be there”, which involves “prioritizing historical and/or literary criteria and procedures”<sup>1003</sup> and that systematic theology “does not dispense with the internal structures of biblical theology” but seeks to “understand and communicate

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<sup>999</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 31.

<sup>1000</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 31 italics his.

<sup>1001</sup> Treier, “Biblical theology...”, 31.

<sup>1002</sup> D. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practise*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 103-125.

<sup>1003</sup> Treier, *Introducing...*, 190.

biblical teaching about God in contemporary contexts.”<sup>1004</sup> Treier thus seems unable to escape standard accounts of the theological disciplines and finds it difficult to carve out a meaningful space for TIS. Ultimately, the confusion in which Treier’s approach is mired relates to one simple issue – the role of *history* in theological interpretation. And it is the fundamental “grace-nature” dualism of his approach to TIS and biblical theology, which, in actuality, relates simply to a “theology-history” and “faith-reason” dualism that hamstrings any attempt to rethink the nature of the theological disciplines and confuses discussion on their interaction.

In contrast to Treier’s approach, the dialogical TNT model fully embraces the task of constructive theology and recognises that it legitimately functions as a variant of systematic theology. At the same time, it refuses to allow biblical theology to function as guardian of the polyphonic NT texts by recourse to dogmatic appeals concerning unity. It does, however, retain a place for the historical nature of the NT texts through the deliberate hermeneutical practise of respecting their alterity. This does not mean the NT texts must sanction the questions addressed to them in the name of contemporary concerns. In fact, any claim by biblical theologians to be simply describing the texts rather than addressing them with questions derived from specific interpretive discourses is a chimera that merely reflects complicity with the theological status quo.<sup>1005</sup> Rather, the interpreter seeks (normative) resources to address the concerns of the present through an encounter with the alterity of the texts that refuses to collapse the distinction between the text as “that which stands against” and the interpreter’s discriminating use of ideas/solutions inspired by the text. To put it boldly, the dialogical model of the TNT is able to do exactly what TIS would like to do but cannot, encumbered as it is by its uncritical retention of existing theological and methodological baggage due to a lack of hermeneutical perspicuity.

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<sup>1004</sup> Treier, *Introducing...*, 194.

<sup>1005</sup> Compare Vattimo’s rejection of claims that “description” is an epistemologically neutral activity in *Hermeneutic Communism*, 12: “A politics of description does not impose power in order to dominate as a philosophy; rather it is functional for the continued existence of a society of dominion, which pursues truth in the form of ...conservation (realism).”

#### 7.2.4. *The Two Horizons Commentary Series.*

The final test of TIS lies in the way in which its programmatic concerns affect its treatment of the biblical text. A sustained example may be found in the *Two Horizons Commentary Series*. The founding of this series was programmatically announced in the volume of essays entitled *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* and aimed to “reintegrate biblical exegesis with contemporary theology in the service of the church”.<sup>1006</sup> Within that volume there was talk of “building bridges” between the biblical and systematic theological disciplines<sup>1007</sup> and a call for “a conversion of sorts, from one set of interests and aims to another...for whom ‘meaning’ is not reified as the sole property of the past or the text itself but belongs...within communities of interpretation for whom these biblical texts are invited to speak as Scripture.”<sup>1008</sup> The demand was for a “theological reading of Scripture” that reflects each interpreter’s or interpretive communities’ interests and deliberately pursues a Christian theological agenda such as Christian formation.<sup>1009</sup>

In a strong move towards the integration of exegesis and theology, Motyer’s contribution to the *Between Two Horizons* volume claims that the role of biblical theology is to help the Bible fulfil its function as “the oracles of God” when we approach the texts “with the questions and motivations that impel us as Christians today.”<sup>1010</sup> Motyer thus comes very close to the concerns of the dialogical model advocated here when he claims that the two interpretive moments of meaning and relevancy coincide: “*the proper center or focus of biblical theology...is the contemporary theological agenda.*”<sup>1011</sup> However, although interpreters address the biblical texts in terms of their contemporary theological “questions and motivations”, Motyer notes they should simultaneously refrain from

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<sup>1006</sup> J. Green and M. Turner, “New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology: Strangers or Friends?” in Green and Turner, 2.

<sup>1007</sup> See Green and Turner, “New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology: Strangers or Friends?” 12; J. Green, “Scripture and Theology: Uniting the Two So Long Divided” in Green and Turner, 42.

<sup>1008</sup> Green, *Scripture and Theology...*, 43.

<sup>1009</sup> For example, R. Wall, “Reading the Bible from within Our Traditions: The “Rule of Faith” in Theological Hermeneutics” in Green and Turner, 104-105.

<sup>1010</sup> S. Motyer, “Two Testaments, One Biblical Theology” in Green and Turner, 159.

<sup>1011</sup> Motyer, 160 italics his.

anachronistic imposition of the interpretive agenda onto the text.<sup>1012</sup> Whilst Motyer's construal of biblical theology as an explicitly Christian discipline that engages the bipartite biblical canon through attention to developmental trajectories of various theological themes and symbols has much to commend it,<sup>1013</sup> his proposal remains unclear on the relation of this task to that of systematic theology. Although he appears to conceive systematic theology rather broadly as the attempt to gain "an integrated understanding of God, of [oneself], and of the world", Motyer elucidates its relation to biblical theology rather ambiguously: "biblical theology needs to be conceived as a bright focus to systematic theology."<sup>1014</sup> Exactly how constructive interchange between the two disciplines is possible is left unstated. Indeed, the question arises as to whether a biblical theology conducted in the mode advocated by Motyer actually starts to render the distinction between biblical theology and a separate discipline of systematic theology (as defined by Motyer) theologically redundant. Unfortunately, given the limited space of Motyer's article, the radical implications of such a reconstrual of biblical theology are left unexplored.

Indeed, to all intents and purposes, *Between Two Horizons* failed to offer a genuinely contrasting vision to existing Protestant methodological orthodoxy. For example, Goldingay states that: "If systematic theology did not exist, it might seem wise to invent it",<sup>1015</sup> since he predicates his entire argument on a basic incompatibility between biblical narrative with its focus on plot, character, ambiguity and allusion and systematic theology's contrary tendencies. Goldingay assumes the traditional approach of exegesis (small narrative), feeding into biblical theology (larger narrative) and modifying systematic theology.<sup>1016</sup> Indeed, this assumption becomes fully explicit when Goldingay, after listing a series of biblical characters, concludes: "All these lives raise issues about

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<sup>1012</sup> Motyer, 159.

<sup>1013</sup> See Motyer's theses, 158-160. Motyer's concern to allow the voice of the OT to be heard on its own terms and his realism in regard to the limitations surrounding our ability to achieve certain knowledge of historical theological development are welcome. However, in contrast to Motyer's proposal, the dialogical model shies away from making any model related to trajectories of theological development necessary to the task of constructive theology. For more on biblical theology, see the following chapter.

<sup>1014</sup> Motyer, *Two Testaments...*, 159 italics removed.

<sup>1015</sup> J. Goldingay, "Biblical Narrative and Systematic Theology" in *Between Two Horizons...*, 138.

<sup>1016</sup> This argument reflects the structure of his entire essay.

what it means to be human that can contribute to a systematic understanding of what it means to be human. *Indeed, I assume that this is why they are there.*<sup>1017</sup> In short, no genuinely sustainable alternative methodology was offered which did not lead to occasional relapses to the standard exegesis – biblical theology – systematic theology model. Perhaps it was precisely the framing of the issue as an attempt to bridge (and thereby preserve) the two horizons of Scripture and systematic theology that prevented a radical questioning of the hermeneutical and theological necessity of maintaining fidelity to an inherited disciplinary distinction between biblical and systematic theology.<sup>1018</sup>

A cursory glance through two currently available *Two Horizons Commentaries* reinforces the impression made by the initial *Between Two Horizons* volume. Indeed, the assumption that the commentary genre, which follows an essentially linear format tied closely to the narrative development of a text, would be a suitable means of overcoming the inter-disciplinary boundaries between biblical studies and systematic theology, is itself surprising. As might be expected, tension between the demands of accurate biblical interpretation and the writers' theological ambitions are sometimes evident.

Both Fowl's commentary on *Philippians*<sup>1019</sup> and Thompson's on *Colossians & Philemon*<sup>1020</sup> evidence a concern to situate the letters within a historical context and to use this data to explicate a passage's meaning when deemed appropriate. For Fowl, theological considerations are primary when writing a commentary and, as such, historical background is useful when necessary for illuminating a passage's "theological meaning". For example, in Philippians 4:10-20, where "Paul gives a dense theological account of the practise of giving and receiving money", the "power of the theological claims...are lost apart from an understanding of the ways in which Paul addresses and in some respects undermines certain social conventions".<sup>1021</sup> On the other hand, inconsistency intrudes when modern concern with elaborating the "historical background of the claims made about Christ" in Philippians 2:6-11 are contrasted negatively with the

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<sup>1017</sup> Goldingay, *Biblical Narrative...*, 142 italics mine.

<sup>1018</sup> Note how the issue is framed in Turner and Green, 8-12.

<sup>1019</sup> S. Fowl, *Philippians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>1020</sup> M. Thompson, *Colossians & Philemon*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>1021</sup> Fowl, *Philippians*, 4.



theologically motivated Christological reading of the text “regulated by the church’s creeds and Rule of Faith” of pre-modern interpreters.<sup>1022</sup> However, Fowl still offers a relatively extensive discussion concerning whether the passage is a hymn and reflects a Pauline ‘Adam-Christology’ in order for “students...to see what scholars are doing in this regard and begin to form some of their own ideas and interpretive habits.”<sup>1023</sup> It would seem that old habits die hard!

Fowl especially interweaves theology with exegesis creating what one reviewer of Fowl’s work termed “almost seamless [integration]”.<sup>1024</sup> However, when one considers the theological sources Fowl uses fairly frequently, such as Aquinas or Chrysostom, it is noticeable that he is usually drawing only on their work which is directly related with the text of Philippians, whether homiletic or commentarial. In reality, Fowl’s work follows a fairly standard commentary paradigm except that theological observations are integrated into the text and not placed in a separate non-historical, exegetical section.

On the other hand, Thompson offers no methodological justification whatsoever for her approach and produces what are essentially theological reflections after a fairly straightforward “smooth” reading of the text which takes into account its historical context. Indeed, apart from a scarcity of footnotes and in-depth argument, it seems difficult to distinguish Thompson’s commentary section from something one would encounter in another basic commentary series such as the *Pillar Commentary Series*.<sup>1025</sup>

Both Fowl and Thompson close their theological commentaries with further theological reflection. Fowl makes clear that this is not an “application” or “theological” section which interprets the data from an “exegetical section” and is content to focus on a single topic – “friendship” – given his extensive theological reflection throughout the commentary.<sup>1026</sup> In contrast, Thompson’s theological reflections attempt to move from

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<sup>1022</sup> Fowl, *Philippians*, 4-5.

<sup>1023</sup> Fowl, *Philippians*, 108.

<sup>1024</sup> Pahl, Michael W. “Review of Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary)”, *Themelios* 32.1 (October 2006): 70.

<sup>1025</sup> See Thompson’s commentary sections, 1-109 (Colossians), 193-227 (Philemon).

<sup>1026</sup> See Fowl, *Philippians*, 205-206.

the theology of the text towards a “constructive theology” which takes account of contemporary issues. With Colossians, this involves a mediating stage situating Colossians within Pauline theology as a whole, whilst Philemon is first placed in the context of “biblical theology” before “constructive theology” is attempted.<sup>1027</sup> As such, Thompson’s account actually mirrors the traditional exegesis - biblical theology – systematic theology approach, which the series is apparently designed to overcome!

Of more significance than this, however, is the nature of the “theological interpretation” pursued here. Fowl’s work at least lives up to the original hopes expressed by the contributors in the programmatic *Between Two Horizons* and in that sense offers an extended example of what TIS offers, though Thompson’s theology sections are also relevant. Two observations are pertinent here. Firstly, it seems that if you “scratch” a theological interpreter of Scripture you will find the remnants of a modern biblical critic underneath. Both Thompson and Fowl anchor their interpretations in a construal of the original historical context of the document and provide warrants for their interpretations by references to relevant ancient sources.<sup>1028</sup> Indeed, both commentaries suggest TIS can only function effectively when the original construal of the biblical text’s meaning is plausible from the perspective of its historical context. This is the case regardless of whether this original construal is made explicitly or lies implicitly “underneath” the “theological interpretation”. For example, Fowl’s theological musings over the “body” and “death” in contemporary America draw their vitality from his sketch of Paul and imprisonment, torture and death within the Roman Empire.<sup>1029</sup> In short, the notion that a completely new paradigm for biblical commentary has been founded seems less than plausible.

A second, and worrying, feature of the commentaries lies precisely in the attempt to be a “theological” commentary and, at the same time, claim to focus on “the two horizons”.

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<sup>1027</sup> Thompson, 111-191, 229-266.

<sup>1028</sup> The indexes of both volumes list the Greco-Roman, Jewish and Biblical sources used. Thompson’s index of ancient sources is naturally larger given her methodology but even Fowl partially sanctions his claim of the importance of humility for Paul by reference to the ‘Qumran Community Rule’ (Fowl, *Philippians*, 84).

<sup>1029</sup> Fowl, *Philippians*, 48-49.

The blurb on the back of each commentary claims that the “two horizons” are “biblical studies” and “systematic theology”, while the original programmatic article by Turner and Green suggested that the volumes would include “conscious dialogue with serious contributions to modern systematic, constructive, and practical theology.”<sup>1030</sup> However, neither Fowl nor Thompson offers anything like a sustained serious dialogue with a modern theologian. As the indexes illustrate, the interaction is primarily, almost exclusively, with biblical interpreters, usually commentators. Only Thompson comes close to a more sustained debate in her seven page section on “metanarrative”, which utilises ideas from Newbigin, Volf and Westphal.<sup>1031</sup> Such a state of affairs shows that the attempt to “bridge the gap” between biblical studies and systematic theology in a single commentary has fallen woefully short.

Furthermore, the very nature of TIS seems to have led to a paucity of non-theological (and therefore almost exclusively ‘Christian’) sources being used, and thus an extremely worrying narrowing of theological vision. Each volume briefly mentions a token postmodern philosopher in a bid for contemporary relevance – Thompson cites the obligatory quotation of Lyotard in her discussion of metanarrative,<sup>1032</sup> whilst Fowl is more creative in relating Foucault’s notion of the body as a “text on which the empire’s power is inscribed” to Paul’s punishment and imprisonment.<sup>1033</sup> Apart from this, Thompson offers a quote from Mandela and Fowl mentions MacIntyre’s discussion of suicide.<sup>1034</sup> In short, the commentaries are essentially examples of “emic discourse.”<sup>1035</sup> For example, Thompson’s discussion of “contemporary pluralism” briefly cites Hick but uses Newbigin to define “pluralism”, critique Hick, and offer some constructive comments – a somewhat ironic move given the topic.<sup>1036</sup> Indeed, no genuine attempt to engage with sources from outside the Christian theological community is attempted, and

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<sup>1030</sup> Turner & Green, *New Testament Commentary*..., 3 (italics removed).

<sup>1031</sup> Thompson, 156-163.

<sup>1032</sup> Thompson, 155.

<sup>1033</sup> Fowl, *Philippians*, 48.

<sup>1034</sup> Fowl, *Philippians*, 57.

<sup>1035</sup> “*Emics* refers to cultural explanations that draw their criteria from the consciousness of the people in the culture being explained. *Etics* refers to cultural explanations whose criteria derive from a body of theory and method shared in a community of scientific observers” (N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) 785).

<sup>1036</sup> Thompson, 177-182

even those sources that are used are almost exclusively taken from each writer's own discipline – biblical studies. Consequently, the commentaries have little to offer a systematic theology that wishes to rigorously engage with the contemporary world and fail to interact in any significant way with anybody outside of their “in-group”, to use a cultural-anthropological term taken from Malina.<sup>1037</sup> If this is the result of the attempt to blend biblical and systematic theological interests and discourse, the triumph of TIS in the academy would only mean the further marginalisation of theology within the public sphere by disciplines committed to the production of contemporary meaning through serious interdisciplinary dialogue.

#### *7.2.5. TIS and Biblical Theology: Conclusion.*

In conclusion, the current methodology and practise of TIS provides no real solution to the question of the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology and probably raises more questions than it solves. Accounts of TIS remain wedded to standard portrayals of the relation between exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology, and lack a clear definition of its role. It fails to solve the standard tension between history and theology, description and normativity, through lack of clear hermeneutical reflection. In addition, the interpreters surveyed retain a theological commitment to the “inner unity” of Scripture which prevents rethinking the hermeneutical issues involved in engaging with the polyphonic diversity of the biblical texts in a manner that allows them to challenge and inform present theological work.

Furthermore, in terms of praxis, it is often not clear at all whether TIS interpreters are depending on the “Rule of Faith” or some other virtuous/theological equivalent to guide interpretation as much as they claim. On the contrary, it often seems as if an explicit or implicit construal of a historically plausible meaning of the text primarily guides the “theological interpretation” and that interpreters may be more dependent on the so-called

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<sup>1037</sup> See B. Malina, *Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea*, (Lexington: WJKP, 1993), 47-88.

“historical-critical” assumptions imbibed through their own education and former practise than they care to admit. As other critics have noted, such an approach leads to methodological inconsistency and arbitrariness due to the use of historical-critical procedures to justify interpretations desirable to the interpreter, whilst eschewing its exegetical use in relation to all texts.<sup>1038</sup>

In addition, whilst a TNT is justified by its advocates as providing a unified account of NT theology for the purposes of grounding and correcting a systematic theology aimed at contemporary relevance, the practise of TIS seems to lead in the opposite direction despite methodological assertions by Treier and others namely, the creation of a discourse relevant only to those which share its (Christian and theological) presuppositions. TIS also fails to significantly interact not only with other disciplines contributing to public sphere discourse but also with other theological disciplines in any credible way.<sup>1039</sup> Ultimately, whilst TIS has provided a major service in revitalising a tired methodological debate around biblical theology as well as demonstrating good intentions with regard to the construction of contemporary theology, it is suggested that the dialogical TNT model remains best placed to address the wide range of TIS’s concerns by means of its dialogical hermeneutical approach, its lack of theological presuppositions which pre-determine the results of the exegetical task, and its clear methodological stance.

### *7.3. Esler: Abandoning Biblical and Systematic Theology.*

Esler expresses his dissatisfaction with the current model for NT theology centred on the attempt to “analyze the Bible historically in order to isolate the key “theological” ideas that...are then available for use by systematic or dogmatic theologians.”<sup>1040</sup> The resultant

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<sup>1038</sup> See the critiques of Watson by Esler, 34-35; and T. Engberg-Pederson, “Once more a Lutheran Paul?”, *SJT* 59.4 (2006): 452-453. Engberg-Pederson gives examples of Watson’s selective use of historical-criticism on page 452.

<sup>1039</sup> Watson is a notable exception in this regard. See F. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

<sup>1040</sup> Esler, 2.

NT, OT or *gesamtbiblische* theology usually involves assigning “a central role to some of the material... (most commonly...Paul or John in the New) and then arranging the ideas hierarchically.”<sup>1041</sup> Esler explicitly states that he does not want to criticize such NT theologies or “the enterprise of producing them” but simply points out that “they represent an unnecessarily limited way of relating the New Testament – investigated historically – to present-day Christianity.”<sup>1042</sup> Of course, whilst this is a respectfully phrased criticism in order to justify the need for a new paradigm for NT theology one *must* show why the existing one is inadequate and so Esler is forced to criticise and he does so in a decisive manner.

Esler points out the reductionism involved in reducing the richness and diversity of the NT witness to a TNT or a doctrinal norm (and, indeed, its redundancy in terms of significance for the ordinary believer who already believes in the norm extrapolated by the theologian and wishes instead for something to help them in life’s complexities).<sup>1043</sup> But reductionism in the interests of academic discourse is not Esler’s greatest worry. Rather, it is the fact “that the whole process involves nonchalance toward the original form and communicative intentions of the constituent documents of the New Testament” that is deeply troubling.<sup>1044</sup> Esler sums up the problem with a striking image:

“The whole process is like a mining operation. Areas with a rich lode of the right ore (passages containing the theological concepts prioritized by the exegete) are dynamited and excavated (the act of exegesis) and the minerals separated (the act of interpreting the exegetical results) from the rock (the text under discussion), thus leaving nasty scars on the landscape (the text) and desolate heaps of tailings (the remnants of texts thought irrelevant).”<sup>1045</sup>

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<sup>1041</sup> Esler, 2.

<sup>1042</sup> Esler, 3.

<sup>1043</sup> Esler, 5-6. Esler’s particular dialogue partner on this issue is Robert Morgan, who argued for ‘vere Deus vere homo’ as the foundation of Christian theology and thus for John’s Gospel as the centre of the NT. cf. R. Morgan, “Can the Critical Study of Scripture Provide a Doctrinal Norm?”, *JR* 76 (1996): 206-232.

<sup>1044</sup> Esler, 6.

<sup>1045</sup> Esler, 6-7. Similar metaphorical descriptions are offered by Isaak: “NT theology...is not about collecting raw material excavated from the gold mine of the Bible so that it can then be presented to the church for its theological work of constructing doctrines...In this view, the Bible is seen as a deposit to be

In response to such ethically troubling approaches, Esler outlines the positive aim of his work: “[to develop a model of NT theology that is able to] bring the results of the historical investigation of the New Testament to bear on Christian identity in a manner that matches and addresses its rich and variegated character *and* that does not violate the original form and message of the texts.”<sup>1046</sup> A correlate of this view is that data from biblical texts does not have to be fed into a systematic theology for them to gain contemporary relevance. Esler states bluntly: “The notion that the truth of God’s dealing with humanity and the cosmos in his son can only have a “theological” impact if it is mediated through the structures of systematic theology was untenable in 1787 and it is today.”<sup>1047</sup> Esler’s concern with preserving the diversity of the NT texts and respecting their historical context, whilst at the same time acknowledging their contemporary relevance without the aid of a systematic theology, is shared by the dialogical TNT model.

Esler’s model shares some key principles with the dialogical model not only in theory but also in practise. His employment of interdisciplinary reading strategies resulting in “socio-theological” interpretation, engagement with contemporary concerns such as interethnic conflict, and the interpretation of NT texts by paying attention to their literary and rhetorical integrity rather than “proof-texting”.<sup>1048</sup> On the other hand, Esler’s approach retains some troubling features beyond the hermeneutical concerns raised previously. Firstly, Esler’s welcome rejection of the exegesis – biblical theology – systematic theology model leads him to overlook the value of any “systematic” or “constructive” theological engagement with the text in the manner made possible within the dialogical TNT. Concerning the engagement of ordinary believers with the text Esler rightly states:

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mined for the propositions useful in contemporary settings.” (Isaak, 18); and Martens: “...the raw material, like crude oil, is to be conveyed to the doctrinal theologian, who will render it into normative form, so that in this form it may power the automobile, understood as the believing community” in E. Martens, “Biblical Theology and Normativity” in Ollenburger, *So Wide a Sea*, 25.

<sup>1046</sup> Esler, 7.

<sup>1047</sup> Esler, 36. NB. “1787” is a reference to Gabler and his famous lecture in biblical theology, which is commonly held to have inaugurated modern biblical theology (see above).

<sup>1048</sup> Esler, 273-276.

“There is no need for them to approach the text with some specific agenda derived from systematic theology. Nor do they need to hand their historical results over to systematicians to make use of them.”<sup>1049</sup>

However, the question remains as to why “systematic theology” is basically interpreted as “dogmatic theology” carried out by “theological elites”<sup>1050</sup> which is then contrasted so sharply with the formative, essentially ethical, appropriation of the NT provided by Esler. Indeed, Esler tellingly compares the attempt to extract a theological norm from the NT with the attempt by Kantian and utilitarian ethics to establish an ethical norm. Both philosophical and theological attempts to provide a norm are attempts to determine one’s actions by recourse to an ethical rule. However, the recent philosophical development of “virtue ethics” rather emphasises “the *formative*, not the *normative*”, focusing not on abstract “norms to be obeyed” but on “saints and heroes” to be emulated.”<sup>1051</sup> Esler thus suggest that “the movement from rule-oriented ethics to an ethics of the good life and of character and virtue offers an arresting possibility for a similar transition in theological interpretation of the New Testament.”<sup>1052</sup>

In contrast to Esler’s dualistic approach, the dialogical TNT model sets up no distinction between reading the text with a view to constructing theology in relation to “traditional” dogmatic concerns such as soteriology and pneumatology and reading the text with a view to constructing a (theological) description and model for ethical action in relation to areas missed by traditional TNTs such as friendship, generosity, hospitality and interethnic conflict. Furthermore, any model which views the goal of the constructive theological process as the final establishment of theological or ethical norms fails to take seriously the interpretive approach offered by philosophical hermeneutics and delineated above. Rather, the dialogical model is a formative process itself, the findings of which

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<sup>1049</sup> Esler, 276.

<sup>1050</sup> Esler, 14.

<sup>1051</sup> Esler, 7 italics his. Though not cited by Esler, the most significant proponent of virtue ethics is probably Alasdair MacIntyre; see A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>1052</sup> Esler, 8.



may well lead the interpreter to adopt certain courses of action or belief, but which always remain provisional given the infinite interplay of contextuality, alterity and human finitude.

The final point in relation to Esler's approach is the extent to which he actually implements his insights into dialogic truth derived from Bakhtin.<sup>1053</sup> Esler rightly notes that the Bible is "not a monologic text"<sup>1054</sup> but rather "a rich plurality of voices."<sup>1055</sup> He thus appropriately draws the methodological conclusion that although "most of the biblical "voices" (or texts) are not engaged in explicit dialogic interaction with one another", they are juxtaposed and "those who hear the various biblical "voices" or read their inscribed forms can also create a dialogue between them."<sup>1056</sup> However, in the example he gives at the end of his book this is precisely what Esler does *not* do. Instead, he explicitly rejects Galatians as a suitable text in relation to his concerns about interethnic conflict and chooses to focus exclusively on Romans.<sup>1057</sup> For a dialogical TNT this is the wrong methodological move. It is precisely through the juxtaposition of the two distinctive NT texts in dialogue that one could possibly hope to gain a deeper insight into the nature of the interethnic conflict Esler wishes to discuss. The apparent lack of suitability of Galatians as a candidate for making a constructive contribution actually suggests its alterity may cast unexpected light on the topic and prevent an interpreter simply using Romans as a pre-text for passing off truisms which they held prior to the act of textual interpretation.

In conclusion, Esler's project must be viewed as a significant move in the right direction and provides encouragement for the development of the dialogical model. At the same time, Esler's approach does not quite manage to embrace the polyphony of the NT texts as enthusiastically as the dialogical model and retains some deficiencies in terms of

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<sup>1053</sup> Esler, 267-272. Esler relies heavily on Newsom's article, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth", *JR* 76 (1996): 290-306.

<sup>1054</sup> Esler, 269.

<sup>1055</sup> Esler, 270.

<sup>1056</sup> Esler, 271.

<sup>1057</sup> Esler writes: "It is clear, for example, that if we hope to engage the New Testament witness in the contemporary problem of interethnic conflict, Paul's letter to the Galatians will be the wrong text to choose" (275).

hermeneutical approach and self-conception in relation to the task of constructive theology.

#### 7.4. *Biblical and Systematic Theology as “Functional Specialities”.*

In trying to elucidate the relation between biblical theology and systematic theology Reimer suggests that they are simply “functional specialities” engaged in a single theological task. Consequently, “the prevalent distinction among biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology, as though these were four different theologies, is false.”<sup>1058</sup> Rather, specialisation is simply due to the limitations of the practitioner’s “skill, temperament, convenience, and so on.”<sup>1059</sup> However, Reimer essentially retains standard accounts of the disciplines by assigning each speciality a separate task. Systematic theology focuses on the church in the contemporary world, shaping its beliefs and values and engaging critically with “the assumptions and demands of the present age, as well as [the church’s] own ideological distortions.”<sup>1060</sup> Biblical theology, on the other hand, concentrates on Scripture in order to “research, analyze, synthesize, elucidate, interpret and translate the biblical texts, and to identify the assumptions of the biblical age.”<sup>1061</sup> For Reimer, it is not simply biblical theology but both disciplines which function as guardians against the distortion of the biblical text. Biblical theology must prevent systematic theology “from ideologically falsifying the biblical texts (and world) in its necessary task of summarizing”, whilst systematic theology must “identify[...] and unmask[...] the contemporary presuppositions that are inescapably present in, and may distort, biblical studies.”<sup>1062</sup> Ultimately, though, both disciplines qualify as “theology” because they are concerned with “coherence”, “unity”, “synthesis”, “systematization” and “mediation”.<sup>1063</sup>

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<sup>1058</sup> J. Reimer, “Biblical and Systematic Theology as Functional Specialities: Their Distinction and Relation” in Ollenburger, *So Wide a Sea*, 37.

<sup>1059</sup> Reimer, 37.

<sup>1060</sup> Reimer, 38.

<sup>1061</sup> Reimer, 38.

<sup>1062</sup> Reimer, 38.

<sup>1063</sup> Reimer, 37.

Reimer goes on to further clarify his model by noting that “the oft-perceived conflict between biblical theology and systematic theology is really a conflict within biblical theology itself. It cannot make up its methodological mind between history and theology.”<sup>1064</sup> However, for Reimer, in claiming to be “biblical *theology*” the discipline has already chosen its methodological path. It no longer speaks in language which the historian can use since it makes theological assumptions about God and reality which the biblical scholar as historian cannot make (although Reimer maintains “there is an important place for the biblical scholar as historian...in biblical studies”).<sup>1065</sup> For Reimer, “biblical theology” is both descriptive and normative as these do not preclude each other.<sup>1066</sup> On the other hand, it is theology and not history, due to its methodology.<sup>1067</sup> The consequence of this, which is the second important point, is Reimer’s ability to reaffirm his original claim – biblical theology belongs alongside systematic theology as a fellow discipline.<sup>1068</sup> They are “parallel theological activities and are related to each other somewhat as were the early church’s parallel movements of canonization and creedalization.”<sup>1069</sup>

In his response to Reimer’s essay, Kaufmann correctly criticises Reimer’s sketch of the relation of the two disciplines. He firstly points out that Reimer does not make explicit how one should move from Scripture to theology given his statement that “all theology if it is Christian ought to be biblical.”<sup>1070</sup> He also notes that since “Scripture itself does not and cannot determine the actual relationship of Scripture to theology...the *biblical theology* pole cannot determine the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology.”<sup>1071</sup> Rather, systematic theology has “a fundamental priority” over biblical theology and “must determine *what* the Bible is, and how it is to be used – as well as what *theology* itself is – for the Bible itself addresses none of these questions

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<sup>1064</sup> Reimer, 48.

<sup>1065</sup> Reimer, 48.

<sup>1066</sup> cf. Reimer, 43.

<sup>1067</sup> Reimer, 47.

<sup>1068</sup> Reimer, 48.

<sup>1069</sup> Reimer, 49.

<sup>1070</sup> Reimer, 37. G. Kaufman, “Critical Theology and the Bible: A Response to A. James Reimer” in Ollenburger, *So Wide a Sea*, 61.

<sup>1071</sup> Kaufman, 61 italics his.

directly.”<sup>1072</sup> Secondly, Kaufman criticises Reimer of practising “bibliolatry” (bible-idolatry) rather than theology since he allows “no place for...a theological critique of biblical claims and the biblical world.”<sup>1073</sup> Rather, the flow is one way: “the biblical world-picture is to stand in criticism of all aspects of our world, never the reverse.”<sup>1074</sup>

Kaufman’s critique (drawing on the work of Kelsey)<sup>1075</sup> helpfully points out that Reimer has failed to provide the necessary rationale for why Scripture should be construed as a resource for the production of a “biblical theology” since Scripture does not “authorize any one particular way of construing it.”<sup>1076</sup> However, even Kaufman fails to question the need for two separate disciplines, producing two different types of theology, which should then be somehow related despite their incompatible methodological differences. As a “unifying”, “systematizing” *theological* discipline, which stands in need of a systematic theological warrant for its activity, biblical theology should not be regarded merely as a parallel theological activity to systematic theology but *falls within the domain of systematic/constructive theology itself*. In fact, it may well be better to go further and claim that the notion of a *discipline* such as “biblical theology” should be altogether abandoned since those who attempt such a task do so precisely for systematic/dogmatic/confessional reasons, thus already placing their efforts squarely in the domain of constructive theology.

In terms of the dialogical model, a construal of the theological task as “constructive theology” is still able to recognise the human limitations which lie behind Reimer’s assertion of “functional specialities” but refuses to allow these to lead to separate “biblical” and “systematic” theologies. Instead it suggests that since the “lone ranger” approach to theological work leads to shortcomings, interdisciplinary work is needed. The single constructive theological task utilising a dialogical model may well mean a multitude of ongoing interdisciplinary projects in which those with expertise in biblical texts and ancient cultures supplement those with expertise in philosophical, historical,

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<sup>1072</sup> Kaufman, 61 italics his.

<sup>1073</sup> Kaufman, 63.

<sup>1074</sup> Kaufman, 63.

<sup>1075</sup> See D. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>1076</sup> Kaufman, 60.

and theological (amongst other disciplines) matters. No doubt one of the most exciting interdisciplinary theological ventures awaiting NT theologians is the encounter with continental philosophy, as Moore and Sherwood have rightly pointed out.<sup>1077</sup> However, the implication of the need to construct theological accounts that are relevant to multiple publics – church, academy, broader society – is that the single-volume TNT written by solitary biblical scholars restricting themselves to matters of historical theological description must be deemed an inadequate contemporary theological model for working fruitfully with biblical texts.

### *7.5. The Question of Normativity and the TNT.*

The theological model one adopts impinges on the question of normativity. The fundamental theology model, the “bridge” model, some variants of TIS, and Reimer’s “functional specialities” model all consider “biblical theology” to be a separate discipline that critiques and thus “norms” systematic theology. As has repeatedly been noted, biblical theology is advanced as the “guardian” of Scripture. The following section offers a critique of Robert Morgan’s account of how a TNT can provide a norm for Christian identity (and thus by default systematic theology). This is then followed by an elucidation of how the dialogical TNT resolves theological worries concerning normativity.

#### *7.5.1. Morgan: The TNT as a Theological Norm.*

The idea that biblical theology can provide a theological “norm” is advanced by Morgan who suggests that the TNT is “the most appropriate form for a theological interpretation of Christian scripture intended to clarify the identity of “Christianity” because it seeks to give an account of the entire NT.<sup>1078</sup> The TNT is not a “biblical dogmatics” but a “set of

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<sup>1077</sup> S. Moore and Y. Sherwood, “Biblical Studies ‘after’ Theory: Onwards Towards the Past. Part Three: Theory in the First and Second Waves”, *BI* 18 (2010): 223.

<sup>1078</sup> R. Morgan, “The New Testament Canon of Scripture and Christian Identity” in J. Barton and M. Wolter, (eds.), *The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 181.

interpretations” of the various documents since its “primary purpose...is to guide Christian reading of the New Testament itself by insisting on its theological [as opposed to history-of-religions] subject matter.”<sup>1079</sup> At the same time, the TNT is not merely historical preparation for “systematic theology” but a vital theological task which is “essential for the life of the church.”<sup>1080</sup> The reasons for Morgan’s defence of the vital significance of the TNT lie in his commitment to using the NT canon as both *source* and *norm*.

The fact that the NT canon functions as the *source* of Christian theology may be easily acknowledged. Christian theological reflection, whether academic or lay, continually draws on the multiple resources of the NT both to inform and realign itself in a never ending hermeneutical flow. However, Morgan sees the use of the NT as a *norm* as something distinct from this general hermeneutical interaction. He maintains that only complete TNTs seek to interpret scripture as a whole and are thus able to allow scripture to function as a defining *norm* of Christianity. However, scripture can only function as a *norm* when interpreted *theologically*, that is, ‘with reference to what believers claim is its essential subject-matter, the saving revelation of God in Jesus’<sup>1081</sup> and so the TNT, rather than any other academic genre, is essential for the task.

Why is such a “norm” necessary? Morgan hardly ever gives a straight answer to this basic question, asserting only that it involves “clarifying the identity of Christianity.”<sup>1082</sup> Why Christianity is in need of such “clarification” seems obscure. Morgan suggests that a *norm* “protects the identity of Christianity”<sup>1083</sup> indicating that it is somehow under threat. The threat Morgan perceives is none other than the destruction of the doctrinal unity by means of critical historical research and the resultant awareness of theological plurality within the NT canon.<sup>1084</sup> Defining Christianity is now no longer a simple task, especially since the boundaries between canonical and non-canonical, and heretical and orthodox

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<sup>1079</sup> R. Morgan, “Made in Germany: Towards an Anglican Appropriation of an Originally Lutheran *Genre*” in Breytenbach and Frey, 112.

<sup>1080</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 177.

<sup>1081</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 159.

<sup>1082</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 158.

<sup>1083</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 154.

<sup>1084</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 153-154.

texts appear to be growing ever thinner, if one believes the rhetoric of some scholars. The tension Morgan faces, given the conundrum he has placed himself in, is how one reconciles the need for a *norm* with the undeniable canonical diversity. He states:

“That there must be some kind of theological unity to scripture is a prerequisite of scripture functioning as a norm defining Christianity, but any account of this must do full justice to the diversity visible to historical investigation.”<sup>1085</sup>

Thus Morgan engages in the quest for a viable norm by envisioning “a thousand” TNTs contributing to the “on-going conversation” to establish a norm, each contributing their unique insights. This diversity indicates that scripture is a “soft” norm.”<sup>1086</sup> Unlike a “hard” norm which seeks to precisely define and so exclude people, scripture allows “the conversation to continue until the heterodox see the error of their ways (or in all conscience exclude themselves).”<sup>1087</sup> Given these statements, one might possibly conclude that a “soft” norm is so vague that it hardly functions at all thus defeating the point of having a norm. More significantly, one might question the point of trying to define a single norm from material that is so open to diverse interpretations. Unless one is concerned to find out whether other people or oneself are “in” or “out” by appeal to a norm, it seems a rather futile endeavour. Morgan himself wishes to discover a hermeneutical measure to provide “a rule of faith and rule of thumb for measuring modern theological proposals, however radical, for their faithfulness to historical Christianity.”<sup>1088</sup> Given the vast diversity of people and movements subsumed under the term “historical Christianity” any such norm must be necessarily vague. Consequently, it is unclear exactly how useful something as vague as “salvation from God in Jesus” or “having to do with Jesus”<sup>1089</sup> can ever be for assessing the value of a theological proposal. Assessments of theological proposals should be nuanced and intricate, and involve a whole spectrum of prior assumptions and commitments on the part of the

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<sup>1085</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 153.

<sup>1086</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 159.

<sup>1087</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 159.

<sup>1088</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 185.

<sup>1089</sup> See Morgan’s discussion of these proposals in Christian Identity, 191-192.

interpreter. One cannot simply declare on the basis of a vague norm whether an entire work/person is “in” or “out”. Even Morgan notes that as soon as one attempts to make any norm more concrete, citing the case of Stuhlmacher’s linking of salvation to a particular theory of the atonement, namely sacrifice, one enters the realm of theological theory where diversity is unavoidable and all proposals are questionable.<sup>1090</sup>

Morgan’s claim that scripture must function as a definable “norm” results in some ethically, hermeneutically, and theologically troubling suggestions. Firstly, it remains ignorant of the consequences of Morgan’s own hermeneutical observations, namely, that “defining Christianity is an on-going process of interpreting scripture” and that a TNT is only ever “one theologian’s reading of these texts at a particular time and place...based on an array of historical and exegetical judgements.”<sup>1091</sup> Unless the norm is so vague as to be practically meaningless it will not avoid the vicissitudes of the infinite hermeneutical process.

Secondly, it becomes clear that in the quest for the ‘unity’ necessary to establish such a norm, certain canonical writings are considered more central than others. Morgan bluntly states: “Some New Testament writings are peripheral to the definition of Christianity.”<sup>1092</sup> Indeed, the norm must “plausibly reflect what is central to each author’s Christianity even though some of the shorter writings provide insufficient data to establish this beyond doubt.”<sup>1093</sup> Such a stance not only opens the door to the tyranny of the larger NT works over the smaller and the consequent distortion of the canon but also points to a failure to think through the evidence adequately. The fact that the norm must be *postulated* due to lack of evidence for some texts suggests that the texts were never intended to function in such a manner at all.

Thirdly, there is a danger that such a norm comes to be used *against* the canon, with those texts which most clearly reflect the norm being given special treatment whilst those

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<sup>1090</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 191.

<sup>1091</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 176.

<sup>1092</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 186.

<sup>1093</sup> Morgan, ... Christian Identity, 185-186.



that do not explicitly attest the norm being neglected. It remains doubtful as to whether a norm that is deliberately used to establish the value of contemporary theologies will not also be used against the canon it allegedly reflects, despite Morgan's rhetoric. Indeed, Morgan is willing to use the results of *historical* criticism on the Gospels to challenge "the evangelists' imperfect presentations" of Jesus in order to "stimulate[...] reflection" and "offer some guidance for Christians."<sup>1094</sup> That being the case, it is unclear whether he could still maintain any grounds for rejecting the use of a *theological* norm to point out other perceived "imperfections" in Scripture wherever they appear, particularly when such a norm is established for the purpose of defining Christian identity in the face of canonical diversity.

Ultimately, Morgan's quest for a norm perhaps reflects something of the existential uncertainty alluded to at the very beginning of this thesis. The attempt to *fix*, *define*, and *protect* an identity seems to reflect a fear of plurality and diversity as well as a failure to acknowledge the hermeneutical reality that identities are never fixed but always "under construction."<sup>1095</sup> Morgan's vision of a thousand TNTs "blooming"<sup>1096</sup> in the quest for a single pithy norm offers a depressing picture of the future of NT theology. Rather than using a hermeneutics of narrowness which sees the NT canon as the source for a closed and fixed identity, the NT should be viewed as a diverse resource whose plurality can richly inform the incessant and unending construction of Christian identities by constantly opening up new avenues to be dialogically explored.

### 7.5.2. *The Dialogical TNT: The Normativity of Method.*

Martens addresses the issue of the normativity of biblical theology by first tracing the debate historically and arguing that the collapse of Stendahl's "meant/means" distinction

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<sup>1094</sup> Morgan, ... *Christian Identity*, 182. In footnote 48 he refers readers to his more detailed arguments in "Towards a Critical Appropriation of the Sermon on the Mount" in D. Horrell and C. Tuckett, (eds.), *Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 157-191.

<sup>1095</sup> See for example, G. McCracken, *Transformations: Identity Construction in Contemporary Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2008).

<sup>1096</sup> Morgan literally states: 'Let a thousand New Testament theologies [TNTs] bloom' (159).

as a valid hermeneutical position inevitably led to the need to rethink how and whether biblical theology is able to function as a norm. If (historical-critical) method cannot supply a pre-suppositionless “view from nowhere”, any norm derived from Scripture is already “tainted” by the presuppositions of the interpreter.<sup>1097</sup> Similarly, Gross notes that there is no unified theology derivable from the biblical texts “ohne denkendes Subjekt”,<sup>1098</sup> whilst Ollenburger observes that there is no “plain sense” of the text except as we specify it.<sup>1099</sup> It may be stating the obvious but the consequence of this hermeneutical fact is that exposition of the text is always distinct from text. Ollenburger therefore rightly notes that Scripture (the biblical texts) “remains a potential focus of and for self-criticism.”<sup>1100</sup>

Martens utilises such this hermeneutical insight to make a distinction between two types of norm:

“The concept of primary norm (Bible) and derivative norms (theologies) safeguards from according finality to any statement of theology. Pride of place is given to the canon; it remains the norm in a way that theologies drawn from it do not.”<sup>1101</sup>

Marten’s indebtedness to the notion that a norm must be some of form of a theoretical statement<sup>1102</sup> means that he retains a dual form of theological normativity, even though he concedes that the theologies which are supposed to be “normative” for faith and practise may be tested and found inadequate.<sup>1103</sup> However, if one resists the view that a norm may be a *practise* rather than a governing theory the need to accord any normative status whatsoever to a theology disappears. In such a case, biblical theology loses its mandate to

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<sup>1097</sup> E. Martens, “Biblical Theology and Normativity” in Ollenburger, *So Wide a Sea*, 22.

<sup>1098</sup> W. Gross, “Ist biblisch-theologische Auslegung ein integrierender Methodenschritt” in Hossfeld, *Wieviel Systematik*, 125.

<sup>1099</sup> B. Ollenburger, “Biblical and Systematic Theology: Constructing a Relation” in Ollenburger, *So Wide a Sea*, 133.

<sup>1100</sup> Ollenburger, *Constructing a Relation*, 133.

<sup>1101</sup> Martens, 29.

<sup>1102</sup> See Martens, 28-29.

<sup>1103</sup> Martens, 28-29.

derive a normative theology from the diverse biblical texts since this is acknowledged as hermeneutically untenable. Gross rightly notes that as a collection of various texts it is problematic to make the claim that “die „ganze“ Bibel als solche etwas sagen könnte[...].”<sup>1104</sup> The diverse perspectives contained in the Bible mean that one should not attempt “eine Systematisierung der Bibel”,<sup>1105</sup> and therefore the construction of a theological norm, but rather “ein systematisches Bedenken”<sup>1106</sup> alongside the variety of biblical texts.

The biblical texts thus function as a theological norm through the *practise* of constant dialogical engagement in the construction of a theology, rather than through reduction of their content to a theoretical principle. This approach has been most clearly acknowledged by Dunn. At the conclusion of his 1979 work *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, Dunn claims to have discovered “a fairly clear and consistent unifying strand”, which marks out Christianity as “distinctive”, and provides its “integrating centre”,<sup>1107</sup> which is “the unity between the historical Jesus and the exalted Christ.”<sup>1108</sup> However, while the unity of first-century Christianity is determined by Christ, as soon as one seeks to give this ultimate category meaning “in word or practise”, diversity becomes manifest.<sup>1109</sup> Indeed, the contrast between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity, between Enthusiastic and Apocalyptic Christianity and Early Catholicism, and the willingness of Paul and John to express their faith in ways that “seemed to others to hazard the distinctiveness of that faith” lead Dunn to conclude that “*there was no single normative form of Christianity in the first century.*”<sup>1110</sup> Thus for Dunn, the significance of the NT canon lies in the fact that it “canonizes diversity” to a “dangerous” degree whilst at the same time sets in place the “limits of acceptable diversity.” The notion that “God meets us through...Jesus of

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<sup>1104</sup> Gross, 142.

<sup>1105</sup> Gross, 142.

<sup>1106</sup> Gross, 142.

<sup>1107</sup> Dunn, *Unity* ..., 369 italics removed.

<sup>1108</sup> Dunn, *Unity*..., 369.

<sup>1109</sup> Dunn, *Unity*..., 371-372.

<sup>1110</sup> Dunn, *Unity*..., 373. italics his.

Nazareth marks...the limits and edge of Christianity.”<sup>1111</sup> The contemporary theological significance of this is clearly stated by Dunn:

*“To recognize the canon of the New Testament is to affirm the diversity of Christianity. We cannot claim to accept the authority of the New Testament unless we are willing to accept as valid whatever form of Christianity can justifiably claim to be rooted in one of the strands that make up the New Testament.”*<sup>1112</sup>

This suggests the “eirenic” character of the NT canon.<sup>1113</sup> The implication Dunn draws from this assessment is that the NT is not the final definitive statement of Christianity valid for all times, places and circumstances. The diversity of the texts does not allow one to claim that it holds a “single stream of theology.”<sup>1114</sup> Indeed, the diversity of the texts (“kerygmata”) in continually seeking to contextually elucidate the “kerygma” points to the “development of Christian faith and practise.” Dunn points out that the NT canon reveals the “how” of development – the continual reformulation and reinterpretation of the normative Christ-event – but not the “what” of development, that is, it does not restrict the legitimacy of any particular development to those “enshrined in its pages.”<sup>1115</sup> Rather, the NT is like a snapshot, which freezes in time the ongoing process of Early Christian “identity in formation.”<sup>1116</sup>

Such an interpretation renders illegitimate any claim that a biblical theology can function as a normative guardian for Christian theology and praxis. Rather, the TNT is better expressed as “New Testament Theologizing”<sup>1117</sup> to prevent the notion that it concerns a fixed and static system of beliefs. Of course, one may take issue with Dunn’s language of theological “development” if interpreted in a Hegelian sense of the constant refinement

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<sup>1111</sup> J. Dunn, “Has the Canon a Continuing Function?” in McDonald and Sanders, 563, 565, 578.

<sup>1112</sup> Dunn, “Has the Canon a Continuing Function?”, 563 italics his.

<sup>1113</sup> Dunn, “Has the Canon a Continuing Function?”, 579.

<sup>1114</sup> J. Dunn, “Not so much ‘New Testament Theology’ as ‘New Testament Theologizing’” in Breytenbach and Frey, 240.

<sup>1115</sup> Dunn, “Has the Canon a Continuing Function?”, 568-569.

<sup>1116</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 241.

<sup>1117</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 241.

and *Aufhebung* of primitive beliefs in the movement towards absolute knowledge. Terms like “reformulation” or “creative transformation” would perhaps better express the idea of the continual contextual reinterpretation of the Christ-event. Just as the NT writings are the fruits of a theologizing process, captured in time, which began long before the documents were written and continues through into our postmodern world, so also any attempt to grasp their significance must occur *theologically* and not simply *historically*. NT Theology cannot simply become “a subset of a historical sociology of religion” and simply descriptive.<sup>1118</sup> Rather, it is the work of NT Theology to keep in sight the *Sache* behind (better: rendered accessible through) the *Sprache*.<sup>1119</sup>

When one realises that the theologies in the NT texts are really processual theologizing, communicated within a primarily oral culture,<sup>1120</sup> and in a particular concrete context which determines the rhetorical strategy, aim, function, and inclusion/exclusion of certain material in order to relate meaningfully to its hearers,<sup>1121</sup> one must come to understand oneself as part of that same theologizing process. Thus, although “the relative stability of the text still functions as a norm for the way it is appropriated and understood and interpreted”,<sup>1122</sup> the NT theologian works with a “*living tradition*” that rejects the Reformation dichotomy of tradition and Scripture.<sup>1123</sup> The NT texts themselves are an interpretation of the *Sache* with both a *Traditionsgeschichte* and *Wirkungsgeschichte* (Gadamer) which shapes the theologian’s “*Vorverständnis*” (‘pre-understanding’) (Bultmann).<sup>1124</sup> Consequently, the NT text is “*norma Normans*” for this living tradition, but not as “something fixed and final, whose meaning is...beyond dispute” but rather as “a reference point to which recourse is made again and again...”<sup>1125</sup> Consequently, for Dunn it is not Paul and John alone who write NT Theology but the contemporary

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<sup>1118</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 225.

<sup>1119</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 226.

<sup>1120</sup> Thus, unlike in literary cultures there is no such thing as an ‘original’ version (Dunn, *Theologizing*, 234). Textual diversity is therefore not “degeneration or fall from the pristine purity of an original” or to be described “simply in terms of scribal error and corruption” but rather situation-specific interpretation (243). Furthermore, one should not assume that allusions and echoes refer to a fixed literary text (235).

<sup>1121</sup> This, for example, means that a complete “theology of Paul” cannot be accessed through his situation-specific letters (237).

<sup>1122</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 246.

<sup>1123</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 245.

<sup>1124</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 244-245.

<sup>1125</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 246.

theologian who chooses to theologise “newtestamently.”<sup>1126</sup> Thus, NT Theology is a *theological* task which is normed by the *practise* of constructing theology dialogically through constant reading and re-reading of the NT texts.

#### 7.6. *Biblical and Systematic Theology: Conclusion.*

The relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology remains problematic. The problem of retaining the duality of the disciplines in the task of constructive theology lies in the fact that each one essentially produces a separate theology which must be reconciled with the other. Whilst understandable for historical reasons, the suspicion of the role of systematic theology in relation to the theological use of biblical texts leads to hermeneutically inadequate models that require biblical theology to norm systematic theology. This the case with all models discussed above. However, the idea that biblical theology should norm systematic theology is untenable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it fails to provide an adequate account of the hermeneutical role of the biblical interpreter and the fact that biblical theology is itself a systematic/constructive theological practise. Secondly, biblical theology substitutes itself as a theological norm in place of the texts of the biblical canon and thereby legitimates hermeneutical strategies that infringe on the intrinsic value of the texts themselves in order to extract the desired norm. Thirdly, the much vaunted fear of the “distortion” of the biblical texts by systematic theology which biblical theology is designed to prevent leaves the systematic theologian paralysed in terms of how to appropriate the biblical canon for a constructive theological enterprise that moves beyond biblical horizons. They are left with two basic options – to become a biblical theologian and thereby avoid such accusations or to ignore the work of biblical theologians when using the biblical texts.

The fundamental problem with the fundamental-theological model (in Hahn’s sense), the “bridge” model, and some versions of TIS is that they are based on an “modernist”

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<sup>1126</sup> Dunn, *Theologizing...*, 246. Dunn employs a literal translation of the German adjective “neutestamentlich” to try and convey the means and manner in which something is done.

understanding of the theological process that is metaphorically akin to the process of industrial manufacturing. Biblical exegesis extracts the raw material out of the texts, which is then processed by biblical theology, and further refined by other theological disciplines into a consumable product fit for the contemporary consumer. This industrial process model is abandoned by the dialogical TNT. The following thesis statements identify the contribution of the dialogical model in the light of the foregoing chapter.

The dialogical TNT model maintains a disciplinary divide between the attempt to “understand” the biblical texts by means of the broad variety of exegetical methods available and the use of the texts in the act of theological construction. Although this appears to be a standard distinction between textual “exegesis” and “contemporary application”, this is misleading.<sup>1127</sup> Interpretation is used very broadly to cover not only historical-grammatical or socio-rhetorical approaches to the NT texts but any other interpretive method that casts light on the meaning of the NT text as text and all that entails in terms of context, alterity, integrity and so forth. This stage is theologically relevant (as is the *Theologiegeschichte* genre) but not theology itself. The constructive theological stage (which is the dialogical TNT) involves the inclusion of appropriate NT texts in a dialogue with other disciplines over a particular theme. The emphasis is not on seeking a better understanding of the NT text, though this may well be a welcome by-product, but rather on the contribution the text can make to the dialogue.

At the same time, the dialogical TNT model *rejects a disciplinary divide between biblical theology and systematic theology*. “Biblical Theology” is already a constructive theological discipline that typically transgresses the integrity of individual texts in the name of a larger theology. Furthermore, the degree to which biblical theology is able to productively inform rather than stifle any further theological tasks is, for all the rhetoric of NT theologians, a matter of some scepticism. The hermeneutical stance of the dialogical TNT model embraces the finite and constructive role of the NT theologian and places such activity firmly within the *theological domain* traditionally labelled “systematic” theology.

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<sup>1127</sup> Compare K. Berger, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1988).

Rather than fearing the distortion of biblical texts by “alien” categories, the dialogical TNT’s methodological, hermeneutical and ethical commitment to the integrity and alterity of the NT texts allows it to *reject the role of a biblical theology which “protects” the theological integrity of the NT*. It therefore rejects any model which uses “meta”-theological categories to justify the treatment of the NT (and biblical) canon as a single “text” that legitimates infraction on the individual texts themselves. By rejecting the role of theological guardian, and therefore the “one way” process model of theological production, the dialogical model allows questions to be put to the biblical texts as part of an interdisciplinary approach to constructing theology. It thereby also escapes the vision of engagement with biblical texts that seeks to preserve their alterity by marginalising the theological task in favour of “history”. Instead it recognises that a genuinely historical approach to the development of Early Christianity and the NT canon is a matter for another genre – *Theologieggeschichte*.<sup>1128</sup>

The dialogical model therefore views the task of *theological construction* as an interdisciplinary web or matrix rather than as an industrial process of refinement. Since the interpretation of the NT texts takes place according to common standards of textual interpretation rather than via pneumatic or theological hermeneutics, shared discourse is possible. Thus, the shape of one’s theology may actually be affected by dialogue with other disciplines since dialogue as envisioned by philosophical hermeneutics necessarily means a mutual shaping of the theological discourse.

The dialogical model is *theological by virtue of its normative process and the constructive presuppositions and goals of the interpreter*. The dialogical TNT model rejects the attempt of extracting a theoretically articulated unifying norm from the biblical texts. Normativity is the process of constantly taking recourse to the NT texts to check for consistency with and adequacy of the one’s theological construction. Dialogue with the biblical texts is a normative theological *practise* for a single task – the infinite

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<sup>1128</sup> See the previous chapter.



construction of a theology that seeks to allow the alterity of the biblical texts to shape contemporary thought and praxis.

## Chapter Eight

### 8. *Dialogical TNT and Biblical Theology.*

Any attempt to produce a specifically *Christian* constructive theology regardless of the primary public or combinations thereof – academic, ecclesiological, public commons – it is aimed towards, must inevitably take seriously the bi-partite nature of the biblical canon.<sup>1129</sup> This fact naturally increases the number of texts and therefore theological perspectives that inform (norm) the theological task. Attempts to address this theological issue currently take a variety of forms. On the one hand, perhaps because of the growing recognition of biblical diversity, attempts to write a fully fledged Theology of the entire Bible (BT) remain few and far between.<sup>1130</sup> On the other hand, the tide of biblical theologies treating a single issue has been rising steadily in recent years.<sup>1131</sup> Most of the English language efforts in this area remain biblicistic in their approach; that is, apart from occasionally offering a cultural, theological, or ecclesiological rationale for the importance of the topic, methodologically they proceed by way of a positivistic description and summary of the biblical texts with scant regard for hermeneutical or philosophical matters or attempts at interdisciplinary interaction. An encouraging contrast in this regard is the annual/biennial publication of the German language *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*, which offers a properly interdisciplinary forum on specific themes or methodological matters with contributions from experts in all theological disciplines,

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<sup>1129</sup> For a list of recent works treating the methodological and hermeneutical issues involved, see the earlier “rationale” section. Two very different responses on the issue of the relation of the NT to the OT and its impact on the task of biblical theology are set out in G. Strecker, ““Biblische Theologie” oder “Theologie des Neuen Testaments”?” in Dohmen and Söding, 267-273, and H. Seebass, “Über die innere Einheit von Altem und Neuem Testament” in Dohmen and Söding, 131-142.

<sup>1130</sup> Recent works, evidencing a range of hermeneutical approaches, include: T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God’s Plan for Life on Earth*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2008); W. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); J. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); E. Meadors, *Creation, Sin, Covenant, and Salvation: A Primer for Biblical Theology*, (Eugene: Cascade, 2011); G. Bray, *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>1131</sup> Though many topics explored are standard theological fare some push into new theological terrain as these recent examples demonstrate: J. Ajayi, *A Biblical Theology of Gerassapience*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); H. Spieckermann and R. Feldmeier, *Der Gott der Lebendigen: Eine biblische Gotteslehre*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); D. Stevens, *God’s New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

as well as related *Geisteswissenschaften* such as sociology, literature, philosophy, political and cultural studies.<sup>1132</sup>

A further problem facing the production of a BT is the challenge of finding an appropriate Christian hermeneutic for reading/appropriating the Old Testament theologically. For over twenty years the development of intertextual studies of biblical texts have been making their mark on NT studies generally and thus impacting the TNT genre and the way it addresses the relation between the two testaments.<sup>1133</sup> 1995 saw the advent of a new TNT genre deliberately entitled *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (BTNT).<sup>1134</sup> These variants on the TNT genre specifically adopted the task of elaborating on the relation between the OT and NT as part of their methodological program. As yet, only three such works have appeared. The following sections discuss the approaches to the OT of Hübner, Stuhlmacher, and Beale, before outlining the approach of the dialogical TNT to the question of the relation between the testaments.

### 8.1. Hübner: *Biblical Theology as “Rezeptionsgeschichte”*.

Hans Hübner’s three volume BTNT has been called “eine gegenüber anderen entsprechenden Werken deutlich herausragende Arbeit.”<sup>1135</sup> It is certainly an exegetically

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<sup>1132</sup> Recent volumes of the *JBTh* published by Neukirchener Verlag have covered topics such as: *Theologie der Gabe* (2012); *Das Böse* (2011); *Heiliger Geist* (2009); *Heiliges Land* (2009); *Die Macht der Erinnerung* (2008). Hopefully such approaches will multiply in the future. The forthcoming work by Reilich which uses interdisciplinary insights and a dialogical use of biblical resources in the construction of a contemporary theological anthropology sounds like a promising development in this regard; see M. Reilich, *Grenzfall Mensch: Biblische Impulse für eine Theologie der Berührung*, (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2012).

<sup>1133</sup> Single selected examples of intertextual studies working with both testaments published by major scholars in this field include: R. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1989); G. Beale and D. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); S. Moyise and M. Menken (eds.), *Deuteronomy in the New Testament: The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel*, (London: T&T Clark, 2007); J. Ebach, *Josef und Josef: Literarische und hermeneutische Reflexionen zu Verbindungen zwischen Genesis 37-50 und Matthäus 1-2*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009).

<sup>1134</sup> Older works such as that by B. Weiss were published with similar titles but did not share the same methodological goals as recent works, see B. Weiss, *Lehrbuch der biblischen Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, (Berlin: Hertz, 1868).

<sup>1135</sup> G. Barth, “Rezension zu: H. Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*”, *ThZ* 54.3 (1998): 277.

rich and complex work incorporating significant methodological, philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical insights. The BTNT is divided into three main parts which do not correspond precisely to the three volumes, namely the prolegomena (volume 1) which lays the methodological, hermeneutical, and exegetical foundation for the next section. The mesolegomena forms the exegetical bulk of the work and fills volume two (Paul and his reception, including the deutero-Paulines, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude) and spills over into volume three (Hebrews, the Gospels (Luke-Acts is treated as a unity) and Revelation). The latter part of volume three forms the epilegomena which includes substantive philosophical and theological reflections.<sup>1136</sup>

For Hübner, biblical theology means reflecting on the relationship of the two testaments to one another<sup>1137</sup> for the sake of the Church.<sup>1138</sup> The resultant theology attempts to grasp the OT and the NT as a theological unity.<sup>1139</sup> Hübner acknowledges that this should not lead to “eine theologische Einebnung von Altem und Neuen Testament”<sup>1140</sup> but the principle leads to the question as to whether there is indeed a way to achieve the objective of fusing OT and NT to theological whole.<sup>1141</sup> The solution Hübner offers is formed from three main strands, two of which will not be further discussed here, namely the use of the theological category of revelation as an overarching unifying concept for the OT and NT writings (despite individual nuances)<sup>1142</sup> and the associated theological claim that not an anachronistic monotheism but rather the unity of the one self-revealing God links Israel’s Scriptures to the NT Christ-event.<sup>1143</sup> More significant here is Hübner’s programmatically unique distinction between the *Vetus Testamentum per se* and the *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum*.<sup>1144</sup>

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<sup>1136</sup> Hübner’s subsequent fundamental theology which forms a hermeneutical, theological, and philosophical foundation for the BTNT has been briefly discussed earlier.

<sup>1137</sup> H. Hübner, “Warum Biblische Theologie?” in Hübner and Jaspert, 10.

<sup>1138</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 41.

<sup>1139</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 14.

<sup>1140</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 14-15.

<sup>1141</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 15.

<sup>1142</sup> For the extensive discussion, see Hübner, BTNT I, 101-239.

<sup>1143</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 240-257; Hübner, BTNT III, 275-277.

<sup>1144</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 67. See also H. Hübner, “Vetus Testamentum und Vetus Testamentum in Novo Receptum: Die Frage nach dem Kanon des Alten Testaments aus neutestamentlicher Sicht” in H. Hübner, *Biblische Theologie als Hermeneutik: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) 175-190.

Hübner claims that the reception of Israel's scriptures by the NT writers led to "eine neue theologische Größe", namely the *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum*.<sup>1145</sup> Consequently, he excludes consideration of the OT texts in and of themselves from his BTNT and focuses on the reception of the "OT" by the NT writers, leading Söding to correctly categorize the approach as "rezeptionsgeschichtlich."<sup>1146</sup> This approach has come in for some criticism, notably Stuhlmacher's claim that it is an inappropriate assumption with which to approach the NT texts as the original writers would not have made such a distinction. He fears that it places the NT writers into an inappropriate interpretive horizon that relativises their truth claims from the outset.<sup>1147</sup> Barth rightly responds by pointing out that the contemporary post-Enlightenment interpreter cannot help but draw such a distinction between the OT and its NT reception.<sup>1148</sup> Furthermore, Stuhlmacher confuses sympathetic attention to the historical context of the texts with an (impossible) attempt to jettison one's contemporary horizon and then reinsert oneself into the first century. Acknowledgment of the NT texts' truth claims need not mean the embrace of first century hermeneutical practises.

More serious is the charge that the methodology of Hübner's BTNT leads both to a neglect of major portions of the OT due to the NT writers' selective appropriation of Israel's Scriptures and the danger of simply projecting NT interpretations back into the OT.<sup>1149</sup> Hübner seeks to avoid this charge by pointing out that he does not merely treat explicit citations but also allusions as well.<sup>1150</sup> However, this still leads to a very limited survey of OT material. Furthermore, the concern about projecting NT interpretation back into the OT without further ado may be a problem in some visions of BT but for Hübner only the *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum* is in view rather than the OT in and of itself. Perhaps more significant is Barth's question about the authority of the different interpretive traditions, that is, the authoritative status of the *Vetus Testamentum in Novo*

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<sup>1145</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 67 italics removed.

<sup>1146</sup> Söding, *Entwürfe...*, 80.

<sup>1147</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 37.

<sup>1148</sup> Barth, Rezension zu Hübner, 278.

<sup>1149</sup> Söding, *Entwürfe...*, 81-82.

<sup>1150</sup> Hübner, BTNT I, 29-30.

Receptum in relation to contemporary readings of the *Vetus Testamentum per se*.<sup>1151</sup> However, this sets up a false contrast between either the *sacrificium intellectus* of adopting the hermeneutical stance of a first century believer or challenging the authority (and therefore truth claim) of the NT. Instead, the NT writers' reading of Scripture may be treated as hermeneutically appropriate strategies within a first century context without requiring the resultant interpretations of the OT to be accepted as the authoritative reading for the contemporary interpreter.

A final criticism relates to the fact that Hübner's TNT is also very selective in its treatment of the NT itself. Barth notes that after the treatment of Paul and the deutero-Paulines the investigation into the reception of the OT in other texts associated with Pauline influence diminishes greatly.<sup>1152</sup> Overall, Hübner's approach follows Niederwimmer by supplementing Pauline and Johannine theology with sustained attention to Hebrews. Whilst the texts (with the exception of Luke-Acts) are treated separately, as a TNT it remains unbalanced since attention to texts is determined by the amount of OT citation and allusion (and one suspects the author's predilections affect this as well). As a result, 2 John and 3 John merit barely any mention at all except for the references to "elders" in the opening verse.<sup>1153</sup>

In summary, Hübner's distinction between the *Vetus Testamentum per se* and the *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum* is helpful in orienting the interpreter to the hermeneutical factors involved in the interpretation of the NT. However, whilst Hübner's emphasis on the Septuagint reflects his methodological approach, it is extremely doubtful that a BT which seeks to make use of the canonical texts should cease to take the meaning of the Hebrew MT (and related texts) into account on the basis that early Christianity by and large used the Septuagint.<sup>1154</sup> Of course, this does not mean that the Septuagint should not

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<sup>1151</sup> Barth, Rezension zu Hübner, 278.

<sup>1152</sup> Barth, Rezension zu Hübner, 274.

<sup>1153</sup> Hübner, BTNT III, 153.

<sup>1154</sup> Contra Räisänen who calls the abandonment of the Hebrew texts "eine unausweichliche Konsequenz" of Hübner's position (Neutestamentliche Theologie?, 44).

play a role in constructing a BT, perhaps even standing alongside the MT.<sup>1155</sup> Overall, Hübner offers a useful descriptive TNT that highlights the theology of the NT texts in relation to the issue of OT reception but on account of his methodology systematically fails to do justice to the full extent of either the NT or OT canon. Furthermore, a BT that is attempting constructive theology according to a dialogical model cannot accept the neglect of the alterity of the OT texts' unique voice and the ensuing loss of theological richness and potential topoi it leads to.

## 8.2. *Stuhlmacher: Biblical Theology as "Traditionsgeschichte"*.

Originally published in the same year as the first volume of Hübner's project, the third basic principle of Stuhlmacher's BTNT runs as follows:

“Sofern sich die Theologie des Neuen Testaments ihre Aufgabenstellung vom Neuen Testament geben läßt, hat sie die besondere Verwurzelung der neutestamentlichen Glaubensbotschaft im Alten Testament herauszuarbeiten und zu respektieren.”<sup>1156</sup>

This leads to the conclusion that:

“die Theologie des Neuen Testaments ist als eine zum alten Testament hin offene biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments zu entwerfen und als Teildisziplin einer Altes und Neues Testament gemeinsam bedenkenden biblischen Theologie zu begreifen.”<sup>1157</sup>

For Stuhlmacher, the OT is not simply the Hebrew canon but also includes the Septuagint. This argument is based on the fact that the Hebrew canon was not closed until

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<sup>1155</sup> The Septuagint already does play an implicit role in BT due to the use of textual criticism in establishing the Hebrew text of the OT canon.

<sup>1156</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 6 italics removed. For a discussion of this principle, see further Graf, 258-268.

<sup>1157</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 6 italics removed.

after the “Christusevangelium” had already been developed and the “main” texts of the NT had been composed, and the fact that the Septuagint had full independent status as a divinely inspired text in the Early Christian communities.<sup>1158</sup> Thus, like Hübner, most of Stuhlmacher’s OT work in the BTNT is related to the Septuagint.

Stuhlmacher’s method of linking the NT and OT is that of *Traditionsgeschichte*.<sup>1159</sup> Graf thus precisely designates Stuhlmacher’s approach “eine traditionsgeschichtlich fundierte kanonische Theologie.”<sup>1160</sup> Stuhlmacher reads the OT as the primary background for the theological conceptions developed in the NT, to the extent that he has been criticised for neglecting the Greco-Roman background of the NT.<sup>1161</sup> More significantly for the current discussion, is the criticism that the *traditionsgeschichtliche* approach presents the complex relationship between the OT and NT as a simplistic unified continuum of tradition, in which the NT becomes a culminating appendix at the close of the process of divine revelation.<sup>1162</sup> Söding has noted the resulting impact on both testaments:

“Vor allem fragt sich, ob durch das Insistieren auf traditionsgeschichtlichen Kontinua nicht der tiefe Einschnitt, der durch das Kommen Jesu gesetzt ist, strukturell, wenngleich nicht immer faktisch, relativiert wird. Im Gefolge dessen fällt es einer traditionsgeschichtlich angelegten Biblischen Theologie vom Ansatz her durchaus schwer, sowohl den Eigenwert des Alten Testaments wie auch die Neuheit des Neuen Testaments zu erkennen und theologisch fruchtbar zu machen.”<sup>1163</sup>

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<sup>1158</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 7-8,

<sup>1159</sup> For a definition see G. Osborne, “The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*”, *JETS* 21.2 (1978): 117-130.

<sup>1160</sup> Graf, 264,

<sup>1161</sup> See O. Merk, “Gesamtbiblische Theologie: Eine offene Diskussion” in Dohmen and Söding, 232.

<sup>1162</sup> Merk, *Gesamtbiblische...*, 231,

<sup>1163</sup> T. Söding, “Entwürfe Biblischer Theologie in der Gegenwart: Eine neutestamentliche Standortbestimmung” in Hübner and Jaspert, 79-80. For Söding, Stuhlmacher’s over-emphasis on the identity of the God of both testaments in order to secure a *traditionsgeschichtliche* continuity leads to an inability to positively value the eschatological newness of God’s act in Jesus (Söding, *Entwürfe...*, 80). Stuhlmacher explicitly rejects this charge in BTNT I, 34.



For any BT that takes seriously the texts contained in both canons (regardless of which particular canon one adopts) the failure to grant the OT texts their own distinct voice is a major failing. Stuhlmacher addresses this concern directly and offers a fourfold response, which is a curious mixture of historical and theological rationales. He begins by noting that concerns to retain the independence of the OT in relation to the NT<sup>1164</sup> coincide with the general approach to the biblical texts utilised in academic research as well as the concerns raised in Christian-Jewish dialogue. However, he suggests that these tendencies could mislead one to adopt an unhistorical approach of treating the NT authors as if they knew of “ein dem Neuen Testament selbstständig gegenüberstehendes Altes Testament.”<sup>1165</sup> Stuhlmacher’s point concerning the possibility of historical anachronism is a good one if one is attempting to only offer an interpretive description of the NT writings. In such a case, how one interprets the OT today is of little relevance since one is concerned about what the NT text is trying to say by means of its use of the OT (hermeneutically sound by contemporary standards or otherwise). However, if a work of constructive theology is being attempted which utilises the full extent of the canon then both NT and OT texts should be considered on their own terms. Thus two different readings of a particular text may be part of the theological process - the *vetus testamentum per se* and the *vetus testamentum in novo receptum*. This is not problematic since the constructive theological task is not concerned with establishing the “correct” reading of the text to the detriment of other receptions of the text. Rather, constructive theology is concerned with bringing a contemporary understanding of what the NT and OT texts are trying to say (“die Sache”) into dialogue.

Secondly, Stuhlmacher suggests that a history-of-religions approach cannot fail to acknowledge the fact that ancient Judaism forms the primary and decisive parameter of the NT writings.<sup>1166</sup> One may easily concede this historical point though with reservations as to where this could practically lead in terms of neglect of Greco-Roman contexts for NT writings. At the same time, it should be noted that this point simply

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<sup>1164</sup> Stuhlmacher is responding explicitly to Childs’ concerns expressed in *Biblical Theology*, 52.

<sup>1165</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 33.

<sup>1166</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 33.

relates to the appropriate historical context of the NT writings for their descriptive interpretation.

Thirdly, Stuhlmacher claims that the NT writers read the Scriptures as divinely inspired texts presupposing the late Old Testament and early Jewish interpretive traditions and that one must bear this in mind to avoid historically anachronistic interpretations of the NT texts. Furthermore, he asserts that one should not simply abandon the early Christian conviction that the Scriptures testified to the same God whom the NT terms the father of Jesus Christ.<sup>1167</sup> This point contains a legitimate historical observation concerning the interpretive historical context of NT texts. However, Stuhlmacher then moves to a theological claim concerning the interpreter's standpoint towards the OT. Instead of simply noting the historical fact that the God of the NT writers was viewed by them as the same God witnessed to in Israel's Scriptures, Stuhlmacher requires the interpreter to adopt (i.e. retain) this same standpoint. That is, the interpreter is expected to read the biblical texts *from the same point of view as the NT writers*. This consequence of Stuhlmacher's hermeneutics of "Einverständnis"<sup>1168</sup> indicates the degree to which he not only feels that his own BTNT reflects the original standpoint of the biblical writers, but also reveals why the OT ultimately does not have its own voice. Although Stuhlmacher never states as much, his approach implies that the NT writers' appropriation of the open ended scriptural canon of Israel offers the normative Christian reading of the OT. This is precisely why his accent falls on "die Traditions- und Bekenntniskontinuität"<sup>1169</sup> between OT and NT and on the search for unity through the definition of a scriptural centre.

Finally, although acknowledging the danger of overly speculative reconstructions, Stuhlmacher argues that one should not restrict oneself to an examination of explicit citations or allusions in the NT texts (as in Hübner's *vetus testamentum in novo*

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<sup>1167</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 33.

<sup>1168</sup> See P. Stuhlmacher, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments: Eine Hermeneutik*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986<sup>2</sup>). On Stuhlmacher's hermeneutical development and for a full bibliography see Graf, 109-155. For a thorough critique of Stuhlmacher's conception see S. Scholz, *Ideologien des Verstehens: Eine Diskurskritik der neutestamentlichen Hermeneutiken von Klaus Berger, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Peter Stuhlmacher und Hans Weder*, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2008), 169-216.

<sup>1169</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 9-10 italics removed.

*receptum*) but should take into account the broader facets of Jewish life such as liturgy and festivals that would have affected the NT writers' from childhood onwards.<sup>1170</sup> This is another valid suggestion for adopting a contextually appropriate lens for reading the NT texts.

In conclusion, Stuhlmacher's BTNT offers a description of the NT writings that takes into account their use of OT and early Jewish literature. However, this approach simply reflects good interpretive practice through ascertainment of the historical context of the NT texts. However, the BTNT does not provide a model for how to interact with OT texts so that their distinctive voices may be part of the constructive theological task.

### 8.3. Beale: *Biblical Theology as "Heilsgeschichte"*.

Beale's work is the first English-language BTNT and represents a methodological departure from its German forebears in some respects. Firstly, Beale recognises the Protestant canon as authoritative and thus works primarily from the "OT Hebrew text" rather than the Septuagint.<sup>1171</sup> Overall, Beale is far more comfortable with Stuhlmacher's approach to relating the two testaments calling it "the best attempt to show most consistently the continuity between the OT and the NT."<sup>1172</sup> He criticises Hübner for neglecting the broader context of OT citations and allusions and, unlike Stuhlmacher, for focussing on a mono-directional hermeneutical flow of interpretation and not seeing that "the OT truly sheds light on the NT and vice versa."<sup>1173</sup> Nevertheless, even Stuhlmacher "makes no substantive attempt" to first set out "the main storyline of the OT",<sup>1174</sup> a deficit Beale intends to remedy.

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<sup>1170</sup> Stuhlmacher, BTNT I, 33.

<sup>1171</sup> G. Beale, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 2-3.

<sup>1172</sup> Beale, BTNT, 13.

<sup>1173</sup> Beale, BTNT, 10-11.

<sup>1174</sup> Beale, BTNT, 12.

This leads to the second distinctive of Beale's approach which is his adoption of a "redemptive-historical" narrative model, which is in effect a variant of the *heilsgeichtlich* BT model:<sup>1175</sup>

"The presupposition of this book is that the NT is the continuation of the storyline of the OT."<sup>1176</sup>

More correct would be for Beale to state that the OT *and* NT are the development of the storyline set out in Genesis 1-3, since Beale begins by outlining the "essentially eschatological themes"<sup>1177</sup> he finds there and then tracing their development through the rest of the OT and into the NT. The survey of OT themes such as "kingship" and "new creation" is at times remarkably forced, particularly in the case of the wisdom literature, where Beale's scant comments on Proverbs show the limits of his methodology in relation to hearing the distinctive voice of a biblical text. His comments in full are:

"The majority of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon, enhancing his stature as the epitome of the wise human in the tradition of Adam. Others also wrote parts of Proverbs, and they express the notion that Israel itself should have functioned as a corporate wise Adam."<sup>1178</sup>

The initial survey of the "redemptive-historical storyline" of the OT leads Beale to summarise the OT narrative as follows:

"The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively re-establishes his new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide

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<sup>1175</sup> Beale, BTNT, 29. For a recent defence of salvation-history as an alternative to "critical" methods for NT theology see R. Yarborough, *The Salvation-Historical Fallacy?: Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology*, (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2004).

<sup>1176</sup> Beale, BTNT, 29.

<sup>1177</sup> Beale, BTNT, 29.

<sup>1178</sup> Beale, BTNT, 74.

commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom and judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory.”<sup>1179</sup>

Beale seeks to deflect criticism of the narrowness of this summary by noting that it is only supposed to function heuristically by covering the key ideas of the OT and that even the wisdom literature has “significant links to Scripture’s historical plotline.”<sup>1180</sup> Such arguments are not fully convincing, and it would be better to admit that such a narrative is simply a product of the interpreter’s selective reading of the diverse biblical texts rather than a property of the texts themselves. In addition to sketchy treatments of the wisdom literature, Beale’s account of OT theology lacks any reference to Nahum, Jonah, and Esther and contains only very limited reference to texts such as Ruth, Lamentations, Obadiah, Zephaniah and Ezra.

Beale revises his narrative summary in chapter 3, following a survey of how the eschatological texts of the OT develop the “primeval eschatology”<sup>1181</sup> of Genesis 1-3, by means of insertion of the word “eschatological” before the phrase “new-creational kingdom.”<sup>1182</sup> Since eschatology is so foundational to Beale’s storyline, it is notable that Beale avoids discussing diachronic issues relating to the likely historical development of eschatological thought by simply reading the texts in their canonical order, since that is how “they would have been perceived to have been written from the standpoint of the NT writers.”<sup>1183</sup> He then goes on to outline a narrative summary for the NT which runs:

“Jesus’s [sic.] life, trials, death for sinners, and especially resurrection by the Spirit have launched the fulfillment of the eschatological already-not yet new-creational reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this new-creational reign and resulting in judgment for the unbelieving, unto the triune God’s glory.”<sup>1184</sup>

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<sup>1179</sup> Beale, BTNT, 87 italics removed.

<sup>1180</sup> Beale, BTNT, 166.

<sup>1181</sup> Beale, BTNT, 91.

<sup>1182</sup> Beale, BTNT, 116.

<sup>1183</sup> Beale, BTNT, 92.

<sup>1184</sup> Beale, BTNT, 182 italics removed.

The distinctive Pauline (and dogmatic) flavour of this summary is apparent, as is its remarkable similarity to the OT summary. No doubt Beale would argue that this makes the inductive case for the continuity of the two testaments, though a sceptic may well feel that it rather reflects the interpreter's concerns in selecting and arranging the biblical material. In general, Beale makes much of the fact of the distinctiveness of his BTNT and particularly emphasises that this potted storyline is not a scriptural centre as postulated by other writers and critiques multiple prior suggestions.<sup>1185</sup> However, it is difficult to see how Beale's narrative summary is significantly different in narrative terms from the full exposition (and not merely the key word slogan such as "reconciliation") of the Scriptural centre offered by a writer like Stuhlmacher (see the earliest treatment above).<sup>1186</sup> Furthermore, Beale notes that he is not able to discuss all the topics directly raised by his storyline due to its scope, including such themes as "grace" and "faith".<sup>1187</sup>

In relation to Beale's treatment of the NT text it should be noted that he follows no consistent pattern. Often NT texts are treated separately, though often a passage is taken out of the context of their literary whole. For example, a section on the "“Already and Not Yet” References to the Land Promises” treats in succession Hebrews 1:2; Romans 8; Ephesians 1:13-14; and Colossians 1:12-14.<sup>1188</sup> However, on occasions, a synthetic approach is used. In such cases, it sometimes seems unclear as to whether the actual subject being discussed is the primary force shaping the arrangement of material or rather the presence of OT allusions. For example, in Beale's discussion of "the wilderness testing of Jesus", he begins with a general reference to "forty days and forty nights" which he links to Exodus 24:18; 34:28, before discussing the link to the temptation of Adam and Eve in conjunction with Luke 3:38; Mark 1:13 and selected passages from Isaiah.<sup>1189</sup> This is then followed by a discussion of "the defeat of the devil in the wilderness" in relation to the conquest of the Canaanites and of Jesus' defeat of demonic

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<sup>1185</sup> Beale, BTNT, 1-24, 85-87.

<sup>1186</sup> Hamilton also notes Beale's somewhat exaggerated claims for the distinctiveness of his approach in J. Hamilton, "Appreciation, Agreement, and a Few Minor Quibbles: A Response to G. K. Beale", *MJT* 10.1 (2011): 65-67.

<sup>1187</sup> Beale, BTNT, 950.

<sup>1188</sup> Beale, BTNT, 760-766.

<sup>1189</sup> Beale, BTNT, 417-422.

powers with reference to Matthew 4:6; Psalm 91:11-13; and Luke 10:17-19.<sup>1190</sup> Finally, Luke's alleged link of Jesus to Adam in 3:38-4:1 is connected to early Jewish literature, particularly *Testament of Levi*.<sup>1191</sup> Such a synthetic procedure is both exhausting to follow and sheds little light on the NT texts themselves. What Beale does not do is fully discuss the actual testing accounts of the Synoptics noting their similarities and differences, their placement in the surrounding literary context, and offer systematic and plausible explanations for their particular use of an OT allusion or citation. This mixture of approaches highlights one of the dangers of Beale's redemptive historical narrative approach: the interpreter forgets that they are constructing a coherent narrative from diverse texts and instead starts to treat the texts on a piecemeal evidential basis assuming that the texts all presuppose the narrative which the interpreter finds so compelling.

Returning to the issue of the relationship between the two testaments, whilst Beale's BTNT offers some substantial discussion of the question of the NT reception of the OT and thus develops standard descriptive approaches to NT theology, it is questionable as to whether Beale really does justice to the OT. Methodologically, he often seems to set up a topic using Genesis 1-3 before using the rest of the OT as a negative foil for the portrayal of the consummation of the theme in the NT.<sup>1192</sup> Beale's emphasis on continuity between the Testaments also leads to the silencing of the voice of the OT in favour of reading them through a NT lens. For example, Beale's treatment of "The Story of the Church as End-Time Israel in the Inaugurated New Creation" offers a treatment of the topic from the perspective of replacement theology without ever raising the question as to what alternative theological positions a reading of the OT texts themselves, without restriction to texts alluded to or cited by NT writers, could perhaps support.<sup>1193</sup> Indeed, Beale's basic hermeneutical stance in relation to the OT texts is problematic. He states:

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<sup>1190</sup> Beale, BTNT, 419.

<sup>1191</sup> Beale, BTNT, 422.

<sup>1192</sup> This becomes particularly clear in part 10 entitled "The Relationship of Inaugurated and Consummated Eschatological Realities to the Parallel Realities Experienced by Old Testament Saints", Beale, BTNT, 887-957.

<sup>1193</sup> See Beale, BTNT, 651-749.

“I will assume that later biblical quotations of and allusions to earlier Scripture unpack the meaning of that earlier Scripture, and yet the earlier passage also sheds light on the later passage.”<sup>1194</sup>

He further clarifies his position by noting that he rejects:

“some postmodern understandings of intertextuality, which, for example, contend that later references to earlier texts interact in such a way that new meanings are produced that are completely unlinked and dislodged from the originally intended meaning of the earlier text.”<sup>1195</sup>

The adoption of a hermeneutic dependent on the availability of the author’s original intention to future interpreters (itself no doubt inspired by Beale’s traditional evangelical theological stance towards the canon and divine authorship<sup>1196</sup>) leads Beale to posit a continuity of meaning between the OT text and its reception in the NT. However, if the NT “unpacks” the original meaning of the OT text this inevitably leads to a hermeneutical stance in which the NT reception of a text determines its contemporary reception. In fact, to argue for the alterity and distinctive voice of the OT texts vis-a-vis their NT usage as suggested in a dialogical model would be to neglect the true fullness of meaning supplied by the authoritative interpretation made by NT writers. Since Beale’s hermeneutic depends on ascertaining original authorial intent he is forced to find continuity of meaning between the OT and NT in order to maintain his doctrine of revelation and the divine authorship of the canon intact. Any discontinuity would either call into question the very status of the OT as divine revelation or the validity of the NT witness.<sup>1197</sup> Consequently, Beale’s hermeneutical position prevents him from adopting an ethically justifiable stance in relation to the distinctive voices of the texts of the very Hebrew canon he adopts as Scripture.

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<sup>1194</sup> Beale, BTNT, 3.

<sup>1195</sup> Beale, BTNT, 3.

<sup>1196</sup> See G. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>1197</sup> A good example of Beale’s sometimes contorted attempts to find “biblical-theological” continuity occurs in his discussion of the citation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15; see Beale, BTNT, 406-412.



In conclusion, Beale offers some useful descriptive exegetical discussion of the NT reception of the OT. His redemptive-historical approach offers a selective account of OT and NT theology but his hermeneutical approach cannot prevent the marginalisation of some biblical texts such as 2 and 3 John or the neglect of the distinctive voice of the OT texts beyond their reception in the NT. A further reservation for any constructive theology relates to where Beale's hypothetical theological construction of the biblical narrative leads. Beale himself links his work to "practical theology and preaching" but is content to leave others to translate his insights into practise.<sup>1198</sup> Of the relation of his work to systematic theology broadly defined there is no mention and this seems symptomatic of Beale's approach. Beale never really escapes the language horizon of the biblical texts in his theological description and thus his BTNT does not even recognise the need for constructing a theological discourse that offers points of contact to the larger world outside of the discourse internal to the NT texts.

#### 8.4. *The dialogical TNT and the OT.*

Isaaks argues that "NT theology must be a theology of the whole Christian Bible."<sup>1199</sup> For him, this means integrating the OT and NT without simply "searching for clues to Jesus' identity" or adopting a "supersessionist" approach to Israel.<sup>1200</sup> Schwöbel also states that Christian theology must be biblical theology in the sense of taking both OT and NT canons into account. This is because the Christian tradition consolidated in the NT canon cannot be explicated without reference to the semiotic system provided by Israel's Scriptures.<sup>1201</sup> Crüsemann describes this well when he writes of the OT as the "truth space" ("Wahrheitsraum") of the NT.<sup>1202</sup> He goes so far as to assert that in relation to Christian theology the OT must have the *same* status as it does in the NT, that is as *the*

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<sup>1198</sup> Beale, BTNT, 962.

<sup>1199</sup> Isaaks, TNT, 17.

<sup>1200</sup> Isaaks, TNT 17.

<sup>1201</sup> C. Schwöbel, "Wie biblisch ist die Theologie? Systematisch-theologische Bemerkungen zur Themafrage" in *JBTh* 25 (2010): 10-11.

<sup>1202</sup> F. Crüsemann, *Das Alte Testament als Wahrheitsraum des Neuen: Die neue Sicht der christlichen Bibel*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011), 28, 341.

Scripture for Jesus and most NT writers, rather than being of secondary relevance to the NT.<sup>1203</sup> Motyer also argues for the necessity of “one biblical theology”, whilst rightly highlighting not only the distinction between the OT and NT canons but also the theological diversity found within the canons themselves.<sup>1204</sup>

The BTNT genre may be interpreted as a move in the direction of satisfying such demands though the attempts conducted so far are by no means considered as adequate to the claims of someone like Crüsemann. Whilst Beale’s BTNT is so recent that there has been scant occasion for criticism and Hübner’s approach is not seriously considered by biblical theologians, Stuhlmacher’s “organic development” approach draws strong criticism from both OT and NT scholars. For Crüsemann, Stuhlmacher’s subordination of the OT to the NT reflects later dogmatic presuppositions rather than the biblical texts themselves. Furthermore, the use of a developmental model of canonical interdependence that reads the OT texts as leading to the NT not only silences the unique voice of the OT texts as pre-Christian texts but threatens to render them historically interesting but superfluous to theological requirements.<sup>1205</sup> On the other hand, Weder critiques Stuhlmacher’s developmental model for failing to allow the radical newness of the historically contingent event of Jesus Christ to be fully displayed and instead reducing it to a logical consequence flowing from the OT Scripture.<sup>1206</sup> The question of the relation between the testaments as a methodological and hermeneutical challenge thus remains disputed ground for the TNT.

The challenges of biblical theology cannot be resolved in a dissertation, let alone a chapter as short as this. However, chapter five on the hermeneutical justification of the dialogical TNT model already indicated that some OT scholars, inspired by Bakhtin, were moving towards embracing a dialogical model for the task. Encouraged by such

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<sup>1203</sup> Crüsemann, 28.

<sup>1204</sup> Motyer, 143-144.

<sup>1205</sup> Crüsemann, 67-69.

<sup>1206</sup> H. Weder, “Biblische Theologie: Konturen und Anforderungen aus hermeneutischer Perspektive” in *JBTh* 25 (2010): 24-30. Weder also critiques Stuhlmacher’s attempt to discern a “text-internal” centre of Scripture as arbitrary and reductive. Only a Scriptural centre external to the texts themselves such as “Jesus Christ” is able to avoid such charges (30-34).

moves, the following set of thesis statements attempts to elucidate the possible contribution to a biblical theology made by the dialogical TNT model.

*Christian theology means the normativity of both Testaments.* Schröter argues that the term “biblical theology” should characterise Christian theology as a whole. Consequently, biblical theology is “keine exegetische Spezialdisziplin sondern konstitutives Merkmal christlicher theologie überhaupt.”<sup>1207</sup> Whilst Schröter therefore suggests that philological and historical work on the biblical texts is itself the theological contribution of biblical studies to Christian theology, the argument made here and stated in the previous chapter is that such work is theologically relevant but to be distinguished from the infinite hermeneutical task of constructing a theology for today. However, the dialogical model is able to embrace Schröter’s definition of theology, particularly in the light of its understanding of normativity as the process of constant reference to the biblical texts.

*Genuinely biblical theology engages the intentio operis of each individual canonical text.* Accepting the claims noted above of Isaak and Schwöbel concerning the definition of Christian theology, it must be noted that the BTNT genre thus far fails to adequately meet the test of theologising with both canons. Hübner restricts the OT’s presence to *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum*, Stuhlmacher restricts the OT to the influence of the traditions which continue into the NT, and Beale employs those texts that best fit his narrative redemptive-historical paradigm. In all cases, the alterity and integrity of some, if not all, OT texts are infringed upon. Consequently, it cannot be denied that all three approaches employ useful exegetical strategies for understanding the communicative intentions of the NT texts which may be utilised in any attempt to understand the NT texts. However, they all fail to respect the *intentio operis* of the OT texts as utterances forming semantic wholes.

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<sup>1207</sup> J. Schröter, “Wie theologisch ist die Bibelwissenschaft? Reflexionen über den Beitrag der Exegese zur Theologie” in *JBTh* 25 (2010): 89 italics his.

*The dialogical model focuses on “text” not “canon”.* The fundamental impasse in the quest for a “biblical theology” seems to lie in the notion that there are two canons which must somehow be reconciled. This acknowledgement of contrasting “text complexes”<sup>1208</sup> renders the quest for the theological “unity” of the testaments doomed from the outset. Attempts to overcome this thus either posit continuity through development (Stuhlmacher), redemptive history (Beale), or meta-theological categories such as “God” and “Revelation”. Given the diversity of the NT canon and the (here assumed) diversity of the OT canon it seems to make little sense to treat them as two consistent blocks which stand opposed to each other. This procedure merely re-locates the theological problem from a textual level to a macro-textual (canonical) level, whilst simultaneously obscuring the fact that both OT and NT canons legitimate and by no means seek to homogenise their own theological diversity. (Indeed, the idea of canon as a coherent semantic whole seems possible only with the invention of the codex that fixed the individual biblical texts into a single “work”).

Consequently, *the dialogical TNT model advanced here reaches its own limitations as a theological model and instead adopts a fully biblical approach* in which relevant texts from both parts of the canon may be brought into dialogue in the construction of a theology. Such a conception does not simply restrict itself to the *historical* dialogue recorded in the texts as suggested by Perrin<sup>1209</sup> but is a constructive model produced by the contemporary theologian (following the suggestion of Claassens discussed previously). Furthermore, this model respects the use of the OT by the NT writers as a means to advance their theological concerns but does not anachronistically impose their hermeneutical approaches on the contemporary interpreter of the OT. Rather, exactly the same approach applies to the OT texts as the NT – respect for their status as “texts”, and consequently for their literary and semantic integrity and their contextual alterity.

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<sup>1208</sup> W. Thüsing, “Perspektiven für eine Biblische Theologie des Alten und des Neuen Testaments” in Dohmen and Söding, 293.

<sup>1209</sup> N. Perrin, “Dialogic Conceptions of Language and the Problem of Biblical Unity” in Hafemann, 224. Perrin also briefly invokes Bakhtin’s dialogical theory to ground his suggestion but his approach is underdeveloped and lacks the rigour and specificity of Olsen, Newsom, and Claassens.

### 8.5. Conclusion: Dialogical Biblical Theology.

This chapter surveyed three examples of the TNT genre which have admirably acknowledged the issue of the relation of the NT to the OT as a key theological issue, thereby developing the BTNT as a new sub-genre. All three examples provide useful resources for a better understanding of the NT texts, particularly in terms of their use of OT texts to inform and support their distinctive theologies. At the same time, the distinctive contribution of OT polyphony in its own right to the theological task is not possible with the approaches taken by Hübner, Stuhlmacher and Beale. Hübner's *rezeptionsgeschichtlich* approach is flawed in limiting the theological discussion to only those OT texts quoted or alluded to in the NT. This not only fails to allow the OT texts their distinctive voices but also marginalises entire texts and textual segments of the NT canon. Stuhlmacher's *traditionsgeschichtlich* approach emphasises continuity between the testaments as does Beale's *heilsgeschichtlich* approach but at the cost of marginalising those texts which do not fit into the model adopted. Furthermore, in both approaches the "real" meaning of the OT texts is found in their interpretation within the NT texts. Consequently, a genuinely Christian theology which acknowledges the normative character of the entire biblical canon for the constructive theological task cannot regard these works as adequate models.

In contrast, it is tentatively proposed that whilst the BTNT genre encourages a better reading of the NT texts, particularly through Hübner's distinction between *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum* and *Vetus Testamentum per se*, it is precisely the latter that a genuinely dialogical model must incorporate in order to be genuine Christian theology. Thus, exploring the *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum* is crucial for understanding the communicative intentions of the first century writers of the NT texts and thus their theological contribution to the dialogical model, but the *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum* is not hermeneutically binding as a Christian theological interpretation of the OT texts for post-Enlightenment interpreters.

By shifting the focus from an unproductive canonical dualism which fails to do justice to the internal diversity of each canon to the focus on “texts”, the dialogical model is able to incorporate the thirty-nine OT texts into the norming process of theological construction in a manner which preserves their polyphony and individual integrity. Such a dialogical model, already proposed by Claassens, avoids the need for linking the two canons by means of narrative, continuity of traditions, typology, or a promise-fulfilment dualism, which serves to marginalise the texts that make little or no contribution to the model adopted. The minimal level of hypotheses required for the dialogical model to function theologically allows full attention to be given to the contribution of the *texts* rather than the use of the texts to justify an adopted “biblical theological” model. Whilst such a proposal will certainly not meet with resounding approval due to its lack of theological presuppositions in approaching “Scripture” it does offer a means of embracing the full polyphony of the entire biblical canon as a theological resource.

Over the last few chapters the alert reader will have noted a subtle shift from talk of a dialogical TNT model to more general talk of a dialogical model for constructing Christian theology. This is not a sign of inconsistency on the part of a writer but lies within the nature of the subject itself. If the TNT is to be truly *theological* and not simply historical-descriptive, then it is an interpretive act of theological construction. However, if the theology is to be truly *Christian* the OT must also play a normative role in that theology. Hence, it is tentatively suggested here that, despite the possible objections, the TNT genre must be subverted in favour of a *dialogical model* that norms the theological task with reference to all sixty-six texts of the Bible and that therefore has the added advantage of *intensifying the benefits of polyphony and diversity* set out in chapter five. This does not mean that every biblical text must be adduced to dialogue every point. Rather, that the scope of the theology constructed broadens to include matters to which each text may make its distinctive contributions.

## Chapter Nine

### 9. Conclusion.

This work began by noting Barth's identification of the three key problems facing the contemporary TNT. All three major problems were both historical and hermeneutical conundrums: Should the "historical Jesus" be part of a TNT? What is the relation between NT diversity and unity? What is the task of a TNT – theology or *Religionsgeschichte*? The decision was made to focus on the second question as a fundamentally hermeneutical problem in the hope that any answers found there would result in a resolution of the other named problems. The case made here is that such answers have been found but before making them explicit a review of the investigation will be made.

Chapter three suggested that the diversity of the NT texts gives rise to the problem of "unity" at both a canonical "macro" level and inner canonical "micro" level. Attempts to resolve the tensions discerned between the texts lead to the implementation of hermeneutical strategies that either actually or *de facto* delete certain texts or text segments from the NT canon. This may be by means of deliberate expurgation, the use of a criterion, whether theological or historical, to establish unity or mark out theological outsiders within the canon, or the adoption of a theological hermeneutic that seeks to transcend polyphony in the name of "Gospel", "Revelation" or "Word of God". Such approaches to the unity-diversity issue are hermeneutically inadequate for several reasons. Firstly, they may transgress on the integrity of the biblical canon as *norma normans* for Christian theology through marginalising texts. Secondly, they may transgress the actual textual boundaries of the 27 diverse texts in the name of a theological "macro" text such as "canon" or "scripture".

This broad overview paved the way for the analysis of the treatment of the NT texts within all TNTs published since 1990. This meant discussing the hermeneutical assumptions and methodological strategies of the TNTs. The presuppositions behind the

critical analysis were the assumption that the NT is comprised of “texts” which should be treated according to standard interpretive norms in order to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue. These norms include understanding the *intentio operis* of a text in relation to its literary integrity and historical alterity. The resulting critical literature review in chapter four identified five main categories into which TNTs may be placed as regards their treatment of the issue of NT unity and diversity. These were the attempt to elucidate a scriptural centre that unites the texts, the extraction of a limited unity from the NT texts generally in the form of a quite basic dogmatics, the “discovery” of a deep and underlying unity that is the fundamental core of all theology, the abandonment of the quest for unity in the face of NT polyphony, and the development of a dialogical model in order to construct a theology without infringing on NT diversity.

Some striking observations can be made in relation to the contemporary TNT genre based on the review. Firstly, regardless of the attitude of the individual writer towards the possibility of discerning theological unity within the NT, *all* writers adopted an analytic approach towards the theologies of the biblical texts at some point within their TNT. This methodological recognition of NT diversity reflects that, whatever the presuppositions held by the writer, *no contemporary NT theologian can fully escape the recognition of NT theological polyphony* produced by post-Enlightenment research into the biblical texts. Even the two-stage method of Hahn, which is expressly designed to uncover unity, remains essentially analytical in its treatment of biblical texts throughout both volumes. Secondly, however, the inconsistency in implementation of the analytical approach in all TNTs with the exception of Vouga’s was surprising. TNTs tended to offer synthetic treatment of texts or text blocks, often the Pauline corpus or Johannine writings, even when they had explicitly rejected the quest for NT unity or a “proof texting” dogmatic *loci* approach. Only Vouga can be said to have truly attempted to preserve the literary and semantic integrity of each individual NT text by means of his use of the dialogical model. Thirdly, attempts to argue for theological unity within the NT required either a high level of theological abstraction in order to achieve any coherence or were more specific but at the cost of marginalising some texts by adopting primarily Pauline or Johannine theological language.



The consequence of the latter fact led to two proposals. The first proposal was to move the location of NT unity *before* the articulated linguistic expression of the NT texts. Instead, the possibility of two shared presuppositions shaping the theologies of the NT was advanced – Israel’s Scriptures and the Christ-event as interpretive lenses. These presuppositions were deliberately left without any further articulated content since the hermeneutical employment of the former and the interpretation of the significance of the latter is precisely part of the polyphony of the NT theologies. The second proposal locates unity *beyond* the NT texts in the act of theological construction by an interpreter. Any “unified” theology derived from the NT texts is not “discovered” or “excavated” but is constructed by an interpreter who selects, interprets, gives weight to certain texts in the interests of producing a theologically satisfying work. However, this activity does not correspond with the intentions of the texts themselves and should not claim to do so.

At this point in the investigation the constructive proposal was made to adopt the dialogical TNT model as the most ethically, hermeneutically and theologically viable model for theologising with the NT texts. The advantages of the dialogical TNT model are its commitment to the literary integrity and alterity of the NT texts. It manages to preserve these features by dialoguing selected texts with regard to a relevant theme. In turn, the use of a thematic rather than narrative approach allows interdisciplinary contributions to be added to the conversation regarding the theme under discussion. The dialogical TNT does not therefore limit itself to the *historical and literary* task of simply exploring existing intertextual relations but is a *constructive theological approach* that uses the texts as resources for engaging theologically with any number of topics. However, the existing attempts at a dialogical TNT by Caird, Isaak, and Vouga all had their shortcomings in terms of consistency of implementation and the provision of an adequate theoretical basis. Consequently, a hermeneutical basis for the dialogical model was sought in order to help ensure its more consistent application whilst simultaneously opening up the theological task to interdisciplinary contributions by avoiding a specific theological hermeneutic restricted in application to the texts of the NT canon.

Chapter five sought to provide the appropriate hermeneutical foundations for the dialogical model. Countering Esler's rejection of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as unsuitable for a TNT model due to its alleged hegemonic pretensions, the claim was made that Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics actually requires acknowledgement of the ethical responsibility of protecting the alterity of the text as an interpretive recourse. Due to the transformative potential of textual alterity in the act of *Horizontverschmelzung*, the preservation of NT polyphony becomes theologically vital in order to maintain the ongoing contribution of the NT theologies to the contextual and constructive theological task. Biblical polyphony both opens up and demarcates the limits of an interpretive space in which acts of Christian theological construction can take place. The NT canon can thereby be seen to be resourcing and constraining the ongoing productive activity of the theological interpreter who, by virtue of their finitude and historical contextuality, can never be said to have "completed" the theological task.

Whilst philosophical hermeneutics supplies a broad hermeneutical basis for understanding the dialogical TNT model, a number of scholars have drawn on the more limited work of Bakhtin to move towards a dialogical model for biblical theology. This work was interpreted as providing confirmation of the appropriateness of the dialogical model in general. Furthermore, Bakhtin's work as a whole was seen to supply useful terminology to clarify aspects of the model. Olsen's suggestion that Bakhtin's notion of (provisional) "monologization" could refer to the act of interpreting the polyphonic biblical texts as a theological unity, albeit with the proviso that eventually any given monologization loses its compelling force, seems a helpful way of construing the theology produced by the dialogical TNT model. Claassens went further in suggesting a dialogical model that entered into an infinite conversation over the meaning of the biblical texts, though her limitation of the scope of the conversation was problematic. Furthermore, Bakhtin's notion of "outsiderness" reinforced the importance of alterity for understanding, whilst his commitment to the text as an "utterance" forming a semantic whole and rejection of the unity-contradiction polarity in favour of more nuanced forms of understanding as "agreement", supported the hermeneutical claims made throughout the work so far. In short, philosophical hermeneutics and Bakhtinian theory provide more

than adequate grounds for maintaining the viability of the dialogical TNT model as hermeneutically and ethically viable. Crucially both hermeneutical contributions support the key commitment to sensitivity towards NT polyphony for the task of constructive understanding and, in so doing, indicate the theological potential of a dialogical model.

At this point the groundwork was laid for the attempt to resolve the three problems facing the TNT cited by Barth. The rejection of the quest for an inherent or original theological unity within the NT texts as a hermeneutically inadequate mode of engagement with NT polyphony releases the TNT from the history-theology tension which characterises all of the problems noted by Barth. The adoption of a dialogical TNT model in which the interpreter constructs a theology with recourse to the texts indicates a decisive shift towards the TNT as a *theological* task. This decision has far reaching consequences as the final chapters seek to make clear.

The troubled question as to whether the TNT should be substituted by some form of *Theologieggeschichte/Religionsgeschichte* is precisely the question as to how adequately the TNT can function as a historical genre whilst simultaneously maintaining its Christian theological commitments. By assigning the TNT a constructive theological task, space was made for the *Theologieggeschichte* to be recognised as an equally legitimate genre/discipline with a different focus and method, namely historical. Consequently, the *Theologieggeschichte* is free to employ the full range of texts, both extant and hypothetically reconstructed, in the attempt to portray and explain the development of Early Christianity. This decision resolves *all three* of the problems raised by Barth. To be explicit, the third problem is answered by asserting that the TNT and *Theologieggeschichte* are *separate and equally legitimate tasks with different ends in view*. The first problem is thereby also resolved insofar as the historically reconstructed proclamation and life of Jesus belongs in the *historical domain* of the *Theologieggeschichte*, whilst the theologically concerned TNT draws only on the canonical texts as a normative resource. This is not to say that none of the insights of the *Theologieggeschichte* may inform the dialogical TNT, only that the dialogical model has abandoned the narrative-developmental model in favour of a thematic-constructive

approach that dialogues actual biblical texts, leaving no place for an explicit treatment of a reconstructed “historical Jesus”.

Furthermore, the second problem of unity and diversity raised by Barth has already been criticised as hermeneutically unhelpful. Both the dialogical TNT *and* the *Theologieggeschichte* resist attempts to find an original articulated “unity”. Interestingly, Alkier notes that the exegetical discipline “Geschichte des Urchristentums” is really a post-Enlightenment development since Baur, which functions as a hermeneutical response to the discovery of NT diversity and the overturning of the idea that Christian history represented a “falling away” from an original pristine unity.<sup>1210</sup> If this is the case, then the claim that the *Theologieggeschichte* can relieve the TNT of its obligation to trace historical development and excavate the original unity of early Christianity is, in fact, not as bold an innovation as some might claim but rather the logical outcome of a hermeneutical process that is almost two hundred years old. At the same time, the notion that the *Theologieggeschichte* is somehow “more objective” than the TNT was critiqued, given the fact that it is also an interpretive and constructive discipline subject to the finitude and ideological constraints of the historian. As such, the *Theologieggeschichte* may inform the reading of the biblical texts norming the TNT but both disciplines remain subject to regular critique of their interests, aims and objectives.

Positioning the TNT as a *theological* discipline also serves to challenge its widespread construal as a “bridge” to systematic theology. The TNT rather constructs theology through interdisciplinary dialogue in relation to the normative biblical texts and therefore already falls in the domain of systematic/constructive theology. The “guardian” model of biblical theology which views it as protecting the integrity of divine revelation due to concerns that thematic approaches may “impose alien categories” on the texts is theologically unproductive and methodologically unsound. The dialogical TNT’s commitment to textual integrity and alterity necessarily protects the biblical texts from undue distortion by virtue of its hermeneutical and methodological approach.

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<sup>1210</sup> S. Alkier, *Urchristentum: Zur Geschichte und Theologie einer exegetischen Disziplin*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 253-254.

Furthermore, the recognition that any theology is not divine revelation itself but the provisional monologization of a finite human interpreter serves to relativise any particular TNT, whilst liberating the theologian to be explicit about their interpretive moves rather than claiming to be presenting “God’s Word” untainted by dogmatic interests. Consequently, the industrial process type model of “exegesis – biblical theology – systematic theology” for obtaining “usable” theology is rejected in favour of “textual interpretation – (*Theologieggeschichte*) – constructive dialogical theology” as an interlinked web of research domains that contingently and incessantly affect each other.

The dialogical TNT model is *theological* precisely by virtue of its commitment to biblical normativity as the *process* of constantly referring to the biblical texts in an attempt to ensure that any theological construction may be supported by the texts. The direct consequence of this is that in order to be genuinely Christian theology, the norming process must relate to both parts of the biblical canon – a fact that more than doubles the level of canonical polyphony available as a resource for theological construction. Whilst the BTNT genre has recognised the need to incorporate the OT canon into a Christian TNT, the current accounts fail to allow the distinctive voices of the OT to be heard in their own terms. Consequently, the argument made here is that the TNT must ultimately give way to a full blown biblical dialogical model that allows the full range of OT texts to be consulted in their own right as worthy contributors to the task of theological construction.

The hermeneutical and methodological investigation undertaken with relation to the treatment of NT diversity in the TNT has led to a shift in terminology and focus as the work developed. Concern with the literary *genre* of the TNT ultimately became displaced by the need for a dialogical *model* that refers to the whole biblical canon within an interdisciplinary discourse that cannot be contained within a single (even multi-volume) work. Furthermore, the *historical* concern of writers with the quest for the original unity of Early Christianity inherent in the NT texts was replaced with a focus on the *theological* task of productively engaging NT diversity in a hermeneutically appropriate

and ethically sound manner. Overall, one may simply refer to these shifts as a move away from *extracting unity* towards *embracing diversity* as a vital theological necessity.

Thus, the position taken here in relation to the Theissen-Räsänen debate mentioned in chapter three is clear. The NT is a building site in which various theological constructions are captured “frozen” in time for the benefit of norming later theologies. However, the constructors working in this building site are the contemporary theological interpreters who seek to shape theologies that may be “supported” by the NT texts. We thus return full circle to the idea of the search for theological unity as an existentially driven quest to define Christian identity noted at the outset of the project. The foregoing study seems to suggest that such a quest is hermeneutically naive. Furthermore, an existential quest that seeks a reductionist account of Christian identity by means of theological axioms will inevitably end up doing violence to the polyphonic diversity of the biblical canon. It would perhaps be better to view Christian identity as always “under construction” in the constant interplay of human historical contextuality and Scriptural polyphony. Consequently, drawing on the Jewish conception of identity as related to *praxis* rather than assent to narrow theological articulations, it may be more helpful to abandon the existential quest for “unity” and define Christian identity by reference to a *normative process* rather than a norm. Thus, Christian identity may be defined by the *praxis* of constructing one’s theology (worldview?) in dialogue with the bi-partite biblical canon. The dialogical biblical model *is* the Christian theological task.

Some may feel that the arguments made here sacrifice too much. This may be particularly the case where, following Schlier, the name of the literary genre “Theology of the New Testament” is invoked to justify the task of discerning theological unity amongst the NT texts. Can NT studies really afford to abolish the TNT? How will the exegetical results of the discipline be synthesised and presented as a theological whole? The counter-claim humbly submitted here is that the days when the results of the discipline of NT studies could be synthesised into a summarising whole are long over. The plethora of methods and hermeneutical presuppositions guiding the interpretation of the texts and their subsequent theological use render such a vision romantically chimerical. The TNT

cannot fulfil such a function. Furthermore, it is not the business of theology to preserve literary genres but rather to find models of theological engagement appropriate to the object (“Gegenstand”) of investigation and sensitive to hermeneutical constraints. This dialogical model, which claims to be ethically sensitive, hermeneutically aware, and theologically productive, is an attempt to do precisely that.

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