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Centre for Theology and Religious studies

Where's the method in all that salvation? SOTERIOLOGY BETWEEN COHERENCE AND RELEVANCE

B. A. Degree Essay, Theology (Systematic Theology)

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Abstract

SWEDISH: Denna uppsats vill bidra till ämnet teologisk *metod*, och undersöker hur soteriologi *integreras* i systematisk teologi, dvs. hur talet om frälsning, som teologiskt delämne, relaterar till en komplex teologisk *helhet*. Soteriologi är präglad av mångfald, vilket är både nödvändigt och önskat. Jag anser att det finns (minst) *fyra vägledande koncept* som är involverade när soteriologi integreras i systematisk teologi, koncept som balanserar behovet av mångfald med behovet av ett integrerat helhetsgrepp. Dessa fyra är koherens, identitet, korrespondens och relevans. Soteriologi behöver visa på *koherens* med andra ämnen inom systematiken (som Kristologi) eller bibliska traditioner; den bör ta hänsyn till kyrkans och individers *identitet*, där tal och gärning, rit och bekännelse sammanstrålar; soteriologi behöver visa på *korrespondens* med verkligheten utanför systemet, genom att relatera till resultat från andra teologiska discipliner, andra vetenskaper eller genom att relatera till mänsklig erfarenhet; vidare, soteriologi bör sträva efter *relevans* för människor, vilket är både en uppgift och en förutsättning för teologi i allmänhet. Koncepten balanserar varandra, de öppnar för mångfald och sammanför i integration. Tillsammans med andra metodologiska teser kan dessa fyra koncept användas som analysverktyg, som tar hänsyn till mångfald, komplexitet och integration. Skillnader mellan teologier kan då medvetandegöras, så att mångfald kan integreras medvetet.

Nyckelord: Soteriologi, metod, koherens, identitet, korrespondens, relevans, mångfald, systematisk teologi

ENGLISH: With this essay, I try to contribute to the field of *methodology*, and study how soteriology is *integrated* into systematic theology, i.e., how the way the talk about salvation, as a part of theology, relates to a complex theological *whole*. Soteriology is diverse, which is both necessary and desired. In this essay, I argue that there are (at least) *four guiding notions* at work when soteriology is integrated into systematics: coherence, identity, correspondence and relevance. Soteriology needs *coherence* with other themes of systematic theology (as Christology) or biblical traditions; it needs to take into account the *identity* of the church and of individuals as converging speech and act, creed and praxis; soteriology needs *correspondence* with reality outside the system, by relating to the findings of other theological disciplines, other sciences or simply relating to human experience; further, soteriology needs to strive towards *relevance* for humans, which is both a task and a condition for theology in general. These notions balance each other – they open up for diversity and gather in integration. Together with other methodological suggestions made in this essay, they can function as analytical tools that take into account both complexity, diversity and integration. Thus, differences can be made conscious and diversity can be integrated consciously.

Key words: Soteriology, Method, Coherence, Identity, Correspondence, Relevance, Diversity, Systematic Theology

Foreword

“*You never know what you're gonna get*” is not just true in films like *Forrest Gump*. So, since I do not know whether I am *gonna get* another chance to write a foreword in my life, I'll gladly take the opportunity that this bachelor's essay provides me so kindly.

From the very beginning of my studies of theology, I was fascinated and puzzled by the sheer variety of interpretations related to soteriology. The way salvation has been understood and perceived is truly marked by diversity. I found and still find this diversity fascinating for different reasons. As a candidate of the priesthood bound for Ministry in the Church of Sweden, I try to understand how a creed so central to the church can be fundamental and, at the same time, so multifaceted. As a private individual, involved in ecumenical and religious dialogue, I try to understand how such a multifaceted creed can function as an identity and border marker between different denominations and religions. Further, I seek for ways to relate findings from the natural sciences – so fascinating and, at times, so relevant for theology – to the talk about salvation. To answer such questions might not be a matter of life or death, but nevertheless, those questions fascinate and capture me, maybe since *fides quarens intellectum*. So why not travelling down this road? Yes, it really is a journey that I embarked with this puzzlement, a journey long from finished. This essay marks but one step. And if its suggestions would help only one fellow theologian in his or her own critical reflection on soteriology and theology, I'd be more than happy.

Many people have accompanied me on this journey, and I am most thankful for all support and the opening of doors that I did not even know existed. I am grateful for the help of my fantastic supervisor Roland Spjuth, for both his personal commitment and encouragement, and his extensive knowledge and understanding. My thanks also go to teachers and staff at the CTR, especially Sara Gehlin, Blazenka Scheuer, KG Hammar, Christina Packalén, Anna-Minara Ciardi, Stephan Borghammar, Jakob Wirén, Gösta Hallonsten, Dan Nässelqvist, Jesper Svartvik and several more for their encouragement, inspiration and help. Another word of gratitude goes to Gunnel Borgegård from the Church of Sweden, for opening two decisive doors, and to the STI in Jerusalem for truly changing experiences. Thanks also to my mum, who borrowed me her observant and caring eyes for finding false friends and other language problems.

Most important – and how I looked forward to this – all love goes officially to my beloved, Annika, who until three months ago thought that there was a forth wise man at the cradle, called 'Bongo', and who usually helps me to summarize my theological work using variations on the theme “blablabla.” And finally: *thank you*, essay, for giving me the opportunity to write a foreword.

/Benjamin

Lund et al., December 2012

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1. Where's the method in all that salvation?

*“But to be a systematic theologian at all is to be responsible for reflecting on theology itself
– on just what it means to do it and on how it ought to be done.”¹*

Schubert M. Ogden

1.1. Introduction and background

Where's the method in all that salvation? This is a question I ask myself sometimes. When studying soteriology – the talk about salvation – one can become puzzled by its diversity. In so many ways has Christ's life and death been interpreted, so many ethical conclusions have been drawn from it, in so different ways has it been represented in Christian Literature, Art and Music. During my studies in theology, I have come to the conclusion that this diversity is a constituent part of soteriology – it is both necessary and desired. There cannot be just one interpretation of what salvation is, how it happens and what it means. And there *should* not be just one interpretation either. But this does not imply that soteriology can be accused of being arbitrary. Each soteriology is also part of a complex entirety, a theological *whole*, where it relates to other parts, creeds and praxes in the Christian tradition. Systematic theology, the area of theology to which I try to contribute, tries to analyse and formulate this *whole* – those single parts of theology and their relation to each other. Thus, when integrated into systematic theology, the formulation of soteriology needs to take this *whole* into account. Likewise, systematic theology needs to take the diversity of soteriology into account when presenting the complex entirety of what Christianity is about. It is this interplay of the part and the whole – taking into account the complexity of theology and its related topics – that this essay tries to illuminate. The ideal outcome of this interplay would be a soteriology that is *integrated* into a mature and holistic theology, taking complexity into account. Basically, I try to formulate four guiding notions that are involved in this process of integration, with special respect to the diversity within soteriology. Thus, this essay is concerned with questions of method (μετα οδος) – with questions about the way things are done.

1 Ogden, *Doing Theology today*, 20.

1.2. Aim and purpose

In this essay, I want to present four guiding notions that are involved in the formulation of soteriology and in its integration into systematic theology as a whole. My aim is to formulate methodological tools (i.e. the four notions) that take into account both the diversity of soteriology and the complexity within theology. My question is '*How is soteriology integrated into systematic theology as whole?*' and my approach considers four notions: coherence, identity, correspondence and relevance.

My wish is that these notions could function as an aid for critical reflection on theologies in general and soteriologies in particular. I believe that these notions are, in different ways, taken into account by theologians when formulating a soteriology, and well they should be. Therefore, they are referred to as *guiding notions*² within this essay. Of course, these notions alone do not suffice for an exhaustive analysis of theologies. Therefore, (but without claiming completeness), some other central notions within theological theology will also be discussed. Thus, an underlying question could be phrased as '*How is theology done?*' It is self-evident that I will only scratch parts of the surface of this question, nevertheless, it is addressed in this essay.

It might already be obvious that this essay will sketch a vast field in broad sweeps, but my hope is that such a meta perspective is, in some way, both legitimate and relevant. If my thesis proves to be useful, I hope that the notions presented could function as a starting point for a discussion of soteriologies and their diversity within systematic theology.

1.3. Method

This study is a study of texts, as is nearly all research in systematic theology, and it is part of a longer journey. One important step was a reading course taken in Spring 2011. At that time, I had an inductive approach and tried to find as much material about soteriology with as much diversity as possible. During this course, basic theses about soteriology and its place and role in systematic theology were formulated. Two of them became especially important to me and they have been used as a starting point in this essay. First, I came to the conclusion that the vast diversity in the field of soteriology is both necessary and desirable. It is, among others, necessary for philosophical reasons

2 After choosing this term, my mentor made me aware that *guiding notions* is used in Lonergan, Morelli, and Morelli, *The Lonergan Reader*, 24. There, a call is made for “guiding notions, in light of which we can render judgements confidently and critically, make decisions freely and responsibly, promote progress, and resist decline.” Without claiming neither a similar usage of the term, nor to have answered their call, I hope to contribute in a tiny manner to the quest of their honourable endeavour.

such as the mobile character of language, and it is desirable for theological reasons such as the ability to carry out the church's pastoral and kerygmatic mission which is directed to a broad variety of individuals. The second thesis that was formulated during the reading course states that the diversity in the field of soteriology does not pose a problem *as long as communion is given priority* over a shared, identical understanding of what salvation is and what it means. These two theses, derived from my inductive study of soteriology, functioned as a kind of selective criteria for further theoretical perspectives. (A minor elaboration of these theses will be done in chapter 3.)

During the reading course, I realized that I lacked the methodological tools which are needed to analyse the diversity of soteriology found in the material. However, I found a pair of terms that seemed helpful as a starting point: *identity* and *relevance*. Thomas Pröpper, a German theologian, titles one of his book sections “Salvation as Liberation? The dilemma of identity and relevance”.³ In this formulation, where he builds on Jürgen Moltmann, a basic tension is pointed out that pervades the creating process of all theology. As Pröpper puts it: “For the more exclusive the Christian identity of faith is exposed, the more questionable its relevance must become.”⁴ He suggests, as I understand it, a tension between uniqueness and relevance. Even though I do not agree with all the formulation's implications as such, this thought opened my eyes to the tensions that are at the heart of each theology and that demand, consciously or unconsciously, choices when a theology is taking shape. I ended up adapting the terms, *identity* and *relevance*, even though not in the same way as Pröpper or Moltmann had used them.

Later, during the preparations for this essay, I regularly returned to questions of method and theory in science and theology. Two terms that I met repeatedly, usually related to epistemology and logic, became central to the structure and content of this study, namely the criteria of *coherence* and *correspondence*. I found that these four terms, coherence, identity, correspondence and relevance, posed a useful set of tools in the analysis of soteriology, its relation to systematic theology, and its diversity that I found so fascinating and puzzling ever since I started my studies of theology. I came to the conclusion that these four actually pose *guiding notions* that are involved, in a way, each time a soteriology is formulated and integrated into theology.

In this essay I will elaborate on each of the terms that I regard to be a guiding notion. This will be done by first explaining what is meant by the notion at hand. After that, an example is given that illustrates its usage in a theological work. It could be argued that this method only uses verification, i.e. that I simply choose theological material that fits my perception of guiding notions at work.

3 Pröpper, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 34, my translation.

4 Ibid., 35, my translation. “Je ausschließlicher nämlich die christliche Identität des Glaubens herausgestellt wird, desto fraglicher muss seine Relevanz werden.”

This is a valid concern, but I intend to present a model that, if it proves useful, could be applied on every theology/soteriology regardless the content of that theology. Thus there is at least one way of falsification: if the model cannot be applied, i.e. if the four guiding notions turn out to be useless for discussing a certain theology, then my thesis is proven wrong and would need to be reconsidered.

1.4. Limitations

An endeavour such as the one embarked in this essay is obviously limited in different ways. Firstly, the guiding notions that I aim to elaborate are *just one approach*, one set of tools to be used for analysing soteriology's integration into systematic theology. I consider the four notions to be covering a wide range of important aspects, but presumably more *guiding notions* could and should be formulated. Secondly, I do not try to present a complete theory of the nature of systematic theology, nor do I want to present an overview over a certain field or topic in systematic theology. Rather, I try to contribute to its methodological arsenal. Thirdly, this study is not a historical one and barely takes into account historical perspectives regarding the integration of soteriology into systematic theology. Such a study would be most stimulating and important, but it is not the study I intend to do.

This study is also limited (as well as made possible) by my own context. I am formed by German and Anglo-Saxon traditions in theology and philosophy and I am writing out of my context, as a young family father in Sweden, rooted in a Lutheran church where I am preparing for ministry, and strongly influenced by ecumenism and religious dialogue. The wish to find openings for such dialogue between churches and religions is and has been a conscious part of my work. Should the reader not share certain perspectives and values with me, then parts of my argumentation and conclusions become either false or irrelevant. This is however unavoidable. And even though I am formed by certain premises (which I try to expose openly), and am, as a result, not “neutral” myself, I certainly hope that the model presented can be used in a variety of contexts.

Finally, and this in my opinion is a more severe limitation, the material available for this study – both for the reading course mentioned earlier and for this bachelor's essay – has from the very beginning been basically confined to Anglo-Saxon and European theologians (though from various denominations). This aided in some way to create a helpful focus vis à vis the material used, but it also became an imposed limitation, since the availability for written text, both printed and electronic, from outside these two spheres turned out to be minimal.⁵

⁵ Anyhow, with the limitations of availability and search method in mind, it is possible to glimpse certain tendencies regarding authorship and theology in the field of soteriology. A search conducted within the database 'Scopus,'

1.5. The academic context of this study

This study takes as its starting point the diversity within soteriology. It is here that the need becomes obvious for tools that help to discuss this diversity.

1.5.1. The diversity of soteriology

The text corpus about soteriology is vast. Soteriology as the discourse about salvation, about what Christ has done and what it meant, is not just part of doctrinal writings, but has a central place also in liturgy, for example. It is therefore not surprising to find a huge variety of ways to formulate soteriology. However, the diversity is so enormous as to become puzzling. Some theologians talk about the life and work of Christ, for example, as “the climax of God's self communication,” marking the beginning of a “divinisation of the world,”⁶ while others state: “God's justice is that Jesus takes upon himself evil and injustice, that which otherwise would have come upon us as punishment and pain.”⁷ The difference is obvious: does Christ *mark a staging point* in an ongoing process, or does he, once and for all, *rescue humanity from evil*? Such differences have major implications on other questions in soteriology and theology, like questions of anthropology. Is humanity in need of rescue? If this is so, then Christ's life, if understood as marking just a staging point of communication, would be arguably salvifically insufficient. If humanity however 'only' need guidance, then Christ's life could become a valuable example to follow, without a need for metaphysical realities to change.

When soteriology relates to other parts of theology, it becomes obvious that all parts are interrelated. Now, the aim of this essay is to illuminate this interrelation: how soteriology, in its diversity, is and can be integrated into systematic theology, taking into account the complex *whole* of theology and its related topics.

1.5.2. Method and theory in systematic theology

Arguably, the field of method and theory within systematic theology has still the potential for development. Other theological sciences are far better equipped in terms of method and theory. There is a vast corpus of books regarding method in, for example, biblical exegesis, frequently used also in theological education. In systematic theology however, explanations regarding method are

using 'christ+soteriology' as search terms, reports only findings published in Northern America, Europe and Australia. A search with 'christ + liberat*' on the other hand, even gives results in South America.

6 Watts, *Theology and Psychology*, 124. Watts relates his statements partly to Rahner and De Chardin.

7 Modéus and Svenska kyrkans nämnd för kyrkolivets utveckling, *Tradition och liv*, 118, my translation.

seldom presented exhaustively and explicitly. If present at all, they are rather integrated into the presentation of the content of theology itself. The case is slightly different in major treatises on systematic theology, where sections of method often are included. However, such sections are usually concerned mainly with the sources of theology (scripture, experience, reason etc.) and the legitimation of these sources. Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*, Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and Peter's *God – the world's future* all contain such a section. Of course, there are works on method and theory within theology. Pannenberg has, as known, made major contributions in this area, elaborating on, among other things, methods of falsification and ways to present the truth of theological statements (or *hypotheses*, as he calls them).⁸ Further, Bernard Lonergan has presented a model for theological work in his well known book *Method in Theology*.⁹

From time to time, more fundamental questions about the nature of theology come into focus. Those questions are often designated “prolegomena” – the things that are to be said *first* when theology is to be done.¹⁰ As Schubert M. Ogden states, in a prolegomena, the focus is on “critical reflection and proper theory.”¹¹ Of course, when questions of theory and method are considered, the answers differ depending on the context of the theology. There is not just *one* academic theology, and theology is not done within the academic sphere only. Gerald O'Collins for example distinguishes *three styles of theology*:

- (1) an academic style in search of truth that finds its sources in writings from the past;
 - (2) a practical style in search of justice that ‘consults’ the poor and suffering in matters of faith, doctrine, and morality;
 - (3) a prayerful style in search of the divine beauty that nourishes a yearning for a final future through public worship.
- These styles, which, when developed unilaterally, can go astray, need and complement each other.¹²

This quotation illustrates the fact that there is not just one universal approach to doing theology. The approaches might seem to be distant from another at first glance. However, the postmodern approaches to science and epistemology, that were reflected also in the change of approaches towards and within theology, resulted in theological attempts that seem to negotiate between different spheres.¹³ There is a quest for more *holistic* approaches. George A. Lindbeck's classic *The Nature of Doctrine* for example, marked a first major step of this change within systematic theology. It has, in a way, been carried further by, for example, those arguing for *the participatory*

8 Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*.

9 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*.

10 Ogden, *Doing Theology today*, 20.

11 *Ibid.*, 22. Ogden builds here on Habermas.

12 O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 322.

13 It must also be noted that, throughout history, there have been times when such a distinction was not drawn at all.

*turn*¹⁴ – a more holistic way of perceiving and carrying out theology, taking both academic study, contemplation, belief, moral reflection etc. into account. But still, there are many different approaches at work simultaneously within theology, differing between disciplines, traditions and generations.

There is no single, leading theory or method in the field of systematic theology. And maybe there cannot be. But there is a need for extending the methodological arsenal of systematic theology in order to continue the task of systematic theologians: “to be responsible for reflecting on theology itself – on just what it means to do it and on how it ought to be done”.¹⁵ I try, as an undergraduate, to contribute to the ongoing discussion and quest.

Towards the very end of the working process, I encountered a model of theological method that is quite close to what I try to suggest with the four guiding notions in my essay. In “Predikans frälsning” [Homiletic Salvation], Mattias Martinson discusses what he calls *two principles* of theological work: the principle of *integration* and the principle of *correlation*.¹⁶ Theological integration means that “theology always is to be put into a continuity regarding knowledge with other human thought”.¹⁷ On the other hand, theological correlation means

that the teachings and praxes of the religious tradition cannot be given any current actuality without their content being detailed in terms of the current religious questions; but even the reverse: that current religious questions cannot be regarded in isolation from the traditions' answers to such questions.¹⁸

In a way, the four notions presented in this essay expand and detail the two principles.¹⁹ As for the question of why such an endeavour is necessary, I want once more to quote Martinson, who formulates the need for an ongoing strive within systematic theology, a need that resonates deeply with the intention for this essay:

I believe namely that the theological method must constantly stretch itself towards the border areas where it nearly does not succeed any more to perceive itself as a coherent pattern. [...] The productive part in this approach is, that the now much more careful theological reflection on one hand can open for new combinations of questions and answers, and on the other side deflate the incorrect idea that all questions necessarily must have timeless answers.²⁰

14 *The Participatory Turn*.

15 Ogden, *Doing Theology Today*, 20.

16 Martinson, “Predikans frälsning,” 95.

17 *Ibid.*, my translation. Martinson builds here on Jeffner, *Theology and Integration*.

18 Martinson, “Predikans frälsning,” 96, my translation.

19 Please note that I use the term *correspondence* instead of *correlation*. While they are close and at times even interchangeable in this essay, I chose the former term due to its epistemological connotation.

20 *Ibid.*, 103–104, my translation.

2. Difference and Systematics

In this chapter, I present a definition of what systematic theology is. I argue for and borrow a quite holistic definition, one which regards both creed and praxis, individuals and churches, as well as Christian and non-Christian sources as the object of systematic theology. Some theologians would of course disagree with defining the object of theology in such a broad sense. However, it is not just in the choice of object that different theologies part from another. There are a number of basic choices that each theology faces, concerning for example intention, claim, approach, order and source. The combination of choices made – consciously or unconsciously – then form a kind of framework for the theology formulated. I will try to briefly sketch on differences between theologies arising from choices in these areas.

2.1. The need for differentiation

Now, how does distinguishing different theologies relate to the aim of this study – the integration of soteriology into systematic theology? This is an important question that needs some consideration. Why bother with *distinguishing different* theologies when the aim of this essay is to provide tools for *integrating diversity*? Why suggest methods that carve out differences when, in a way, communion is sought? I regard that it is a necessary step in the integration of diversity to reveal differences. Otherwise, the diversity might not be perceived as such, but as an erroneously perceived consensus. To assume a unity where there is none, in terms of concepts or understanding, is naïve, and can have, in my opinion, fatal consequences. On one hand, to assume a shared, identical theology within one's own tradition, can lead to assuming a simplified conformity in other traditions and religions, possibly paving the way for superficial prejudices. Further, it eliminates the possibility of diving deeper into the shared quest for 'truth, goodness and beauty' (see below) through mutual dialogue about different viewpoints.

Therefore, because it is important to be aware of differences when trying to integrate diversity, I point out some areas of difference later on in this chapter. These areas are related to methodological choices made by each theologian. How do these choices relate to the *guiding notions* that are suggested as methodological tools within this essay? I will try to illustrate this by drawing a mental picture. Theology is a combination of many elements. Those single elements can be imagined as a pile of books, each presenting one element, like a certain creed, a particular praxis and so on. Now, the systematic theologian tries to put these books, these elements, into a bookshelf, so that they are,

as *a whole*, ordered in a good and meaningful way (which is what I mean by *integration*). Now, the main aim of my study, the integration of soteriology into systematics, concerns the question of *where* the 'book' on soteriology is to be placed on the bookshelf and, more importantly, *why*. On the other hand, the distinction between different theologies, to which I will turn soon, illustrates different ways of constructing *the shelf itself*. This is important, since the construction of the shelf affects the way the book can be integrated. Some shelves do not allow for a certain order. Certain shelves, so to say, do not provide enough "space" for a certain book or a certain order. In other words, the book cannot be placed anywhere without regard to the possibilities given by its shelf – its framework. So, in this chapter, notions that are fundamental for the formulation of theologies *in general* are considered. This is done as a preparation, before moving on to considering notions at work at the integration of soteriology into systematic theology. There is a need for differentiation before diversity can *consciously* be integrated into a theological whole. Of course, the two processes (the formulation of the general theology and the formulation and integration of the specific soteriology) are akin, but they can, nevertheless and advantageously, be distinct from each other, at least to some extent.

2.2. What is systematic theology?

In this essay, I make an attempt to formulate methodological tools that take into account the diversity of soteriology, a diversity that I regard as both necessary and desirable. As this diversity relates to many different areas – dogma, ethics, liturgy etc. – a holistic approach to systematic theology is needed in order to enable an integration. In this section, I first argue for the need of a holistic approach and then present a definition for systematic theology that suits this approach.

2.2.1. The dimensions of religion

As religion, Christianity consists of different aspects or dimensions, of which the dogmatic/systematic is but one. Soteriology is central to all dimensions. In order to formulate methodological tools that take into account the diversity within soteriology, systematic theology needs to consider all dimensions involved. There are of course different ways of perceiving and defining different aspects and dimensions of religion. Ninian Smart, for example, developed a *phenomenological model*, where he identified a theoretical and a practical side of religion, distinguishing six dimensions: a doctrinal/philosophical, a mythic/narrative, an ethical/legal, a

ritual/practical, an experiential/emotional, and a social/organizational.²¹ This model is useful for sketching the centrality of soteriology in different areas of religion.

Doctrinally/philosophically, soteriology contains focal notions and rules for Christianity: Something decisive happens for humankind and the individual with the work of Christ, something that puts things in a new light, and that cannot be neglected. *Narratively*, what Jesus Christ has done is the focus of the New Testament, the most important text in Christianity. In Christian *ritual*, in liturgy, what Christ did is praised. *Experientially/emotionally*, salvation can result in a perceived change of life, feeling, values etc., and elements of this change are, by some, regarded as a proof of salvation (and as an identity marker)²². *Ethically*, soteriology can describe what Christ did, either as an example for our own ethical behaviour, or as a precondition for it. *Socially*, soteriology functions as a marker of identity and border. It is a constituting element of the *Christian* community. Associations to Christ in practice and belief are a commonality – maybe *the* commonality between different Christian traditions. Sometimes, when different expressions of that practice and belief are compared, it can seem difficult to find more commonalities than just the association to that name.²³

Now, since soteriology is central to so many aspects of faith and religion, it is necessary, for this methodological study, to take a holistic approach to systematic theology.

2.2.2. A holistic approach

In order to be able to describe the integration of soteriology into systematic theology, an answer is needed to the question of what systematic theology is. As stated, for this study, the approach must be holistic. Both regarding object and purpose, I find Nicholas M. Healy's definition useful:

Systematic theological inquiry is the activity of reflecting critically and constructively on the beliefs and practices of Christians and their churches, and on the Christian and non-Christian sources in relation to which such beliefs and practices arise. The goal of inquiry is to develop a coherent construal of what Christianity is as a whole, in order to discern better the truth, goodness and beauty of the gospel and to contribute to our common quest to follow it more truly, lovingly and felicitously.²⁴

His definition fits well into this essay, since it takes a holistic approach, taking into account both beliefs and practices, individuals and denominations, Christian and non-Christian sources. Further,

21 Jones, *Encyclopedia of Religion*., “Ninian Smart”. Smart added later on two more dimensions, the artistic/material and the political/economic. I first encountered this model in Larsson, *Samtal vid brunnar*, 61.

22 Alexander, *Signs & Wonders*, esp. ch 3.

23 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 83–84; For some very interesting perspectives on that diversity, see Vähäkangas, “Mission Studies, Syncretism and the Limits of Christianity During the Time of the Heretical Imperative.”

24 Healy, “What is Systematic Theology?”, 24; Gutenson, *Reconsidering the Doctrine of God*, 15.

Healy has a constructive, and not just an analytical, purpose. His definition even has a certain emotive, doxological component to it, which resonates with my basic theological paradigms.

Healy distinguishes three different types of systematic theology, “each with its own form, function, interests and location: ‘official’, produced by the institutional church; ‘ordinary’ theological reflection, engaged in by virtually all believers, [and] professional-academic systematic theology.”²⁵ Surely, these different types are intertwined in various ways, both when it comes to methods, functions etc., but also since the individuals engaging in theology can adhere to more than one of these groups.

2.3. Areas of difference within theology

Each theologian, regardless which “type”, faces different choices in his or her process of formulation. But how is this theological work done, and what methodological choices are to be made? Bernard Lonergan has presented a much known model of theological work, where he distinguishes four levels, or steps, of theological inquiry: first, the detection and determination of facts and data (research); second, understanding the data (interpretation); third, judgement and integration; and fourth, deciding in reality (dialectic).²⁶ On all of these levels choices are made; the task of each level can be carried out in different ways. Together, the choices – to return to the picture drawn – form the shelf onto which later on the different books, the different elements of theology, are to be integrated. It is noteworthy that Lonergan himself used the term *integration* (in his third step). As stated before, the process of formulating an overall theological structure and the process of formulating a specific topic, like soteriology, are akin and interwoven. Still, I try, for now, to focus on some methodological questions concerning the overall structure of a theology.

So, in this section, starting partly from Healy and Lonergan, I suggest five areas that might be considered when analysing theologies. These areas are intention & addressee, claim, approach, order and source & warrant. They designate underlying questions and choices of path (i.e. method). Of course, these areas do not cover all the relevant questions of method in theology. Neither are the examples given within the different areas complete. However, I find the mere mentioning of these areas to be helpful for the thesis, as they can make conscious some differences between theologies.

25 Healy, “What is Systematic Theology?,” 25.

26 This presentation builds on the concise summary in Hünemann, “Die Methodologische Herausforderung der Dogmatik,” 144.

2.3.1. *Intention & addressee*

By the intention of a theology, I mean two things: the main purpose of the presentation; and the dialectical relationship between Christianity and 'the world'. The main purpose can differ between theologies. It could, for example, simply be to present an overview on dogmatics for other theologians, or it could also be to emphasize the element that is regarded most important or central in theology. Then the task becomes to relate all other aspects to that one, most central, element, even though nearly all elements of “a classical systematic theology” are covered. An example of that would be Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*.²⁷ Another example of intention is found in the definition of systematic theology applied in this essay. Healy states that the purpose and goal of systematics is the formulation of *a coherent whole* that can be used in the doxological context of the church. It becomes obvious that the intention of a theology is related to the chosen and implied addressee of this theology.

The other question regarding *intention* concerns dialectics – the relation between the theology and its surrounding. Does the theology try to present the Christian faith as fundamentally different from 'the world', or does it build on a common foundation with all and everybody, or does it take a position in between? An example of different dialectical intentions is found in Mark C. Mattes' book *The Role of Justification in contemporary Theologies*, where Mattes examines the theology of four contemporaries with regard to what he thinks is useful for the Lutheran church today. He writes:

Pannenberg, Jüngel and Moltmann, each in their own ways, *seek a foundation for Christian faith shared by non-Christians* – a quest for totality, or for a unique, life-giving experience, or for an ideal, completely fair society. Jensen shares no such commonality, no such foundation, with the world. Instead, *he offers the church as a clear alternative to the world*; the world has no story, while the church's story is guided by the *telos* of God.²⁸

As shall become clear, the different methodological choices imply each other. The question of dialectical intention, for example, is closely related to the choice of *source & warrant* (see below), but also to the *claim* made.

2.3.2. *Claim*

Different theologies have different claims. With the claim of different theologies I mean their claim of truth – in which way do theological utterances relate to truth, and which kind of truth is meant? I concentrate here on three ways of approaching this question, building on George Lindbeck's classic

²⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope; on the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*.

²⁸ Mattes, *The Role of Justification in contemporary Theology*, 143, my italics.

work *The Nature of Doctrine*. I choose his classification before others – and there are many alternatives – since I find both its context and its conclusions adaptable to the study of the *diversity* of soteriology. Lindbeck writes in an ecumenical (and thus diverse) context and discusses in his book the possibility of *doctrinal reconciliation*. With *doctrinal reconciliation*, Lindbeck refers to the ecumenical discussions during the last decades, discussions which have resulted in new interpretations and formulations of fundamental Christian beliefs. While this process of constant reformulation has proven to be both vital and important in many ecclesiastic contexts, it can, at least theoretically, pose a certain problem to dogmatics, not least if one regards the nature of tradition to be accumulative. How, Lindbeck thus wonders, can already existing creeds be reconciled with newly formulated ones, or with their own reformulation? Are there theoretical approaches to the nature of doctrine that could make such an attempt harder or easier respectively?²⁹ It is in this context, that Lindbeck distinguishes three approaches to doctrine: a cognitive one, an experiential-expressive one and his own cultural-linguistic alternative.

The first approach emphasizes cognitive aspects, “and stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.”³⁰ The second one emphasizes the “‘experiential-expressive’ dimension of religion, and it interprets doctrines as non-informative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.”³¹ Further, a combination of those two can also be found. However, Lindbeck states that “in all of these perspectives it is difficult to envision the possibility of doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation.”³² Lindbeck therefore suggests a third approach, his famous cultural-linguistic one. Here “religions are seen as comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualized, which structure human experience and understanding of self and world.”³³

Doctrinal language is thus part of a scheme, a web of interrelations, that structure experience and understanding. This process of structuring experience is however not just a passive way of receiving stimuli; it is in a certain way an active *co-creation of reality*. This is a viewpoint elaborated and established within, for example, social constructivism. Social constructivism suggests that language not only expresses a reality, but also, in a certain sense, creates it. An often used example refers to the colours of the rainbow. Different cultures and languages define and express the shades differently within their language. Thus, even though the optic *perception* of the phenomena is the same, the structured visual *experience* differs. Now Lindbeck's understanding of

29 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 15.

30 Ibid., 16.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 32.

doctrinal language is obviously constructive: “There are numberless thoughts we cannot think, sentiments we cannot have, and realities we cannot perceive unless we learn to use the appropriative symbol systems.”³⁴

In this structuring scheme of religion, Lindbeck thinks of dogmatic language in terms of rules. They are the grammatical patterns, that underlay the religion as a whole and that regulate the interrelation between its single parts. Therefore, it is by comparing those regulating and defining patterns, that similarities and differences between religions or denominations can be discussed, or that questions concerning 'truth' could be asked:

The datum that all religions recommend something which can be called “love” toward that which is taken to be most important (“God”) is a banality as uninteresting as the fact that all languages are (or were) spoken. The significant things are the distinctive patterns of story, belief, ritual, and behaviour that give “love” and “God” their specific and sometimes contradictory meanings.³⁵

Lindbeck here suggests that it is neither terminology nor concepts per se that are to be used as the central criteria for comparing and analysing religion. Instead, it is their regulative and regulated place in the totality of all the dimensions in religion (like story, ritual and behaviour). A meaningful analysis of theology and religion has to take this totality into account. This thesis will become important later on when discussing the diversity in the field of soteriology.³⁶

2.3.3. Approach

Loneragan regards research, the detection and determination of facts and data, to be the first level of theological work.³⁷ But there are, of course, different ways of determining facts. The methodological approach for formulating a theology can here range between induction and deduction: is the starting point the vast variety of Christianities in the world, or is the basic strategy to extract some fundamental statement that is deductively elaborated? Again, I am not so interested in the content of theology, but rather with its working strategies. An example of what I mean by an inductive approach is Elizabeth A. Johnson's book *Quest for the Living God*.³⁸ Here, she tries to encourage the reader to go beyond what, in her opinion, are far too fixed ideas about God; instead,

34 Ibid., 34.

35 Ibid., 41–42.

36 Please note that I consider Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach to be a way of understanding and discussing the *truth claim* of dogma, and not to be a paradigm of understanding theology per se. The authors of *The Participatory Turn* for example regard their own approach as a better alternative to “the currently prevalent cultural-linguistic paradigm” (p. 1-2). However, I regard that the cultural-linguistic approach alone does not pose a complete approach to *theology per se*, but mainly (though not exclusively) to the question of truth claim.

37 Hünemann, “Die Methodologische Herausforderung der Dogmatik,” 144.

38 Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*.

people are to open up to the dynamics that arise when discovering God's continuous involvement with mankind. Johnson therefore takes as her starting point the life situations of different groups: How have slaves, oppressed woman, marginalized people etc. perceived God? Most chapters begin with a phrase like “Consider the insight into God that emerged by...”³⁹ Of course, Johnson's choice of groups can be questioned, and it can certainly not be said to cover all the different Christian traditions or human experiences. But she nevertheless uses an approach in her theological work that is rather inductive in its attempt.⁴⁰

2.3.4. Order

After the level of research, Lonergan designates the third step “the judgement and integration” of the findings.⁴¹ Here distinctions are made between central and peripheral, important and unimportant. Despite the fact that most of the different systematic theologies handle the same, or at least a similar, set of themes, the order can vary, with respect to what is regarded central and what is regarded peripheral. Such differences in order can be more or less explicit. In a certain way, differences can already be glimpsed when comparing different tables of content. Which theme is chosen as the starting point of the presentation? Which dogmatic topics and themes are specified and given weight in, for example, a separate chapter? This is not merely a practical or pedagogical question, but reveals something about the schematic order – or, with Lindbeck's words, the pattern – underlying the theology at hand. Several differences become obvious when comparing the table of content between for example Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*⁴² and Peters' *God – the World's Future*.⁴³ Whereas Pannenberg starts out with “The Truth of Christian Doctrine”, Peters tries to sketch his own context for “Addressing the postmodern person” (note that the notion of intention plays a role in this opening chapter). Then, Pannenberg elaborates each topic in great detail, whereas Peters sketches in wider moves along a dynamic meta story. This understanding of *order*, concerned with a work's outline, is of course closely related to the basic intention or goal of theology.

A more specific example is found in Roger Haight's *Jesus – Symbol of God*. In a section titled “Uncentering of the resurrection in Christian Faith” he resonates: “The focusing of Christian faith on the historical Jesus implies a certain 'repositioning' of the resurrection in the structure of

39 E.g.: Ibid., 49.

40 In a way, the recent dissertation of Martin Lembke, *Non-gods and Gods*, could pose an example for a rather deductive method.

41 Hünemann, “Die Methodologische Herausforderung der Dogmatik,” 144.

42 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*.

43 Peters, *God – the World's Future*.

Christian faith.”⁴⁴ Haight states clearly that this is not to be seen as a minimalisation of the importance of the resurrection. Instead, he contrasts his own position against Hans Küng, for whom “the resurrection is taken 'not only the basic unit, but also as the permanent, constitutive core of the Christian creed.’”⁴⁵ Now, it is not that Haight totally disagrees with Küng. But the two evaluate the centrality of the resurrection differently, especially in relation to other aspects of Jesus' mission. Haight regards “Jesus' life, what he said and did [as] the center of faith,” crediting Jesus' earthly life much weight. In contrast, Haight remarks, Küng's statement “makes it appear as though the person of Jesus, seen in his earthly teaching and actions [...], was not [...] in himself a revelation of God, or not a revelation [...] sufficient enough.”⁴⁶ For Haight, such a centrality of the resurrection risks to obscure the importance of Jesus' mission *before* this event. This is why the resurrection cannot be central to him in an absolute sense.⁴⁷

2.3.5. Source & warrant

Different theologies draw on different sources and anchor their statements in different ways. Theological statements are derived from a certain source (scripture, feeling, reason, tradition etc.) and also tested (warranted) against those sources in a kind of hermeneutic circle. The source and the warrant of theological statements can therefore be identical, but they do not have to. I do not attempt to account for all possible sources and warrants here, but rather to exemplify the diversity in this area. Healy speaks about “Christian and non-Christian sources” that he tries to take into account. What are such potential sources?

One obvious source is *scripture*. Scripture can be understood differently. It can on one hand designate a selection of bible verses or biblical themes, that are regarded central. This is the case for example in much evangelical theology. As Stanley J. Grenz in *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* states so explicitly in his chapter called “The sources of theology”: “The task of theology so conceived is the discovery of the one doctrinal system that inheres in the Bible.”⁴⁸ On the other hand, scripture can be understood as 'the word of God in its proper context', e.g. the Church, its mission and the word incarnated. Karl Barth is a well known representative for such an understanding.⁴⁹

Another source is *religious experience* or *feeling*. Here Schleiermacher is the self evident

44 Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 149. (Thanks to my fellow student Jozsef Nemeth for the tips on Haight.)

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., 150.

48 Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 87.

49 Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. Bd I, Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes*.

example. In his attempt to overcome a perceived separation between God and the world, and coloured by his pietistic background, he emphasized the “feeling of total dependence” as a basic and central opening for communication with God.⁵⁰

To a certain degree, reason has widely been regarded as a source for theology. Traditionally, a distinction has been made between natural and supernatural knowledge about God.⁵¹ What we can know about God is partly given to all by birth and/or acquired during a person's life *naturally*, or revealed *supernaturally* by God through prophets, apostles and scripture. What is commonly referred to as an “inclusive approach” in the theology of religion credits this natural knowledge with much weight.

Summary: This chapter started out by arguing the need for making conscious the differences between theologies. Otherwise, diversity cannot be integrated consciously, but might be perceived – erroneously – as a kind of consensus. Further, I argued for a holistic approach to systematic theology, so as to accommodate differences and diversity. In this essay, systematic theology is understood, through a definition by Nicholas Healy, to be a critical reflection with a holistic approach, taking into account both creeds and praxes, individuals and denominations, Christian and non-Christian sources. The purpose is “to develop a coherent construal.”⁵² Such a definition of systematic theology forms a certain framework into which soteriology is then integrated. There are thus different underlying choices and premisses that are at work both consciously and unconsciously, throughout the whole process of formulating theology. To express it pictorially, those choices and premisses build the shelf onto which the systematic theologian puts the book on soteriology. Now, what will become important later on, is that different shelves allow for different ways of ordering. With the help of Lonergan's and Healy's contributions, different areas of methodological choice are distinguished in this chapter. Without claiming completeness, I discussed the areas of intention & addressee, claim, approach, order and source & warrant.

50 *Christianity*, 'Schleiermacher.' The distinction between scripture and feeling as sources would be an interesting focus for further study. is not scripture, among other things, expression of experience in the past?

51 Hägglund, *Teologins historia*, 284.

52 Healy, “What is Systematic Theology?,” 24.

3. The necessity, desirability and non-problem of diversity

Self-evidently, theologies differ from one another. There is a diversity. The starting point of this essay is the diversity within the field of soteriology and I wish, among other things, to show the ability and necessity to incorporate the diversity of soteriology into systematic theology. I will return later to the *ability* of incorporating diversity, when discussing the four guiding notions at work during integration. Regarding the *necessity* of incorporating diversity, initial clarification might be needed on why such a necessity exists. In this chapter, I present two reasons for why diversity could be regarded as inevitable and therefore *has to* be taken into account when dealing with systematic theology. One stems from the philosophical insight that language is mobile and undecidable, the other from the theological insight that diversity is needed in order to be able to address different individuals. Further, I argue that diversity does not pose a problem, *as long as communion is valued higher than shared understanding*.

3.1. Linguistic undecidability

The integration of diversity regarding soteriology is *necessary*, since this diversity is constitutive to soteriology. The talk about salvation cannot be but diverse. One reason for regarding the diversity within theology in general (and soteriology in particular) as a *necessity* is the notion of “linguistic undecidability” – the thought that language is necessarily *mobile* in its use and nature. My line of thought goes as follows: Soteriology is expressed in language. Now, even though there are affirmations and formulations that are undeniably central to this talk about salvation, like “Christ is Saviour,” the mere existence of such central phrases, shared by basically all Christians, does not ensure a common or single understanding of this phrase or formulation. This is an obvious fact, formulated in various ways by hermeneutics and other contextual approaches. However, here I want to focus on a more philosophical aspect of this diversity, namely the notion of language as mobile. Language and linguistic entities, like sentences, do not in themselves have a meaning that is stable. Their meaning is not beyond doubt established when they are uttered. This thought has been meritoriously elaborated by Patrik Fridlund in his doctoral thesis *Mobile Performances*.⁵³ In his chapter titled “Six Areas of Linguistic Unclarity”, he presents six ways in which language is open to interpretation regarding its final meaning:

53 Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*.

1) *The deceitful forms of linguistic entities*: Fridlund suggests, building on J.L. Austin, that it is not always clear when an utterance is performative (i.e. not only describing, but being an action or part of it) or not. As a simple example, he states: “If some says, 'there is a bull in the field' it may or may not be a warning; it might as well be just a description of the scenery.”⁵⁴ The content itself does thus not always unequivocally reveal the whole meaning of an utterance.

2) *The intention and perception of meaning as an open affair*: The next area of unclarity Fridlund suggests, is the difficulty of knowing whether an utterance is meant as a warning or a threat, an advice or an order. This thought is closely related to the first one, and even here he builds on Austin. Fridlund gives as an example the phrase: “Shut the door”, which is obviously not merely a description. But: is it “a warning (Shut the door, the beast is attacking!), or a threat (Shut the door, otherwise...)?”⁵⁵ As an example from the field of religion, he points out that utterances like “‘Jesus is savior,’ or ‘Allah is the righteous judge’ have the apparent form of constatives [descriptive statements]. But what if they are warnings? Threats? Promises?”⁵⁶

3) *Deceitful agreement*: Fridlund points out that agreement on one level, or regarding one doctrine, does not entail agreement in other areas or on other levels. Also, different consequences can be drawn from a certain utterance, even if its meaning seems perfectly clear and shared. For example, although Christians all over the world “read the same Bible and profess the same faith [...] the consequences that some draw [from these common foundations] may differ significantly from the consequences others draw.”⁵⁷ The way in which all Christians can be said to profess the same faith is open to discussion, but Fridlund definitely points out an obvious fact: that in World Christianity, different conclusions are drawn from seemingly similar premisses.

4) *Deceitful clarifications*: When a common understanding or meaning is searched for, clarification of a given term is not always helpful, Fridlund writes. Rather, this can reveal contradictions. Basic utterances of belief like “God is omnipotent” or “God is wholly good” might be agreed on as basic beliefs, but different Christians “do have significantly different understandings of what these terms mean when clarifications are made.”⁵⁸ This is however not the surprising point. Rather, it shows – and here he makes an emphasis – that clarification thus is not always “helpful when one aims at establishing meaning.”⁵⁹ I will return to that point.

5) *Unbalanced weight*: Even if two adherents of a faith would agree on a certain utterance as a belief of their faith, and even would “agree upon what it means to say so” they could still regard the

54 Ibid., 56.

55 Ibid., 56–57.

56 Ibid., 57.

57 Ibid., 58.

58 Ibid., 59.

59 Ibid.

statement either as rather secondary in Christian life, or as a cornerstone.”⁶⁰ (I have already touched on this area in the criterion of *order* in section 2.3.4.)

6) *Rough descriptions*: It can be difficult to judge a certain utterance as true or false, as certain utterances are to be understood as “rough descriptions”. Fridlund gives the description of France as hexagonal as an example. “It seems pointless to speak about true/false in this case. [...] It is rather a rough description, not a true or false one.”⁶¹

Fridlund states himself that all of these six areas of linguistic undecidability, which by some could be perceived as problems, “concern the practice, not the meaning of the linguistic entities.”⁶² However, this concern does not pose a problem in this study, since both the practical and the theoretical components of theology, as well as their point of junction, are in focus.

The undecidability of language is of course not the only reason for regarding the diversity within soteriology as *necessary*. A theological reason closer at hand is the obvious diversity of (and within) biblical accounts that are related to the theme. However, regarding *theological* reasons for diversity, I'd like to focus on the desirability of diversity for reasons of pastoral care.

3.2. The theological desirability of diversity

The main traditions of the church have never officially established a dogma on salvation. Instead, a diversity has been kept that made it possible to relate the discourse about salvation to many individual's situations. This is no coincidence. As David F. Ford states in his amazing book *Theology – A very short introduction*: “[The Church] has recognized the complexity of human life and the ways it can be damaged, perverted, healed, and renewed.”⁶³ It is – among other things – due to that complexity that no single exhaustive interpretation of salvation has been stated as dogma. Likewise, John McIntyre argues in his equally amazing *The Shape of Soteriology* for the value of diversity for homiletics and pastoral care, where “the whole foundation of salvation [is needed...]. It is the whole Gospel which has to be preached...The [soteriological] models offer the variety of ways in which Jesus the Redeemer may meet the needs of his people.”⁶⁴ McIntyre states that the different ways of understanding and expressing what salvation means and constitutes – formulated in models, of which I will account later – are all needed for the Church to carry out its mission of pastoral care. This is what I mean by a theological desirability of diversity.

60 Ibid.

61 Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, 61.

62 Ibid., 62.

63 Ford, *Theology*, 104.

64 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 120.

3.3. Unity in doctrine or meaning in communion?

But does not this diversity pose a threat to Christian union? Is not the talk about salvation too central for Christianity to allow such a diversity? The question at hand is kind of a theological evergreen, often formulated through the notion of universalism versus contextualism.⁶⁵ However, I want to approach it through an interesting observation that Fridlund made in his thesis, the one he called “deceitful clarification.” He stated that clarification of what formulations mean is not always “helpful when one aims at establishing meaning,” as it reveals differences and contradictions.⁶⁶ What is interesting here, is that *meaning* (according to the Oxford Dictionary) can not only be considered by “what is meant”, cognitively, by a term or concept, but also by its significance or quality and *purpose*.⁶⁷ Now, I want to pose the question: what is the ultimate *purpose* of establishing meaning regarding salvation? Is it to arrive at a defined and everlasting theological formulation that cannot be misunderstood? Or is it to capture the centre of the/a church's communion, the nave of the/a group of believers? In one way, this is a question of value. Is a shared cognitive understanding valued higher than a shared communion marked by a roughly related diversity? To put it differently – is not the meaning (the purpose) of salvation to establish communion, rather than to define an utterance? Of course, it is possible that shared formulations pose a potential way of establishing communion. But that just shows that a formulation of salvation, however much defined and shared, is no end-in-itself, but just an extrinsic step towards establishing communion, in the simple sense of being and acting like belonging together. This being said, I want to re-state that this essay takes its starting point in the idea that soteriology, despite its diversity, is not formulated arbitrary. The very aim of this essay is to illuminate *guiding notions* at work in this process of formulation, that balance the need for diversity with the integration of this diversity into a theological whole.

However, it seems to me that in theology in general, priority is given to the idea of communion rather than to a shared cognitive understanding, and I regard evidence for that to be found in the simple fact that there is so much diversity found within the Christian church, within the different denominations and within each single congregation. This diversity seems to be accepted. In a way, this has to do with the *identity* of the church. In the life and identity of the church, where rite and communion, creed and daily life converge, doctrine doesn't pose the single, most central element. Rather, it is one among many, and it can even play a peripheral role. Communion, in an everyday-life sense, can therefore be given priority over a shared understanding as the central element. (I will return to that point later.)

65 For an introduction, see f.ex. Bergmann, *God in Context*.

66 Fridlund, *Mobile Performances*, 58.

67 *Oxford Dictionary of English*.

4. Soteriology

In this chapter, I give a short account of what I understand by *soteriology*. I distinguish two elements in the discourse of soteriology: one concerning the formality of salvation and one concerning its content. I discuss diversity and unclarity within the different elements, and also comment on the notion of *uniqueness* in the context of salvation. Then, as a main point in this chapter, some common models of soteriology are presented as examples of how soteriology has been formulated. Finally, the fact that most models use biblical language is stressed and discussed.

4.1. What is soteriology?

In order to be able to describe the integration of soteriology into systematic theology, an answer is needed to the question of what soteriology is. Soteriology is the attempt to interpret and articulate what Christ's life (his deeds and passion – *acta et passa Jesu Christi*) means. It is a dogmatic topic that, as I understand it, tries to articulate answers to the following four questions: How does salvation happen? How is salvation attained [by 'the recipient'; Swed.: *tillgodogjord*]? What does salvation signify? And, finally, what are the consequences of salvation? The first two questions concern what I call the *formality* of soteriology, the latter two concern its *content*.⁶⁸ Regarding the question of what salvation signifies, a distinction is often made between *from what* and *to what* humans are saved.

Due to the different elements and questions that are combined, soteriology touches on practically every other theme in systematic theology – hamartology, anthropology, ecclesiology etc. However, soteriology is, as has been argued above, not just important within systematic theology and dogmatics, but in all dimensions of Christian faith in general. This is why a rather holistic approach to systematic theology is used in this essay, taking into account both praxes and creeds.

4.2. Soteriologies – sketching different models

In this section, I present different models of soteriology, i.e. different interpretations of what Christ's life & death meant and means. First, I'll focus on formality, and then on content, even though the two are most clearly intertwined.

⁶⁸ Pröpfer, in *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 254–255, distinguishes between 'dem dramatischen Erlösungsgeschehen' and 'Motiven des Heilsinhalts'.

4.2.1. Formality, uniqueness and diversity

Ted Peters states, not uncritically: “Generally soteriology concerns itself more with the means of accomplishing salvation than with the nature or content of salvation itself.”⁶⁹ I'd say that, while theologians in general have expressed themselves with greater emphasis about the *how* of salvation, they have been careful to keep and allow for differing opinions regarding the content of salvation. But this does not imply, as Peters' statement seems to do, that there has been only little attempt at formulating what this salvation *means*. Rather, the opposite is the case: theologians and Christians throughout history have manifoldly formulated what Christ's life, death and resurrection meant *for them*.⁷⁰ Innumerable texts have been written on that theme. However, I'd agree with Peters to the extent that there has been, at times and by some, a certain tendency to focus on formality. This tendency might, I think, have to do with the question of (and the quest for) uniqueness: when a specifically *Christian* soteriology is to be presented, especially in a diverse religious context, it is presumably easier to show how formality constitutes a *unique* element, rather than content. At least at first glance (and sometimes at second), different religions can seem to have very similar ideals about human life and how it is to be lead; they can in a similar way express spiritual experiences,⁷¹ or even advocate similar ways of living that spirituality,⁷² whilst, in contrast, the specific association of spirituality etc. with *Christ's* salvific deeds, life and person is a for Christianity *unique* element.⁷³ The formality of salvation, the way it is achieved, is thus an identity marker for Christianity. This does not come as a surprise, given the fact that the story about that 'formality' – the story about Christ's life, death and resurrection – is a foundation of Christianity.

The formality of the Christ-event is central to soteriology. However, different models in soteriology ascribe different weight to different elements of the Christ-event. I will soon present a variety of such models and comment on their *content's* diversity, but already now I want to point out the diversity regarding the *formality* of salvation, as the presentations of the models below do not explicitly account for formality in some cases. The first question concerns the instant when salvation happens. Is it already the birth of Jesus, the incarnation itself that is decisive? Or Jesus death? His resurrection? Which point can be said to mark the transition from *before salvation* to *after/in salvation*? On the other hand, can the wholeness of Jesus' life, death and resurrection be divided (into more and less relevant elements) at all? Many theologians have been critical towards attempts to isolate one single salvific instant in the Christ-event. However, there has often been a

69 Peters, *God – the World's Future*, 211.

70 This *for them* was an allusion to the *hyper-formula*, found in several biblical texts about salvation, e.g. Rom 5:8 - “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (NIV)

71 See, e.g., Lai, “Tillich on Death and Suffering.”

72 See, e.g., Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 135ff

73 Surely, some religions honour Jesus as a prophet, avatar or similar, but I leave that out for the moment.

certain focus on the *death* of Jesus as the central nave and decisive point.⁷⁴

Another point of diversity relates to the question of how salvation is attained by humans. Few theologians regard the salvation of mankind as a process that automatically affects all humans entirely throughout all time. Usually, a notion of attainment is involved when speaking about salvation,⁷⁵ distinguishing between the salvation through Christ and its attainment through the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ Sometimes, this difference is marked by distinguishing *salvation* or *atonement* from *justification*.⁷⁷ Regarding this justification, there are some interesting points of tension, such as the relationship between faith and baptism, for example. Some formulations from *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (TJD) and *Confessio Augustana* (CA) illustrate that. § 25 in TJD reads: “We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation.”⁷⁸ How should the difference be understood between the justification that happens by faith and the gift of salvation that is granted in baptism? A similar tension occurs in CA, where point four states “that humans are justified for Christ's sake through faith,” while point nine emphasises “that the baptism is necessary to salvation.”⁷⁹

Why is it so difficult to capture the way salvation is attained? This question deserves its own essay, but I want to briefly formulate my suggestion. One side of it is, I assume, that theologians are rightly careful as soon as utterances about God's salvific work are to be defined, in order not to limit God's work erroneously. Thus, by allowing for a certain *flexibility*, more possibilities are created for humans to be addressed by the talk about salvation (see also 3.2. and, for further elaboration on this *flexibility*, 6.2.3.). Connected to that is the fact that salvation involves the whole of the human being – all aspects of life. Therefore, how could there be just one way of describing it? As will be argued below, identity (both for individuals and 'the church') resemble a union of belief and praxes, creed and rite, speech and act. Salvation concerns all elements of a person's identity.

Another point is that salvation, to quote Mattias Martinson, somehow “concerns the question of the overall structure of the theological system,” not just one aspect of it.⁸⁰ Thus, there is a striving to relate many themes of theology to soteriology. I will return to that point later.

74 Kessler, *Die Theologische Bedeutung des Todes Jesu.*, 296 and 15, note 27. See also the discussion in 2.3.4.

75 Leonhardt, *Grundinformation Dogmatik*, 310, even uses the headline “Die Heilsaneignung durch den Menschen” (roughly “The appropriation of salvation through man”) for his section on soteriology itself.

76 Kessler, *Die Theologische Bedeutung des Todes Jesu.*, 11; Leonhardt, *Grundinformation Dogmatik*, 310.

77 Peters is however critical to such a distinction, since “it tends to divorce justification from the work of Christ on Calvary.” *God - the World's Future*, 231.

78 Lutheran World Federation and Roman-Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.

79 “Confessio Augustana – Das Augsburger Bekenntnis.” IV: quod homines [...] gratis justificentur propter Christum per fidem; IX: [baptismo] necessarius ad salutem.

80 Martinson, “Predikans frälsning,” 98, my translation.

4.2.2. Two dimensions of soteriology

Another way of illuminating the diversity within the formality and content of soteriology is by sketching *the two dimensions* of soteriology. By partly building on Gösta Hallonsten, Mattias Martinson distinguishes between *the process of salvation* and *its object*. Regarding the process, soteriology has to negotiate between the *eschatological future* of salvation and the spiritual *now*. Put differently: should the emphasis in soteriology lie on the ultimate salvation of mankind, or on its intermediate status quo? Regarding the object, soteriology has to negotiate between the reality of *the individual or group* and the reality of *the whole creation*: does salvation concern single human beings, or a group or all living beings, regardless of their consciousness of that salvation?⁸¹

Werner Jeanrond formulates his *Theology of love* in the midst of this tension:

Does salvation mean to be saved from the conditions ruling after the Fall, including sin, death, suffering, illness and alienation? Or does salvation mean a participation in God's creating and newly creating project? In the first meaning, salvation is presented as an ordered exodus out of our fallen world, whilst it in the latter case signifies the eschatological dynamic of love. Even if both of these visions of salvation lead towards a life in a loving relationship with God, the processes are radically different. [...] Salvation [embraces] in the latter case always a wish that also the others should be there, taking part in the fullness that one strives after. Within the network of love it is not meaningful to be "saved" by oneself.⁸²

4.2.3. Examples of models

Now, *how has* salvation been articulated? Salvation has been articulated in pictures, metaphors and models – different theologians use different terms for this articulation. I will mainly follow John McIntyre and speak of *models*. It is also on his book *The Shape of Soteriology* that this section largely, but not exclusively, builds. In the different models, formality and content are of course most intimately interwoven. They do not mark separated components as such, but rather different foci. McIntyre stresses the importance of presenting different models. He also argues that the models are not just a variety of aftermath constructions, i.e. of interpretations after the event, but that each aspect of salvation – presented in the different models – was and is actually part of the density of the Christ-event.⁸³ Most of the models make use of biblical language. This is a rather important observation to which I will return.

I will now, just briefly, sketch some of the most important models and some of the questions

81 Martinson, "Predikans frälsning," 98–99.

82 Jeanrond, *Kärlekens teologi*, 261–262, my translation. Unfortunately, I could not get hold of Jeanrond's original English version without too much effort. I thus had to create this third hand quotation.

83 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 73–74.

related to them; the focus of this essay is the integration of soteriology into systematic theology, not an exhaustive presentation of soteriology itself. Each model answers, in different ways and with different emphasis, the four questions of soteriology (see 4.1.).

One central model is *ransom*. It builds upon Mt 20:28 (=Mk 10:45): “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁸⁴ Now, the question arises, towards whom this ransom has to be paid. Usually, the personification of evil – the devil – poses the answer. But, already Anselm of Canterbury is said to have wondered whether the devil has “any right to claim possession of mankind, 'because the devil and man belong to God alone’.”⁸⁵

Anselm is known for his work *Cur deus homo*, in which he developed the notion of *satisfaction*. Satisfaction is related to ransom, but stresses and presupposes, more than *ransom* does, the ontological *order* of the world and God's attributes. Man has, through sin, disturbed this order, resulting in a debt that only God can, but man *has to* pay. This is why God became man – *cur deus homo*. McIntyre states interestingly, that theology since Anselm's work has a test-criterion “for a genuine work in the discipline of soteriology, [namely] whether it tackles the question of the *necessity* of Christ's death.”⁸⁶

Many models relate, at least partly, to the concept of *redemption*. Biblical reference is found in Eph 1:7 or Col 1:14. However, in the translation from the Greek texts, it is difficult to distinguish clearly between the word translated into *ransom* (λύτρωσις and ἀπολύτρωσις) and the word for *redemption* (λύτρον). Maybe a difference can be found concerning the focus and object of the two notions: *who* receives a ransom, respectively *what* is to be redeemed? However, similar problems arise: Is God in obligation to anything or anyone? Due to these questions, McIntyre states that this symbol is “incomplete.”⁸⁷ (The Swedish theologian Gustav Aulén contributed to a renewed interest in this model during the last century, mainly through his book *Christus Victor*.)⁸⁸

One of the most central models is the one of *salvation*, “which pervades not only almost all the biblical talk about the death of Christ, and God's purpose revealed therein, but gathers up the whole of God's will for his people.”⁸⁹ One of the reasons for this almost all-embracing quality is, I think, the diversity of the term, which also McIntyre states. Its root goes back to “health” (even “wholeness”) and it has thus references to the physical, social, political, economical, mental, moral

84 All bible-quotations are, unless stated otherwise, cited from *New International Version* (NIV).

85 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 31, building on *Cur Deus Homo*, 1.8.

86 *Ibid.*, 17, original italics.

87 *Ibid.*, 32–33.

88 It seems impossible to write a bachelor's essay in soteriology at a Swedish university without at least *naming* Aulén.

89 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 33.

etc.⁹⁰ Still, the question remains: saved *from what* and *to what*? Nevertheless, the model possesses an obvious advantage in its manifold openings and meanings. Presumably this is why even the term itself (maybe next to atonement) became so predominant within soteriology – the talk about salvation.

McIntyre also presents the model of *sacrifice*, which has many references to the Israelite cult.⁹¹ Taking the notion of sacrifice as an example, I want to put focus on the complexity of each model. Jacob Nordhofen, in his substantial doctoral thesis *Durch das Opfer erlöst?*, shows the diversity of motives and concepts converging in *sacrifice*. For example: starting with the variety of sacrifices in the cult, via the prophets' criticism of certain sacrifices and praxes, Nordhofen argues that it becomes questionable to regard the act of referring to this sacrifice to be a demand for attaining God's grace (considering Christ's own criticism on aspects of the cult).⁹² Further, he sketches the use of the concept of *sacrifice* as an ideal for discipleship and as a motive of communication.⁹³

There are plenty more models, not all of which are accounted, neither in McIntyre, nor in this section of mine. There is, for example, *liberation*, which usually takes as its starting point the story of the exodus, or the notion of Christ's life as an *example*⁹⁴ for correct moral behaviour.

4.2.4. The biblical language of the models

Most of the models use biblical language – expressions and concepts found in biblical texts. It is somehow remarkable that theologians, since the very beginning, have kept close to that language within the field of soteriology, while in, for example, christology, another discourse has been added to the biblical vocabulary. This fact is also pointed out by Gösta Hallonsten, who in his article “Är

90 Ford, *Theology*, 103. Salvation is thus an umbrella term, found in innumerable biblical texts. In the case of “salvation,” I see a tendency to include both experiences of salvation, witness of experience as well as concepts found in the Old Testament under this umbrella term, and thereafter associate it *exclusively* with Jesus Christ. This re-contextualisation is in itself nothing surprising – Christians read the texts of the Old Testament through the glasses of the New Testament (I sometimes prefer, due to the risk of supersessionistic implications, 'First and Second Testament,' terms that were – to my surprise – suggested by the Palestinian theologian Yohanna Katanacho). But I am still struggling to grasp the fact that Christians, for example seemingly validate the experience of the psalmist giving thanks for receiving the forgiveness of sins by praying these words themselves, *at the same time* as the source of that forgiveness is modified (even if the nature of that modification is open to discussion). This points to one of the special challenges for the dialogue and relationship between Jews and Christians: the shared text corpus and vocabulary, despite differences of value, weight and interpretation concerning these terms and texts.

91 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 34–35; McIntyre risks here supersessionistic implications, that could easily be avoided while at the same time remaining even closer to biblical exegesis. See Svartvik, “Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews without presupposing supersessionism.”

92 Nordhofen, *Durch das Opfer erlöst?*, 129.

93 Ibid., 128–136.

94 There is, however, a challenge with such an understanding of Christ's life. As is remarked in the *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, 405, (“process theology”): “The task for christology proper is to show not how God could have been present in Jesus, but how this presence could have been different enough from the divine presence in all people, indeed in all individuals, to justify taking Jesus as of decisive importance.”

Jesus frälsare?” [‘Is Jesus saviour?’] reflects on the role of narratives regarding salvation.⁹⁵ As Ola Sigurdson states (in conversation with Hallonsten), the “centre [for the discourse about salvation] are the stories of the Gospel *as stories*.”⁹⁶ Hallonsten writes in his article:

The reason that there is no exhaustive soteriology [qua dogma] – and presumably cannot be – but that salvation can only be narrated, so my thesis, is that salvation in the end is about just God – about communion with God.⁹⁷

Soteriology thus has its sources of communication in the biblical stories – stories that Christians joined⁹⁸ and narrated ever since. They have been interpreted and discussed; certain things have been added (like the model of satisfaction in the West or the notion of deification in the East), but basically, the *modus communicandi* of salvation is *the story*.⁹⁹ The claim of the stories is, however, that they are not “just stories” in the sense of “just myths.” Hallonsten argues that this is the very reason for developing dogmas in the first place, instead of merely continuing to tell the story.¹⁰⁰ But to recall, dogmas on soteriology have never been established. Instead, the discourse on salvation has another test criterion, namely the creed of trinity, which works like a “rule of speech’ – only so-and-so we can talk about God if it should meaning to the story of Jesus, and not dissolve it into myth.”¹⁰¹ (Please observe the notion of creeds as “a rule of speech”. This is similar to the claim Lindbeck ascribes to doctrine in the cultural-linguistic approach.)¹⁰²

95 Hallonsten, “Är Jesus frälsare?”

96 Sigurdson, *Världen är en främmande plats*, 144, my translation, italics as in original. “Centrum [för talet om frälsning] är alltså evangelieberättelserna som berättelser.”

97 Hallonsten, “Är Jesus frälsare?,” 112, my translation. “Anledningen till att det inte finns och förmodligen inte kan finnas någon uttömmande frälsningslära utan att frälsningen bara kan berättas, det är min tes, är att frälsningen ytterst handlar just om Gud, om gemenskap med Gud.”

98 I refer here to the act of “reading oneself into the story,” a phenomena observed by various disciplines. One identifies with the characters in the story and becomes absorbed into the plot. This can also be expressed by making the story one's own – by adapting and contextualising it – in, for example, liturgy or drama.

99 In this perspective is Kevin J. Vanhoozer's book *The Drama of Doctrine* seems interesting, which I only had the possibility of taking a glimpse at. He also situated doctrine in the context of experiences and, more important, lived authentic stories of communion. His work is none of my sources, but one of my next readings I hope.

100 Hallonsten, “Är Jesus frälsare?,” 110.

101 Ibid., 112, my translation. “Och så stöter vi på en treenightslära, som närmast fungerar som en 'språkreglering', endast 'så-och-så' kan man tala om Gud om det skall ge mening åt berättelsen om Jesus, och inte upplösa den i mytologi.”

102 I mean in no way to imply that Hallonsten necessarily embraces that view.

5. Coherence and Identity

Soteriology – the talk about salvation – rising from and told in the stories about Jesus, finds a rule of speech and a test-criterion in other Christian creeds and dogmas, like the creeds on Trinity. Soteriology is thus integrated into systematic theology – into a *whole* – through a relation to other dogmatic topics. In this chapter, I wish to illuminate two aspects of this relation, namely coherence and identity. Systematic theology qua system aims at some form of coherence. The applied definition in this essay states: “The goal of [systematic theological] inquiry is to develop a *coherent* construal of what Christianity is as a whole [...]”¹⁰³ Coherence, according to the Oxford Dictionary of English, refers to “the quality of being logical and consistent” and “the quality of forming a unified whole.”¹⁰⁴ The question, though, is: *consistent with what?* Also: *which parts* should be unified into a *whole*?

To answer these questions, I will in the first two sections distinguish two objects of coherence: *other dogmatic topics* and the so called *history of salvation* – the *meta story* of Christianity. When integrating soteriology into a *whole*, coherence can be sought with either one of them or both. I regard the meta story to be a dimension of dogmatics, i.e. the history of salvation could be seen as a narrative structure of the sum of creeds. However, the two are somewhat different aspects of the theological whole to which soteriology can relate.

A third section introduces *identity* as a form of coherence, a consistent *whole* in which behaviour, thoughts, attitudes etc. merge. Sometimes, *identity*, as term and concept, is more suitable than *coherence*, especially in the context of the church or of individuals' life, where rite and creed, or speech and act respectively, merge.

As this chapter marks the beginning of the main section aim in this essay – the formulation of four guiding notions involved when integrating soteriology into systematic theology – I want to recall the picture given in chapter 2. The integration can be compared with putting and placing a book onto a bookshelf, and it is important to stress that the way the shelf is constructed affects the way in which this integration can and should be done. Fundamental choices regarding, for example, intention or order, underlying the theological *whole* are important to consider when discussing the guiding notions at work during integration. Also, I want to remind that the aim of this essay, and thus the aim of the four notions, is to formulate methodological tools that take both the *diversity* and the *integration* of soteriology into account. As will become obvious, there is a balancing relation

103 Healy, “What is Systematic Theology?,” 24, my italics.

104 *Oxford Dictionary of English*, “Coherence”.

between the notions, opening for diversity on one hand and striving towards converging integration on the other hand. I regard this balance between opening up and converging as being necessary for soteriology in particular and theology in general, and therefore also for the methodological tools (like the essay's four notions) that aim at discussing soteriology and theology.

5.1. Coherence with other dogmatic topics

Hallonsten states that soteriology is tested against the creed of trinity, for example. Thus, there needs to be, in one way or another, a consistency with this and other dogmatic topics when soteriology is formulated and being integrated into systematic theology. The way of speaking about the *work* of Christ must, e.g., be consistent with what is said about the *person* of Christ, and the way of speaking about salvation must be consistent with what is said about the trinitarian God.¹⁰⁵ This consistency – this coherence – is not just a question of method. It is something fundamental to dogmatics. In dogmatics, as Peter Hünemann states, all topics are reflected in each other. This is due to the fact that they all intend to speak about *the whole* of life and faith, and do so, but just from different perspectives.¹⁰⁶ (As remarked in 4.2.1., the different topics also strive towards a relation with soteriology, since it concerns “the overall structure of the theological system.”)

As an example of coherency with another dogmatic topic, I want to mention the work of Thomas Pröpper. In his book *Erlösung und Freiheit*, he reflects on the relationship between revelation and soteriology. Revelation as a theological theme can be explicit or implicit, i.e. it can be elaborated in a section of its own, or implicitly underlay the theology. In modern times, Pröpper argues, there has been a “primacy of reason”, which denies experience – and thus history – as a valid locus of (supernatural) revelation.¹⁰⁷ As soon as history is discredited as source and warrant (see 2.3.5.), due to a primacy of reason, the way soteriology can be expressed is affected. The predominant model that remains for expressing what soteriology signifies is *example*. Pröpper writes: “The modern loss of history as a site of a salvation coming from God needed to lead, consequently, to the *secularisation* of Soteriology. *Secular soteriology, though, means morality.*”¹⁰⁸ What this example shows, is that coherency may limit the ways in which soteriology can be expressed, at the same time as it is a necessary test-criterion for systematic theology and a necessary element of integration.

Coherence is related to logic. The fact that coherence can limit the ways in which soteriology

105 *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, 475.

106 Hünemann, “Die Methodologische Herausforderung der Dogmatik,” 151.

107 Pröpper, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 111.

108 *Ibid.*, 118, my translation, original italics.

can be expressed, seems to pose a certain problem to some theologians. In a treatise on theological argumentation, Anders Jeffner has remarked that an “overwhelming majority of modern theologians” refuse a certain logical advancement.¹⁰⁹ That means that, even though a consistency with other dogmatic topics is desired and sought for, certain conclusions are, implicitly or explicitly, avoided. (Of course, it must be remarked here that such a reasoning is not due to a wish to avoid consistency.) Jeffner gives following example: a theologian states two sentences that can be regarded as “to be premisses in a theological argument [...]

(1) God loves all men. [...] (2) There is a form of existence in which everything happens in accordance with the will of God and finally this form of existence will be the only one.

[... Now, these sentences can be used for concluding the following:] (3) Everyone who participates in the final form of existence will be in a good and happy state. Let us call this reasoning a logical refutation of the doctrine of eternal punishment.¹¹⁰

It is here, at this point of logical refutation that would seemingly arise from coherence and logic, that Jeffner remarks upon the way theologians handle the question. “Either they deny [the concluding refutation] explicitly or say that we cannot accept the conclusion with certainty, even if the premises are certain; or else they avoid saying anything as to the final state of man, which is a remarkable theological silence.”¹¹¹ It seems as if there is a tension between different theological statements, a tension that becomes clear not least in pluralistic societies. One such tension might be expressed like this: “How can baptism be said to be necessary for salvation, while, at the same time, a universal message of unconditioned love is to be conveyed?” Such questions can pose a serious challenge to many theologians. In order for some statements to coexist, coherence – so it might seem – must take a step back.¹¹²

5.2. Coherence with meta stories

Other theological topics, like trinity or christology, are however not the only possible objects with

109 Jeffner, *Theology and Integration*, 21.

110 Ibid., 20–21.

111 Ibid., 21.

112 A short interlude: the previous section on logical consistency points to a methodological element that is not discussed explicitly in this essay (which is, in a way, a limitation I might have needed to point out in chapter 1), namely the allowance for appealing to “divine mystery” or alike in theological argumentation. Different theologians have different viewpoints regarding whether theology must present a logical consistent system, without any unanswered questions left or without any contradictions. Though it might be neither necessary, nor possible, nor desirable to draw a sharp line between viewpoints on this matter, I myself tend to being rather open to such an appeal. However, I would put it in words like “the nature of life is such, that we cannot know everything.” Of course, one could argue that the ability of such an appeal is related to evaluations and beliefs about ontology, and that therefore, this appeal could be analysed with help of *coherence* with ontology as a dogmatic topic.

which consistency and coherence could be established. Coherence with biblical tradition is a test-criterion for systematic theology as well. The fact that the bible poses the main source for soteriological language and concepts has already been pointed out. Wolfhart Pannenberg even uses consistency with biblical tradition as one of his four well known criteria of falsification. According to him, “[theological hypotheses] are to be judged [as being] not substantiated if [...] they cannot demonstrate that they express implications of biblical traditions”¹¹³ The phrase “implications of biblical traditions” (note the pluralis) is vague and wide, I assume on purpose, which points to the fact that many different threads run through the biblical stories.

In order for a soteriology to integrate into systematic theology, it needs some consistency with biblical tradition. If we follow Pannenberg and his falsification criterion, then it could be said that the more biblical traditions that are revealed, the more potential reference there is for integration. In the opening section of this chapter, I stated that the history of salvation – the meta story of Christianity – can be understood as a narrative structure of the sum of creeds. What I mean is that all creeds in one way or another have biblical reference, and that the Bible, from a Christian perspective, is understood as telling a master story, starting from the creation of heaven and earth, via the Fall and the Christ-event towards the last things, with a New Heaven and a New Earth. Soteriology in general integrates into this meta story. Now, with Pannenberg's criteria of falsification in mind, it should be possible to argue, that the scope of potential soteriologies could be *widened* by discovering more traditions. (Note that coherence with other dogmatic topics in a way could *limit* this scope.) Therefore, I want to mention as an example in this section the way Jesper Svartvik points out alternative master stories within Christianity. With different master stories, potentially more diversity can be integrated.¹¹⁴

Not seldom, biblical traditions are compressed into what could be called the Christian master story. The history of salvation is an aspect of this meta story and is generally understood as a story where *fall precedes revelation*. This interpretation of history goes back to Paul. He called Jesus ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος, the second man, (1 Kor 15:47) “thereby constructing an exceedingly influential Genesis-Jesus dichotomy”, as Jesper Svartvik states.¹¹⁵ The first Adam failed, so the second had to come. However, several scholars have successfully argued for (and criticised) that Paul's work is heavily affected by a “from-solution-to-plight” paradigm.¹¹⁶ According to that thesis, Paul first came to understand Christ as the/his saviour – the solution and answer – and did only *afterwards* specify the problem – the plight. While the resulting historiographical scheme – where fall precedes

113 Bradshaw, *Pannenberg*, 156–157.

114 To put it simple: the more diversity is found in the bible, the more diversity can (or even should?) be integrated in systematic theology (at least potentially).

115 Svartvik, “The Interplay between Ecclesiology and Theology of religions,” 7.

116 Ibid.

revelation – is the predominant one in Christianity, it is not the only one. Svartvik shows that a different focus in biblical tradition can reveal another master story, one in which *revelation precedes fall*. This can be of importance in Jewish-Christian dialogue and reflection, since “[t]he focus [in Jewish tradition] is on the people which accept the *Torah*, but fail to live up to its demands.”¹¹⁷ Here, revelation precedes fall, and not the other way around. Now, Svartvik suggests “that there is an excellent parallel in the Gospels' presentation of the disciples, the fallible followers of Jesus of Nazareth.” In the Gospel, Jesus calls the disciples who are later on depicted in their human defectiveness. Since soteriology also seeks to answer the question about the consequences of salvation, it is of some importance that there is a Christian master story that puts fall *after* call and revelation.¹¹⁸

The existence of diverse biblical traditions, acknowledged by systematic theology in general, is one reason for the ability to integrate the diversity of soteriology. As we shall see later on, process theology, for example, when attempting to integrate the findings of theories of evolution makes use of such alternative meta-stories. The Christ-event is then often interpreted as a starting point of transformation or a point of revelation, rather than an event of rescue or re-establishment.

5.3. Identity as a form of coherence

Coherence with biblical tradition has been suggested by Pannenberg as a criterion of falsification. This already hints that coherence as a term is mostly used in epistemology. I cited, above, the Oxford Dictionary, stating that coherence refers to something being “consistent.” Now, coherence and consistency can also be formulated in other ways. A term that might be more suitable for discussing, for example, the life of the church, or everyday life, is *identity*.

Identity, as well as coherence, designates a consistency between different elements. In the case of identity, such elements are behaviour, attitude and expression, for example. Usually, this consistency is assumed to be both diachronic and synchronic, i.e. consistent both over time and at a specific instant. In the following sections, I want to elaborate more on the notion of identity in both an ecclesiastic and an individual context. As will be shown, the notion of identity marks a point of junction between the criterion of coherence and of correspondence.

117 Ibid., 6, original italics.

118 Of course, one can argue in which way the call and revelation of and in Christ related to the salvation and justification through Christ. However, the example shows the existence of parallel master stories.

5.3.1. Identity in ecclesiastic law – creed and rite

In the context of the church, one important aspect of identity is the notion of tradition. Tradition is, in the words of KG Hammar, “the thinking that has been regarded valuable and relevant, which has been confirmed by new experiences and which is passed down, told and recorded.”¹¹⁹ Tradition is a conversation partner with whom coherence is sought in different ways. Since tradition, in a way, is accumulative, the question arises how to relate older traditions to newer ones. When Lindbeck formulated his theory about the cultural-linguistical approach to dogma, he tried to face exactly that challenge: how can different dogmatic formulations, that seem to contradict, be reconciled? The rapid development within ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue during the last decades, shows the importance of such an endeavour. Arguably, theological reflection on this dialogue lags somewhat behind the grass-root movements' vital activity in this field.¹²⁰

When it comes to integrating soteriology into systematic theology, it is important to take into account the complexity of ecclesiastic identity. Of course, one single bachelor's essay could never cover a theme like “ecclesiastic identity”, ever the less this little section of mine. Instead, I want to focus on *one aspect* of this identity, namely the interplay between creed and rite, exemplified by a case study which I did a year ago concerning the Church of Sweden. The study dealt with documents from the annual synod. Such documents are classified as ecclesiastic law, and they are, in a way, central to the identity of the church, as they guide and regulate the church in specific ways. Bertil Nilsson even calls ecclesiastic law “the church in concrete shape.”¹²¹

So what were the conclusions of the study? I analysed how the creed [Swed.: *bekännelse*] of the Church of Sweden has been discussed at a number of synodal meetings during an intensive period of reflection on creed and identity.¹²² The relation to tradition seemed to be ambivalent. Tradition was understood both as a *contextual witness* and an *obligating example* and *warrant*. I found, not surprisingly, a recurring tension between the wish to renew and “adapt” the creed (i.e. the formulations regarded as fundamental by the denomination), and the wish to keep and guard this creed unchanged. Further, at several points, the role of the service was emphasized, as well as the understanding of creed as a process with the congregation as the primary actor and locus. “*Lex orandi – lex credendi*” was argued and concluded more than once.¹²³

The interplay between creed and rite is also central in the first paragraph of “the order” (the

119 Hammar, KG, “Gudstro och människosyn i Darwins värld,” 134, my translation. Of course, not all denominations would agree with this definition of tradition. For example, tradition itself could be regarded as the test criterion, instead of being put under the test criterion of validating experience. Further, the centrality of 'tradition' varies among denominations.

120 So resonates Henrix, in “The Son of God Became Human as a Jew” 396.

121 Nilsson, Bertil, “Kyrkan i konkret gestalt,” 263, my translation.

122 Ulbricht, “Bekännelsen är på väg.”

123 Church of Sweden, CsSkr 1993:4; TU 2003:10; Ln2007:7y.

law) of the Church of Sweden. It states: “The belief, creed and teaching of the Church of Sweden [...] is shaped/takes shape [Swed.: *gestaltas*] in service [worship] and life.”¹²⁴ This formulation provides space for the dynamics of the interplay between creed and rite. The primary locus of the creed becomes rite and life, and the intimate relation between creed and praxis is pointed out. The formulation also reveals an interesting feature of the nature of ecclesiastic law documents, namely that they are both normative *and* descriptive. Most importantly, the formulation shows that ecclesiastic identity is a complex term in which all aspects of the church meet – rite, life, scripture, tradition etc.

When attempting to integrate soteriology into systematic theology, it is necessary to take into account this dynamics of identity, this interplay of creed and rite. John McIntyre has actually suggested the interplay of creed and rite as a reason for the diversity of soteriology.¹²⁵ He writes, building on Dix and partly quoting the former Bishop of Derby:

“It was not the death upon Calvary *per se*, but the death upon Calvary as the Last Supper interprets it and gives clue to its meaning, which constitutes our Lord's sacrifice. The doctrine of sacrifice (and of atonement) was not read *into* the Last Supper; it was read out of it”. [Now...] the Eucharist is “primarily something done, of which what is said is only one incidental constituent part, though of course an essential one”. If the distinction is pressed, it then becomes a category mistake to try to formalise a soteriology, one which the Church avoided for the first four or five centuries....¹²⁶

If no attention is given to the identity of the church as a communion of belief *and* practise, if no space is provided for the centrality of rite (and life) in relation to dogmatic creed, the systematic theologian risks an incorrect evaluation of the interplay between liturgy and dogmatics, and thus risks an inadequate understanding of *the whole*. As Lindbeck argued, a doctrine cannot be judged by its formulation or concept alone, but must be understood in its regulated and regulative function among rite, behaviour etc. As I have argued in chapter three, doctrine is neither the only, nor the single most decisive element in ecclesiastic identity. Other elements of religion, such as ritual communion, can thus be given priority over a shared understanding of a creed. This has to be taken into account when analysing soteriologies and theologies.

5.3.2. Identity in everyday life – speech and act

In everyday life, identity can be understood as the complex and reciprocal interplay between a

124 Svenska kyrkan, *Kyrkoordning för Svenska Kyrkan 2010*, §1, my translation. “Svenska kyrkans tro, bekännelse och lära [...] gestaltas i gudstjänst och liv [...]”

125 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 8.

126 *Ibid.*, 10, original italics.

person and his or her surrounding,¹²⁷ forming a rough picture of “who someone is,” a picture in which a certain consistency is expected. This picture contains many different dimensions, like behaviour, attitude, speech and act and more. For the purpose of this study, the integration of soteriology into systematic theology, the coherence between act and speech, between word and deed, that forms a central aspect of “identity,” is vital. As Lindbeck states:

Utterances are intrasystematically true when they cohere with the total relevant context, which, in the case of a religion when viewed in cultural-linguistic terms, is not only other utterances but also the correlative forms of life. Thus for a Christian, “God is Three and One”, or “Christ is Lord” are true only as parts of a total pattern of speaking, thinking, feeling, and acting. They are false when their use in any given instance is inconsistent with what the pattern as a whole affirms of God's being and will.¹²⁸

Lindbeck regards act and speech as being part of the same system, the same “relevant context” when it comes to religion. He argues therefore, that “it is only through the performatory use of religious utterances that they acquire propositional force.” (To recall: in chapter 3, I referred to Fridlund who states that utterances often have several potential performatory uses: “Christ is Lord,” for example, can be regarded both as a threat, or a promise, or a comfort etc.)

Lindbeck's argument continues on a very fascinating line. Building on Thomas of Aquino, Lindbeck distinguishes between the human ways of talking about God (*modus significandi*) and God (*significatum*), and states that there is no direct correspondence between them. Despite that, he emphasises the importance of such utterances. A statement like “God is good” might possibly be said to have only a minimal cognitive content; nevertheless, the claim “is of utmost importance because it authorizes responding as if he were good in the ways indicated by the stories of creation, providence, and redemption which shape believer's thoughts and actions.”¹²⁹ I argue that something similar can be said of salvation – that the statement “Christ is saviour” or “You are saved”, should not be judged by its cognitive content alone, but also by its enabling, authorizing and permitting function. Here, there is an opening that allows *identity* to be regarded as a point of junction between coherence and correspondence. I will return to that below.

Summary: When formulating a soteriology and integrating it into systematic theology, there are several guiding notions at work. One of them is *coherence*. Coherence designates consistency within systematic theology (thus concerning *intrasystematic* coherence). Here, two examples would

127 Stier, *Identitet*.

128 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 64.

129 Ibid., 66.

be the consistency with other dogmatic topics as Trinity and revelation, or consistency with meta stories, such as the history of salvation. Consistency resonates also with the notion of *identity*, a term more useful when speaking about coherence in ecclesiastic and every day life. Here, different dimensions of religion and of life converge into a dynamic whole. The different notions balance the opening for diversity within soteriology on one hand, and the converging integration into systematic theology on the other hand.

6. Correspondence and relevance

In this chapter, I try to illuminate the integration of soteriology into systematic theology through two more guiding notions at work, namely *correspondence* and *relevance*. With these notions, the focus shifts slightly, compared to the previous chapter: it could be said that the guiding notions of coherence and identity have to do more with intra-systematic relations, like between different dogmatic topics or different aspects of identity. On the other hand, without suggesting a clear separation between the two spheres, correspondence and relevance rather relate to areas beyond and outside the given system. Of course, it can – and should – be argued about where a dotted, imaginary line is to be drawn. However, I proceed to elaborate on the guiding notion of correspondence. There has to be a correspondence, a relation of soteriology to elements “outside the system” in order to ensure its relation to reality as a whole. In this section, correspondence with other disciplines, with experience and with other sciences is considered. Thereafter, I discuss the notion of relevance as a most central aspect of the integration of soteriology into systematic theology. If a way of formulating salvation has no relevance to humans, it is neither confirmed nor useful.

6.1. *Correspondence as relations stretching beyond the system*

When formulating a theology in general or a soteriology in particular, there is a need for correspondence, for a relation that stretches “beyond” intra-systematical criteria. Such a correspondence can be established, for example, through a relation with other theological disciplines. Their findings are necessary both as sources for theology and as test criteria. As mentioned, Bernard Lonergan distinguished four levels or steps of theological work: first, the detection and determination of facts and data (research); second, understanding the data (interpretation); third, judgement and integration; and fourth, deciding in reality (dialectic).¹³⁰ This scheme can be said to be coloured by a hermeneutic circle – the findings that are interpreted and integrated are checked with “reality”, and the results of this check are again interpreted and integrated into theology.

130 Hünemann, “Die Methodologische Herausforderung der Dogmatik,” 144.

6.1.1. Correspondence with other theological disciplines

As I see it, Peter Hünemann observed the relation between systematic theology and other disciplines correctly when he writes the following:

Dogmatics makes explicit what the other theological disciplines assume in advance and imply ongoing. By relating to dogmatics they keep their character as theological disciplines. In return it holds, that the dogmatic work depends on the reception of the working results of the other disciplines, since, through these results, the context of plausibility – which at the same time has to prove the continuity with the history of faith – shifts.¹³¹

Note that “the context of plausibility” – the web in which *the coherent whole* of systematic theology is to be presented – *shifts* due to the ongoing and changing findings in different theological disciplines. Systematic Theology is not established once and for all, but is involved in an ongoing discussion with itself and others. Systematic theology thus has to incorporate the findings of the other disciplines in order to be able to present a *whole* of the Christian faith that corresponds with the way that this faith, in its belief and practice, is perceived by other theological disciplines. This is related to, but not identical with, the choice of *source* for theology as it also marks a test criterion: is the *whole* of systematic theology able, for example, to incorporate the complexity of ecclesiastic law and life?

In a section above, I commented briefly on the relation between creed and rite, exemplified by a study in Church- and Mission Studies. In this study it became obvious that the motto *lex orandi – lex credendi* played a central role in the discussion on creed in the Church of Sweden. Now, a systematic theology, if taking correspondence into account, would need to somehow relate to this priority of rite over creed in ecclesiastic law. In a way, it could be said that the logic of the argument by Dix et al., quoted via McIntyre in the section on *identity* above, is supported by such a correspondence. There it was argued that the notion of salvation has to be understood in relation to the Eucharist; and since the Eucharist is “something done,” it becomes a mistake to “formalize a soteriology”.

6.1.2. Correspondence with experience

Wolfhart Pannenberg has presented four criteria for judging theological hypothesis. One of them was already accounted for earlier in this essay, namely the relation between theological hypothesis and biblical traditions (see 5.2.). Two of the remaining three criteria can be related to the criterion of

131 Ibid., 152, my translation.

correspondence:

[...] second, they have no connection with reality as a whole which is cashable in terms of present experience and shown so by current philosophy [...]; third, they are incapable of being integrated with the appropriate area of experience or no attempt is made to integrate them, (e.g. in the doctrine of the church as it relates to the church's role in society) [...]¹³²

Relating these criteria to soteriology, it could be said that salvation has to prove its truth in correspondence (or, as Pannenberg puts it, relation) to experience.¹³³ Pannenberg makes explicit use of this criterion in his treatise on soteriology:

The statements about Christ as redeemer and saviour would not be true without its correlate, healed and reconciled humanity. [...] But is humanity actually reconciled with God and redeemed from sin and death? The appearance and the apparent lessons of world history do not seem to speak in favour of that, till the present day. [...] The truth of the soteriological statements] is however not yet proved definitely. [...] It is here, between the anticipated soteriological titles of Christology (as Son, second Adam, imago dei) and the actual, but yet incomplete process of reconciliation of humanity, that the statements about the salvific work of Christ [...] have their place.¹³⁴

Pannenberg regards the salvation of humanity as not yet confirmed. Utterances about salvation first require their correlates before being possibly confirmed as “true”. I would like to remain on this point for a moment, posing the question of *how* this correlate is to be established? As so often in this essay, this is a question that cannot be answered in its entirety. But it is a question that points to an important notion in theology, the one about “human agency”. As John McIntyre writes:

Two points: first, by refusing to forgive, we may actually be preventing the forgiveness of God from reaching others, and so bringing the purposes of God to frustration. Secondly, if we do not forgive those who have offended us, we shall not ourselves know forgiveness.¹³⁵

What McIntyre points out is the role humans might play in establishing the correspondence, the correlate of soteriology, i.e. the salvation of the world. Of course, there are many more theologians who have argued along such a line, roughly representing variations on the theme in the well-known saying “God has no hands but ours.”

Above, I have stated that the notion of identity marks a point of junction between the criterion of coherence and that of correspondence. To re-state: identity designates a complex unity of

132 I here used the meritorious summary in Bradshaw, *Pannenberg*, 157.

133 Alasuutari, *Social Theory and Human Reality*.

134 Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, 489–490, my translation.

135 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 129.

behaviour, speech, attitude, belief, rite etc. When soteriology is formulated, the notion of identity has to be taken into account. Soteriological utterances are part of a system which (in the identity of human beings) is made up, not just by other utterances, but also by “correlated forms of life” as such. As these correlative forms of life can be involved in establishing a condition that is *in correspondence* with the utterances, there is a point of junction between coherence and correspondence. It could be said, that the way how individuals and groups live, can make their message true. What I mean is the following: arguably, salvation is a (positive) state of being. Pannenberg regards the experience of salvation as a prove for its truth – there needs to be a correspondence between the *claimed* state and the *experienced* state. Now, human beings can take part in creating this correspondence with their actions, e.g. by helping and forgiving each other. When such deeds are done, humans create both coherence and correspondence. They create coherence between their own utterances of faith and salvation and their deeds. And they can contribute to creating a correspondence between another person's claimed and experienced salvation. In these processes, the permitting and enabling function of soteriological utterances (as formulated by Lindbeck, see 5.3.2.) become vital.¹³⁶

This point of juncture between coherence and correspondence also points to another idea – the need to consider experience together with its consequences. What is experienced and what is done with this experience cannot be separated too sharply. The notion of correspondence with experience must therefore always be considered *alongside* and *together with* other guiding notions. As Anders Jeffner states in his remarkable book *Theology and Integration*, “religious experiences must never be allowed to be the sole criterion of truth. They must always be balanced against scientific and moral criteria [...]”¹³⁷ (This is also true, since experience, regarded psychologically, can deceive.)

6.1.3. *Correspondence with other sciences*

Jeffner argues that religious experience must be balanced against other criteria, such as scientific ones. Now, the relation between theology and other sciences is, to use a euphemistic term, complex. For the sake of space, I have to constrain myself to solely one example.

One way of understanding the relation between natural science and theology has been presented by Gerhart and Russel. They state their view by posing the question “What is it possible for human beings to believe in the light of what natural science has learned is highly probable about the world?”¹³⁸ It is obvious that priority is given here to natural science – it maps out and defines the

136 As Luther put it, man becomes, by receiving the message that s/he is saved, free to serve others.

137 Jeffner, *Theology and Integration*, 44.

138 Gerhart and Russel, “Mathematics, Empirical Science and Religion,” 127.

frontiers of what is to be regarded as “possible to believe”. When it comes to soteriology, the question most widely discussed is not the salvific action of Christ itself, but rather the state of humanity, both in regard to anthropology and hamartology, in the light of the theories of evolution. The question is “What are we saved from?” One traditional answer is: “Sin and death.” But what if the existence of death (and, partly, evil) is not the consequence of a historical event? As Murphy remarks, in conversation with Gerhart and Russel: “the issue of suffering and death in the animal world” has traditionally been regarded “as a consequence of the Fall, but the study of biology has made it clear that the death of countless animals not only *did* precede the first human sin, but was a necessary condition for human beings to come on to the scene at all.”¹³⁹

As Eva-Lotta Grantén puts it, what seems to be the problem for theology is that “[e]volution does not acknowledge the existence of a created state of origin, free from suffering and death, which has been corrupted afterwards by the Fall. [...] Suffering and extinction is according to evolution something *constitutive* for life.”¹⁴⁰ Now, a theological and soteriological answer to that could be, according to Grantén, to emphasize the fact that “God suffers with every conscious organism”, and that he in Christ, through the incarnation, also took on a biological nature “vulnerable to disease and decay.”¹⁴¹ In this way, God shows solidarity. Further, the resurrection marks “the start of the transformation of creation”.¹⁴² Please note that when theology tries to formulate a soteriology that gives priority to such a form of correspondence with the natural science, the need for alternative meta stories arises (see 5.2.). The Christ-event is here regarded not as a point of rescue, but as a starting point for transformation.

6.2. Relevance as a form of correspondence

This section argues for *relevance* as a guiding notion. In the notion of relevance, all other guiding notions (coherence, identity and correspondence) resonate. As it has become obvious in this study already, the four notions are intimately interrelated – they balance each other. Relevance is, in this essay, regarded both as a precondition and as an aim for theology.

139 Murphy, “On the Nature of Theology,” 152, original italics.

140 Grantén, “Det förlorade paradiset,” 166, my translation. Italics as in original, where even the whole first meaning is italicized.

141 Ibid., 168. Grantén builds here on Southgate and Gregersen.

142 Ibid, my translation.

6.2.1. *The relevance of relevance*

Why should theology bother with relevance? Actually, I regard relevance to be a focal point. If a theological statement is irrelevant to humans it is useless. This is both a personal preference – in my personal opinion, *for whom* is theology done if not for humans? - and a conviction stemming from the notion of correspondence. Pannenberg regards relation with experience to be a necessity (see 6.1.2.), otherwise theological hypotheses are to be regarded as false or unsubstantiated. In a way, *relevance* is thus an important aspect of theological truth. My line of thought goes as follows: I assume that the (Pannenbergian) relation to experience presupposes relevance. This is due to the fact that experience and relevance are tightly related: humans do not really experience, consciously, things that are regarded as totally irrelevant, since such things just bypass our consciousness in the long run.¹⁴³ Thus, in order for a soteriological statement to relate to experience, it has to be relevant. How is this relevance attained? What passes for relevant? I want to highlight two elements: pragmatism and flexibility.

6.2.2. *Relevance and pragmatism*

One aspect of relevance is, I argue, the pragmatic usability of thoughts and concepts in everyday life. Several scholars, such as Alasuutari¹⁴⁴ in the field of social anthropology or Tremlin¹⁴⁵ in the field of neuroscience and theology, have argued for a certain parallelism of reflection and intuition. This means that humans might be aware of the complexity of theology, language or religion when reflecting calmly, but that pragmatic, simplified ad hoc solutions are applied in many everyday life situations. Even if this distinction is at times drawn too sharply, it points to something important, namely usability. How does a certain theological statement help us to understand and cope with our everyday life? One important feature must of course be that the statement can be understood, and – in order to be useful in everyday life – can be understood more or less intuitively.

When it comes to soteriology, some models are more intuitive than others, and thus, in a pragmatic sense, more useful. Of course, the (intuitive) understandability of the models shifts with the context. The theory of satisfaction, as put out by Anselm of Canterbury, is more intuitive, and thus more relevant, in a context where *order and stability* are regarded to be basic ontological aspects of creation and creator. Today however, the predominant world view, in at least several cultures (such as mine), is rather dynamic, influenced by, among other things, the theory of

143 In a way, this thought also concerns pedagogics – in order to convey a message, it is necessary to be able to reach through to the addressee.

144 Alasuutari, *Social Theory and Human Reality*.

145 Tremlin, *Minds and Gods.*, esp. chapter 6.

evolution. Therefore, other models resonate more intuitively with today's humans' everyday life. As for example KG Hammar remarks, evaluating different soteriologies: “we can recognise the [soteriological] motive of fight [between good and evil] from our own life's fight and struggle for meaning and goal.”¹⁴⁶ Such recognition, more or less intuitive, is important for a theological utterance in order to be and remain relevant. This notion of relevance is close to, but not identical with, the notion of correspondence with experience. The difference is that relevance includes the ability to address an individual, to strike somebody with an utterance that *creates* an experience, rather than corresponding with a pre-existing one.

6.2.3. *Relevance and diversity*

Another aspect of relevance, apart from intuitive understanding – and here we come to a core statement in my essay – is *flexibility*. Individuals differ, and their lives are diverse and multifaceted, both at a particular instant and over time. In order for theological statements to be relevant, these statements must allow for a certain *flexibility* – a way to relate to *different situations in life*. This idea has already been touched in section 3.2. (“The theological desirability of diversity”). In order for soteriology to be relevant for people, it must be able to address different individual situations. Such an ability – such a flexibility – can be achieved in two ways.

One way of achieving flexibility is by restraining from exaggerative de- and confining. If a model is confined and specified too much, it might fit solely one situation. It seems that this risk is being avoided intuitively in current theology, and that the opposite tends to become predominant. Even if this might happen with good intentions, the result can pose some problems. While it is important and legitimate to avoid an over-definition of certain things in soteriology, soteriological language at times risks being a bit *too vague*. For example, Mattias Martinson has studied how salvation as a term and a theme has been used in contemporary Swedish sermon drafts. He concludes: “reflections on the specific meaning of the term salvation and its concrete content have been dimmed to a minimum.”¹⁴⁷ Of course, such a tendency might simply reflect a certain helplessness – an uncertainty regarding how salvation should be understood, now that it seems to speak about “everything and nothing?”¹⁴⁸ Surely, vague phrases can create an apparent flexibility, opening up for possible interpretations that relate to different concrete situations. It poses however an obvious problem: when a specific message is to be conveyed,¹⁴⁹ vagueness creates the need for

146 Hammar, *Tecken och verklighet; Samtal om Gud; Ecce Homo, efter två tusen Åår*, 200, my translation.

147 Martinson, “Predikans frälsning,” 89, my translation.

148 Ibid., 98, my translation.

149 Of course, it might be that a preacher uses vagueness deliberately as a means to create a certain meditative space.

further explanation and specification. So, when vagueness is used as means to achieve the needed flexibility in a sermon, for example, then this can actually obscure the wish for an appealing message within the church.

Another way of achieving flexibility is to make use of the *diversity* of models related to soteriology. The mere existence of these multiple models is a proof for this hypothesis. As already stated in the section above: “[The Church] has recognized the complexity of human life and the ways it can be damaged, perverted, healed, and renewed.”¹⁵⁰ It is *therefore* that “the whole Gospel [...] has to be preached...The [soteriological] models offer the variety of ways in which Jesus the Redeemer may meet the needs of his people.”¹⁵¹

The obvious advantage of this diversity is that the utterances about salvation can be rather definite and specific. This, in return, can be an important factor for relevance. Rita Nakashima Brock is a splendid example of specific theology. For example, she defines salvation, in her book *Casting Stones*, as becoming free from prostitution, and she relates grace and forgiveness to this particular situation.¹⁵² This is specific theology – it is not abstract, but relates to real life situations. It becomes intuitive and pragmatic. In my opinion, to make use of the diversity of models, which due to their diversity can be more specific, is the better way of achieving a relevant soteriology. Of course, this relevance is to be sought for in balance with other guiding notions, such as coherence with biblical tradition. But a soteriology that does not appeal and address specific life situations risks to become or remain irrelevant.

Summary: One of the guiding notions at work when integrating soteriology into systematic theology is *correspondence*. Correspondence designates a relation to *reality* outside the system. Possible conversation partners in the quest for correspondence are other theological disciplines, other sciences and human experience. The findings of those can, in a way, function as both source and test criteria. Another guiding notion is *relevance*. In a way, relevance is both an aim and a condition for theology. It can be achieved through vagueness, creating an apparent flexibility, but also (and better) through a diversity of *specific* soteriologies.

150 Ford, *Theology*, 104.

151 McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 120.

152 Brocks work has been well summarized and analysed by Sofia Camnerin in “Försoningsteologi för vår tid,” 47.

7. (Over) There's the method in all that salvation!

In this final chapter, I summarize the findings of this study and discuss some of its implications and possibilities for further investigation.

7.1. *Conclusions and discussions*

The talk about salvation is not formulated arbitrarily, at least not when it is formulated within the framework of systematic theology as a whole. I have tried to extract and formulate four guiding notions that are at work when integrating soteriology into systematic theology. These notions are *coherence*, *identity*, *correspondence* and *relevance*. Every theology and soteriology relates to them in a certain way. They can therefore also function as a starting point for discussing different soteriologies: which guiding notion is given preference? How are correspondence and relevance attained? Of course, these four notions are not the only methodological aspects to consider. Questions of intention & addressee, of claim, order, approach and source & warrant also mark methodological areas that are taken into account each time a theology is formulated.

This essay tries to suggest the four notions as methodological tools that take into account both diversity and integration. Their usage (alongside with the other areas of difference) is twofold: they can, as a first step, help to make conscious the differences that exist between soteriologies and theologies. As a second step, they can relate this diversity to the process of integration and thus, in a way, to the quest of communion. I name *communion* in this context, since I believe that a communion in diversity – a, for me, important goal for theology and life – needs both this consciousness regarding differences, and a way of relating to these differences within the same, specific theological framework. In this sense, the process of integration converges with the quest to “provide theological space”¹⁵³ for diversity and difference. Among the four notions, there is a balancing relation between opening for diversity and converging into integration.

An answer to the question in this essay – *How is soteriology integrated into systematic theology as a whole* – would thus be something like this: Soteriology, the talk about salvation, indicates an aspect of theology, and at the same time, it concerns its overall structure. Therefore, the formulation of a theology as a whole cannot be completely separated from the way soteriology as a part is formulated. The part and the whole are intimately interwoven. However, (at least) four guiding

¹⁵³ The term “providing theological space” became dear to me through the efforts of Prof. Jesper Svartvik, who however did not himself coin the phrase.

notions can be observed regarding the integration of soteriology into systematic theology. I believe that a mature and balanced soteriology needs to relate to all notions in order to avoid one-sidedness, naïvety and error. 1) *Coherence* is to be sought with other dogmatic topics, with biblical traditions and meta stories; 2) the *identity* of denominations and individuals is to be taken into account, where creed and praxes, speech and act converge; 3) *correspondence* is needed with other disciplines, with human experience and other sciences, as both a test-criterion and a source; 4) *relevance* is to be sought in order to address and appeal to people.

These four notions both differentiate and integrate. Somewhat simplified the process might go like this: The notions of coherence and correspondence reveal differences between theologies, as they reveal different methods for how coherence and correspondence are established, for example. On the other hand, the notions of identity and relevance can pose starting points for integrating diversity – they converge rite, creed, act and speech and make obvious the need for diverse, specific models of soteriology. The notions take into account both diversity and integration – they address both the necessity and the desirability of diversity. Thus, the notions can help as methodological tools towards the background of the basic thesis in chapter 3.

The four guiding notions were and are given different weight by different theologians, among different traditions and throughout different periods of history. Such differences have resulted in different judgements regarding theological diversity. In a way, the always ongoing debate about a potential adaptation of theology to a *Zeitgeist* can be understood as the tension between the quest for coherence and identity on one hand, and the quest for correspondence and relevance on the other hand. How can a faithful Christian theology be formulated, that still either resonates with, or appeals to contemporaries? Now relevance *is* a tricky notion. If it is used as the only guideline, there is a risk of simply presenting a theology that says what the addressee wants to hear. On the other hand, if it is neglected, theology could lose the ability to address people at all. It seems to me that the notion of *relevance* is nevertheless in focus in the current theological debate (maybe alongside correspondence with experience), at least in the Swedish ecclesiastic context.¹⁵⁴ Of course, what is regarded as relevant differs between individuals, times and traditions. It can very well be that coherence with other dogmatic topics is regarded as the most important notion of all, and thus also, in a way, as the most relevant.

The balance between the notions also raises the question of stability versus flexibility. In which way is a central theme like salvation to be reconsidered and reformulated ever again? And why is that to be done? In order to achieve relevance, or in order to meet biblical traditions that are discovered anew? What becomes clear is that theology is in need of remaining in process and

¹⁵⁴ See, e.g., my fellow student John Wessberg's bachelor essay "Den som är satt i skuld är kanske fri?"

attention. Still, the words quoted in the first chapter appeal to and resonate with me:

I believe namely that the theological method must constantly stretch itself towards the border areas where it nearly does not succeed any more to perceive itself as a coherent pattern. [...] The productive part in this approach is, that the now much more careful theological reflection on one hand can open for new combinations of questions and answers, and on the other side deflate the incorrect idea that all questions necessarily must have timeless answers.¹⁵⁵

In this essay I hope to have, at least partly, combined methodological work with theological work, and presented both methodological tools (the four guiding notions) and a theological thesis (the necessity and ability to integrate diversity within soteriology). It is a possible object for further study, to see if the notions could prove usable even in the context of other theological topics.

7.2. Outlook

In a way, this bachelor's essay just points towards a distant horizon – *over there* is the method in all that salvation. I do not regard this essay to have answered the question of its title (*Where is the method...?*) exhaustively. Rather, I have hopefully contributed some openings and ideas to a field of theology that still needs a lot of attention, namely method and theory. The different notions that I regard to be at work within the process of formulating and integrating soteriology need improvement, and their mutual relations need to be clarified in more detail. The notions must be discussed further, also with respect to historical perspectives which have deliberately been left out in this study. The relation between areas of difference among theologies in general and the guiding notions in particular need further clarification. Most important, the model has to be tested against concrete theologies, in order to prove correct and useful in a long run.

¹⁵⁵ Martinson, "Predikans frälsning," 103–104, my translation.

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