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cultural context of the hermeneutical community, and the larger tradition of the church. Missiologicals have tended to focus on contextualization and doing theology and have not often asked how hermeneutical principles might differ.

Second, because more attention has been given to adapting the message to the culture, a priority has been established of analyzing the culture first. Then the hermeneutical community tries to find Scripture that speaks to the cultural issues. From a narrative perspective, there is something fundamentally wrong with this order. It is the story of Scripture that is normative; the community learns to live out of the story in life.

Third, ethnohermeneutics is an emerging area that will have to negotiate its way into the discipline of biblical studies. As local churches begin to do local theology, how will the church as a whole resist parochialism and nihilism? The first step is to recognize that there has never been anything but "local." No hermeneutical tradition stands in a privileged position, though there are many claims to the contrary. The second step is to create links between the local and the universal. One way would be to formalize processes so that any local hermeneutical community would, at regular intervals, submit its work to the scrutiny of the universal church. With the majority of Christians now in the south and east, perhaps it is time to work toward a mutuality in which equal partners enter a roundtable discussion, bringing gifts of hermeneutical principles, in order to do theology together.

Trust and the Spirit:
The Canon’s Anticipated Unity

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Abstract — How can one talk responsibly and theologically about the biblical canon’s unity in a pluralist age? In this article I explore a number of ways in which theological practice both appeals to and constructs the canon’s unity. The argument of section one addresses biblical, not canonical, unity. I distinguish between the Bible as a given text composed of multivalent layers, individual texts, genres, and a plurality of content; and the canon as a theological concept, which is analytic with unity. The theological arguments of sections two and three situate the theoretical construction of the canon’s unity in view of biblical multivalence. Some theological issues are at stake in this relation. Biblical multivalence opens up theological, philosophical, and ethical questions concerning how different proposals of the canon’s unity can coexist, while each making claims to truth. Truth criteria—for example, coherence and comprehensiveness—can be worked out in order to determine the validity and viability of different theological proposals. A proposal must also be evaluated on the basis of its adequacy to contemporary concerns. The complex process of forming theological judgments about the canon’s unity contextualizes the selection of one proposal of unity, among others, in a particular matrix of contemporary concerns. Hence, the unity of the canon is anticipatory in view of the process of articulating theological judgments in various contexts. I conclude by proposing that unity and multivalence can be grasped together in the intersubjective orientation to truth that takes place in trust, established by the Holy Spirit.

Key Words — multivalence, Bible, canon, unity, theology, truth, anticipatory, trust, soteriology, Holy Spirit

The question concerning the unity of Scripture should warn even the coldest of theological hearts. When questions of a conceptual nature are

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asked of theologians by more empirically oriented biblical scholars, theologians ought to be moved to help build bridges across the Enlightenment divide between the empirical and the conceptual disciplines. The concept of unity is a topic theologians love to discuss, and they discuss it by applying theology's tools to devise conceptual unities that integrate particulars. Theology uses integrative reason to synthesize the manifold so that the manifold can be comprehended as a totality that is more than the sum total of its parts. It is also theology's concern to investigate the various parameters of unity as, for example, the metaphysical speculation regarding the unity of the whole.

But the theologian's joy quickly turns to apprehension. The drive toward metaphysical unity has been associated with the peculiarly Christian theological drive to the monarchical rule of power. The desire for unity is accused of flattening, contorting, and silencing the diversity of the manifold. Is the Other not lost in the narcissistic abyss of the Absolute? Questions of this sort have haunted the West's preoccupation with subsuming the many under the one, and these questions must be attended to when unity is thematized as a topic for theological consideration.

In this article, I will make a theological case for the unity of the canon, but I will do so only by proceeding on the basis of the Bible's multivalence. In order to set up the theological argument of section two, I begin section one by focusing on the givenness of the Bible as a text that is multivalent when considered from its literary and historical dimensions. I use the term *Bible* in this section only to describe the Bible as a historically given book that continues to represent the broad consensus among Christians throughout the centuries that it functions as the textual foundation for liturgy, doctrine, morals, and spirituality.

The theological arguments advanced in subsequent sections (two and three) situate the theological construction of the canon's unity in view of biblical multivalence. If the canon's unity is to represent conceptually a theological proposal concerning the unifying elements in the Bible, then it must be constructed in honest view of the different forms and content making up the Bible. I use *canon* in sections two and three to denote the theological meaning of the term as analytic with a theologically and hermeneutically determined unity. By analytic with unity, I mean that the

canon cannot be defined without unity, that unity is contained in the concept of canon. I describe some theological issues at stake in this relation. Biblical multivalence generates theological proposals for unity that cannot all be unified in one formulation. The question of multivalence opens up theological, philosophical, and ethical questions concerning how different proposals of the canon's unity can coexist, while each making claims to truth. Truth criteria—for example, coherence and comprehensiveness—can be worked out in order to determine the validity and viability of different theological proposals. Furthermore, a proposal can be evaluated on the basis of its adequacy to contemporary concerns. The issue of adequacy shows that the generation of proposals for unity in the theological judgment-making process requires the selection of some layers of the Bible that may conflict with other layers. The complex process of forming theological judgments contextualizes the selection of one proposal of unity, among others, in a particular matrix of contemporary concerns. Hence, the unity of the canon that I have in mind is anticipatory, rather than having been determined once and for all.

In part three, I use Luther's soteriology in the Galatians commentary as a representative example to show that an individual theologian's construction of unity is formed by relating biblical, theological, and contemporary issues in the context of a particular community. Truth as consensus complements truth as coherence and truth as comprehensiveness in the evaluation of different proposals. I conclude the article by proposing that unity and multivalence can be grasped together in anticipatory orientation to truth that takes place in trust established by the Holy Spirit.

which unity is predicated of the canon, while diversity is predicated of Scripture. This difference in title represents a semantic difference. The Barton/Wolter volume presupposes Ernst Kümmel's seminal work on the diversity in the NT canon (see Barton and Wolter, "Einleitung," 3-4 n. 6; and this article, n. 7) and discusses unity as a function of the Bible when it is read "as Scripture" (see Barton's chapter, "Unity and Diversity in the Biblical Canon," 2), while the Helmer/Landmesser volume distinguishes between Scripture as a text or aggregate of texts viewed from historical and literary perspective and canon in terms of a unity that is hermeneutically and theologically determined. Both volumes, prepared independently of each other, agree on recommendations for the future direction in biblical theology. Biblical theology is becoming truly interdisciplinary—questions of theology and philosophy are imperative in a field that has tended to be limited to biblical scholars—because of the new interest in questions concerning concepts and referents. Biblical theology is also becoming interreligious, specifically in view of the texts shared between Judaism and Christianity. This development poses the fascinating questions concerning theological plurality that can historically coexist without attempting to integrate one tradition into another. Another agreement is that biblical theology does not need to be restricted to some type of overarching theological prescription for a trinitarian reference to the biblical text. Rather, theological analysis can consider many aspects of biblical referentiality. The "theology" of biblical theology is not to be reduced to a prescriptive function but can serve as a conceptual interpretative tool for studying the biblical texts at a variety of historical and structural levels.

1. Two edited collections have recently been published by two European publishers, both on the same topic of the unity of Scripture. John Barton and Michael Wolter published the results of an Oxford-Bonn dialogue that is entitled in German and English: *Die Einheit der Schrift und die Vielfalt des Kanons [The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon]* (BZNW 118; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). In this title, unity is predicated of Scripture, while plurality characterizes the canon. The opposite is the case for the title that, together with Christof Landmesser, I applied to our edited collection *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), in
A theological commitment to the unity of the two testaments in the Christian Bible is particularly significant in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. Contemporary theologians and biblical theologians, for example, R. Kendall Soulen and Bernd Janowski, have uncovered the supersessionist tendency in Christian theological legitimations of the distinction between "old" and "new" that has decisively haunted Christian anti-Semitism. The precritical solution of flattening historical and semantic difference in order to fit the OT to the subject matter of the NT—which means reading the OT as a warrant for the triune God in, for example, Gen 1:26—is replaced by a hermeneutic that acknowledges rabbinic Judaism as one historical and theological "outcome" (Janowski's term) of the Hebrew Bible while remaining committed to the Christian outcome of this shared complex of texts. Divalence calls for a hermeneutical strategy to read the Christian Bible in a way responsible to historical-critical research into the early years of the Bible's formation and a theological sensitivity to plural ways in which God and humans meet.

The divalence of the Christian Bible is just the starting point for thinking about its multivalence. Multivalence is acknowledged at the origins of Christianity and as a feature of its enduring state. The NT records division between Peter and Paul, dissimilarity between the Synoptic Gospels and John, and spiritual differences between churches in Corinth and Galatia. The study of early Christianity reveals more differences among early actors, vying for positions and jockeying for power. Ernst Käsemann's 1951 lecture on divalence as constitutive of the NT canon—itself the common focal point of Barton's and Wolter's edited collection—added new historical insights to understanding the polemics and disagreements in the early Christian community. Current theological interest is focused on the different theological positions the NT presents, sometimes on topics as central to Christianity as justification. As Landmesser has shown, for example, Paul's account of justification by Christ alone is placed alongside Matthew's account that justification, in addition to Christ, requires ethical effort. Or as Christian Eberhart points out, the NT's interpretation of Christ's death is at odds with a dominant theological strand in Western
Christianity that places sacrifice at the heart of its theory of vicarious satisfaction. What theology has learned from biblical scholarship is that difference and polemic have drawn the theological map of Christianity. The harmony of the early church and the goal of theological uniformity is a phantasm.

If theological univocality is exposed as a historical fiction, then literary multivalence in the Bible complicates the picture further. The literary records documenting the life and work of the person constitutive of Christianity's raison d'être are literally diverse and therefore literally multivalent. The literary form of the Gospel, a novum in the Greco-Roman world according to comparative historians, is canonized as a foursome, with further gospels appearing plentifully at the canon's margins. There are four accounts of one person in the NT, each different from the other in literary form, content, and interpretation. Sometimes the accounts betray fundamental disagreement over events that have been seen as most significant for theology, for example, the disagreement between the Synoptics and John concerning the dating of Jesus' last week of mortal existence. Yet church consensus regarding the coexistence of four accounts in one Bible has been sustained even in the face of attempts to harmonize them, such as Tatian's Diatessaron in the second century, or the early 19th-century attempts, Schleiermacher's for example, to distill from multiple sources one biography for Jesus.

The Bible is indeed a dazzlingly multivalent book. It is written by a range of authors and groups with varying literary talents and literary goals. Literary seams indicate an original multivalence, such as the two creation accounts in Gen 1:1–2 sewn together with no apparent contradiction for noncontradiction. Both testaments together are written over a historical range of many centuries, though the speculative bookends (Genesis and Revelation) glimpse into eternity. The Bible is a palimpsest of historical fragments, particularly parts of the OT that include sections redacted a few times into larger overarching wholes. The many genres of story and song, prayer and lamentation, prophecy and praise gather persons and peoples into all sorts of narrative and theological combinations. Where one canonical arrangement organizes the books according to a particular theo-logic, another privileges a different theological scheme. The Hebrew Bible's tripartite division has different hermeneutical consequences from both the Protestant canon that places Malachi right before

Matthew and the Roman Catholic canon that fits deuterocanonical material between them.

As a historically given book that has been retained by church consensus as singular, although not by any intrinsic necessity, the Bible's multivalence is perhaps its only outstanding characteristic. It is characterized more by difference in virtue of literary, historical, and religious material than by sameness. Perhaps the insistence in the Christian theological tradition upon prescribing unity to the Bible discloses the uneasy awareness that the opposite is in fact the case. Unity is left open as a question to be discussed anew precisely because of the Bible's multivalence. The question of unity continues to be posed in spite of the fact that past theologians have already proposed answers to it. Whether the answer addresses the historical reasons for the canon's closure or prescribes theological claims of material unity, the question of unity remains open precisely because the Bible's multivalence cannot be comprehended by one formula for unity.

At this point I turn to the critical question regarding theology's tendency to rush to construct the Bible's unity. I call in the next section for a theological account of multivalence in order that a more precise understanding of the nature of unity in relation to multivalence might emerge.

**Canonical Multivalence**

Theology has a disturbing tendency to be quick to prescribe, often bypassing the particularly curious and beautiful features of a distinctive given. It is the rush to prescribe a unity to the canon with which I am particularly concerned. The modern tendency to unite particulars is a function of reason and hence is part of the inevitable epistemological apparatus that humans contribute to the knowledge of objects of experience. But the specific danger of this tendency is to prescribe unity in such a way that diversity is either promptly occluded or absorbed without differentiation. This prescription of an overarching semantic unity overreaches the transcendental unities that Kant accords the ideas of self, God, and world in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The question of a unifying construct that hermeneutically protects the canon from the "outside" plagues the methodologies of those appropriating the canon as "narrative." The conceptual paradigm that conceives canon as narrative is the starting-point of the problem. Hans Frei in his influential
book *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, makes use of a fundamental distinction between the Bible and culture. Frei distinguishes the theologies that interpret the world from "within" the scriptural framework, namely the pre-critical theologies of Luther and Calvin, from the theologies characteristic of Enlightenment thinking that judge biblical claims in terms of extra-canonical reason, or more precisely, in the categories of culture and history. A similar distinction informs George Lindbeck's understanding of a "scriptural world [that] is thus able to absorb the universe." I mention these advocates of narrative theology because they represent a structural paradigm that appears, with diverse variations, in contemporary theology and ethics. The "canon as narrative paradigm" demarcates the all-encompassing perspective in which biblical reality is interpreted and lived. By virtue of its bookends of Genesis and Apocalypse, the canon narrative demarcates a world-historical abstraction in the theological terms of divine economy: Creation, sin, redemption, sanctification, and the consummation of the world are held together in a narrative unity. But this unity is a theological abstraction from the Bible. As an abstraction, the canonical narrative remains an intertextual category with no explicit historical or metaphysical reference. Its proponents make epistemically totalizing claims of the Bible's absorptive capacity without taking into account that their claims require verification by historical, empirical, or metaphysical criteria. The assumption of the narrative canon seals its adherents from the world.

In this vein, I have even become wary of a prescription of unity that I once defended concerning the claim of an objective unity that is grasped by individuals with perspectives from different historical communities. Even though I acknowledged differences in interpretation at the level of historically distinct religious communities, I appealed to an objective unity beyond the canon as the all-encompassing way in which world history was embraced by the triune God. But this sort of move abstracts from the canon to a periodization of world history that is then correlated with the trinitarian economy; the canon is conceived as a philosophical problem regarding the God-world relation. Variations of this correlation have also been advanced by John Webster and Eilert Herm. I now re-
for unity are probably as many as there are theologians interpreting the canon. And this theological multivalence is directly related to the possibilities in the Bible for generating coherent meanings for the people interpreting it. Theologies that are self-consciously committed to a relevant relation with the Bible must be open to the Bible's own insistence that its content cannot be exhausted by theology. A theology that is ready to relate itself in some way to the Bible must be ready to have the Bible call theology's own claims into question. It is theology that changes; the Word remains the same. By calling theology into question, the Bible calls theology to accountability regarding biblical multivalence. Can there be a plurality of proposals regarding canonical unity that coexist with each other? Can these proposals then stand up to some common criteria of analysis in order to compare them for their truth value? These are the questions concerning both the philosophical possibility of coexisting theological proposals for unity (which I will not address in this article) and the theological accountability to biblical multivalence regarding the pluralism of unities. True unity is constituted by plurality.

The claim that unity is constituted by plurality best reflects the goal of systematic theology. It is the work of any systematic theology to strive to articulate the one coherent principle constituting the unity of all parts in relation to other parts and of each part in relation to the whole. The unity of the plurality of parts is measured by the way in which the coherence informing the unity also constitutes the parts. A true system rests on the truth criterion of coherence. Yet complex coherence contains a greater truth value than simple coherence because the truth of unity is simultaneously measured by the comprehensiveness criterion. The more predicates, the more determined the subject will be, and the more complete its concept. The most complete concept, as Leibniz articulated it, is the system of the world because it is the most comprehensive concept in terms of the infinite number of predications making up the subject term. Yet the subject term must contain its predicates in such a way that they cohere either logically or ontologically with each other. Similarly a theologically established canonical unity has a greater truth value if it grasps a greater number of aspects of the Bible's comprehensiveness by a coherent concept than a unity that has a smaller range. The claim to the double truth criterion of comprehensiveness and coherence in relation to the Christian Bible would mean that a canonical unity accounting for both testaments in an explanation of their coherence has a greater truth value than a canonical unity that can only grasp the content of one testament. This truth value has been historically acknowledged by theological and ecclesial consensus. Schleiermacher's resistance to including the OT as canonical for Christian faith and morals, for example, met with sharp criticism from the first publication of his Brief Outline in 1810 on to the present day. And it is this dual criterion that should be invoked against abstract appeals to the Trinity as the referential unity of the canon's representation of world history. The truth value of these proposals, although high according to the criterion of coherence, is significantly reduced by the comprehensiveness criterion because of failure to do justice to the historically given diversity of particulars.

The comprehensiveness criterion excludes a naïve return to biblical sources as sole warrants for theological proposals. A unity resulting solely from biblical sources would be a hermeneutical impossibility. Such an account of unity bypasses the historical processes that form the major concepts interpreting biblical material. Concepts such as covenant and Trinity are determined by each generation of religious belief and theological reflection. Although the recovery of the concepts' original determination is a goal of biblical scholarship, it is impossible to read the Bible without having the concepts as they have developed through centuries of religious and theological history resonating in one's ear.

A theological concept of canonical unity that takes biblical multivalence and concept formation into serious account must also enter into conversation with contemporary theological and cultural concerns. Herein lies the precise balance between theological freedom and theological truth. An account of canonical unity means on the one hand doing justice to the historically given. Theology must acknowledge the truth of the given, the truth in the fact that its foundational texts are constituted by a plurality of genres, of voices, of testimonies, of books, of theologies, and of sightings of Jesus. It is this factual diversity that suggests a possibility of unities, and it is theology's task to do justice to these possibilities. On the other hand, theological truth also consists in its freedom to discern the layers in the Bible that best inform claims that theology must make today. These claims concern ethical, theological, and philosophical issues that press in upon our times.

Today the topics of economic justice in a global capitalist economy and "horrendous evils" are occupying center stage of intellectual concerns. In meeting these concerns, theology takes the liberty of integrating various issues and methods in its decision-making process that, in consultation with

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18. For concise analyses on how different layers of the Bible generate different theological meanings, see my edited volume, The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meaning (Eerdmans, 2006; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).
the Bible, articulates proposals of unity to orient contemporary questions. In formulating a theological position that meets the adequacy criterion to the respective context, a theologian might fit together elements from the Bible, contemporary culture, personal experience, and commitment to a religious tradition. The ways in which these elements might be fitted together vary; there are different methods of correlation and strategies for conceptual integration. Yet the application of a method and the selection of content are a process or reciprocal fitting that will result in the transposition of the biblical element into a larger conceptual unity. For example, the death penalty is supported by some passages in the Bible. If a theologian who is committed to a position against the death penalty wishes to form a theological ethic in conversation with the Bible, she must appeal to other biblical elements as sources for her theology. One avenue could be to appeal to another biblical element. The life-sustaining and life-affirming activity of the Holy Spirit is one such biblical element uniting Genesis (1:27) and Romans (8:6). By selecting one biblical element over another, the preservation of precious life over the death penalty, the decision to affirm a theology of justice and an ethic of compassion requires the marginalization of some biblical elements while moving others to the center. Reading the canon as a unity in view of supportive sources for this theological claim thus entails restricting some aspects of the Bible while upholding others. Yet one proposal for unity does not necessarily entail the exclusion of other proposals. As arguments continue to be advanced, as claims continue to be submitted to truth criteria, they will continue to develop, to be refined, and to change. If dialogue is cut short by one imposed claim, then the tradition stagnates and closes in upon itself to die.

There is always an actual danger of repression. Dynamics of power working in tandem with evil silence interpretive possibilities, and the silence in turn spells the impoverishing of future innovation. The Bible as a historical legacy is itself a witness to restriction. The canon is a document that excludes. Its borders were established in the human mix of power, politics, and religion. But the danger of restriction is already checked (at the very least) by the historical givens of biblical multivalence, which can be invoked to subvert the theological drive to power in the name of unity. If the Bible advocates a few sides to an issue, then theology is not condemned to monopolizing unity. In fact, the givens of biblical multivalence might even be invoked to question the earliest restrictions of the Bible as a canonical unity. If multivalence is a feature of the Bible, then might not theological constructions of canonical unity appeal to texts deemed noncanonical by ecclesial consensus in addition to the other sources that inform theological claims? Noncanonical texts could theoretically be considered sources for theological decisions on a par with the host of other texts and cultural concerns playing into a construction of the canon's unity. It would then be theology's task to apply the relevant truth criteria to all proposals and to prescribe application of these interpretations to ethical practice. The determination of a canonical unity is never "a done deal." Each proposal must keep open possibilities for future participants in the theological discussion.

The unity of the canon that I am arguing for is primarily a determination of unity in a theologically and hermeneutically elusive sense. It is to a notion of anticipated unity that I now turn.

**Canon as Anticipated Unity**

The constitutive feature of the Christian canon's multivalence is the reason for the lack of closure concerning the unity question. The givenness of multivalence presents a canon open for many possible determinations of its material unity. The question I address in this final section is how the theological process of determining the canon's material unity takes place. I define this process on the basis of the canon's givenness as analytic to unity and propose that the type of unity analytic to the canon is anticipatory. The conclusion to this essay is a theological appeal to the Holy Spirit, who establishes the trust creating the conditions for a plurality of proposals of anticipated unities.

Unity is analytic to canon. The term analytic means that the term canon cannot be defined unless the definition includes the term unity. The canon, at least in the Christian sense of the word, is by definition a unity. The canon is given in the tradition as a unity, and it is used as a unity to inform theological judgments. The particular point about the canon's use as a unity in the exegetical practice of theological decision-making is an important one. In the process of forming theological judgments, the theologian establishes an interpretational grid that shapes her thinking about a subject matter. This interpretational grid becomes clearer as the process of investigating the subject matter takes place. In order for a judgment to be made about the subject matter, the parts of the subject matter are related to each other through the interpretational grid. At one point of clarity in the process, the interpretational grid becomes an integrative structure that reconstructs the parts of the subject matter in relation to other parts within the whole. When interpretive possibility becomes a claim to knowledge, a judgment is made.

The canon enters into the theological judgment-making process as a preliminary unity. Whether the canon's unity is construed in terms of a material claim, for example divine providential agency, or in terms of a distinguishing criterion, for example the law/gospel distinction, it informs the process by which a theological concept of interest is analyzed according to its parts. A representative example of how the canon's unity is used
as a resource in the theological decision-making process is Luther’s construction of his soteriology in the *Lectures on Galatians* (1531; published in 1535). Luther’s soteriology is driven by the idea of attributing curse to Christ in Gal 3:13 (“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written: Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree”). In order to make sense of this predicature of maximal sin to Christ, Luther invokes the relation between law and gospel as the fundamental distinction constituting the canon’s unity that he had established after many years of wrestling with the Bible. Luther applies this distinction to the subject matter in focus, soteriology, in order to make the metaphysical claim concerning the transfer of sin onto Christ for soteriological reasons. The theological judgment is made about the metaphysical constituents of Christ’s person. This judgment provides the rationale for the claim that Christ’s exchanging of human sin with divine salvation is soteriologically efficacious. In Christ, the law that exposes sin is terminated, and the gospel takes its place. After applying the law/gospel relation to the metaphysical claims concerning Christ’s person, Luther curiously reappears the category of law and gospel onto Scripture. His soteriology is turned back to Scripture in order to make sense of biblical multivalence on the issue of works and redemption. The result is that Luther suppresses a theology of works articulated in the Bible by the theology of grace that he has arrived at through his theological judgment-making process. Luther replies in direct speech to the question concerning biblical proofs for righteousness by works:

> Therefore if He Himself is the price of my redemption, if He Himself became sin and a curse in order to justify and bless me, I am not put off at all by passages of Scripture, even if you were to produce six hundred pages in support of the righteousness of works and against the righteousness of faith, and if you were to scream that Scripture contradicts itself. I have the Author and the Lord of Scripture, and I want to stand on His side rather than you.

The canon’s unity in Luther’s case informs a theological judgment about Christ’s person that is then used to finesse multivalence in view of greater clarity on the unity question. Even in the face of biblical contradiction, Luther argues for the coherence of a theological doctrine that meshes with a judgment about the canon’s unity. As a unity, the canon informs theology’s truth as coherence.

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20. LW 26:206.
21. Luther puts the predicature in the direct speech of the Father to the Son: “In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them” (LW 26:380).
22. LW 26:209.
promise freely offers to us, who are oppressed by sin and death, reconciliation on account of Christ, which is received not by works, but by faith alone.” The Augsburg Confession establishes the consensus in Lutheranism regarding the canon's unity. Luther's individual reformation breakthrough—the law/gospel relation—found the basis for the consensus of the ensuing tradition. Consensus is the objective instance that opens up possibilities for individual commitments to a tradition. It has its abusive actuality, as all human realities do, in being inevitably drawn into the messiness of the community power dynamics. Yet consensus is the way by which the individual is integrated into the objectivity of intersubjective reality in order that theological judgments can be tested in decision-making processes.

A theological community is constituted by interpersonal relationships that are made by virtue of objectifying one's proposals or theological decisions in an intersubjective context. Yet the relational constitution of human existence is ontically an extremely fragile reality. The making of community by consensus among individuals requires the exercise of the most important skills of being human; the preservation of community is perhaps humanity’s most difficult task. Dangers of invective and polemic, exclusion and denigration, dominance and suppression haunt and perhaps almost inevitably constitute intersubjective relations. Human truth as consensus requires diversity in making intersubjectivity an actuality for human(e) possibilities.

The main reason for the fragility of human community is coexisting plurality. Uniformity is easy to dictate and enforce. Plurality is much more difficult to negotiate. Yet community is constituted precisely by the invitation for plurality and the commitment to engage in making community while applying criteria of truth to different theological judgments. The concern with the truth of theology is precisely the reason for engaging differences in coexisting plurality. By ensuring a coexistence of proposals, a community promotes its ongoing life in its openness to arguments for the truth of different proposals. Proposals are advanced that are more or less true, better or worse. It is the concern for and commitment to making community that negotiates the application of truth criteria to the variety of proposals. The orientation to truth while acknowledging the actuality of multivalence is preserved by the divine in the midst of human beings.

**CONCLUSION**

Human community is so fragile that God must preserve it. Human truth is so fragmentary, opaque, and imprecise that it requires the Spirit’s

guidance to allow momentary glimpses of divine truth. The best we can do under these conditions is to acknowledge and promote the coexistence of proposals in the context of preserving community while being concerned with the truth anticipating the unity of plurality.

Each proposal that enters into the intersubjective real in order to be tested by truth criteria determined by consensus is subject to alteration and to transposition. Every theological claim is dated as it is articulated in history; every claim to unity anticipates another possibility for unity that is not yet actualized. Precisely because the canon is given, the plural determinations of its unity are caught up in the historicity and finitude of human decision-making. Given as a unity, the canon is an open problem for every theological mind and for every theological generation. Givenness means accountability, not satisfaction. The practice of accounting for the givenness of biblical multivalence while making theological proposals regarding the canon’s unity is an intersubjective one. The practice of trying to be human is attended to by the Spirit, whose reason for being is to orient individuals intersubjectively to truth. If proposals regarding the canon’s unity are to coexist in a community that works out their truths, then the stance accepting anticipatory unity is trust—Spirit-filled trust attentive to the multivalence of truth's unity.