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Of Mirrors and Men—Surveying a Trajectory for 'Moving Beyond' from Scripture to Theology

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Is there such a thing as a particular evangelical theology? And if there is, what does it look like? Over a longer period, one would have argued, evangelicalism can be found in many denominations, probably even all. Since the last decade of the 20th century, David Bebbington's quadrilateral fostered significant progress by submitting that evangelicalism can be identified by the now famous four components of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism.

While it was helpful to identity these components, they are rather descriptive in nature, and do not provide answers for other questions that arise. How should evangelicals do theology? How should they move from hundreds of pages of texts to doctrine that guides the faith? How should one 'move beyond' scripture to theology?

In this article, I summarize three stages of what can respectively be described as a trajectory towards what Vanhoozer and Treier call 'Mere Evangelical Theology'—a framework within which evangelicals can do theology that is faithful to scripture in the 21st century.

I Mere Evangelical Theology

1. The Marshall Plan

In 2002, the Institute for Biblical Research heard the annual lecture given by the late I. Howard Marshall, who was professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen over several decades. The lecture, as well as some of the responses to it led to the publication of a book titled *Beyond the Bible—Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Baker Academic, 2004). In this book, Marshall presents an argument that may be summarized like this: The task of hermeneutics in the evangelical realm is one that cannot be ignored. Even though evangelicals do not read 'just some book' when they read the bible, but a book that 'possesses authority over its readers', the hermeneutical task remains. In fact,

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the hermeneutical task may be even more crucial, just *because* both nature and function of this particular text are of utmost importance and authority.[1]

1. Marshall's proposal

For the purposes of his case, Marshall distinguishes three levels: general hermeneutics, exegesis, and exposition (or application). In reference to these three levels, Marshall comments on the current status within the evangelical world, claiming that possibly the most important and controversial issue might be the third one.[2] He describes a 'typical' approach of appropriating ancient text for a modern world by referring to J. I. Packer,[3] arguing that, although there are strengths in such a typical approach, there would also be significant problems.

For one, different conclusions would often be drawn, even if the interpreters worked under the same kind of setting.[4] For another, particular diversity would be visible where Christians dealt with issues for which there are no close analogies within scripture. Thirdly, modern Christians would actually criticize developments of our time, although scripture would have known some of such developments, but did *not* criticize those with even a single passage (take, for instance, the issue of slavery).[5]

Marshall, who also sees methodological problems,[6] points out that both the routes of 'liberalism' (namely, leaving behind claims of scripture which are interpreted as 'incompatible' with the modern reader) and 'fundamentalism' (namely an approach in which often just one form of interpretation would be pursued as 'biblical', while all others would be rejected) should not be the route evangelicalism follows.[7]

a) Ethics, worship and doctrine

How should we move on, then? In his third level, exposition, Marshall discusses three areas: ethics, worship, and doctrine. In each case, Marshall lays out two approaches. Regarding ethics, Marshall argues that some tend to take scripture at face value, while others may assume that 'there may be cases where, for example, some scriptural teaching is relativized by other teachings, or where we are called to do things that may go beyond scriptural reasoning'.[8]

With regard to worship, he distinguishes a *normative* approach, in which various practices are permitted as long as they are not excluded by scripture, and on the other hand, a *regulative* approach, in which worship has to be 'prescribed' or at least implicitly permitted by scripture.[9] With regards to doctrine, Marshall claims that there is in fact a certain development. He cites the example of the Formula of Chalcedon or the forms of the doctrine of atonement

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1 I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible—Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 13.

2 Marshall, *Beyond*, 26.

3 Marshall, *Beyond*, 26-7.

4 Marshall, *Beyond*, 28.

5 Examples are submission to political frameworks, the issue of slavery.

6 Marshall, *Beyond*, 30.

7 Marshall, *Beyond*, 31-2.

8 Marshall, *Beyond*, 35.

9 Marshall, *Beyond*, 40-1.

through history.[10] However, again there would be two approaches to dealing with the situation. Marshall addresses these approaches as 'conservative' and 'progressive', one preventing (or ignoring) any development, one accepting (and advocating) it.[11]

There would be, then, such development for various reasons: the questions of readers change, for instance with increasing knowledge about the world as it is. Furthermore, statements of scripture may be required in a *form* that is in itself not found in scripture. Challenges arise also if a text of scripture stands in tension with other texts; certain solutions to those tensions would often differ from others. Finally, readers with a mind nurtured by the gospel will change their interpretation over time, and so there will be not only development within the interpreter, but also variation between different interpreters.

In all of this, Marshall's challenge is to 'provide some kind of reasoned, principled approach to the question of the development of doctrine from Scripture'.[12] Marshall follows developments of doctrine from the OT on towards the teachings of Christ and up to some developments within the apostolic teachings, claiming that developments took place at each stage.[13]

This conclusion leads him to his ultimate concern: Is there development in doctrine today? He argues that in some sense there is not, since the canon is closed. However, *interpretation*

of the canon is not closed, Marshall claims: 'The closing of the canon is not incompatible with the nonclosing of the interpretation of that canon.'[14]

b) Going beyond

From here, Marshall moves on to search for principles to 'go beyond' the bible 'biblically'. He starts out by asking what took place when writers of the New Testament made use of the Old Testament.

i) Old Testament

Marshall does so by focusing on the New Testament usage of Leviticus. Working through eight references from the New Testament to the Old, he draws four conclusions: a) offerings are obsolete since the death of Jesus; b) Jesus' teaching goes beyond the teaching of the Old Testament and (probably) applies today; c) the law has to be fulfilled by the followers of Jesus until today, and consummated in the command to love one's neighbour, and (d) the statement that people will live (that is, will be *justified*) by acting out the law is set aside explicitly by Paul (while the law still prescribes how to live).[15]

Marshall concludes that while the authority of the Pentateuch continues, 'it is read in a manner different from what it used to be', and eventually 'it may be best to say that it is reading the Old Testament in light of Christ as the inaugurator of the new covenant that is the guiding principle in the present instance'.[16] This inauguration through Christ includes, for example, a *spir-*

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10 Marshall, *Beyond*, 42.

11 Marshall, *Beyond*, 44.

12 Marshall, *Beyond*, 45.

13 Marshall, *Beyond*, 48-53.

14 Marshall, *Beyond*, 54.

15 Marshall, *Beyond*, 58.

16 Marshall, *Beyond*, 58.

itualization of the covenant—a difficult term, Marshall agrees, but a necessary one, for instance when it comes to such issues as a physical land for Christians.[17]

ii) Gospels

A second step of Marshall is to look at how the early church read the gospels of Jesus Christ. Marshall offers four parameters by which the teaching of Jesus would have been constrained: (1) It was given before his death and resurrection, (2) it is elementary instruction for beginners, (3) it is given in and for a Jewish context, (4) it uses the imagery and thought forms current at the time.[18]

Marshall expands those parameters by interpreting them as *liminal*. Now, by referring to a liminal period Marshall submits that we witness a 'stage during which something is coming to birth and therefore is neither completely out of the womb nor completely into independent existence', a 'time of transition'.[19]

As a result of reinterpreting his parameters, Marshall concludes that 'the Gospels sometimes have to be understood on *two levels*: the level of the original hearers of Jesus and the level of Matthew's audience (including ourselves).'[20] His point is that Jesus' teaching continues into the liminal period—it is not 'set aside', but it has to be understood in the 'light of the continuing revelation in the post-Easter period'.[21]

iii) Apostles

A final step for Marshall then is the teaching of the early church. Within the Apostolic Tradition, Marshall refers to the 'keryma', or the 'apostolic deposit'—a basic core for defining the centre of Christian theology and also as an interpretative key for it.[22] However, it would be easy to direct a given interpretation towards an understanding the interpreter himself prefers.

That is unless the interpreter has a mind which is 'nurtured on the Gospel'. Marshall refers to the concept of Christian wisdom in order to determine the truth, for instance by referring to 1 Corinthians 2:13-15.[23] From the concept of 'kerygma' and a mind nurtured on the gospel, Marshall deduces his twofold principle: apostolic deposit and Spirit-given insight.[24]

2. Vanhoozer's response

Kevin Vanhoozer, research professor of Systematic Theology at Evangelical Trinity Divinity School, was one of the responders to Marshall's lectures. In *Beyond the Bible*, he agrees in general with Marshall's proposal. In particular, he describes four ways of going beyond the Bible to develop doctrine biblically.

With Calvin, he addresses the way of 'extrabiblical conceptualities', referring to doctrine which conceptualizes biblical content; an example is the case of the concept of *homoousios*.[25] With Webb, adjunct professor at Tyndale Seminary Toronto, he addresses the

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17 Marshall, *Beyond*, 62-3.

18 Marshall, *Beyond*, 63.

19 Marshall, *Beyond*, 63.

20 Marshall, *Beyond*, 68, emphasis his.

21 Marshall, *Beyond*, 68-9.

22 Marshall, *Beyond*, 70.

23 Marshall, *Beyond*, 70-1.

24 Marshall, *Beyond*, 71.

25 Marshall, *Beyond*, 89.

way of 'redemptive trajectories' (a topic we will discuss in more detail in the following section). With Wolterstorff, Professor of Philosophy at Yale and known for his advocacy of Reformed epistemology, he addresses the way of 'divine discourse', arguing that a passage of scripture must be understood in the light of the entire canon. His position, named 'continuing canonical practices', refers to the idea of doctrine that must 'go beyond' by being set into practice.[26]

It should be noted that Marshall's proposal did not go unchallenged. One example of such a critique is that of Walter Kaiser Jr. which is represented in the next section. Here I want to point out, though, that Marshall provides a highly readable presentation of his case—a case which is rather short on the other hand (less than 100 pages), and which leaves plenty of room for critical questions. So it is not surprising that Marshall's proposal has been debated.

II 'Moving beyond'—a Debate

In 2009, Walter Kaiser Jr., Daniel Doriani, Kevin Vanhoozer and William Webb discussed the question of how to 'move beyond' the Bible to theology. The discussion is published as a part of Zondervan's 'Counterpoints' series, entitled *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*. The editor, Gary Meadors, assured his readers on the first pages that such a 'move beyond' the Bible is not a liberal idea—in other words, 'moving beyond' would not refer to the idea of going *without*

or even *against* scripture. Rather, the expression would refer to 'a theological construct that cannot claim a biblical context that directly teaches the point scored'.[27] Are such moves beyond scripture necessary for evangelicals, or more importantly, are they permitted? And if so, how should one move beyond from scripture to theology?

1. Kaiser

The first answer to these questions is given by Walter Kaiser and his method of 'principlizing'. He sketches the method in this way: after determining subject, emphasis and context, the interpreter has to set out propositional principles provided through the given text.[28] Finally, Kaiser focuses on the 'Ladder of Abstraction', which would work 'from the ancient specific situation', from where 'we move up the ladder of the institutional or personal norm' in order to reach 'the top of the ladder, which gives to us the general principle'.[29]

Now, as a matter of fact, Kaiser presents his approach rather briefly—also by referring to his earlier and somewhat influential textbook, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Baker Academic, 1998), then spending significant time on examples through which he applies his model of principlizing to such issues as euthanasia, women and

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26 Marshall, *Beyond*, 93.

27 Marshall, *Beyond*, 9.

28 Walter C. Kaiser Jr., 'A Principlizing Model', in *Four Views on Moving Beyond from the Bible to Theology*, Stanley N. Gundry & Gary T. Meadors, eds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 23.

29 Kaiser, 'A Principlizing Model', 25.

the church, the bible and homosexuality, the bible and slavery, abortion, and embryonic stem cell research. In sum, Kaiser challenges the idea of going 'beyond the sacred page' in general –the principle of *sola scriptura* must not be abandoned for the sake of modern curiosity.[30]

2. Doriani

A second answer to the questions regarding the idea of 'going beyond' is given through the representation of Doriani's 'Redemptive-Historical Model'. Doriani sketches this method in this way.

After paying close attention to a given passage (step 1), one must synthesize this passage with the 'master-texts', i.e. texts displaying God's plan of redemption throughout history (step 2).[31] A passage, however, must not only be understood, but also applied in the same approach (step 3): imitation of Christ is the central theme, as God's plan of redemption was the theme in step 2.[32] Doriani's final step is his crucial one, as he himself stresses: The Bible, being a narrative itself, would have more to offer than commands, and in regard to the advice it gives, this narrative must not be neglected, Doriani argues. Thus:

> Where a series of acts by the faithful create a pattern, and God or the

narrator approves the pattern, it directs believers, even if no law spells out the lesson.[33]

More concretely, interpreters may 'go beyond' through (a) casuistry and (b) asking the 'right questions'. With the former, Doriani refers to 'the art of resolving particular cases of conscience through appeal to higher general principles';[34] with the latter, identifying the particular questions of casuistry, namely questions of duty, character, goals and vision.[35]

In all of this, Doriani does not question the need for moving beyond as Kaiser does. He uses a practical question, how to celebrate his daughter's wedding in accordance with scripture, to exemplify his approach for moving beyond in a case for which there is no direct teaching of scripture regarding that particular issue. Again, he does so by searching for general biblical principles (for instance, 'In biblical weddings, friends and family gather for a feast, with music and joyful celebration, before bride and groom go off to bed') and by moral reasoning (for instance, there is room for improvisation among the families within the general ethical guidelines of scripture).[36]

It seems that Doriani combines a version of principlizing with moral reasoning—the latter is necessary, then, since he acknowledges that there are questions that cannot be deduced from

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30 Kaiser, 'A Principlizing Model', 26-7.

31 Daniel M. Doriani, 'A Redemptive-Historical Model', in *Four Views on Moving Beyond from the Bible to Theology*, Stanley N. Gundry & Gary T. Meadors, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 85-6.

32 Doriani, 'A Redemptive-Historical Model', 86.

33 Doriani, 'A Redemptive-Historical Model', 89.

34 Doriani, 'A Redemptive-Historical Model', 100.

35 Doriani, 'A Redemptive-Historical Model', 103.

36 Doriani, 'A Redemptive-Historical Model', 91-2.

scripture directly. In conclusion, Doriani demonstrates this approach by addressing issues such as gambling, architecture and women in ministry.

3. Vanhoozer

Vanhoozer presents a third answer by laying out his 'Drama-of-Redemption'model. For Vanhoozer, biblical interpretation is a 'joint project' of the various disciplines of theology, and ultimately an ecclesiastical one—holy scripture must lead to holy doctrine, and holy doctrine must lead to holy living.[37]

'Going beyond' is 'participating in the great drama of redemption of which scripture is the authoritative testimony and holy script'[38]: The church is participating by putting scripture into practice, and doctrine gives directions for doing so. *Performing* the script is Vanhoozer's term of choice, for this is another term for living the Bible:

> We move beyond the script and become faithful performers of the world it implies by cultivating minds nurtured on the canon.[39]

The 'way forward', then, may be summarized as the task of being a discerning church—finding answers that fit both the particular part of story within scripture for one and the particular context of the church for another while in all following the rule of love and the way of wisdom.[40]

Ultimately, Vanhoozer presents two case studies on 'how to make canonically correct judgments', namely the doctrine of Mary as the mother of God and the issue of transsexuality. I will cover only the earlier here.

Vanhoozer argues that Mary is rightly portrayed in using the concept of *theotokos*, as 'God-bearer', by the Council of Ephesus in 431. This concept would display not only 'good canonical judgment, but it clarifies further the identity of some of the key *dramatis personae*', since Christology is at stake, namely Christ as one person in two natures.[41]

Now, for evangelicals the critical issue comes into focus with Vatican I—should we state that Mary is a 'great exception' who did not sin? Beside referring to the obvious lack of scriptural evidence for such a claim, Vanhoozer locates Mary within the theodrama in order to answer the question of who Mary is: In giving birth to the Messiah, she would play a key role within the theodrama, but she would also play a key role in the transition from Israel towards the church.[42] Vanhoozer concludes:

> Mary is thus the only figure in the Bible who plays a role in Acts Two, Three, and Four alike: she represents the believing remnant of Israel; she is the mother of Jesus who

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37 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'A Drama-of-Redemption Model', in *Four Views on Moving Beyond from the Bible to Theology*, Stanley N. Gundry & Gary T. Meadors, eds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 155.

38 Vanhoozer, 'A Drama-of-Redemption Model', 156.

39 Vanhoozer, 'A Drama-of-Redemption Model', 170.

40 Vanhoozer, 'A Drama-of-Redemption Model',175-86.

41 Vanhoozer, 'A Drama-of-Redemption Model', 188.

42 Vanhoozer, 'A Drama-of-Redemption Model', 189-90.

remains with him to his death; she is a follower of the risen Jesus and gathers together with other believers to pray.

However, Vanhoozer rejects any ontological superiority of Mary for the lack of canonical evidence.[43]

4. Webb

A fourth answer is presented by William Webb and his approach of the redemptive-movement model. Webb begins by stating that there would basically be two ways to read through the Bible—one being a 'redemptive-movement appropriation', ie, one that 'encourages movement beyond the original application of the text in the ancient world', and the other, a more static or stationary appropriation of Scripture.[44] The latter would understand biblical texts in isolation from their cultural, historical and canonical context and with little emphasis on the underlying spirit (if any), which would lead to a misappropriation of the text. The earlier model—the one Webb proposes—would lead towards an 'ultimate ethic'.

Webb uses 'the slavery texts' and texts on corporal punishment to illustrate his point: The earlier texts show that slavery was part of ancient cultures and had to be dealt with,[45] but ultimate ethics lead towards an affirmation of an abolitionist ethic.[46] From Webb's perspective, the latter texts on corporal punishment would likewise bear witness to the redemptive spirit of scripture.

Now, it appears to me that the crucial question is how one obtains an 'ultimate ethic'. In the case of corporal punishment, Webb provides 'three crucial areas of biblical meaning', namely purpose meaning, abstracted meaning and redemptive-movement meaning.[47] Corporal punishment would have the *purpose* of turning children away from folly and towards wisdom. It would teach *abstract* lessons (such as 'Discipline your children') through concrete commands.

Yet ultimately, *movement meaning* within the biblical texts on corporal punishment would open the door to 'a *kinder and gentler* administration of justice that underscores the dignity of the human being that is punished'[48] than might have been the case without the very biblical texts. This way, while explicitly not answering the question of whether the purpose, the abstract lessons and the movement meaning of texts on corporal punishment could not be achieved without corporal punishment (and therefore against these very texts) today, Webb indicates that this might be the exact way to go.[49]

Now, it is not my aim to assess the

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43 Vanhoozer, 'A Drama-of-Redemption Model', 190-1.

44 William J. Webb, 'A Redemptive-Movement Model', in *Four Views on Moving Beyond from the Bible to Theology*, Stanley N. Gundry & Gary T. Meadors, eds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 217.

45 Webb, 'A Redemptive-Movement Model', 225.

46 Webb, 'A Redemptive-Movement Model', 228.

47 Webb, 'A Redemptive-Movement Model', 236-40.

48 Webb, 'A Redemptive-Movement Model', 240, emphasis his.

49 Webb, 'A Redemptive-Movement Model', 240.

positions laid out by the contributors in full scale. In fact, even the presentation of those approaches appears to be burdened with the necessity of brevity, and at times I believe the contributors would have actually made an (even) better case if there had been more room for doing so.[50] But even a short analysis will have to address the fact that there are significant differences in moving from scripture to theology as portrayed in the four models.

While Kaiser believes that one can generate biblical principles for Christian conduct, Doriani emphasizes the act of moral reasoning regarding principles, but also character, goals and vision. While I see Doriani's approach as a differentiated example of the general approach Kaiser promotes, Vanhoozer and Webb promote significantly different views on 'moving beyond'.

Vanhoozer's approach seeks to do justice to the tentativeness of doctrine, to the requirement of putting scripture into practice, and to the diversity of real-life-situations of biblical interpreters. I feel that in some sense, his account can be understood only if one reads more of his writings. Webb, then, promotes his interpretation 'by trajectory', an approach that *per se* can hardly survive without the very idea of moving beyond.

Now, while I have tremendous respect for all four of the contributors, I have to say that all leave the reader with substantial questions.[51] Fortu-nately, Vanhoozer and Treier have published their book on 'mere evangelical theology', which I will address now.

III Towards a Mere Evangelical Theology

In 2015, Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier addressed the issue of moving from scripture to theology within a full-fledged proposal for 'mere evangelical theology'. While *Theology in the Mirror of Scripture—A Mere Evangelical Account* does not limit itself to the question of 'moving beyond', the very question regarding evangelical theology today implies this question to some degree. I will therefore survey this title, and I will do so by dividing the survey into two parts, as it is presented within the book.

1. Agenda

Vanhoozer and Treier start their account by laying out both the material and the formal principles of evangelical theology.

a) Material principle

The material principle addresses the reality that scripture then addresses: What is the essence of evangelical faith, the 'agreed-upon doctrinal core'? And right here the first problem presenting itself is identified, namely that there just is no such thing as a universally accepted doctrinal core in evangelicalism.[52] In proposing such

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50 I believe this is especially true when it comes to the presentation of case studies.

51 I have to say, though, that for me, Kaiser's approach seems to be more an example of the problem than an example of a solution, for in his case the ultimate solution lies within his

personal, individual exegesis of a given text.

52 Kevin J. Vanhoozer and David J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture—A Mere Evangelical Account* (Downers Growe: IVP Academic, 2015), 46-7.

a core, Vanhoozer and Treier propose an anchored set rather than a bound or centred set: the church is the vessel, the anchor is God's very being.[53]

This being of God is then appropriated in Vanhoozer and Treier's following sections. They start with the gospel: God has acted, and God has spoken—God reveals what he himself has done,[54] and by doing so, who he is.[55] All of this is mirrored in Christ: he is the *imago dei*, communicating God's being, act and speech. In Christ, therefore, is 'a whole economy—an outworking of the divine purpose to share God's light, life and love with the entire cosmos, and the human creature in particular'.[56]

It is essential to Vanhoozer and Treier to understand that the economic Trinity (that is, what the Father, Son and Spirit do in history) 'is a dramatic representation of what God's eternal life is (the immanent Trinity)' *and* to understand 'his eternally gracious disposition toward the world'.[57] At the centre of the economic Trinity, we find Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Gospels, a 'moving picture' of the way God is in eternity, which is why Jesus Christ is the ultimate point of reference.

Vanhoozer and Treier flesh out a bit more of what they call the first theology of a mere evangelical account, namely what is 'in Christ'. In Christ, then, would be the state of humans 'in-

sofar as the Spirit unites us to Christ'. Being part of this family, we are to celebrate Christmas forever 'with the holy family, exchanging gifts—of grace, gratitude and glorification—around the tree of life'.[58]

But Vanhoozer and Treier's ontology does not stop here—both scripture and the church have a place in the economy of light as well: Scripture is 'a text authored (ultimately) by God, with God (Jesus) as its ultimate content, and with God (Holy Spirit) as its ultimate interpreter.'[59] Scripture is authored by God, bears witness of God and is read through God's redemptive work in time and space. It is read by the church—the domain in which Jesus now reigns, a 'reality of the new creation in the midst of the old'.[60]

In sum, Vanhoozer and Treier sketch mere evangelical theology as a framework of the worldwide renewal movement with which they identify evangelicalism. Subsequently, mere evangelical theology is not concerned with particular confessional statements, but with this very anchoring framework.[61]

b) Formal principle

The formal principle of evangelical theology addresses scripture itself. Vanhoozer and Treier shift from the ontology of the gospel in chapter one to the epistemology of the gospel in chapter two. The presenting problem identified here is summarized by the claim that

53 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 48-52.
54 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 53-6.
55 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 56-7.
56 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 63.
57 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 65.

58 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 72-3.
59 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 73.
60 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 77.
61 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 79-80.

'interpretive anarchy nullifies biblical authority'.[62]

In other words: where evangelical theology is lacking an agreed-upon core regarding its doctrine, it finds itself challenged by countless interpretations of scripture to begin with—a mere fact, which challenges not only the quest for doctrine, but the very authority of scripture. Agreeing that moving from the 'canonical cradle' to the 'development of doctrine' is a very challenging task, Vanhoozer and Treier dare to submit a proposal which starts with what they call a critical (evangelical) biblicism.[63]

Rather than 'short-circuiting the economy of light',[64] the task of evangelical theology would be to set forth the truth of the gospel in speech, seeking and promoting understanding of '*what is in Christ*'[65]—that is by expounding, not by inventing. Such a process must start with the internal resources of the gospel, Vanhoozer and Treier claim. They start with Jesus as the teacher and the gospel's content, a gospel that was written through and is understood by the work of the Holy Spirit.

According to Scripture, Vanhoozer and Treier claim, the gospel cannot be understood properly without Scripture,[66] and evangelical theology must therefore be done in accordance with Scripture. But how does one do theology 'in accordance with Scripture'? Vanhoozer and Treier stress the importance of the nature of the gospel,

which would ultimately be that of testimony: historical facts, told by making sense of what happened, in various literary genres, but yet truly communicating 'what is' in order to edify the reader. The texts of Scripture 'cultivate *wisdom*: knowledge that gets lived out'.[67]

With this general trajectory in mind, Vanhoozer and Treier call for a biblical reasoning that does connect the 'canonical dots' (that is, the various authoritative texts in Scripture, namely by 'figurally reading'), but that does not convert *sola scriptura* into *solo scriptura*. When connecting the canonical dots, we have to keep in mind the nature of doctrine, they claim: while Scripture is a verbal icon of what is in Christ, doctrine helps to answer questions about the story of salvation, including the realities presupposed and implied as well as locating one's own place within this story.[68]

It therefore *sets forth in communicative action* what is in Christ 'on the basis of the Scriptures'.[69] The domain of the gospel, however, is the church, which reads Scripture, interprets and applies it.[70] Since evangelical theology communicates the gospel into different times and places, there is no inherent conflict with the fact of a 'Pentecostal' plurality—rather, different churches or denominations may be seen as different 'voices … to articulate all the wis-

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62 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 82.
63 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 85.
64 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 85.
65 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 86.
66 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 94.

67 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 99, emphasis his.
68 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 105-6.
69 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 106.
70 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 110.

dom and blessings that are in Christ'.[71]

Mere evangelical theology, then, is the

> wisdom to know the difference between courageously preserving the truths of the gospel that cannot change and charitably acknowledging the interpretive diversity of non-essential truths'[72]

On the one hand, there is the magisterial authority of the canonical judgments—a gospel which cannot change. On the other hand, there is the ministerial authority of the scope of the Spirit's illumination—the requirement of doing theology in communion with the saints.[73]

2. Analysis

To flesh out the consequences the application of their agenda would have on evangelical theology, Vanhoozer and Treier address four areas: a focus on the pursuit of wisdom, theological exegesis, the fellowship with the saints and scholarly excellence.

a) Wisdom

Vanhoozer and Treier finished the first part with the argument that wisdom is required in order to discern (unchanging) gospel from interpretive diversity of non-essential truths. In search of such wisdom, Vanhoozer and Treier conclude from 1 Corinthians 1-2 that there is both pagan wisdom, which is a

secular enterprise and doomed to pass away, and Christian wisdom, which is found among those believers who pursue maturity and which will endure.[74]

Christian wisdom rests on Scripture, but listens and contemplates; it includes personal knowledge, and can, at its best, be termed as theology, Vanhoozer and Treier claim.[75] One of its most important potentials would be to heal the wound between head and heart.[76] While the issue of Christian wisdom would be generally absent in both evangelical prolegomena and theological education, Vanhoozer and Treier call for a 'more unified notion of theory and practice than either evangelical saints or scholars tend to possess'.[77]

Such a notion would require bolder integration of both saints and scholars, of both word and spirit, of both dogmatics and ethics,[78] leaving 'room for later discernment about philosophical nuances' regarding more detailed methodological questions explicitly.[79]

However, what Vanhoozer and Treier do address at some length is the general path towards wisdom. They do so by focusing on biblical hermeneutics. More concretely, they address theological interpretation of Scripture, seeking

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[71] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 121-2.

[72] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 122.

[73] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 122-7.

[74] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 138.

[75] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 140.

[76] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 141.

[77] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 148.

[78] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 152-3.

[79] Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 156.

to answer the question '*in what* basic practice the wisdom of authentically 'evangelical' theology fundamentally consists.'[80] In doing so, Vanhoozer and Treier claim that 'history' and 'mystery' must not be pitted against each other; rather, 'mystery gets defined redemptive-historically by Paul, while redemptive history is perceived spiritually and not just naturally.'[81]

b) Exegesis

One resource for an evangelical theology that mirrors biblical teaching is a theological exegesis of Scripture (TIS).[82] TIS, then, emphasizes canon, creed and culture—canon, since TIS does not 'shy away' from interpreting one passage of Scripture through the entire canon; creed, since TIS interprets a passage of Scripture in the light of 'the Trinitarian and Christological heritage of the early church that became formalized in symbols such as the Nicene Creed';[83] and culture, which refers to the reflection regarding the present-day conditions for our own hermeneutics.

After presenting clarifications and a defence of TIS,[84] Vanhoozer and Treier lay out their view on the essence of TIS by first addressing Scripture's eschatological and ethical context: the mirrors in Scripture 'display the image of God:

the Word of the Son, by the Spirit, helping people to grow into final freedom reflecting the Father's own life.'[85]

Vanhoozer and Treier take this issue further by addressing the theological concepts in sapiental contexts. Via Rorty's 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature' they arrive at 'philosophy's pragmatist turn', which translates into (evangelical) theology as a perspective in which wisdom functions as a regulative virtue.[86]

c) Church

How would church and academy fit into the given framework? Vanhoozer and Treier refer back to 1 Corinthians once more, stressing the fact that Paul acknowledges 'factions' within the Corinthian church: those 'necessary divisions within an apocalyptic context … reveal divine approval and/or disapproval of those being tested'.[87]

They move on to argue that in this very letter, Paul would demonstrate teachings representing 'first level doctrine', namely Christ crucified in the beginning of the letter, and then the issue of resurrection at the end, presenting a core consisting of Christ's death, burial and resurrection—an approach that would be found in the remaining letters of the New Testament as well.

For evangelical catholicity, this treatment of the gospel would entail two implications, namely identifying and preserving the gospel. However,

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80 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 158, emphasis his.

81 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 161.

82 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 164.

83 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 166.

84 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 168-176.

85 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 180.

86 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 184.

87 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 197.

1 Corinthians would hint 'at a second level of Christian division and dogmatic rank by mentioning allegiances to various leaders such as Apollos, Cephas and Paul'.[88] They use the dispute between Paul and Barnabas concerning John Mark as an example (Acts 15:36-41)—'Christian fellowship remains, even if ministry is pursued separately'.[89]

Thirdly, there are divisions of the lowest dogmatic rank. As an example, Vanhoozer and Treier use Romans 14-15. Vanhoozer and Treier do pay attention to 'current evangelical alternatives', though, by addressing the debate within *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, by Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen (Zondervan, 2011). Summarizing the positions of Kevin Bauer (fundamentalism), Albert Mohler (confessional evangelicalism), John Stackhouse (generic evangelicalism) and Roger Olson (Postconservative evangelicalism), they conclude that 'consistently missing are overtly scriptural accounts of apostolicity and catholicity, of how evangelical fellowship might reflect and contribute to the biblical fidelity and wholeness of the church(es).'[90]

This is not to say that there is nothing constructive in those contributions—far from it. However, Vanhoozer and Treier's concern is that the discussion focuses only on the gospel and the church in a few cases and to a certain degree.[91]

d) Theology

Pursuing wisdom in theological exegesis as the church, Vanhoozer and Treier finally focus on theology as an intellectual discipline. Their assessment falls in line with their argument so far and is, therefore, a humble one:

> Evangelical theology cannot grasp any certainty apart from the gospel, and divine revelation does not grant comprehensive knowledge in this era of redemptive history. Scripture can mirror only partially the fullness one might long to know, and theology can mirror only partially the teaching of Scripture itself. Only in the context of charity, with eschatologically informed humility, do we claim theological knowledge.'[92]

IV Conclusion

How should we move beyond from Scripture to theology? Not by coincidence this article has focused on some of the contributions of Kevin Vanhoozer, for the question posed appears to be one of the major ones Vanhoozer has been dealing with over decades. It appears, then, that with 'Theology in the Mirror of Scripture' we have the account Vanhoozer has been aiming for over a considerable period of time.

There might be rightful critique in

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88 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 202.

89 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 202.

90 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 211.

91 Vanhoozer and Treier state that they have the greatest affinity with Stackhouse's approach. However, they also recommend the concept of gospel doctrines in Bauder's contribution.

92 Vanhoozer & Treier, *Mirror of Scripture*, 224.

a number of instances—Vanhoozer and Treier state this themselves. However, such a critique would require separate and dedicated treatment. The purpose of this article was to survey a part of the remarkable journey towards what I believe to be a proposal for doing 'mere evangelical theology', which might actually function as a foundation for both the academia and the church. Hence both are 'run' by ordinary women and men, yet their theology needs to 'continue scripture' by living out the Bible and therefore mirroring Christ.

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