

METHODOLOGY OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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(1) History

The modern criticism in scriptural study started with Richard Simon (1638-1712) who asserted that unwritten tradition lay at the base of literary history. The rise of historical method in the eighteenth century comes to its triumph in the nineteenth century. De Wette (1780-1848), who treated the events of the Bible as phenomena comparable to other historical phenomena and subject to the same laws of historical research, contributed greatly to direct firmly the Old Testament studies along the path of historical criticism in the nineteenth century. The historio-critical method as envisaged by De Wette and practiced by his successors combined literary and historical criticism. Literary criticism seeks to establish textual limits and to ascertain the genres and special characteristics of the underlying sources; it studies content under the threefold aspect of language, composition, and origin. Historical criticism attempts to determine the value of sacred writings as historical documents, both as to facts and as to teaching. This method seeks to reconstruct the writer's life, ideas, and milieu through the use of auxiliary sciences like philology, archeology and geography.

De Wette's enthusiasm for history was occasioned, at least in part, by the birth and development of critical, scientific, and historical scholarship in the early days of the nineteenth century, chiefly in Germany. In the name of reason, scholars of the Enlightenment had ignored the religious and social past with its legends and traditions. Consequently, history was denied value as a factor in human progress. With the dawn of Romanticism, however, history—a measured progress from primitive institutions to wise systems—came to be appreciated as

a vital factor in civilization.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the methods and conclusions of the historical method, protesting voices were raised both by Protestants and Catholics who were affronted by the assertions that dogmatic supernaturalism is untenable and that critical canons must be independent of theology. On the Catholic side, during the steady growth of the new criticism in the two centuries after Richard Simon, Catholic biblical scholarship was at low ebb. However, faced with J. Wellhausen's (1844-1918) exposition of Documentary Theory—theory that in order to understand the sacred writers and their work, the critic must supplement literary analysis by a thorough study of the history behind the final literary production—Catholics began to realize the implications of rationalistic criticism. By and large, they rejected the system; concession was deemed compromise and no distinction was made between methods and conclusions of the new criticism and the rationalistic philosophy upon which the system was based. Catholic opposition merely repeated the old positions.

Gunkel's (1862-1932) method of form criticism gave direction to the course of the twentieth century scriptural scholarship. Though his system is not without deficiencies of its own, by emphasis upon oral tradition and by the utilization of the archaeological and literary materials of the Near East, it approached closer to the life situation that produced the biblical writings than did static literary criticism. One of the deficiencies of form criticism was a tendency of preoccupation with individual blocks of tradition resulting in the fragmentation of the historical books of the Old Testament. Gunkel anticipated the work of Dibelius and Bultmann in their proposed methodology for the analysis of literary forms in the New Testament.

In his use of form criticism von Rad (b. 1901) was aware of the danger. He concedes that analysis is essential, but analysis must be followed by synthesis and herein lies the difficulty. How to explain the coalescence of so much divergent material in the sacred books? Von Rad's solution lies in postulating key traditions, like the Exodus, the conquest of the land, and the covenant, which summarized Yahweh's

saving acts for Israel. Von Rad asserts that, though a historical kernel is found in many of the biblical accounts, the genuine historical concern is God's dealing with Israel. Accordingly, the faith of the Hebrews must be explained in terms of what Israel thought of its relation to Yahweh.¹⁾

This approach represents the contemporary tendency in biblical theology. The spirit that pervaded all of the nineteenth century scriptural criticism—a strong reaction against the dogmatic theologizing of preceding ages—had hastened the decline of biblical theology. Just as rationalists of a century ago reacted forcibly against the theological dogmatism, so contemporary exegetes are reacting against the critical orthodoxy of the nineteenth century. Biblical theology has been revitalized in the twentieth century because critics have come to realize more and more that the elements of inexplicability in Hebrew religion demand theological commitment from the biblical theologian if he is to interpret them truly and completely.

Throughout most of this period, within the Catholic Church, a stage of siege was being maintained. People were trying to fend off any recurrence of the Modernist attack at the beginning of the twentieth century. And since it was in Scripture that the heresy had most devastating attack, the task of defending Catholic doctrine fell heavily upon Scripture scholars. However, the impact of a new trend was gradually being felt. Great strides in archaeology and in Oriental linguistics began to exert increasing influence upon Catholic criticism after 1930. And with the coming of the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) the Catholic scriptural scholarship started to move forward confidently. With the passage of time the line of demarcation between Catholic and non-Catholic critics has become less sharply drawn. Catholic biblical scholars have shown greater readiness to employ the methods and to accept some of the conclusions of non-Catholic scholarship.

1) Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, transl. by D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962).

(2) Definition

In recent years the scriptural scholars seem to have come to a tentative definition of biblical theology.²⁾ The proposed definition is "the doctrine of God contained in Scripture in graduated clarity, analyzed and systematized in biblical categories." In Scripture we find gradual development in revelation and in the people's understanding of it. In order to grasp the meaning of God's teaching, biblical theology first tries to determine the meaning of texts, and then the teaching in each book of the inspired writers. Here a biblical theologian works in collaboration with exegetes who are mainly concerned with the meaning of texts. Nevertheless, biblical theology also aims at systematization, and in this way differs from pure exegesis. This systematization is not to be done in some philosophical system, but in categories which are particular to biblical writers.

Is biblical theology theology? Peinador places biblical theology as something in between exegesis and theology.

...in everything it functions within the faith. Outside the field of the latter one could find an exegete, never a Biblical theologian. It is distinguished from theology in so far as our discipline works exclusively on the Scriptural datum, while theology considers equally the traditional. Biblical theology looks for the profound and full sense of the texts;

2) Roderick A. L. MacKenzie, "The Concept of Biblical Theology," *Proceedings* (Catholic Theological Society of America, 1955) pp. 56-58.

David M. Staley, "Towards a biblical theology of the New Testament," *McAuley Lectures* (Connecticut: St. Joseph College, 1958) pp. 277-278.

Frederick J. Cwiekowski, "Biblical Theology as Historical Theology," *CBQ* 24 (1962) 408.

Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) p. 422.

Karl Rahner, "Bible, theology of," *Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. by Karl Rahner et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) vol. 1, p. 176.

However:

Alexa Suelzer, "Modern Old Testament Criticism," *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown et al. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968) vol. 2, p. 602.

theology goes besides to the conclusions deduced by means of reasoning in which philosophical categories come in.³⁾

His definition of theology, evidently, is "that which studies the traditional in order to deduce conclusions by means of reasoning in which philosophical categories come in." If theology is understood as such, biblical theology is not a branch of it. However, his use of the term is limited to a field of theology, the more common definition of which is:

.....a discipline in which, on the basis of Revelation and with its light, the truths of the Christian religion are interpreted, elaborated, and ordered in a body of knowledge.⁴⁾

Theology defined as such, biblical theology meets fully the requirement, and thus merits the title.

Biblical theology is not theology either, according to a school of thought which wishes to remain faithful to the nineteenth century ideal of scholarly objectivity. A few scholars like Enslin and Pfeiffer protest vehemently against the mingling of faith and scholarship.⁵⁾ Biblical study understood merely as a research of scientific facts is not theology.

However, the function of biblical theology is not merely description of objective facts. Stendahl in an article discusses the descriptive function of biblical theology and its possibility. In spite of his emphasis of the importance of its descriptive function, he says:

Once this distinction (between the contemporary and the biblical) became great enough to place the Bible further away from us.....the need for 'translation' became a real one.....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,

3) Maximo Peinador, "Integracion de la exegesis en la theologica," *Sacra Pagina* (Louvain; Actes du Congrès International Catholique des Sciences Bibliques, 1958) vol. 1, p. 178.

4) Yves M-J Congar, "What is Theology," *DTC* 15 (1946) 447.

5) M. S. Enslin, "The Future of Biblical Studies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65 (1955) 1-12.

R. H. Pfeiffer, "Facts and Faith in Biblical History," *ibid.*, 70 (1951) 1-14.

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 answer 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.⁶⁾

Though Stendahl strongly emphasizes the descriptive function of biblical theology, he does not see it as a goal in itself. It also has a normative function, though it should not be mixed with the other function.

D.M. Stanley also speaks of the normative function with regard to the New Testament theology as follows :

The aim of biblical theology, accordingly, is not only to establish and to synthesize the theological data formally expressed by the sacred writers of the NT. In other words, it cannot remain merely a "theology of the NT" but must become a "theology created out of the NT". It will accomplish this by developing the doctrinal deposit found upon the sacred page which will serve the spiritual life of the Christian.⁷⁾

Biblical theology thus defined as "the doctrine of God contained in Scripture" distinguishes itself from a mere history of religion, and is truly a branch of theology.

As to its relation to different branches of theology, there are two main differing groups of thought. There is a group of scholars who consider it as a part of positive theology. Both R. A. F. MacKenzie and D. M. Stanley agree with Muniz's division of theology from the point of view of its functions, positive and speculative ; the one making positive analysis of scripture and tradition, and the other using a system of philosophy to develop that faith and drawing theological conclusions. According to this division, biblical theology is a part of positive

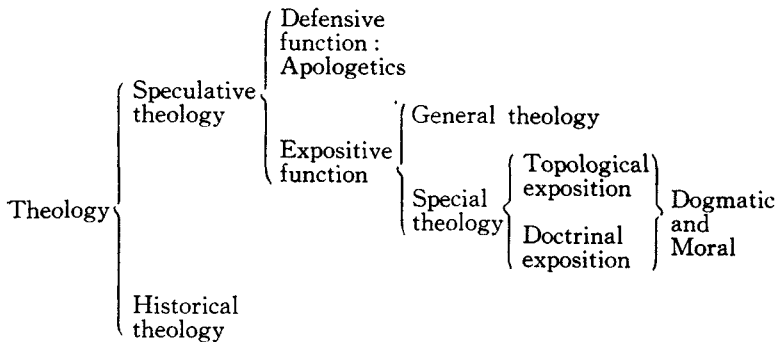
6) Stendahl, op. cit., p. 422.

7) David M. Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology* (Romae : E Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1961) p. 3.

theology.⁸⁾ J. Castelot and W. Murphy make the same division.

Positive theology accurately demonstrates the existence of the various truths of the faith by collecting and organizing the various statements of Sacred Scripture and the documents of Tradition. Its task is to show that such and such a truth really is contained in tradition.....Positive theology is subdivided in accord with the emphasis it places on one or another source of revelation. It is called *Biblical* theology if it draws its arguments almost exclusively from Sacred Scripture.⁹⁾

There is another group which considers biblical theology as a part of historical theology. Cwiekowski in an article discusses the validity of C. Journet's diagram of branches of theology.¹⁰⁾



According to Journet, the first difference between historical theology and the "topological exposition", or, more commonly, "positive theology" consists in the use of the word *positive*. The topological exposition is called "positive" because this work is directed primarily to a study of the documents. It is interested in the authority of the document and the degree of explicitness which revelation has received in that text. It works always with the aim of achieving a doctrinal synthesis. Historical theology also studies the documents, but it seeks

8) R. A. F. MacKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection*, p. 3.

9) Gerardus Cornelis van Noort, *Dogmatic Theology*, transl. by J. J. Castelot and W. R. Murphy (Westminster: Newman Press, 1955) xxv.

10) Frederick J. Cwiekowski, "Biblical theology as historical theology," *CBQ* 24 (1962) 404-411.

primarily to understand revelation in terms of the historical vicissitudes of the process by which it was made known. It is precisely by studying this process, this "genetic ordering," that it hopes to understand better the data of revelation itself.

Another difference, somewhat consequent to the first, is the procedure or method employed by the topological exposition of doctrinal theology and by historical theology. The former is first of all concerned with making contact with the mature and precise magisterial teaching of the Church in its most evolved and recent forms. The method of inquiry is normally, though not exclusively, a regressive one. The method of historical theology, if not always so in its research, is at least in its presentation, primarily progressive.

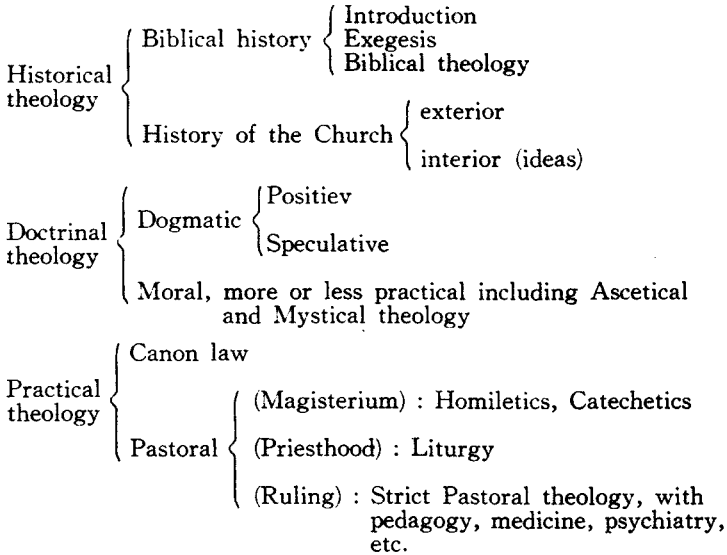
Now within this schema, is biblical theology historical theology? Biblical theology seeks to understand the divine wisdom communicated by God progressively and by degrees. (n.b. definition: "in graduated clarity") If biblical theology is to be faithful to the Bible to understand, then it must concern itself with the genetic ordering inherent in revelation. Therefore, if it would be biblical theology, Cwiekowski says, it must be considered as a part of historical theology, and he offers his own diagram which is almost exactly identical with Journet's.

This understanding of biblical theology as a part of historical theology can be said to be truer to its historical nature than when considered as a branch of positive theology. According to this division, some of the falsification that occurred in the past and still occurs from time to time today can be lessened—the careless intermingling of three stages which Stendahl decries, and the dogmatic theologizing in scriptural studies to which the nineteenth century strongly reacted. Nevertheless, Cwiekowski's diagram is not without its weakness. Moral and practical theologies, the places of which are not clear in Journet's diagram, disappear from his.

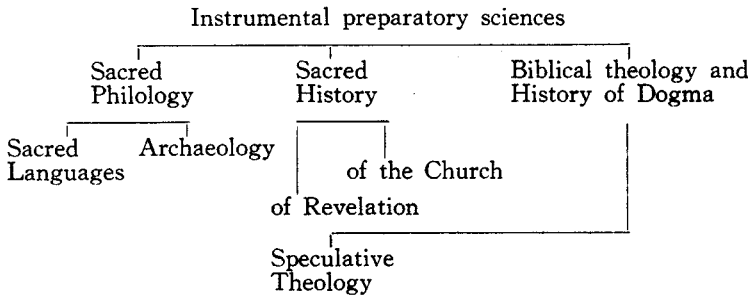
The diagram Congar cites from J. Belz in his article in DTC treats biblical theology as historical theology, and is also satisfactory in the distribution of different disciplines of theology according to different

parts of auxiliary sciences.¹¹⁾

Apologetics



This diagram, however, still leaves the question what is the relationship between the biblical theology and speculative theology. Another diagram which Congar cites in the same article seems to answer the question. It distributes the parts of theology according to two stages; the preparation and the application of the work of theology.¹²⁾



11) Congar, op. cit., p. 494.

12) Congar, op. cit., p. 494.

What Congar exactly means by biblical theology being an instrumental preparatory science cannot be known from the article. This diagram is unacceptable if by this we are to understand that biblical theology is a preparatory science to speculative theology as exegesis is to biblical theology, since :

It cannot be regarded simply as profane science, nor does its function consist in supplying the systematic theologian with the scriptural raw materials out of which he can create scholastic theology.¹³⁾

Exegesis investigates the word of God as it was heard by the Old Testament people of God and the early apostolic Church. Biblical theology, if one accepts the definition of its function as both descriptive and normative, is not only concerned with the word of God as was spoken to men of biblical times, but also with its meaning today which also is the concern of speculative theology. Their distinction from each other lies in the method of systematization and presentation. While biblical theology uses biblical categories in its systematization, speculative theology uses some philosophical system. Also in their method of exposition, the former is primarily progressive, while the other regressive.¹⁴⁾

There has existed in Catholic theology a dichotomy between dogmatic theologians and exegetes, which Karl Rahner deplors :

The dogmatic theologian seems at times to have the feeling that exegetes pay scant attention to the dogmatics to which the theologian is bound, and which pronounces upon matters which are the subject of exegesis. Some exegetes, on the other hand, seem convinced that the theologians want to tie the Scripture scholar's hands in a way for which there is no objective justification, but simply because the theologians have not taken sufficient account of the progress Catholic exegesis has made in recent decades.¹⁵⁾

Evidently there is a difference in perspective between dogmatic theology and exegesis. On the other hand, biblical and dogmatic theology,

13) Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection*, p. 2.

14) cf. p. 26.

15) Karl Rahner, "Exegesis and Dogmatic Theology," *Dogmatic vs Biblical Theology*, ed. by Herbert Vorgrimler (Dublin: Helicon, 1964) p. 31.

though differing in their method of systematization and exposition, cannot be opposed to each other. Harkening to the word of God in grace, which is faith, creates the identity between Scripture and dogma, Scripture and tradition, Scripture and a theology guided by the Church. Schillebeeckx points as the development of a newer, more authentic character in dogmatic theology in recent years, the understanding that :

The Church wins its dogmas not by theological conclusions from Scripture, but by re-discovering its own living dogma in the Scripture.¹⁶⁾

Understood thus, the distinction between the two becomes very fine, and there looms a great possibility of cooperation between biblical and dogmatic theology. Karl Rahner says in his recent articles, "Biblical theology is.....an intrinsic element in dogmatic theology itself."¹⁷⁾ However, he opts for the possibility of its becoming an independent branch of study within theology as a whole, which, he says, is appropriate even on practical grounds. He continues ;

Perhaps in the course of the reform of ecclesiastical studies, a separate specialist department will be formed in which biblical theology will be pursued neither as a mere prolongation of ordinary exegesis nor as a mere element in dogmatic theology, but as a separate branch of study which will represent the correct intermediary between exegesis and dogmatic theology.¹⁸⁾

Biblical theology faithful to its nature and functions has much to offer to catechetics, too. It exposes people to the Bible illumined and illuminating in its original intention and intensity, as an ever new challenge to thought, faith, and response. It also plays an important part in missiology. In some non-Christian countries people are realizing more and more that biblical mentality is closer to their own than western mentality, and find less obstacle in responding to the gospel news when it is given in its original form than through western

16) Edward Schillebeeckx, "Exegesis, Dogmatics and the Development of Dogma," *Dogmatic vs Biblical Theology*, p. 143.

17) Karl Rahner, op. cit., p. 177.

18) Ibid.

dogmatization.

(3) Method

The commitment envisaged by modern biblical theologians is not simply literary and historical analysis. As we have seen in the second part, the work of a biblical theologian is not merely descriptive. However, realizing that the Bible does not merely describe propositional revelation, but rather the response of men to God's self-revealing intervention in history, he uses both literary and historical criticism as his tool to attain the essence of that divine revelation.

The work of biblical theology in descriptive function is both analytic and synthetic. First, there must be an analysis and determination of the exact data of the content of each inspired work. In this part of the work, biblical theology makes use of the result gained by exegesis. Systematization "in biblical categories" then follows. This synthesis is needed in order not only to understand each inspired work or writer better by placing him in a larger historical context, but also to come to the better understanding of revelation itself. However, we shall come to this point later.

This systematization is legitimate and possible since there is unity in the Bible. There are some who question the possibility. Ebeling, for example, says:

From an historical point of view it is impossible to regard the statements of the Old and New Testament as being on one level without any distinction and by combining them together to produce a single theology of the Bible.¹⁹⁾

Schnakenburg also speaks of the difficulty of the task:

The task of bringing unity to a theology of the Old and the New Testament, a theology constructed on different levels of Revelation and of the history of salvation, is a difficult one, which has hitherto been tackled in only a groping and unsatisfying manner.²⁰⁾

However, in recent years the legitimacy and possibility of biblical

19) Gerard Ebeling, "The Meaning of 'Biblical Theology'", *JTS* 6 (1955) 220.

20) Rudolf Schnackenburg, *New Testament Theology Today* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963) p. 21.

theology are generally agreed upon.²¹⁾

Regarding what that unity exactly is, there are divergent opinions. To give some examples :

The Bible presents not a uniform but a progressive revelation. Its true unity and final significance are to be found in the general direction and the outcome of the process, culminating in the supreme and central revelation of God in Christ.²²⁾

There is a fundamental similarity between Old and New Testaments which rests upon a community of ideas, of beliefs, of language. It is the same God whose saving will is revealed in each of the Testaments.²³⁾

There is.....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.²⁴⁾

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.²⁵⁾

Consequently various opinions are to be expected concerning what "biblical categories" are when biblical theologians are faced with the work of synthesis.

One of the most influential scholars is Eichrodt. He attempts to present Hebrew religion as an entity whose organic unity can be best seen in the central notion of the covenant. All characteristic features of the Old Testament theology, Eichrodt holds, stemmed from the

21) *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

22) Millar Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946) p. 53.

23) John L. McKenzie, *The Two-Edged Sword* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1955) p. 297.

24) Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

25) Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 425.

basic notion of the alliance with Yahweh originating in Mosaic times. He does not deny that Israel's beliefs underwent development in the course of the ages, but the orientation of the development process had been initially determined by Israel's covenantal relationship to God. His book²⁶⁾ deals with the theme of the covenant under the headings such as :

The Covenant Relationship
The Covenant Statutes
The Name of the Covenant God
The Nature of the Covenant God
The Instruments of the Covenant
Covenant Breaking and Judgment
Fulfilling the Covenant : The Consummation of God's
Dominion

The validity of founding such a complex matter as the Old Testament theology upon a single concept, comprehensive though it may be, is questioned by some critics. However, in his English edition of the book, he defends his own approach :

There is in fact no legitimate reason why we should be forbidden to look for an inner agreement in these testimonies of faith which we have so carefully analysed ; and in this agreement, despite their great differentiations and internal tensions, certain common basic features emerge which in combination constitute a system of belief which is both unitary in its essential structure and fundamental orientation and also unique in the history of religions. The charge that such a method only arrives at an abstraction is not in fact well conceived.....That in such a treatment it is often necessary to argue *a posteriori* in order to bring to light a pattern of belief not directly presented as such in the sources is in general nothing unusual or aprioristically questionable. It is simply the method demanded in any scientific description of the content of one's sources.²⁷⁾

Another most challenging biblical scholar in recent years is von Rad. The following is the method he uses in his *Old Testament*

26) Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, transl. by J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961).

27) Eichrodt, op. cit., p. 517.

*Theology.*²⁸⁾

1. Determine the theology of each book or author
 - a) exegesis to determine the meaning of each book or author
 - b) isolate key images, terms, concepts
 - c) isolate key themes (clusters of concepts)
 - d) discover the development of images, concepts, themes, within an author's works
 - e) discover interrelation and importance of these images, concepts, themes
2. Group various authors in books historically :

This step which may appear as secondary in biblical theology has in actuality a decisive importance. As a historical theology, its exposition is to built itself following the conclusions of the chronology and literary history of biblical writers.
3. Trace historical development of themes in the Old and New Testaments
4. Synthesis :
 - a) determine key concepts, images, themes of the whole Old and New Testaments
 - b) determine the importance of each
 - c) determine the patterns of relationship between these themes
 - d) clarify the Old Testament by the New, the New Testament by the Old.

Von Rad's method is based on his assertion that Israel's belief is founded upon the deeds of Yahweh for Israel. The point at issue is Israel's concept of her relation to Yahweh, a relationship that was established slowly in the course of many experiences. Since the historical testimony that Israel received from Yahweh was only gradually formulated, any attempt to restrict the religion of Israel into a hard and fast system will be a betrayal. Furthermore, states von Rad, the Hebrews showed no urge to reduce all data to logical order, and their unconcern for a single unifying principle is an additional deterrent to

28) von Rad, op. cit., vols. 1 and 2.

the systematization of biblical thought. Von Rad sees biblical theology centered in two points: covenant and kingdom. Yet he is in no hurry to prove a point; he lets each portion of the text speak for itself, even if it cannot do this conclusively. His method yields no neat theological propositions, but what it lacks in precise formulation it makes up for in the insight it gains into the true position of Israel before Yahweh.

Other biblical theologians have found the unifying element of the Old Testament in its orientations to Christ as the climax of divine revelation. This the type of biblical theology with strong christological interpretations. There are other scholars who analyze various biblical themes, tracing the growth of an idea or a doctrine throughout the various stages of its development.

There are two major problems in the work of systematization. The first, is the tension between a historical exposition and systematic presentation which has its root in the nature of biblical theology itself. Since biblical theology must be related to a historical study of the theological concepts which meet and are developed in Scripture, it must necessarily trace a historical line of development. The unity of biblical theology would be destroyed, if one is content merely to set out the ideas and the views of each individual writer. If one does not trace historical development, but follows the sequence of the events of salvation, and turns for information to the witness and the testimony that we find in Scripture, one could fail in displaying the originality of the various theologians. An acceptable solution to this issue seems to be the synthesis of the two contrasting approaches: the historical method, with its emphasis on differences, while constantly showing the cohesion.

The second of the problems is in categorization. Its purpose is an attempt to grasp that content of revelation which is common to biblical writers, and then express it in our own way. But the danger is that we might force living forms into clothing which does not suit them and thus destroy their vitality. Schökel says:

.....la méthode d'exposition par énoncés et thèses,
saine et nécessaire en soi, n'en recèle pas moins un grave

danger. Danger universel des formules qui facilement dégénèrent en "formulisme", surtout dans les sciences de l'esprit, où la revision et la correction expérimentale sont malaisées, où les formules tendent plus rapidement au conceptualisme, et dont les étudiants moins doués peuvent se contenter, comme d'une espèce de nominalisme.

En fait, ce danger a pesé gravement sur ce qu'on nomme "argument scripturaire" dans les thèses theologiques. Sous la force des formules, le champ de la Bible s'est rétréci: on cite à peine quelques versets de l'Ancien Testament.²⁹⁾

Considering these problems, of the different types of approaches we have seen, von Rad's seems the most ideal. As God spoke to people at different times in different situations in history, though recurring again and again in a slightly different manner, there must be different aspects of revelation emphasized at different times. From that viewpoint, systematization under one concept seems rather forced. On the other hand, simple juxtaposition of different themes, without reference to their interrelationship, is not sufficient in dealing with revelation. There must be some dominant themes in revelation as it is given with a certain purpose, the totality of which can be grasped by human mind from differing angles and aspects. Von Rad's presentation seems to be the most faithful, so far, to the nature of revelation and to the historical nature of Scripture.

Lonergan in his "De methodo theologiae" speaks of the scientific communication of a commonsense understanding of the text. He points to two possibilities:

As the number of occasions mounts on which one states the meaning of texts, one finds oneself stating over and over again the same meanings or slightly different meanings, and so one begins to compare and classify, to find basic recurrent categories, their differentiations, their frequencies.

Genetic processes next come to one's attention, and from the fact one may proceed to the cause or the form or the end of the genesis.³⁰⁾

29) L. Slonso-Schokel, "Argument d'écriture et théologie biblique," NRT 81 (1959) 343.

30) Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "De methodo theologiae," translation in a folder for private use of USF, p. 11.

To this second possibility is related the descriptive approach toward different layers of meaning which Stendahl speaks of.³¹⁾ He says that the Old Testament contains material from many centuries of Israelite life. This makes it obvious that there are different layers of meaning within the same account. The history of interpretation is woven into the very fabric of the biblical texts themselves. Thus any statement of a descriptive sort about what an Old Testament 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 Old Testament 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 interpreted as the acts of God. This problem of interpretation, he continues, is not confined to the Old Testament. It forms the crucial problem of Gospel research when we try to push beyond the evangelists to the actual words and deeds of Jesus.

With regard to the different levels in the New Testament, Schnakenburg suggests that in consideration of the actions, message and teaching of Jesus, we should distinguish three levels: the "historical" level—the level of what Jesus himself said and did, restored to its original form; the level of the tradition of the early Church—the level on which the evangelists are simply passing on to us the earliest kerygma of Jesus, that is, the "gospel"; and the level of the evangelists themselves—on which they are setting down their own personal theological ideas.³²⁾

There seems to be a question whether or not to include the search of this first level—the so-called "quest of historical Jesus"—in biblical theology. For example, Bultmann's idea is that the New Testament theology begins only with the kerygma, and that Jesus' own proclamation cannot be part of a theology of the New Testament. Stanley agrees with him:

31) Stendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 422-425.

32) Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

As Rudolf Bultmann has correctly observed, "Jesus' preaching belongs to the presuppositions of the NT theology, and is not properly a part of it." (cf. *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen, 1948, I.)³³⁾

Theoretically speaking, the research to discern the three levels is a legitimate one, though it may not be possible to distinguish them in every case. Schnackenburg says :

Although it is difficult to discern and to define these three levels in every case, this distinction is nonetheless a very important one for theology ; it is, in fact, the only way we have of distinguishing Jesus' revelation from the theological interpretation of the early Church, and this interpretation from the individual theologies of the evangelists.³⁴⁾

However, in another place, he admits that the fact closer to the situation is that :

.....Jesus' message takes its place in any New Testament theology, not only as Revelation, but also as a theology. It would be best to begin this exposition with the tradition of the Apostles and the early community ; then the theology of the synoptic Gospels, beginning, perhaps with what they have in common, and following with the ideas which are special to Mark, Luke and Matthew. Only then would one develop the theology of Paul, John and the other New Testament theologians, at the same time indicating everything in them that testifies to their continuity with the earliest tradition and to their agreement with the Church's confession of faith.³⁵⁾

Such a work would bring to light the inner unity of the various theologies in the New Testament, and to show their hidden foundation and the unseen, unifying link.

The descriptive function does not exhaust the function of biblical theology. It is not in search of historical or literary data only. To quote Stanley again :

.....it cannot remain merely a 'theology of the New Testament', but must become a 'theology created out of the New Testament'.³⁶⁾

33) Stanley, *McAuley Lectures*, p. 281.

34) Schnackenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

35) *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

36) Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection*, p. 3.

The descriptive task can be carried out by believer and agnostic alike. As Stendahl says³⁷⁾ the believer has the advantage of automatic empathy with the believers in the text, but his faith constantly threatens to make him read into the text something that is against the literary criticism, unless he exercises his descriptive scholarship. 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.

However, to a believing biblical theologian, Scripture is not simply a word of God spoken to Israelites in the past, but also word addressed to him.

Aborder la Bible en croyant, ce n'est donc pas y découvrir de nouveaux éléments factuels, qui auraient échappé à la science exégétique. La foi consiste, par définition, à dépasser le fait, à lui trouver par exemple une *signification* qui, d'ailleurs, échappe à son tour à l'investigation scientifique. Les objets formels de la foi et de la science ne coïncident pas.³⁸⁾

Biblical theology in its normative function is concerned with the same Word of God as it addresses men of our times. God speaks to men of biblical times, to men of the ancient Church of the Fathers, to men of the Middle Ages, to modern men, to men today.

This does not reduce the word of God to something merely "relative", valid for one age but not for another. In faith man, the real man as he exists in every epoch of time, always seeks to reach the objective content of the revealed word of God. But no matter how absolute and unchangeable is the supernatural truth, it—like every other truth—shares, in the form it reaches our minds, the qualities of all human things. It has the imperfection, the relativity, the possibility of development, the historical conditioning which goes with

37) Stendahl, op. cit., p. 422.

38) Albert Descamps, "Reflexions sur la Méthode en Théologie Biblique," *Sacra Pagina* (Louvain; Actes du Congrès International Catholique des Sciences Bibliques, 1958) vol. 1, p. 146.

all truth as possessed by men. One and the same perception of the mind can be illuminated and approached from different sides, so that in one and the same reality different, mutually complementary but correct insights are possible.³⁹⁾

The intentions of the Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets surpass what the sacred writers with their limited powers could express.⁴⁰⁾ The Old Testament gains its final significance only in the light of Christ's fulfilment, as propounded in the New Testament. Thus the literal sense of the Old Testament is sustained by an objective dynamism, which by means of a particular Jewish meaning still points on to the Christ who comes. In the same way, the New Testament writers did not know of later dogmas as they were to be expressed in the Church, but they put into their writings a certain objective dynamism, or tendency, which points on darkly toward what will be heard by the Church as the Word of God. But for all their limitations, they express deliberately, if only vaguely, something of what the Holy Spirit really meant, and what is brought to clearer expressiveness in the definition of a dogma.

This objective dynamism in the meaning of the Bible is the so-called *sensus plenior*, fuller sense, and is really a meaning belonging to the Bible. Once we affirm that the *sensus plenior* was not clearly intended by the human author but was intended by God, we have to find a way of determining the presence of such a deeper meaning, since, as we have seen, the divine quality of Scripture escapes the historical, philological and literary method. The way of determining the presence of a fuller sense is through further divine revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.⁴¹⁾

Since it is God who reveals and who inspires, God can tell man through revelation what he intended in inspiring earlier passages of

39) Schillebeeckx, cp. cit., p. 131.

40) Raymond E. Brown, "Hermeneutics," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown et al. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968) vol. 2, p. 615.

41) *Ibid.*, p. 616.

Scripture. Individual books of the Bible have greater meaning when seen in the context of the whole Bible. Themes like faith, sin, and justice have profundity when seen in the context of the whole biblical teaching on the respective subjects.

Another aid to determining the fuller sense is the community of the faithful, the community of the Church whose soul is the same Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture. If there are real meanings of Scripture that cannot be detected by scientific methods and yet are of importance to the divine plan for man's salvation, they are most likely to emerge to clarity and acceptance in the context of Church life, for

.....the depths of a man can only be known by his own spirit, not by any other man, and in the same way the depths of God can only be known by the Spirit of God. Now instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us.⁴²⁾

Therefore, Church life, prayer and doctrine supply a context in which Scripture is read so that the meaning which God wished to convey emerges. Through the Spirit we ourselves stand in direct contact with the reality of Christ and whole mystery of salvation. If he who is the author of Scripture also inspires the life and worship of the Church and its dogmas, it is clear that the biblical utterance of the Holy Spirit in any given case will have an intrinsic relationship with the later word which the Holy Spirit brings to utterance with regard to the same reality of salvation. Consequently, the fuller meaning of Scripture must be approached gradually through the life of the Church as lived throughout its history.

Here biblical theology rejoins dogmatic theology, history of dogma, and liturgical theology, in its effort of faith seeking understanding.

42) 1 Cor. 2: 10-12.

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