

Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology?

In Search of a Working Proposal

Prof. Dr. Fernando Canale, US 31, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104-1500, USA

I. Introduction

Christian theology is a complex enterprise involving a variety of activities. Ever since the sixteenth-century Reformation new theological schools and denominations have multiplied. By the end of the twentieth-century the confusion produced by the multifariousness of Christian theologies gives Christian theologians an ambivalent sense of despair and hope. Recognizing that Christian theology is in crisis some theologians despair. Other theologians hope that the present crisis of identity and theological divisiveness can be overcome during the twenty-first century by way of an all-inclusive Ecumenical theology. The postmodern realization that we live “between the times” has generated a series of methodological proposals.¹ Not surprisingly, Christian theologians representing a broad spectrum of traditions have recently approached the issue of theological method hoping to foster understanding of their positions, and to suggest ideas that may bring to an end the impasse Christian theology is currently facing. Some of the more notable contributors to the current debate on theological method are John Macquarrie (1966),² Thomas F. Torrance (1969),³ René Latourelle (1969),⁴ José Miguez Bonino (1975),⁵ Gerhard Ebeling (1975),⁶ Gordon D. Kaufman (1975),⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg (1976),⁸ Bernard Lonergan (1979),⁹ Randy L. Maddox

¹ Hans Küng has given serious thought to the construction of an Ecumenical theology, see for instance his *Theology for the Third Millennium*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1988); *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 1995); and also Hans Küng and David Tracy (eds.), *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

² *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

³ *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁴ *Theology: Science of Salvation*, trans. Mary Dominic (Staten Island: Alba House, 1969), and also René Latourelle and Gerald O'Collins (eds.), *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

⁵ *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

⁶ *The Study of Theology*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

⁷ *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).

⁸ *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976).

⁹ *Method in Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1979).

(1984),¹⁰ David Tracy (1988),¹¹ a group of Evangelical theologians (1991),¹² Oswald Bayer (1991),¹³ and Avery Dulles (1992)¹⁴.

A survey of these works would reveal the variety that is also an obvious characteristic in contemporary reflection on theological method. Variety on methodological issues stems mainly from the confessional and philosophical convictions theologians accept. Some methodological approaches, then, are conceived to support either a confessional or philosophical frame of thinking. Among some of the major methodological approaches determined by philosophical convictions we find the Transcendental (Rahner and Lonergan), the Existential (Macquarrie and Tillich), the Empirical (Tracy), and the Socio-Phenomenological (Schillebeeckx and Sobrino) methods.¹⁵ Among the confessional approaches it is possible to recognize the Roman Catholic and Protestant views on theological methodology.¹⁶

Modernity has prompted not only a variety of theological methodologies, but also the inception of a variety of independent disciplines. The amount of knowledge has grown to the point that individuals are forced to choose a field, an area, and even a topic of specialization. Most thinkers and scholars tend to specialize within one discipline and become unfamiliar with the rest. As a result of scholarly specialization communication between various theological disciplines has become increasingly difficult.¹⁷

Up to the eighteenth-century some notable scholars were somehow able to embrace and evaluate the entire range of human knowledge. For

¹⁰ *Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1984).

¹¹ *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) and *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

¹² See for instance John D. Woodbridge, and Thomas Edward McComiskey (eds.), *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991).

¹³ *Autorität und Kritik: Zu Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991).

¹⁴ *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

¹⁵ John J. Mueller, *What are they saying about Theological Method* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

¹⁶ Avery Dulles' *The Craft of Theology* represents a Roman Catholic view while Woodbridge and McComiskey's *Doing Theology in Today's World* (see above n. 12) brings up the Evangelical perspective.

¹⁷ Not every theologian is able to perceive the isolation that our specialities create. Brevard S. Childs, a notable Bible scholar, described the way he experienced the gap between the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology in the following words: "In spite of the challenge of trying to gain competence in both testaments, this task paled into insignificance before the difficulty of gaining entrance into the field of dogmatic/systematic theology. Anyone who has ever studied under Karl Barth is left with the lasting sense of inadequacy just for remembering the standards of thoroughness which he required of his students. Soon I became painfully aware that an iron curtain separated Bible from theology, not just at Yale, but throughout most of the English-speaking world. I am sure that the fault lay with both disciplines, but deep suspicion and disinterest prevented any serious interaction" (*Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* [Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992], xvi).

instance, Aristotle and Hegel are well-known examples of what may be labeled as an “encyclopedic” approach to philosophy. In the last two centuries the encyclopedic approach to the study of sciences has become no longer viable. At the turn of the third millennium the information explosion makes it impossible for any individual to embrace all disciplines. Moreover, the increasing specialization taking place in all areas of research requires more effort and time. As knowledge of the basic problems and structure of other sciences become unfamiliar to practitioners of any given disciplines, communication between specialists tends to disappear. The onset of independent theological discipline two hundred years ago and the increasing specialization taking place in all areas of theology have seriously damaged its unity. The formulation and operation of an interdisciplinary methodology may be one way to avoid the ongoing fragmentation of Christian theology.

Brevard S. Childs is worth commending for his willingness to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gap that separates the disciplines of biblical and dogmatic theologies on his own. Yet, he came to the unavoidable conclusion that “life is too short for a biblical specialist to do more than read selectively and dabble here and there.”¹⁸ Experiencing the same situation from the perspective of dogmatic theology, I can honestly say that Childs’ conclusion applies to whoever would attempt to cross over the gap from the side of systematic theology. Any systematic theologian trying to relate to the extensive and sound scholarship developed by biblical scholars in recent times will soon be overwhelmed by the sheer size and complexity of the task. Should we remain satisfied to take occasional glances over the fence that separate us while working in the isolation of our own specialties? Surprisingly, Childs seems convinced that the future of biblical theology depends on the creativity and ability of the next generation of scholars to engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue. In an almost prophetic overtone he stresses the need for interdisciplinary methodology. “Clearly if there is to be any future for biblical theology, the pressing need for the next generation is to build strong links between the disciplines of Bible and theology.”¹⁹

The purpose of this article is to explore the question of whether theological method should include, besides and parallel to recognized disciplinary methodologies, an overall interdisciplinary methodology. Specifically, the question of whether an interdisciplinary methodology is possible and necessary will be discussed. The aim of the article, then, is not to propose an interdisciplinary methodology but to consider the setting and conditions that should be kept in mind when working out an interdisciplinary proposal. I have chosen to set up our inquiry from within the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

general point of view provided by the *sola Scriptura* principle advanced by the Protestant Reformation.

To reach our proposed goal we need to deal first with some broad issues involved in the study of theological methodology. The notion of method, the conditions that determine the actual shape of any methodology, and the phenomenon of variety in theological methodology need some preliminary clarification. The necessity of an interdisciplinary methodology will be studied next. Recognizing that one's interpretation of the disciplinary landscape becomes a major factor conditioning the formulation of an interdisciplinary methodology, I will explore, in the last section of the article, the basic profile the disciplinary landscape adopts when taking seriously the *sola Scriptura* principle. I write these pages in hope that practitioners of all theological disciplines may come to realize the need to formulate a working proposal for an interdisciplinary theological methodology.

II. Notion of Method

What do we mean when we speak of "method?" In other words, what is the notion of method? Our goal in this section is not to open up the philosophical discussion on method in all its broadness and intricacies.²⁰ However, we need to become familiar with the basic notion of method by ascertaining some of its most special traits. At the beginning of the third millennium (A.D.) the idea of method becomes inextricably related to the notion of science. Experimental method becomes the foundation of the so-called hard or factual sciences.²¹ We should avoid, however, identifying the notion of method with its experimental expression. The orderly process of observation, hypothesis, experiment, record keeping, and evaluation of hypotheses is only one concrete application of method.²²

²⁰ For a philosophical discussion on method see, for instance, Justus Buchler, *The Concept of Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *S.T. Coleridge's Treatise on Method* (London: Constable, 1934); and Otto Muck, *The Transcendental Method* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). For a theological introduction to the discussion on method see, for instance, Anders Nygren, *Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology*, trans. Philip S. Watson, 1st American ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972); and Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (see above n. 9).

²¹ I use the conventional labels "hard science" and "factual science" to refer to experimental sciences (astrophysics, physics, biology, zoology, and the like). Science, however, is broader. It includes the so-called sciences of the spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften* in German, or, humanities in English). The nature of Christian theology places it in closer relationship to the humanities than to the factual sciences.

²² Hans-Georg Gadamer, even though critical of a superficial application of the experimental method of factual sciences in the realm of human sciences, recognized the universality of

The word “method” comes from the Greek μετά (with, in), and ὁδός (way, path), thus literally meaning “with the way” or “in the way.” José Ferrater Mora suggests that method comes into view when “one follows a certain ‘way,’ ὁδός, in order to reach a certain goal.”²³ This general and simple description uncovers one of the most distinctive characteristics of method: action. If method is the way we follow to reach a goal its essential characteristic is activity.²⁴ All knowledge, even what we could classify as “vulgar knowledge,” is the result of an implicit or explicit action (method). In a primary sense, then, method is something that one does. In a secondary derived sense one can say that method is a set of procedures or rules prescribed with the purpose of facilitating the achieving of a goal.²⁵ A theoretical approach to method, then, does not originate from the blue sky as pure speculation, but takes place as an intentional reflection on a preceding action that has successfully reached its intended goal. Theoretical reflection on method attempts to describe and explain the principles, rules, and procedures that were instrumental in reaching an intended goal. The purpose of the theoretical description of method is to make it available to anyone attempting to reach the same goal. Reflection on method, then, produces a discourse containing the “formula” of the activities required to reach a given goal. Discourse on method makes method public. In other words, discourse on method

method. Commenting on the reactions to his work on hermeneutics he wrote that “the methodical spirit of science permeates everywhere. Therefore I did not remotely intend to deny the necessity of methodical work within the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). Nor did I propose to revive the ancient dispute on method between the natural and the human sciences” (*Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd revised ed. [London: Sheed and Ward, 1975], xxix).

²³ José Ferrater Mora, *Diccionario de Filosofía*, Madrid: Alianza, vol. III, 1979, s.v. “Método.”

²⁴ Bernard Lonergan correctly describes method as “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results” (*Method in Theology* [see above n. 9], 5). “There is method, then,” explains Lonergan, “where there are distinct operations, where each operation is related to the others, where the set of relations forms a pattern, where the pattern is described as the right way of doing the job, where operations in accord with the pattern may be repeated indefinitely, and where the fruits of such repetition are, not repetitious, but cumulative and progressive” (*ibid.*, 4). Consequently, Lonergan organizes his discourse on method as an identification and explanation of the operations involved in the task of doing theology (*ibid.*, 6–25). John Macquarrie agrees with Lonergan’s definition of method but goes on to apply it in a different way to the task of theology (*Principles of Christian Theology* [see above n. 2], 33).

²⁵ René Descartes explained that “by method I mean certain and simple rules, such that, if a man observe them accurately, he shall never assume what is false as true, and will never spend his mental efforts to no purpose, but will always gradually increase his knowledge and so arrive at a true understanding of all that does not surpass his powers” (“Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins [Chicago, Ill.: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952], 5).

makes the various processes required to reach a specific intended goal open to anyone willing to follow the same pattern of activities (way).

The essence of method as intentional activity discloses its omnipresence and manifoldness. Where there is a theology, implicitly or explicitly, a specific method has been followed. Discourse on method as an explicit reflection on concrete activities, however, is a modern phenomenon that can be traced back to René Descartes.²⁶ The question of method, then, explores the operations Christian theology requires to reach its purposes and goals.

III. Conditions of Method

We have learned that method is an action, an operation, a task. Discourse on method is a theoretical reflection on the action required to achieve a goal. The question on method, then, assumes the question on action. What factors are involved in the determination of the contents of any action? The answer to this question may help us to answer the related question: What factors are present in the determination of the contents of any method? In ontological Aristotelian terms we are asking for the causes or principles of action. In epistemological Kantian terms we are asking for the conditions of method.

The notion of condition is closely related to the notions of cause and principle. Again, this is not the place to discuss their differences and similarities. In the context of method we will use the notion of condition in a slightly different way than the notion of cause. Let us understand “cause” in the positive sense of being that through which something comes to pass or to be. Let us understand “condition” in the negative sense of being that without which what comes to pass or to be as result of causation could not be or take place.²⁷ The relation between cause and condition becomes understandable only when we realize that at the bottom of most processes there is a combination of causes and conditions.²⁸ The understanding of any process, then, requires familiarity with its causes and conditions.

²⁶ René Descartes, “Discourse on Method,” in *The Rationalists* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 39–96. However, even though the word method is not used, discourse on method can be traced as far back as Aristotle’s *Organon*. The Aristotelian *Organon* included six works: *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations* (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984], vol. I, 3–314).

²⁷ Ferrater Mora (see above n. 23), vol. I, 1979, s.v. “Condición.”

²⁸ The multicausality of phenomena was already perceived by Aristotle when he concluded that “there are several causes of the same thing” (*Metaphysics*, 1013b5–6). For instance, Aristotle explained, “both the art of the sculpture and the bronze are causes of the statue not in virtue of anything else but *qua* statue; not, however, in the same way, but the one as matter and the other as source of the movement” (*ibid.*, 1013b6–8).

The cause of method is the human being performing the action. In Christian theology the theologian performs the action through which theology comes to being. If the content of method should be determined only on the basis of its cause, namely the subject performing the activity, theological methodology would be totally subjective. Methodologies are not usually grounded on such a subjective basis. On the contrary, theologians determine the content of methodologies by carefully recognizing and listening to the principles that condition methodic activities. What are, then, the main conditions of method?

Aristotle's reflection on the causes of movement may assist us as we try to identify some of the main conditions of method. We should bear in mind that a condition is something without which methodical activity cannot take place. Aristotle's identification of the four causes of movement is useful because action is movement and method refers to action. As we review the causes of movement according to Aristotle's view, I will focus on the basic description of the kind of conditions involved in movement without associating it with Aristotle's implicit ontology. This selective reading of Aristotle will help us discover some of the conditions involved in the "movement" of method.

Aristotle discusses the causes of movement in several portions of his writings.²⁹ He identified four causes of movement: material, formal, efficient, and final.³⁰ The material cause is "that form which (as immanent material) a thing comes into being, e.g. the bronze of the statue."³¹ The efficient cause is "the maker, a cause of the thing made and the change – producing the changing."³² The formal cause is the "form or pattern" that the process of movement follows.³³ The final cause is that "for the sake of which a thing is done."³⁴ From this brief description

²⁹ He addresses kinetic movement in his *Physics* (94b17–195a26), and his *On Generation and Corruption* (335a24–336a14). Movement from an ontological viewpoint is dealt with in his *Metaphysics* (1012b33–1013b28).

³⁰ "Evidently we have to acquire knowledge of the original causes (for we say we know each thing only when we think we recognize its first cause), and causes are spoken of in four senses. In one of these we mean the substance, i.e. the essence (for the 'why' is referred finally to the formula [λόγος], and the ultimate 'why' is a cause and a principle); in another the matter or substratum, in a third the source of the change, and in a fourth the cause opposed to this, that for the sake of which and the good (for this is the end of all generation and change)" (*Metaphysics*, 983a24–32).

³¹ *Metaphysics*, 1013a26–7. In *Physics*, 194b24 we read that the material cause is "that out of which a thing comes to be."

³² *Metaphysics*, 1013a31–2. In *Physics*, 194b31–2 Aristotle says that efficient cause is "what makes of what is made and what changes of what is changed."

³³ *Metaphysics*, 1013a26. In *Physics*, 194b27 Aristotle defines the formal cause as "the form or the archetype."

³⁴ *Physics*, 194b33; see also *Metaphysics*, 1013a32–3.

of the four Aristotelian causes let me suggest that by essence method corresponds to the efficient cause.

The activity of the efficient cause, according to Aristotle, is not self-sufficient, but depends on or is conditioned by at least three main conditions, namely, the material, formal, and final causes. The same conditioning takes place in theological method. The content and shape of any theological activity (method) depends on three main conditions, namely, the material theologians are given to work with (material cause),³⁵ the pattern theologians follow to process the material (formal cause),³⁶ and the goal they attempt to reach by arranging the material in a special way (final cause).³⁷

Method, then, requires a material to work with, a pattern to process the material, and an end to provide it with direction and purpose. In theological parlance the material condition of method corresponds to the issue of revelation-inspiration. The formal condition of method corresponds to hermeneutics. And the final condition of method corresponds to the subject-matter of theology.

From the perspective of fundamental theology there are four principles of theology: the cognitive, hermeneutical, methodological, and teleological principles.³⁸ The cognitive principle of theology discusses the

³⁵ The material condition of method is present in Descartes's advice that "in the subjects we propose to investigate, our inquiries should be directed, not to what others have thought, nor to what we ourselves conjecture, but to what we can clearly and perspicuously behold and with certainty deduce, for knowledge is not won in an other way" ("Rules for the Direction of the Mind," 3 [rule III]).

³⁶ Descartes recognized this condition of method by saying that "method consists entirely in the order and disposition of the objects toward which our mental vision must be directed if we would find out any truth" (*ibid.*, 7 [rule V]).

³⁷ Descartes's rule according to which "there is need of a method for finding out the truth" recognizes the teleological condition of method (*ibid.*, 5 [rule IV]).

³⁸ The usage of the term "principles" in theology probably originates with Aristotle's usage of ἀρχή (beginning, source, rule, office or first principle) by way of Rufinus' translation of Origen's *On First Principles*. Rufinus chose to translate Περὶ ἀρχῶν as *De Principiis* (Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. Vol. 1: Prolegomena to Theology* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987], 296). The reader should be aware that Aristotle's use of ἀρχή has a clear ontological connotation. He says that ἀρχή is "the first point from which a thing either is or comes to be or is known" (*Metaphysics*, 1013a18). The epistemological connotation "is known" is grounded on his realist ontology. In this article I do not use the terms "principle" or "principles" within the ontological tradition but within the hermeneutical tradition. Thus, I use "principle" and "principles" in the sense of hermeneutical presupposition. Because of their far-reaching broadness and inclusiveness the four principles I am dealing with in this article can be considered as first hermeneutical principles. For an analysis of the role of presuppositions in the interpretation of theological reason see my *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 10; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1983).

nature, shape and reach of divine revelation and identifies the sources through which revelation is made available to the theologian.³⁹ Clearly, this principle corresponds to the Aristotelian material cause. The hermeneutical principle of theology discusses the pattern through which the cognitive material with which the theologian works should be interpreted.⁴⁰ This principle seems to play a role similar to the role Aristotle assigned to the formal cause. The teleological principle sets the goals that require theological action (method). The teleological principle of theology operates in a way similar to Aristotle's final cause. The methodological principle reflects upon the best possible strategies theologians and Christians should follow when attempting to achieve the goals set by the teleological principle. The methodological principle of theology broadly corresponds to the role the efficient cause plays in Aristotle's four causes of movement.

Method as activity and as discourse develops its rules and procedures on the basis of the principles that condition activity and movement. It is impossible to devise or apply any specific methodology in independence from the conditions of action. The more specific a discourse on method becomes, the more the role of its implicit conditions appears to operate. Frequently, then, discourses on method consider the principles that condition the concrete contents of the method extensively. This characteristic of discourses on method surfaces also in the realm of discourses on theological methodology. At times method is identified with one of its conditions. For instance, Wolfhart Pannenberg calls the hermeneutical principle of theology "a methodology for understanding meaning."⁴¹

Let me end this section with an example. Bernard Lonergan is the theologian who has dealt with the discourse on theological method in more detail during the last forty years. He thinks of method as an ensemble of diverse operations of the thinking subject. The thinking subject in its concrete consciousness is the "rock" on which theological methodology

³⁹ Reformed Protestant Orthodoxy was aware of this principle and recognized its grounding role in theological methodology. They referred to this principle as *principium cognoscendi theologiae* which they connected to Scripture. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. Vol. II: Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1993), 149–230.

⁴⁰ Barth clearly perceived the crucial importance of dealing with this principle in a thorough and responsible way before engaging in the actual interpretation of Scripture and doctrines. "Can scientific investigation ever really triumph so long as men refuse to busy themselves with this question, or so long as they are content to engage themselves with amazing energy upon the work of interpretation with the most superficial understanding of what interpretation really is? For me, at any rate, the question of the true nature of interpretation is the supreme question" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns [London: Oxford University Press, 1977], 9).

⁴¹ Pannenberg entitled chapter 3 of his *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (see above n. 8): "Hermeneutic: A Methodology for Understanding Meaning" (156).

builds.⁴² Here Lonergan is working with the methodological principle as such and, therefore, dealing with Aristotle's efficient cause of movement. After establishing human consciousness as the "rock" and starting point for method, Lonergan realizes that the operations of consciousness require contents or data to work with.⁴³ Thus, Lonergan recognizes the material cause of Aristotle and, more precisely, the cognitive principle of theology. However, what the operation of consciousness seeks "by inquiry is never just another datum but the idea or form, the intelligible unity or relatedness, that organizes data into intelligible wholes."⁴⁴ In this sentence the teleological principle of theology and the final cause of Aristotle's interpretation of movement shows up in Lonergan's discourse on method. According to Lonergan's thinking the role of guiding and shaping the operations of consciousness in search for intelligible unity and wholes is played by what he calls, in clear Kantian overtones, transcendentals.⁴⁵ That the transcendentals provide the pattern for Lonergan's conception of theological methodology becomes apparent in the name "Transcendental Method" which he chose to designate his interpretation of theological methodology.⁴⁶ Thus, a transcendental understanding of Thomistic philosophy becomes the pattern of Lonergan's view of theological methodology. The pattern of action is what Aristotle called the formal cause of movement, and what I have called hermeneutical principle of the task of doing theology. In one way or another, then, every methodology assumes and includes all the principles that condition its activities.

IV. Variety of Methodologies

The brief review of literature included in the introduction will show that theologians understand theological methodology in different ways. Variety in theological methodology flows from the principles that condition it. Broadly speaking, there are two main types of variety in theological methodology, namely, structural and hermeneutical. Structural variety stems from the complexity implicit in the teleological principle. Hermeneutical variety originates in the diversity of ways in which the cognitive and hermeneutical principles are interpreted by theologians.

⁴² *Method in Theology* (see above n. 9), 19. "The rock, then," concludes Lonergan, "is the subject in his conscious, unobjectified attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility" (*ibid.*, 20).

⁴³ "Without data there would be nothing for us to inquire about and nothing to be understood" (*ibid.*, 10).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ "The transcendentals," explains Lonergan, "are comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, invariant over cultural change" (*ibid.*, 11). Moreover, "[t]hey are comprehensive because they intend the unknown whole or totality of which our answers reveal only part. So intelligence takes us beyond experiencing to ask what and why and how and what for" (*ibid.*). Regarding the philosophical connotation of the word transcendental Lonergan states that "here, the word, transcendental, is employed in a sense analogous to Scholastic usage, for it is opposed to the categorial (or predicamental). But my actual procedure also is transcendental in the Kantian sense, inasmuch as it brings to light the conditions of the possibility of knowing an object in so far as the knowledge is *a priori*" (*ibid.*, 14).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

Structural variety is required by the manifoldness of ends that is involved in the theological enterprise. Thus, as Macquarrie points out, “in theology, as in other disciplines, the method of study is a complex one, or perhaps one should better say that several methods are employed together.”⁴⁷ Every interpretation of theological method has to wrestle with structural methodological variety. This kind of variety, however, does not conspire against the unity of theology as an intellectual and practical enterprise. One goal requires another, and, in the end, an ultimate goal would provide the ground for systematic coherence of all operations.

Hermeneutical variety comes to view as the concrete contents of method are organized and defined. Hermeneutical variety does not belong to the essence or structure of method, but flows from the sundry ways in which the cognitive and hermeneutical principles are interpreted. Let me illustrate this point by a brief reference to Macquarrie’s interpretation of theological method.

Macquarrie correctly perceives the grounding role of the cognitive principle of theology. “Method and content,” writes Macquarrie, “are inseparable in theology. Any discussion of method in abstraction can be only provisional.”⁴⁸ Consequently, he clearly spells out the material or data with which theologians work under the heading “Formative Factors in Theology.”⁴⁹ The sources of theological data Macquarrie identifies are: experience,⁵⁰ revelation,⁵¹ scripture,⁵² tradition,⁵³ culture,⁵⁴ and reason.⁵⁵

Let us consider his views on revelation and scripture. Revelation, says Macquarrie, “is the primary source of theology, and is also a basic category in theological thinking.”⁵⁶ Revelation follows a basic pattern “common to all the religions of the world.”⁵⁷ What is that pattern? The pattern of revelation is a “gift-like character” belonging to “a different order from our ordinary matter-of-fact knowing of the world.”⁵⁸ As a consequence of this “pattern of revelation” to which Macquarrie subscribes “it is not surprising that recipients of revelatory experiences, when they try to describe them, have to stretch our ordinary language beyond the limits of normal usage, and may even seem to be using quite fantastic talk as they try to communicate to us the ecstatic experience in which, as they believe, a holy reality broke in upon them.”⁵⁹ What Macquarrie is doing is sharing a synthesis of his own interpretation of what the Bible calls revelation. That interpretation is dictated by his existential understanding of the hermeneutical principle of theology.

⁴⁷ *Principles of Christian Theology* (see above n. 2), 33.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4–18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9–11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11–13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13–15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15–18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The role of Scripture as component of the cognitive principle of theology is dictated by Macquarrie's existential interpretation of revelation. Thus, "scripture is not itself revelation, but it is one important way (not the only one) by which the community of faith keeps open its access to that primordial revelation on which the community has been founded."⁶⁰ Authority, consequently, is taken away from Scripture and placed, via the existential interpretation of revelation, upon the hermeneutical principle of theology.

The hermeneutical principle of theology conditioning theological methodology is grounded on imaginative reason.⁶¹ Macquarrie, as most theologians do, surrenders the task of interpreting the hermeneutical principle of theology to human philosophy and science. It is from a philosophical perspective influenced by Kantian epistemology, then, that Macquarrie sets up his interpretation of revelation, his consequent denial that God could speak through the contents of Scripture, and his interpretation of the concrete shape of theological method. As the role of defining the contents of the hermeneutical principle of theology is ascribed to philosophy and science, the application of the *sola Scriptura* principle becomes impossible.

Even though disagreeing with Macquarrie's existential interpretation of the cognitive and hermeneutical principles, most theologians adopt an approach similar to Macquarrie's. They allow some form of philosophy to decide the actual content of the hermeneutical principle thereby allowing that form of philosophy to condition the actual limits, shape, procedures, and rules of theological methodology.

Theological method, then, is defined by its conditions. Of paramount importance is the role of the cognitive and hermeneutical conditions. Because the hermeneutical and cognitive conditions of method can be interpreted in various ways, they become likely sources of hermeneutical variety in theological methodology. Structural variety stemming from the teleological principle belongs to the essence of the object of theology and therefore to its complexity and richness. Hermeneutical variety flowing from the cognitive and hermeneutical principles does not belong to the essence of theology but to the essence of human thinking. This diversity gives rise to contradictory and incompatible versions of the Christian religion and its doctrines.

V. Necessity

The question about a theological interdisciplinary methodology is a recent development in the history of Christian theology. The reason for its late arrival is that its condition, the existence of independent theological disciplines, came also of late. For instance, during the Middle Ages the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶¹ "In theological method," argues Macquarrie, "as indeed in the method of any discipline, there is (explicitly or implicitly) an overriding *rationale* which coordinates the various avenues of approach and assigns to each its proper degree of emphasis. This is in accordance with the constructive role of reason, in its imaginative or architectonic function" (*Principles of Christian Theology* [see above n. 2], 34).

most prominent interdisciplinary relation was not within theological disciplines but between theology and philosophy.⁶² Moreover, the relation between theology and philosophy did not take place exactly in the way in which our contemporary independent university disciplines dialogue among themselves, but rather as theologians drawing philosophical resources that might help them in the performance of their task.

Wolfhart Pannenberg points out that before modern times “apart from the separation of canon law – the fundamental distinction was that between biblical interpretation and systematic theology. The beginnings of this distinction go back to the Middle Ages, though the development into autonomous disciplines did not reach any completion before the late eighteenth century. All the other theological disciplines have acquired their autonomy in modern times.”⁶³ According to Pannenberg the beginnings of systematic theology as an independent theological discipline can be traced back to Abelard’s *Sic et Non*.⁶⁴ According to Gerhard Ebeling the prospect of biblical theology becoming an independent theological discipline can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation.⁶⁵

For about seventeen centuries Christian theology was done within the confines of systematic (dogmatic) theology. In that context an interdisciplinary methodology was not necessary. Biblical theology came to challenge the universal reign of systematic theology when it became an independent theological discipline around the middle of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ From the very beginning biblical theology experienced its iden-

⁶² Thus in the prolegomena to his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas did not speak about how various theological disciplines may work together but about how theology should relate to philosophy (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. [New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947], vol. I, 1, 1 and 4).

⁶³ *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (see above n. 8), 351.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 352–3. Cf. Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Introduction à l’Étude de Saint-Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Institut d’Études Médiévales, 1954), 71, 113, 226.

⁶⁵ *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 82. “In fact,” explains Ebeling, “one is bound to say that Reformation theology is the first attempt in the entire history of theology to take seriously the demand for a theology based on holy scripture alone” (*ibid.*). For a scholarly overview of the post-Reformation Reformed theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. I (see above n. 38), 251–76.

⁶⁶ In the historical process that gave rise to biblical theology as independent discipline, Ebeling sees a decisive turning-point taking place with the publication of *Gedanken von der Beschaffenheit und dem Vorzug der biblisch-dogmatischen Theologie vor der alten und neuen scholastischen* [Reflections on the Nature of Biblical Dogmatic Theology and on Its Superiority to Scholasticism Old and New] (1758), by Anton Friedrich Büsching (Ebeling, *Word and Faith* [see previous note], 87). By this step biblical theology has moved from being a discipline subsidiary of Dogmatics to becoming “a rival of the prevailing dogmatics [scholastic theology]” (*ibid.*). Biblical theology “set itself up as a completely independent study, namely, as a critical historical discipline alongside dogmatics” in 1787 with a programmatic lecture by Johann Philipp Gabler (*ibid.*, 88; Anthony C. Thiselton, “Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford [Cambridge, Mass.: Black-

tity and task as essentially connected to the criticism of dogmatic theology.⁶⁷ Almost from its inception biblical theology conceived its task as historical and adopted the historical critical method of the Enlightenment. This methodological allegiance led biblical theology to abandon the Orthodox doctrine of verbal inspiration and to adopt its “own dogmatic principles.”⁶⁸ The application of modern historical methodology to the study of the Bible played a significant role in precipitating the division of the nascent discipline of biblical theology into two independent theological disciplines, namely, Old Testament and New Testament studies.⁶⁹

Biblical theology was not the only component of dogmatic theology moving toward disciplinary independence during the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ Also, the prolegomena to dogmatic theology began to move toward disciplinary independence. The prolegomena to Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* (1266–73) set out the nature and methodology of theology as discipline in a rather concise way. The prolegomena to Francis Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (1679–85) present a much longer discussion of the nature, object, genus, and sources of Scriptures.⁷¹ The heightened role of Scripture in the cognitive principle shows up in Turretin’s long exposition of Scripture as source of theology. Randy L. Maddox credits the Tübingen school with developing, at the turn of the eighteenth century, what German theology discussed under the *Prinzipienlehre* into fundamental theology as an independent theological discipline.⁷² Francis

well, 1997], 520). Gerhard Hasel gives a slightly earlier date for the independence of biblical theology from Dogmatics. “As early as 1745 ‘Biblical theology’ is clearly separated from dogmatic (systematic) theology and the former is conceived of as being the foundation of the latter” (*Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, revised ed. [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975], 18).

⁶⁷ Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (see above n. 65), 88–91.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁹ According to Ebeling the real reason for the division of biblical theology into two independent disciplines, Old and New Testament studies, is not the “result of progressive specialization in historical methods of study,” but “that historical criticism of the Bible made the theological unity of the Old and New Testaments problematical” (*ibid.*, 91).

⁷⁰ See Randy L. Maddox, *Toward an Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (American Academy of Religion Academy Series 47; Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1984), 15–7.

⁷¹ Aquinas, I. 1; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992], vol. I. 1 and 2 [vol. I, 1–167]).

⁷² According to Maddox, Gottlieb Planck in his theological encyclopedia (*Einleitung in die theologische [sic] Wissenschaften* [1794–5]) prefaced “exegetical theology (as contrasted with systematic and historical theology) with a separate discipline which he called *apologetics*: this was for him the *study of the proofs for the divine origin of the doctrines of Scripture*” (16). “The final step in the development of the Tübingen school,” continues Maddox, “was taken by Johann Kleuker who explicitly named the collection of exegetical and apologetic disciplines a ‘fundamental theology’” in his *Grundriss einer Encyklopädie der Theologie* [1800–1] (*ibid.*).

Schüssler Fiorenza credits Johann Nepomuk Ehrlich, professor at the University of Prague, with seeking, in 1859, “to give a theoretical foundation for a new and distinctive theological discipline.”⁷³ According to Fiorenza, the apologetical emphasis of fundamental theology has moved from the retrieval of basic teachings of Christianity, to the apologetical defense of Christianity as historical revelation, and to the foundation or grounding of theology as a scientific discipline vis-a-vis scholarship in general.⁷⁴

Thus, fundamental theology has come to embrace a number of meta-theological issues.⁷⁵ In an effort to ground faith before the tribunal of reason the Catholic tradition strongly emphasizes the apologetical issues, whereas the Protestant tradition somehow emphasizes the disciplinary issues involved in fundamental theology.⁷⁶

Practical theology became an independent theological discipline by the end of the eighteenth-century, and even with the encouragement of Schleiermacher “remained controversial down to quite recent times.”⁷⁷ Missiology, the youngest theological discipline “made its appearance in 1897 at Halle with a special chair of Protestant Missiology, held by G. Warneck, and subsequently spread rapidly, with the establishment of chairs in both Protestant and Catholic theology faculties.”⁷⁸ Thus, roughly a century ago, with the development of five independent disciplines, Dogmatics, Old Testament, New Testament, Practical theology and Missiology, the development of an interdisciplinary methodology had become necessary.

⁷³ *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 261.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 265; Fiorenza describes the development of fundamental theology as a move from fundamental to Foundational theology (250–64).

⁷⁵ “Metatheological” is the contemporary word we use to refer to what in the past has been named “prolegomena” or *Prinzipienlehre*. As a technical term “metatheological” underlines the fact that these introductory issues do not belong to the actual content of Christian theology but explore related and background matters.

⁷⁶ Recently, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza has addressed the field of fundamental theology from a Roman Catholic viewpoint. Fiorenza’s scholarly and up to date analysis works within the apologetical tradition that emphasizes the task of grounding faith and theology (Fiorenza [see above n. 73], 269). Gerhard Ebeling seems to emphasize more the disciplinary task of fundamental theology as laying “the foundation of theology in a way that takes explicit account of the disciplinary pluralism” (*The Study of Theology* [see above n. 6], 154). This could include, in Ebeling’s view, (1) the discussion and definition of basic normative principles (a fundamental doctrine), (2) apologetics (to “establish the right of theology against the hostility of the times”), (3) theological encyclopedia (to order the mass of material and the directions for theology), and, (4) the ground rules for the disciplines according to which theology must proceed (methodology as a theory of scholarship) (*ibid.*, 154–5). The first two seem to include the grounding of faith and theology (they have a clear apologetic slant) while the other two seem to include more methodological issues (they have a clear philosophical slant). The study of an interdisciplinary theological methodology, then, falls within the area of fundamental theology.

⁷⁷ Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (see above n. 8), 357.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

The interdisciplinary nature of theology is required by the existence of the theological encyclopedia. Gerhard Ebeling explains that when “a person constructs an *outline* that orders the mass of material and the directions for theology, which tend to diverge, so that it can be surveyed and attempts to make a synopsis of it possible, then one engages in the business of a theological *encyclopedia*.”⁷⁹ Theological encyclopedia, then, is a label used in theological circles to refer to the various disciplines involved in the study of theology. In turn, reflections on the disciplinary status of theology take place within the emerging discipline of fundamental theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher suggested that theological encyclopedia can be understood either as formal or material. “Formal encyclopedias” tend “to provide a brief sketch of the principal contents of individual disciplines,” while “material encyclopedias” “give a very exact outline of their organization.”⁸⁰ In passing, Schleiermacher recognizes that the organization of theological studies as theological encyclopedia necessarily involves the issue of methodology.⁸¹

Interdisciplinary methodology, then, is made necessary at least by the historical process through which the science of theology divided itself into a plurality of independent disciplines. Besides, as Schleiermacher perceived, “no one person can perfectly possess the full compass of theological knowledge.”⁸² This limitation is partly because “every discipline can be infinitely developed in detail, and partly because the diversity of disciplines requires a variety of talents, all of which one person can scarcely possess to the same degree.”⁸³ On the specific area of interdisciplinary methodology, however, Schleiermacher was forced to recognize that back in the nineteenth century, reflection on interdisciplinary methodology was next to nothing. “The present condition of our academic institutions and of our academic literature, however,” explains Schleiermacher, “presents a problem. For, except for what methodology merges automatically from such an outline of the internal organization of theological disciplines, it all depends too largely on fortuitous circumstances even to warrant devoting a special section to methodology here.”⁸⁴ In my opinion, this scenario still lingers within the Protestant tradition in general, and also within the sectors upholding the *sola Scriptura* principle.

⁷⁹ *The Study of Theology* [see above n. 6], 155.

⁸⁰ Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), § 20.

⁸¹ “Insofar as it is of the nature of encyclopedia to present an initial introduction to theological studies, there also belong to it certain technical considerations on procedures by which these studies are to be carried on – what is ordinarily called ‘methodology’” (*ibid.*).

⁸² *Ibid.*, § 14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, § 20.

VI. *Setting the Stage for an Interdisciplinary Methodology:
Levels and Disciplines*

Recently, Gerhard Ebeling,⁸⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg,⁸⁶ Edward Farley,⁸⁷ and Richard Muller⁸⁸ have published important contributions to the study of the theological encyclopedia. The first two authors deal with the theological encyclopedia from the perspective of the scientific task of a theology while the latter two authors approach the same subject matter from the perspective of theological education. Not surprisingly, a brief survey of their approaches reveals several continuities and discontinuities.⁸⁹

From a conservative Protestant perspective, Muller gives a prominent place to the *sola Scriptura* principle.⁹⁰ He argues in favor of the viability and usefulness of a hermeneutical application of the eighteenth-century basic fourfold pattern of theological disciplines. This fourfold pattern includes three theoretical components (biblical, historical, and systematic) and the practical field.⁹¹ Biblical theology includes Old and New Testament studies. Historical theology makes room for “the history of the church, as distinct from the history of God’s people within the canon of Scripture,” and for the “institutional and doctrinal histories plus such subdivisions as the history of piety or spirituality.”⁹² “Systematic thinking includes doctrinal theology (sometimes called ‘systematic theology’), philosophical theology, apologetics, and ethics.”⁹³ “The ‘practical’ field encompasses those areas that relate directly to churchly practice or ‘doing’ – homiletics; liturgics, or worship; counseling; ministry; and the practice of personal and corporate piety, which can be called Christian formation.”⁹⁴ Muller’s proposal is a coherent and well-articulated attempt to overcome the fragmentation of theological disciplines brought about by the Enlightenment by grounding the unity of theological discourse on a hermeneutical application of this traditional fourfold model of the theological encyclopedia.

Basically agreeing with Muller’s dissatisfaction with the theological model of modernity, I find myself seeking to overcome the resulting dis-

⁸⁵ *The Study of Theology* (see above n. 6).

⁸⁶ *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (see above n. 8).

⁸⁷ *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

⁸⁸ *The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation* (Foundation of Contemporary Interpretation 7; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991).

⁸⁹ Farley includes a lucid and helpful survey of some important aspects of Ebeling’s, Pannenberg’s, and his own views (*ibid.*, 41–60).

⁹⁰ See for instance *ibid.*, 172–3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 24–5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

connection between the tasks and goals of the new theological disciplines in a different way. Moreover, my suggestions in this article also differ from Muller's because I am not approaching the theological encyclopedia from the perspective of theological education but from within the field of fundamental theology.

In this section I would like to explore the disciplinary structure within which an interdisciplinary methodology should be worked out through direct interdisciplinary dialogue between representatives of each discipline. Since, as underlined earlier, the necessity of an interdisciplinary methodology depends on the existence of theological disciplines, we need to consider the shape that they may take when the *sola Scriptura* principle assumes the role of *norma normans*.

The successive independence of various disciplines has been historically sketched earlier in our study. The existence of disciplines may affect directly the curriculum of theological education, yet, from a scientific viewpoint the right to existence of a discipline needs to be shown. However, the legitimacy of a discipline depends on how some basic conditions are met. A scientific enterprise must have data, subject-matter, hermeneutics, and methodology. These conditions are essential to the existence of any scientific discipline. In theology these principles also are at work. I have identified them as principles of Christian theology.

In a scientific discipline, data are relevant information about its subject-matter of research. To be relevant, scientific information must originate from the object being investigated. In theological science the question about relevant data corresponds to the question about revelation and inspiration.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, Christian theologians interpret revelation-inspiration and, therefore, the question of theological data in different ways.⁹⁶ Differences in this area will directly affect the outcome of any enterprise. It is not surprising, then, to find theologians widely disagreeing on the meaning and doctrines of Christianity.

The Protestant *sola Scriptura* principle assumed the classical concept of revelation and the conviction that Scripture had been somehow "dictated" by God.⁹⁷ This view of revelation-inspiration, therefore, directly

⁹⁵ The question of theological data is also included in the question on theological sources. Anyone familiar with the present status of theological science knows that theologians deal with many issues that do not specifically originate from divine revelation. Drawing a clear distinction between grounding (revealed) and auxiliary data is, therefore, necessary. By grounding or revealed data we understand the information that originates in the subject of study, namely God. By auxiliary data we understand data that need to be processed to make sense of primary data. In the absence of primary data no science can exist.

⁹⁶ For an introductory overview to the main views on revelation see, for instance, Avery Robert Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

⁹⁷ I am aware that Protestant theologians have rejected the idea of "dictation." While I have to recognize that some revisions of the dictation theory of inspiration such as, for instance, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker

impinges on the question of theological data. The *sola Scriptura* principle, however, may also stand on a different interpretation of revelation-inspiration. I recognize that this question deserves a detailed discussion, which, however, falls beyond the purpose and limits of this article. I have addressed the question of revelation-inspiration elsewhere.⁹⁸ I have argued that a cognitive-historical understanding of revelation-inspiration may provide a better explanation of the way in which Scripture is the clearing zone where God has given Himself to be known within the limits of human knowledge. Thus Scripture holds a cognitive privilege that entitles it to become the authoritative source of theological data. Consequently, Scripture becomes the source from which not only Christian doctrines but also the hermeneutical principles for their interpretation should be determined.

Disciplines become necessary not only because of the data, but also on account of the subject-matter they seek to reach. The subject-matter of theology can also be interpreted in different ways. Building on Scripture as primary data of theology it is possible to argue that the ultimate subject-matter of theology includes the knowledge of God and the salvation of human beings.⁹⁹ Reaching this ultimate end involves several disciplines and levels. The landscape of theological disciplines includes theoretical, practical, and fundamental levels. While it is clear that according to Scripture the knowledge of God and the attainment of salvation cannot be reduced to the level of theory it is necessary to recognize that it involves a theoretical facet. The salvation of human beings assumes knowledge, but also penetrates and changes life. From this simple reflection we discover that the object of theology embraces at least two levels, the cognitive level (theoretical), and the level of life and action (practical).

The theoretical level of theology includes biblical and systematic theologies. The practical level includes the sciences of action, namely, ministry, mission, and administration. I suggest that these disciplines are directly called by the data of theology and object of theology and form the core of theological science. We, therefore, can recognize them as “core” or “root” disciplines. This description of theology is not new. When compared with Muller’s endorsement of the traditional fourfold division of theology into biblical, historical, systematic, and practical disciplines the basic distinction is that historical disciplines are not recognized as root

Book House, 1991), do depart from the dictation mechanics of inspiration, still the outcome of the theory is the same due to the overriding control of the sovereign God.

⁹⁸ This model allows for direct contributions from the human author not only regarding inspiration but also regarding revelation. See my *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: In Search of New Foundations* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2001).

⁹⁹ “αὕτη δὲ ἐστὶν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν” (John 17:3). Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. 1. 7; and Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. I (see above n. 38), 195–205.

disciplines. The reason for this omission is simple. When the *sola Scriptura* is accepted, Church tradition falls outside revelation as the place where God has made Himself available within the limits of human knowledge. On the contrary, tradition is the place where God's revelation has been received and interpreted. Tradition, then, relates directly to hermeneutics, not to the origin of revealed data. However, because of their direct relation to hermeneutics, historical studies become the most important collateral field contributing in the development of all root disciplines.

Modernity and postmodernity have brought to the surface the thus far hidden level of hermeneutics. Acknowledgment of the always present work of hermeneutical principles has made them open to criticism. Hermeneutical principles have always been present and working in Christian theology. Tradition relates to hermeneutics only in the sense that it records and transmits the various ways in which Scripture has been interpreted. Tradition, however, is not the intellectual dynamic through which hermeneutical principles are criticized and defined. The discussion and definition of the hermeneutical principles of theology have been carried, thus far, mostly within the area of philosophy. However, when the *sola Scriptura* principle is duly recognized, the discussion of the principles to be used in the interpretation of Scripture and the development of theology cannot be left to philosophy to define. The *sola Scriptura* principle makes necessary a theological criticism of the hermeneutical principles operative in Christian theology. This criticism brings to the surface epistemological and hermeneutical studies and opens to view the level of theological foundations. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize a third theological level, namely, the level of foundations. In this level the foundations or principles of theology, including hermeneutical principles, are subjected to criticism and definition. Because in this level theology sets the hermeneutical principles that other root disciplines assume, we should recognize it in the commonwealth of root theological disciplines. To the practical and theoretical levels we must add the level of foundations.

When Christian theology works within the general parameters of the *sola Scriptura* principle several root disciplines, belonging to three different levels (foundations, theory, and practice), are required. The level of foundations covers every philosophical and disciplinary issue assumed in the task of doing Christian theology. Based on Scripture, the object of this level is to criticize and determine the contents of the cognitive, teleological, hermeneutical, and methodological principles of theology. Arguably, this level broadly overlaps with some areas covered in fundamental theology and with others discussed in metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology. Traditionally, these philosophical disciplines approached their object based on data originating in nature. As these issues are discussed by theology in the level of foundations the data to interpret them will be data originating in biblical revelation.

The level of theory includes biblical and systematic studies. Probably due to modernity and the demands of scholarly specialization, biblical theology has divided its field between Old Testament and New Testament studies. The subject-matter that calls for the existence of the independent disciplines of Old and New Testaments is the understanding of the biblical text. The object of these disciplines is the same, to clarify the content of Scripture as text. How should we interpret the contents of Scripture? Prominent to biblical studies is the exegetical methodology involved in the interpretive task. The outcome of Old and New Testament studies is an interpretation of the text and of the theological teachings of Scripture. Arguably, then, biblical theology is a science of the text.

Systematic theology works from the same Old and New Testament texts, but is concerned with the interpretation of past, present, and future reality. In more traditional terms, systematic theology seeks to determine, in the light of Scripture and biblical theology, the contents of the teachings, preaching, and action of the church. Its task, therefore, is dogmatic. The subject-matter of systematic theology is not the interpretation of the written text of Scripture, but of the living text of reality.¹⁰⁰ Its subject-matter allows systematic theology to interact with the text of Scripture from a perspective and rules other than the one usually adopted by Old and New Testaments studies. Arguably, systematic theology is a science of ideas about reality.

Because in searching to interpret reality on the basis and in the light of Scriptures, systematic theology follows the dynamics of ideas, it perceives the articulation and unity of biblical thinking in a way that biblical disciplines may frown upon. Reasons for frowning may be many. Indicative of interdisciplinary tensions is the fact that biblical theology came into existence by way of challenging dogmatic theology. Biblical theology is correct in criticizing and deploring the traditional disregard that Dogmatics has shown for biblical studies. We have to recognize that Christian theology has been and still is usually constructed with philosophical systems and methods incompatible with biblical thinking. When dogmatic theology performs its tasks by way of a philosophical methodology that requires very little biblical content, it consistently reduces the role and contribution of biblical theology.

With this historical and ideological context in the back of their minds, biblical theologians often feel that biblical theology must replace Dogmatics. Moreover, some practitioners of biblical theology act as if Scriptures can only be approached from within the limits of biblical theol-

¹⁰⁰ "Living reality" is known in philosophical jargon as "*Lebenswelt*" (world of life). See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 127–29.

ogy, and by that assumption they set the same limits for systematic theology. This tendency is more noticeable in traditions subscribing to the *sola Scriptura* principle. By failing to recognize the systematic and dogmatic functions of theology this propensity contributes to the objectionable use of philosophical principles in biblical and systematic theologies. The philosophical grounding of systematic theology, however, is avoided when Christian theology defines its Foundations based on the *sola Scriptura* principle and recognizes the proper functions of biblical and systematic theologies. Working with hermeneutic principles based on Scripture, biblical and dogmatic theologies should discuss their interdisciplinary and methodological relations to correct and integrate their findings. This interdisciplinary methodology should become instrumental in harnessing their resources, as biblical and systematic theologies search to find the theoretical truth of Christian theology. Thus, an interdisciplinary methodology is required, not only to articulate the levels of Foundations and Theory, but also to integrate the work of biblical and systematic theologies.

Biblical and systematic theologians need to realize that Christian theology does not begin or end in the theoretical level. Without the level of Foundations, Christian theology is blind and falls under the control of changing philosophical, scientific, and cultural fads. Without the practical level, theology is incomplete and fruitless. Biblical and systematic theologians need to bear in mind that the ultimate goal of theology, the knowledge of God and the salvation of human beings, cannot be achieved either in the foundational or theoretical levels. The essential contribution of the practical level is required to reach the ultimate goal of theology. Correspondingly, even though the achievement of the ultimate goal of theology takes place within the area of life, practical theologians need to realize that they cannot reach this goal without the conjoint contributions of the fundamental and theoretical levels. Interdisciplinary theological methodology, therefore, must embrace the three levels of theology. Interdisciplinary methodology is required not only to overcome disciplinary fragmentation, but what is more important, to help theology reach its ultimate objectives.

VII. Conclusion

Method is always a factor in the task of doing theology. Explicitly or implicitly, theological discourse and action always involve method. Without method the theological task cannot take place. Method is action pursuing an end by following a specific pattern. But method does not stand by itself. Method stands on the shoulders of the other three principles of theology, the cognitive, hermeneutical and teleological prin-

ciples. The variety of theological methodologies rests, in part, on the variety of materials (cognitive principle) and subject-matters (teleological principle), and, in part, on the various philosophical interpretations of the hermeneutical principle.

The dismissal of the *sola Scriptura* principle has been based on the assumption that the hermeneutical principle must be built on the latest scientific and philosophical theories. While the classical theories allowed some room for the *sola Scriptura* principle, modern philosophy and science had no place for it. The hermeneutics of postmodernity, however, has taught us the need not to build our thinking on the authority of traditional theories, but to deconstruct them in order to build anew on the “things themselves.” Thus, postmodernity has opened the door for a deconstruction of the classical and modern interpretations of the hermeneutical principle of theology, thereby making room for a new theological construction building on the “things themselves.” In the case of theology the “things themselves” are given in the cognitive clearing of biblical revelation. As the philosophical construct of modernity is deconstructed, the *sola Scriptura* becomes again a viable option. As the validity of the *sola Scriptura* principle is established, the formulation of an interdisciplinary methodology for a theology built within its parameters becomes possible.

During the last two hundred years Christian theology has become an umbrella designation for a growing complex of disciplines.¹⁰¹ This situation, arising from a variety of historical, sociological, and intellectual causes, makes an interdisciplinary methodology necessary. However, the necessity of interdisciplinary methodology finds its justification in the inner principles that condition the formation and legitimacy of theological science. Consequently, the development of Christian theology requires, besides disciplinary methodologies, the formulation and application of an interdisciplinary methodology.

The landscape of a theology conceived within the parameters dictated by the *sola Scriptura* principle requires a variety of disciplines spreading throughout the foundational, theoretical, and practical levels of thinking and action. In the foundational level, theology deals with the criticism and formulation of the principles on which its activities and teachings are to be built. In this level, traditional interpretations of the cognitive, hermeneutical, teleological, and methodological principles are deconstructed and constructed again based on biblical notions and assumptions. In the theoretical level we find the more easily recognized disciplines of biblical theology (Old and New Testament studies), and systematic or dogmatic theology (doctrines and ethics). Ministry, mission,

¹⁰¹ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (see above n. 9), and Ebeling, *The Study of Theology* (see above n. 6).

administration, and apologetics are the leading root disciplines in the practical level.

By articulating the effort of all root and collateral disciplines involved in the task of Christian theology a disciplinary methodology may greatly contribute to the unity of the theological enterprise. To avoid fragmentation and isolation Christian theology needs to work on the hermeneutical and methodological fronts. On the hermeneutical front there is a need to define the hermeneutical principles assumed by all theological disciplines from Scripture rather than from philosophy, science, or culture. In the methodological front there is a need for all disciplines to recognize their disciplinary limitations and the way in which each depends on the others for input and correction. Briefly put, conceiving and operating an interdisciplinary methodology requires a clear formulation of the object, limitations, and methodology of each theological discipline.

With this context in mind, all disciplines should join in the common task of devising the procedure through which they might unite their strengths and correct their individual weaknesses. No discipline or level can single-handedly decide the actual shape of an interdisciplinary methodology that might have a real chance to become operative in the ongoing business of Christian theology.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Untersucht werden Bedingungen, die eine interdisziplinäre Methodologie zu beachten hat. Dazu wird die These vertreten, daß Methoden – explizit oder implizit – stets konditioniert sind: entweder durch materiale, formale oder teleologische Voraussetzungen, das heißt durch die verwendeten Quellen, durch die befolgte Hermeneutik oder die leitende Absicht. Es ist zwar möglich, sich unabhängig von diesen Voraussetzungen eine spezifische Methode auszudenken und diese anzuwenden; da Voraussetzungen von Theologen in unterschiedlichster Weise in den Blick genommen und gewichtet werden, nimmt auch die theologische Methode unterschiedliche Formen an. Damit interdisziplinär gearbeitet werden kann, müssen die Bedingungen von jeder vertretenen Disziplin verstanden werden. Daher sollte der interdisziplinäre Dialog eindeutig sein und sich durch gemeinsame Einsichten auszeichnen. Da es nun aber viele Formen gibt, nach denen die Bedingungen der Methode verstanden werden können, wird es stets eine Pluralität interdisziplinärer Theologie geben.

Der vorliegende Aufsatz untersucht die Form, die eine interdisziplinäre Methodologie haben müßte, wenn die materiale Bedingung der Methode durch das *sola Scriptura* bestimmt wird. Innerhalb dieser konkreten Perspektive untersucht der Verfasser die Notwendigkeit einer interdisziplinären Methodologie für die christliche Theologie, deren konkrete Gestalt nur von denen bedacht und formuliert werden kann, die in der Aufgabe der christlichen Theologie engagiert sind.