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RECLAIMING THE SENTENCES: A LINGUISTIC LOCI APPROACH TO DOCTRINE

Risto Saarinen

The contemporary discussion on the so-called linguistic understanding of doctrine, initiated by George Lindbeck in the 1980s, has largely come to the following conclusions: (a) although we may criticize a merely propositional understanding of doctrine, we cannot move beyond propositions. Propositions remain necessary but not sufficient constituents of linguistic utterances. (b) The speech-act theory, inspired by Wittgenstein and formulated by Austin and Searle, has permanent value for the understanding of religious doctrine. By means of this theory theologians can identify important aspects of those linguistic utterances which are considered to be doctrines. (c) The linguistic approaches to doctrine lead to postliberal theologies which emphasize and even justify the ecclesial and traditionalist nature of doctrinal formulations.¹

The strong tendency of many theologians to prove (c)² often neglects the very complex nature of (a) and (b). A reader of such approaches receives the impression that the authors primarily want to establish (c) by means of (a) and (b). As a result of this interest, the complex linguistic claims (a) and (b) do not receive proper sophistication but are seen, rather, in terms of the author's over-arching canonical and ecclesial interest. Therefore, the understanding of language *per se* often remains superficial in

¹ George LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984). Bruce MARSHALL and George LINDBECK, 'Aquinas as a Postliberal Theologian', *The Thomist* 53 (1989), 353-406. Bruce D. MARSHALL, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Reinhard HÜTTER, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Kevin J. VANHOOZER, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). Kevin J. VANHOOZER (ed.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

² See in particular HÜTTER (see above n. 1) and VANHOOZER, *Drama* (see above n. 1). Others, like Kathryn TANNER, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), and also MARSHALL (see above n. 1) are more careful. As my aim is to focus on the linguistic features, many other important

postliberal theories. Although they argue that the evidence provided by linguistics allegedly supports their theological conclusions, there is no generally approved and clearly argued connection that leads from (a) and (b) to (c).

Is it possible to construct a linguistic approach to doctrine without adopting the traditionalist underpinnings of (c)? Leaving out (c), one could argue that (a) and (b) already contain the building blocks which can establish a fruitful linguistic approach to religious doctrine. This is precisely what the present paper argues. Through taking very seriously the linguistic points expressed in (a) and (b) an approach to doctrine can be constructed which need not be traditionalist in its outlook. The approach can rather be characterized as modern and it can integrate not only canonical but also historical-critical modes of reading the Scripture. This procedure need not, however, lead to a merely rationalistic picture of religious doctrine. The present paper will show how linguistic utterances in themselves incorporate the resources to speak about the mysteries of faith. They may do so even better than in postliberal theories, since many postliberals locate the mystery to the social and cultural context of the church rather than to the text as a linguistic entity.

Leaving most theological considerations for the final section, the present paper begins with a strong focus on contemporary linguistics. A brief look at some basic concepts of semantics will lead to the quest for a fresh linguistic approach to religious doctrine. Another guide in this quest is provided by the so-called *loci* method, as developed by the early modern language-oriented theologians Erasmus of Rotterdam and Philip Melancthon. After a brief presentation of their method, the paper proceeds to outline a “linguistic *loci* approach to doctrine”. Finally, the paper discusses briefly the relative importance of exegetics in linguistic theories of doctrine.

Propositions and Sentences

dimensions of postliberal theology remain undiscussed.

Pieter A. M. Seuren's *Language in Cognition*³ serves as my first guide and handmaid in the quest. This new study of semantics does not discuss religious language, but it nevertheless creates an informative linguistic background to the claims (a) and (b). Seuren believes that the semantic analysis of linguistic utterances consists of two components, namely, the speech-act operator and the propositional content. Relying on speech-act theory, Seuren argues that the primary task of language is not information transfer but social binding. For this reason, propositions need to be seen in connection with the socially binding force involved in linguistic utterances.⁴ This interest connects his semantic project with the claims of many postliberals.

In some important respects, however, Seuren differs from postliberal theologians. Although he follows Austin and Searle, he does not consider Wittgenstein as a serious linguist.⁵ For Seuren, the speech-act theory does not belong to pragmatics but to semantics. This means that the socially binding forces are already operative on the level of individual sentences. As the primary units of semantics are lexical meanings and sentence meanings, not larger narratives, Seuren's analysis focuses on sentences. He also believes in the power of modern and classical logic in analysing sentence meanings, as propositional sentences are the bearers of truth values. Given this focus, Seuren does not need to employ narrative theories or pragmatics to argue that socially binding forces determine meaning.⁶

³ Pieter A. M. SEUREN, *Language in Cognition: Language from Within 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also SEUREN, *The Logic of Language: Language from Within 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), and SEUREN, *Western Linguistics: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

⁴ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 56.

⁵ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 419: "Wittgenstein cuts a poor figure ... none of his thoughts have led to any research programme of lasting value". *Ibid.*: "The linguistic world proper was never impressed" [by Wittgenstein].

⁶ Linguists often defend the primacy of the sentence as the maximum grammatically defined unit of speech (so SEUREN, *Western* (see above n. 3), 206, referring to Leonard Bloomfield). The appreciation of modern logic accompanies this attitude, as "the predicate calculus ... has proved to be the best instrument available to date for the systematic rendering of sentence meanings" (*Ibid.*, 371). My adoption of such preferences in the following implies a certain reservation regarding the alleged primacy of "stories" and "narratives". At the same time, I grant that social binding needs non-linguistic (cognitive, psychological) frameworks.

For Seuren, the socially binding force as the primary function of language is not only opposed to propositionalism but also to the communicative function of language in general.⁷ While postliberals tend to play propositionalism against more communicative views of doctrine,⁸ Seuren considers that communication typically operates with propositions. The primary social binding manifested in speech-acts, however, precedes propositional content.⁹

Another difference between Seuren and postliberals is found in the claim of cognitivism: Seuren maintains that the mental or cognitive level of understanding must be assumed and kept distinct from the level of language.¹⁰ The event in the speaker's mind is called *intent*. It consists of two parts: the definition of the socially binding force (e.g. question, command, etc.) and the mental proposition. In language, the mental proposition receives a linguistic shape, but the socially binding force is only sometimes explicitly expressed as speech-act operator.¹¹

Although Seuren does not consider propositional communication as being primary, he emphatically holds that linguistic utterances express propositions.¹² In defining the nature of a proposition, Seuren proceeds from Aristotle's definition that a proposition "says something of something".¹³ According to his definition, "a proposition is the here-and-now (token) mental act of assigning a property to one or more actual or virtual objects (entities)".¹⁴ Propositions are thus mental rather than linguistic entities. They do not primarily express universal *types* but occasional, unrepeatable *tokens*.

⁷ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 147-148.

⁸ VANHOOZER, *Drama* (see above n. 1), 268-278. See also Kevin J. VANHOOZER, *Remythologizing Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁹ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 147-148.

¹⁰ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 8-18.

¹¹ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 156-157. On pp. 159-174, Seuren discusses "the linguistic reality of the speech-act operator" with many examples.

¹² SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 84.

¹³ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 92, referring to ARISTOTLE, *Prior Analytics* 24a16.

¹⁴ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 85.

Seuren points out that the linguistic shapes of propositions are often read and understood as types, although the speaker performs a token-level mental act.¹⁵

To understand a linguistic utterance correctly, the listener should connect the type-level linguistic appearances of propositions to the mental token proposition intended by the speaker. In such a process, listeners relate the proposition to its context (so-called *anchoring*) and to the intention of the speaker (so-called *keying*). Propositions are in this sense “contextually anchored and intentionally keyed”, although their linguistic shape may look like a universal type. Seuren calls this universal linguistic shape “L-proposition”. While the semantic analysis of a sentence consists of grasping the L-proposition and the speech-act operator, one also needs to apply the mental processes of keying and anchoring to understand the proposition properly. Without anchoring, an L-proposition has a *meaning*, but well-anchored L-propositions have also an *interpretation*.¹⁶ The present paper uses the concepts of meaning and interpretation in this manner.

Inside the proposition we have a difference which has made history in linguistics: “A proposition consists of two terms, a predicate and a subject term.”¹⁷ For the present paper, the distinction between *subject* and *predicate* is the crucial tool which enables the construction of a linguistic approach to doctrine. While many postliberals treat propositions bluntly, the present paper performs a deconstruction of the proposition and claims that, to understand religious propositions properly, their subjects needs to be treated differently from their predicates. This project of deconstruction starts with a specification of six linguistic features relevant to these two constituents of a proposition.

First, all properties that are assigned to the subject in question, can be called predicates. In the sentence / proposition “John runs fast” the subject is “John” and the predicate “runs fast”. In the sentence / proposition “The house is red”, the subject is “the house”

¹⁵ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 96-98.

¹⁶ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 98-101.

¹⁷ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 85.

and the predicate “is red”. As a mental rather than a linguistic term, the subject can be called “object” or even “entity”. We will, however, use the linguistic term “subject”.

Second, the subject is primary or has a “lower order” than the predicate. In the sentence “John runs fast”, “John” is logically a zero-order individual entity, while “runs fast” is a first-order class which takes as its extension a number of zero-order individual entities that belong to this class.¹⁸ Such logical primacy of the subject does not mean that it is better known than the predicate. On the contrary, propositions very often aim at characterizing a relatively unknown subject by means of assigning familiar properties to it. However, in order to assign a property to “something”, this subject must already be assumed and has a lower order or semantic primacy in this sense. The claim that a proposition contains two semantic orders already revises Lindbeck’s view of the “first-order” proposition.¹⁹

Third, grammatical subject and predicate do not always correspond to the mental level of propositions. If I ask: “Who caught the thief” and you answer: “The policeman caught the thief”, “the policeman” is the grammatical subject, but in the logic of discourse “catching the thief” is the actual topic which is elucidated by assigning “the policeman” to it. Such observations have triggered extensive discussions on the so-called topic and comment and the ways in which they correspond to subject and predicate.²⁰ The present paper employs a simplified model as follows: in spite of varying token-level discourses, the mental proposition and its linguistic expression (L-proposition) employ a “topical subject” which is elucidated by means of assigning predicates to it. While the L-proposition expresses the topical subject as a type rather than token, the speech-act operators and other token-level markers should enable its keying and anchoring to the occasion relevant in the discourse. When you answer: “the policeman caught the thief”, I am supposed to understand which particular thief is

¹⁸ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 85-86.

¹⁹ Cf. LINDBECK (see above n. 1), 68, 80.

²⁰ SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 101-110. For the broader history of this theme, see SEUREN, *Western* (see above n. 3), 120-133, 158-160.

meant, although the L-proposition does not specify it. In this manner my interpretation of your answer grasps both the socially binding forces involved and the L-proposition.

Fourth, we need to make a consistent distinction between *sentence* and *proposition*. Sentences are linguistic entities; their token-level surface structure expresses the L-proposition and speech-act operators, which together constitute the semantic analysis of the sentence. Both speakers and listeners employ keying and anchoring to interpret the sentences. Thus the sentence “the policeman caught the thief” can be interpreted to contain a question-answer speech act which presupposes a singular occasion. The sentence also contains an L-proposition in which “catching the thief” is assumed to be the topical subject. Such a view does not move speech acts to the level of pragmatics, but they are semantic constituents of sentences. The L-propositions remain important constituents of sentences but they also differ from sentences. Fundamentally, propositions are mental and sentences linguistic entities. The L-propositions available in the sentences need to be cognitively interpreted in the light of intent, context and socially binding forces. The speech-act operators are sometimes marked already in the language (as question mark, through phrases like “I promise”, etc.); in addition, the cognitive processes of keying and anchoring are often supposed to grasp the intention and context in which a particular token-level sentence is uttered, thus providing its interpretation.²¹ The above-mentioned linguistic exchange regarding the policeman and the thief illustrates the dynamics of such interpretation.

Fifth, because of their subject-predicate ordering, propositions are capable of tasks other than that of making a truth-claim. The topical subject can be actual, virtual or non-verifiable, a feature which is extremely important for constructing religious language.²² When a theist and an atheist interpret the Bible, they can agree on the

²¹ Although SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 100, admits that “the question of what actually constitutes intentional keying is ... still without a satisfactory answer”, he considers that the best options move in the cognitive level of consciousness. This view of sentences and propositions differs from LINDBECK (see above n. 1), 67-68.

²² Although Seuren does not address religion directly, his postulate of a “creative mind” (SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 55-84) needed to understand why language moves so easily between actual and virtual can be fruitfully applied to

semantics of biblical language in spite of the fact that one interpreter considers God to be actual and the other virtual. Moreover, because the topical subject is a “something” which is elucidated through higher-order predicates, the subject can be mysterious or hidden. This is a very common feature in learning the meaning of words and things. If somebody has never heard the word “badminton”, others can elucidate this topical subject by referring to higher-order predicates: it is a ballgame with two players; you need a racket and a net, etc. Often the topical subject can remain mysterious: you can speak about sea-urchins and hobbits without knowing what they are or whether there are such things. In Seuren’s semantics, the postulate of a cognitive framework of the human mind alleviates the philosophical problems which result from dealing with virtual and non-verifiable entities.²³

Sixth, in some sense the topical subjects always remain mysterious in the sense of inexhaustibility. If I ask: “Who is John?” and you answer: “John is a university professor, father of two children, he likes jogging and eating hamburgers, etc.”, there does not seem to be any logical end in assigning meaningful properties to the topical subject. The socially binding forces of speech-acts set pragmatic limits of communication, but in principle one can always say new things about the topical subject in question. This means that propositions are epistemically open-ended and inexhaustible: rather than mirroring a factual or virtual reality, they construct sets of properties which aim at elucidating the topical subject from some perspective.²⁴ At the same time, other properties remain hidden although they might be as relevant as the

religious language.

²³ I do not mean that religious sentences would be merely virtual but rather that their truth-value remains non-verifiable. With the postulate of a creative mind, the cognitive-realist view of language preserves this openness. Assuming a cognitive basis for religious sentences does not, however, contribute to their truth-value. One should therefore remain careful in developing this idea towards anticipation (cf. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Systematische Theologie I* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 58-72) or a God-given conformity with Christ (cf. MARSHALL (see above n. 1), 265-272). My approach combines cognitivism with a rule theory of doctrine, as will be argued below. What can be cognitively grounded is not, however, the final truth of doctrine but its regularity.

²⁴ This idea is to some extent taken from Jaakko HINTIKKA, *Lingua Universalis vs. Rationalis Calculator: An Ultimate Presupposition of Twentieth-Century*

assigned ones. In this sense, some properties always escape the propositional description, leaving it dialogical and inexhaustible.

Looking at these six features from the theological angle, we can even maintain that all doctrine has been transmitted to us in the form of sentences. The sentences contain L-propositions and traces of socially binding forces. In encountering religion, every theologian and probably every religious person first encounters spoken and written sentences. Religious behaviour may not even emerge in any other way than through the elucidation provided by the sentences. That is to say, while visual representations or social practices could also be claimed to prompt religion, cognitively developed animals can look at such representations or live in a religious environment without becoming themselves the least religious. Although the matter is very complex, the approach put forward in this paper proceeds from the view of language as the primary source of religiosity. Such a sentential and cognitive explanation of religious beliefs creates a counterpoint to those theories of cultural and social practice which dominate the postliberal scene.²⁵ The programme of reclaiming the sentences nevertheless assumes the presence of socially binding forces already on the semantic level.

Postliberal theory maintains that doctrines first become meaningful when they are embedded in social and cultural practices. From this claim some writers draw the conclusion that the tradition of the church needs to be assumed, and often in a fairly traditionalist fashion.²⁶ Seuren's semantic framework revises this assumption: if sentences contain both the proposition and the socially binding force, the reader is invited to find them both already in the text. She does not need to bring the Bible to the church to understand it, but she can grasp both the propositional content and the socially binding forces when she reads the text carefully. The forces discussed are not

Philosophy (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996), pp. 20-45.

²⁵ This does not mean a dismissal of those theories but simply that I emphasize the primacy of language in a way that is often neglected in both progressive and traditionalist social theories. For a competent evaluation of many such theories, see Olli-Pekka VAINIO, *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

²⁶ For instance, HÜTTER (see above n. 1). VANHOOZER, *Drama* (see above n.

something in addition to the text, a context, a usage or a separate pragmatics – they are present in the token-level sentences and required in their adequate interpretation.

A reader of Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, for instance, does not actually grasp this medieval textbook²⁷ as a series of abstract and timeless propositions, but in reading this work he constantly employs the type-token distinction and recognizes the speech-acts created as questions, commands, promises, etc. He probably also comprehends the partially overlapping different intents of various authors: when Lombard quotes Augustine's Pelagian controversies, the medieval author might have a slightly different aim (Lombard's textbook intent) than his ancient source (Augustine's intent to refute heresies), but these intents also overlap considerably. Both Augustine and Lombard can employ the same L-propositions, although they may anchor them differently. Doctrinal sentences are, therefore, both flexible (they can be anchored and keyed differently) and stable (they continue to employ the same L-proposition).

The interplay of topical subjects and commenting predicates enables a particularly rich variety of dialogical possibilities: when the textbook says that "Pelagians have the properties x, y and z", and the reader knows some contemporaries who also allegedly have the properties x, y and z, he easily draws the conclusion that these people are also Pelagians. For such reasons, the Aristotelian event of "saying something of something" is not rigid, monologist or limited to conveying information; for better or worse, it is a highly dialogical, communicative and perspectival event.²⁸

The Loci

1), 26-30 and 155-165 discusses this feature in more detail.

²⁷ For this work, see Philipp ROSEMANN, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's Sentences* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007).

²⁸ Although much of this is compatible with Vanhoozer's "canonical-linguistic" programme, I find his "postpropositionalism" (VANHOOZER, *Drama* (see above n. 1), 266-278) exaggerated. While I have sympathy with his notions of "cognitive-poetic imagination" (*Drama*, 278-181) and "communicative practice" (*Drama*, 226; see also the communicative theism of VANHOOZER, *Remythologizing* (see above n. 8), 79-294), my own approach aims to present the linguistic issues with less colourful but hopefully more precise terminology.

Although the medieval tradition of *Sententiae* could be connected with my quest, more adequate historical models are provided by Erasmus of Rotterdam and Philip Melanchthon. They introduce the functional use of the *loci* method and combine it with their moderate understanding of *sola scriptura*. With “moderate understanding” I mean a view which is not hostile to ecclesial tradition but claims that one can learn the basic intents and socially binding forces of Christianity already from the Scripture. According to such a view, reading the Bible in itself equips the reader with an understanding of the social and ecclesial practices embedded in scriptural sentences. Such a “Protestant turn” runs parallel to my concern to reformulate the linguistic approach to doctrine.

Even more important for the approach launched in this paper is the *loci* method, which establishes the missing link between linguistics and the theory of doctrine. This method has often been considered as trivial, that is, as a way of organizing the different points of doctrine in a pedagogical or mnemotechnical manner. One can certainly trivialize the *loci* method, but Erasmus and Melanchthon cannot be blamed for such a move. These two authors perform a “linguistic turn” from Scholastics to Humanism; their views will also serve as my guides and handmaids in the quest for a fresh linguistic approach to doctrine.

The concept of *topos* / *locus* stems from Aristotle’s theory of argumentation and the rhetorical tradition.²⁹ Erasmus connects both traditions in his claim that good speech, constructed around the most important *loci*, needs to imitate the order of nature and its organic plans. God has accommodated the divine word to human speech; in this accommodation, Christ becomes the goal or purpose, the *scopus*, around which theological *loci* are to be organized. At the same time, the systemic and natural elements of speech also remain valid: therefore, theological speech can be composed around a number of the most important *loci* in a manner which resembles other

²⁹ For an overview, see O. PRIMAVESI et al., ‘Topik, Topos’, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* 10 (1998), 1263-1288.

speeches. The *loci* need to be taken from the Bible and arranged around the *scopus*, Christ.³⁰

The *loci* thus allow the reader or listener to grasp the organizing principles of a given text or speech. Through the *loci*, the speaker's intent can be elucidated. At the same time, the *loci* and the speech around them follow the order of nature. This order is familiar to the reader, creating a bridgehead from which the listener can step in to the intended world of the speaker. In his *Ratio verae theologiae* (1518), a methodological text attached to his Greek New Testament, Erasmus advises the reader of biblical books to collate "theological *loci* in which you place everything you read as if in certain little nests". The reader can further arrange these topics in organic or systematic relationships according to their similarities and differences. Through this procedure, all significant features of different biblical books can be highlighted in the manner they deserve.³¹

Erasmus thus distinguishes between three domains: (i) the *scopus* of all theological speech, Christ, (ii) the *loci*, the organizing principles or nests, and (iii) everything else notable in the Bible that should be assigned to the nests. Following this method, the reader should make his heart "a library of Christ". When the biblical text is organized in this manner, the *loci* become sources from which all true theology originates.³² Erasmus thus downgrades all post-biblical theology to a fourth domain. On this domain (iv), true theology reflects its biblical origins, while false theology cannot claim these origins.

Significant in this methodology is the differentiation between four cognitive orders or domains. The biblical language moves on domains (ii) and (iii), consisting of nests or *loci* (ii) in connection with their various properties (iii), which are assigned to their particular nests. The organized linguistic totality of (ii) and (iii) points towards the final

³⁰ Manfred HOFFMANN, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 211-212.

³¹ ERASMUS, *Ausgewählte Schriften* 3 (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 64-67, HOFFMANN (see above n. 30), 37.

goal and purpose, Christ. Immediately before his presentation of *loci*, Erasmus outlines the teaching or doctrine of Christ.³³ There he focuses on the life and acts of Christ (i) rather than any theoretical doctrine; this underlying and primary *circulus et orbis Christi*³⁴ defines the *scopus* which is then elucidated by means of biblical *loci* (ii) and other biblical texts (iii) assigned to various *loci* like eggs in nests. The nests (ii) and their contents (iii) are not merely pedagogical structures, but they make visible the natural and divine order which proceeds from (i) to (ii), (iii) and (iv). The nests do not make up an additive catalogue, but they are organized like a dynamic ecosystem with its careful balance of natural and divine order. The domains (ii) and (iii) also reflect the subject-predicate order of language: the topics or *loci* are elucidated and commented on by means of the texts assigned to them. The nests and their contents are thus not only elements of speech but they also become constituents of cognitive phenomena.

Philip Melanchthon develops Erasmus's view in his *Loci communes* of 1521. He lays great value on the nature of cognition in grasping the biblical *loci*. Like Erasmus, Melanchthon does not consider Christ as one *locus* among others, but Christ institutes and makes known the various *loci* which are *Christi doctrina*. This "form" of Christianity needs to be collected from the canonical Scriptures. The *loci* lead to the *scopus*.³⁵ For both Erasmus and Melanchthon, the concepts of *locus* and *scopus* are closely connected to each other and both can exemplify *doctrina*. Simplifying their usage to an extent, we may say that while *locus* is the linguistic and cognitive concept which can be used of various subject terms, *scopus* is the one goal to be reached, normally summarized as and identified with Christ.

Melanchthon adds to his Erasman scheme a hermeneutical rule saying that Christ wants us to know in particular the Pauline concepts of sin, grace, law and gospel. The "higher" points of doctrine, like the Trinity and the two natures of Christ, remain mysteries which are to be adored rather than understood. This attitude does not imply

³² ERASMUS (see above n. 31), 68.

³³ ERASMUS (see above n. 31), 58,3-4: "Christi dogmata".

³⁴ ERASMUS (see above n. 31), 60,6.

³⁵ Philipp MELANCHTHON, *Loci communes 1521* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher

any contempt of higher doctrines, but it is meant as a warning that it is extremely difficult to speak of these properly. Christ is known (*cognoscitur*) through the *loci* of sin, law and grace, because knowing Christ means knowing his gifts and services to humankind. When Paul wrote Romans, he focused on these *loci* and did not write much about the Trinity or the Incarnation. These Melanchthonian remarks should be read as hermeneutical, meaning that the biblical speech is constructed around such *loci* which contain accessible cognitive power. In his textbook Melanchthon aims at explaining the meaning of these main topics (*rationem eorum locorum*).³⁶

Like Erasmus, Melanchthon operates with an organic grasp of different domains: there is, first, the divine mystery which should be adored and studied through focusing on Christ as the cognitive scopus; second, one needs to focus on the most common biblical *loci* (*loci communes*) which reach out to Christ. These receive biblical predicates which, as a third domain, establish a canonical understanding of the *loci*. The human words of the interpreters constitute the fourth domain; they may or may not follow the biblical speech. In this outline, the second domain of *loci* contains the cognitive potential of biblical speech. But also the third domain, the totality of biblical speech, is important, as “God does all his works through his speech”.³⁷ This maxim establishes a truly linguistic view of doctrine, a view in which the speech-act and the propositional content converge. Used properly, such a view may lead towards a new dawn of biblical narrative rather than its eclipse.

The Model

Although the following “linguistic *loci* approach to doctrine” employs ideas from Seuren, Erasmus and Melanchthon, it very consciously aims at being a model standing on its own feet. The linguistic and historical guides discussed above provide some background, but they are not to be held responsible for what follows.

Verlagshaus, 1993), 12,4; 14,8; 16:1.

³⁶ MELANCHTHON (see above n. 35), 18; 22; 24.

³⁷ MELANCHTHON (see above n. 35), 16,11.

Let us assume that we have received a text with many valuable teachings. In reading it, we detect a number of key issues which can be called the topical subjects of this text. These become the *loci* which we employ as the organizing principles. Other linguistic items in the text are related to the *loci* as predicates relate to the subject: they elucidate the topical subject and assign various properties to it. To elucidate the topical subject, the predicates need to be understood according to their ordinary semantics. In other words, the lexical meanings available through the L-proposition as well as the contextual anchoring and the intentional keying of individual sentences are essential in the interpretation of the text.

This process of interpretation is conditioned by the assumption that the topical subjects, the *loci*, emerge from and point towards the hidden mysteries of religion. Their intentional keying and contextual anchoring extends beyond our ordinary cognition. In some sense, they remain “strange” even after elucidation through predicates. This phenomenon can be interpreted in various ways. A Barthian-minded theologian might say that this is and should be the nature of God-given revelation. A naturalist-minded cognitive scientist would rather maintain that the dynamics of folk psychology creates supernatural agents to fill the cognitive lacunas; their strangeness marks the non-standard character of such an entity. A theory of doctrine can, however, leave such foundational issues undiscussed for a while.

The topical subjects constitute a distinct semantic class in religious language: while their final lexical meanings remain strange or hidden from ordinary cognition, they are also elucidated through the assignment of a number of ordinary predicates to them. By means of this process they receive meanings, for instance: God is omnipotent, father, and creator. The interpretation of these meanings is, however, open-ended and incomplete. While God may resemble a father, the totality of assigned predicates also shows that God is very different from ordinary fathers. Thus the set of predicates provides for the anchoring and keying of the topical subject only to some extent. The topical subject remains anchored and keyed to the mystery, although its meaning is elucidated through the predicates.

We may deal with the strangeness of religious topical subjects by saying that they have only one “hand” that stretches towards mystery. The predicates of religious sentences have two hands: one that marks the assignment to a given topical subject and another that connects the predicate with the ordinary discourse relevant for the understanding of this predicate. If we take the linguistic universe of the Bible as the collection of relevant sentences, we obtain the same four domains of linguistic entities which appear in Erasmus and Melanchthon: (i) the hidden objects, the *scopus* which remains a cognitive mystery, (ii) the topical subjects of biblical language, the *loci* pointing to the mystery and *scopus*, (iii) the biblical predicates which elucidate the subject by means of ordinary language and collect various themes under the same title like eggs in a nest, (iv) the rest of ordinary language, the cognitive resource which allows ordinary readers and listeners to understand all sentences with their subjects and predicates. These four domains resemble the lower and higher orders of linguistic subjects and predicates in the sense that (i) depict the lowest and (iv) the highest order. While the higher orders are supposed to elucidate the lower ones, the lower orders remain the primary constituents of religious understanding.

We can illustrate the dynamics of this linguistic universe with a figure in which the “hands” are represented by arrows. The boundaries between the four domains can be visualized with different lines: while the veil between (i) and (ii) remains impermeable, the boundaries between (ii) and (iii) as well as between (iii) and (iv) are porous. The domains (ii) and (iii) constitute the biblical language of the canon. Most of this canon, namely all predicates (iii), is in cognitive communication with the entire resource of language (iv). Some designated terms are understood as topical subjects (ii); they are only elucidated by the rest of the canon (iii). Due to their assumed connection with the mystery, they contain an aspect of otherness or strangeness. Their meaning is not defined by the entire resource (iv), but only by the canonical predicates (iii). Thus the doctrinal sentences of a canon follow the pattern: subject (ii) + predicate (iii). In this manner we obtain the following Figure 1:

The model outlined here operates with sentences rather than propositions and considers doctrines to be linguistic (sentential) rather than mental (propositional) entities. At the same time, the variegated cognitive understanding of sentences remains important. The sentences need to be seen in terms of L-propositions as well as in terms of contextual anchoring and intentional keying of their linguistic shapes. The propositional form has been deconstructed so that the topical subject (ii) is constituted differently from its predicates (iii). As the topical subject remains connected with otherness (i), the domain of predicates is primarily responsible for the cognitive understanding of doctrinal sentences. This domain is open to historical-critical and other rational means of semantic inquiry. The identification of the domain of *loci* (ii) makes, however, this inquiry a theory of doctrine rather than a merely exegetical quest for meaning and interpretation.

Given this, the obvious question is: who decides which terms in a canon are to be assumed as topical subjects (ii) rather than ordinary predicates (iii)? There is no easy or

straightforward answer to this question, but the following guidelines can be given: the *loci* should follow and also reveal the natural order of the text. This means that they cannot be constructed at will but that the text presupposes a systemic order through which one finds the constitutive concepts and their final *scopus*. A religious text normally reveals an ascending order: it stretches from the ordinary and perceivable world (iii+iv) towards a more abstract, invisible and maybe even ineffable domain (i).³⁸ The topical subjects (ii) are, therefore, terms which organize the flow of the text towards such goals.

The topical subjects do not contain any such innate properties in themselves that would make them *loci*. Their “strangeness” may provide some clue for identification, but one should not assume that non-standard uses in themselves reveal a topical subject. The *loci* are “constructed” in the sense that the entire systemic order of the text has them appear as its “natural” centers of gravity. In this sense we can speak of the self-emergence of *loci*.

Logically speaking, all lexical words are predicates in the L-propositional level: they assign properties or relations to entities.³⁹ The sentence “Jesus Christ is the Lord” assigns the property of lordship as well as the name “Jesus Christ” to the relevant entity. Semantically, however, names like “Jesus Christ” can be treated as topical subjects and assignments like “the Lord” as predicates (cf. Figure 1). This means that the *loci* are names or labels pointing to the entity or representing it in the linguistic universe. Theoretically, such names could also be treated as first-order predicates attached to the underlying zero-order mystery on domain (i). The distinction between domains (ii) and (iii) is, therefore, not absolute or ontological, but it results from the systemic organization of the linguistic universe.

Historically, many doctrinal texts are organized in this manner. *The Apostle’s Creed* can be read as three articles, the topical subjects representing God, Jesus Christ and the

³⁸ The metaphor of “ascending” assumes that (i) and (ii), though logically lower-order entities than (iii) and (iv), are higher as the goal of the process.

³⁹ See SEUREN, *Cognition* (see above n. 3), 289.

Holy Spirit. In *Westminster Confession*, the title of each article names the topical subject, and the text of the article elucidates the title through assigning various predicates to it. At the same time, these “nests” do not make up a merely additive list, but they constitute a systemic order in which the elucidations may employ the resources of other *loci* and the same predicates can be assigned to various *loci*. Given the existence of such a systemic order, one can organize a biblical text around a number of assumed *loci* in the manner of Erasmus. Let us label this procedure “the rule of systemic order”. To call it a *rule* means that the organizing principle is not only natural but also intentionally constructed order.

The answer to the question “who decides the *loci*?” is thus found in the complex interplay of natural and constructed features of language. In reading a historical text, the reader cannot simply decide what the text is speaking about. The author has already made his own choices, and the readers need to adapt themselves to the *scopus* and the *loci* present in the text. We may even speculate how much the author has decided or constructed and to what extent he is reporting the order which has been made available to him by nature or by some previous agents. At the same time, however, the reader of the text is not merely a passive recipient but she also interprets the sentences. This interpretation occurs through the predicates, but the *loci* remain fairly stable, as they constitute the fixed points of what the text is speaking about. The rule of systemic order with its centers of gravity is, therefore, not a mere construction of the reader but it depends on the author’s cognition and intent.

This answer does not mean that the readers could not debate the status and relative importance of some *loci*. While there can be little doubt, for instance, that the New Testament speaks about Christ, one can debate the extent to which “the church” is a constitutive *locus* of the New Testament as a whole or of some parts of it. The *loci* should emerge from the texts “naturally” rather than be imposed on them. In addition, some *loci* are constitutive of partial units rather than of the entire text. The precise number and status of *loci* is thus not absolute. On the other hand, a meaningful and influential text probably contains some fairly stable and coherent *loci* which connect the entire text to its alleged *scopus*, creating the rule of systemic order.

If we approve the postulate of stable and coherent *loci* available in doctrinal texts, the next question is: what is the added value of seeing doctrinal sentences in terms of topical subjects and explanatory predicates? We may identify three such added values. First, this approach allows seeing the interplay of identity and difference, understanding and ineffability. When God is called “father, omnipotent, creator”, something is being understood. At the same time, these assignments by no means exhaust the meaning of the subject term. Rather than mirroring reality or capturing the meaning, the subject-predicate order of sentences formulates a number of perspectival accounts without claiming to give a total description of the *locus* elucidated in this manner. Something can be understood, but the ineffable mystery nevertheless remains the moving power of religious imagination.

Second, the *loci* approach assumes that concrete texts do not consist of propositional types. As a group of token sentences, a text bears witness to the speech-acts which, through the processes of keying and anchoring, can be interpreted to reflect the socially binding forces and authorial intents at stake. The process of such interpretation is the daily work of historical-critical exegesis. While postliberal approaches tend to be indifferent of or even hostile to exegetical methods, the *loci* approach encourages the quest for historical and social interpretations by means of anchoring and keying the texts with historical speech-acts and socially binding forces. Such a quest does not, however, entail a reduction to these features, as they work in connection with universal L-propositions. While postliberals often locate the speech-act theory to the realm of textual pragmatics, the *loci* approach considers speech-acts to be semantic components of the token-level sentences. This insight is optimistic with regard to the resources of historical exegesis: it assumes that petrified doctrinal sentences may still contain traces of the socially binding forces of the first Christians, like an ancient organism may preserve information about its own past. The speech-acts need not, therefore, be imposed on these texts by later ecclesial traditions and practices, but they remain constitutive parts of the token-level sentences.

A third added value can be seen in the integration of the cognitive dimension into a linguistic approach to doctrine. While postliberal theories tend to see doctrinal meanings primarily in terms of *de facto* uses and narrative practices, the *loci* model is more willing to grant a communicative potential to the sentences in themselves. The doctrinal sentences employ an L-proposition which is a necessary but not sufficient part of the interpretation of the sentence. Through seeing the universal L-proposition in connection with the occasional processes of keying and anchoring, the creative mind can construct an abundant variety of interpretations. The token sentences constructed in such cognitive interpretation processes need not have a truth-value in the positivist sense of the term. People can even have different opinions about truth-values and nevertheless imagine and discuss an issue coherently: for instance, a theist and an atheist can debate an exegetical matter competently in this way. The assumption of a creative mind with cognitive capacity thus helps to understand the richness of religious linguistic universes.

In presupposing the cognitive capacity, we may even speculate whether the domain of mystery is in some way available to the cognition. Erasmus seems to think that the “life-circle of Christ” in a way shines through the veil of mystery. Melanchthon assumes that some mysteries, like the Trinity, remain distant, while others, like the work of Christ, are proximate. The reluctance of postliberal approaches to make experience a theological category may in itself be sober. However, if linguistic approaches ignore the dimension of the creative mind with its cognitive capacity, they may fail to account for the richness of doctrinal elaboration in its interplay of language and cognition.⁴⁰

Given this, it is nevertheless also important to see that the *loci* approach does not aim at a cognitive reduction of doctrines. As the *loci* point to the mystery, their meaning is to some extent different from their non-topical homonymous counterparts. Because of this difference, they remain strange in their relationship to the cognitive resources of

⁴⁰ HÜTTER (see above n. 1) and VANHOOZER, *Drama* (see above n. 1) realize this and offer also other aspects like *poiesis*, *pathos* and inspiration. The *loci* approach extends these towards an affirmation of cognitivism.

language. The kingdom of God, for instance, remains different from worldly kingdoms in Jesus' proclamation. In its topical and theological sense the term "kingdom", *basileia*, is employed "catachrestically", that is, it is intentionally misused.⁴¹ The peculiar uses and misuses of the term create its non-standard understanding; such otherness is finally justified by the ineffable subject matter. The "one-handedness" of the *loci* in Figure 1 is another way of saying that, as core terms of religious doctrine, the topical subjects are employed catachrestically. One may say, therefore, that the canonical uses of *loci* are particularly important for their understanding. Religious language "baptizes" certain concepts by means of catachresis, increasing their relative importance and bringing them to a lower order (from iii to ii), closer to the mystery. The non-standard use of the *loci* terms, their strangeness, reflects the cognitive ineffability of their subject matter. At the same time, one cannot use too many concepts catachrestically. Most concepts need to be understood by means of ordinary cognition, since otherwise the sentences cannot be understood at all.

In addition to the rule of systemic order, the linguistic *loci* approach contains another rule, which organizes the reader's cognition on the borderline between (iii) and (iv). If canonical doctrines are formulated as sentences employing topical subjects (ii) and predicates (iii), a community using this canon can argue that these sentences should also regulate all religious speech of community members in domain (iv). If religious speech in domain (iv) significantly deviates from the patterns present in sentences consisting of (ii) and (iii), it can be considered as problematic. To do this, the community need not have full cognitive access to normative sentences but it is enough to have this rule.

Let us, for instance, examine two sentences: (a) "Christ is the gate" and (b) "Christ is the window". Since (a) can be derived from John 10:7 but (b) does not belong to the canonical language (its predicate being in domain iv), (b) can be considered as being problematic. In such a consideration, the community need not know in which cognitive sense the topical subject resembles gates but not windows. The community can be

⁴¹ The notion of catachresis is taken from Eberhard JÜNGEL, *Gott als*

content with the rule-based view that only sentences consisting of domains (ii) and (iii) provide access to the mystery. Although this access may contain cognitive features (e.g. the gate enables a transition to a new space), the status of a given sentence as doctrine is defined by the rule (a is canonical, b is not) rather than its cognitive interpretation (one cannot claim, e.g., that windows also enable transitions). We may call this condition “the predicate restriction rule”.

This result entails a corollary stating that the predicate restriction rule does not apply to sentences consisting of (iii) and (iv) in the same manner. It is perfectly legitimate to say, for instance, that “the gate (iii) in John 10:7 means transition to a new space (iv)”, because the domain (iii) is supposed to be cognitive and not catachrestic. Even very conservative and Biblicist religious communities allow the interpretation of biblical predicates in this manner. At the same time, many religious communities restrict interpretative leaps from (ii) to (iv), thus applying the predicate restriction rule. Such observations may provide some evidence for an intuitive use of the linguistic *loci* approach to doctrine in religious communities.⁴²

In sum, the model presented here assumes that the cognition of religious sentences occurs through a set of four orders or domains. The sentences are grasped properly by means of distinguishing adequately between their subjects and predicates. The most important topical subjects establish *loci*, connection points with the mystery of faith. The cognitive elements are conditioned by two rules, the rule of systemic order and the predicate restriction rule. While the rule of systemic order establishes the borderline between (ii) and (iii), the predicate restriction rule safeguards the boundary between (iii) and (iv). George Lindbeck sometimes makes a distinction between the cultural-linguistic “approach” and rule “theory”.⁴³ In terms of such a distinction, the model outlined here exemplifies a linguistic *loci* approach. Because it employs four cognitive

Geheimnis der Welt, 5. Aufl. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 401.

⁴² The stimulating book of William CHRISTIANS, *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 145-149 launches the concept of “alien claims” to cope with related matters. See also MARSHALL (see above n. 1), 147.

⁴³ LINDBECK (see above n. 1), 18.

domains and two basic rules, it could be labeled as “cognitive rule theory”. The present paper speaks, however, in terms of approach rather than full-fledged theory.

Exegetics

A linguistic *loci* approach to doctrine need not be limited to an exposition of biblical content.⁴⁴ As this is, however, the background of the views of Erasmus and Melancthon, and as the contemporary discussion on the theological interpretation of the Bible is closely connected with linguistic theories, we will also focus on this dimension. The *loci* approach provides rich opportunities to integrate exegetical and doctrinal work, because it presupposes both universal doctrinal *meanings* (L-propositions) and particular historical and social *interpretations* of biblical sentences (keyed and anchored tokens).

Many current proponents of the theological interpretation of the Bible want to provide alternative ways of reading the Scripture. In practice, however, linguistic, canonical and speech-act theories have not produced substantial exegetical results. Often these theories remain on a highly philosophical level, and when they present biblical interpretations, they offer little more than a traditional sermon. The new *Brazos Theological Commentary of the Bible* is an exciting laboratory in this respect. The volumes published thus far are innovative in showing how an author relates his own theology to the biblical material.⁴⁵ The exegetical performance of these commentaries has, however, remained meager. Moreover, the volumes are very different not only from exegetical commentaries but also from each other; no general profile of “theological interpretation” can be seen to emerge. The “canonical” or “theological” pre-understanding of the authors does not provide concrete patterns of interpretation.

⁴⁴ For related issues around the idea of “scriptural reasoning”, see the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* published since 2001.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Jaroslav PELIKAN, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005); Stanley HAUERWAS, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007); Robert W. JENSON, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009); R. R. Reno, *Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010).

On the liberal scene we can detect a reverse dynamics: while the authors provide very radical and innovative interpretations of individual texts, the general outline of their New Testament theologies follows traditional patterns. Heikki Räisänen's *The Rise of Christian Beliefs* is an example of this dynamics. The work programmatically develops a non-confessional, academic presentation of the "thought world" of early Christians. In this project, many individual texts are treated in a highly innovative and non-theological manner, but the chapter titles still exemplify the traditional *loci* of the New Testament: sin, the human condition, eschatology, salvation, Jesus Christ as mediator, the Spirit, Jewish and Christian identity.⁴⁶

Seen from the perspective of the *loci* approach, the following explanatory remarks could be made on the basis of these observations: A consistently liberal academic exegesis may be very innovative in domains (iii) and (iv), but since the topical subjects (ii) are already assumed by the text, even very critical scholars who are committed to fair play and common sense find more or less the same set of *loci* in the text. In this limited sense one could even say that the Scripture elucidates and interprets itself. On the other hand, postliberal, canonical and ecclesial interpreters want to remain true to the great tradition of the church. They also keep the same *loci* (ii) and do not want to question the received understanding of biblical predicates (iii). This attitude makes their exegesis somewhat tedious and may motivate them to bypass uninteresting historical discussions.

To make their exposition more exciting, these interpreters apply philosophical or other speculative ideas on the domain of post-biblical and post-exegetical ecclesial considerations (iv). Because such considerations do not concern the actual semantic content of biblical speech (ii+iii), they remain personal theologies of the interpreters. The postliberal authors clearly do not violate the rule-based restriction that all human interpretation (iv) should be compatible with canonical sentences (ii+iii); thus their expositions are unproblematically biblical. The authors are not, however, so much

⁴⁶ Heikki RÄISÄNEN, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

expounding the Bible as interpreting other issues (philosophical, linguistic, and cultural) in harmony with biblical witness.⁴⁷

The *loci* approach is more courageous in this respect, since it prompts the expositor to tackle with all the exegetical problems and opportunities available in domain (iii). In the *loci* approach, the speech-acts are not understood to concern the later reception and use of the texts but the actual semantics of biblical sentences. Therefore the social binding and contextual anchoring of the texts is not a matter of later tradition but of the immediate circumstances and the author's intent. In addition to the type-related or "typological" *meaning* of the biblical sentences, available as L-propositions, the *loci* theorists may claim that they can present a viable *interpretation* of the sentences on the basis of token-related traces available in the historical text. This process of interpretation is basically exegetical. It does not necessarily lead into a non-ecclesial understanding, since many, perhaps most, New Testament authors in fact do have an ecclesial intent.⁴⁸ The historical authors may also, however, have other intents, and these can be spelled out by means of careful exegetical analysis. Such a procedure identifies the occasional speech-acts marked in token sentences and interprets them to be anchored in particular contexts.

My own commentary in the Brazos series is a programmatic attempt to present an exposition which combines detailed exegetical analysis with consistent theological interpretation.⁴⁹ While my postscript to this commentary already outlines the *loci* approach very briefly,⁵⁰ the present paper has attempted to give a fuller methodological discussion, embedding the approach in a current view of linguistic semantics. As the last part of the present paper, some concrete examples may illustrate this attempt.

⁴⁷ For such a project, see Hans FREI (*The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁴⁸ The Old Testament / Jewish Bible offers an example of the limits of the *loci* approach. While the Brazos series shows that it is possible to read the Old Testament in the light of Christian theology, the problem of natural vs. imposed *loci* must be solved in such a project.

⁴⁹ Risto SAARINEN, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon and Jude*, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008.

⁵⁰ SAARINEN (see above n. 49), 225-232.

The Pastoral Epistles are strongly marked by Paul's critical discussion with the so-called false teachers. Although we do not know for sure who they were, the text offers an abundance of occasional sentences which can be contextually anchored and intentionally keyed with some probability. My exposition provides for this anchoring and keying through claiming that both Paul and his opponents employ the vocabulary of Hellenistic therapeutic philosophy. When Paul refutes his opponents with the help of this vocabulary, his main concepts, the topical subjects of the Pastoral Epistles, perform a double move or even a twofold catachresis between the kerygmatic world of Jerusalem and the philosophical world of Athens.⁵¹

Typical *loci* of this kind are *ekklesia*, the church, and *eusebeia*, godliness or piety (see Figure 1). The first catachresis of *ekklesia* occurs when it is brought from "Athens" to "Jerusalem": it is no longer a meeting of the city-state, but a gathering of the faithful. In the second catachresis, *ekklesia* again approaches the world. When the predicates of *oikos* and *oikonomia* are assigned to the church (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:20), this household vocabulary relates it to Hellenistic ideals, sometimes expressed philosophically as *oikeiosis*, familiarization or sociability. Through the double catachresis, the church remains a *locus* pointing to the mystery, but through its many predicates it is also introduced to outsiders and critically compared with their ideals.⁵²

A similar double move concerns *eusebeia*. This Hellenistic concept of "civil piety" is in the Pastoral Epistles launched as the virtue of Christian community. Thus it is employed catachrestically, that is, differently from its Hellenistic homonymic counterpart. But when Paul teaches that godliness is contentment and moderation (1 Tim 6:6-10) he attaches the vocabulary of Athens to this Christian virtue, pointing out that while Christian piety differs from the piety of outsiders, it also displays their virtues in its particular manner.⁵³

⁵¹ Cf. SAARINEN (see above n. 49), 25-26.

⁵² SAARINEN (see above n. 49), 68-72, 143-146.

⁵³ SAARINEN (see above n. 49), 80-82, 101-104.

Through organizing Paul's discussion around such topical subjects the commentary aims at taking very seriously the exegetical discussion. At the same time, the commentary performs a systematic and theological exposition of the text. This task presupposes the understanding of Pauline sentences in terms of subject-predicate order as well as the keying and anchoring of these sentences to their particular historical background. The purpose of such contextualization is not a cognitive or contextual reduction. The typological L-propositions do not lose their universality when they are keyed and anchored in this manner. They are seen in terms of concrete sentences rather than as propositions which rigidly mirror a reality. Linguistically, sentences aim at elucidating the topical subject with the help of their predicates and various other token-like features. The *loci* approach to doctrine aims at capturing this basic elucidation rather than saving the propositions. When this approach reclaims the sentences as building blocks of doctrine, it wants to focus on the topical subjects and the mysteries pointed at through them.

The final *scopus* of doctrine has been called "mystery" for two reasons, first, because this is the term employed in Melancthon's *Loci communes*, and second, to underline that the cluster of predicates never "exhausts" the meaning of the topical subject. Sentences and propositions are by nature perspectival, as they elucidate the *locus* from certain angles. There always remains a surplus of meaning to be sought. Biblical sentences are privileged vehicles of approaching the mystery, as they provide the rules on which religious cognition can be grounded.

SUMMARY:

While many current linguistic approaches to theological doctrine are traditionalist and postliberal in their outlook, there is no necessary connection between linguistic theory and theological traditionalism. Using contemporary semantics and the *loci* method of early modern theology, this paper outlines a new linguistic approach to doctrine. This "linguistic *loci*" approach employs cognitivism and a non-traditionalist rule theory of doctrine. The approach relates positively to historical-critical exegetics and claims that most exegetical work remains compatible with it. At the same time the linguistic *loci*

approach takes over some ideas of canonical exegesis and does not aim at a rationalist reduction of theological doctrine.