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A Comparative Study of the Doctrine of Scripture in Article 4 of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession with the Doctrine of Scripture in the Works of Kister Stendahl

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN ARTICLE 4 OF THE APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

WITH

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE WORKS OF KRISTER STENDAHL

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This paper is to be a comparative study of the doctrine of Scripture found in Article Four of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession with the doctrine of Scripture found in various representative writings of Dr. Krister Stendahl. The paper will be an attempt to establish the relationship between the view of Scripture found in an article of the Lutheran Confessions and the view of Scripture found in a Lutheran biblical scholar who works from the perspective of what may be called the historical - critical method. In other words, the question this paper is asking is: Is the historical - critical method "Lutheran?" Or are these doctrines of Scripture antithetical, complementary, supplementary, or perhaps, impossible to compare?

This question is at the heart of much heated debate in our synod at this time. There are those who say that the presuppositions of this method are doctrinally unsound in that they (the presuppositions) deny, reject, or ignore the fact of the inspiration or divine authorship of Scripture. Others say that the method is a neutral tool to be used by the biblical student as he wishes it to be used. It is suspected that both of these opinions reflect incorrect, or at the least, inadequate information about this so-called method. One thing is clear; that our synod is greatly troubled by this new approach to Scripture. At the 1971 Synodical Convention in Milwaukee a resolution was adopted which is entitled: "To Evaluate Historical Critical Method of Interpretation." Having stated that the so-called historical critical method seems to be the center of

Synod's difficulty with biblical interpretation, this resolution resolved to have "The Commission on Theology and Church Relations give priority to continue its study and evaluation of this method of biblical interpretation and bring a recommendation concerning its use to the Synod in 1973."

For the writer this debate poses a serious problem. Many times the church has become concerned over this problem to the exclusion of all other challenges that face this church. This study does not wish to become merely another study that mulls over internal debate. Rather, it is hoped that this study can be a positive step toward resolution of the conflict that has held up the church in its mission to the world. Thus one goal of this paper is to arrive at a theological stance toward Scripture that will be pastoral in approach, honest with the biblical witness, and a reflection of an honest confessional commitment. While written under the guidance of the Department of Systematic Theology, this paper hopes to be systematic in the sense that it strives to come to grips with not only the content but also the task of Scripture. That task is the proclamation that all men have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the most difficult aspects of this paper is the attempt to come to grips with what is loosely called the historical - critical method. This term defies definition. It is one thing to one man. It is quite another thing to another. It was decided that the term historical - critical method could not be the point of departure for the comparative study. This is the case for several reasons. First, the term, as has been mentioned, does not denote any set pattern. To deal with the "method" would be to deal only with ambiguities and statements with qualification

upon qualification upon qualification. Also, it was feared that the reader would get "hung-up" on the statements about the historical-critical method and never get to the point of the paper; namely, that it is a comparative study. The writer does not wish to argue the difference between various biblical scholars.

Thus it was decided that the best approach would be to pick a scholar who could be representative of what is called the historical-critical method. This assumes that there are similarities of approach that make it possible to talk about "representation." The focus of the comparative study indeed shifts from a method to a particular man's method. That is, we are always working in this paper one step removed from what may be called the historical-critical method. We are dealing with the view of Scripture found in the works of Krister Stendahl. We are not dealing with the view of Scripture found in the Historical-critical method." Perhaps in this the comparative study loses some of its directness. But in reality this is the only way this method can be approached with any kind of accuracy. It is not fair to ask Stendahl to defend Bultmann simply because they have been thrown together into a category loosely labeled "historical-critical method."

Dr. Stendahl was chosen for this study for two reasons. First, because he is a leading New Testament exegetical scholar. Formerly a professor, now Dean of Harvard Divinity School, he has made major contributions to the field of New Testament studies. The paper focuses on his writings where he specifically comes to terms with questions of hermeneutics. An attempt has been made to deal with these writings honestly without "putting words into his mouth." From the very beginning of the research paper it was clear that nothing would be gained by making

Dr. Stendahl say what he does not in fact say. The success of this paper lies in how accurately the two doctrines of Scripture can be articulated. The second reason for choosing Dr. Stendahl for this study was that he is a Lutheran. The criticism may be made that this is too parochial. But it was decided that it would be a definite advantage in this study to examine the works of a man who, himself has come to terms with the tension between his growing biblical insights and his commitment to the Lutheran Confessions.

On one side of the coin, then, the comparative study will be dealing with the doctrine of Scripture found in the works of Krister Stendahl. Admittedly, what is being attempted is to find the doctrine of scripture of a man who represents what has loosely been labeled "the historical-critical method." On the other side of the coin, the comparative study will be dealing with the doctrine of Scripture found in Article four of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Admittedly what is being attempted here is to find a doctrine of Scripture that can be labeled "Lutheran."

Article Four of the Apology was chosen for this study because it deals directly with the problem of a view of Scripture. The question at hand in Apology IV is just this, "What is your view of Scripture?" In June of 1530 the Augsburg Confession was presented at an imperial diet called by Emperor Charles V. Article IV of this confession stated that Scripture clearly teaches that men do not merit the forgiveness of sins; but rather, this forgiveness is a free gift from God through faith, for Christ's sake. The Roman Catholic church in its confutation of the Augsburg Confession stated, "For it is entirely contrary to Holy Scripture

to deny that our works are meritorious."[2] Thus the question that Melancthon faced in Apology IV was most intimately connected with a view of Scripture. He and the confutators claimed the same source for their opposing views. Obviously the point of departure was their view of Scripture. Melancthon saw his task as that of first setting forth the way that the Lutherans looked at Scripture. Then he could go on the matter of justification. Though Apology IV is formerly an article "de justificatione," it contains all the makings of an article "de Scripture." It is for that reason that Apology IV was chosen as the "Lutheran representative" to be used in a comparison with a "historical-critical method representative."

There is still one crucial point that must be discussed in this chapter. Neither in Apology IV nor in the writings of Krister Stendahl is an explicit doctrine of Scripture spelled out. However, this paper presupposes that a doctrine of Scripture is implicit in one's approach to Scripture. Thus the procedure that this paper will follow is this; the principles of hermeneutics in Apology IV will be spelled out (see chapter 2) also the principle of hermeneutics in the writings of Krister Stendahl will be spelled out (see chapter 4).

To arrive at a doctrine of Scripture in either the works of Krister Stendahl or Apology IV becomes, then, a matter of recognizing a view of Scripture from the approach to Scripture.

Hermeneutics is that part of the theological task that sets forth the principles that are to guide the biblical student in his interpretation of Scripture. In other words hermeneutics is the theory of exegesis, or interpretation. Martin Franzmann in his "Essays in

Hermeneutics" wrote, "Accordingly, the principles that are to guide us in the interpretation of Scripture must be derived from the nature of Scripture itself."[3] Thus one's view of the nature of Scripture and one's principles of hermeneutics are a closely related set, one pointing to the other. Ralph Bohlmann states that "the attitude of an interpreter toward the nature of Holy Scripture will materially influence his principles of biblical interpretation."[4] If a man's principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) can be set forth accurately and clearly, then these principles will lead us to a view of Scripture that reflects the view of the interpreter.

Needless to say, if this task of deducing a view of Scripture from an approach to Scripture is shown to be impossible this comparative study will prove to be pointless. But the possibility must be examined before we can make our judgement. The writer is aware of the fact that what started out to be a comparison between a "Lutheran" view of Scripture and a "historical-critical" view of Scripture is now a comparison between a representative "Lutheran" view of Scripture and a representative "historical-critical" view of Scripture. It is hoped that even though we are always one step removed from the center of the issue we can move forward in our understanding of this issue. This point is one of great importance. For it is becoming increasingly clear that if our Synod is to move forward in a united, brotherly manner her pastors and laymen will need to be led to a solution to this vexing problem of the doctrine of Scripture.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCIPLE OF HERMENEUTICS IN APOLOGY IV

The goal of this chapter is to arrive at a principle or set of principles which can be understood as guidelines of Apology IV for interpreting Scripture. These guidelines are what is called hermeneutics. It will be remembered that in Chapter One hermeneutics was defined as the principles that are to guide the student in his interpretation of Scripture. This chapter will examine Apology IV in order to isolate the principle or set of principles used in interpreting Scripture within that article.

It must be stated that nowhere in Apology IV is there a section that explicitly says, "This is our principle of hermeneutics." Thus, to isolate a principle of hermeneutics is to a degree a matter of judgement. The reader is responsible for testing the findings of this chapter to see if they accurately reflect the data, and the thrust of Apology IV. Any references to specific sections of Apology IV will be identified by paragraph number. Any direct quote of Apology IV will be taken from the Theodore G. Tappert edition of The Book of Concord.

As was noted in the first chapter Apology IV is in some aspects a case study in hermeneutics. Though the question at hand is "de justificatione," Melancthon saw that the first step in his argument would have to be setting forth the Lutheran approach to Scripture. Apology IV is critical of the Confutators' approach to Scripture in several areas. They make all kinds of mistakes in their exegesis. In their translation of a text they do not even follow the rules of logic

and grammar (357). They neglect doing careful word studies in order to gain an accurate translation (72, 112). They bring their own opinions to the text; not allowing the text to speak for itself (224, 253,286). They do not understand the text in its obvious intended literary sense (152,280). These exegetes violate the general principle that a text must be understood in the light of all of Scripture. That is, certain passages cannot be ignored while other passages are emphasized out of proportion (131,183,221,284,286).

According to Apology IV the Roman Confutators managed to make all of these mistakes while yet claiming that their teachings were based on Scripture. But as one reads Apology IV he gets the impression that, though Phillip Melancthon disapproves of these exegetical mistakes, he could live with them if need be. Because the Confutators make a much more serious error in their approach to Scripture than mere sloppy exegesis, Melancthon's chief argument is not with their exegetical method but rather with their understanding of what Scripture is. In order to set the record straight Melancthon states at the very beginning of his argumentation, "All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promise (5)." Having asserted this basic point, namely that Scripture can be understood only as one of two messages, Melancthon goes on to make his most devastating criticism of the Confutators. He states, "Of these two doctrines our opponents select the law and by it they seek the forgiveness of sins (7)."

In this criticism we can see how an article of faith entitled "de justificatione" is in reality a case study in hermeneutics. It is Melancthon's opinion that the Confutators have lost sight of the one article of faith that alone can give meaning to any article of faith.

The Confutators have lost sight of the fact that sinful man stands before his righteous God as God's child "sola gratia" and "sola fides." This central truth about man's relationship to God is what is at stake in Apology IV. It is at stake, that is, a point of argumentation, because the Confutators view and use God's revelation, Scripture, in an erroneous fashion. They pick out only those passages that refer to the law of God (lex) and neglect those passages that refer to the promise that God has made to man in Jesus Christ (promissio) (183,286). Melancthon states that, "It is surely amazing that our opponents are unmoved by the many passages in the Scriptures that clearly attribute justification to faith and specifically deny it to works (107)." The Confutators pick out the law and by that they seek to be forgiven by God.

The Confutators have gone all wrong in their interpretation of Scripture. They have the wrong guideline in their interpretation. Their guideline is certainly understandable in the eyes of human reason. "For to some extent human reason naturally understands the law since it has judgement naturally written in the mind (108)." They have through their human reason grasped the wrong guideline. They have the wrong principle of hermeneutics. This is not just an academic error. This choosing of the wrong guideline has profound consequences. For all who take the lex as their principle of hermeneutics have lost hold of the one true article of faith. They have abolished the promissio. Melancthon states, "But by their denial that faith justifies and by their doctrine that because of our love and works we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation, our opponents simply abolish this free promise (186)."

This is the tragic error that Apology IV confronts. To seek forgiveness of sins and justification in the lex is to abolish the promissio. We can now see why Melancthon begins this article with an insistence that the first step in resolving the difference between the Lutheran position and the Roman position is to properly distinguish the lex from the promissio. If the lex is not seen as lex (that which kills), then the promissio cannot be seen as promissio (that which gives life). The principle of hermeneutics for the Confutators was that the lex is the starting point for understanding Scriptures. The principle of hermeneutics for Apology IV was that the promissio is the starting point for understanding Scripture.

The proper interpretation of Scripture is that interpretation that first takes hold of the promissio, the message that sinful man is a child of God only by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. Melancthon says, "We must not reject the promise of Christ when the Law is preached and works are enjoined. We must first take hold of the promise...(266)" To "first take hold of the promise" is the most radical thing a man could do. For to take hold of the promise is to say to God - "Yes! Yes, God, I trust that you are merciful and gracious to me only for Christ's sake. I will place my life and death into your hands." This is the point that Apology IV is making. To be sure, it is a point "de justificatione." But it is a point that is brought home by a setting forth of the principle of hermeneutics which is to be the guideline for all interpretation.

Melancthon states, "We call upon devout minds to consider the promises;... Later we add the teaching of the law (188)". This is to

be the procedure in interpreting Scripture: first the gospel, then the law. But what if the passage clearly is a statement of God's lex? What then of the principle of hermeneutics found in Apology IV?

> To all their statements about the law we answer immediately that the law cannot be kept without Christ, and that if civil works are done without Christ they do not please God. In commending works, therefore, we must add that faith is necessary, and that they are commended because of faith as its fruit or testimony. (184)

The lex never stands alone. The promissio must be added. Human reason cannot look at the lex by itself without getting that deep-seated, "old Adam" impulse to trick himself by saying "Well, maybe if I really tried I could..." At all of those times when the lex is rubbing against a man's soul, he must remind himself that the lex is really lex. It must be added that the lex cannot be kept without Christ. That promissio is needed. Man needs that message that he is God's child, not because of what he could do or has done, but because of what God has already done for him in Jesus Christ. Melancthon shows that this rule of interpretation is a part of the New Testament.

> In the preaching of the law there are two things we must always keep in mind. First, we cannot keep the law unless we have been reborn by faith in Christ, as Christ says (John 15:5), "Apart from me you can do nothing." Secondly, though men can at most do certain outward works, this universal statement must be permitted to interpret the entire law (Heb. 11:6), "Without faith it is impossible to please God. (256)

This, then, is the Lutheran rule of interpretation. We start from the promissio. We must first take hold of the gospel if we are to rightly understand Scripture's message to us. Having separated Scripture into the two main doctrines, law and gospel, the Lutheran exegete must understand all passages in their context. Perhaps we can say that to Melancthon the proper context of any given passage is not the preceding

or succeeding passages but rather it is the light of the promissio that brightens all of Scripture. It is a rule that all passages on the law must be interpreted by the Gospel (372). But this rule does not only apply to passages where the distinction between lex and promissio is at stake. When Apology IV deals with prayer (332-336) or the certainty of hope (344-347) it is always in the light of the promissio that these concerns are settled. This rule is to be used as a "key" by which the meaning of each passage of Scripture is to be "unlocked."

When this rule of interpretation is not followed the proclamation of the Church is nullified. For "in this controversy the main doctrine of Christianity is involved (1)." The way to evaluate any interpretation is by its proclamation, or lack of proclamation, of Jesus Christ. Does an interpretation exclude Christ? Then it is to be rejected (290). The outcome of taking hold of the lex rather than the promissio is that it "buries Christ (18,81)". This is the most tragic of consequences. Yet, time and time again, Melancthon points out that the Confutators are hiding Christ (286), or excluding Christ (290). In grabbing hold of the lex they reject Christ (260). This position of the Confutators "obscures the glory and blessings of Christ (3)." Only when the promissio is grasped with all its power can man truly live as the child of God. The power of the promissio rests in the fact that time and again sinful man can go to Christ the blessed mediator for comfort and consolation. "We are not trying to be overly subtle when we condemn those who teach that we merit eternal life by works, omitting the faith that takes hold of the mediator Christ (378)."

All interpretation of Scripture must work toward the proclamation of Christ (promissio). If an interpretation of a passage excludes Christ, or if the lex is interpreted at the expense of Christ (24), then that interpretation must be rejected. The glory of Christ can be set forth in all of Scripture only when the interpreter has first laid hold on the promissio. It is the task, or mission, of the lex to aid in the proclamation of the promissio. In order for the lex to serve the promissio, it must be brought into "submission" under the promissio. Only then will it point to the promissio rather than abolish it.

The principle of hermeneutics in Apology IV is an outgrowth of the main doctrine of Christianity. We are God's children "sola gratia". This message of "sola gratia" is the promissio of a faithful God. Man can understand God's words to him (the "words" are a "word" of lex and promissio) only by first taking hold of the promissio. Only with the starting point being a firm hold on the promissio can Scripture be properly interpreted. That is, only with a hold on the promissio can Scripture be interpreted in such a way that Christ might shine (299) and good works might be praised "in such a way as not to remove the free promise (188)."

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN APOLOGY IV

In his book entitled Theology of the Lutheran Confessions Edmund Schlink states, "Furthermore, in the actual use of Scripture by the Confessions there is implicit not only a doctrine of Scripture but also principles of interpretation..."[1] Having examined the principle of interpretation of Apology IV in the previous chapter, we now must try to arrive at a doctrine of Scripture implicit in that principle of interpretation. It has already been pointed out that the source of the difference between the Lutherans and the Roman Confutators was not in what they read but in how they read it. The starting point for the Confutators was that part of Scripture that is isolated as lex. The starting point for the Lutherans was that portion of Scripture that is isolated as promissio. Melancthon, in a certain sense, began writing Apology IV by saying, "I must set forth my view of Scripture in order that the doctrine of justification (promissio) might show forth." Our beginning in reading Apology IV is a sort of inverted parallel. We begin by saying. "We must examine the doctrine of justification (promissio) to get to the view of Scripture."

It perhaps seems unfair to use an article of faith entitled "de justificatione" as the means for arriving at a doctrine of Scripture. But according to Apology IV it is impossible to ask how Scripture is to be interpreted without constantly asking how men are to be saved. For it is Melancthon's conviction that the gospel (promissio) is the starting point for a proper interpretation of Scripture. Having separated the

message of Scripture into two categories, lex and promissio (5,183) he states that one can rightly understand these messages only when faith has grabbed hold of the promise. "We call upon devout minds to consider the promises,... Later we add the teaching of the Law (188)." "We must not reject the promise of Christ when the law is preached (interpreted) and works are enjoined. We must first take hold of the promise... 266" Indeed, Melancthon even goes so far as to say that this doctrine of "sola fide" is a rule by which "all passages on works can be interpreted (372)." This rule of interpretation (promissio as the starting point) is the principle of hermeneutics found in Apology IV. It is under the impact of this promissio that a doctrine of Scripture in Apology IV can be formulated.

In our day any discussion about a view of Scripture is formulated along the line of authorship. The question about the nature of Scripture is defined as "verbally inspired," or as God's Words in the sense that God wrote them. Some find grounds for such a view of Scripture in Apology IV in paragraph 108. At this point in the article Melancthon appears to be exasperated at the Confutators for their lack of understanding. He states, "Do they suppose that this is repeated so often for no reason? Do they suppose that these words fell from the Holy Spirit unawares?" (108) Though this is just a passing comment certainly not meant to be the basis for a "doctrine of inspiration," there are those who have used this statement to point out that the confessions presuppose that Scripture is the inspired Word of God.[2] There are several things that must be said about such a use of paragraph 108. For one thing, the validity of that point is called into question by the fact

that the sentence is pulled out of the thrust of Melancthon's argument. It is used out of context. By way of analogy, in paragraph 88 Melancthon states, "And lest we suppose that Paul made the statement 'faith justifies' inadvertently, he reinforces and confirms it with a long discussion in Rom. 4 and repeats in later in all his epistles." Adopting the approach used with paragraph 108 we could be justified in saying that Apology IV assumes that the writers of Scripture were capable of error and only the oft-repeated elements are sure statements of truth.

But this is foolishness. It is making a point with no power. To get caught up in an argument of this sort is to completely miss the point of Apology IV. Let the point be conceded. Apology IV assumes the working of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture. Where does that lead us? Down what great avenue of truth did it lead the Roman Confutators - who assumed the very same thing? Indeed, if Apology IV says anything it is that a doctrine of Scripture that relies only on inspiration is not incorrect but rather completely insufficient as a key to understanding God's word. For what is always at issue in the Scriptures is not "who wrote it?" but rather "what is the message?"

Any discussion on the doctrine of Scripture in Apology IV must in essence be a discussion on the role of the promissio in our lives. For it is not so important that the Bible is a book written by God. What is most important is the message that is central in the Bible; that is, the Gospel, the Good News that God has declared sinners to be saints on account of Jesus Christ. The very center of Scripture is Jesus Christ (promissio). We cannot see the truth about Scripture (have a correct doctrine of Scripture) until we see the truth about Christ (who is the center of Scripture).

Our present day discussion of a doctrine of Scripture is often formulated through the question of inspiration in order to establish the authority of Scripture. According to this view, the authority of Scripture rests on its divine authorship.[3] But Apology IV challenges us to make the Gospel the center of authority. It is the content of Scripture that makes it authoritative. What is at the heart of any discussion about Scripture's authority is the very crucial and personal question, "Is this book something on which I can rely?"

Those who stress the doctrine of inspiration are answering this question by saying, "Yes, you can rely on this book because God wrote it." But Apology IV gives a different answer to this question. In effect it says, "Yes, you can rely on this book because see how Christ is in the center? See how forgiveness of sins, assurance of salvation, comfort and consolation are held out to all believers?"

We are working with two different notions of authority. One view says that authority of Scripture stems from the inspired author. Indeed Apology IV does assume that the author is inspired. But the authority of Scripture does not come from the author of the "words" but rather from the author of the "message". This seems like "double talk." But it is not. The center of Scripture is the promissio. The authority of Scripture lies in the author of the promissio. That is, the authority of Scripture comes from the forgiving Christ. The fact of inspiration is a statement about authorship. But authority is a power that moves, exerts force, rules and changes things and people. This authority is in the promissio. The point of all of this is that Apology IV does not pin the authority of Scripture on the inspiration of Scripture (though it accepts

the inspiration of Scripture). To speak of the authority of Scripture is to comment on the role of the promissio in our lives. The promissio counts here and now. It has the authority, the power, to make me God's child. Herein lies the authority of Scripture.

Perhaps at this point it would be helpful if we again remind ourselves what was at stake in Apology IV. What was at stake was the "main doctrine of Christianity." (2) This main doctrine is the promissio, the message of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Somehow this doctrine was destroyed by the Confutators. Intricately involved in the "source" (4) of the conflict is the fact that of the two chief doctrines of Scripture the "opponents select the law." (7) Melancthon was forced to redefine the subject matter. He had to restate the problem so that the discussion no longer revolved around the lex but rather around the promissio. The doctrine of Scripture in Apology IV is that the Scripture is God's Word. It is God's message about what God has done in His son Jesus Christ. Melancthon showed that Scripture is not a message about what man must do to be God's child. This is a view that revolves around the lex. Today the doctrine of Scripture in Apology IV is the same, though it speaks to a different question. Scripture is a message about what God has done in His son Jesus Christ. It is not a message about what God has done in writing the Bible.

To pin a doctrine of Scripture solely on a doctrine of inspiration is to sadly miss the point of Apology IV. Such a doctrine of Scripture is so inadequate that it borders on the incorrect. It carries the burden of this criticism: to pin the doctrine of Scripture on a doctrine of inspiration puts Scripture in a "sub-gospel" light. It is "sub-gospel" in

the sense that it does not point to the center of Scripture - Jesus Christ. In some cases it can even be said that those who pin their doctrine of Scripture on a doctrine of inspiration hide Christ. This happens when the ultimate criterion for membership in the body of Christ becomes not faith in Jesus Christ but rather a "proper" view of inspiration. Such a view is indeed "sub-gospel". It hides the message of Scripture; or, at least, competes with it.

In 1530 Apology IV radically called for a view of Scripture that allowed Christ to become brighter and brighter. This article of faith redefined the exegetical task from a "sub-gospel" task to a task that pointed to the promissio as the heart of Scripture. This is the message of Apology IV for us today. Just as the content of faith is synonymous with the basis of faith; so also, the content and authority of Scripture are identical, namely, Jesus Christ. For Apology IV there is only one correct view of Scripture. That view of Scripture is the view that brushes aside all "sub-gospel" questions and shows Jesus Christ as the ultimate authority of Scripture because He is the ultimate center of Scripture.

According to Apology IV, to say the Scripture is God's Word (inspired) is not enough. For the dilemma in reading God's Word is to " "catch" what God wants to give. This can be done only when the interpreter takes hold of the promissio (Jesus Christ) and uses that promise to hold back that part of God's Word (lex - which is just as inspired as the promissio) which destroyed us in our sins. (300) The proper view of Scripture rests not on "who is the author?" but on "Who is being proclaimed?" We can properly "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" God's word only when in faith we have grasped the Word made flesh as our Lord and Savior.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCIPLES OF HERMENEUTICS IN THE WORKS OF KRISTER STENDAHL

The goal of this chapter is to identify the principles of hermeneutics in the works of Dr. Krister Stendahl. For the purpose of this study, various articles written by Dr. Stendahl have been read. Chief among these are "Biblical Theology, Contemporary" in volume 1 of The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, and The Bible and the Role of Women.

In Dr. Stendahl the basic hermeneutical principle revolves around the tension of a time span of 19 centuries (in the case of the New Testament). The basic historical fact that these documents were written 1,900 years ago has tremendous impact on our understanding of the Bible. This tension is identified by the questions, "What did it mean?" and "What does it mean?" These two questions represent the challenge that faces the biblical interpreter. The first step in biblical interpretation is to recognize this tension. To pass over this span of 19 centuries lightly is to not take seriously the nature of the biblical witness.

This distinction between "What did it mean?" and "What does it mean?," while allowing for a meaning in Scripture for the here and now, challenges the presupposition that the "revelation is available in a pure and unambiguous form."[1] Each of these questions demands that it be seen in its own right. To Dr. Stendahl the challenge is to face each question honestly and openly.

The answering of the question "What did it mean?" is the task of descriptive biblical theology. In his own words Stendahl describes it

this way: "Our only concern is to find out what these words meant when uttered or written by the prophet, the priest, the evanglist, the apostle - regardless of their meaning in later stages of religious history, our own included."[2]

To Dr. Stendahl the first half of the science of translation is exactly that - a science. He seems to say that this is an endeavor of historical understanding which is by and large an intellectual task only. He states; "The descriptive task can be carried on by believer and agnostic alike."[3] Later in the same article he says that the goal of descriptive biblical theology is "to have the original spelled out with the highest degree of perception in its own terms."[4] In another article he says, "the task of biblical studies, even of biblical theology, is to describe, to relive, and relate in the terms and the presuppositions of the period of the texts what they meant to their authors and their contemporaries. To furnish the original."[5]

"To furnish the original," or to "accept the original in its own terms" is to examine the biblical texts by lifting them out of the theological concepts with which they have been associated and by putting them back into their "sitz im Leben" of Israel or the Church.

Facing head on the question of "What did it mean?", Dr. Stendahl clearly states the challenge that this question poses for the exegetical task. In a lecture given at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, in March of 1964, on the topic of "Renewal through the Scriptures," he made the point that it is the task of the exegetical department "to really think in Paul's terms." He stated that the real question is not the question of the "J E P D Stuff" or the "Q Stuff." That is just "kid's

stuff" compared to the real question. The real question is, "What really went on in the New Testament World? What were their questions and answers?"

Coming to grips with this first question of the "What did it mean?" is the first step in the task of biblical interpretation. It is a crucial step, to be sure. But, nevertheless, it is only the first step. The challenge to the church of today is not to reconstruct the New Testament era and then to go through life in the twentieth century playing first century Christian. Today's biblical interpreter must also face the very real question "What does it mean?" This task of examing what it meant then in order to see what it means now is the challenge of living with the biblical witness in a creative fashion. In what way can we apply yesterday's answers to today's questions? What are the guidelines in this transition of 1,900 years? The following quote from Dr. Stendahl represents in part his thinking on an aspect of this problem.

> We have learned to see with the eyes of the believers of the first century. We understand that they understood the teaching of Jesus to be a proclamation about something which was about to happen. In the light of their experiences they recognized the resurrection as His messianic enthronement and this together with the spirit formed aa basic yet partial fulfillment of the coming of the kingdom. To obey His teaching was not primarily to repeat it but to watch what happened and to interpret it in the light of what He had said. The obedience to His teaching went by necessity beyond what he had taught."[6]

To Dr. Stendahl, the process of answering "What does it mean?" is not a matter of blind repetition of a first century action or series of actions. The initial event must be reinterpreted and re-applied as the situation calls for such reinterpretation and re-application. Thus we are forced again to ask, "What is the principle, or principles, by which "What it meant" can be translated into "What it means." Dr. Stendahl is

very clear that a mere literal translation from the original into the modern is not an adequate answer to the problem. He appeals to the theologian to be "bi-lingual" in the sense of being able to work not just with the words but also the patterns and modes of thought of the New Testament Church.[7] Thus he states, "With the original in hand, and after due clarification of the hermeneutical principles involved, we may proceed toward tentative answers to the question of meaning here and now."[8]

But there is precious little "due clarification of the hermeneutical principles involved" in Stendahl's works. Perhaps he tips his hand when he says "Once we confine ourselves to the task of descriptive theology as a field in its own right, the material gives us means to check whether our interpretation is correct or not."[9] But this quote does not help us see any principles by which we can answer the question "What does it mean?" It does not show us how to answer the question only how to judge our answer. Once again we must pose the problem, "How can 'What it meant' be translated into 'What it means?'"

Stendahl proposes as an answer to this problem "a systematic theology where the bridge between the centuries of biblical events and our own time was found in the actual history of the church as still ongoing sacred history of God's people."[10] Such a theology sees the Christian existence as a life lived by the constantly renewing power of the Spirit, not as a faith which rests on concepts that can be deduced from the teachings of the prophets, Jesus or Paul concerning God's acts. Thus the history of the church is not a history that is theologically bare on the contrary, such a theology would "recognize that God is still the God who acts in history when he leads his church to new lands and new cultures and

new areas of concern."[11] What is called "church history" is actually the "history of salvation" which is God's acts in the covenant and in the Christ being handed down in history. As Stendahl says, "The church lives, not only by the aorist of the Holy Spirit, but by the perfect sense as the Greeks understood it: an action which is completed and the effects of which are still with us."[12]

If one tries to find a principle by which all passages can be interpreted for today, he is bound to end up only frustrated. The meaning for today is always tentative, and always open to re-interpretation and re-application. In his article called "Messianic License" Stendahl deals with the question of the modern meaning for the Sermon of the Mount. Without going into his historical interpretation of the Sermon I would like to quote his application as an example of answering the question "what does it mean?" He states, "As far as man is driven by the Holy Spirit he can claim the Messianic License..."[13] He follows this statement by affirming that there is a great deal power in the Sermon on the Mount and that "the Church is responsible for the right handling of it."[14] The modern-day application takes place by the prompting of the Spirit within the context of the Church, that is, within the context of God's continuing action.

One tends to wish that Dr. Stendahl could be pinned down more precisely. But perhaps we will have to be satisfied with these imprecise findings - at least for the time being. This much we can say about the principles of hermeneutics in Krister Stendahl: The interpretive task must always be seen in the light of these two radically separated questions, "What did it mean?" and "What does it mean?" The challenge to any kind of hermeneutics in this task is to find a way in which this

time-gap can be bridged. At this point we cannot be any more specific than to say that the gap will be bridged in the context of the church by the prompting of the Spirit. That is, "What it meant" will mean something now only in the setting of God's people as they live by the power of God's Spirit.

This leaves several important questions unanswered. The key question of course would have to be, "What does this say about the nature of Scripture?" It is to this question that we will turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE WORKS OF KRISTER STENDAHL

To formulate "a doctrine of Scripture" from the principles of hermeneutics that Dr. Stendahl employs is perhaps an unfair step. The point of Stendahl's hermeneutics seems to be that there can be no static doctrine or view of Scripture. As the church moves farther away from the New Testament era it must continually re-evaluate its relationship with Scripture. Each era or situation within an era must define for itself what the functions of the Scripture might be.

Yet Dr. Stendahl makes basic assumptions about Scripture in his hermeneutics. These assumptions are to be the topic of discussion in this chapter. As was shown in the previous chapter, all biblical interpretation must take place under the umbrella of the time gap of 19 or more centuries. This historical fact must be recognized as the first step in understanding Scripture. Under the impact of this time gap the task of biblical interpretation must be separated into two areas. The first part of biblical interpretation deals with the question "What did it mean?" Here the biblical text is allowed to speak in its own terms, as an aswer to the questions of the Old and New Testament days. The second part of biblical interpretation deals with the question "what does it mean?" Here the original meaning, found in answering the first question, is applied to the present situation.

The presence of these two questions says that the Bible is conditioned by the time and setting in which it was written. This conditioning means that the terms, attitudes, and patterns of thought of the

New Testament or Old Testament cannot be transferred directly to the Twentieth Century. On this point Dr. Stendahl quotes Anton Fridrichson in commenting on what is valid in principle for our time and our church.

> Everything in the Bible emanates from the Christ-reality. Thereby its absolute character of revelation is given and articulated. But implied in the fact that the Bible is a testimony to and an interpretation of the Christ event is also the fact that it consists of words of men, contingent upon and determined by historical, sociological, and psychological circumstances. Thus we have in the Bible what is absolute only in and through what is relative. It is the work of the Spirit to make the word of men in the Bible into God's absolute word for us.[1]

In other words, what we have in the Bible is an application of the faith of the church to a particular setting or situation. In another article Dr. Stendahl states that "by and large we have to approach Jesus in the traditions about him, not the traditions about him in the light of factual, historical information."[2] The Bible is not a storehouse of religious information. It is a response of the Church to its present situation. Thus we are not so much to be involved in translating the biblical words to present situations but the faith of the church to present situations. Stendahl states, "That Christianity can be translated, with all the risks and the organic transformations of thought structures implicit in translation, has always been accepted."[3] What is significant in this quote is that what is translated is "Christianity." The total faith and impact of the Church. Translation is not narrowed to The biblical witness.

The point of this seems to be that the church must move away from a "biblicism" where we "get back to the Bible" in such a way that we are forced to use biblical-era thought structures and biblical-era answers to biblical-era questions in our attempt to preach to twentieth century man

with his twentieth century thought structures and twentieth century questions. The revelation of Scripture is couched within the message written by a first century man for a first century audience (speaking of the New Testament). This revelation somehow draws its message from what is called the Christ-event. Is this Christ-event a timeless truth which invades each and every situation and era? Stendahl seems to think that a term like "timeless truth" is not an adequate term in discussing the revelation of the Bible. In talking about the realistic interpreter Stendahl states, "He may even question whether the idea of 'timeless truth' is congenial to the biblical material in which the revelation in the Scriptures is always open to interpretation."[4]

But where does all of this leave us in our attempt to spell out Dr. Stendahl's doctrine of Scripture? For Dr. Stendahl, the Bible is to be seen as "neither idol nor symbol."[5] The concern here is that, in the case of making the Bible an idol, we forget that it is a book. For Dr. Stendahl, it is not proper to say "The Bible says," or "the Word of God says." What must be said is "God says in His word." The Bible is a book that needs the help of God's Spirit to make what is relative into a word that is absolute. Or in the case of making the Bible into a symbol, the concern is that the Bible is never taken seriously as a message stemming from the reality of God's actions in the world. Somewhere between these extremes of making the Bible an idol or a symbol lies the approach to Scripture of seeing the Bible as a book which has meaning to the Church as it functions in today's world.

This functional meaning of Scripture directs us to the use that Scripture plays in the church today. The Bible itself is not seen as a

"once and for all" action but as one of the fruits of the "once and for all" action of God in the Christ-event. The Bible itself came into existence under the impact of the actions of God. It can continue to function in the church only as the church is a part of the continuing action of God. As was quoted above "It is the work of the Spirit to make the word of man in the Bible into God's absolute word for us."[6] That "work of the Spirit" is the creative action of God which turns "church history" into "sacred history." The Bible has a creative effect on God's people because it is one of God's creative actions.

I repeat the last sentence in the first paragraph of this chapter. "Each era or situation within an era must define for itself what the functions of the Scriptures might be." This point must be emphasized. To Dr. Stendahl scripture can never be "defined," or set within a "doctrine." The church can never set its Scripture on an altar and step back and say, "This is our scripture. Its nature is this or that." Scripture takes on meaning and impact only as it is used. And each era must decide for itself how it will answer that crucial question "What does it mean?"

CHAPTER VI

THE CONCLUSION

At the outset of this paper it was stated that what would hopefully be accomplished here is a comparison of the doctrines of Scripture found in Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession and in the works of Krister Stendahl. To accomplish this task we have isolated the various principles of interpretation found in Apology IV and Krister Stendahl. From these principles of interpretation we tried to arrive at the respective doctrines of Scripture.

It has to be admitted that to a degree our comparison is like comparing apples and oranges. Apology IV and Krister Stendahl are approaching different problems from different points of view. To make them arbitrarily answer the same questions is to not be completely fair to either of them. But, if the reader will let his imagination roam freely, perhaps we could imagine a conversation between Melancthon and Stendahl as they met one afternoon at the neighborhood pub. As they get into the topic that we have set up (respective views of Scripture), maybe the dialogue would go like this.

Melancthon: Now Krister, what's all this stuff about a "time-gap" and "What is absolute only in and through what is relative?" Where's the gospel? How can you feel that the gospel is not in the Scriptures in a "clear and unambiguous form?" Look how Scripture urges Christ? Nothing could be more plain?

Stendahl: But Phillip, your approach to Scripture is too naive. You assume that, because you are totally concerned with the subject matter of

Scripture, the fact that it was written 19 centuries ago is unimportant. But a concentration on the subject matter does not bridge that time gap.

Melancthon: But isn't the subject matter the same? Is not the message of justification by grace still the center of Scripture?

Stendahl: The goal is not to find the "center of Scripture" per se. The goal is to let Paul's letters, or John's gospel, or Jeremiah speak in their own terms to their own situation. Then and only then can you start to say what the message of Scripture is for today.

Melancthon: But my point is that the message never changes. We are at one with the Christians of the 1st century because we have the same Lord and Savior.

Stendahl: But how do you know the message never changes if you never even attempt to keep alive that tension between the Centuries. If you have never let the biblical witness speak to you outside of your own theological constructs, then, of course, you are at one with the biblical witness. But that is because your biblical interpretation is an outgrowth of your theology. It must be the other way around if the Bible is to be a creative force in the Church.

Melancthon: No Krister, to understand Scripture properly requires a leap of faith that takes hold of the grace of God. There is, of course, merit in your insistence upon an accurate understanding of the biblical material in its own terms. But these historical insights do not mean that a person has properly caught the message that God wants to give. A person could answer with one hundred percent accuracy the question "What did it mean?" and still not understand Scripture. A person has properly read Scripture only when he has seen Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

Stendahl: But Phillip, when you approach Scripture with that thought in mind you are not doing biblical theology. You are doing systematic theology with the Bible as the center of your task. This is unfair to the biblical witness.

So much for our conversation at the neighborhood pub. It is clear that these men are operating from different perspectives. Melancthon in Apology IV says that when we approach Scripture it must be under the impact of the promissio that we read its message. Stendahl says that when we approach Scripture we must be aware of the time gap of 19 centuries and all the profound influence this 1,900 year period has had on our understanding.

Using the setting of a prison ward as an analogy I would like to make my point a little more clearly. Picture two prison wards where one can walk down a hallway in front of numerous doors to individual cells. In one ward the doors are all locked and unlocked by the same key. Only one key is necessary for the whole ward. But in the other ward each cell door has a different lock. In this ward many keys are needed. These keys are carried on a big keyring. Whenever a door needs to be opened the keyring must be hauled out and each key tried until the proper key is found then the door is opened.

The first ward symbolizes the approach to Scripture found in Apology IV. Each Scripture passage (cell) is opened by the same key. This key is the principle that the promissio is the starting point for interpreting Scripture. The second ward symbolizes the approach to Scripture found in Krister Stendahl. Each Scripture passage (cell) must be examined and opened as its specific lock requires. The only unifying factor is the keyring. This keyring is the sacred history of God's people. The keys

that are included on this keyring are the keys that are needed for the daily life of the prison ward. That is, the keys reflect the need of the people who use the prison cells. Thus the church holds together the way the door is to be opened.

But what does all of this say about the relationship between these two views of Scripture? There are, to be sure, differences. The insistence of Apology IV that the Gospel is the starting point is definitely not the same as Dr. Stendahl's insistence that the recognition of a 19 century time-gap is the starting point. But in reality is the conviction of Apology IV that the promissio is the starting point that much different from Dr. Stendahl's ultimate answer to his question of "What does it mean?" Dr. Stendahl states that "What does it mean?" can be answered only in the context of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit. Though this is still a bit nebulous, it certainly can't be considered antithetical to Apology IV. Dr. Stendahl is quoted as saying that the revelation of Scripture emanates from the "Christ-reality." Assuming that by "Christ-reality" he means the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, Lutherans can live comfortably with this idea of Scripture.

Apology IV denies, or at least ignores, the principle that historical distance creates a basic hermeneutical problem. The subject matter makes Scripture valid and applicable to all times. But to Dr. Stendahl this means only repeating Scripture when the challenge is to translate the message. Indeed Dr. Stendahl would probably point to Apology IV itself as an example of Sixteenth Century translation. The Reformers translated the biblical message of the confrontation with legalism that they experienced.

The most telling argument against Dr. Stendahl's approach to Scripture lies in the insistence of Apology IV that the interpretation of Scripture must never be pulled down to a sub-gospel level. That is, we must never talk about the interpretation of Scripture apart from the salvation of mankind. To say that the determining dynamic in biblical interpretation deals with the passing of time is to lose sight of the "gospel" level of Scripture. To Apology IV the determining dynamic in biblical interpretation is the necessity of first grabbing hold of the promise.

On the other hand, Dr. Stendahl might criticize Apology IV of not seeing Scripture in its true sense. The tension of the time-gap is lost. The biblical witness is not allowed to speak to the believer of today in its own terms.

To this point allow me to quote from an article written by Dr. Edward Schroeder.

> What is striking about this Lutheran hermeneutics is that it is not first of all based on intellectual principles - like scientific admonitions to be open-minded and unprejudiced, to look at the grammar, syntax, forms of literature, Weltanschauung in which the message is couched etc., but based on theological principles and convictions, namely, that the ultimate Word of God is Promise and therefore must be present in the written Word.[1]

There is a growing need to allow the biblical text to be free to be its own source of power for God's people. But this does not negate the necessity for submitting oneself to the promise of God. For God Himself has stamped the promissio over all that we do. That is, in spite of the fact that our lives are justly destroyed by God's lex, God allows us to force His lex into submission through his promissio. In fact, God Himself has brought His own Word of lex into submission under His word of promissio. As God's children we then follow suit

by saying "yes" to the promissio; whether it be in the area of living as a brother among brothers or in the area of interpreting God's message to us.

I do not believe that there are any reasons why we cannot use the tools of the historical-critical method as set forth by Dr. Stendahl in our interpretation of Scripture; as long as they are brought to submission under the promise of God that we are His children in Jesus Christ. To the degree that the two stated doctrines of Scripture serve the Gospel of Jesus Christ they can live together as brothers. They shall never be identical twins. But in the service of the promissio they can be brothers. What is important is that Christ is not buried. For the only reason that the Church interprets Scripture at all is to spread the message that "He is risen." It is in the service of this message that all doctrines must find their validity.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

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2. J. M. Reu, The Augsburg Confession-A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930) p. 351.

3. M. H. Franzmann, "Essays in Hermeneutics," Concordia Theological Monthly, IX, (August, 1948) p. 597.

4. Ralph Bohlmann, Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968) p. 23.

CHAPTER III

1. Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961) p. 1, footnote 1.

2. Ralph Bohlmann, Principles p. 32.

3. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

1. Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) p. 14.

2. Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) I, 422.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

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6. Ibid. p. 36.

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8. Ibid. p. 422.

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10. Ibid. p. 428.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Krister Stendahl, "Messianic License," Biblical Realism Confronts the Nation, edited by Paul Peachey (Nyack, N. Y.: Fellowship Publications, 1963) p. 150.

14. Ibid.

CHAPTER V

1. Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women, p. 16.

2. Krister Stendahl, "Implications of Form-criticism and Tradition-critism for Biblical Theology," p. 34.

3. Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women, p. 17.

4. Ibid. p. 13.

5. Krister Stendahl, "Uses and Misuses of the Bible," Pittsburgh Perspective, I (1960), p. 23.

6. Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women, p. 16.

CHAPTER VI

1. Edward Schroeder, "Is there a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" The Lively Function of the Gospel, edited by Robert Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966) p. 95.

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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, CONTEMPORARY.

A historical survey of major contributions to the field of biblical theology, such as in Biblical Theology, History of, makes it more than obvious that there is no one definition of this field on which biblical scholars can unanimously agree. It is true that a closer analysis of contemporary contributions to the field may well show that some of the older definitions are obsolete, as well as bring to light certain common tendencies in aim and method; but it will not eliminate the tensions between different conceptions of what a biblical theology is or should be. Such diversity was to be expected, since very different theological and philosophical presuppositions are necessarily involved.

And yet, in spite of these differences, recent biblical studies have gravitated with an unprecedented enthusiasm toward topics and problems which undoubtedly fall within the biblical theological field. This seems to be due to the fact that a new stage has been set for biblical theology, as a result of a new emphasis upon its descriptive task. Since consideration of this task has proved far more suggestive and creative than is often recognized, there is good reason to consider the nature of the new descriptive biblical theology and then to move toward its implications for other aspects of theology. This can be done only by way of hermeneutics. Thus we arrive at the following outline:

A. The descriptive task
  1. A new stage set for biblical theology
  2. What it meant and what it means
  3. Three approaches to NT theology
    a. Barth
    b. Bultmann
    c. Cullmann
    d. Conclusions
  4. Is a descriptive NT theology possible?
  5. The descriptive approach and the OT
  6. "Sacred history" and the unity of the Bible

B. The hermeneutic question
  1. As raised by a descriptive biblical theology
  2. Alternative answers to the hermeneutic question
  3. The significance of "canon" for biblical theology
  4. The preacher and biblical theology

Bibliography

A. *THE DESCRIPTIVE TASK.* 1. **A new stage set for biblical theology.** The alleged biblical basis for what has been called "liberal theology" in its classical form (the use of the term "liberal" in this sense, referring to the dominant theology *ca.* 1900, does not imply that many more recent types of theology are not just as "liberal" in their method and presuppositions)—i.e., the view that the OT is a witness to the evolution of a more and more ethical monotheism and that the gospels are biographies of Jesus as the even more refined teacher of the Golden Rule, the fatherhood of God, and the eternal value of the individual—the alleged biblical basis of this view was not shattered by the conservatives, but by the extreme radicals of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* ("history-of-religions school"; *see* Biblical Criticism). They could show, on the basis of the comparative material, that such a picture of Jesus or of the OT prophets was totally impossible from a historical point of view and that it told more about the ideals of bourgeois Christianity in the late nineteenth century than about the carpenter from Nazareth or the little man from Tekoa. What emerged out of the studies of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* was a new picture of the men, the ideas, and the institutions of biblical history. Those elements and traits, which did strike modern man as crude, primitive, cultic, and even magical, were now given equal and often greater emphasis than those which happened to appeal to enlightened Western taste. The "peril of modernizing Jesus"—to use Henry J. Cadbury's phrase—was fully recognized. Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer made a forceful plea for a most abstruse and appalling eschatology as the actual setting for Jesus and his followers; H. Gunkel, H. Gressmann, and S. Mowinckel placed the OT back in the matrix of Near Eastern myth and cult. Johannes Pedersen applied V. Groenbech's studies of human self-understanding in old Nordic religion to an extensive study of OT anthropology, where cherished distinctions between soul and body, magic and religion, cult and ethics, individual and collective, were thoroughly intermingled and lost much of their meaning. It became a scholarly ideal to creep out of one's Western and twentieth-century skin and identify oneself with the feelings and thought-patterns of the past. The distance between biblical times and modern times was stressed, and the difference between biblical thought and systematic theology became much more than that of diversification over against systematization or of concrete exemplification over against abstract propositions.

What emerged was a descriptive study of biblical thought—empathetic in the sense that it was beyond sympathy or antipathy. This was actually a new phenomenon in biblical studies, and yet it came as a mature outgrowth of the historical and critical study of the Scriptures. It differed in three ways from earlier contributions of historical criticism:

a) The strait jacket of doctrinaire evolutionism—in Darwinistic as well as in Hegelian terms—was

considerably loosened. While development and stages were recognized and noticed, the later stages were not preconceived as progression (e.g., from priests to prophets) or regression (e.g., from Jesus to Paul). Each period and each ideology was given enough attention to be granted a careful description on its own terms.

b) The question of fact—i.e., whether, e.g., the march through the Red Sea or the resurrection of Jesus had actually taken place as described—was not any more the only one which absorbed the historian. Now there was more concern about what the function and the significance of such an item or of such a message as "He is risen" might have been to the writers and readers (or hearers) of the biblical records. Form criticism and *Sitz im Leben* became the catchwords for students of the documents of temple, synagogue, and church.

c) The question about relevance for present-day religion and faith was waived, or consciously kept out of sight. This statement will be, perhaps, the strongest reminder of how biblical theology was swallowed up or threatened by a history of biblical thought or a history of biblical religion. This historicism or antiquarianism, with its lack of interest in relevance, has been challenged on many scores by modern writers. And yet it remains a fact that modern biblical theology would be quite inexplicable were it not for the fact that the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* had drastically widened the hiatus between our time and that of the Bible, between West and East, between the questions self-evidently raised in modern minds and those presupposed, raised, and answered in the Scriptures. Thereby a radically new stage was set for biblical interpretation. The question of meaning was split up in two tenses: "What *did* it mean?" and "What *does* it mean?" These questions were now kept apart long enough for the descriptive task to be considered in its own right.

2. What it meant and what it means. To liberals and conservatives alike, this distinction was not sharply in focus prior to the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. We may be justified in taking Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* as the most influential popular summary of liberal interpretation of the NT. It is not accidental that Harnack, as Bultmann points out in his Introduction to a reprint of the work (1950), "failed to realize the importance of the so-called *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and never truly became sympathetic with it." Albert Schweitzer had brought this aspect of Harnack's interpretation to bear upon the problem now under consideration when he said in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus:* "Harnack, in his 'What Is Christianity?' almost entirely ignores the contemporary limitations of Jesus' teaching, and starts out with a Gospel which carries him down without difficulty to the year 1899."

The apologetic intentions of the "liberals" should not be forgotten. In the light of later development, "liberal" came to stand for the "leftists" in the theological assembly. By the turn of the century this was not so. The liberals understood themselves as the mediating party who, often with a deep concern for Christianity and its future role in our culture and with a genuine piety, refuted the radical assaults of D. F. Strauss and others. But the way in which they carried on their apologetic task made them poor historians of religion. Their methods were basically the same as those used by the conservatives. Both were convinced that the Bible contained revelation which could be grasped in the clean form of eternal truth unconditioned and uncontaminated by historical limitations. The difference was only one of degree. While the orthodox interpreters found this revelation in the whole of scripture and systematized it by harmonization and by interpreting the less easily fitting by those passages which were hand in glove with their own systems, the liberals arrived at the pure revelation by way of more or less drastic reductions. This reductionist approach was often carried out by literary criticism, but once the *ipsissima verba* ("very words") of the prophets or of Jesus were established, these words happened to square well with the ideals of the modern age. Thus the tension between the past and the present meaning had been overcome before it could create any problems for interpretation. And this happened because the liberals were convinced that the teachings of the Bible were meaningful for modern man—just as the orthodox claimed the same for a vastly more challenging amount of biblical teaching. For the liberals the nucleus of revelation had to be that which could be hailed as relevant and acceptable to modern man.

The resistance to the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* was openly or unconsciously aimed against its disregard for theological meaning and relevance. By and large, Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit,* Mowinckel's *Psalmenstudien,* and Schweitzer's *Quest* appeared on the scene with no immediate relation to the ongoing theological discussion. Schweitzer's work did actually contain an Epilogue in which the author made a cautious attempt to draw out the ramifications of the thoroughgoing eschatology of Jesus for theology as well as for the life of the believer, but the return is rather small. When facing the shocking distance back to the Jesus of the gospels, Schweitzer finally takes refuge in an expectant mysticism where the Christ of faith comes to us as "One unknown," yet One who in an ineffable mystery lets man experience who He is. In the German edition this final sentence of the whole volume symbolically ends with ellipsis dots.

This ellipsis formed, however, a challenge, the response to which is the vigorous interest in biblical theology starting in the 1920's and showing no slackening tendencies toward the end of the 1950's. Once freed from the anachronistic interpretations of their predecessors, and forced to accept the hiatus between the ideas and ideals in the biblical material, the theologically minded student of the Scriptures slowly found a new and deeper relevance in what the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* described for him as the pre-Westernized meaning of sayings and events. In the broader context of cultural climate this tendency had its obvious similarities in the taste for the primitive, with its crude vigor in art, music, and literature. It was akin to Rudolf Otto's re-evaluation of religious phenomena in his study of holiness. It had striking parallels in the field of historical theology, where, e.g., Luther's own words

and intentions were sharply contrasted with the teaching of seventeenth-century Lutheranism, the sympathies of the scholars always siding with the former. But it was primarily the experience of the distance and the strangeness of biblical thought as a creative asset, rather than as a destructive and burdensome liability.

Without this new and nonmodernizing look at the Bible, Karl Barth's programmatic commentary on Romans or Rudolf Bultmann's *Theology of the NT*—or his book written in 1926 on Jesus—would be inexplicable. O. Cullmann's *Christ and Time*, as well as his more recent *NT Christology*, are the typical examples of a somewhat different result of the same ideal of historical distance. In OT studies, W. F. Albright's *From the Stone Age to Christianity* and G. E. Wright's *God Who Acts*, as well as W. Eichrodt's and G. von Rad's OT theologies, are all inspired by the same tension between the mind of a Semitic past and the thought of modern man. Yet most of these writers launch strong attacks on the "historicism" of the "historian of religion." By these terms they do, however, usually refer to other elements in the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* than the one to which attention has been drawn here—viz., the descriptive element, and its awareness of the distinction between what it meant and what it means.

3. Three approaches to NT theology. This distinction between past and present meaning has its specific problems for OT theology, and we may consequently be wise in first trying to clarify the issue in relation to NT theology. We may for this purpose go to three contemporaries who exemplify three different types of NT theology: Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Oscar Cullmann. They are all aware of what we have called the distance between the centuries. Especially Bultmann's relation to the radical tradition—over against the liberal—in biblical studies is obvious—e.g., in his references to D. F. Strauss. The question raised by the distance should thus be faced in its most radical form: Do these old documents have any meaning for us—except as sources for our knowledge of a small segment of first-century life and thought, or as means for a nostalgic visit to the first era of Christian history? If they have a meaning in the present tense and sense, on what ground do they have this meaning?

a. Barth. In the Preface to the second edition of his commentary on Romans, Barth argues for the exegesis of Luther and Calvin over against that of men like Jülicher and Lietzmann. The former are the only ones who really have tried to "understand" Paul, since, e.g., Calvin, "having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent, i.e., till Paul *speaks* there and the man of the sixteenth century *hears* here, till the conversation between the document and the reader is totally concentrated on the subject-matter, which *cannot* be a different one in the first and sixteenth century." The concentration on the subject matter (God, Jesus, grace, etc.) bridges the gap between the centuries, and it does so since they cannot but be the same. This identity in the subject matter guarantees the meaningfulness of the Pauline writings. They must speak about what Calvin (or the modern interpreter) knows as the subject matter. This is apparently so since God, Christ, and all of revelation stand above history. Thereby the tension between the first century and ours is resolved, or rather transformed, into a theological category of "otherness."

It is also significant to note that Barth speaks as if it were a very simple thing to establish what Paul actually meant in his own terms. To say that the Reformers interpreted Paul by equating the problem of the Judaizers and the Torah in Paul with the problem of work-righteousness in late medieval piety and that this ingenious translation or application of Pauline theology may be 80 per cent correct but left 20 per cent of Paul inexplicable—and consequently distorted in a certain sense the true picture of Pauline thought—to say this is to call attention to a problem which could not be detected, let alone criticized, by Barth or any truly Barthian exegete. Thus biblical theology along this line is admittedly incapable of enough patience and enthusiasm for keeping alive the tension between what the text meant and what it means. There are no criteria by which they can be kept apart; what is intended as a commentary turns out to be a theological tractate, expanding in contemporary terms what Paul should have said about the subject matter as understood by the commentator.

When the term "biblical theology" is used of works where this method is applied, it does not designate anything basically different from systematic theology, except that its systematic task is so defined as to make the Bible central in its work. Thus it may be convenient for classification within the realm of systematic theology to speak of this theology as "biblical" rather than philosophical. But from the point of view of biblical studies such a theology is not automatically "more biblical" than other types of systematic theology.

b. Bultmann. On the last page of Bultmann's *Theology of the NT* we find a statement (in italics below), apparently made in passing, which is worth noting in relation to the question if or why the biblical documents have any meaning for the present. He places the reader before an alternative: "Either the writings of the NT can be interrogated as the 'sources' to reconstruct a picture of primitive Christianity as a phenomenon of the historical past, or the reconstruction stands in the service of the interpretation of the NT writings *under the presupposition that they have something to say for the present.*" Bultmann sides with the second alternative, and in so doing he takes for granted that the NT has such meaning. For Bultmann, as for Barth, the common denominator of meaning is the subject matter; but for Bultmann there is only one subject matter which is valid: the self-understanding as it expresses itself in the NT and as it is experienced through human history until the present time. This gives to his NT theology a strikingly uneven character. In dealing with the message of Jesus, the kerygma of the early church and its development into the second century, his method is by and large descriptive; but in the exposition of Pauline and Johannine material—and this is almost half the whole work—the tone and even the method are different, since these writings lend themselves so

much more easily to anthropological interpretation.

Yet nobody could blame Bultmann for not having given reasons for what he is doing. Most of his later writings have centered around his plea for demythologizing, and it has become more and more obvious that this to Bultmann also implies a dehistoricizing of the NT. His attack on the historicism of NT interpretation (i.e., the use of the NT as a "source" for our knowledge of a historical past, be it the historical Jesus or the life and teaching of early Christianity) is centered in his emphasis on the NT as a message, a kerygma. The intent of NT theological utterances is not to state a doctrine (as for orthodoxy) and not to give the material for a concept (as treated by the historians). It is to challenge man in his own self-understanding, and consequently "the act of thinking must not be divorced from the act of living." When the NT kerygma witnesses to historical events (as in I Cor. 15:3-8), these "events" are of little significance as events; what counts is to recreate their effect on man's self-understanding. Thus —in Bultmann's own view—his NT theology becomes "theology" explicitly only where it clarifies the "believing self-understanding in its reference to the kerygma." As such—and only as such—has the NT "something to say to the present." Only on such terms does Bultmann find it possible to do justice to the intent of the NT.

c. Cullmann. In Cullmann, perhaps the most productive contemporary writer in the field of NT theology, we find a very different approach to biblical theology. If history is mute to Bultmann for reasons of hermeneutics and philosophy—a view which colors Bultmann's exegesis to the extent that he interprets NT eschatology as implying the end of history in Christ—Cullmann finds the key to NT theology in its understanding of time. Most discussions of Cullmann's *Christ and Time* have centered around a criticism of his distinction of linear time (biblical) versus circular time (Greek) and his idea of Christ as the center of time, but if these interpretations were refuted, the thrust of Cullmann's argument is still unchallenged when it urges us to recognize how the categories of time and history, rather than essence, nature, and eternal or existential truth, are the ones within which the NT moves (cf. Cullmann's "Le mythe dans les écrits du NT," *Numen*, I (1954), 120-35). Cullmann has thereby recaptured the mood of thought of the NT writers and stays within it long enough to work out its implication for different aspects of NT thought. On the other hand, it is not quite clear how Cullmann understands the relation between such a descriptive biblical theology in its first- and second-century terms and its translation into our present age; his hermeneutic discussions have nothing of the radical penetration of Bultmann's. His work is basically confined to the descriptive task, and when Bultmann could say about Cullmann—as he does about E. Stauffer's NT theology—that he "transforms theology into a religious philosophy of history," Cullmann's answer would be that NT theology *is*, whether we like it or not, a religious philosophy of history, and that he finds it difficult to see how this historical dimension can be translated away in any presentation of the gospel to the present age.

Such a discussion between Cullmann, Stauffer, and Bultmann would, however, be totally fruitless, for the following reasons: (*a*) All three take for granted that the NT has "meaning," but while Bultmann discusses from the vantage point of his own motivation for such a meaning, Cullmann (and Stauffer) have not clarified their answer to why or how they consider the NT as meaningful for the present age. Because of this lack of clarification, their works are read by many—perhaps most—readers as being on the same level of present meaning as Bultmann's or Barth's highly "translated" interpretations; and there are indications that they do not mind such a use of their works. A close study of Stauffer's NT theology makes it quite clear, however, that its method remains strictly descriptive; this is the more obvious in his extensive and impressive use of noncanonical intertestamental material as equally significant to picture the mood of NT thought. Cullmann's Christology follows suit in this respect. (*b*) Consequently, Bultmann's critique of such an approach should be the opposite to what it actually is. He could charge his opponents with not having seen the need for transforming or translating the NT religious philosophy of history into a contemporary theology, a need which he himself has epitomized in his quest for demythologizing. This would force his opponents to clarify why they consider such a dehistoricizing translation unnecessary or arbitrary. (*c*) Bultmann's case for the end of history in Christ and Cullmann's for ongoing history as the essence of NT eschatology have to be tested on the descriptive level. On this level a meaningful discussion can be carried on. If Cullmann seems to be much closer to the truth, Bultmann's interpretation may remain valid as a demythologized translation. But the "validity" of such an interpretation hinges then on the validity of the hermeneutic principles of the interpreter, and is of no direct consequence to the descriptive task of biblical theology.

In the present state of biblical studies, Cullmann's (and Stauffer's) contribution reminds us of Schweitzer, who felt himself compelled to present as forceful an eschatological picture of Jesus as he found in the sources, in spite of the fact that he did not see too clearly what its theological ramifications might be. This is the same as saying that these works carry the signs of hope which belong to every vigorous contribution to descriptive biblical theology, in spite of its hermeneutic unclarity. The pitfall for both the scholars and the common reader is the ambiguity by which the descriptive method is allowed to transcend its own limitations. (Stauffer later moved on to a quite different methodology, by which he claims to have established a new basis for the "historical Jesus.")

d. Conclusions. It thus appears that the tension between "what it meant" and "what it means" is of a competitive nature, and that when the biblical theologian becomes primarily concerned with the present meaning, he implicitly (Barth) or explicitly (Bultmann) loses his enthusiasm or his ultimate respect for the descriptive task. And yet the history of the discipline indicates that all types of biblical theology depend on the progress of this descriptive biblical theology, to which the contribution of the theologi-

cally irrelevant representatives of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* is strikingly great.

From the very beginning of the use of the term "biblical theology" in the seventeenth century, there has been the tension between the contemporary (be it scholasticism, conservatism, liberalism, or existentialism) and the biblical, but it is in the light of historical criticism that this tension has become clarified as one between two centuries with drastically different modes of thought. Once this difference became great enough to place the Bible further away from us—to the liberal theology the historical Jesus was closer to modern man than was the Christ confessed in the dogma of the church—the need for "translation" became a real one. Bultmann's plea for demythologizing—regardless of the way in which he carries it out—is certainly here to stay. But this makes it the more imperative to have the "original" spelled out with the highest degree of perception in its own terms. This is the nucleus of all biblical theology, and the way from this descriptive task to an answer about the meaning in the present cannot be given in the same breath on an *ad hoc* basis. It presupposes an extensive and intensive competence in the field of hermeneutics. With the original in hand, and after due clarification of the hermeneutic principles involved, we may proceed toward tentative answers to the question of the meaning here and now. But where these three stages become intermingled, there is little hope for the Bible to exert the maximum of influence on theology, church life, and culture. How much of the two last stages should belong to the discipline of biblical studies or to what extent they call for teamwork with the disciplines of theology and philosophy is a practical question, a question which in itself indicates the nature of the problem. If the three stages are carelessly intermingled, the theology as well as the preaching in our churches becomes a mixed or even an inarticulate language.

4. Is a descriptive NT theology possible? Many are those who express serious doubts about the possibility of the descriptive task as pictured above. Every historian is subjective in the selection of his material, and it is often said that he does more harm when he thinks himself to be objective—i.e., when he does not recognize, not to say openly state, what his presuppositions and preconceived ideas are. We can smile when we see how an earlier generation of biblical scholars peddled Kantian, Hegelian, or Ritschlian ideas, all the time subjectively convinced that they were objective scholars who only stated "facts." All this naturally calls for caution; but the relativity of human objectivity does not give us an excuse to excel in bias, not even when we state our bias in an introductory chapter. What is more important, however, is that once we confine ourselves to the task of descriptive biblical theology as a field in its own right, the material itself gives us means to check whether our interpretation is correct or not. To be sure, the sources are not extensive enough to allow us certainty in all areas; and the right to use some comparative material, while disregarding other such material as irrelevant for our texts, gives further reason for uncertainty; but from the point of view of method it is clear that our only concern is to find out what these words meant when uttered or written by the prophet, the priest, the evangelist, or the apostle—and regardless of their meaning in later stages of religious history, our own included. Such a program is by and large a new feature in biblical studies, a mature fruit of the historical method. It does not necessarily disregard the intent of the biblical texts, but captures the implication of their kerygmatic nature when it lifts them out of the framework of "theological concepts" and places them back into their *Sitz im Leben* (the "life situation") of Israel or the church.

This descriptive task can be carried out by believer and agnostic alike. The believer has the advantage of automatic empathy with the believers in the text—but his faith constantly threatens to have him modernize the material, if he does not exercise the canons of descriptive scholarship rigorously. The agnostic has the advantage of feeling no such temptations, but his power of empathy must be considerable if he is to identify himself sufficiently with the believer of the first century. Yet both can work side by side, since no other tools are called for than those of description in the terms indicated by the texts themselves. The meaning for the present—in which the two interpreters are different—is not involved, and thus total co-operation is possible, and part of their mutual criticism is to watch whether concern for meaning or distaste for meaning colors the descriptions where it should not.

5. The descriptive approach and the OT. The tension between the meanings becomes further complicated when we turn to the nature of OT theology, and this for two main reasons: (*a*) The OT contains material from many centuries of Israelite life. This makes it obvious that there are different layers of meaning within the same account. The account of the sacrifice of Isaac may well once have functioned as God's own command of substituting an animal for human sacrifices, but in its present setting in Gen. 22 the meaning is clearly seen as a witness to Abraham's ultimate obedience. Jacob's dream at Bethel seems to be a tradition by which the validity of the cult of the N kingdom was upheld by reference to how the patriarch had found Yahweh at that place, but once the rivalry between the two kingdoms was a dead issue, the story took on—or returned to—the meaning of a more general epiphany. This problem of interpretation and hermeneutics is certainly not confined to the OT; it forms the crucial problem of gospel research when we try to push beyond the evangelists to the actual words and deeds of Jesus. But in the OT it is a more flagrant and paramount problem. Thus already the descriptive task is faced with the constant question of "layers of meaning" through the history and transmission of OT traditions. The history of interpretation is woven into the very fabric of the biblical texts themselves, and the canonization of Torah, Prophets, and Writings did not disrupt the ongoing reinterpretation in sectarian or normative Judaism, as we learn from the intertestamental and the rabbinic material. Thus any statement of a descriptive sort about what an OT passage meant has to be accompanied by an address: for whom and at what stage of Israelite or Jewish history? The track along which the biblical theologian pursues the meaning of the OT is thus that of the

ongoing religious life of Israel as the chosen people of God and as responding to the events in its history which they interpret as the acts of God.

b) Secondly, the church was born out of a dispute with Jewish interpreters of the OT regarding its meaning, and first-century Christian theology of the more verbalized sort, as that found in Paul, centers around the terms on which the church finds the OT meaningful—e.g., as promise now fulfilled or as law binding on the members of the church. The Christian claim to the OT rested on the conviction that Jesus as the risen Christ was the Messiah to whom the OT witnessed. The church thereby sided with those interpreters of the OT who, like, e.g., the Qumran community, saw the center of the OT in its prophecies and promises, including those found in the five books of the Law, while the Jewish exegesis which became normative more and more emphasized the law as the core of revelation and the precious token of Israel's chosen status (*see* LAW IN THE OT). Neither interpretation had any similarity with the one prevailing in the theologized form of the Wellhausen interpretation of Israelite history, where the significance of the OT was seen in the evolution of ethical monotheism. Here, again, it was the radicals of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* who caused the construction of this liberal interpretation to crumble, corrupted and weakened as it was by the apologetic interest in a meaning for the present.

Any writer in the field of OT theology must be aware of this double outcome of the ongoing interpretation of the OT material, each within the framework of a community of faith. For the descriptive task both outcomes appear as live options, and neither of them can claim to be the right one if judged by the potentialities of the OT material itself. The act of faith by which the interpretations parted ways does not add anything to the OT material as such. Thus a Christian and a Jewish OT theology differ only where the question of meaning is pursued beyond the material and the period of the OT texts themselves. Such a Christian OT theology may find its organizing principle in the NT understanding of the OT in first-century terms (another descriptive task being thus involved) or in any one principle of Christian hermeneutics from later centuries, our own included. Nobody could deny the validity or even the necessity for the church of such a task, especially since it is in the very tradition of the NT itself. Yet the same warning which emerged out of our study of the meanings in NT theology applies to such an enterprise. The distinction between the descriptive function as the core of all biblical theology on the one hand, and the hermeneutics and up-to-date translation on the other, must be upheld if there is to be any chance for the original to act creatively on the minds of theologians and believers of our time.

6. **"Sacred history" and the unity of the Bible.** In OT theology even more than in its NT counterpart, history presents itself as the loom of the theological fabric. In spite of its intentions to be historical, the liberal interpretation of the OT overlooked this fact, substituting its evolutionistic interest in the development of ethics and monotheism for the sacred history in which Israel experienced its existence. In more recent times an anthropological approach to OT theology—not much different from Bultmann's approach, but unaware of its implicit demythologizing and dehistoricizing—has been tried with some success. Its success is partly due to its superior descriptive power if compared with that of the liberals.

In sharp contrast to what is called—with a gross generalization—"the Greek," we find the Semitic or Hebrew or biblical anthropology spelled out, and sometimes this very anthropology is hailed as the essence of biblical theology. But in works like those of G. E. Wright and G. von Rad, OT theology seeks its center where the ongoing life of Israel—from a descriptive point of view—experienced it—i.e., in its own history as a peculiar people, chosen by God. Especially in Wright this approach is coupled with arguments for the uniqueness of Israel as compared with surrounding people and cultures, a claim which seems to be a carry-over from another methodology. Israel's uniqueness was hardly based on its ideas about God or man but in its ELECTION consciousness, which in turn has given its thinking distinctive features which we may well call unique. *See* COVENANT.

But the thrust of an OT theology which finds the center in the acts of God (Wright) or in Yahweh's revelation through words and deeds in history (von Rad), is ultimately to establish that HISTORY is not only a stage upon which God (*see* GOD, NT) displays his nature through his acts, but that the drama itself is one of history. The salvation which is promised is one within history, either in terms of return of the dispersed people from all the ends of the earth or as a New Jerusalem and a glorified Israel in a new age, which in spite of its otherworldly features comes in time and history at the end of this present age (*see* ESCHATOLOGY OF THE NT). This historical consciousness of Israel lives by the remembering of the past and the ever new interpretation of it as a promise for the future. The cultic festivals, with their roots in Near Eastern ritual and their manifestations in the sacred kingship of the Davidic dynasty, become projected toward the eschatological future of bliss, righteousness, and peace. In all this the common denominator—from a descriptive point of view—is neither certain concepts of God as One or as acting, nor an anthropology peculiar to the Bible, but the ongoing life of a people cultivating the traditions of its history in the light of its self-understanding. It is guided therein by its priests, prophets, and teachers of wisdom, and thus this people moves toward a sure but ever evasive *eschaton*, keeping the law, which is the token of their chosenness.

Such a framework for OT theology is the only one which takes the descriptive task seriously, since it does not borrow its categories from the NT or later Jewish or Christian interpretation but finds the organizing principle in the very life situations out of which the OT material emerges as meaningful to the life of the people. From such a layer of meaning we may move back into the meaning of the different elements which were placed in this framework of sacred history. This may lead us to patterns of thought and blocks of tradition originally quite unrelated to the historical consciousness of Israel; but only with a full recognition of this framework can we adequately go behind it and analyze what the

original elements of the tradition may have been and how they were modified by their setting in the religion of Israel. Only so can we know to what extent they retained their character as remnants—whether weak or vigorous and creative—of an earlier period within the total tradition. As such remnants they deserve the fullest descriptive treatment and should not be swallowed up by a generalizing sweep of sacred history as though that sweep constituted the entire content of the OT.

When the OT is treated in this fashion as the living and growing tradition of a people, it yields a theology which brings us up to the parting of the ways by Jews and Christians. The description thereof places us where the NT stands, and we face the issues of NT theology as once Jews and Christians faced them in the first century. It brings into the NT the dimension of time and history which is essential to our understanding of the NT in its own terms. The announcement by Jesus that the new age is impending, and the faith of the early church that the Messiah is enthroned in heaven since he is risen and since the Holy Spirit has been poured out, comes as a vigorous claim for fulfilment of the OT promises, not accepted by the majority of the Jews. Yet Paul is convinced that before the kingdom is established on earth as it is now in heaven, the Jews will accept Jesus as the Messiah (Rom. 9–11). Thereby the drama of this age will come to its glorious end; the new age will be ushered in. Jewish exegesis in the Christian era went rather in another direction, and the eschatology which had reached its peak in Christianity as well as in parts of Judaism became more and more toned down. The emphasis shifted from the hopes for the future to the obedience in the present under the law. Rabbinic Judaism established itself as the normative interpretation of the OT, but the common denominator remained the same: the ELECTION consciousness which accepts the law as the gracious token of God's special favor to his people.

The only question which is beyond reach for such a descriptive approach is: Who was right—the Jews or the Christians? Its answer remains what it always was, an act of faith. If we approached OT theology in terms of developing ethical monotheism, we could, at least theoretically, arrive at an answer. This is, at any rate, what the liberal theologians implied when they hailed Jesus as a teacher superior both to the best of the prophets and to the wisest of the rabbis. But once we have accepted history as the fabric of biblical theology, we are thrown back to the same choice of faith which faced the first century. History does not answer such questions; it only poses them.

This highly simplified sketch of biblical theology in the encounter between the testaments suggests also in what sense there can be a biblical theology where the OT and the NT are held together as a unity. The significance of the OT for the NT is thus shown to be inescapable, just as it was in the early church before there was a NT in our sense. On the basis of the OT and its fulfilment in Christ rests the Christian claim to be the chosen ones of God, the true Israel in Christ, and—if Gentile by birth—"honorary Jews," heirs to the promises given to Israel. The crucial question arises when we ask what impact the NT should have on the presentation of OT theology. When biblical theology allows for such impact, it goes beyond its descriptive task, unless what is being attempted is merely a description of how the early church understood the unity between the OT and its fulfilment in what came to be the NT. But if the biblical theologian should go on to say that this is consequently what the OT text meant, he would be making either a statement of his own faith or a statement about the faith of the NT. If he says that this is what the OT means for the present-day Christian, he has proceeded from description, via hermeneutics, to a contemporary interpretation.

Thus the treatment of the Bible as a unity in this sense is beyond the task of descriptive biblical theology. Indeed, such a biblical theology will tend to discourage and prevent too facile a unification. To cite one example: Paul's radical concentration on the OT promises and his view of the law as holy and yet obsolete, once Christ has come, led Marcion to do away with the OT. He was in a certain way faithful to Paul—far more so than some Jewish Christians—but since his conceptual framework did not allow for a God who dealt with mankind differently in different dispensations, he could not imagine God as the originator of a holy law which he later declared obsolete. In its defense against Marcion, the church by and large forgot Paul's dialectic of time, and leaned over backward placing the OT and the NT on an equal basis. A truly descriptive biblical theology would have prevented both extremes. Thus the historian, with his descriptive approach, may clarify the issue of the relation between the two testaments.

There is, however, one way in which descriptive biblical theology does consider the Bible as a unity. The "sacred history" continues into the NT. Israel's election consciousness is transferred and heightened by the Christians—Jews and Gentiles alike. History is still the matrix of theology. Jesus does not come with a new doctrine about forgiveness for sinners; when he comes, "it so happens" that sinners accept him and the righteous do not. The first shall be the last. He does not leave his disciples primarily as a group of pupils who have rehearsed the "teachings of Jesus" as a lesson to teach others, but he has promised them a place as princes in the new Israel and has urged them to watch for the signs of the times and the coming of the kingdom. They do so; and his RESURRECTION and the HOLY SPIRIT are indications to them that Jesus is now enthroned as the Christ on the right hand of God. The PAROUSIA must be close at hand, and the Spirit is the efficient and sufficient down payment of their share in the age to come. As Israel lives through its history as a chosen people, so are the Christians now gathered together as the chosen ones, the church enjoying a higher degree of anticipation of God's redeeming grace and power than did even the messianic sect at Qumran. God is still the God of a people with an ongoing history, however short it may be: the NT develops its ecclesiology.

It is in such a framework that NT theology can be properly described, and this framework is basically the same as that of OT theology. Here is the common denominator from a descriptive point of view. Within this framework, which gives us the *Sitz im*

Leben of NT thought as a message and a self-presentation, we may study different ideas and concepts. We may find out how they are related or how they conflict with one another. But none of these ideas exists as general and eternal truth apart from the self-understanding of the church as the chosen community.

Thus there is a unity of the Bible on a historical basis. And this is the basis on which the two testaments came together. If, on the other hand, we approach the unity of the Bible or one of the testaments from the point of view of concepts and ideas, we may still be able to discern a certain unity in its anthropology, in its concept of God, or in its attitude toward ethics. A descriptive study of, e.g., Paul's concept of justification would find the roots in the Song of Deborah, perhaps the oldest piece of tradition in the whole Bible (Judg. 5:11; צדקות="saving acts of God"). The Gospel of Mark could be seen in relation to the kerygma in Acts 10; I Cor. 15, as we have learned from C. H. Dodd's *Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*. But we would look for a *type* of unity which was different from the organic unity to which the testaments themselves witness. And we would be faced with a diversity of views without the means to understand how they fell into a meaningful pattern for the biblical writers themselves. Paul's dialectic attitude toward the law—mentioned above in comparison with Marcion—is a case in point. We would be inclined to see a great—or merely contradictory—paradox in his statement about the holiness and the obsoleteness of the law, if we did not recognize that Paul thought in the pattern of dispensations. The tension between the teaching of Jesus and the early theology of the church would remain a total enigma were it not for the fact that the disciples interpreted what followed after his death as a drastic step forward in the timetable of God, leading toward the Parousia. Our description has to detect and clarify such a development. It could, however, hardly answer the question whether the disciples were right or wrong in their interpretation. We can only describe what they did and why they thought they were right while others thought they were wrong.

What has now been presented as the first and crucial task of biblical theology—i.e., its descriptive function—thus yields the original in its own terms, limiting the interpretation to what it meant in its own setting. An attempt has been made to show that such a task does not necessarily imply the disintegration of the biblical material into unrelated bits of antiquated information. It is quite capable of presenting the different elements as an organic unity *if that unity is the one which actually holds the material together in the Bible itself*. It has been indicated that any question of meaning beyond the one suggested by the sources themselves tends to lessen the challenge of the original to the present-day theologian and makes him unaware of the hermeneutic problem as a *sine qua non* for any such interpretation.

B. *THE HERMENEUTIC QUESTION.* 1. As raised by a descriptive biblical theology. A more thorough familiarity with the net result of such a descriptive approach as the one outlined above raises the hermeneutic question in a somewhat new form. No period of Christian theology has been as radically exposed to a consistent attempt to relive the theology of its first adherents. The ideal of an empathetic understanding of the first century without borrowing categories from later times has never been an ideal before, nor have the comparative sources for such an adventure been as close at hand and as well analyzed. There have always been bits and pieces of an appeal to the original meaning over against different later dogmas and practices of the church. The School of Antioch fought the School of Alexandria by such means; the Reformers argued with the papal theologians, and the Anabaptists with the Reformers, on such a basis; the pietists criticized the orthodox scholastics in the same fashion, and the liberal theologians claimed the same type of arguments against the evangelicals, etc. But never before was there a frontal nonpragmatic, nonapologetic attempt to describe OT or NT faith and practice from within its original presuppositions, and with due attention to its own organizing principles, regardless of its possible ramifications for those who live by the Bible as the Word of God.

The descriptive approach has led us far beyond a conglomeration of diverse ideas, the development of which we may be able to trace. We are now ushered right into a world of biblical thought which deserves the name "theology" just as much as do the thoughts of Augustine, Thomas, Calvin, and Schleiermacher. The translation of its content cannot any more be made piecemeal. The relation to the historical record is not any more one where systematic theology takes the raw material of nonsystematic data of revelation and gives to it systematic structure and theological stature. The relation is not one between a witness of a theologically innocent faith and a mature and sophisticated systematic theology. It is a relation between two highly developed types of theology. On the one hand, theologies of history, from which all statements about God, Christ, man, righteousness, and salvation derive their meaning and connotations, in terms of their function within the plan and on the plane of history; and on the other hand, theologies of an ontological sort, where Christianity is understood in terms of the nature of God, Christ, man, etc. *See* GOD, NT; CHRIST; MAN, NATURE OF (NT).

Within this pattern of nature or essence Christian theology has always tried to do justice to the historical element in the biblical material. But under the pressure of the thought-pattern inherent in the Western theological approach, biblical eschatology —i.e., the matrix of NT thought—was taken care of in a "last chapter" of systematic theology dealing with the "last things" (*see* ESCHATOLOGY OF THE NT). Thereby the very structure of biblical thought was transformed and its eschatology inactivated.

In more recent Protestant theology there have been serious attempts to do more justice to eschatology as the overarching category of systematic theology and the motif of the "two aeons," this age and the age to come, has been stressed—e.g., by the Lundensian theologians. But once again the outcome is a radical transformation, in that the aeons become internalized as levels of existence and experience in the mind and life of every Christian ac-

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cording to the formula "At the same time justified and sinner." The life on the border between the two dispensations as Paul knew them is lifted out of its historical context and becomes a timeless description of an inner dialectic of the Christian existence.

The focal point for a theological preservation of the historical dimension in the biblical material was found quite naturally in the stern insistence on the INCARNATION in Jesus Christ. But in this process the Incarnation was more and more intensively developed in terms of its ramifications for the nature of Jesus Christ, while its original connotations were far more centered in the chronological pattern of the Johannine Prologue: God had *now* come to men in Jesus Christ to tabernacle among them in a glory which outshone that of Moses and the law.

The situation could perhaps be best analyzed in the realm of NT Christology (*see* CHRIST), where significant strands of tradition display what later on came to be branded and banned as adoptionism—i.e., the concept of Jesus, who was made the Christ in his BAPTISM, or in his RESURRECTION, or by his ASCENSION. In the light of later doctrinal development it is easy to see why such a Christology was deemed heretical. But there is no indication that there was any conscious tension or argument, within the NT and in its time, between an adoptionist position and one which spoke of Jesus Christ in terms of pre-existence or virgin birth. This was apparently not a matter of conflict. It became so only when the biblical witness was forced to yield the answer to the question about the nature of Jesus Christ, and when this very question became the shibboleth of true doctrine. As long as the question remains within the theology of history, it does not ask what Jesus Christ is or how human and divine nature go together in him. It centers around the question: Who is he? Is he the Messiah or isn't he? In such a context an adoptionist answer coincides for all practical purposes with that of the pre-existence type. But once this framework is lost, the answers come miles apart from one another as contradictory, and the kerygmatic statements in Acts 2:32-37 are a sheer liability to the orthodox theologian when they hail Jesus as the one whom God has made both Lord and Christ after his crucifixion, placing him on his right side as the enthroned Messiah in heaven, whence he now could and did pour out the promised Holy Spirit as a sizable down payment of the age to come.

It is perhaps even more striking when Acts 3:18-21 urges repentance in order that times of refreshment might come from God and that he might send the aforetime-appointed Messiah, namely Jesus, who is now retained in heaven. Here the Parousia is really not the Second Coming of later theology. There is only one coming of the Messiah, the one at the end of time. We are used to considering the First Coming—i.e., the earthly ministry of Jesus, as a clear, uncomplicated "coming" of the Messiah, but recognize how many complications arose out of the interpretation of the Second Coming. To the theology manifested in Acts 3, the problem seems to have been the opposite one. The Parousia—what we call the Second Coming—was no "problem"; it was part of the Jewish expectations concerning the age to come. The problem was rather in the opposite direction: To what extent was the First Coming, the earthly ministry of Jesus, simply, and to what extent a real coming? How much of an anticipation did it imply, and to what extent did Jesus exercise messianic power within it? Once he was hailed as the Messiah enthroned in heaven, it was clear to the gospel writers that Jesus was the Christ, but there are enough indications left in the Synoptic gospels to show that he was so by inference from what had happened after Calvary, and by references about what he was to become.

Thus the pattern of history in this type of NT theology sheds new light on the discussion about the messianic consciousness of Jesus. Those who deny such a consciousness and credit the church with having made Jesus their Messiah overlook the nature of this theology of history, for which there needed to be no distortion of facts in the belief that Jesus was made the Messiah in his ascension and enthronement. Those who claim a straight messianic consciousness in Jesus overlook the evidence that the messiahship in Jesus' earthly ministry has a strong futuristic note. But from the vantage point of post-Resurrection/Ascension the church confesses: Jesus is the Messiah now, and consequently he was the Messiah then—but he had not really become so by then, nor is he yet the Messiah here on earth as he is to be at the Parousia. Such an attempt to catch the theological meaning as found in Acts 2-3 gives no sense to one who inquires into the nature of Jesus Christ, and it sounds strange to a "yes-or-no" approach to the problem of the messianic consciousness of Jesus. But it was highly significant to those who were eager to understand where they were in the messianic timetable of Jewish and Christian eschatology. He who changes the question can only be misled or confused by using the biblical text as a direct answer to it.

Texts and problems have been chosen from some of the highly controversial areas of NT exegesis only as illustrations to clarify the problem before us. The exegesis involved may well require correction or refutation, but the thrust of the descriptive method would always be of the same nature. The hermeneutic problem of biblical theology therefore centers in the clash between two types of theology. Each type includes a wide variety of alternatives. On the biblical side there are the different types of OT theology, some contemporary with one another, some later developments of earlier strata. In the NT it is somewhat easier to discern a Matthean, Markan, Lukan, Johannine, or Pauline theology, etc. But they all live within the presupposition of their respective centuries, and they all answer questions which require a historical consciousness and an awareness of where in God's history they now stand.

On the systematic side there is perhaps an even greater diversity, but in our Western tradition we find the questions asked by the systematic theologian to be by their very nature above history and beyond change. Such a systematic approach has been considerably intensified by biblical criticism, with its conflicting answers to exegetical problems and its radical doubt or mild uncertainty about many events and data on which systematic theology would have to rest its case. Lessing's statement that eternal truth cannot be derived from historical data became the

more pertinent to systematic theology once the biblical basis for orthodox Christianity was summoned to constant trial before the courts of historical criticism. But in a certain sense Christian theology had freed itself from its historical matrix already in the time of the apologists of the second century when the case for Christianity was spelled out in the terms of Hellenistic philosophy. It would be unwise to exclude some elements within the OT and the NT from a similar tendency; thus the need for and the possibility of a translation of biblical theology into new categories of thought is taken for granted from the very outset. Orthodoxy never had repristination as its program in the periods of its strength. The possibility of translation was given—as it is for Barth—in the reality of the subject matter, apart from its intellectual manifestation in the thought-patterns of the original documents. God and Christ were not Semites in such a sense that the biblical pattern of thought was identified with revelation itself.

Consequently, theology through the centuries acted in great freedom and with good conscience and considerable creativity. The fathers and the Reformers alike had no idea of a biblical theology apart from other theological endeavors. They were convinced that they were biblical theologians in the only sense one could be a theologian; in this respect Barth is certainly right in claiming the authority of Calvin and Luther for his biblical approach. But once the concern for a biblical theology as distinguished from other types of systematic theology has made itself manifest, a new problem arises. By way of a wide variety of hybrids where systematic and biblical categories were hopelessly intermingled, this concern has now brought us to the point where we can make reasonably clear statements about the meanings of the original in its own terms. This is why we have the right to say that the result of descriptive biblical theology has raised the hermeneutic problem in a somewhat new form.

2. Alternative answers to the hermeneutic question. In the light of descriptive biblical theology, it becomes possible to pass tentative and relative judgments on the alternative ways in which systematic theologians have stated the meaning for the present day—or for all times, if that is their conscious aim—of the biblical material. Such judgments can be made on the basis of the degree to which systematic theology succeeds in communicating the intention implied in the biblical texts, an intention which only a precise and uncompromised study of the original could detect. But such a judgment would always remain tentative, since the task of systematic theology is by its very nature one of translation from one pattern of thought into another, and every true and great translation is a creative effort, not just a painstaking and nearsighted exchange of the precise words of one language with its lexicographical equivalents in another language. Aquila's Greek text stands as the horrifying example of such a senseless approach. On the linguistic level we hold the view—at least Protestants do—that there is no language into which the Bible could not be translated well enough to communicate its message; and the student of the Greek gospels is already once removed from the Aramaic vernacular of Jesus' teaching. If this analogy were one of considerable precision, it would imply that there could be few philosophies, epistemologies, anthropologies, etc., which could not furnish the framework for a systematic theology by which the meaning of the Christian scripture could be stated. The history of Christian theology gives us reason to accept the analogy to a considerable extent. And the fact that the original is available gives us the right and the audacity to encourage such translation activity.

The attempt of the so-called "liberal theology" to detect the meaning for today in the evolution of an ever more refined religious insight with a higher level of ethics could hardly be ruled out as one of the alternative answers to the quest for meaning. Its validity as a Christian theology would hinge upon its ability to live with a growing awareness that its categories of meaning are utterly alien to biblical thought. Such an awareness is harder for the liberals to take than for any other theologians, since they traditionally have rested their case on its historical truth, and claimed the historical Jesus as the first protagonist for their own views. In their attempt to grasp the intention of the biblical message, they were unusually handicapped.

In the wake of liberal theology in its academic form—in its popular form it is still very much with us—came the tendency to establish contact with the world of descriptive biblical theology by simply substituting its categories for those traditional to Western theology. Well aware of the peril of modernizing Jesus, one was less afraid of archaizing oneself. The achievements of the descriptive biblical theology were dumped right into the twentieth century. The fact that those results now displayed enough structure and religious intensity to give the impression of a real theology made it quite tempting to try such a return to the prelogical, the Semitic, the Hebraic, the first century. All these categories were now subsumed under the heading "biblical," and this in an evaluating fashion, so that the theological ideal became an ill-considered parallel to the well-considered descriptive ideal of divesting oneself of the twentieth century. The "biblical way of thinking" was spelled out over against "the Greek." Once more the descriptive and the contemporary became interwoven, this time on the terms of the result of the descriptive approach. From a theological point of view this meant that revelation was identified with patterns of thought and culture; the need or the possibility of creative translation—i.e., the very glory of systematic theology through the ages—was undercut. No serious attempts at a conscious translation were made.

Such a criticism could certainly not be directed against what we may call the thoroughgoing translations, where the tendency is ahistorical or even antihistorical. Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann are two pronounced representatives of such answers to the hermeneutic problem. Neither of them finds anything normative in a theology of history as presented by the descriptive approach. To both of them history is utterly mute as far as theological meaning is concerned. Secondly, historical data are to them too shaky a foundation for the theological enterprise. Tillich thus approaches theology from an analysis of

Being, and he is consistent enough to claim no, or little, biblical support for such a category. Bultmann, on the other hand, finds his point of departure as well as arrival in human self-understanding, and for this he claims considerable biblical authority, since, according to him, the very intention of the kerygma (*see* PREACHING) is to challenge man's self-understanding. It appears, however, that Tillich, in spite of being perhaps the least "biblical"—in a conscious sense and by mode of language—of all contemporary theologians, is capable of communicating a wider range of biblical intention than does Bultmann with his highly anthropological concentration.

The most common response to the challenge of descriptive biblical theology is perhaps what may be called the semihistorical translation. Here the historical nature of revelation is taken seriously. The Bible is the record of the acts of God in history, and the kerygma is the powerful proclamation of these acts, a proclamation which shares in the creative power of the acts themselves. Thus the church is nurtured and renewed through the ages by this creative Word by which it rehearses the acts of God in sacred history. But somewhere along the line this sacred history has stopped, and there is only plain history left, with a more general PROVIDENCE at work. Thereby the God who acts becomes more and more the God who did act in biblical history. Consequently his acts appear as performed on the stage of history in order to demonstrate his nature. Theology reads his nature off the record of sacred history. The acts of God in history and the human response to them become calcified into a mold. This mold is then used by theology to make the true images or concepts of God as Him Who Acts. The difficulty with such a translation into nonpropositional and nonphilosophical concepts is that it accepts the historical framework of biblical thought for biblical times, since it yields the illustrations for our grasp of God's nature and will; but once the canon of the NT has drawn the line, there is a change of categories. Sacred history has come to an end, and what remains is a history where these deep-frozen images of God's acts are constantly brought to life in the remembrance of the church. The tension between a historical understanding of the Bible and a theologically void history of the church raises grave problems of inconsistency.

Such a problem would lead us to suggest that the only consistent alternatives would be either a radical, ahistorical translation as mentioned above, or—if the historical framework of biblical thought were to be retained—a systematic theology where the bridge between the centuries of biblical events and our own time was found in the actual history of the church as still ongoing sacred history of God's people. The blueprint for such a theology could be found in that self-understanding of Israel, both new and old, which descriptive biblical theology has laid bare as the common denominator of biblical thought. Such a theology would conceive of the Christian existence as a life by the fruits of God's acts in Jesus Christ, rather than as a faith according to concepts deduced from the teaching of the prophets, Jesus, and Paul regarding God's acts. It would exercise some of the same freedom which Paul's and the other NT letters do when they refrain from any nostalgic attempts to play Galilee into their theology by transforming the teaching of Jesus' earthly ministry into a system of theology and ethics. It would recognize that God is still the God who acts in history when he leads his church to new lands and new cultures and new areas of concern. A theology which retains history as a theologically charged category finds in its ecclesiology the overarching principles of interpretation and meaning. It does not permit its ecclesiology to be transferred to the second last chapter in its systematic works, followed by that on an equally inactivated eschatology. A theological awareness of sacred history seems to imply by inner necessity a growing recognition of the church as something far beyond an organization for the promotion of evangelism and theology. Through the ongoing sacred history, which is commonly labeled "church history," the fruits of God's acts in covenant and in the Christ are handed down to the present time. Within this history the task of preaching and theology under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is part of an ongoing sacred history. The chasm between the centuries is theologically as well as historically bridged by history itself, not only by a timeless kerygma which reaches the individual in an ever-repeated punctiliar action. The church lives, not only by the aorist of the Holy Spirit, but by the perfect tense as the Greeks understood it: an action which is completed and the effects of which are still with us.

3. The significance of "canon" for biblical theology. Such an approach would raise the question of the CANON (i.e., the limitation of the Bible to—usually—sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the OT and twenty-seven in the NT) in its sharpest form. As far as the descriptive approach goes, the canon can have no crucial significance. The church has a "Bible," but the descriptive approach knows it only as the "Bible of the church." In order to grasp the meaning of an OT or NT text in its own time, the comparative material—e.g., the intertestamental literature (Enoch, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Jubilees, etc.; *see* APOCRYPHA; PSEUDEPIGRAPHA) or the APOSTOLIC FATHERS, some of which clearly antedate some NT writings—is of equal or even greater significance than some canonical material. The revival of biblical theology in our own generation depends greatly on the way in which such material was brought to bear on the original meaning of biblical texts. But when the descriptive task is addressing itself to the interplay between different parts of the Bible, as, e.g., the NT understanding of the OT, it naturally takes cognizance of the limits of, as well as of the very idea of, canon. The descriptive approach also yields considerable insight into the nature and motivations for canonization itself and is capable of understanding the need as well as the rationalization connected with the long process of canonization. This in itself is one of the most puzzling and fascinating interplays of historical circumstances and theological concerns.

Once we go beyond the descriptive approach, the canon of scripture becomes crucial. To many of the modern types of biblical theology, the phenomenon of canonical scriptures seems to count little. To Barth it is INSPIRATION rather than canon that

matters, and the process of canonization is an external feature which neither adds to nor substracts from the power of the inspired writings to allow the Word to authenticate itself ever anew to him who hears. This is actually consistent with an ahistorical theology, since canonization so obviously is a historical process. It strikes the historian, nevertheless, that the concept of inspiration was of little or no avail in the first centuries of church history, when the church moved toward a closed canon. Apostolic origin, a doctrine in agreement with the succession of teaching, and wide usage and recognition in the churches were the chief criteria when the early church dealt with a wide range of writings, many of which were recognized as equally inspired with those finally received among the twenty-seven. But once the canon was closed, the doctrine of inspiration served well as an answer to the question: Why are these books different from all other books? To Bultmann, canon seems to be of little significance. The Christian self-understanding, to which the Bible caters, is found within it, but there are also parts of it which do not display it. Furthermore, its meaning for the present rests on the same basis as that on which any historical document has "meaning" beyond its value as a source for historical information. Finally, the understanding of the intention of the Bible as kerygmatic is not deduced from its canonical nature; on the contrary, it is the kerygmatic nature which gives the Bible its claim to authority.

To the radically historical alternative, as outlined above, much depends on the understanding of canon as a crucial category of any theological enterprise. This is certainly what we would expect if the historical nature of revelation is retained in a theologically potent framework of the sacred history of God's people. It is quite significant that, e.g., a biblical theologian like Cullmann, who has given such a strong impetus to the historical alternative, has also addressed himself extensively to the problem of tradition and canonization (see the chapters "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity" and "The Tradition," in *The Early Church* [1956]), and that his discussion takes the form of a new attempt to clarify how Protestant and Roman Catholic theology differ in their understanding of the interplay between the continuous tradition and the line drawn around the Bible by canonization.

To the historical approach the question raised by Harnack's studies in the NT canon becomes theologically significant: Why is there a NT, not only a fourth part added to the three units of the OT (Law, Prophets, Writings)? The descriptive approach suggests a theological answer: The NT—as well as the church itself—rests on the return of the Spirit. Judaism in the time of Jesus lived under the conviction that the Spirit had ceased, and when the question of valid scriptures was discussed, this cessation was related to the last of the prophets (i.e., Malachi). They recognized themselves as living in a period when Israel depended on the scriptural interpretations of scribes whose authority rested on faithful transmission, not on the Spirit in which one could say, as the prophets had done, "Thus saith the Lord." But they cherished the hope and the promise of the return of the Spirit. This would be one of the crucial manifestations of the coming of the new age. Thus it is quite natural that the conviction of the church that this new age had arrived and manifested itself in the Holy Spirit also gave the basis and theological rationale for what came to be the NT.

It is worth noting, however, that the closing of the NT canon is not based on any argument similar to that of Judaism regarding the OT—viz., that the Spirit ceased again. Such a view would have undercut the very faith and life of the church and was never considered in the argumentation regarding the NT canon in the first centuries. The development from diversified oral and written traditions to the twenty-seven books of the NT was of a more historical nature, guided by the necessity to protect the original from more and more undependable elaborations and distortions, some "heretical" but quite a few properly orthodox in their intentions. The gift of prophetic and inspired teaching was still a recognized phenomenon, an ever-repeated "aorist" of God's dealing with his church. But the significance of Jesus Christ and his apostles as ἐφάπαξ ("once for all"), and as the very basis on which the church was built—i.e., the "perfect-tense" dimension of biblical thought, as referred to above—called for a distinction between this and what the church understood as original and as its magna charta. Thus Cullmann seems to be right when he suggests that early Christian tradition bore within it the element which served as a compelling cause for the process of canonization. This element may be defined as the "perfect-tense" element of Christian theology. As such it affirms the acts of God as unique in Christ and his apostles, but it also points toward an ongoing history of the theological existence of the church. God's acts are not punctiliar aorists, frozen and canned within the canon, nor do they belong to the timeless present tense of mysticism.

The question as to the meaning of the Bible in the present—as distinguished from the meaning in the past as stated by descriptive biblical theology—receives its theological answer from the canonical status of scripture. In its most radical form, the question was: Do these old writings have any meaning beyond their significance as sources for the past? On what basis could it be valid to translate them into new modes of thought? On what basis could such an original—and such a translation—have a normative function for the life of the church? Such questions can be answered only within the consciousness of the church. The answer rests on the act of faith by which Israel and its sister by adoption, the church, recognizes its history as sacred history, and finds in these writings the epitome of the acts of God. As such these writings are meaningful to the church in any age. It is as canon, and only as canon, that there is a Bible, an OT and a NT as well as the whole Bible of the church as a unity. The old question of whether the Bible rests on the church or the church on the Bible is a misleading question from the point of view of the historical alternative. To be sure, the church "chose" its canon. But it did so under the impact of the acts of God by which it itself came into existence. The process of canonization is one of recognition, not one of creation *ex nihilo* or *ex theologia*.

as a reaffirmation of the line drawn protectively around the canon. In a situation when the growth of tradition threatened to submerge the "original"—as had the traditions rejected as noncanonical in the second and third centuries—Luther and Calvin reinforce the distinctiveness of the original and its superior authority in the life of the church. There are many things which we would like to know, historically as well as theologically, beyond what the Scriptures tell us. In the Roman Catholic tradition such quite legitimate and pious curiosity has centered around Mary, the mother of Jesus. Against such and other elaborating traditions the Reformers take a firm stand on *sola scriptura* as sufficient, yea, more than sufficient, unto salvation. The canon is enforced, and such a return to the "original"—given the circumstances of the time—engenders one of the most spectacular renewals of theology and church life that history has seen.

This is in its own way a suggestive illustration of how an exposure to the "original" plays into the life of the church. It gives us theology in a new key and breaks through many cherished presuppositions. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that the highly developed descriptive biblical theology of our own period in the long run may have a slightly similar effect. This is not to hail our age as capable of a new Reformation. But it does suggest that all theological renewal and creativity has as one of its components a strong exposure to the "original" beyond the presuppositions and the inherited frame of thought of our immediate predecessors in the theological task. Otherwise the history of theology would be an uninterrupted chain reaction of a philosophical nature, with Augustine correcting the earlier fathers, Thomas Aquinas correcting Augustine, Luther refuting Thomas, Schleiermacher touching up Luther and Barth, and Tillich carrying the traditional discussion up to our own time. The exposure to the "original," as it is made accessible by descriptive biblical theology, could give an alternative to such a development. This alternative is not new in principle; it has been at work through the ages. What is new is the radical concern for the original *in its own terms*.

If we were to take an extreme example of what this could imply, we could return to the area of Christology. We saw how in the NT "adoptionism" stands as an equal, side by side with other types of Christology, and how the reasons for its downfall were found, not in the NT, but in the framework of later philosophical presuppositions. If the ontology which caused its downfall in the theology of the church were not any more a live option to the philosophical structure of a systematic theology of our time, it would be quite possible to speak meaningfully and in a most orthodox manner about Christ in "adoptionist" terms when witnessing to his function and his reality. There may be many and other reasons why this specific case should not be followed up; our only concern is to indicate in what way a descriptive biblical theology gives the systematic theologian a live option to attempt a direct translation of the biblical material, not a revision of a translation of a revision of a translation. . . . It is

theology on the mission field and in the young churches, and there are signs that Western Christianity could be well served by a similar approach, with its sharp distinction between past and present meaning.

4. The preacher and biblical theology. A sharp distinction between what the texts meant in their original setting and what they mean in the present has considerable ramification for the work of the preacher, if he in any sense sees it as his task to communicate the message of the Bible to the congregation whose shepherd he is, and to the world which is his mission field. If we may use once more the analogy of the original and the translation—and this should not be considered more than an approximate analogy—the preacher is called upon to function as the bilingual translator. He should through his training and his ongoing studies attain the marks of a truly bilingual person—i.e., one who is capable of thinking in two languages. (By "languages" are meant, not the Greek and Hebrew of the Bible—although these would become more and more indispensable if the "bilingual" approach were taken seriously—but the modes and patterns of thought in the Bible.) His familiarity with the biblical world and patterns of thought should, through his work in descriptive biblical theology, have reached the point where he is capable of moving around in his Bible with idiomatic ease. His familiarity with the "language" of the contemporary world should reach a similar degree of perception and genuine understanding. Only so could he avoid the rhetorical truisms of much homiletic activity, where the message is expressed in a strange—sometimes even beautiful—mixed tongue, a homiletical Yiddish which cannot be really understood outside the walls of the Christian ghetto.

The demand for such a bilingual function of the preaching ministry may seem quite exacting, and indeed it is. It is also as it should be that the work of biblical as well as systematic theology finds its functional focus in the pulpit of the church. But it would be unreasonable to demand of the preacher—if now we may press our analogy once more—to become an academic grammarian of these two "languages" or a master of philosophical semantics. His task and his competence would remain by and large on the level of the vernacular, which he should have overheard long enough to be able to use it naturally and easily, as he would also use the Bible.

A mere repetition and affirmation of the biblical language, or even a translation which mechanically substitutes contemporary terms—often with a psychological slant—for those of the original, has little chance to communicate the true intention of the biblical text. To use an example from Bultmann's demand for demythologizing, the mere statement "Jesus is risen" directs the mind of most listeners toward a unique phenomenon, glorious or impossible as the case may be. On the basis of this phenomenon the believer is invited to base his hope for eternal life. A closer descriptive study of the resurrection passages suggests, however, that to the first listeners to the kerygma the phenomenon of the Resurrection was not surprising in the same sense. All Jews—

except the [illegible] the climax of God's history; the phenomenon was nothing strange and new to them. The only new thing was that it had happened. The claim of the church that Jesus was risen thus meant to those who accepted it that the general resurrection, to which they looked forward, had started to happen; Paul consequently says that Christ has been raised as the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (I Cor. 15:20). In the same chapter the argument runs partly in the opposite direction to what we are used to think: "If there is no general resurrection, then Christ has not been raised" (vs. 13; cf. vs. 16). Those who first heard and believed the news about the Resurrection were not absorbed in a consideration of the phenomenon as such, but received it as a message that the new age had started to manifest itself here and now. This certainly affirmed their hopes in sharing in Christ's resurrection in God's good time, but the center of the message was that the power of the new age was at work in their own world and their own time.

Bultmann suggests that the task of the preacher is to free this message from its biblical nucleus, the proclaimed fact of the Resurrection as a historical event. But even for a preacher, who finds reason to object to such a demythologizing or dehistoricizing of the gospel, the problem which Bultmann points up remains a real one. Can the preacher say that he has communicated the message of Easter by stating and by underscoring the physical nature of the phenomenon of the Resurrection as a stumbling block for unbelievers, but a rock of salvation for those who believe? His familiarity with the results of a descriptive biblical theology would urge him to place the emphasis where the texts themselves put it and to meditate, e.g., along the lines of how the power of the new age manifested itself in Jesus Christ, not only as a token of our resurrection, but as the enthronement of Christ and as the possibility for man to live by the powers of the new age here and now. There would be many other lines like this which opened up from the gospel of Easter if the preacher did not become paralyzed—in faith or in doubts—by the phenomenon of the Resurrection, deducing from it theological propositions, but let his familiarity with the biblical world guide him through the concrete and diversified way in which the early church recognized and rejoiced in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His homiletic imagination would become enriched, and the message would have a chance to find its live and relevant translation.

If the task of the pulpit is—as suggested here—the true *Sitz im Leben*, "life situation," where the meaning of the original meets with the meaning for today, then it is once more clear that we cannot pursue the study of biblical theology adequately if the two tenses are not kept apart. For the descriptive biblical theologian this is a necessity implied in his own discipline; and whether he is a believer or an agnostic, he demands respect for the descriptive task as an enterprise valid in its own right and for its own sake. For the life of the church such a consistent descriptive approach is a great and promising asset which enables the church, its teaching and preaching ministry, to be exposed to the Bible in its original thought, faith, and response.

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