

RECOVERING THE REAL: A CASE STUDY OF SCHLEIERMACHER'S THEOLOGY

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Recent and frequent appearances of the adjectival use of "real" connote more than a philosophically naïve tautology, and recent nonphilosophical appearances of the noun "Real" (with a capital R) express a longing in an age that seems to have turned its back at last on an infinite representational regress.¹ Even a recent visitor to the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art can detect a sudden shift from conceptual-subjective art to art that depicts recognizable subjects in identifiable contexts.² The interest in reality, in its recovery in text and image, is a sign of the present times. The longing for the real in current intellectual, political, and artistic circles marks a turning point away from postmodern obsession with representation and sociocultural construction. Postmodernism appears to have crashed on the shores of reality, and a new sobering wave of consciousness is surfacing.

This turn to the real is the reappearance of an aspect of the West's own history. The emphasis on evidence as the Enlightenment intended it was to locate truth-telling in the public forum. Empirical study was to be governed by rules concerning reality that were to be displayed for all to see. Not just the sciences but the humanities as well were to be informed by evidence. It was to history, anthropology, and psychology, rather than to metaphysics, that modern theology turned in order to anchor its claims in reality.³ Even the "linguistic turn" in the early twentieth century could not divorce language from reality, teaching that reality was interpreted through linguistically determined concepts. The empirically real was experienced through conceptual

1. See Slavoj Žižek's new book, *Interrogating the Real* (ed. R. Butler and S. Stephens; London: Continuum, 2005).

2. See www.moca.org for an introduction.

3. The representative example of this turn is Friedrich Schleiermacher, the "parent of modern theology."

interpretation. It was perceived through the biases, ideologies, and multiple epistemologies informing the modern subject of knowing.

It is the intention of this essay to recover the real in the distinct discipline of Christian theology and to attempt this recovery in view of the claims expressed in the Christian religion about the saving benefits of the person of Christ. Such claims are more than a cognitive assent to an epistemologically interpreted event. They are the expressions of the many transformative experiences of the encounter with a living reality.

I ask in this essay the question concerning how theology can recover the real in order to anchor its terms in historically and metaphysically determined reality. I will use the example of Friedrich Schleiermacher's theology to show that the real can be grasped both in relation to the text of the New Testament and in the theological categorization of contemporary experience. The real can be recovered in view of the New Testament's expressions concerning Jesus of Nazareth; when the texts are seen as literary records of unique encounters with the person of Jesus, their reality can be extrapolated, compared, and contrasted with the reality expressed in other similar accounts. The real as recounted in the New Testament is multivalent, yet even in this text the beginnings of categorizing multivalent reality can be detected. New Testament topography is the starting point for theological concept formation. In the second section of the essay I argue that theology's process of relating descriptions of reality to theological concepts does not inevitably result in a loss of reality for those concepts. Rather, the method of concept formation that Schleiermacher proposes determines the concepts with predicates gleaned from reality. The application of Schleiermacher's method to theology gives theology the resources to recover the reality of transformative encounters with Jesus for the formation of theological concepts.

1. RECOVERY OF THE REAL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The linguistic turn characterizing a major philosophical development in the twentieth century gave rise to a fascination with the text. Language exists in texts, it was maintained, and religion also is preoccupied with linguistic-literary studies of the text. The past is presented for contemporary description and analysis by the text, yet is not completely identified with it. The text, produced by a subject or group of subjects, captures in literary form a reality that is available through the text, yet the text neither historically exhausts the reality to which it refers nor can it be metaphysically identified with that reality. Nineteenth-century philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher keenly approaches the text as a transcript of the reality of its author and the respective author's encounter with a distinct reality. Schleiermacher recovers

the real described in the New Testament by explaining his understanding of how this text expresses the diverse experiences of aspects of a personal reality that its authors have experienced.

The rhetoric of Christian liturgy, preaching, and theology gives the impression of an ongoing rehearsal of the past. Christianity's present-tense existence is permeated with scripture. Maybe not all contemporary preachers and scholars are as well-versed in the living memory of biblical passages and books as were Augustine or Luther, yet even in an age in which the canon has become a "cultural memorial" (*ein kulturelles Gedächtnis*),⁴ writings from the Christian religion can hardly be interpreted without appealing to the Bible as a reference work. My question concerning the reason for the sustained representation of ancient texts in contemporary liturgical practices and scholarly works is posed by this actual evidence of use. Why regard the biblical text as the eternal well from which one can continuously draw? Answers to this question range from historical-pragmatic considerations⁵ to philosophical-theological⁶ explanations, from recognitions of the multivalence of its constitutive texts to longings for a unity as the text spans world history from creation to apocalypse.

But a bit of disentangling is in order here. The "linguistic turn" in some philosophical-theological cases conflates text with reality. When reality is understood in terms of the self-referentiality of language, the text becomes reality.⁷ This identification in Christian theology is, as I have argued elsewhere,⁸ a development of the neo-Kantian distinction between spirit and

4. This is the title of Jan Assmann's book on canon and memory in ancient and modern contexts from a cultural-historical perspective: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (C.H. Beck Kulturwissenschaft; Munich: Beck, 1999).

5. Schleiermacher distinguishes between the Christian Bible as the book used by the church throughout its history and the Christian canon as the product of literary-critical, historical, and canon-critical reconstruction. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study* (trans. T. N. Tice; Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 1; Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1990), §103 (58), §115 (63–64) (page numbers in parentheses).

6. For example, Nicholas Wolterstorff discusses the unity of the Christian canon by using the aesthetic category of a work's completion in "The Unity behind the Canon," in *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives* (ed. C. Helmer and C. Landmesser; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 222–32.

7. Frei identifies D. Z. Phillips with the "fifth" type of theology in "Five Types of Theology," in *Types of Christian Theology* (ed. G. Hunsinger and W. C. Placher; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 46–55. This type, Frei argues, asks the question of God's reality as the question concerning the criteria by which talk about God's reality in a specific religious context is meaningful (Frei, "Five Types of Theology," 47).

8. Christine Helmer, "Mysticism and Metaphysics: Schleiermacher and a Historical-Theological Trajectory," *JR* 83 (2003): 517–38.

nature. If the "Word"—in its identification with the risen Christ or in its meaning as the words of the Christian church's proclamation or doctrine—is identified with spirit in opposition to nature, then its reality in language must be its only reality. The Word's spiritual reality in language is contrasted with the reality of the world of nature. The text "absorbs the world."⁹

On metaphysically realist grounds, however, the spiritual reality of the text cannot be said to absorb the world. The text cannot be said to stand as the reality of language's self-referentiality; rather, the text stands for a distinct perspective of reality. The text refers to reality by linguistically conceptualizing an aspect of reality that has entered into the work of concept formation. A perspectival categorization of reality both exhibits and occludes dimensions of reality, discloses and hides, grasps and misses aspects of reality that other categorizations may or may not be in a position to see. Multivalence characterizes the perspectival relations of text to reality. This relationship also requires for its plausibility an explanation for the unity of its referent across descriptive difference. Without an account of unity, perspectival difference would lapse into incoherence; there would be no common constraints in reality controlling differences among conceptualizations and therefore no possibility of conversation among different individuals about a common subject.

A starting point for discussing the text's relation to the reality of the real is the historical origin of the text in relation to experience. One site for recovering the real is the site most proximate to an original experience. Some memories fade with time, but the vividness characterizing the early impression of the real cannot be erased. It is to this immediacy of the event in its present tense power that we must turn.

The history of Christianity witnesses to the power of initial impressions. Reformation movements have been born from new experiences with the biblical text. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Barth attest to the ongoing fascination with Paul's Letter to the Romans. Christianity can almost be written as a history of rediscovering the power of the Crucified One described in this significant epistle. The documents attesting to the early histories of the Christian tradition—the Old and New Testaments, and in some cases the

9. This is my paraphrase of the citation, "A scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe," by George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 117. The sentences preceding these words suggest an equivocation between text and world: "These same considerations apply even more forcefully to the preeminently authoritative texts that are the canonical writings of religious communities. For those who are steeped in them, no world is more real than the ones they create" (Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 117).

deuterocanonical writings—continue to be engaged as these texts are cycled through lectionaries, liturgies, private devotions, and small-group study. The same texts continue to be read for the purpose of recovering the vividness of realities experienced by persons and authors, since those experiences are determinative of Christian traditions. The life in Christian traditions is sustained precisely by the ongoing return to those documents categorizing the early impressions of a distinct aspect of reality.

The text's literary level provides clues identifying the ways in which first impressions took shape. An insight into the literary coherence of a text as the criterion of original liveliness is offered by Schleiermacher's interpretation of John's Gospel. Schleiermacher's special love for John's text consists precisely in his literary appreciation for its coherence. According to Schleiermacher, the liveliness of John's impressions of Jesus of Nazareth is evident in the way in which the Gospel presents Jesus' biography according to the coherence criterion of a single tendency (*Tendenz*) or principle. "The Gospel of John has always given me the impression that in a decisive way it bears the character of a coherent, comprehensive presentation," Schleiermacher writes in *The Life of Jesus*.¹⁰ John has one principle that he uses to describe each different episode in Jesus' life. Schleiermacher continues: "the Gospel of John reveals one and the same tendency from beginning to end. It evidently comes from one who narrates what he himself had experienced."¹¹ Although Schleiermacher admits that there are gaps in John's chronology and account of Jesus' geographical movement,¹² he evaluates the Gospel's coherence as a literary key unlocking John's proximity to the reality of Jesus.

The literary criterion, however, gets Schleiermacher into some historical trouble. By identifying coherence as the criterion for John's status as an eyewitness, Schleiermacher erroneously proposes an early dating for the Gospel. New Testament consensus regarding John's Gospel, at least since 1820, disagrees with Schleiermacher.¹³ Nevertheless, Schleiermacher's interpretation concerning the relation between coherence and first impressions does not require the additional claim of historical accuracy in order to be true. By virtue of Schleiermacher's own claims concerning the identity of

10. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus* (ed. J. C. Verheyden; trans. S. M. Gilmour; Lives of Jesus Series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975; repr., Mifflintown, Penn.: Sigler, 1997), 43.

11. *Ibid.*, 159. John's tendency, according to Schleiermacher, is that he "wishes to make understandable the disaster in Christ's destiny together with the authentic nature of his activity, while—regarding the matter from John's own standpoint—the two conflicted with one another" (*ibid.*).

12. *Ibid.*, 43.

13. Verheyden refers to Karl Bretschneider's late dating for John's Gospel in 1820 (Verheyden, "Introduction," in *ibid.*, xxxi).

influence emanating from Christ's postmortem and antemortem presence,¹⁴ literary coherence can be applied as a criterion to any expression of experiences of Jesus. The systematic coherence of a doctrinal system, in fact, reflects precisely the relation of systematic coherence to contemporary personal conviction regarding the transformative effect of Jesus.¹⁵ What Schleiermacher means by historical proximity to Jesus is the immediacy of Jesus' presence to every age.

If the text is regarded as the expression of its author's experience with reality, then the interpretation of the text must include, if not presuppose, a psychological mechanism explaining the author's production of the literary work in relation to reality. Authorial intention is a mainstay of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical program.¹⁶ The correct interpretation of a text relies in part on the accurate identification of a subjective authorial unity structuring the work as a whole. This unity is the author's tendency, the theme that is extended throughout the work in order to permit identifying parts of the work to the whole and to order these parts in specific relations to each other. Most important, the tendency expresses the author's psychological grasp of reality. Authorial intention is not just a subjective psychological condition that is presupposed by the text's unity. Rather, it is the psychological site at which the author experiences a reality in terms of a proportion between passive influence from the environment and active contribution to the categorizing of that experience. This hermeneutical insight recalls Schleiermacher's psychological claim in *The Christian Faith*: each of life's moments is constituted by a feeling of dependence and a feeling of freedom that register together mutual reciprocity with the environment.¹⁷ Authorial intention as the psychological unity grasping the reality of an experience is, according to Schleiermacher, the unity between the subjective reality of an author's psychological conditions and the objective reality that is experienced. This unity is a psychological unity of passivity and activity that is evident at the only place at which experiences are expressed: the text, its grammar, choice of terms, syntax, positioning of main to relative clauses, and all other literary evidence. The text is the hermeneutical key for recovering the real of experienced reality from the perspective of its author.

14. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (ed. H. R. McKintosh and J. S. Stewart; trans. D. M. Baillie et al.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999), §14.1 (69).

15. See my argument regarding this relation in "Systematic Theology: Beautifully True," in *Truth: Interdisciplinary Dialogues in a Pluralistic Age* (ed. C. Helmer and K. De Troyer, with K. Goetz; Studies in Philosophical Theology 22; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 34–40.

16. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings* (ed. and trans. A. Bowie; Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

17. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §4.2 (13–14).

Multiple authorship writes experiential multivalence into the New Testament. The New Testament Gospels, in addition to other Gospels that are not included in the canonical New Testament, are characterized by plurality. There are four canonical Gospels, each superscribed by four different names purporting to be the Gospels' respective authors.¹⁸ The superscription privileges individual authorship at the level of the New Testament's final form, even though the historical origin of the superscripts might not coincide with the individual Gospel's composition history. At the level of the canonical whole, these superscriptions point to four different authors, each presiding over four different accounts of Jesus' life and passion. Modern literary criticism has been more insistent than Schleiermacher on the literary integrity of these four Gospels. Rather than perceiving them as the compiled aggregates of undistinguished writers, modern literary critics concede the literary value of the Gospels, viewing the authors as literary creators in their own right.¹⁹ Such a literary appreciation can provide even more helpful evidence than Schleiermacher ascertains for his text theory regarding the recovery of the real through authorial intention. If the texts are understood in Schleiermacher's terms as accounts of reality, then their literary quality and features can be related with hermeneutical precision to the distinct perspectives of experienced reality that Schleiermacher was unable to claim for Matthew and Luke.²⁰

It is an assumption of the New Testament that Jesus is the same referent in each particular Gospel and epistle. Jesus is designated by different names that overlap in different texts: Son of Man, Son of God, shepherd, Christ, the Crucified One, the one raised by the power of the Spirit. The nuances in the meanings of these names differ according to the semantic fields of individual author's vocabularies. For Paul, the Crucified One is the designation associated with the unequivocal triumph of grace, whereas for Matthew the Crucified One is associated with a "secondary conditioning of salvation."²¹ In

18. David Trobisch uses these superscriptions to argue for an early redaction of a New Testament codex in *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46–7.

19. See, e.g., David M. Rhoads, *The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 62, 99.

20. Schleiermacher judged Matthew and Luke to be redactions of a third or fourth hand on the grounds of literary inelegance. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Über die Schriften des Lukas: Ein kritischer Versuch (1817)," in *Exegetische Schriften* (vol. 1.8 of *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*; ed. H. Patsch and D. Schmid; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 19–20.

21. This is Christof Landmesser's terminology (*die sekundäre Konditionierung des Heils*) in *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott: Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Konzept der mathäischen Soteriologie im Anschluß an Mt 9,9–13* (WUNT 133; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 141–49.

all these cases manifesting differences in authorial intentions, the designations identify the same referent. Such an assumption boldly holds together the differences in descriptions, Jesus' life and death, his preexistence and ascension, his postmortem and antemortem existence. There are four Gospels yet one gospel, as Luther summarizes the relation between difference and unity in terms of one common referent.²²

One reality serves to orient perspectival multivalence in the New Testament. It is this preoccupation that represents the objective side of authorial intention. Authorial intention requires an intentionality that expresses the individual author's perspectival grasp of reality. Without this intentionality, the New Testament authors would have nothing to say. The sameness of the referent in spite of differences in titles and descriptions must be assumed if there is to be complementarity or even disagreement between differing accounts. Each New Testament passage can be investigated as to its contribution to understanding the aspects of personal presence responsible for what is experienced as decisively transformative. From the perspective of its referent, the New Testament already contains its own guides for interpreting its form and content. Without this assumption, there could neither be agreement concerning the genre of the gospel as the "good news of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1) nor consensus concerning the intention of the epistles to comfort and exhort communities living under the existing sign of Christ's reign.²³ The assumption furthermore communicates directions regarding how best to interpret a person as the text's referent. The New Testament's personal referent stands under the same anthropological and narrative conditions of interpretation as any human being. The gospel's content is informed by the narrative details of Jesus' life. The four Gospels' common focus on Jesus' ministry and extended accounts of the passion also suggest the significance of these details for an understanding of his person.

The category of person as appropriate for understanding the New Testament's referent is problematized at those sites of description that veer into the realm of theological interpretation. New Testament multivalence poses the problems of historical and chronological gaps, of grammatical and syntactical variation, and of harmonizing different accounts. Theology can help readers engage discrepancies by offering other levels of meaning by which to understand the text. The narrative tracking of Jesus' life and passion in the Gospels, for example, seems to problematize the historical claim that the Gospels were

22. Martin Luther, "Preface to the New Testament (1546)" (trans. C. M. Jacobs; rev. E. T. Bachmann), in *Luther's Works: American Edition* (ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann; 55 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958-86), 35:357-58.

23. This and all subsequent references to the Christian Bible are from the NRSV.

written later than Paul's epistles, even though they occur canonically at the beginning of the New Testament. A theological reflection on this historical difficulty interprets the meaning of Jesus' person in terms of his work. The person, whether antemortem or postmortem, is the cause of his saving effect. Salvation is inscribed into the origins of Jesus' life, which are themselves shrouded in mystery. The historical problems of reconstructing Jesus' origins can also be the subject of theological engagement. At the origin of Jesus' life is a signal of his eternal relation to God (John 1:1). This relation of essence explains the power of his work and the divine authority from which he receives this power.

The theological categories of person and work together constitute the conceptual relationship that brings together in a single focus the New Testament's perspectival multivalence. The categories abstract from multivalent accounts of reality, yet as abstractions can be applied as the structural parameter for interpreting the different texts. Different accounts are viewed through this common structural lens so that they can be categorized according to a particular aspect of reality. This aspect of reality remaining the same throughout difference is the attribution of transformative effects to Jesus in each and every case. Schleiermacher captures the attribution of diverse definitive life-transforming effects to their same cause in a sermon:

But in these conversations there was also something of that other effect—an impression, independent of the subject at hand, that was always the same, although it was manifested in the most various forms and widely divergent conditions throughout his entire association with them. And it was this impression that Christ's whole personality, his distinctive nature however it might express itself, never failed to create.²⁴

From new possibilities for living in community to the radical transition from death to life, the varieties of transformative experiences are all predicated of Jesus. From the earliest exorcisms to his resurrection appearances, Jesus is the one from whom all blessings flow. A common reality joins multivalent description to theology.

2. RECOVERY OF THE REAL IN THEOLOGY

If theological concepts do not have any corresponding intuitions, this emptiness will result in prescriptive vacuity. This is the danger that haunts

24. Friedrich Schleiermacher, "The Effects of Scripture and of the Redeemer," in *Servant of the Word: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (trans. D. De Vries; Fortress Texts in Modern Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 103-4.

contemporary Christian theology. This discipline, more than others, seems to be currently preoccupied with canonical questions of geographically limited focus primarily because it has been historically concerned with the historical method as integral to the formation of its concepts. But this does not need to be so. The real can be recovered for theology in a way analogous to what I have described above in section 1 for the New Testament. Here I turn to the possibilities of drawing on the New Testament, on Schleiermacher's epistemology, and on contemporary non-European contextual-theological movements in order to recover the reality of intuitions for theology's concepts.

The multivalence characterizing the New Testament already has a distinct profile; its topography suggests interpretative possibilities. The canonical shape of the Christian Bible, for example, orders the final prophetic books of the Old Testament in proximity to the Gospels and ends with John's eschatological vision in the book of Revelation. This topography leans toward a salvation-historical interpretation. A reception-historical topography privileges Paul's Letter to the Romans, to use another example, and thereby establishes the law-gospel relation as foundational for Western Christian belief. Specific topographical contours function as hermeneutical guides for theological interpretation anchored in the reality shaping the text's presentation.

Theology carries the burden of its own inevitable character. Its nature is to abstract from particulars in order to reach the grand universal; its task is to relate discrete parts in relation to a coherent whole. A coherent comprehension of the whole in view of its parts requires a sufficient degree of abstraction from the particular. Not every particular detail enters into the more abstract concept; rather, bits are integrated into larger wholes through a process of abstracting common elements and determining their interrelations. The comprehension of the whole occurs by grasping common elements through every stage of abstraction. If abstraction proceeds by relegating particulars to an ontologically lesser status than the concepts that allegedly grasp them, the resulting concept will be devoid of determined content. Being devoid of any particular way of being is precisely that, an empty concept alone at the top of Aristotle's chain of being. If abstraction occurs by conveying the particular in the conceptualization of the universal, then the concept grabs hold of reality and more adequately represents it. How the real can be recovered for the theological concept is the serious question in view of theology's burden and challenge.

Theology's burden can also be its joy. Abstraction as a work can be understood for this discipline as seeking precisely to articulate the concepts of religious realities as they are lived, practiced, and thought. In its process of abstraction, theology conceptualizes exactly the radically particular realities of face-to-face encounters, individual stories of personal pain and redemption, and the sacramental centers of real personal presences. If theology is to

be about life rather than about the worshipful awe of empty or exhausted concepts, then it must explore ways to retain the determination of its concepts by the real.

The task of topographical design is for the theologian the process of forming concepts. Already in the New Testament, the writers are at work offering topographies for future doctrinal conceptualization; the texts bear the structural imprints of persons who have experienced and schematized reality. Luke's conviction concerning the world-historical significance of the babe in the manger carries his Gospel (Luke 2:1-2). Paul's passion about the universal reconciliation accomplished by the crucified Christ informs his preaching and exhortation (2 Cor 5:18-19). John's Jesus, in the world but not of this world (John 16:16), structures the misunderstood conversations and the death sentence for the one who did not commit a crime. The concepts appear in narrative, expressing tendencies structuring the texts: healing, forgiveness, resurrection. The theological task of interpreting these texts is to determine hermeneutically how the tendencies surface as concepts schematizing reality. Paul's dramatic conversion, the recovery of sight after the blindness with which he was struck on the way to Damascus, is the experience riveting his soul to a new reality (Acts 9), which Paul expresses as he treats different topics in distinct historical circumstances. The Corinthians get a glimpse of this new reality when they are exhorted to temper their spiritual exuberance by obeying the gospel of love (1 Cor 13). The Galatians are exhorted to relinquish their enthusiasm for legalism by entering into the freedom for which Christ has set "us" free (Gal 5:1). By hermeneutically recovering the contours of experience, theology gets to the particular aspect of reality that is schematized by the text.

The theological recovery of the real in the New Testament is the hermeneutical task of describing and analyzing the ways in which concepts focus at the textual surface. The concepts, however, are themselves the products of psychological states and historical events, registering relations between subject and object. They can be described in view of an individual writer's production of her text. Yet the same mechanism of conceptual focus at the surface can also be applied to the New Testament as a whole, albeit without the individuation of the concept to authorial differences. When the New Testament is considered as a theological whole, its conceptual *Tendenz* can be described in view of a distinctive experience. Even though distinctive authorship cannot be applied to the text as a whole,²⁵ the composite can be read as

25. This question (mentioned by Wolterstorff in "Unity behind the Canon," 232) concerns the possibility of God as author of the entire work.

structural agreement concerning the person-work relation. The New Testament is constituted as a whole by a conceptual structure that comes together in its parts. The person-work relation does not imply abstraction from the real by denying its determination by reality. Rather, the abstraction of structural agreement as the person-work relation conveys a key material-theological claim. The unique reality of Christ's person is conveyed by necessarily relating transformative effect to its personal cause. As such, the New Testament topography presents a relation between person and work that the subsequent Christian theological tradition has categorized by the doctrines of Christology and soteriology. The process of abstracting the conceptual relation from the text as a whole presupposes a determination by the unique reality that is conceptualized.

The question regarding the analogy between New Testament theology and contemporary systematic theology can now be formulated. How can the real be recovered for contemporary theology in light of the formation of concepts that are significant to its problem-solving? It is the difference in perspective that Schleiermacher sought to minimize vis-à-vis concept formation at the origins of Christianity and at its present-tense location. For Schleiermacher, there is no qualitative difference in experiencing the person of Christ as a bodily person or as a spiritual presence embodied in the Christian community.²⁶ The early Christians were at no experiential advantage and, as a result, at no conceptual advantage, by being able to put their hands inside Christ's wounds (John 20:27). The difference in mode of perception, as personal bodily presence or as personal presence communicated by the community, does not presuppose a difference in perceptual apparatus; in both circumstances, the senses are affected. This perceptual difference does not result in a different effect; the same redemptive effect is also guaranteed by the sameness of the person: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). By underlining the sameness of person and effect, Schleiermacher stabilizes the identity of concept formation for both the New Testament and for any subsequent theology that bases its claims on expressions regarding the reality of Christ's person. The same concepts continue to be formed because they are evoked by the experiences of the same reality.

The challenge to forming the concept in full view of reality becomes a problem when access to reality is hypersaturated with determination. The weight of tradition, its historical span, its experiential comprehensiveness, and its issues of power and authority are factors already playing into concept formation before an individual or community deploys and shapes those

26. See n. 14.

concepts to describe reality. Theology in its Western Christian form is particularly burdened by inheritance. Since the incorporation of an explicit history of concept formation as an integral piece of systematic theology, theology itself has been stagnating in its European mold. The history of dogma is a theological tool that is supposed to contextualize contemporary theological questions in the historical light of their intellectual development. It involves, like all other historical descriptions, an abstraction from history, yet its highly reified interpretation of history functions to dislocate intellectual history from the many histories playing into the formation of ideas. Furthermore, the reconstruction of this history itself presupposes an authoritative instance for those doing the reconstruction. Voices are lost, voices are marginalized, and voices are destroyed in the process of abstracting an authoritative canonical connection between past and present. When such a method is coupled with a metaphysic of history, the heavy burden of truth serving power becomes too much even for reality to bear. The real is confused with the rational, and an intellectualized history replaces those living realities that have shaped the concepts in the first place.

Intellectual history as constitutive of theology's concept formation is in contemporary crisis. Theology continues to deploy concepts used by the tradition to schematize reality. Yet it is precisely the assumption concerning the capacity of these concepts to capture contemporary experience that must be reexamined. If these concepts are made to stand as ciphers for a history that is alien, if their truth is presupposed without adequate dialogue, if their empirical determination does not match one's own experience, then the concepts no longer serve the living (Luke 9:60). This difficulty is particularly insistent, given the primarily European history of the concepts' formation. Theological concepts risk becoming the artifacts of a European white male intellectual elite if this historically assumed course is not critically appropriated. A theology that is dead will be preoccupied with the past, canonizing its canon over and over again in every present generation. Theology can live as a conceptual discipline only if its predicates are determined from the contemporary perspective; the past only lives as past in present reality. If intellectual history is to continue to have a formative role to play in assigning concept formation to set up the present, then it must be open to different histories meeting it with regions of experience that cannot be pressed into traditional theological molds. This is the case for the new multibraided accounts of the European reformations and of contextual theologies, both of which are coming up with new empirical determinations for theological concepts.

Schleiermacher offers a useful model to explain how the real can be recovered for a theology that aims to represent ideas living in present Christian experience. The dialectical method can be applied to theology in order

to determine theology's concepts by real particulars. According to Schleiermacher, concepts are formed in history, through both individual biography and the transhistory of concepts in a particular historical series. The concept is presupposed as the subject term in a judgment, standing for the unity in reality of a particular comprehending its empirical appearances.²⁷ As such, it exists in reality, yet the empirical grasp of its existence is assigned to its predicates, and the grasp of its reality is assigned to a conceptual act of reason. Concept formation proceeds by assigning predicates gleaned from reality to the subject term; concept formation proceeds by way of judgment formation. Schleiermacher borrows from a Leibnizian account of intensional logic in order to explain the mechanism of the history of concept formation. A singular concept (*conceptus singularis*) is permitted on the grounds that it has one predicate. In the language of intensional logic, the concept presupposes the existence of the subject term. As predicates are assigned to the subject term, the concept is formed. Subsequent judgments presuppose earlier predications, whether true or false, so that the historical series of predication can include false predications that need to be revised.

The conceptual grasp of the subject's unity is an achievement of speculative reason working in tandem with empirical reason. While empirical reason investigates the subject's appearances, speculative reason unites those appearances in such a way as to offer a preliminary comprehension of the subject as a whole. By proceeding in this way, the empirical is brought together as a unity by conceptual act. The reality of the conceptual unity of the subject term is informed by the empirical predicates assigned to it. Reality is grasped by the unity of empirical predicates. Schleiermacher's achievement in his understanding of concept formation is both to rid the concept of any psychologically occult unity posited behind appearances and to recover the real by grasping its unity through judgment formation. As a concept, it is fundamentally revisable; as a reality, the appearances of the unity must be available to experience.

A compelling and controversial example of Schleiermacher's method of concept formation is his account of the concept of the Redeemer. Many scholars have noted the similarity of referent between Schleiermacher's reconstruction of the life of Jesus and his conceptual analysis of the Redeemer in *The Christian Faith*.²⁸ This structural agreement between exegetical results and theological claims is not the result of a conceptual overriding of his-

27. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über Dialektik* (vol. 2.10 of *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*; ed. Andreas Arndt; 2 vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 2:504–7.

28. See Schleiermacher, *Life of Jesus*; idem, *Christian Faith* §§93–100 (377–431).

torical data, as David Friedrich Strauss criticized.²⁹ Rather, the aim of the reconstructive exegetical work, as Schleiermacher understands it, is to give a "calculus" of Jesus as person.³⁰ The conceptualization of the person of Jesus is a grasp of his individuality, not as a psychologically occult reality but as his personality becomes available in personal development for viewing. The calculus constituting Jesus is itself the explanation for all his thinking and doing. By the same token, the conceptual delineation of Christ as Redeemer follows from the effects; by virtue of the effects of his person, the predicates can be assigned to their cause. On Schleiermacher's own grounds, the soteriological claims concerning Jesus' effects are attributed to the conceptual grasp of the unity of his person. The determinations of effect and cause are mutually reciprocal, dependent on the recovery of the real through both the empirical and the conceptual.

The multivalent accounts of the reality of Jesus can continue to provide theology with the empirical moorings that it needs. As theology continues to categorize experienced reality, it must work to open up various discourses that point to new areas of religious experience and then strengthen its resources to describe and explain these phenomena. In light of the increased appreciation that the Christian religion is lived out in communities well beyond the bounds of European or European-oriented confines, theologians are drawing increasingly on experiential-contextual resources to determine their concepts. Feminist theologians, for example, privilege experiences particular to women to expose ways in which systems, thought patterns, and behaviors have treated women as less than men. This imperative must change an academic theological environment that seems to place race, class, and gender restrictions on the "universal" reality that it purports to conceptualize.

Yet openness to new discursive regions must not come at the expense of forgetting. Concepts are formed transhistorically, especially those in view of a transhistorical religion such as Christianity. If the concept is to ring true for contemporary use and formation, its historical predicates must also sound as possibilities in the present. There must be agreement that the concept as it has been formed historically is capable of further development precisely because its predicates are possible predicates that might be actualized now. The task of rehearsing the possibility of predicates demands criticism and correction that simultaneously involves making claims to knowledge about the past from the present perspective. The predicates as possibilities undergo transformations

29. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's Life of Jesus* (ed. and trans. L. E. Keck; Lives of Jesus Series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 36.

30. The term is Schleiermacher's; see Schleiermacher, *Life of Jesus*, 8.

and then, in confrontation with novelty, might even determine the concepts in new ways. True multivalence means recognizing possible predicates together with actual predicates in the concept. This recognition is what makes true liberalism in view of the truth of reality possible.

3. CONCLUSION

If postmodernism has crashed against a resistant real, then it is the responsibility of theology to restore reality to its proper place for thinking and doing. Thinking about reality is a claim already established in the New Testament; its *raison d'être* is the joyful response to a reality encountered as transformative. Doing also requires the real as the place for moral reasoning and judgment. Without such a temporally and spatially constituted realm, doing would not exist as the concrete actualizations of personal and communal commitment.

The test case of Schleiermacher used in this essay argues for a recovery of the real through the dual application of empirical and conceptual reason. An account of New Testament multivalence showed that a primarily empirical method could glean the diversity of authorial expressions of experiences of Christ, thereby offering possibilities of experience together with an account of the structural parameters of those possibilities. Primarily conceptual reason comprehends the unities of appearances as those unities of authorial intentions are available for interpretation and subsequently for the formation of theological concepts. The conceptual grasp of unity, according to Schleiermacher, is accounted for in such a way that the unity does not remain an abstraction from empirical reality but rather is a specific way of relating the empirical to the conceptual. By this procedure, the empirical can be celebrated rather than repressed as it determines the concepts. The New Testament's multivalence can be an analogy for the reasons why theology should pursue new areas of experiential discourses. By attending deeply and openly to many accounts of experience, theology might become an ethically stronger and materially richer discipline, all the better to convey the reality for which Christian theology is known and for which it exists.

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