

Transhistorical Unity of the New Testament Canon from Philosophical, Exegetical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives¹

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity characterizes the biblical canon when it is viewed for its historical, thematic, and material-theological content. Historical plurality is written into the redactional layers of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Even in descriptions of one and the same event, different narrators relay different stories, each told from a particular historical and cultural location that lends a different interpretational spin to the basic story.² Furthermore, thematic plurality characterizes biblical content. From the aetiology of creation and human origins to architectural design, from ethical injunctions to immoral behaviour, from curses to hymns, the Bible represents its diverse themes in many literary genres shaping the subject matter through different languages.³ And

¹ I thank both Leann Long and Stephen Davis for our conversations on the subject of this essay and for kindly suggesting improvements to the text.

² For example, as Marvin Sweeney has shown, Jeremiah reflects critically upon the Isaian tradition in developing his own understanding of the exile from Jerusalem. Marvin A. Sweeney, 'The Truth in True and False Prophecy', in Christine Helmer and Kristin De Troyer, with Katie Goetz, eds., *Truth: Interdisciplinary Dialogues in a Pluralist Age*, Studies in Philosophical Theology, no. 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 9–26.

³ For a study of how genre shapes subject matter through the different discourses a genre generates (e.g. disputation, hymn, sermon) see Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: The Relationship Between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther's Works (1523–1546)*, Veröffentlichungen

finally, material-theological plurality reveals differences in conceptions of self, world, and God. The Psalms portray the individual tossed on the sea of emotions.⁴ Ecclesiastes exposes the vanity of most human striving, opting for the pleasures of eating, drinking, and enjoying the wife of one's youth (Eccles. 9: 7-9), while the ethereal evangelist, John, advocates the sovereignty above the fray in following the one who is in but not of this world (John 8: 23; 18: 36). Even the doctrine of God is depicted by an extreme amplitude between the God in whom one can and must place one's fear and trust (cf. Exod. 20: 2-3), and the God of prophetic witness who chooses one man and rejects his brother (cf. Rom. 9-11).⁵ And after surveying the diversity of human activity, wisdom literature can only maintain its awe in the face of the incomprehensibility of divine ways (cf. Rom. 11: 33-6), and in view of the divine foolishness that still puts human wisdom to shame (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 20, 25).

Despite this immense plurality, even embracing opposing ideas,⁶ the Bible is taken as a unified whole by religious communities and scholars. Christians continue to acknowledge the early church's decision to accept the first testament as an unredacted whole, joining it with the second testament to form the larger biblical unity of both Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, in the theological sub-discipline of systematic theology, concern with the Bible's unity has historically been more than a formal designation of what is contained between two book covers. In fact, theologians who have engaged seriously with scripture have

des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte/Abteilung Abendländische Religionsgeschichte, no. 174 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1999).

⁴ In his preface to the Psalter, Luther writes, 'A human heart is like a ship on a wild sea, driven by the storm winds from the four corners of the world.' Martin Luther, 'Preface to the Psalter', in Jaroslav Pelikan *et al.*, eds., *Luther's Works: American Edition*, 55 vols. (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958-86), 35: 255. (Hereafter referred to as LW.)

⁵ Of all theologians in Western history, it was perhaps Luther who was able to make this amplitude fruitful in his theology, if problematic for his interpreters. In 'The Bondage of the Will', Luther distinguishes between the hidden and revealed God in view of Romans 9-11. Martin Luther, 'The Bondage of the Will (1525)', in LW 33: 15-295.

⁶ See Christof Landmesser's chapter, 'Interpretative Unity of the New Testament', section entitled 'Differences between New Testament Texts', in this volume.

sought material principles determining the Bible as a whole, while taking those principles to structure their own respective theologies. Martin Luther's intra-biblical principle was a christological one. In order to distinguish between passages declaring Christ's forgiveness and those passages either pronouncing the human guilty or prescribing moral strictures, Luther determined the material principle of all scripture to be 'what conveys Christ'.⁷ The principle of gospel, with its accompaniment of law, was not only Luther's privileged hermeneutical tool for intra-biblical interpretation, it also structured the material claims of his own theology. As an example in contemporary theology, Brevard Childs seeks the unity of the biblical *res* in the self-same referent of its witnesses; the entire Bible witnesses to the one true God, whether in the distinctive voice of Israel or in the trinitarian witness of the church.⁸ What is common to Luther and Childs, to use just two examples, is that unity is preserved at a transhistorical and materially determined level. Although the Bible is constituted through diversity, the theological use of the Bible suggests that certain transhistorical features are required to set the general parameters for a religion, to serve as hermeneutical points of continuity between past and present, and to unify the tradition at a minimally determined material level so as to open up hermeneutical and theological freedom for the future life of the tradition. The question of the unity of the Bible is the question concerning the unity of the history of the church and theology.

The aim of this chapter is to offer a philosophical, exegetical, and systematic-theological view of the unity of the Christian

⁷ The term 'conveys' is the author's translation of the German 'treiben'. Martin Luther, 'Preface to the Epistle of St James and St Jude', in LW 35: 396. For Luther, the identity of God and the substance of salvation dispensed in history is retained by a medieval semantics prohibiting the introduction of temporality into the eternal referent. From whatever temporal location a theological claim is made, either intra-biblical or extra-biblical, the eternity of the referent is retained. See Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther*, 75-8.

⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 87. For Janowski, the *res* behind the text is the same God who unifies both testaments of the Christian Bible. See Bernd Janowski, 'The One God of the Two Testaments: Basic Questions of a Biblical Theology', trans. Christine Helmer, *Theology Today* 57/3 (1997): 297-324.

canon so as to account for the transhistorical stability of the Christian religion. My approach will be based on the work of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and his understanding of the canon as a concept that accounts for the continuity of the essence of Christianity throughout the church's history by virtue of a stable core of ideas that are expressed in the biblical text and also in the church's history. Schleiermacher's theological and philosophical thought provides a model for showing the construction of the canon's unity as a function of a subjective hermeneutically constituted unity as well as an objective transhistorical factor uniting the diachronous history of the church with the synchronous diversity of the many expressions of Christianity's essence. Although Schleiermacher limits his discussion of the Christian canon to the New Testament, I will suggest possible ways to include both testaments of the Christian Bible.⁹

The chapter's structure follows Schleiermacher's own ordering of the three theological sub-disciplines of philosophical

⁹ Although I closely follow Schleiermacher's thought in this essay, I do not agree with one significant aspect of his concept of canon. In his *Brief Outline*, Schleiermacher makes the terminological distinction between the Christian canon or New Testament and the Christian Bible or Old and New Testaments together (§ 115, (63)), and claims that exegetical theology's task is to investigate the New Testament canon, using the Old Testament as an auxiliary hermeneutical tool (§ 104 (58); § 128 (68–9); §§ 140–3 (73–5)). References to the *Brief Outline* are found in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study* (1811/1830), trans., with essays and notes by Terrence N. Tice, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations, no. 1 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990). (Hereafter referred to as BO. Unless stated otherwise, the BO is cited according to the second edition of 1830 with references given for paragraph numbers. Page numbers are given in parentheses.) Since the publication of the first review of the *Brief Outline* in 1812, a host of voices has been raised in criticism of Schleiermacher's view that the Old Testament neither expresses the central perspective of Christianity nor is to be used as a warrant for Christian systematic theology. For the famous first review see F. H. Chr. Schwarz, Review of 'Schleiermachers Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen', *Heidelbergische Jahrbücher der Litteratur* 5 (1812): 526–7. Among numerous articles, see the following two examples of a critical view of Schleiermacher: Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation*, Lutterworth Library, no. 47 (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 59–67, and Rudolf Smend, 'Schleiermachers Kritik am Alten Testament', in *Epochen der Bibelkritik: Gesammelte Studien*, iii, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie, no. 109 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1991), 128–44.

theology, exegetical theology, and systematic theology in his *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*. In the first section, I explain the philosophical-theological concept of canon as the originating point for a discussion of the canon's unity. Canon is a formally determined unity denoting a religion's essential features as transhistorical ideas expressed in language. In the second section, I determine the task of exegetical theology to study those transhistorical ideas as they are originally expressed in the New Testament canon. The canon's unity is constituted by the experience of a subject 'behind' the text that is subjectively construed by individual authors of the New Testament. Furthermore, the canon's unity as a collection of texts is related both objectively and subjectively to the tradition of its interpreters. In the third section, I determine the task of systematic theology to be a subjective construal of the canon's unity, based on the impact of the transhistorical unifying experience that itself is constituted by a principle of coherence in relation to the contemporary context in which the canon is received.

UNITY OF THE CANON FROM A PHILOSOPHICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since the Greeks, the search for a stable unity amid seething plurality has been the prerogative of philosophical enquiry. While Plato sought to find the unity of virtue, the state, and metaphysics in which plurality participated,¹⁰ Kant sought in reason (*Vernunft*) the function unifying the sensible manifold into a coherent whole.¹¹ Human reason itself is systematic by nature; the 'purpose of any member can be derived only from the complete concept of the whole'.¹² It was, however, Schleiermacher who

¹⁰ For Plato, the *Protagoras* concerns the unity of virtue, the *Republic* concerns the unity of the state, and the *Parmenides* concerns the metaphysical unity of being.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), A 77 = B 103 (210). (Page numbers are given in parentheses.)

¹² Immanuel Kant, 'Preface' to *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, *With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Gary Hatfield,

applied the sense of the whole to religion. He showed how the positive religions are historical phenomena that are to be studied as unities in order to grasp a religion's distinctive characteristics in relation to other religions. In this section, I will describe the role that Schleiermacher assigns to philosophical theology to discern the transhistorical essence of a religion through the use of speculative reason. I will show how philosophical theology then is applied to the canon as a concept accounting for the transhistorical unity of a positive religion, such as Christianity.

The conceptual designation of a positive religion's historical features sets the parameters for further determining a particular religion's idiosyncratic features. For Schleiermacher, any historical religion is constituted by two factors, each with its own starting-point and historical trajectory. The unity of a religion consists of an outer characteristic that can be detected historically and an inner self-same essence. The essence of every historical religion is constituted by both 'an outward unity, as a fixed fact of history with a definite commencement, and an inward unity, as a peculiar modification of that general character which is common to all developed faiths of the same kind and level'.¹³ The outer unity has an original starting-point historically anchoring a feature recognizable as a central perspective to that particular religion. The inner unity is determined in the psychological terms common to all adherents of the respective religion as the relation between immediate self-consciousness and sensible self-consciousness.¹⁴ In view of Christianity as a positive religion, the outer unity is conceptually designated for the entire historical trajectory as the essential relation between the founder, Jesus of Nazareth, and the effect of redemption emanating from him.¹⁵

Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13 (= 4. 263).

¹³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (1830/31), eds. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart, trans. D. M. Baillie *et al.*, of 7th edn. by Martin Redeker (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), § 10, proposition (44). (Hereafter referred to as CF. References to CF include paragraph and corollary number, or proposition, or postscript, while page numbers are given in parentheses.)

¹⁴ CF §§ 7–10 (31–52).

¹⁵ The essence of Christianity is 'a monotheistic faith, belonging to the teleological type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth'. CF § 11, proposition (52).

The inner unity of Christianity, as is the case with two other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, is characterized by the feeling of absolute dependence in relation to an ultimate Whence.¹⁶ Christianity, like Judaism, is also a 'teleological' religion, which orients states of passivity to activity in the world.¹⁷ And by virtue of a particular construal of monotheism and teleology, Christian self-consciousness is constituted by both the consciousness of sin and the consciousness of grace, the latter attributed to an external source.¹⁸ This inner unity together with the outer unity forms the unity of Christianity's essence, or the conceptual determination of Christianity's distinctive features retained through historical change.

The inner and outer unities unite to constitute a religion's essence. This unity is the key to what Schleiermacher means by religion: Religion is historical. Religion necessarily takes historical shape because its inner unity cannot appear anywhere but intentionally in history. The unity between inner and outer unity, however, cannot be characterized as a one-way external expression of an inner state. Rather, the historical environment in which a religion is embedded is a realm of the relative freedom and relative dependence characterizing all of inter-human and inner-worldly interactions.¹⁹ By virtue of its historical embeddedness, a religion's inner unity is expressed in the external coefficients of its environment, yet conversely, externalized expressions are circulated in the environment in such a way as to impact the inner psychological states of individuals. A religion's external expressions are the same coefficients shared by language, culture, politics, and philosophy. These coefficients are constitutive of the psychological level of sensible self-consciousness that is necessarily related to that psychological domain reserved as religion's 'peculiar province'²⁰: immediate self-consciousness. The constitutive relation between inner and outer unities guarantees the identity of an identifiable shape through history distinct from other externalizations of the human spirit, such as

¹⁶ CF § 9, 1 (40–2).

¹⁷ CF § 9, 1 (41–2).

¹⁸ Part II of Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* is structured by these two aspects of Christian self-consciousness. The first aspect or the 'Explication of the Consciousness of Sin' precedes the lengthy second aspect or the 'Explication of the Consciousness of Grace'. See the table of contents in CF, xvi–xviii.

¹⁹ See CF § 4, 2 (13–15).

²⁰ CF § 3, 4 (9).

politics and the academy. Yet the two dimensions of inner and outer explain how a religion remains the same while changing with history's ebb and flow. In Schleiermacher's thought, the relation between a self-same essence and its external manifestations explains how a religion is intentionally based on external coefficients, but cannot be reduced to any one of them. Any external aspect of the religion must be deemed an appearance of the inner unity in its entirety; no metaphysically occult reality hides behind the appearance. Yet a religion's empirical manifestation does not exhaust the possibilities of a religion to change through time because it is its inner unity that holds constant throughout.

The metaphysical features of a religion's unity determine epistemological access to that religion's essence. It is to the field of philosophical theology that Schleiermacher assigns the more or less *a priori* construction of a religion's unifying parameters. This *a priori* construal borrows from the Leibnizian distinction between power (*Kraft*) as the unity holding together and underlying the manifold of appearances, and the appearances (*Erscheinungen*) of the inner unity that themselves as a whole exhibit the religion's outer unity. In Schleiermacher's system, the relation of power (or essence) to appearance operates as the metaphysical key to understanding the transhistorical unity of any historical religion, and that of the Christian religion in particular.²¹ The speculative construction of a religion's essence is the task of philosophical theology; philosophical-theological reason is speculative, rather than empirical, and it is oriented to conceptually fixing a minimal description of a religion's essence in relation to other religions. By this speculative activity, philosophical theology assigns a conceptual site to a particular religion within a system composed of concepts that bifurcate into their divisions on their lower side and concepts that are unified into higher concepts on their higher side.²² This constructive task cannot be entirely accomplished without a minimum of em-

²¹ 'Therein lies the truth that in spite of all change, Christianity can be comprehended as a historical appearance.' Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Theologische Enzyklopädie* (1831/32): *Nachschrift David Friedrich Strauß*, ed. Walter Sachs, Schleiermacher-Archiv, no. 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 35 (to BO § 32). (Hereafter referred to as ThE. Any German text for which no published English translation is available is translated into English by the author.)

²² This is my summary of CF § 2, 2 (2-4).

pirical contribution.²³ Although Schleiermacher distinguishes between the speculative task determining the concept and the empirical historical task determining the historical predicates,²⁴ the minimum/maximum continuum uniting speculative and historical poles relates minimal empirical content to the speculative fixing of the essence.

This is evident in the 'Introduction' to *The Christian Faith* (§§ 1-31). In contrast to the properly dogmatic-theological parts I and II (§§ 32-172), Schleiermacher sets up the 'Introduction' as a set of epistemological steps constructing the location of the individual essence of Christianity within a system of concepts. First, the general sphere of ethics, as the activities of human *Geist* providing the rules for historical agency, claims necessity for the appearance of the church as the manifestation of a common essence of piety (§§ 3-6). Next, the sphere of philosophy of religion classifies the various manifestations of the essence of religion as the positive religions according to kind and type (§§ 7-10). Finally, the field of apologetics (§§ 11-14) minimally fixes the concept of the essence of Christianity as the 'redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth'.²⁵ The delineation of the

²³ 'Philosophical theology, it is true, presupposes the material of historical theology as already known; its own prior task, however, is to lay a foundation for the properly historical perspective on Christianity.' BO § 65 (37).

²⁴ The distinction is taken from the *Dialektik* in which Schleiermacher assigns the work of speculative reason to one type of thinking, concept formation, and empirical reason to the second type of thinking, judgement formation. Borrowing from the Leibnizian figure of a minimum/maximum continuum, Schleiermacher places speculative and empirical reason in relation to each other as the two poles of reason, and connects them with a principle of identity allowing for the transition from one pole to the other. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik: Im Auftrage der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften auf Grund bisher unveröffentlichten Materials*, ed. Rudolf Odebrecht (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1942; reprint, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), 255. (Hereafter referred to as DialO.) On the principle of identity in Leibniz and post-Kantian philosophy see Manfred Frank, 'Identität, Korrespondenz und Urteil: Fragen an Schleiermachers *Dialektik*', in Christine Helmer, Christiane Kranich, and Birgit Rehme-Iffert, eds., *Schleiermachers Dialektik: Die Liebe zum Wissen in Philosophie und Theologie*, Religion in Philosophy and Theology, no. 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 3-22.

²⁵ CF § 11, proposition (52). In the CF and along with ethics and the philosophy of religion, apologetics is ordered to the 'Introduction' (§§ 11-14 (52-76)). In the BO, apologetics is ordered to philosophical theology as one of its two constitutive elements; the flip-side of apologetics is polemics (§§ 43-62 (26-36)).

essence of Christianity in terms of the redemption–Redeemer relationship presupposes a purview of historical theology. From a survey of the history of Christianity is gleaned that which is perspectively deemed to be the constant factor throughout the trajectory.

As a theological sub-discipline, philosophical theology is assigned the important task of setting up the concepts to be discussed by exegetical and systematic theology. Although philosophical theology, with its two constitutive areas of apologetics and polemics, was not yet part of the nineteenth-century theological repertoire, Schleiermacher invented this field for the purpose of delineating the minimal conceptual requirements for academic dialogue.²⁶ Schleiermacher's particular need for philosophical theology as the discipline that establishes the conceptual conditions of agreement concerning the subject matter of theology can be understood against the backdrop of the inter-confessional controversies of Protestant Orthodoxy. Rather than begin a discussion with disagreement concerning concepts, Schleiermacher opts for minimal agreement at the onset, thereby setting the stage for subsequent disagreement concerning the predicates of the concept as well as the possibility of resolution.²⁷ The formal character of Schleiermacher's philosophical theology serves to lay out the conceptual agreement concerning the 'purely logical'²⁸ dimension of the subject matter in order

²⁶ 'But for the interests of Apologetics as well as of Dogmatics it seems advisable rather to be content with a scanty result at the beginning and to hope for its completion in the course of further procedure, than to begin with a narrow and exclusive formula, which is of necessity confronted by one or more opposing formulae, with which there must be a conflict sooner or later.' CF § 11, 1 (54).

²⁷ The purpose of the *Dialektik* as 'the art of conducting conversation' (DialO 47) is to prescribe rules governing the resolution of an intersubjective controversy (*Streit*) in the realm of 'pure thinking' (*reines Denken*). On this intersubjective procedural approach for 'doing philosophy' see the 1833 'Introduction' to the *Dialektik* in DialO §§ 1–5 (5–44).

²⁸ In Schleiermacher scholarship, there is controversy regarding Schleiermacher's use of the term 'above "Christianity"' in the BO (§ 33 (19)) to describe the starting-point for a philosophical-theological treatment of the conceptual relation of Christianity to a general theory of religion. In the BO, Schleiermacher explicitly uses the term above 'in the logical sense' (§ 33 (19)), rather than in an empirical or a generic sense in order to assign to philosophical theology the task of setting up a conceptual grid making an empirical analysis possible.

that the predicates gleaned from the historically given material can be added and evaluated. The concept fixes the unity of the subject matter at the speculative level, and empirical observation later fills in the predicates of that concept through the process of judgement formation.²⁹ By creating agreement concerning the basic concept, philosophical theology provides the opportunity for subsequent exegetical and systematic-theological reflection on a religion's historical predicates.

A significant responsibility of philosophical theology is the selection of distinct concepts for historical investigation. The careful choosing of concepts is a crucial step determining subsequent reflection of those concepts. For Schleiermacher, the choice of which concepts to study follows from the conceptual grid relating a particular religion to its proximate kinds. Once a particular religion has been situated in relation to other religions manifesting similar features, such as the 'monotheistic teleology' of Judaism and Christianity, these relations can be more precisely determined by specific concepts in such a way as to facilitate both further comparison by philosophy of religion and further specification of the particular religion's essence by theology.

The formal features of religion as inner and outer unity play a role in determining philosophical-theological concepts. In the *Brief Outline*, Schleiermacher assigns to the 'apologetics' subdivision of philosophical theology the task of selecting the concepts. In contrast with 'polemics', which determines a religion's internal state of sickness or health, apologetics clarifies key concepts used to describe a religion's necessary historical existence.³⁰ For apologetics, concepts relevant to this task must

²⁹ I am applying here the insights of the *Dialektik* to determine the epistemological character of the CF's 'Introduction' and main body. The 'Introduction' makes primary use of speculative reason to set up a conceptual grid relating Christianity to other positive religions as historical manifestations of piety, and the CF's main body makes use of historical reason to flesh out the ways in which Christian doctrines have historically been and, in Schleiermacher's case, are currently being, articulated.

³⁰ By this definition, Schleiermacher changes the common use of the term 'polemics' to mean philosophical theology's internal orientation promoting the particular religion's health. In its common usage, polemics is directed outwards, to attack aberrations in confessions and denominations not one's own. See TheE 44–7 (to BO §§ 41). For its counterpart 'apologetics', Schleiermacher retains the term's original usage as a defence directed outwards (see TheE 42–5 (to BO

show religion to be a necessary manifestation of human spirit in history, and in view of a particular religion, distinguish it from other historical religions by differences in inner and outer unity. Apologetics isolates the distinctive features of a religion in terms of its origins, characteristics accounting for that religion's historical continuity, and the unique unity between its inner and outer unities. In view of the particular religion of Christianity, Schleiermacher assigns the concepts of revelation, miracle, and inspiration to distinguish Christianity at its origins from other religions, and the concepts of prophecy, type, and pattern to tease out Christianity's continuity in time as distinct from other historical religions.³¹ In terms of its outer unity, a religion's origin marks it off from a preceding historical series as well as being decisive for its subsequent development. Furthermore, a particular religion's historical continuity is an individuation of formal features, for example, 'pattern' characterizes the outer unity of any historical religion. Questions concerning a religion's outer unity are inevitably bound together with its inner unity. In view of inner unity, concepts are chosen to tease out features of a religion's essence that remain the same despite changes occurring through time. It is precisely the canon that Schleiermacher designates to be one of two such concepts (the other is sacrament) preserving the religion's inner unity.

Canon is a concept yielded by the determination of a positive religion's conceptual features. Although he appeals to the concept of canon in view of any historical religion, Schleiermacher defines the distinct Christian concept³² as that which 'demonstrate[s] how the unity of its [the Christian Church's] essence is never-

§§ 39-41)). As a defence, however, apologetics offers neither a proof nor a demonstration of Christianity's truth, but rather derives the necessity of Christianity's historical existence from the necessity of human *Geist* to manifest piety in the historical religions.

³¹ This is my brief summary of BO §§ 45-7 (27-8). The two 'religions' that Schleiermacher distinguishes from Christianity in view of these features of outer unity are Judaism and 'Heathenism' (*das Heidentum*). Cf. CF § 12 (60-2).

³² In the ThE, Schleiermacher contrasts the distinctiveness of the Christian canon of the New Testament with the Old Testament canon. See ThE 54 (to BO § 47). According to Schleiermacher, the crucial difference lies in the common referent of all New Testament texts. In Schleiermacher's opinion (and on this point criticism is necessary), the Old Testament canon is a literary aggregate with no such unifying feature.

theless not endangered by such [historical] modifications as it undergoes', or in other words, that which is 'conceptually related to the continuity of what is essential in Christianity'.³³ The feature of inner unity establishing the historical continuity of the religion's essence is the psychological component. An identity of 'feeling' constitutes the self-same Christian essence throughout the historical life of the tradition. For Schleiermacher, this self-same feeling characterizing the Christian religion can only be described in soteriological terms because the distinctive Christian essence is by definition related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.³⁴ The distinctive Christian feeling (or self-consciousness) is constituted by the redemptive impact of Jesus Christ that moves the soul from a state of the need for redemption to the state of redemption. Although the state of redemption for all believers other than Jesus Christ is not a constant one, the identity of feeling is a function of the psychological realignment between sensible and immediate self-consciousness.³⁵ The consciousness of sin and the consciousness of grace are due to the inverse ways in which the two aspects of self-consciousness are related to each other. Grace is the soul's state characterized by the permeation and elevation of the feeling of absolute dependence into all temporally constituted moments of thinking and doing; sin is the state inhibiting this permeation. With recourse to a soteriologically determined understanding of the distinctive Christian self-consciousness, Schleiermacher's understanding of the concept of canon circumscribes the distinct psychological

³³ BO § 47 (28).

³⁴ For the soteriological determination of Christianity's essence, I am in agreement with Brian Gerrish who claims against Brunner (Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort*, 2nd edn. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1928)) that Schleiermacher defines the distinctively Christian essence in soteriological terms, and not in terms of a generic religious essence. See Brian Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 22-45. By conceiving the essence of Christianity on its own terms, rather than as an accidental manifestation of a deeper and more generic essence, the fundamental relation between the 'Introduction' to the CF (§§ 1-31) and the dogmatic body of the work (§§ 32-172) can be clarified. The 'Introduction' sets up the conceptual parameters for the dogmatic determination that follows, yet itself presupposes the historical data in conceiving these parameters.

³⁵ I am reading CF § 11 (52-60) together with the paragraphs devoted to soteriology (§§ 100-1 (425-38)).

feature of Christianity as its inner unity consistent throughout the tradition and generations of believers.

Yet the psychologically conceived inner unity is inevitably related to the particular religion's outer unity. A second distinctive feature of Schleiermacher's understanding of the canon is this relation between inner and outer unity. Canon is 'so related ["to the continuity of what is essential in Christianity"] insofar as this continuity finds expression in the production of ideas'.³⁶ By this concept of canon, Schleiermacher is not at all identifying canon with text. Rather, he defines this concept against the backdrop of his understanding regarding the relations between psychology, thought, and language. Because sensible self-consciousness is the temporal dimension to consciousness, feelings are inevitably externalized as gestures, and eventually fixed with greater precision in thought, and ultimately in language as the completion of thought.³⁷ As an authorial intention, a thought expresses feeling in the feeling's relation to sensible self-consciousness. Authorial intention is at the same time intentional in its capacity to refer to reality. In precise soteriological terms, the intentionality of self-consciousness is the redemptive impact of Jesus Christ that is expressed together with the consciousness of grace. Through genres ranging from the less precise but more evocative poetic and rhetorical genres to the didactic-descriptive genre that suits the purpose of scientific investigation,³⁸ thinking fixes ideas concerning soteriological intentionality. It is the relation of the plurality of ideas to Christianity's self-same essence that Schleiermacher has in mind with his concept of canon. As such, canon is the concept relating the unity of Christianity's essence to the plurality of expressions that can either be circulated in the community for pious edification or be studied as the object of theology.

With his determination, Schleiermacher makes a decisive shift

³⁶ BO § 47 (28).

³⁷ In the *Dialektik*, Schleiermacher presupposes the claim of his *Hermeneutik*, that thought is rendered complete and fixed in language. 'Thought is prepared by inner discourse, and to this extent discourse is only the thought itself which has come into existence.' Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism And Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Andrew Bowie, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

³⁸ For a description of these three genres see CF § 15, 2 (78) and § 16, 1 (78-9).

in the concept of canon. Canon is neither to be identified with a text as such nor is its unity to be circumscribed by literary boundaries, as is the case with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestant Orthodoxy.³⁹ Rather, canon is a philosophical-theological concept derived from a theory of religion in order to account for the transhistorical essence of a religion. The essence accounting for the unity of the tradition is less tied to a literary text than to the living principle of a historical religion. Furthermore in view of the particular religion of Christianity, canon is determined in (minimal) soteriological terms. Canon is the inner unity of a psychological consciousness of grace that is attributed to the transhistorical reality of Christ 'behind the text' as it redemptively impacts individuals in the church.⁴⁰ The production of ideas eventually fixed in the text presupposes the experience of a modification of self-consciousness under the impact of Christ. And this experience is a perpetual one, open to a plurality of future possibilities. The minimal fixing of this plurality in a conceptual unity is the task of philosophical theology. The material plurality, however, that is given in the literary fixing of the New Testament is the object of exegetical-theological investigation. The experience determining the unity of a religion makes the formation of the canon possible in the first place. And this experience, as we shall see in the next section, makes exegetical theology as the search for the canon possible.

UNITY OF THE CANON FROM AN EXEGETICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Although the canon as concept presupposes both a textual fixing as the 'Bible' and a philosophical-theological fixing as the essence of Christianity, it is as a concept that it requires material

³⁹ For the Protestant Orthodox doctrine of scripture see Heinrich Schmid, ed., *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 3rd edn. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 38-91 (= §§ 6-12), and Heinrich Heppe, ed., *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, rev. edn. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker House, 1978), loci II-III.

⁴⁰ For Schleiermacher, the redemptive encounter with the person of Christ shapes ecclesial identity. The community's identity is conceived in soteriological, not in sociological terms.

determination. In Schleiermacher's system of theology, this role is given to historical theology and its three sub-disciplines. To the first of these sub-disciplines, exegetical theology, is assigned the task of determining the canon in its relation to a text. I begin this section by studying Schleiermacher's understanding of the relation between text and the subject matter presupposed by his understanding of exegetical theology. For Schleiermacher, the transparency of New Testament texts to the subject matter holds both for its individual authors and for the collection as a whole. I conclude this section by summarizing what Schleiermacher means by 'open' canon. The entire section aims to show how the unity of the subject matter behind the text is determinative for the canon as text and how the text is open to a diversity of subjectively constituted unities.

Given philosophical theology's initial determination of the canon as concept, the concept's relation to the literary text needs to be considered. It must be stressed from the onset that Schleiermacher does not identify the canon with the Bible. The Christian Bible is understood in pragmatic-ecclesial terms as the literary text composed of both Old and New Testaments and used by the church since its early history.⁴¹ The canon, however, is an idea⁴² concerned with the unity of the Christian tradition as the identity of an experience that is expressed in a variety of ways and subsequently fixed in literature. For Schleiermacher, the experiential identity of the Christian tradition is related to the historical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament and other early Christian texts were written under the impact of this person; experience is related to text.

An experience establishes the identity between the different ideas fixed in the literary canon. Schleiermacher summarizes this canonical experience as 'the action and effect of Christ both on and with his disciples and also those which concern the com-

⁴¹ BO § 115 (63).

⁴² In the first edition of the BO (1811), Schleiermacher refers to the canon as idea (BO, 1st edn., vol. i, § 2 (58 n. 43)). In the subsequent edition of 1831, Schleiermacher dispenses with the term idea, preferring instead a terminology that more closely relates the concept of canon to the New Testament text. 'The collection of those writings which contain the normative presentation of Christianity forms the New Testament canon of the Christian Church.' BO § 104 (58).

mon action and effect of his disciples toward the establishing of Christianity'.⁴³ This definition of the canon represents an important conflation between a literary observation and a theological claim. As a literary observation, Schleiermacher agrees with the early church's canonical distinction between the New Testament gospels and the apostolic letters. He then relates this literary distinction to a theological claim regarding the co-constitution of redemption and the creation of the church. This move is significant because it implies that the redemptive experience is communicational at its very essence; Christ's impact on his disciples is conveyed through them and this communication constitutes the church. The idea of canon is precisely this experience that gives the explanation for why the experience is necessarily communicable in the first place. When interpretations of this experience are eventually fixed in literary form, the literary canon perpetuates the communicational structure that it fixes. By communicating redemption, the community of faith is formed. At the origin of this communication, the 'purest' expressions of the canon are textually fixed where 'pure' means the most immediate expressions at a site historically proximate to Christ with as little intervening material as possible.⁴⁴ Pure does not mean canonical in the sense of the text's dignity.⁴⁵ Rather, it refers to the text's transparency to the experience behind it that motivates the text's production.

⁴³ BO § 105 (58). By this distinction, Schleiermacher indicates his agreement with the 'ancient practice of dividing the canon into *evangelion* and *apostolos*'. BO § 105 (59). (Italics in the original text.) In his 'Introduction' to the New Testament canon, Schleiermacher gives a historical survey of the early church's development of the distinction between gospels and apostles. See his *Einleitung ins neue Testament*, ed. G. Wolde, in *Friedrich Schleiermachers Sämtliche Werke*, vol. I/8 (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1845), 55–62. (Hereafter referred to as SW.)

⁴⁴ BO § 83 (47).

⁴⁵ According to Schleiermacher, there is no strict boundary between canonical and extra-canonical material because the boundary that separates them is unclear in terms both of historical limits and of the apostolicity of its authors. Both factors contribute to an uncertain 'outer boundary of the canon'. BO § 106 (59). In my view, Schleiermacher's position on the unclear limits is due to his privileging of the experience behind the text, rather than the text's dignity itself, that holds for non-canonical material as well. On this basis, material criteria need then to be defined in order to distinguish between a canonical record of the experience and a non-canonical one.

The differentiation between text and subject matter represents a crucial shift in understanding the relation of text to its critical investigation. In the early nineteenth century, Schleiermacher saw the challenge posed by historical and natural-scientific theories against a supernaturalistic view of biblical inspiration and an inspired canonical text.⁴⁶ To salvage an aspect of Christianity against its cultured despisers, Schleiermacher takes its 'inner fire'⁴⁷ to be both the subject matter of theology as well as the referent of scripture (see John 5: 39).⁴⁸ The 'inner power of Christianity'⁴⁹ is the experiential factor funding the unity of the Christian tradition as a whole, and urging its communication in speech and text. As a result, all communication is an interpretation of that experience.⁵⁰ The literary canon does not stand as revealed fact over and against the tradition of its interpretation, as is the case with Protestant Orthodoxy. Rather, the New Testament presupposes '[f]aith in God's revelation in Christ'⁵¹ before a 'peculiar authority can be granted to Holy Scripture'.⁵² As such, the New Testament is 'the first member in the series'⁵³ whose normativity rests on its capacity to 'contribut[e] to the

⁴⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, 'The Second Letter to Dr Lücke', in *On the Glaubenslehre*, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza, AAR Texts and Translations Series, no. 3 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1988), 60–8. On hermeneutical grounds, Schleiermacher criticizes Protestant Orthodoxy's supernaturalistic claims of a holy text inspired by the Holy Spirit for all time. See Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 53, 57, 59, 81, 86, 130–1, 149.

⁴⁷ The evocative term is taken from the *Speeches*. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, ed. and trans. Richard Crouter, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 99 (Fifth Speech).

⁴⁸ 'You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.' *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁹ Schleiermacher, 'The Second Letter to Dr Lücke', 66.

⁵⁰ On biblical texts as interpretation see Kristin De Troyer, 'The Letter of the King and the Letter of Mordecai', *Textus 21* (2002): 187–8; ead., 'Septuagint and Gender Studies: The Very Beginning of a Promising Liaison', in Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine, eds., *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 334–7.

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, 'The Second Letter to Dr Lücke', 65.

⁵² CF § 128, proposition (591).

⁵³ CF § 129, proposition (594).

original, and therefore for all times normative, presentation of Christianity'.⁵⁴ The given literary canon establishes the parameters of the church's original apprehensions of Christ without which no Christian community can exist.⁵⁵ The text fixes these parameters, not by identity with experience or revelation, but in view of its reference to an experience identical for the entire tradition. On the basis of this text–subject matter differentiation, the text can be the object of critical investigation, the study of the subjective construals of an experience that critical methods cannot falsify.

Although this relation between text and subject matter circumvents the difficulties associated with supernaturalist doctrines, it presents its own exegetical-theological difficulty. With the distinction, the problem of a historical gap arises. It was Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) who problematized the gap between Jesus and the New Testament record, and it was his research, that although 'naive', provided a clear impetus for an entire generation of nineteenth-century scholarly attempts to solve the 'synoptic problem'.⁵⁶ In the *Fragments*, published posthumously by the librarian at Wolfenbüttel, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), Reimarus attempted to falsify Christianity by exposing the contradictions in the New Testament gospels to be a record of deception by Jesus' disciples.⁵⁷ Although Reimarus understood Jesus' own message to be an ethical one, his disciples falsified it by adding supernaturalistic claims. For the next generation of New Testament scholarship, Reimarus succeeded in posing the distinct problem of gospel harmony in the context of the possibility of historical research to falsify theological claims concerning the necessary connection between Christ and his disciples.

⁵⁴ BO § 103 (58).

⁵⁵ 'For no Christian communion will admit that any such body can exist apart from witness to Christ'. CF § 127, 1 (586).

⁵⁶ John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 275.

⁵⁷ Lessing published the *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* between 1774 and 1778 (Berlin: In der Sanderschen Buchhandlung (C. M. Eichhoff)). In English: *Fragments*, ed. Charles H. Talbert, trans. Ralph S. Fraser, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). For a detailed summary of Reimarus's position and the ensuing discussion of the synoptic problem, see Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 275–328.

The possibility of historical falsification also motivated Schleiermacher's own research into the synoptic problem. If the canon, on Schleiermacher's terms, refers to a transhistorically common Christian experience, then the continuity between Jesus' appearance in history, the disciples' efforts in founding the church, and the New Testament record of these activities requires historical justification. Along with other New Testament scholars of the time, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851), Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812), and Johann Leonhard Hug (1765–1846), Schleiermacher attempted to fill the lag time between Christ and the New Testament with a history of gospel sources and their relations of dependence.⁵⁸ With such a study, Schleiermacher aimed to prove that nothing essential to Christianity had been lost, and that no significant distorting element had been added in the process of text fixation. As apostles of the church, the disciples founded it in obedience to and in continuity with Christ's injunctions.⁵⁹ And in spite of their less than sophisticated literary talents, the disciples were not so ignorant as to plunge all of Christianity into error.⁶⁰ Thus exegetical theology's search for the original links between Christ and text is intended to guarantee that the earliest production of Christianity's ideas was not tainted by deception.

⁵⁸ Schleiermacher presents his theory of gospel dependence in his *Commentary on Luke* (1817) and in his commentary of the *Papias-Fragment* (1832). Schleiermacher proposes a collection of Jesus' sayings (Matt. 5–7; 10; 13: 1–52; 18; 23) together with a narrative source 'proto-Mark' behind Matthew. In view of dating, Matthew is the first gospel, and Mark is the final gospel that borrows from both Matthew and Luke. See Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 295–7, and Christine Helmer, 'Schleiermacher's Exegetical Theology and the New Testament', in *Cambridge Companion to Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁵⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, ed. and intro. Jack C. Verheyden, trans. S. MacLean Gilmour, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1975; reprint, Mifflintown: Sigler, 1997), 22–4. (Hereafter referred to as LJ.)

⁶⁰ 'If these writers belong to the class of the first preachers of the Gospel they were penetrated by its principles in an important way; it is precisely they who made it possible for Christianity to take its particular place in the world, so one should assume better of them.' Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 153.

Although it was Reimarus's challenge that propelled nineteenth-century gospels research, it was Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91) who first undertook a historical study of the canon's formation. Professor at the University of Halle during Schleiermacher's studies there, Semler wrote a controversial *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon* (1771–5),⁶¹ a history of the canon that paved the way for dismantling Protestant Orthodoxy's supernaturalistic doctrine of the canon as verbally inspired. Arguing from historical evidence, Semler showed that neither was the Christian canon accepted uniformly by all early churches, nor were all books included in the canon received as such by the early Christian communities.⁶² Rather, a variety of canons were circulated in the early church, and only through a complex process of selection and sifting was the collection that came to be regarded as canonical put together.

If Semler used historical arguments to falsify doctrinal claims of the canon's catholicity, then he also placed its twin, apostolicity, in jeopardy. Semler left this task to Schleiermacher who hammered out his own ground-breaking work on deuteropauline scholarship, criticizing the apostolic authorship of 1 Timothy in a detailed philological analysis of this book, which had until then been regarded as the work of the Apostle Paul.⁶³ By comparing the letter with Paul's speeches in Acts, as well as with two other letters attributed to Paul, Titus, and 2 Timothy, Schleiermacher concluded that 1 Timothy could not have Paul as its author, but was a compilation of Titus (chapters 1–3) and 2 Timothy from chapter four; dated to the end of the first century CE.⁶⁴ With this

⁶¹ An abridged edition is: Johann Salomo Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*, ed. Heinz Scheible, Texte zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte, no. 5 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1967).

⁶² *Ibid.*, esp. 71–81.

⁶³ For a study of Schleiermacher's contribution to deuteropauline scholarship see Hermann Patsch, 'Die Angst vor dem Deuteropaulinismus: Die Rezeption des "kritischen Sendschreibens" Friedrich Schleiermachers über den 1. Timotheusbrief im ersten Jahrfünft', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 88 (1991): 451–77.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ueber den sogenannten ersten Brief des Paulos an den Timotheos* (1807), ed. Hermann Patsch, in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. I/5 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 153–242. (Hereafter referred to as KGA.)

critical work, Schleiermacher contributed his own insights to the history of canon research.

Although he demonstrates the historical shakiness of the canon's apostolicity, Schleiermacher considers the New Testament authors to be essential for determining the canon. Exegetical theology's task is to study an author's grasp of an experience held in common with other writers that is communicated according to the writer's respective principle of individuality. Countering Reimarus's criticism against the texts' lack of veracity, Schleiermacher claims that the New Testament documents contain the 'purest' record of Christianity's essence at its origins and hence are to be considered more or less reliable texts,⁶⁵ even though some, like Matthew or Luke, are redacted at considerable distance from Christ. By studying individual expressions of authors through an analysis of genre—of which there are two in the New Testament, historical and didactic⁶⁶—and language, Schleiermacher aims to gain a clearer understanding of an identical experience compelling manifold expressions. This task is accomplished by applying the hermeneutical method that has as its goal the 'correct' understanding of the authorial intention underlying a work as its unity.⁶⁷ In his *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, Schleiermacher uses the psychological interpretation (which must not in any way be privileged over the grammatical interpretation either as a transcendental unity in Dilthey's sense or as a fusion of horizons in Gadamer's sense⁶⁸) to tease out the author's tendency (*Tendenz*), the unity of a work that reflects the author's apprehension of the manifestation of Christianity's essence at its original site of appearance: in the person and work of Jesus.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ See Schleiermacher's LJ 36–44, and *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 145–6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶⁷ In the opening definition of his *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, Schleiermacher makes clear that the hermeneutical goal is not just understanding but 'correct' understanding. 'The former (hermeneutics) is generally the art of understanding particularly the written discourse of another person correctly.' Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 3.

⁶⁸ Timothy Clancy, SJ, 'Introduction to Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutics*', unpublished paper, 2–8.

⁶⁹ 'In part the individuality of the N.T. writers is initially a product of their relationship to Christ, in part, as far as Paul and John, who are the more individual by nature, are concerned, one of them completely changed . . . the

In light of the whole, the parts of the work are investigated in order to distinguish the canonical from the non-canonical.⁷⁰ The search for the canon at the origins of Christianity is precisely the hermeneutical determination of the New Testament author's own subjective construal of Christ's redemptive work that resides as an original intention driving the resulting literary expression. This is a task that, although never entirely exhausted, can succeed in 'grasp[ing] ever more completely the life they [the authors] have in common, the being and the spirit of Christ'.⁷¹ Once the many individual construals of identical experience are gleaned from the New Testament text, they can then be used as a source base for reconstructing one aspect to the canon's unity 'behind' the text: the life of Jesus.

If one aspect of the search for the canon is to study the New Testament authors' apprehensions of an object, then another aspect is to establish an objective unity for those subjective construals. It is such a project that Schleiermacher realizes in his reconstruction of the *Life of Jesus*. Schleiermacher was the first theologian to offer public lectures on the life of Jesus, lectures which were unfortunately published in 1864, right before David Friedrich Strauss's (1808–74) devastating critique the following year.⁷² Although Schleiermacher's own endeavour stands in the line of critical fire with such Straussian criticisms as an ahistorical psychologically portrayed Jesus who has remarkable affinities with Schleiermacher's own dogmatically reconstructed Christ, the *Life of Jesus* lectures are a key piece in Schleiermacher's understanding of the canon's unity as its common referent. The lectures' aim is to glean a coherent biography of Christ from the diverse apprehensions of him.⁷³ Such a biography would consist

other obviously came young to Christ and only developed his individuality as a Christian.' *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁰ For this interpretation, I am reading BO §§ 106–13 (59–63) in light of more explicit remarks in the *Hermeneutics and Criticism* on the identity of the referent in the New Testament.

⁷¹ Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 157.

⁷² Verheyden, 'Introduction' to Schleiermacher's *Life of Jesus*, xi. Strauss's criticism from 1865 is, in English: David Friedrich Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's The Life of Jesus*, ed., trans., and intro. by Leander E. Keck, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

⁷³ 'The task (of biography) is to grasp what is inward in the man with such

of a 'calculus' of Christ's personal existence as the 'unity' constituting his individuality as it is manifest throughout his different life moments. Christ's person 'behind' the gospel texts is the object of 'hermeneutical'—both grammatical and psychological—operation.⁷⁴ On the basis of Jesus' biography, Schleiermacher trusts that he can draw out the soteriological implications of the Redeemer's person in history. It is after all Christ's person and particularly his potent God-consciousness that Schleiermacher considers to be the transhistorical means of redemption. If the transhistorical unity of the canon is related to the person of Jesus, then a reconstruction of the person 'behind' the New Testament would isolate features of that person that have shaped and continue to shape the Christian consciousness of redemption. According to Schleiermacher's own analysis, these features are most powerfully exhibited in John's gospel.⁷⁵ The coherence of John's text reveals the immediate impact of Christ's person that Schleiermacher deems to be most relevant when reconstructing an experience common to the history of Christianity.

The question of how the diversity of sometimes opposing

certainty that it can be said: I can say with a measure of assurance how what is outward with respect to the man would have been if what affected him and also what he affected had been different than was actually the case.' LJ 8.

⁷⁴ I am deliberately applying Schleiermacher's hermeneutical strategy to his understanding of the person of Jesus in order to make the claim that, for Schleiermacher, hermeneutics has not the text as such but its author as the subject of enquiry.

⁷⁵ According to Schleiermacher, the literary coherence of a biblical work is a function of the immediacy by which an author experiences an event. Based on this rule, Schleiermacher regards John to be the New Testament author most proximate to Christ. Deemed an 'immediate eyewitness' (LJ 171), John writes a unified literary composition (LJ 37, 43, 171) in clear view of a precise tendency: the tension between the catastrophic outcome of Jesus' life and the nature of his activity (LJ 159). The question as to why biblical books tend to carry the name of an alleged author—Moses as the author of the Pentateuch notwithstanding—is a fruitful one for the study of the canon. Although actually assigned authorship is historically debatable, alleged authorship could be read in Schleiermacher's sense of attributing coherence to an individual's experience 'behind' the text. Trobisch's book explores the significance of alleged authorship as a function of redaction in view of the New Testament canon's formation. See David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45–66.

voices in the New Testament⁷⁶ can be reconciled with unity is the question regarding the collection as a whole. As one work, the New Testament reflects yet another dimension to the question of the canon's unity. In view of its referent, the New Testament presupposes relative identity, as Schleiermacher's reconstructive harmonization of the gospels in the life of Jesus shows. The collection as a whole, however, points to the added hermeneutical task of determining the unity of the text in view of understanding its parts. Schleiermacher's hermeneutical method of understanding the part in view of the whole and conversely, the whole in view of the part,⁷⁷ aims to tease out the texture, contours, and emphases of canonically significant as well as marginal ideas. In his own work, Schleiermacher privileges John's relevance for the biographical component by (erroneous) historical argument and argues for Paul's primacy among the didactic writings.⁷⁸ The collection has its own topography of a differentiated unity that is to be critically investigated.

This exercise in understanding has its theological rationale. The exegetical task is justified by a theological claim hooking the canon to the transhistorical experience of the church. At this juncture, Schleiermacher articulates a position that appears surprising in the face of his repeated rejection of a supernaturalistic text understanding. To explain how canon and tradition are continuous in view of identity, Schleiermacher refers to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the unifying principle behind the canon as a collection.⁷⁹ And not only the canon, but the entire tradition is gathered under the aegis of the Spirit. The Holy

⁷⁶ On two very different soteriological conceptions in the New Testament, one by Paul, another by the author of Matthew's gospel, see the section 'Differences between New Testament Texts' of Landmesser's chapter, 'Interpretative Unity of the New Testament', in this volume. Even Schleiermacher acknowledges that the diversity in the New Testament poses a difficulty for grasping its unity. See his *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 149, 152. On the whole-part hermeneutical method in Gadamer and Schleiermacher see Nicholas Wolterstorff's chapter, 'The Unity Behind the Canon', in this volume.

⁷⁸ Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 49.

⁷⁹ It is the Spirit to whom Schleiermacher ascribes the writing of the original documents and their compilation into a collection. 'Scripture, however, as we actually have it—each single book and the whole collection as a treasure preserved for all later generations of the Church—is invariably a work of the Holy

Spirit's activity to lead in all truth, as Schleiermacher fondly cites John 16: 13,⁸⁰ is to be taken as the principle that connects the New Testament with the canon's openness to the living tradition of Christianity.⁸¹ It is the same principle that enlivens the New Testament authors and all subsequent believers in the church's history. When considered in light of the canon-tradition continuity, Schleiermacher's pneumatological argument is not surprising but exhibitiv of his understanding that the unity of the whole must be attributed to a unity-shaping power⁸² that continues to render Christ to every generation of believers. In consequence, it is trust, not anxiety, that characterizes Schleiermacher's position on the canon's capacity to communicate an experience that remains the same through trans-historical plurality.

By distinguishing text from, yet also relating it to subject matter, the biblical canon is opened up to exegetical-theological investigation. Although open, it is still understood to have a unity. On the one hand, unity is imposed upon the text and upon the tradition that the text shapes by a referent 'behind' the text. On the other hand, this referent is accessible through the text that is the literary product of individual subjective apprehensions of

Spirit as the common spirit of the Church . . . Scripture now stands by itself, for its preservation unchanged guarantees in a special manner the identity of our witness to Christ with that originally given.' CF § 127, 2 (588). In his detailed historical-theological study of the canon as seen through the church's history, William Abraham makes a compelling argument for a theological understanding of canon as a challenge to the stagnation of the discussion in epistemological questions. 'On this analysis, the canonical heritage should be seen as a network of means of grace given by God to be received through the working of the Holy Spirit . . . Furthermore, it is one element in a rich tapestry of materials, persons, and practices which are to function together in harmony for the welfare of the Church and for the salvation of the world.' William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 477-8.

⁸⁰ CF § 149, 1 (678).

⁸¹ Schleiermacher agrees with Benjamin D. Sommer's remarks regarding the similarity between a Jewish and a Roman Catholic understanding of the unity between scripture and tradition. See the 'Introduction' to Sommer's chapter, 'Unity and Plurality in Jewish Canons: The Case of the Oral and Written Torahs', in this volume.

⁸² Landmesser uses the terminology of 'unity-shaping' potential, aspect, or effect in his chapter 'Interpretative Unity of the New Testament' in this volume.

that referent. Finally, the unity of the entire collection is open to construal by exegetical theology for the purpose of determining features of Christianity's self-same essence. These features continue to play a role in the systematic-theological view of the canon's unity to which I now turn.

UNITY OF THE CANON FROM A SYSTEMATIC-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

If the search for the canon determines the predicates of the Christian essence accounting for the production of ideas throughout church history, then systematic theology too has a role in this endeavour. While exegetical theology looks for the canon's predicates at the church's origins, systematic theology's search for the canon works in synchrony with exegetical study and focuses its view from the perspective of the contemporary church. In this section, I study how a systematic-theological perspective appeals to the unity of the canon through the process of verifying theological claims. I conclude by suggesting how the unity of the canon can help diverse theologies coexist in a state of a mutual correction of each other's inevitably one-sided positions.

The systematic-theological perspective shapes answers to questions concerning the canon's unity in ways that differ from its exegetical-theological counterpart. If exegetical theology aims to get at the subject matter of the New Testament texts in order to account for the production of ideas at the origins of Christianity, then systematic theology justifies the doctrinal fixing of ideas for the contemporary context. Schleiermacher assigns the temporal distinction for the two tasks of exegetical and systematic theology by virtue of the historicity characterizing a positive religion. In order to determine a religion's canon, its manifestations through time must be empirically investigated in relation to a speculative determination of the religion's essence. That essence is historically manifest in three general time-frames, each the distinct object of a historical-theological sub-discipline.⁸³ The

⁸³ Schleiermacher organizes the three sub-disciplines of historical theology in view of church leadership as the external organizing principle for theology as a positive science. Although he orders the historical-theological sub-disciplines chronologically, Schleiermacher privileges the dogmatic-theological task of

original manifestation is exegetical theology's purview; church history has the grand view of the time between origins and present; while systematic theology's subject is 'the knowledge of doctrine that now has currency in the evangelical Church'.⁸⁴ The historical range of the Christian religion presupposes the continuity of the essence throughout its diverse appearances. For Schleiermacher, continuity is guaranteed by the person and work of Christ to whom no one, not even the biblical authors, has privileged access. It is the same Christ who, as a historical person according to either his bodily or his spiritual mode of existence, is present through the literary or oral apprehensions of him that are circulated in the church.⁸⁵ With this paradigm that stresses access to the same subject matter at different temporal sites, questions regarding the relation between systematic theology and exegetical theology are posed. This relation is not one of constructing a hermeneutical bridge from past to present. This would be the case if the subject matter available in the past needed to be transmitted in some form to the present. Rather, the systematic-theological privileging of a contemporary access to the subject matter is related to exegetical-theological results in a process of verification.

'Verification' (*Bewährung*) characterizes Schleiermacher's systematic-theological use of the canon. It is a procedure of relating systematic theology to exegetical theology that Schleiermacher develops in order to counteract the proof-texting method (*dicta probantia*) of Protestant Orthodoxy. The Protestant Orthodox presupposition concerning semantic equality between similar terms uttered in different historical locations could no longer be held true in a historical-critical age that acknowledged

knowing the present-day church for the purpose of church leadership. It is from the present-tense perspective that he situates knowledge of the origins of Christianity and the past history of the church as the knowledge concerning how the present church has actually come to be. See BO § 26 (16).

⁸⁴ BO § 195 (97). While I use the term systematic theology to denote the contemporary discipline, Schleiermacher prefers the term dogmatic theology because it connotes a historical rather than a speculative meaning. For Schleiermacher's discussion of his choice see BO § 195 (98–9).

⁸⁵ According to Schleiermacher, the bodily presence of Christ has the same redemptive efficacy as his spiritual presence. See CF § 105, 1 (467), and CF § 108, 5 (490–2).

semantic difference as a function of historical difference. Biblical authority could not be justified by semantic equivocation because linguistic similarity did not necessarily reflect similarity in meaning.⁸⁶ In light of arising consensus on this point, Schleiermacher proposes another way of connecting contemporary doctrinal statements to biblical passages that moves beyond literary proof to semantic verification.

If verification amid semantic difference is to proceed, then it requires accounting for the identity between different linguistic construals of a subject matter. In Schleiermacher's thought, difference and identity are related to the continuum between language and thought on the one hand, and language and subject matter on the other hand.⁸⁷ Hermeneutical study aims to capture authorial intention by retracing the steps of how thought is completed in language. Yet each linguistic fixing of a thought also reflects an intentional grasping of a subject matter. Language itself concretizes authorial intention through its intentional relation to reality. The complex of language, authorial intention, and intentionality to reality is already exhibited in the New Testament text. Each author articulates a distinct apprehension of Christ's person and work of redemption in language. Furthermore, this complex can be used to describe any communication of a religious experience, whether it is transhistorical or contemporaneous in a community. A transhistorical experience establishes the intentional identification of apprehensions, while distinctiveness is a function of the unique authorial intention of each communicator. For exegetical-theological study and systematic-theological appropriation of exegetical study, testing compares literary fixings in view of difference and identity to determine

⁸⁶ For one example of Schleiermacher's polemic against the *dicta probantia* method see his *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 86, 130–1.

⁸⁷ This is my summary of what I consider to be the essential points in Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutics and Criticism*. A theological claim, such as the one articulated by John Webster, that 'the Christian canon as an element in the triune—and especially Christological-pneumatological—reality of God's saving self-communication', requires a philosophical explanation regarding the relation between the canon as a product of authorial intention and the canon's role in the dispensation of grace in order to facilitate a fruitful discussion between biblical scholars and theologians. See John Webster, 'The Dogmatic Location of the Canon', *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43/1 (2001): 40.

whether the articulated apprehension is genuine or false. By testing a religious experience against others, one determines if that experience is either an accidental aberration or a genuine variant of the possibilities set in the respective religion's foundational documents. Rather than comparing linguistic similarity, the author's grasp of the subject matter is verified with other apprehensions of the same event in order to see if it is a variant of those made possible on the grounds of the New Testament. By this approach, Schleiermacher guarantees the identity of the tradition at the level of experience through opening up language to many individual ways of fixing that experience. Verification is an inevitability of communication that looks for identity amid diversity. And in order for verification to occur, the canon must itself be grasped as a unity.

A contemporary grasp of the canon presupposes subjective access to the same transhistorical subject matter reflected in the canon. A biblical author's grasp of the subject matter is similar to one of a contemporary theological system, yet the latter must exhibit a more explicit principle of coherence. In the *Brief Outline*, Schleiermacher indicates that a coherent presentation of doctrine requires that its author have a 'personal conviction' of the 'truth', or in other words, an existential immediacy to the subject matter.⁸⁸ This 'inward certainty'⁸⁹ is the personal grasp of the religion's subject matter that underlies any discursive reflection on its content. For Christians, personal conviction, according to Schleiermacher, is 'faith in Christ',⁹⁰ elicited through feeling under the influence of Christ's perfect God-consciousness.⁹¹ Christ's redeeming impact is one that refashions individuality at the level of its integrity.⁹² Redemption is a process of re-creating the new person by intensifying God-consciousness as it is manifest in temporal moments of thinking and doing. The self's coherence that is soteriologically supplied by an encounter with Christ is common to both contemporary authors of Christian systematic theology and the New Testa-

⁸⁸ BO § 196 (99). This dovetails with the definition of faith provided in CF § 14, 1 (68-9).

⁸⁹ 'We . . . presuppose . . . that every Christian . . . has already the inward certainty that his religion cannot take any other form than this.' CF § 11, 5 (60).

⁹⁰ CF § 14, 1 (68). ⁹¹ See the christology section of CF §§ 96-8 (391-417).

⁹² For a detailed discussion of the self's psychological coherence as soterio-

ment authors. Nevertheless, a systematic-theological perspective differs from a New Testament outlook because its principle of coherence is informed by a grasp of the spirit of its own age.⁹³ For systematic-theological coherence, the self's coherence together with an insight into the contemporary spirit constitute the principle of coherence that endows a discursive systematic-theological presentation with its unique individual stamp. It is such a presentation that is related to the canon as a unity.

In order for verification of a systematic-theological proposal to proceed, individual access to the subject matter must also be related to a subjective grasp of the canon. It is in his lectures on *Practical Theology* that Schleiermacher hints at the significance of this relation. He writes that 'scripture is given as a system of inter-relations [*das Zusammenhängende*] and the living use of scripture is given only in these inter-relations [*im Zusammenhang*]'.⁹⁴ For Schleiermacher, the isolated use of individual passages detracts from their meaning, which is available only within the whole canonical milieu. It seems that this claim reflects more than a hermeneutical strategy of understanding the part through knowledge of the whole. What Schleiermacher seems to be suggesting is that the meaning of the text is contained in and revealed through the diversity of these accounts of religious experience. These experiences are kept alive by being communicated. A grasp of the canonical whole is access to the livingness of its referent, which itself is comprehended according to the same principle of coherence as a systematic-theological proposal. It is a process of dialogue with a living tradition that facilitates a comprehension of the whole through the experience of the present.

This idea of Schleiermacher's can be concretized with the example of his own intention to use John 1: 14 as the coherence

logical effect see Christine Helmer, 'Systematic Theology: Beautifully True', in Christine Helmer and Kristin De Troyer, with Katie Goetz, eds., *Truth: Interdisciplinary Dialogues in a Pluralist Age*, Studies in Philosophical Theology, no. 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 27-46.

⁹³ Schleiermacher uses the terminology of 'dominant principle of the period' in BO § 200 (101). The individual grasp of this 'dominant principle' establishes the contemporary relevance of a system of theology.

⁹⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche*, in SW 1/13 (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1850), 393. (Hereafter referred to as PTh.)

principle structuring *The Christian Faith*.⁹⁵ According to Schleiermacher's aim, his understanding of the whole is crystallized in the one Johannine passage of John 1: 14, a claim that dovetails with Schleiermacher's own canonical privileging of John as Jesus' most proximate disciple on the basis of the gospel's literary coherence.⁹⁶ Although his appeal to John is hardly supported by historical-critical consensus, Schleiermacher bases his own systematic-theological coherence principle on his evaluation of John's primacy in the New Testament to capture the life of the Christian spirit. The unity of Schleiermacher's system of theology dovetails with the unity of his construal of the New Testament canon.⁹⁷ The subjective unity of the theological system can be verified by a construal of the canon's unity because both refer to an identical transhistorical subject matter.

So far it might seem that verification is more like a systematic-theological confirmation of the same principle in the canon's unity. In order to truly verify systematic theology by the canon, however, there must then be some appeal to a more objectively derived unity of the canon that would show up agreement or disagreement. What is meant by objective unity is, first of all, the unity of the text resulting from exegetical-theological study.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ 'I would have wished to construct the work (CF) so that at every point the reader would be made aware that the verse John 1: 14 is the basic text for all dogmatics, just as it should be for the conduct of the ministry as a whole.' Schleiermacher, 'The Second Letter to Dr Lücke', 59. For a detailed essay describing Schleiermacher's system of theology in view of John 1: 14 see Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., 'Schleiermacher as an Anselmian Theologian: Aesthetics, Dogmatics, Apologetics and Proof', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51/3 (1998): 342-79.

⁹⁶ See footnote 75.

⁹⁷ Jenson mentions the correlation between a system of theology and scripture as a whole in view of verification. 'Finally, a *system* of theology, such as will here be presented, is tested against Scripture by its success or failure as a hermeneutical principle for Scripture taken as a whole, as one great text with a very complex internal structure.' Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, i: *The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33. (Italics in original text.)

⁹⁸ In his *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, Schleiermacher writes of objective and subjective unity in the context of understanding a text. The objective unity 'lies in the relationship between object and form' (114) while subjective unity as 'a unity which goes beyond that unity [the objective unity]' is 'the intention of the will of the author, through which material and form come together' (115). In the PTh, Schleiermacher also writes of objective and subjective unity. Objective unity is that 'through which every individual part of the unity is connected just

Here, an exegetically derived unity based on a controlled study of the text serves as the rod against which the subjectively derived unity of a systematic-theological proposal is tested. A case in point is Schleiermacher's understanding of John's function for the whole of the New Testament, which did not agree with the exegetical consensus of his time.⁹⁹ Another objective unity is the ecclesially determined unity of the textual canon. When Luther rejects James 'among the chief books' of the canon on the apostolic criterion of conveying Christ, he does not 'prevent anyone from including or extolling him [James] as he pleases', for the reason that the book contains 'many good sayings'.¹⁰⁰ Luther's argument amounts precisely to an acknowledgement of some reason for retaining James according to tradition's consensus.

If the objective unity of exegetical theology safeguards against systematic-theological imposition, then another aspect of this unity is implied by any systematic-theological grasp of unity. The canon itself generates ideas through the tradition. Although the textually fixed canon has led to the predominance of some ideas over others and has privileged some ideas at the expense of others, it has also served as the source of common principles objectively uniting the plural voices of the tradition. This objective unity is reflected in the comprehensiveness that is required for systematic theology in a way that it is not for exegetical theology. Complexity is introduced into Christianity's historical trajectory after its New Testament origins and this fact must be evident in a system of theology that seeks to propose one position in view of others. Although Schleiermacher did not deepen this insight into how the evolving tradition contributes to the whole of a historical series, he claims comprehensiveness to be a significant criterion for systematic theology.¹⁰¹ The comprehensiveness criterion informs the verification procedure by

to this whole and that which is put together in this and in no other way' while subjective unity is the 'innermost germ of self-active productivity from which it becomes a whole' (222).

⁹⁹ On the historical priority of John, Schleiermacher disagreed with Karl Bretschneider, who in 1820 published a book, *Probabilia*, which assigned a late date to John. See Verheyden, 'Introduction', xxxi.

¹⁰⁰ Luther, 'Preface to the Epistles of St James and St Jude', in LW 33: 397.

¹⁰¹ BO § 201 (102).

indicating how church history is the drama behind which the divine agent holds together its unity.¹⁰² The identity between an exegetical-theological construal of the whole of its referent and the systematic-theological subjective whole construing the tradition's comprehensiveness is verified by the New Testament canon, which is itself related to the principle 'behind' the tradition. As comparison, verification shows that the original canon contains the parameters that are open to ongoing experiences of the guiding principle 'behind' the text. The canon is not a 'lifeless possession' but is the ground of the church that renews itself in the same spirit of agreement with the original witness to Christ.¹⁰³

As both a subjective and objective unity, the canon is used for systematic-theological verification. Systematic theology requires the whole of the canon, its textures, its diverse positions, and its important differences. As a whole, it verifies whether the contemporary subjective grasp of the whole is produced by the same essence. This verification points to an objective dimension regarding the continuity of the referent of authorial intention. Yet the sameness is understood as open to a manifold of individuality introduced by each subjective grasp of the unity on the basis of its own principles of coherence and comprehensiveness. From present to past, rather than from past to present, the verification procedure establishes the novelty of the present to be in a unity with the past while noting the uniqueness of both. And through this process, it establishes the continued relevance of the religion's foundational texts. By accounting for unity among a diversity of perspectives, the ongoing process of verification places the canon at the intersection of biblical interpretation and the articulation of Christian doctrine. It is the verification procedure itself that contributes liveliness to the tradition.

There is, however, one perspective that Schleiermacher rejected, one that has rightly elicited much criticism. In view of Christian faith and morals, Schleiermacher dismissed the canonical status of the Old Testament. He argues that with the novel experience introduced into world history that is tied to

¹⁰² For a detailed description of the canon's unity established by the triune God 'behind' the text and history see Eilert Herms, 'Was haben wir an der Bibel? Versuch einer Theologie des christlichen Kanons', *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 12 (1997): 99–152.

¹⁰³ CF § 127, 2 (588).

the 'total impression'¹⁰⁴ of Jesus of Nazareth, the Old Testament is rendered obsolete.¹⁰⁵ Rather than containing any canonical content for the verification of Christian doctrine, the sole use for the Old Testament in Christian theology is as a hermeneutical aid in understanding the 'new' against the backdrop of the Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew languages as well as the religious concepts of ancient Judaism.¹⁰⁶ The problem with Schleiermacher's position has to do with the way he determines the central perspectives of both Christianity and Judaism that he then templates onto the two testaments of the Christian Bible. According to Schleiermacher, Christianity's essence is tied to the historical appearance of Christ that is to be *conceptually* distinguished from Judaism.¹⁰⁷ Schleiermacher's conceptual distinction, however, seems to overrule any historical argument for the continuity between Judaism and Christianity.¹⁰⁸ It seems that for Schleiermacher, a privileging of the conceptual novelty of Christianity precludes any historical explanation from the prior series of Judaism and it is this novelty that is then turned into the argument for the close relation between Christ and the production of the New Testament text.

There is justifiable scholarly consensus regarding the untenability of Schleiermacher's position on the Old Testament for Christian theology. It is, however, possible to argue that Schleiermacher's idea of the canon can be extended to include the Old Testament for a determination of the transhistorical essence of

¹⁰⁴ By emphasizing that the image is the conveyer of Christ rather than a discursive concept, Schleiermacher points out the soteriological efficacy in immediate self-consciousness of the 'total impression' of Christ. The term total impression is found in CF § 14, postscript (76) and CF § 99, postscript (423).

¹⁰⁵ Schleiermacher believes that with the immediate experience of Christ, the Old Testament can no longer function as a source of faith (CF § 132, 3 (611)), and as a warrant for the more speculative doctrines of the inner-trinitarian relations and Christ's pre-existence (CF § 170, 3 (741)). Schleiermacher's own position on the Old Testament and on Judaism must be differentiated according to the argumentative strands (political, philosophical, ecclesial, biblical, theological). A reconstruction of his position would help to clarify the multiple issues and offer criticism against those aspects which are not acceptable in contemporary scholarship on this subject.

¹⁰⁶ BO §§ 128–31 (68–70) and §§ 140–4 (73–5).

¹⁰⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 113–15 (Fifth Speech).

¹⁰⁸ See the famous remark in *ibid.*, 114 (Fifth Speech): 'I hate that type of historical reference in religion.'

Christianity. The notion of a transhistorical subject matter 'behind' the text can be used to account for the continuity between the two testaments that is established in different dispensations by the same divine referent. It was Calvin who, by emphasizing typological exegesis, and Luther who, by using a nominalist semantics, argued for the relation between a self-same divine referent and different historical dispensations of the same eternal benefits.¹⁰⁹ In contemporary biblical theology, both Childs and Janowski show that the one God, identical for both religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity, is represented differently according to the two possible outcomes of the Hebrew Bible: in the rabbinic tradition for Judaism and in the New Testament for Christianity.¹¹⁰ The notion of a transhistorical subject can function to open up the range of experiences of the divine to a diversity of apprehensions. Subjective construals reflect the creativity of God's activity that continues to surprise with the new while remaining faithful to the constancy of the divine way of being.

The systematic-theological account of the canon's unity presented here is designed to appreciate a multiplicity of ways in engaging the canon on the same transhistorical ground. On the ground of agreement, room is made for individual construals of the subject matter, for different linguistic articulations of those apprehensions, and even for a variety of systems of theology. From a systematic-theological perspective, the unity of the canon does not push for uniformity but invites plurality.

A gesture towards such plurality is already signalled in the Bible itself. The early church's decision to include two testaments in its one Bible, the major and minor prophets with their distinct messages, the four gospels, and the many didactic letters, exhibits a privileging of plurality within the collection itself. In the history of the church, it is precisely a truncated canon that has elicited vitriolic reactions; Marcion's canonical torso of parts of Luke and Paul, and Schleiermacher's reduction of the Christian canon to the New Testament, are two examples. The polemic

¹⁰⁹ This is Frei's argument in: Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 32-3. On the identity of the semantic referent in Luther see Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther*, 76-8.

¹¹⁰ See footnote 8.

against these views reveals the theological and philosophical point that any one-sided position reduces the possibilities of the truth of the whole that is kept alive by the diversity contained in the whole. The livingness of the whole requires maintaining multiple positions to correct the one-sidedness in isolating one of the parts.

It is precisely the integration of unity and diversity that systematic theology must seek to preserve in the contemporary theological and religious context. Systematic theology has as its task to keep the canon open for its own work that is extending beyond its European confines to other cultures incorporating Christianity into their own traditional religions.¹¹¹ With the increased fragmentation of theological discourses from each other, it is precisely the question of the canon's unity that can play a role in providing a common foundation for plural visions. As a common focal-point to the many traditions of Christianity, the canon's material unity is open to determination by different cultures. By this living engagement with the subject matter, confident trust can characterize the conviction that the authors, compilers, and tradents are communicating a subject matter that has transhistorical reality and relevance. The idea of the canon guides the practical goal of actualizing Christianity in new contexts because it offers the overarching vision of how unique ecclesial manifestations are related to its self-identical core. Only by integrating biblical insights into one's vision of the canonical whole can scripture be quoted responsibly and imaginatively in a context differing from its original inception. Schleiermacher stresses the open-ended quality of the search in order to permit a dialogue with the authors and theologians of the past that is open to both revision and development in the future. His position is not motivated by a fear that reaches back into the mausoleums of the past in order to prescribe once-used norms for present legitimation. Rather, the question of canon ultimately anchors the individual grasp of the whole in the divine author who continues to guide the church in its truth, inscribing it with a love that drives out all fear (cf. 1 John 4: 18). The canon's unity is transparent to the

¹¹¹ See for example Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. 'Tink' Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001) and a review by Christine Helmer in *Pro Ecclesia* 12/2 (Spring 2003): 240-2.

one who transcends human reason, yet whose union with Christ guarantees that the theological work that has begun 'in you' will be brought to its perfect end (Phil. 1: 6).

CONCLUSION

Schleiermacher's concept of canon significantly challenges the position identifying canon with text by relating text to experience. Canon represents the transhistorically stable experience of a religion that produces ideas and creates language. Canon is essentially communicative; as a concept, it is the explanation of how an identical experience is circulated among those participating in the living whole of a historical religion. The nature of the transhistorical communication of a religion's ideas through language and the maintenance of a common experience across history and across cultures are aspects to the canon that steer it towards the question of unity. The unity of the canon is both a transhistorical reality 'behind' the text and a transhistorical reality of individuals and communities 'in front of' the text. This understanding of canon is presented in Schleiermacher's system as an important proposal for interdisciplinary theological work. The question of the canon's unity is addressed by establishing the formal basis of interdisciplinary communication and by leaving the canon's material underdetermination open to exegetical investigation and systematic-theological verification. Such an interdisciplinary cooperation is required of a biblical theology that takes seriously historical investigation on the one hand and, on the other hand, explores those philosophical and theological questions inscribed in the biblical texts and posed by subsequent generations of its interpreters. Such a biblical theology would make use of philosophical theology to clarify issues of the nature of religion, its constancy amid historical change, and the justification of concepts, such as the canon. An exegetical theology would contribute historical answers to questions relating experience to text production and show how these historical results can be evaluated in light of theological questions concerning the nature of that experience. And systematic theology would verify that contemporary systematic articulations of experience are indeed parts alive in the whole of a transhistorical religion's communication.