

# **SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY 1 CLASS NOTES**

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**Note: These notes are to be used in conjunction with the course.  
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CLASS NOTES  
FOR ST591 -- SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY I  
BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Robert J. Dunzweiler, Professor

Note: These class notes have been prepared for use in the classroom, not only as a guide for orderly coverage of the content, but also as a tool to encourage students to think theological problems through to scriptural solutions. As such, these pages contain statements and quotations which may not represent the viewpoint of the seminary or that of the professor. These statements and quotations should not be taken out of the context of the abovementioned purpose of these notes. The positive contributions of these materials should not be treated like a published book, and should not be quoted out of context or reproduced without permission. However, this is not intended to be a ban on the use of these materials. Rather, students are encouraged to adapt them to their own needs and modes of expression, and to make profitable use of them.

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# PROLEGOMENA

## I. Introduction to the Study of Theology

### A. Objectives of Theological Study

In our studies we will pursue four basic objectives:

1. To develop and maintain a distinctive climate, marked by the following characteristics:

- a. Openness of discussion
- b. Seriousness of attempts to understand differing ideas, positions, and systems
- c. Stimulation of the critical faculty and encouragement of its development
- d. Gracious, nonjudgmental acceptance of disagreement within the bounds of evangelical orthodoxy, coupled with gracious but uncompromising discernment and rejection of heresy

- e. Awareness of the influence of the personal-subjective aspect of interaction with the truths of God's Word.
- f. Dependence on the Holy Spirit for illumination to spiritually understand the revealed truths of Scripture
- g. Reverence and joy at the truthfulness, goodness, beauty, unity and utility of the teaching of Holy Scripture

2. To develop and employ a distinctive theological approach and method, characterized by the following features:

- a. An organic approach to the study of Scripture that emphasizes the need to organize the individual teachings of Scripture into a self-consistent, coherent, interrelated whole, in much the same way that organs in a living organism are interrelated.
- b. Inductive studies of a representative number of or all "commonplaces" related to a particular doctrine or doctrinal area, in order to ascertain the scope of meaning and the "drift" of the biblical data
- c. A method of forming and testing theological proposals, theories, and constructions that consists in studying the scriptural facts, devising theories to explain them, and testing those theories by logic and additional facts
- d. Attempts to employ relevant insights, proposals, frameworks, and constructs provided or suggested by other disciplines
- e. A technique involving the raising of questions, defining of problems, identifying of alternative proposals, and tracing of implications, in order to clarify issues, delimit responses, and facilitate understanding
- f. The use of various teaching styles, including posing of questions to stimulate discussion, directed discussion, open discussion to stimulate creative and analytical thought, highlighting of class notes, line-by-line examination of class notes, review of readings, and lecture
- g. The employment of visual aids of various types, including charts and diagrams

3. To develop and employ learnings and skills, including the following:

- a. The ability to use the lexicographical and concordential tools available to the student of Scripture
- b. Familiarity with the literature relevant to each area of theological study
- c. A working knowledge of the contents of Scripture, together with a firm grasp of those texts considered key or classic with respect to its major themes and emphases
- d. The ability to effectively articulate and communicate theological

concepts, insights, and proposals

4. To develop and exemplify specific qualities, including the following:
  - a. Theological literacy
  - b. Theological knowledgeableness and awareness
  - c. Theological preciseness
  - d. Theological perspicacity
  - e. Theological self-reliance
  - f. Theological integrity
  - g. Theological humility

## B. Definitions of Theology

1. The word "theology" comes from two Greek words θεός and λόγος. The compound means "word, speech, language, or expression concerning God".

2. Various definitions of theology have been offered:

Augustine defined theology as "rational discussion respecting the deity."

David Hollaz observed different meanings in the term:

The word Theology is employed in a fourfold sense: (a) most comprehensively, for every doctrine concerning God, whether true or mixed with error; (b) comprehensively, for true Theology, either in itself considered, or as communicated; either of men on earth or of saints in heaven; either natural or revealed; (c) specifically, of revealed Theology, that guides mortal man to eternal life; (d) most specifically, of the doctrine concerning the one and triune God.

Johann Quenstedt stated, "Theology, if you consider the force and usage of the word, is nothing else than ... what is said about God and divine things, as πνευματολογία is what is said about spirits, and αστρολογία, what is said about the stars."

Friedrich Schleiermacher defined theology as "the science which systematizes the doctrine prevalent in a Christian Church at a given time."

Charles Hodge defined theology as "the science of the facts of divine revelation."

Augustus Hopkins Strong defined theology as "the science of God and of the relations between God and the universe."

Abraham Kuyper defined theology as "the science of God."

Herman Bavinck defined theology as "the scientific system of the knowledge of God."

Karl Barth defined theology (which he called "dogmatics") as "the science in which the Church, in accordance with the state of its knowledge at different times, takes account of the content of its proclamation critically, that is, by the standard of Holy Scripture and under the guidance of its Confessions."

Paul Tillich defined theology as "the methodical interpretation of the contents of the Christian faith."

Louis Berkhof defined theology as "the systematized knowledge of God in His various relations to the universe." He further states:

Theology... is the effect which the divine revelation, embodied in Scripture, produces in the sphere of systematic thought. Theology is the fruit of the reflection of the Church on the truth, revealed in the Word of God.

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. defines theology as "the study which treats directly of God and His relationship to the world and to man."

L. Harold DeWolf defines Systematic Theology as "the critical discipline devoted to discovering, expounding and defending the more important truths implied in the experience of the Christian community."

John Macquarrie defines theology as "the study which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available."

Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest define theology as "the topical and logical study of God's revealed nature and purposes." They further state:

Systematic Theology not only derives coherent doctrines from the entirety of written revelation but also systematically relates them to each other in developing a comprehensive world view and way of life.

3. Some definitions of theology appear to emphasize "experience", or "the content of the Church's proclamation", or "the contents of Christian faith", or "the doctrine prevalent in a Church at a given time". Others appear to emphasize the "facts of divine revelation", or "truth revealed in the Word of God", or "written revelation".

Yet both kinds of definition use such terms as "science", "systematize", "methodical", and "systematic thought". And both kinds seem to agree that the subject matter of theology is God, divine things, and the relations which God sustains to the universe and mankind.

Nevertheless, although there are apparent points of agreement regarding the content of theology, one kind of definition appears to stress subjective experience as the source of theology's content, whereas the other kind

appears to stress objective revelation as the source of theology's content. This distinction of source could very well affect the content of theology.

4. What is theology and how do we go about doing it? We will employ the following as a working definition:

**Theology is an imperfect attempt to develop increasingly more accurate approximations of God's perfect system of truth: (a) by exegeting and organizing the facts and meanings of God's revelation of His nature, God's revelation of His works of creation, providence, redemption, and judgment, and God's revelation of His purpose and will for all created beings; (b) by constructing formulations that accurately define and interrelate the truths of God's revelation; (c) by expressing these formulations in terms of thought-forms appropriate to the current culture.**

A Shorter Form of this Definition

Theology is the attempt to discover and express the truth concerning God and His relationships to the universe.

(a) How do we go about discovering this truth?

By exegeting and organizing God's general and special revelation, and by constructing formulations of its facts and meanings.

(b) How do we go about expressing this truth?

By defining and explaining it in terms of thought-forms appropriate to the current culture.

C. Branches of Theological Study

Paul Tillich has proposed the following outline of theological encyclopedia:

I. Historical Theology

- A. Biblical disciplines
- B. Church History
- C. History of Religion and Culture

II. Systematic Theology

- A. Apologetics
- B. Ethics
- C. Dogmatics

To these divisions he adds Practical Theology, not as a third division but as "the technical theory through which these two parts are applied to the life of the Church."

Archibald Alexander Hodge, in his *Outlines of Theology* lists the main divisions of the theological sciences as follows:

- I. Sciences Auxiliary to the study of theology
- II. Apologetics
- III. Exegetical Theology
- IV. Systematic Theology
- V. Practical Theology
- VI. Historical Theology

Under Exegetical Theology he includes General Introduction, including higher and textual criticism, biblical philology, biblical archeology, hermeneutics, biblical inspiration, and the history of interpretation; Special Introduction; and Exegesis Proper, under which he includes Biblical Theology. Hodge defines Biblical Theology as the discipline that "traces the gradual evolution of the several elements of revealed truth from their first suggestion through every successive stage to their fullest manifestation in the sacred text, and which exhibits the peculiar forms and connections in which these several truths are presented by each sacred writer."

Under Systematic Theology he includes Systematic Theology proper ("the construction of all the contents of revelation into a complete system"; Doctrine-History; and Polemics. )

Under Historical Theology he includes Biblical History and Ecclesiastical History.

Benjamin B. Warfield. in his article, "The Idea of Systematic Theology", states the following:

Without encroaching upon the details of Theological Encyclopaedia, we may adopt here the usual fourfold distribution of the theological disciplines into the Exegetical, the Historical, the Systematic and the Practical, with only the correction of prefixing to them a fifth department of Apologetical Theology. The place of Systematic Theology in this distribution is determined by its relation to the preceding disciplines, of which it is the crown and head. Apologetical Theology prepares the way for all theology by establishing its necessary presuppositions without which no theology is possible -- the existence and essential nature of God, the religious nature of man which enables him to receive a revelation from God, the possibility of a revelation and its actual realization in the Scriptures. It thus places the Scriptures in our hands for investigation and study. Exegetical Theology receives these inspired writings from the hands of Apologetics, and investigates their meaning; presenting us with a body of detailed and substantiated results, culminating in a series of organized systems of Biblical History, Biblical Ethics, Biblical Theology, and the like, which provide material for further use in the more advanced disciplines. Historical Theology investigates the progressive realization of Christianity in the lives, hearts, worship and thought of men, issuing not only in a full account of the history of Christianity, but also in a body of



facts which come into use in the more advanced disciplines, especially in the way of the manifold experiments that have been made during the ages in Christian organization, worship, living, and creed-building, as well as of the sifted results of the reasoned thinking and deep experience of Christian truth during the whole past. Systematic Theology does not fail to strike its roots deeply into this matter furnished by Historical Theology; it knows how to profit by the experience of all past generations in their efforts to understand and define, to systematize and defend revealed truth; and it thinks of nothing so little as lightly to discard the conquests of so many hard-fought fields. It therefore gladly utilizes all the material that Historical Theology brings it, accounting it, indeed, the very precipitate of the Christian consciousness of the past; but it does not use it crudely, or at first hand for itself, but accepts it as investigated, explained, and made available by the sister discipline of Historical Theology which alone can understand it or draw from it its true lessons. It certainly does not find in it its chief or primary source, and its relation to Historical Theology is, in consequence, far less close than that in which it stands to Exegetical Theology which is its true and especial handmaid. The independence of Exegetical Theology is seen in the fact that it does its work wholly without thought or anxiety as to the use that is to be made of its results; and that it furnishes a vastly larger body of data than can be utilized by any one discipline. It provides a body of historical, ethical, liturgic, ecclesiastical facts, as well as a body of theological facts. But so far as its theological facts are concerned, it provides them chiefly that they may be used by Systematic Theology as material out of which to build its system.

This is not to forget the claims of Biblical Theology. It is rather to emphasize its value, and to afford occasion for explaining its true place in the encyclopaedia, and its true relations on the one side to Exegetical Theology, and on the other to Systematics -- a matter which appears to be even yet imperfectly understood in some quarters. Biblical Theology is not a section of Historical Theology, although it must be studied in a historical spirit, and has a historical face; it is rather the ripest fruit of Exegetics, and Exegetics has not performed its full task until its scattered results in the way of theological data are gathered up into a full and articulated system of Biblical Theology. It is to be hoped that the time will come when no commentary will be considered complete until the capstone is placed upon its fabric by closing chapters gathering up into systematized exhibits, the unsystematized results of the continuous exegesis of the text, in the spheres of history, ethics, theology, and the like. The task of Biblical Theology, in a word, is the task of coordinating the scattered results of continuous exegesis into a concatenated whole, whether with reference to a single book of Scripture or to a body of related books or to the whole Scriptural fabric. Its chief object is not to find differences of conception between the various writers, though some recent students of the subject seem to think this is so much their duty, that when they cannot find differences they make them. It is to reproduce the theological thought of each writer or group of writers in the form in which it lay in their own minds, so that we may be enabled to look at all their theological statements at their right angle, and to understand all their deliverances as modified and conditioned by their own point of view. Its exegetical value lies just in this circumstance, that it is only when we have thus concatenated an author's theological statements into a whole, that

we can be sure that we understand them as he understood them in detail. A light is inevitably thrown back from Biblical Theology upon the separate theological deliverances as they occur in the text, such as subtly colors them, and often, for the first time, gives them to us in their true setting, and thus enables us to guard against perverting them when we adapt them to our use. This is a noble function, and could students of Biblical Theology only firmly grasp it, once for all, as their task, it would prevent this important science from being brought into contempt through a tendency to exaggerate differences in form of statement into divergences of view, and so to force the deliverances of each book into a strange and unnatural combination, in the effort to vindicate a function for this discipline.

The relation of Biblical Theology to Systematic Theology is based on a true view of its function. Systematic Theology is not founded on the direct and primary results of the exegetical process; it is founded on the final and complete results of the exegesis as exhibited in Biblical Theology. Not exegesis itself, then, but Biblical Theology, provides the material for Systematics. Biblical Theology is not, then, a rival of Systematics; it is not even a parallel product of the same body of facts, provided by exegesis; it is the basis or source of Systematics. Systematic Theology is not a concatenation of the scattered theological data furnished by the exegetical process; it is the combination of the already concatenated data given to it by Biblical Theology. It uses the individual data furnished by exegesis, in a word, not crudely, not independently for itself, but only after these data have been worked up into Biblical Theology and have received from it their final coloring and subtlest shades of meaning -- in other words, only in their true sense, and after exegetics has said its last word upon them. Just as we shall attain our finest and truest conception of the person and work of Christ, not by crudely trying to combine the scattered details of His life and account of His teaching as given in our four gospels into one patchwork life and account of His teaching; but far more rationally and far more successfully by first catching Matthew's full conception of Jesus, and then Mark's, and then Luke's, and then John's, and combining these four conceptions into one rounded whole: -- so we gain our truest Systematics not by at once working together the separate dogmatic statements in the Scriptures, but by combining them in their due order and proportion as they stand in the various theologies of the Scriptures. Thus we are enabled to view the future whole not only in its parts, but in the several combinations of the parts; and, looking at it from every side, to obtain a true conception of its solidity and strength, and to avoid all exaggeration or falsification of the details in giving them place in the completed structure. And thus we do not make our theology, according to our own pattern, as a mosaic, out of the fragments of the Biblical teaching; but rather look out from ourselves upon it as a great prospect, framed out of the mountains and plains of the theologians of the Scriptures, and strive to attain a point of view from which we can bring the whole landscape into our field of sight.

From this point of view, we find no difficulty in understanding the relation in which the several disciplines stand to one another, with respect to their contents. The materials that Systematics draws from other than Biblical sources may be here left momentarily out of account. The actual contents of the theological results of the exegetical process, of Biblical Theology, and of Systematics, with this limitation, may be said to be the

same. The immediate work of exegesis may be compared to the work of a recruiting officer: it draws out from the mass of mankind the men who are to constitute the army. Biblical Theology organizes these men into companies and regiments and corps, arranged in marching order and accoutred for service. Systematic Theology combines these companies and regiments and corps into an army -- a single and unitary whole, determined by its own all-pervasive principle. It, too, is composed of men -- the same men which were recruited by Exegetics; but it is composed of these men, not as individuals merely, but in their due relations to the other men of their companies and regiments and corps. The simile is far from a perfect one; but it may illustrate the mutual relations of the disciplines, and also, perhaps, suggest the historical element that attaches to Biblical Theology, and the element of all inclusive systematization which is inseparable from Systematic Theology. It is just this element, determining the spirit and therefore the methods of Systematic Theology, which, along with its greater inclusiveness, discriminates it from all forms of Biblical Theology the spirit of which is purely historical.

## D. Sources of Theology

Historically, theological beliefs have been derived from a number of sources, traditions, and revelation.

Upon examination, these sources appear to contract to four major sources: reason, religious experience, ecclesiastical authority, and revelation.

### 1. Reason as the source of religious beliefs concerning God and His relations to the universe

A prime example of this source is Deism, which as a movement began at the end of the 17th century, following the Act of Toleration (1689). This Act, which offered toleration to the dissenters within the Church of England, enlarged the bounds of permissible theological discussion. The deists were concerned with a reasoned and reasonable Christianity, stripped of doctrinal accretions, devoid of reliance on miracles and supernatural intervention in natural events, and freed of the weight of institutional and clerical control. Many of Deism's ideas appear to have been anticipated by the earlier Cambridge Platonists and Latitudinarians.

Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648) never called himself a deist but has been called "the father of English Deism". His *De Veritate* (1624) laid down the first principles of Deism. These principles are: (1) that there is one supreme God; (2) that he ought to be worshiped; (3) that virtue and piety are the chief parts of divine worship; (4) that man ought to be sorry for his sins and repent of them; (5) that divine goodness dispenses rewards and punishments both in this life and after it. These truths, he argued, are universal, and may be apprehended by reason. Herbert treated Scripture as ordinary history, ridiculed bibliolatry, and overtly attacked priestcraft; and disavowed faith as a basis for religion.

John Toland of London (1670-1722) produced the first important work of the deistic controversy: *Christianity Not Mysterious: or, A Treatise Shewing that there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd a Mystery* (1690). Toland opposed not only biblical mysteries, but also challenged the validity of the biblical canon and pointed out corruptions in biblical texts. He mocked the implicit faith of the Puritans and their bibliolatry, and severely censured the vested interests of priests of all denominations.

The principal ideas advanced in his book are:

- (1) There is nothing mysterious or incomprehensible in Christianity.
- (2) True religion must be reasonable and intelligible.
- (3) Reason is the judge of what is regarded as revelation.
- (4) No event can be called miraculous which is contrary to reason.
- (5) Though the clergy may seek to hide the message of Christianity behind the veil of revelation, man can penetrate to the inherently reasonable nature of the New Testament.

Matthew Tindal of Oxford (1657-1733) published a work that became known as "The Deist's Bible". He entitled it *Christianity as Old as the Creation: or, The Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730). Tindal deduced the being and attributes of God by *a priori* reason. He asserted that, as man reasons downward from the knowledge of the attributes of God to knowledge of himself, the religion of nature, including all of the moral precepts requisite for leading the life of virtue and achieving ultimate salvation, then follows. Scripture, with all of its ambiguities, is thus not only unnecessary but is actually confusing to men of reason.

The principal ideas advanced in this work are:

- (1) Because the nature of God is unchangeable, it can be inferred that God will treat all men at all times in the same way by supplying them all with the same sufficient means of recognizing and discharging their duties.
- (2) The religion of nature is the standard of judgment of what is acceptable in revelation, for the latter can add nothing to the perfection of the former.
- (3) Whether externally or internally revealed, true religion is constant in both doctrine and precept.
- (4) The Gospel is a republication of the religion of nature.

Other English deists included Charles Blount (1654-1693), Anthony Collins (1676-1729), William Wollaston (1660-1724), Thomas Woolston (1670-1731), Thomas Chubb (1679-1746), Thomas Morgan (d. 1743), Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), and Peter Annet (1693-1769).

On the continent, Francois-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) were regarded as deists.

In the United States, Ethan Allen (1738-1789) of Litchfield, Vermont, published a book entitled *Reason, the Only Oracle of Man, or a Compendious System of Natural Religion* (1784). In this work he stated his belief in human responsibility and immortality, but rejected prophecy and revelation.

Thomas Jefferson of Philadelphia and Monticello (1743-1826) compiled but never published in his lifetime a work that later came to be known as *The Jefferson Bible, being The Life and Morals of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. In it he extols Jesus as a man for his moral teachings, omits ambiguous and controversial passages, and while rejecting many of the supernatural elements, presents what he considered to be the core of Christian morality.

A compilation of the basic tenets of Deism yields what might be called "The Creed of Deism", as follows:

- (1) The physical world is comprised of matter in motion.
- (2) This motion can be described and formulated in terms of regular mathematical laws.
- (3) Orderly motion does not arise out of chance movement or out of the nature of matter itself.
- (4) Order implies an ordering intelligence; therefore the laws of nature must have been imposed upon matter by a supreme intelligence, which we call God.
- (5) It would seem natural and reasonable to attribute to God not only the

- governing of matter, but also its creation.
- (6) Since the world is both created and a universe, God must be a single being outside of the world and behind the world.
  - (7) Man is not only a created being, but also a rational being.
  - (8) Since mind is more than matter, man as a rational being must also have been created by God.
  - (9) Man is not only a material and rational being; he is a moral being, and has been given a moral law by God.
  - (10) This moral law is enforced by God, not by necessity (as is true in the case of natural law), but by rewards and punishments.
  - (11) A complete distribution of rewards and punishments does not occur in this life.
  - (12) Therefore, in order that full justice may be secured, man must and does survive death. Man is also therefore a spiritual being.
  - (13) God is thus seen to be that transcendent Omniscience or Beneficence which men of sense can serenely contemplate with respect, and to which they owe gratitude, praise, and obedience.
  - (14) True religion consists of the foregoing beliefs, which are simply the product of pure reason or common sense. Any additional religious beliefs must be viewed as corruptions or superstitions.

Deism, which achieved its greatest strength during the eighteenth century, has also been called "ethical monotheism", "natural religion", "common-sense religion", and "rationalism".

## 2. Religious Experience as the source of religious beliefs concerning God and His relations to the universe

A prime example of this source is Friedrich Schleiermacher's important work, *Der Christliche Glaube* (The Christian Faith). Schleiermacher (1768-1834) published this eight-volume work in 1821-1822 (Second Edition, 1830-1831). A selection of key paragraphs (which constitute the major headings and summarize the gist of the argument) follows. These translations from the German were made by D. M. Baillie in *The Christian Faith in Outline* (Edinburgh: W. F. Henderson, 1922).

1. Dogmatic Theology is the science which systematizes the doctrine prevalent in a Christian Church at a given time.

2. The science which systematizes the doctrine is pursued for these reasons: partly to clear up the confusion of one's thinking on the subject of the religious affections; partly to distinguish that thinking the more definitely from other kinds of thinking which, while of different origin, arrive at the same content.

3. Thus the Doctrine of the Faith rests on two things: first, on the endeavor to set forth in doctrinal form the affections of the religious and Christian mind; and secondly, on the endeavor to bring into its exact connections what has been thus expressed as doctrine.

4. Accordingly the following would be the rules by which any Dogmatic must be regulated, to whatever Church it belongs. First, never to set forth as doctrine anything which was not present in that totality of religious affections of which the doctrinal system ought to be a copy, but directly or indirectly to absorb into the system of doctrine whatever was present in these affections.

Secondly, to set forth every doctrine as it appears in its connections with all others, and therefore to leave out of the system nothing which is required in order to bring this connection into view.

5. As Christianity stands at present, we cannot presuppose any general agreement as to what is or is not the essential in the religious affections of Christendom.

6. In order to determine in what the essence of Christian piety consists, we must go beyond Christianity and adopt a higher standpoint, so as to compare it with other varieties of faith.

7. Such a comparison presupposes that there is some common element in all faiths, in virtue of which we put them alongside of each other as kin; and that there is some peculiar element in each, in virtue of which we separate it from the others. But neither of these can be pointed to as a known and given quantity.

8. Piety in itself is neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a disposition and modification of Feeling.

9. The common element in all religious affections, and thus the essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of our absolute dependence, i.e., the feeling of dependence on God.

34. All dogmatic propositions, in addition to their being descriptions of human states of mind, can also be set forth in two other forms: as conceptions of divine attributes, and as utterances regarding the constitution of the world; and these three forms have always subsisted alongside of each other in Dogmatics.

36. When in immediate self-consciousness we find ourselves to be absolutely dependent, there are therein combined our own finite being and the infinite being of God; and that dependence is, in general, the way in which alone these two can become one in us as self-consciousness or feeling.

37. This original feeling of dependence is not accidental, but is an essential element of human life, and does not even vary from person to person, but is identical in all developed consciousness.

38. The recognition that this feeling of dependence as an essential condition of life takes for us the place of all proofs of the existence of God; which proofs have no place in our procedure.

39. The original feeling of dependence, which at the same time involves a Supreme Being, only comes to actual consciousness, in the case of us who are Christians, along with the relation to Christ; but all Christian religious affections contain this feeling of dependence. Hence throughout the whole compass of Christianity piety the relation to God and the relation to Christ are inseparable.

40. The religious affection in which the antithesis is least prominent is that related to the consciousness that we are placed in a universal system of Nature.

41. In that religious affection in which the feeling of dependence relates to our being placed in the universal system of Nature, our self-consciousness at the same time represents the totality of all finite being (see 15).

42. The representation of such a self-consciousness according to the first form (see 34) will thus contain utterances concerning the relation of God to the world; according to the second form, doctrines concerning attributes of God which relate in general to the world; and according to the third form, doctrine concerning the constitution of the world as determined by its dependence on God.

64. All attributes which we ascribe to God are not to be taken as indicating something specific in God, but only something specific in the way in which we refer to God our feeling of absolute dependence.

65. God, as indicated in the feeling of absolute dependence, can only be so described that His causality shall be, on the one hand, distinguished from, and thus set in antithesis to, the causality embraced in the system of Nature, and, on the other hand, equated with it as regards its range.

#### First Doctrine: The Eternity of God

66. The eternity of God is only to be understood as omnipotent eternity, i.e., as the element in God which conditions not only everything temporal but also time itself.

#### Second Doctrine: The Omnipresence of God

67. The omnipresence of God is only to be understood as omnipotent presence, i.e., as the element in God which conditions not only everything spatial but also space itself.

#### Third Doctrine: The Omnipotence of God

68. The conception of the divine omnipotence contains two things: first, that the entire system of Nature in all spaces and times is founded upon the divine causality, which, as eternal and omnipresent, is in antithesis to all natural causality; and secondly, that the divine causality, as expressed in our feeling of dependence, is completely exhibited in the totality of finite existence, and thus everything for which there is a productivity in God actually exists and comes to pass.

#### Fourth Doctrine: The Omniscience of God

69. The divine omniscience is not related to the divine omnipotence as understanding and will are humanly related to each other, but is simply the spirituality of the divine omnipotence itself.

#### Appendix: Of Some Other Divine Attributes

70. Of the remaining divine attributes that are usually specified, Unity, Infinity, and Simplicity especially are of the kind that have no reference to the antithesis which exists in the actual affections of the religious consciousness; only, they cannot be regarded as divine attributes with the same right as those already dealt with.

In *Bibliotheca Sacra* of 1844 an article appears by Friedrich A. G. Tholuck (1799-1877) entitled "Theological Encyclopedia and Methodology". Tholuck was a lecturer at Halle in 1842-43. He refers to Schleiermacher's theology as follows:

Since the year 1820 or thereabout, the theology of Schleiermacher has gained an important influence. Its fundamental principle is, that the essential part of religion is not the intellectual view, not the action, but the state of the religious feeling. It is the immediate feeling of dependence on God. Doctrines are nothing more than those imperfect reflections, in which men endeavor to make the state of their own feelings clear to themselves. Philosophy has nothing to do with religion. It develops the ideas on the ground of a necessity in the order of the thoughts alone, entirely independent of the feelings. Schleiermacher knew the experiences of the religious life of a Christian; and he felt a powerful reality in them. In many of his speculations he coincided with Spinoza and Fichte, but feeling was



for him a stronger reality than speculation. He believed that philosophy is as yet far from attaining its true end; and he drew himself back from it, and retired into the province of Christian experience. This experience he vindicated in his Systematic Theology, with the aid of a fine-drawn and eloquent system of dialectics. On the other hand, the rationalistic tendencies of the day in which Schleiermacher commenced his labors, the style of criticism too which then prevailed, his own philosophical studies also, particularly his study of Spinoza, undermined his faith in many parts of the orthodoxy that has ever been prevalent in the church. Hence it is, that he defended the great doctrines of Christianity, and at the same time, abandoned many portions of truth, many parts especially of the historical revelation....

A large number of theologians, influenced by the genius and labors of Schleiermacher, now came forward, and exhibited more or less of Christian earnestness in defending the weightier doctrines of Christianity, but at the same time favored the cause of rationalism in many respects, and particularly in their style of criticism. Baumgarten Crusius, Hase, Lucke, are representatives of this school. Other disciples of Schleiermacher, however, have adhered more closely to the teachings of the Bible and of the church. Such men, for example, are Neander, Nitzsch, Twisten.

Another prime example of religious experience as the source of religious beliefs is found in Robert Barclay's work, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1676). Robert Barclay was a Scottish Quaker who became the theologian of the Quakers.

In the *Theses Theologicae* the first three prepositions are germane:

#### THE FIRST PROPOSITION

##### Concerning the true Foundation of Knowledge

Seeing the height of all happiness is placed in the true knowledge of God, (This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent), the true and right understanding of this foundation and ground of knowledge, is that which is most necessary to be known and believed in the first place.

#### THE SECOND PROPOSITION

##### Concerning Immediate Revelation

Seeing no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son revealeth him; and seeing the revelation of the Son is in and by the Spirit; therefore the testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be only revealed; who as, by the moving of his own Spirit, he converted the chaos of this world into that wonderful order wherein it was in the beginning, and created man a living soul, to rule and govern it, as by the revelation of the same Spirit he hath manifested himself all along unto the sons of men, both patriarchs, prophets, and apostles; which revelations of God by the Spirit, whether by outward voices, and appearances, dreams, or inward objective manifestations in the heart, were of old the formal object of their faith, and remain yet so to be; since the object

of the saints' faith is the same in all ages, though set forth under divers administrations. Moreover, these divine inward revelations, which we make absolutely necessary for the building up of true faith, neither do nor can ever contradict the outward testimony, of the scriptures, or right and sound reason. Yet from hence it will not follow, that these divine revelations are to be subjected to the examination, either of the outward testimony of the scriptures, or of the natural reason of man, as to a more noble or certain rule or touchstone: for this divine revelation, and inward illumination, is that which is evident and clear of itself, forcing, by its own evidence and clearness, the well-disposed understanding to assent, irresistibly moving the same thereunto; even as the common principles of natural truths move and incline the mind to a natural assent: as, that the whole is greater than its parts; that two contradictory sayings cannot be both true, nor both false; which is also manifest, according to our adversaries' principle, who (supposing the possibility of inward divine revelations) will nevertheless confess with us, that neither scripture nor sound reason will contradict it: and yet it will not follow, according to them, that the scripture, or sound reason, should be subjected to the examination of the divine revelations in the heart.

### THE THIRD PROPOSITION

#### Concerning the Scriptures

From these revelations of the Spirit of God to the saints, have proceeded the scriptures of truth, which contain, 1. A faithful historical account of the actings of God's people in divers ages, with many singular and remarkable providences attending them. 2. A prophetic account of several things, whereof some are already past, and some yet to come. 3. A full and ample account of all the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ, held forth in divers precious declarations, exhortations, and sentences, which, by the moving of God's Spirit, were at several times, and upon sundry occasions, spoken and written unto some churches and their pastors: nevertheless, because they are only a declaration of the fountain, and not the fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate primary rule of faith and manners. Nevertheless, as that which giveth a true and faithful testimony of the first foundation, they are and may be esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and certainty; for as by the inward testimony of the Spirit we do alone truly know them, so they testify, that the Spirit is that guide by which the saints are led into all truth: therefore, according to the scriptures, the Spirit is the first and principal leader. And seeing we do therefore receive and believe the scriptures, because they proceeded from the Spirit; therefore also the Spirit is more originally and principally the rule, according to that received maxim in the schools, *Propter quod unumquodque est tale, illud ipsum est magis tale*. Englished thus: *That for which a thing is such, that thing itself is more such*.

3. Ecclesiastical authority as the source of religious beliefs concerning God and His relations to the universe

A prime example of this source is the Roman Catholic Church's dogma concerning Tradition, as detailed in the *Baltimore Catechism No. 3*, Confraternity Edition of 1949.

Q. 23. Can we know God in any other way than by our natural reason?

Besides knowing God by our natural reason, we can also know Him from supernatural revelation, that is, from the truths found in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition, which God Himself has revealed to us.

Tradition is the unwritten word of God -- that body of truths revealed by God to the apostles, and not committed by them to writing but handed down by word of mouth. These truths, which were later committed to writing, particularly by the Fathers of the Church, have been preserved and handed down to the present day.

Q. 23a. What do we mean when we say that God has revealed these truths to us?

When we say that God has revealed these truths to us we mean that He has made them known to certain persons, to be announced to their fellow men as the word of God.

Q. 23b. What is the Bible?

The Bible is the written word of God, committed to His Church for the instruction and sanctification of mankind.

Since the Catholic Church wishes Catholics to read only correct translations of the Bible, it forbids them to read translations that are not approved by Church authorities. The Church also commends that footnotes be put in approved editions, so that the readers may understand the true meaning of difficult passages.

Q. 23f. How can we know the true meaning of the Bible?

We can know the true meaning of the Bible from the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, which has received from Jesus Christ the right and the duty to teach and to explain all that God has revealed.

(a) Since the Bible contains many difficult passages, it must be interpreted by some authority appointed by God if its truth is to be known with certainty. When men interpret it on their own authority, they arrive at many different views, as is evident from the many opposing doctrines that non-Catholics, using private interpretation, draw from the same passages of the Bible.

(b) The teaching authority which Christ gave the apostles and their successors, the bishops of the Catholic Church, includes the right and the duty to interpret the true sense of the Bible. The Church exercises this authority through letters and instructions from the Holy See and through the ordinary teaching of the bishops, subject to the Pope.

(c) The Catholic Church possesses the authority to determine whether or not a book is divinely inspired. In the early Christian centuries there were certain books which some believed to be inspired writings, but the Church decided they were not. These are called apocryphal writings.

(d) Catholics are bound in conscience to accept the interpretations of the Bible officially given by the Church.

Q. 23i. What is Divine Tradition?

Divine Tradition is the unwritten word of God -- that is, truths revealed by God, though not written in the Bible, and given to the Church through word of mouth by Jesus Christ or by the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

(a) The Bible itself tells us that it does not contain all that God has revealed.

(b) The word "tradition" can also be understood in a wider sense, namely, as all the truths which the Church received in the beginning to be handed down (the word "tradition" means "handing down") throughout all ages. Some of these truths were later written under inspiration (the Bible), others were not (tradition as described in the answer above). The Church continues to hand down these truths, and this exercise of her teaching authority, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, is sometimes known as "active tradition". The utterances of persons who preserve and preach these truths, especially the Pope, are also sometimes called Tradition.

Q. 23j. Has Divine Tradition ever been committed to writing?

Divine Tradition has been committed to writing, especially by saintly writers called Fathers, who lived in the early centuries but were not inspired, as were those who wrote the Bible.

(a) The writings of the Fathers are very helpful toward the understanding of the true sense of Sacred Scripture and Divine Tradition.

(b) The Church has granted the title of Doctor to certain holy and learned men, whose writings have been very beneficial to religion. Some of these are also Fathers, others who lived in later centuries are simply Doctors.

Q. 23k. Has Divine Tradition the same force as the Bible?

Yes; Divine Tradition has the same force as the Bible, since it too contains God's revelation to men.

(a) Besides Divine Tradition, there is also ecclesiastical tradition, made up of historical narratives and customs that date from the early days of the Church but were not revealed by God. This type of tradition is not accepted with divine faith, but it belongs to the Church to pass judgment on its reliability.

Q. 23I. By what kind of act do we believe the doctrines contained in the Bible and in Divine Tradition?

We believe the doctrines contained in the Bible and Divine Tradition by an act of divine faith, which means that we accept them on the authority of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

(a) Divine faith is a theological virtue by which we firmly believe the word of God because He is all-wise and all-truthful. Since all the doctrines contained in the Bible and Divine Tradition are the word of God, we must believe them with divine faith.

(b) Since it is reasonable to accept the statement of a learned and truthful man when he tells us something about which he is an expert, it is most reasonable to believe all that the infinitely wise and truthful God has revealed.

(c) Some of the truths of divine revelation were communicated by God only implicitly - that is, contained in more general doctrines -- and were recognized explicitly by the Church only in the course of time. Such for example, are the doctrines of Mary's Immaculate Conception and bodily Assumption into heaven.

(d) The Catholic Church possesses the same authority to explain and to interpret Divine Tradition as it has to explain and to interpret the Bible.

Although the Roman Catholic Church's dogma concerning Tradition is a prime example of ecclesiastical authority as a source of religious beliefs, other examples come easily to mind, e. g., the cults.

Whether we speak of Theosophy, Christian Science, Rosicrucianism, Unity, Baha'ism, Swedenborgianism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventism, the Unification Church, or the Worldwide Church of God, there is one feature common to all of them. They all hold that there is an authoritative extra-biblical writing (usually that of the founder of the cult) that must be added to the Bible in order to understand the Bible and Christianity correctly. Usually this writing gains the ascendancy over the Bible, not theoretically but functionally.

For Theosophy the writings are those of Helena ("Madame") Blavatsky and Annie Besant. For Christian Science it is Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. For Rosicrucianism it is Max Heindel's *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-conception or Mystic Christianity*. For the Unity School of Christianity it is Charles and Myrtle Fillmore's writings. For Baha'ism it is the authoritative interpretations of Baha'u'llah's writings by 'Abdu'l-Baha. For Swedenborgianism it is the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, especially *Arcana Coelestia* and *The True Christian Religion*. For Mormonism it is Joseph Smith's *The Book of Mormon*. For the Jehovah's Witnesses it is Charles Taze Russell's *Studies in the Scriptures* (6 vols. ). For Seventh-Day Adventism it is Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*. For the Unification Church it is Sun Myung Moon's *Divine Principle*. And for the Worldwide Church of God it is the writings of Herbert W. Armstrong, especially as published in *The Plain Truth*.

4. Revelation as the source of religious beliefs concerning God and His relations to the universe

The prime example of this source is evangelical Christianity.

Perhaps the following chart will help to summarize and sort out these sources.

## SOURCES OF THEOLOGY

SOURCE	EXAMPLE	PROPONENTS
Reason	Deism	Edward Herbert of Cherbury John Toland Matthew Tindal Voltaire Rousseau Ethan Allen Thomas Jefferson
Religious Experience	Liberal Theology,  Dialectical Theology, Existential Theology Liberation Theologies  Quaker Theology	Friedrich Schleiermacher Albrecht Ritschl Karl Barth Emil Brunner Rudolf Bultmann Paul Tillich Gustavo Gutierrez James H. Cone Rosemary Radford Reuther Letty M. Russell Robert Barclay
Ecclesiastical Authority	The Roman Catholic Church,  The Orthodox Churches,  The Cults	The Bishops of Rome The Pope (since 1870) The Bishops of Constantinople Helena Blavatsky Annie Besant Mary Baker Eddy Max Heindel Charles and Myrtle Fillmore Baha'u'lah Emanuel Swedenborg Joseph Smith Charles Taze Russell Ellen G. White Sun Myung Moon Herbert W. Armstrong
Revelation	Evangelical Christianity	Augustine Martin Luther John Calvin Charles Hodge Benjamin B. Warfield Carl F. H. Henry J. I. Packer

## E. Bibliography for Systematic Theology

The following list includes only works in Systematic Theology as a whole, not works on particular areas of doctrine. Books on particular areas will be referred to when those areas are treated. This list is comprised of works from various theological traditions, and is not intended to be exhaustive, but only representative. Publishers' names are not included, and no attempt is made to indicate whether books are in or out of print. Works are listed alphabetically according to author.

1. *Summa Theologica, Summa Contra Gentiles*, by Thomas Aquinas (1265-1274, 1258-1260, respectively)
2. *The Writings of Arminius*, by Jacobus Arminius, in three volumes (1609) – Dutch Remonstrant
3. *The Faith of the Christian Church*, by Gustaf Aulen (1923) – Swedish Lutheran, attempted to steer a middle course between Fundamentalism and Modernism
4. *Christian Theology*, by Emery H. Bancroft (1925) – American Evangelical, Professor of Bible Doctrine and Systematic Theology, The Practical Bible Training School
5. *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, by Robert Barclay, in three volumes (1676) – Scottish Quaker, the theologian of the Quakers
6. *Church Dogmatics*, by Karl Barth, in twelve volumes (1936-1952) – Swiss Neo-orthodox
7. *De Gereformeerde Dogmatiek (Reformed Dogmatics)*, by Herman Bavinck, in four volumes (1895-1899) – Dutch Reformed, Professor of Theology, Free University of Amsterdam (one-half of Volume 2 has been translated into English under the title *The Doctrine of God*)
8. *Our Reasonable Faith*, by Herman Bavinck (1909) (a synopsis of Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics)
9. *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology*, by Frans Josef van Beeck, in three volumes (1989) – American Roman Catholic
10. *Studies in Dogmatics*, by G. C. Berkouwer, in fourteen volumes (1952-1976) – Dutch Reformed, Professor of Systematic Theology, Free University of Amsterdam
11. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, by Donald G. Bloesch, in two volumes (1978-1979) – American Evangelical, Professor of Theology, Theological Seminary, University of Dubuque
12. *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, by James Montgomery Boice, in four volumes (1978-1981) – American Reformed



13. *Dogmatics*, by Emil Brunner, in three volumes (1950-1960) – Swiss Neo-orthodox
14. *Systematic Theology*, by Louis Berkhof (1941) – Dutch-American Reformed, Professor of Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary
15. *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, by J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., in two volumes (1962-1963) – American Reformed, President, Professor of Theology, Wheaton College
16. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin, in four books (First Edition 1536, Final Latin Edition, 1559) – French Reformed
17. *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, ed. Charles W. Carter, in two volumes (1986) – American Wesleyan Aminian
18. *Systematic Theology*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, in eight volumes (1947-1948) – American Dispensationalist (the theologian of Dispensational Theology), President and Professor of Systematic Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary
19. *An Outline of Christian Theology*, by William Newton Clarke (1908) – American Liberal, Professor of Christian Theology, Colgate University
20. *A Black Theology of Liberation*, by James H. Cone (1970) – American black liberation theologian, Professor of Systematic Theology, Union Theological Seminary, New York
21. *The Christian Faith*, by Olin Alfred Curtis (1905) – American Methodist, Professor of Systematic Theology, Drew Theological Seminary
22. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, by Robert L. Dabney (1878) – American Reformed Southern Presbyterian, Professor of Systematic Theology, Union Theological Seminary, Virginia
23. *The Fountain of Wisdom*, by John of Damascus (Yanah ibn Mansur ibn Sargun) (742) – the theologian of the Eastern Church
24. *A Theology of the Living Church*, by L. Harold DeWolf (1953) – American Liberal Methodist
25. *Dick's Lectures on Theology*, by John Dick, in four volumes (1838) – Scottish Reformed, Professor of Theology in the United Secession Church
26. *System of Christian Doctrine*, by Isaac August Dörner, in four volumes (1885) – German Liberal, disciple of Schleiermacher, Professor of Theology, University of Berlin
27. *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*, by H. Ray Dunning (1988) – American Wesleyan Methodist
28. *Christian Theology*, by Millard J. Erickson, in three volumes (1983-1985) – American Baptist Evangelical, Academic Dean and Professor of Theology, Bethel Theological Seminary

29. *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, by Charles Grandison Finney (1887) – American revivalist and evangelist
30. *Christian Theology*, by P. B. Fitzwater (1948)– American Evangelical
31. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, by Wayne Grudem (1994) – American Reformed, Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
32. *Outlines of Theology*, by Archibald Alexander Hodge (1860) – American Reformed, Professor of Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary (succeeding his father, Charles Hodge, in that chair)
33. *Systematic Theology*, by Charles Hodge, in three volumes (1871) – American Reformed, Professor of Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary
34. *Reformed Dogmatics*, by Herman Hoeksema (1966) – Dutch Reformed
35. *System of Doctrines*, by Samuel Hopkins (1793) – American Reformed New School or New England Theology
36. *Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach*, by Walter Marshall Horton (1955) – American Liberal, Professor of Theology, Oberlin College
37. *God, Creation, & Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*, by Paul K. Jewett (1991) – American Neo-Evangelical, Professor of Systematic Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
38. *What Christians Believe: A Biblical and Historical Summary*, by Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber (1989) – Professor of New Testament and Christian Ethics and Professor of Theology, respectively, Wheaton College
39. *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective*, by G. D. Kaufman (1968) – Liberal Mennonite
40. *Principles of Sacred Theology*, by Abraham Kuyper (1898) – Dutch Reformed, Founder and Professor of Systematic Theology, Free University of Amsterdam
41. *Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, by John Lawson (1980) – American Methodist
42. *Introduction to Christian Dogmatics*, by Auguste Lecerf (1949) – French Reformed
43. *Integrative Theology*, by Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, in three volumes (1987-1994) – American Conservative Baptists, professors in Denver Theological Seminary
44. *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, by E. A. Litton (1912) – English Anglican

45. *Principles of Christian Theology*, by John MacQuarrie (1966) – American Anglican Existentialist, Professor of Theology, Union Theological Seminary, New York
46. *Christian Dogmatics*, by Hans Lassen Martensen (1849) – Danish Liberal Lutheran, Bishop of Seeland, Professor of Theology, University of Copenhagen
47. *Loci Communes Rerum Theologicarum (Commonplaces of Theological Truth)*, by Philipp Melanchthon (1521) – German Reformed
48. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, by Daniel L. Migliore (1991) – American Liberation Theologian, Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary
49. *Systematic Theology*, by John Miley, in two volumes (1892) – American Wesleyan Arminian
50. *Christian Dogmatics*, by John T. Mueller (1934) – Missouri Synod Lutheran, Professor of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary
51. *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, by Edgar Young Mullins (1917) – American Southern Baptist, President and Professor of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky
52. *Systematic Theology*, by Wolfhart Pannenberg (English translation 1991) – Professor of Systematic Theology on the Protestant Theological Faculty, University of Munich
53. *Systematic Theology*, by Thomas C. Oden, in three volumes (1987, 1989) – American Methodist, Professor of Theology, Drew University
54. *Outline Studies in Christian Doctrine*, by George P. Pardington (1916) – American Arminian, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Professor of Theology, The Missionary Institute at Nyack
55. *Christian Dogmatics*, by F. Pieper, in four volumes (1950-1957) – Missouri Synod Lutheran
56. *Dogmatic Theology*, by Joseph Pohle, in twelve volumes (1911) – American Roman Catholic
57. *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, by W. B. Pope (1879) – English Methodist Arminian
58. *Theological Investigations*, by Karl Rahner, in ten volumes (1961-) – Roman Catholic
59. *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-Day Perspective*, by Richard Rice (1985)
60. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, by Walter Rauschenbusch (1917) – American Liberal, Professor of Theology, Rochester Theological Seminary
61. *The Christian. Faith*, by Friedrich Schleiermacher, in eight volumes (1821-1822) – German Liberal, Professor of Theology, University of Berlin
62. *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, by Heinrich Schmid in two volumes (Third Revised Edition, 1899) – German Lutheran
63. *Dogmatic Theology*, by William G. T. Shedd, in three volumes (1888-1894) – American Reformed Southern Presbyterian

64. *Theology for Ordinary People*, by Bruce L. Shelley (1993) – American Evangelical, Professor of Church History, Denver Seminary
65. *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, by Menno Simons (1539) – Dutch Anabaptist
66. *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, by Gordon J. Spykman (1992) – American Reformed, Professor Emeritus of Religion and Theology, Calvin College
67. *Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, by W. W. Stevens (1967) – American Southern Baptist
68. *Systematic Theology*, by Augustus Hopkins Strong, in three volumes (1907) – American Northern Baptist
69. *The Evangelical Faith*, by Helmut Thielicke, in three volumes (1974-1982) – German Neo-orthodox Lutheran
70. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*, by Henry Clarence Thiessen (1951) – American Amminian, Professor of Theology, Wheaton College
71. *Systematic Theology*, by Paul Tillich, in three volumes (1951-1963) – German- American Neo-liberal
72. *Christian Dogmatics*, by J. van Osterzee, in two volumes (1874) – Dutch Reformed, Professor of Theology, University of Utrecht
73. *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*, by Geoffrey Wainwright (1980) – English Anglican
74. *A Body of Divinity*, by Thomas Watson (1692) – English Puritan
75. *Foundations of Dogmatics*, by Otto Weber, in two volumes (1955, English Edition 1981) – German Neo-orthodox, Professor of Reformed Theology, University of Gottingen
76. *Introduction to Theology*, by J. C. Wenger (1954) – American Mennonite, Professor, Goshen Seminary
77. *Christian Theology*, by H. Orton Wiley, in three volumes (1940) – American Amminian, Church of the Nazarene

78. *Renewal Theology*, by J. Rodman Williams, in three volumes (1988-1992) – American Charismatic, Professor of Theology, CBN University

## F. Liberalism in Theology

Biblical Theological Seminary has a policy that "no person favorably inclined toward theological liberalism shall be considered for or retained in the position of board member, administrator, or faculty member, nor shall any person so inclined be considered as a potential chapel speaker or special lecturer in religious programs." This raises the question of the meaning of "liberalism".

The word "liberal" has two basic areas of meaning when used as an adjective. First, a liberal person is one who is marked by generosity and openhandedness. Second, a liberal person is one who is broad-minded, tolerant. When used as a noun, the word "liberal" has as one of its meanings "one who is open-minded in the observance of orthodox or traditional forms." As used in the liberal arts, the word "liberal" has no relevance to theology, nor does its first area of meaning as an adjective.

The term "liberalism" is defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary in one of its meanings as "a movement in modern Protestantism emphasizing intellectual liberty and the spiritual and ethical content of Christianity." The term is also used in the contexts of economics and politics.

Theologically and historically, liberalism is both a mood and a movement. As a mood, it is marked by a basic attitude toward Scripture that can be called liberal. Any theological view that has the attitude that Scripture is anything less than final authority for Christian belief and practice is *per se* liberal. This is the central motif of theological liberalism.

The mood of liberalism should not be confused with the movement known as Liberalism. The mood of liberalism can be found in every age since the Scriptures came into existence. The movement of Liberalism began in 1800.

### 1. LIBERALISM

The dominant tendency in liberal religious thought that developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is called Liberalism. Liberalism took two major forms: a more conservative(!) form called Modernism, and a more radical form called Humanistic Liberalism.

The dominant motif of Liberalism was that of immanence. Immanence with regard to God's location means that God is present in the universe. Two major types of immanence may be distinguished. The first is a cosmological immanence in which nature or some part of it is God's location. The second is a humanistic immanence in which human powers, plans, causes, ideals, etc. are the dwelling place of God. During the Age of Immanence humanistic immanence followed cosmological immanence; i.e., autonomy followed continuity.

Religious Liberalism grew gradually out of and away from orthodoxy. It was prompted particularly by the challenges of science and philosophy, and was driven by the desire to make religion relevant and respectable.

Liberals, believing that sincerity, integrity, and impartiality characterized both true science and true religion, could not bring themselves to reject one or the other, but felt that there were traditional elements in religious orthodoxy that perhaps were not essential to a true and living religion. They felt that these non-essentials were the only ones really threatened by the findings of science.

Believing also that the empirical method of obtaining knowledge via sense experience (according to Hume and Kant) was the only possible one, they sought to reconstruct religion and theology on the basis of the empirical approach. Human experience, and especially religious experience, thus became the source and touchstone of theology. And since all empirical concepts were viewed as subject to revision, all theological definitions became relative to ongoing experience.

Because of its emphasis on religious experience rather than on a supernatural revelation, Liberalism has often been accused of turning theology into anthropology. Theology became the study of the religious consciousness, and called into active participation such disciplines as Philosophy of Religion, History of Religions, Study of Comparative Religions, and Psychology of Religion.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is called the "father of modern theology". He was the first to attempt to construct an empirical approach to religion via specifically Christian experience. He was influenced by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, with two modifications. Schleiermacher believed that although religious experience does not give us knowledge of God in Himself, yet it does give us real knowledge of God's relation to us. And he believed that theology does not deal merely with the phenomenal, but also with the noumenal (i.e., not only with things as they appear, but also with things as they are).

Schleiermacher was also influenced by Hegel's philosophy of continuity and its emphasis on the divinity of man. He found the real revelation of God in the inner life of man, and particularly in Jesus Christ, who Schleiermacher felt enjoyed a greater measure of God-consciousness than any other man.

Religion in its essence is "the feeling of absolute dependence". When we reflect on our consciousness, we discover a realm in which we have a sense of being absolutely dependent, as being ultimately derived from and sustained by something beyond us. The being whom we experience in this relationship is God.

Schleiermacher felt that the basic task of theology is that of careful analysis and description of the religious consciousness (the feeling of absolute dependence) to determine what doctrines can be discovered in it. Such analysis yields three basic aspects of religious (or more specifically, Christian) consciousness: (a) consciousness of dependence; (b) consciousness of sin; and (c) consciousness of grace. Further analysis of these aspects yields certain attributes of God, as follows:

- (1) Consciousness of dependence
  - (a) Omnipotence (the basic attribute)
  - (b) Eternity
  - (c) Omnipresence
  - (d) Omniscience
- (2) Consciousness of sin
  - (a) Holiness
  - (b) Righteousness
  - (c) Mercy

(3) Consciousness of grace

(a) Love

(b) Wisdom

The meaning of each of these attributes is determined by their reference to human experience.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) reacted against the subjectivism of Schleiermacher, and held that the focus of theology should not be subjective experience within the believer, but rather the object toward which faith is directed and from which faith is received. The object could only be God as revealed in Jesus Christ. However, for Ritschl what was of real importance was not Jesus' ontological nature, but his historical character and personality, i.e., his acts and sayings. And even in this regard, what was important was not the sheer facticity of this or that act or saying, but Jesus' meaning for the believer as revealing God to him.

Ritschl thus directed research away from Christian experience to the historical Jesus (a move toward greater objectivity). However, between the theologian and the objective revelation, he placed faith with its value judgments. By faith, Ritschl said, we accept those values in Christ that have real religious significance. By analysis of this faith, we arrive at religious truth. Thus the real source of theology became once again the faith of the believer. Since the virgin birth, the miracles, and the physical resurrection of Christ had no religious significance for Ritschl, he felt justified in denying them.

Thus, although Ritschl's method appeared to have a more objective starting point than that of Schleiermacher, in the end his emphasis on the experience of faith with its value judgments brought him back to theological subjectivism.

The Theory of Evolution was highly influential in the development of liberalism. The general idea of evolution as the historical process by which contemporary institutions, customs, and beliefs have come to be what they are and are now passing slowly into other forms, had become a prominent factor in philosophy a generation before Darwin's time (chiefly through Hegel). When Darwin published his *Origin of Species* (1859), his main contribution was seen to be an empirical verification of the organic evolution hypothesis.

The theory of evolution had three significant influences on religion during the Age of Immanence:

(1) It seemed to imply a naturalistic view of man's origin and nature, which was contrary to the account of man given by religion.

(2) It implied a development of the Judaeo-Christian Religion (as indeed, of all religions) from a very low, primitive form through the stages of fetishism, animism, polytheism, and henotheism, into the ethical monotheism of the eighth century B. C. prophets, which is the basis of the Christian religion.

This view of the process of development from cruder and less adequate ideas of God to higher and more ethical ones opened a way of relief from the distressing difficulties many liberals had felt existed in the orthodox view -- the imprecatory Psalms, the threats of eternal torture in hell-fire, the Old Testament massacres of men, women, and children, the picture of God as a merciless judge and ruthless punisher -- and was seen as more closely approximating man's innate sense of justice and love.

(3) It made ample room for the higher criticism of the Bible. The assumption could now be upheld that the Bible is not a supernatural revelation of God, but a record of human experiences, and of the natural development of the ideas of God and the world, of sin and redemption, of religious worship and ethical ideals. Instead of containing absolute and unadulterated truth, the Bible could be viewed as containing a historical representation of truth mixed with error, or of truth gradually emerging out of error.



Modernism held that the goal of religious experience was the integration of personality, and that the kind of religious experience which most fully fosters the integration of personality is that exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus. Although Christianity could not be granted any absolute status among the religions of the world, it could be viewed as possessing a relative superiority.

Modernism held that the outlook concerning the ultimate triumph of the forces of good over the forces of evil was optimistic. God himself was viewed by some modernists as a finite, struggling, suffering, and growing God; by others as the consummation of the moral and religious evolution of the human race; by still others as that power in the world to which we gain right adjustment when achieving the greatest goods of which human nature is capable, especially the good of harmonious unification and effective invigoration of personality.

Most modernists held that human personality was immortal, while rejecting the orthodox ideas of hell and heaven. They believed that the integration of personality would find fuller expression beyond this present life, in a continued existence. They rejected miracles, prayer as petition for special benefit, and the Bible as the inspired record of supernatural revelation. They redefined the concepts of sin, grace, salvation, etc., in the light of present experience.

Humanistic Liberalism appeared early in the twentieth century. Most liberals tended to find the heart of religious experience in the need of integrating human personality into a coherent whole. But whereas the modernist held that Christianity provided the most effective way to attain this wholeness, the humanistic liberal, consistent with empirical method, held that whatever aids people to achieve this experience is religious. It followed that the traditional distinction between Christian and the non-Christian religions, and between the religious and the secular realms, must be dropped. Thus any devotion to an appealing good in the form of an artistic vision, the advancement of scientific truth, an enticing social cause, a personal friendship, a family trust -- whatever specific form it might take -- through which an individual found himself, attaining serenity and unity of purpose, was *ipso facto* religious. Religion could then be defined as man's eager, unshackled quest for whatever goodness and fineness life makes possible.

The culmination of Liberalism in continental, English, and American theology occurred during the first two or three decades of the twentieth century.

On the Continent, Gustav Theodor Fechner, Rudolf Hermann Lotze, and Eduard von Hartmann were attempting to synthesize science and philosophy, and Hermann Cohen and his successors were making epistemology their entral concern. The dominant tone of the nineteenth century was post-Kantian and post-Hegelian, but as yet pre-existentialist. This dominance was reflected in the theology of the Ritschlian school, especially in Wilhelm Hermann and Adolf von Harnack.

In England the neo-Hegelians, Francis H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet, dominated philosophy. The "New Theology" controversy (1907-1910) centering about the immanentist, R. J. Campbell, occasioned a strong reaction, on the part of P. T. Forsyth, J. R. Illingworth, and Baron von Hugel, in the direction of transcendence. But the dominant tone remained that of immanence until the 1930's.

In the United States, Drummond, Fiske, and Abbott appropriated the framework of evolution for the doctrine of God. Just before the turn of the twentieth century, such theological schools as Oberlin, Union, Chicago, Yale, and Colgate joined the already liberal Andover in its theological viewpoint. This shift was largely due to the coming of such men as H. C. King (Oberlin), Shailer Mathews (Chicago), and W. N. Clarke (Colgate). After 1900 a movement

called the "New Theology" made a violent attack on supernaturalism and orthodox theism, calling them "deism" and "spatialism". For the "New Theology" God's location was at first in nature, but in the 1920's a humanistic wing located God (for those who still used the term) within human goals and values. This mood was reflected in the Gospel of Social Christianity, which was driven by the optimistic hope that the Kingdom of God can come in and through the United States, reforming individuals and groups by means of a sermon on the mount ethic. Here Walter Rauschenbusch exerted great influence. When World War I came, it was looked upon in the United States as a necessary dark step toward better things. Hence the 1920's in the United States were marked by such classical Liberal works on the immanence of God as J. M. Snowden, *The Personality of God* (1920); H. A. Jones, I (1922); C. A. Beckwith, *The Idea of God* (1922); G. B. Foster, *Christianity in its Modern Expression* (1924); J. F. Newton, ed., *My Idea of God* (1926); D. S. Robinson, *The God of the Liberal Christian* (1926); J. E. Turner, *The Nature of Deity* (1927); J. W. Buckham, *The Humanity of God* (1928); Richard Roberts, *The Christian God* (1929); and E. S. Ames, *Religion* (1929).

Hence the first three decades in England and the United States, and the first two decades in continental Europe, are marked by the culmination of the theism of immanence.

A number of transitional factors contributed to the coming of the new mood of transcendence. Four factors in particular may be mentioned:

#### (1) Criticisms of middle-class culture

In Europe, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Strindberg, and van Gogh were early prophets of revolt against what they called the "bourgeois spirit". In the United States, Herman Melville, Samuel Clemens, Theodore Dreiser, H. L. Mencken, and Sinclair Lewis were blasting away at the foundations of American middle-class morality and its assumptions at the same time that theologians were saying "man is recognized as divine." These social critics sensed something in culture and in life itself that was shaky if not downright rotten. They attempted to uncover it!

#### (2) New currents in philosophy

On the Continent, early criticisms of Hegel (Schelling, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Marx, Trendelenburg, etc.) set the stage for the coming of a more realistic temper. Existentialism was the strongest reflection of this reaction, emphasizing Idealism's mistake of identifying statements about existence with existence itself, and the finitude and estranged nature of human existence as discontinuous with the divine.

In addition to Existentialism's rejection of the continuity principle of Hegel, a new emphasis came to be placed on the "other person". Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had emphasized the uniqueness of individual existence, thus setting the individual over against other individuals. Nicolas Berdyaev and especially Martin Buber developed these insights into the concept of the Other. Buber is especially important for his classic analysis, in *I and Thou*, of the relation between the Single One and the Other, thus pointing the way, in relating man to God, to transcendence. Applied to God, this transcendence asserts God to be the irreducible Other.

In the area of cosmological metaphysics, T. E. Hulme and Lloyd Morgan attempted a metaphysics grounded, not in continuity, but in discontinuity. Morgan, in his *Emergent Evolution* (1923), outlined a theory of emerging levels of reality with new levels not reducible to or explainable by earlier ones. Hulme, in his *Speculations* (1924), outlined discontinuous levels described as inorganic, organic, and ethico-religious. The rise of the new physics, with its questioning of all simple monistic assumptions, and the rise of Neo-realism, also contributed, by virtue of their emphases on pluralism, to the defeat of all simple monisms (and therefore to the defeat of the immanentistic temper of continuity).

### (3) New disciplines in religious studies

In relation to the nature of religion itself, primitivism was somewhat qualified by the work of Rudolf Otto, who found in all religion an element of awe and fascination before an Other which can never be completely understood in categories not engendered by itself (*The Idea of the Holy*, 1923). A revival of mysticism took place in the first two decades (three in the United States) in England and Germany, which fostered this new stress on God's transcendence. This revival may be seen in W. R. Inge's *Christian Mysticism* (1898); Baron Friedrich von Hugel's *The Mystical Element in Religion* (1908); Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* (1911); Rufus Jones' *Studies in Mystical Religion* (1919); and Rudolf Otto's *Mysticism East and West* (1926). This revival may also be seen in the new translations of original texts and studies of such classical mystics as Johannes (Meister) Eckhart (1260-1327) and Jacob Boehme (1575-1621).

Historical theology also contributed to the coming of the new temper. Out of the Luther studies of the Ritschlian school and the general reworking of the Reformation period came background material for the work of Barth and Brunner, especially Luther's concept of "God hidden and revealed". The rise of "Biblical theology", with its attempts to go behind the *Historisch* to the motifs that make up *Heilsgeschichte* (covenant, law, cult, salvation, God, etc. ), strongly clashed with many of the liberal syntheses, and thus helped to defeat Liberalism.

### (4) National and international catastrophes

Not until the twentieth century did the preceding factors become a landslide. This was directly due to catastrophes that produced a dramatic change of mood. In Europe it was World War I that marked the formal ending of the Age of Immanence. In the United States, however, untouched by the ravages of war, the catastrophe was not the war but the depression that began in 1929.

In the theological revolution on the Continent, Karl Barth is the key figure. His studies leading to the *Römerbrief* and the controversies that ensued, the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten*, and the writings of Gogarten, Brunner, and Bultmann, all conspired to change European theology in the 1920's.

In the United States and England the years 1929 to 1934 were the crucial years of change, largely through the influence of Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr, and Tillich. By 1936 "Neo-supernaturalism" was established.

## 2. DIALECTICAL THEOLOGY

This movement in liberal theology has been known by various names, each of which represents some aspect or emphasis of the viewpoint. It has been called Realistic Theology, Neo-Supernaturalism, the New Biblical Theology, Theological Positivism, the Dialectical Theology, the Theology of Crisis, Neo-Orthodoxy, the New Modernism, Barthianism, Neo-Reformation Theology, Kerygmatic Theology, and the Theology of the Word. Not all of these names are commendatory!

The two major voices of this movement are Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. Both Barth (1886-1968) and Brunner (1889-1966) were born in Switzerland.

### KARL BARTH

On May 10, 1886, the first son of a minister of the Swiss Reformed Church in Basel, Switzerland, was born. The minister's name was Fritz Barth, and this first-born son was named Karl. Two other sons were subsequently born to Fritz Barth, named Peter and Heinrich. Peter became a Calvin scholar, and Heinrich became a professor of philosophy at the University of Basel. Both of Karl's grandfathers were also ministers.

When Karl was three years old, his father was made *privat dozent* (lecturer) at the University of Berne, and thus the family moved to Switzerland's capital city. Soon afterward (in 1891), Fritz Barth was appointed Professor of New Testament and Early Church History at Berne.

In his *gymnasium* (prep school) training in Berne, young Karl found himself attracted, not to mathematics and the sciences, but to history and drama. As boys, he and his brothers had enjoyed playing with toy soldiers, and he had insisted upon playing the role of Napoleon, the tactician par excellence. He became fascinated with the history of military tactics, an interest which he maintained for the rest of his life, even to the extent of becoming an American Civil War buff. As a Swiss youth, he also underwent a kind of paramilitary training.

In his sixteenth year he received instruction for confirmation in the Swiss Reformed Church. It was during this period, he states, that his interest in systematic theology was kindled.

In 1904, at the age of eighteen, he began theological studies at the University of Berne under the direction of his father. He studied systematic theology under Hermann Ludemann, but was not attracted to him. Instead, he became vitally interested in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. After four semesters at Berne, Karl wished to take further studies at Marburg, but was opposed by his father, who wanted him to be exposed to a more conservative influence.

As a compromise, Karl entered the University of Berlin in the fall of 1906. Here he came into contact with Reinhold Seeberg (historical theology), but was not attracted to him. However, he avidly sat at the feet of the liberal church

historian, Adolf von Harnack. During his one semester at Berlin, Karl also read Wilhelm Hermann's book on ethics, an experience which confirmed his determination to study in Marburg (where Hermann taught). Nevertheless, he returned to Berne for the spring semester to please his father.

In the fall of 1907, Karl enrolled at the University of Tübingen to sit under the teaching of his father's choice, Adolf Schlatter, a rather conservative New Testament scholar. He did not find Schlatter appealing, however, and wrote letters to his father, saying, "I told you so!" However, he also heard Theodor Haring lecture on systematic theology, and became quite interested in the subject.

At last, in the spring of 1908, his father relented and Karl enrolled at Marburg, where he remained for three semesters. Here he heard lectures of such renowned New Testament scholars as Johannes Weiss, Adolf Julicher, and Wilhelm Heitmüller, as well as those of the leading Neo-Kantian philosophers, Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. But the outstanding feature of his studies at Marburg was the lectures of the most renowned systematic theologian of his day, Wilhelm Hermann. Speaking of this experience, Barth later wrote, "I absorbed Hermann through all my pores!"

Having completed his university education, Karl Barth returned to Berne to take his theological examinations, which he completed successfully. He was ordained in the summer of 1909 (at the age of 23), and would have entered the pastoral ministry, but did not feel ready. He returned to Marburg and assisted Martin Rade for a short time in the editing of the liberal periodical, *Die Christliche Welt*.

Late in 1909 he returned to Switzerland, where he was appointed assistant minister of the German-speaking congregation of Geneva, where he remained for almost two years. Here he preached in the same hall in which John Calvin had lectured. He diligently reread Schleiermacher and worked his way through Calvin's Institutes. At this time he considered himself an uneasy disciple of Albrecht Ritschl, uneasy because of Ernst Troeltsch's philosophy of religion, and because he could see no better way before him.

In 1911 Karl Barth was appointed pastor of the Reformed Church of Safenwil in the canton of Aargau (north-central border of Switzerland), where he was to remain for ten years. Safenwil lay in the middle of an agricultural area (cattle, cereals, dairy and general farming), but it boasted three industries: a sawmill, a dye factory, and a weaving mill. Here Barth was faced not only with the problems of sermon preparation, preaching, and pastoral care, but also with social problems involving labor-management relations.

In 1912 Karl's father died. In 1913 Karl married Nelly Hoffman, an attractive young woman who was also a talented violinist. Her interest in music was complemented by Karl's own propensity for classical music, especially that of Mozart.

Also in 1913 Eduard Thurneysen, a fellow Swiss whom Barth had known at Marburg, became pastor at Leutwil, a village on the other side of the mountain from Safenwil. Thurneysen and Barth found that they had much in common, became fast friends, and corresponded regularly or met occasionally to discuss common problems or interests. The influence of Thurneysen on Barth was great. He introduced Barth to Christoph Blumhardt (who connected the kingdom of God with the social and political movements of the time), to Hermann Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz (leaders of the Swiss religious-socialist

movement), and to the works of Feodor Dostoevsky (whose writings influenced Barth in his work on *The Epistle of the Romans*).

Also during this time Barth became acquainted with Emil Brunner another young Swiss pastor in an adjoining canton.

Both Thurneysen and Barth became religious socialists, and Barth took the side of the workers in Safenwil who were attempting to gain better working conditions and more adequate wages. Because of his stand on social issues some of the people in the village referred to him as the "red pastor", and in his own congregation one of the factory owners left the Reformed Church and joined the Old Catholic Church. The leaders of the religious socialist movement, Ragaz and Kutter, claimed that socialism would usher in the kingdom of God while the church was wasting its time on individual salvation.

Then came the great WAR.

In his book *The Humanity of God*, Barth reports his first serious disillusionment with Liberal Theology. He writes:

One day at the beginning of August of that year (1914) impressed me personally as the day of doom, when ninety-three German intellectuals published their approval of the war-policy of Kaiser Wilhelm and his advisors; among whom to my horror I was compelled to recognize the names of nearly all my theological professors, whom I had heretofore devoutly honored. Confused by their morality, I saw that I could no longer follow their Ethics and Dogmatics, their biblical expositions and historical constructions. I realized that for me at any rate the theology of the nineteenth century no longer had any future.

As the war progressed, the young pastor was faced with the crushing realities of life! As he stood before his people, preaching the "good advice" of Modernism with its easy formula for peace on earth, the cannon at Verdun punctuated his sentences and punctured his optimistic social gospel! He found to his dismay that, instead of a message to meet the desperate need of men's souls, he had only a collection of superficial human speculations!

Barth began an intensive study of the Bible, especially the writings of Paul, and discovered that the Bible took a realistic view of life and of man's ability to save himself and society. He discovered that the God of the Bible was not the God of his teachers, and that man cannot of himself know or speak of God. He took up a study of Romans and discovered, not man's religion and religious ethics, but man's sin, God's judgment, and yet God's grace and forgiveness through faith. In 1916 Barth wrote, "I began to recover noticeably from the effects of my theological studies and the influences of the liberal-political pre-war theology." By 1917 his new views began to crystalize, and in 1918 he wrote his commentary on Romans. In addition to his biblical studies, Barth had turned to Luther and Calvin, and to Kierkegaard, whose influence on his thinking was great. During the next year this young unknown pastor of a small village church became famous, largely through the publication of his *Romerbrief* (*The Epistle to the Romans*).

In 1921 Barth published the completely re-written second edition of *Romans*. In its preface Barth included a statement of his ultimate first principle:

If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my

regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance "God is in heaven and thou art on earth." The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.

Also in 1921 he was called to a chair in Reformed Theology at Göttingen, an appointment that he accepted. In January 1922, Munster conferred upon Barth the Doctor of Theology degree for "manifold contributions to the revision of the formulation of religious and theological questions." This came as a surprising (but pleasant) shock!

In 1923 Barth, F. Gogarten, E. Thurneysen, and G. Merz founded the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* (*Between the Times*, i.e., of Christ's resurrection and His final revelation), which journal became a rallying-point for the Dialectical Theology. During this period Barth had numerous contacts with an up-and-coming New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, and occasional contacts with another young theologian, Emil Brunner. Both Bultmann and Brunner were greatly affected by Barth's views.

In 1925 Barth became professor of theology at Munster, where he staunchly opposed the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1927 he produced his first effort in systematic theology, entitled *Christian Dogmatics*. The first printing of four thousand copies was sold out almost at once! However, Barth was not satisfied with it.

During the period 1917-1927 Barth had been under the influence of Søren Kierkegaard's twofold emphasis upon divine revelation and human existence. Although he had attempted, in the second edition of *Romans*, to rid himself of all influences of the Neo-Kantian philosophical concepts which he had employed in the first edition, he now realized that in his first volume of systematic theology he had based his doctrine of the Word of God on the concepts of existential philosophy. The very thing that he had himself abhorred; i.e., the formulation of a theology according to the structure of human philosophy, was precisely what he had done. Speaking of the change from Volume I of *Christian Dogmatics* to Volume I, Part I of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth writes:

... to the best of my ability I have cut out in this second issue of the book everything that in the first issue might give the slightest appearance of giving to theology a basis, support, or even a mere justification in the way of existential philosophy. "The Word or existence?" The first edition gave acumen or even stupidity some cause to put this question. I may hope that the answer to it, at least so far as my purpose is concerned, is now clear.

Accordingly, Barth tore up his first dogmatic attempt.

On this very issue of the existential interpretation of theology Barth, sometime between 1927 and 1929, broke with Bultmann.

In 1930 he went to the University of Bonn, where he lectured to overflowing classrooms. In 1931 he published his book on Anselm, in which he developed the epistemology of his theology; and in 1932 he published the first volume of his monumental *Church Dogmatics*, of which twelve volumes were completed (seventeen were originally planned), and of which it can be said that it is the most comprehensive dogmatics since Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*.

In Volume II, Part 1 of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth recalls that in 1933 the Evangelical Church in Germany was called upon:

To recognize in the political events of that year, and especially in the form of the God-sent Adolf Hitler, a source of specific new revelation of God which, demanding obedience and trust, took its place beside the revelation attested in the Holy Scripture, claiming that it should be acknowledged by Christian proclamation and theology as equally binding and obligatory... It has since become clear that behind the first demand stood quite another... what was really intended, although only obscurely outlined in 1933 was the proclamation of this new revelation as the only revelation.

In May 1934, representatives of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions in Germany met at Barmen, and drew up a Declaration, in response to this demand of the Third Reich. In part the Declaration reads as follows:

Jesus Christ, as he is testified to us in the Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, whom we are to hear, whom we are to trust and obey in life and in death.

We repudiate the false teaching that the church can and must recognize yet other happenings and powers, images and truths as divine revelation alongside this one Word of God, as a source of her preaching.

We repudiate the false teaching that the church can turn over the form of her message and ordinances at will or according to some dominant ideological and political convictions.

Accordingly, Barth refused to open his classes with the Nazi salute; refused to pledge unconditional allegiance to Hitler; and in 1935 was forced to leave Germany. He returned to the University of Basel to become professor of Systematic Theology, a post which he held until his retirement in 1962.

Following his retirement, he was kept so busy with speaking engagements, correspondence, colloquies, visitors, writing, and reading of theses, that he found little time to listen to his collection of Mozart recordings. When asked when the thirteenth volume of his *Church Dogmatics* would appear, Barth simply said, "Let people read my first twelve volumes!"

*Time* magazine, in its May 31, 1963 issue, called Karl Barth "the greatest living Protestant theologian".

It is important to understand Barth in terms of the development of his thought. When, for instance, the English translation of his *Römerbrief* (Second Edition) appeared in 1932, Barth wrote in the forward that he now looked on this commentary, written and published ten years earlier, as a book "written by another man."

Three major periods of Barth's theological development may be distinguished:

(a) The first period finds Barth within the framework of Liberalism, under the influence of Adolf Harnack, Albrecht Ritschl, and Wilhelm Hermann, and the neo-Kantians Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. This period extends from Barth's university days to his reaction to Liberalism in 1917.



(b) The second period finds Barth under the influence of Kierkegaard's double emphasis on divine revelation and human existence. This period extends from the writing of the *Romerbrief* to 1929.

(c) The third period finds Barth repudiating Kierkegaard's existentialism, tearing up the first volume of his *Christian Dogmatics* (of 1927), publishing his book on Anselm (in 1931), beginning his monumental *Church Dogmatics*, and repudiating Brunner's *Personalism*. This period extends from 1930 to Barth's death.

These three periods in Barth's theological development have been called the pre-existentialist stage, the existentialist stage, and the post-existentialist stage, respectively. Perhaps the second name, "existentialist stage", is an over simplification.

Within the third period two sub-stages may perhaps be distinguished. In 1950 Brunner began to write of the "new Barth"; and in 1952 Barth's famous article accusing Rudolf Bultmann of a new modernism, of subjectivism, and of a one-sided concern with human existence, appeared. From that time on Barth quietly inserted more and more "objectifying elements" into his theology, in order to further distinguish it from, and to keep it from being further exposed by, Bultmann.

Thus from 1930 to 1949, in the first sub-stage of the third period, Barth was placing his emphasis on that Geschichte that exists only for faith. By Geschichte Barth meant Revelation-history, or revelatory present encounter. But from 1950 on, in the second sub-stage of the third period, Barth increasingly emphasized those "objectifying elements" in Geschichte that do not exist only for faith, and yet are not *Historie*! By *Historie* Barth meant temporal history, human history, mere objective occurrence in the past. Yet, although he inserted "objectifying elements", he did not retreat one inch from his flat denial of the objective character of divine revelation and of the validity of that revelation for all men irrespective of subjective decision!

#### BRIEF OUTLINE OF KARL BARTH'S THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

<u>Period</u>	<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Philosophical Framework</u>	<u>Theological View</u>
1st	1905-1917	Neo-Kantianism	Modernism
2nd	1918-1929	Existentialism	Dialectical Theology
3rd	1930-1958	Repudiation (alleged) of every philosophy	Barthianism

As to the development of Dialectical Theology or Barthianism in the United States, several events may be mentioned as important. In 1928 Barth's book *The Word of God and the Word of Man* was translated into English and was read avidly in England and the United States. Also in 1928 Emil Brunner visited the United States and lectured on Barthianism. In 1932 Reinhold Niebuhr published his *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, and in 1933 Paul Tillich came to the United States. Thus in England and the United States the crucial years of change fall between 1929 and 1934.

If the question be asked, "What are the basic teachings of Karl Barth?" the question may be answered by looking at Barth's theological method, his controlling presuppositions, and some of his theological positions.

## THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

### Barth's Theological Method

Karl Barth attempted to repudiate every alliance with philosophy in order to develop a genuine "theology of the Word". Unfortunately, he adopted a number of first principles, the application of which to Scripture results in an exegesis which in a number of cases is forced, and a theology which, at many points, contradicts not only Scripture but also itself! His theological method may be represented by the following four steps:

- (1) He adopts certain philosophical-theological presuppositions
- (2) He draws certain logical inferences from these presuppositions
- (3) He applies these presuppositions and their logical inferences to his exegesis of Scripture, and interprets Scripture by means of them
- (4) He reluctantly admits that in some cases such application and interpretation cannot be fully carried out

### Barth's Basic (and Controlling) Presuppositions

#### 1. God is wholly transcendent

This foundation principle of all of Barth's theology is expressed in the Preface to the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*. Barth writes:

If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: "God is in heaven and thou art on earth." The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.

God is thus the totally Other. He is transcendent in every respect: in identity, in essence, and in character. God is infinite, man is finite; God is holy, man is sinner. Thus there is an infinite, unbridgeable chasm between God and man.

#### 2. God is rationally inapprehensible

The discontinuity between God and man is so great that whatever we may say about God must of necessity be filled with paradox and contradiction. God cannot be known rationally, but only existentially.

#### 3. God is sovereign

God always remains above and free from created reality at every point. He is never caught in His own being, or in His decrees, or in His works, or in any system of "revealed truths".

4. God is always Subject, never object

God is always a personal, living, knowing, self-disclosing Thou; never an impersonal, objective It! Man can know God only as a person knows a person, never as a person knows a thing; only as a subject knows a subject never as a subject knows an object.

5. Revelation of God is Christomonistic

Revelation of God is found, not in nature, nor in man, nor in history, nor even in the Bible, but only in Jesus Christ. He is the only revelation; in fact, revelation is Christ.

6. Revelation is Geschichte

Although revelation enters history (*Historie*), it always remains hidden, in the realm of revelatory present encounter (*Geschichte*). This must be so, because it is revelation of the transcendent God, who is rationally inapprehensible. Thus God is concealed in the very act of revealing Himself. Barth expresses this in the statement, "*Geschichte ist historisch, aber Historie ist nicht geschichtlich*" ("Revelation is historical, but history is not revelational").

7. Truth is found in the Revelation-encounter

Truth is not to be found in "revealed propositions" or assertions or predications about God; rather Truth is an encounter! Real Truth is personal, transforming, existential! This must follow, since no intelligible propositions can be formed concerning metaphysics of a transcendent God!

8. Faith is irrational response to Revelation

God-in-Christ breaks through from eternity into time and encounters us, confronting us with the decision of faith. And this faith has nothing to do with reason, for Christian faith is above reason, and even contradictory to reason!

9. Scripture is a human witness to divine Revelation

The Bible is a record of human responses to experiences of divine Revelation, of human attempts to say something about the experience of the transcendent God. The Bible is not the Word of God (Christ is the only Word of God), but is rather the word of man about the Word of God. Concerning the Scriptures, Barth says: "They could err, and they have erred in every word.... but precisely with this fallible and erring human word they have spoken the Word of God."

10. The single hermeneutical principle of Scripture is Christ

Revelation is Christ. The Bible is a witness to Revelation. Christ is thus the sole topic of Scripture and of theology (Christocentrism). Thus the decisive principle of interpretation for all Scripture, and the starting point, method, and goal of theology, must be Christ. Thus theology in each of its divisions becomes Christology.

### Barth's Theological Positions

The following lists of affirmations and denials are not exhaustive, but only representative.

#### Barth Affirmed:

- The Trinity
- The necessity of sin in God's creation
- The Fall of man and original sin
- The sinfulness of all mankind
- God's condemnation of sin
- The true deity and the true humanity of Christ
- The Incarnation
- The Virgin Birth
- The substitutionary atonement
- The resurrection of Christ
- The ascension of Christ
- The forgiveness of sins
- Justification by grace through faith alone

#### Barth Denied:

- The possibility of objective revelation
- The Bible as a revelation of God and of truth
- The inerrancy of Scripture
- The Bible as final authority
- General revelation
- The historicity of Adam
- The historicity of the Fall
- The historicity of miracles
- The sinlessness of Christ
- The historical character of Christ's resurrection
- Life after this life
- The physical resurrection of the body and everlasting life

**A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SELECTED WORKS BY KARL BARTH**

*Romans* (1918)

*The Word of God and the Word of Man* (1924)

*The Resurrection of the Dead* (1924)

*Come Holy Spirit* (1924)

*The Christian Life* (1926)

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*Church Dogmatics (Die kirchliche Dogmatik), 12 vols.* (1932-59)

*Theological Existence Today!* (1933)

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*The Christian Cause* (1941)

*The Church and the War* (1944)

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### 3. EXISTENTIAL THEOLOGY

#### General Remarks

In the twentieth century collapse of idealism and naturalism, at least four types of philosophy arose: pragmatism, phenomenology, linguistic analysis, and existentialism.

In his famous essay, *Existentialism*, Jean-Paul Sartre asks the question, "What is meant by the term existentialism?"

Most people who use the word would be rather embarrassed if they have to explain it, since, now that the word is all the rage, even the work of a musician or painter is being called existentialist... Someone recently told me of a lady who, when she let slip a vulgar word in a moment of irritation, excused herself by saying, "I guess I'm becoming an existentialist."... A gossip columnist (in a certain periodical) signs himself The Existentialist, so that by this time the word has been so stretched and has taken on so broad a meaning, that is no longer means anything at all.

Walter Kaufman, Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University, wrote that

Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the living "existentialists" have repudiated this label, and a bewildered outsider might well conclude that the only thing they have in common is a marked aversion for each other. To add to the confusion, many writers of the past have frequently been hailed as members of this movement, and it is extremely doubtful whether they would have appreciated the company to which they are consigned. In view of this, it might be argued that the label "existentialism" ought to be abandoned altogether.

Nevertheless, lists of "pre-existentialists" and existentialists include the following names: Soren Kierkegaard, Feodor Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, Miguel de Unamuno, F. H. Heineman, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Rainer Rilke, Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, Nicolas Berdyaev, Leon Shestov, Martin Buber, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

The heart of existentialism in its negative implications is said to consist in the refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life.

Existentialists have not only reacted against all traditional and contemporary systems of philosophy, they have come to believe that present human existence is characterized by at least three motifs: alienation, meaninglessness, and absurdity. The following are mentioned as factors which have contributed to their reaction:

(1) The increasing dominance of technological alienation; which may be defined as that stage of technological achievement at which technology dominates man instead of man dominating it. An example of such development may be seen in the progression from man-made tools to man-made tools that use machines, to humanly-programmed machines that make tools, to machines that create other machines.

(2) The increasing loss of individuality, through alienation from the increasingly complex structure of society. As one philosopher points out:

Human institutions -- the stage, the government, the civil service, the party, the factory -- have become impersonal and anonymous powers of enormous strength which the individual tries in vain to master. Thence arises the growing sense of frustration, anxiety, and despair which pervades the Western hemisphere.

(3) The sense of personal alienation from the physical world, from other men, from oneself, and most of all, from God.

(4) The feeling that all these forms of alienation have caused a general loss of meaning in life. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

(5) The feeling that alienation coupled with meaninglessness ends in absurdity. This does not necessarily mean that the universe is absurd, but that man, who projects his absurdity into the world, is absurd. Many products of contemporary art and literature are undoubtedly absurd, and in that regard they are a true mirror of our time. "Absurdity of absurdities, all is absurd" seems to be the motto of the contemporary world.

(6) The failure of logical positivism and other current philosophies to come to grips with reality, with concrete experience, and with the most pressing problems of man and of human existence.

The three great existentialist classics are Soren Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*, and Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'etre et le neant (Being and Nothingness)*.

Although the European philosopher F. H. Heineman, in his book *New Paths in Philosophy* (1929) first used the term "Existenzphilosophie" (philosophy of existence), it is Soren Kierkegaard who is generally regarded as the spiritual father of existentialism.

### Soren Kierkegaard

Morton White, in *The Age of Analysis*, states:

The Dane Soren Kierkegaard is probably the most important figure in the history of existentialism, to which he contributed at least three things. First of all his interest in feelings like boredom, dread, and anxiety, which he attempted to analyze psychologically; secondly, his Christian faith and his anti-clericalism; thirdly, and most important from our point of view, his ideas on existence.



S. U. Zuidema of the Free University of Amsterdam, in the concluding paragraph of his monograph on Kierkegaard in the *Modern Thinkers* series, writes:

For anyone who wishes to understand the period in which we live, a knowledge of the basic ideas of Kierkegaard is indispensable. The origin of these ideas is inwardly bound up with the person of Kierkegaard but their power and content go far beyond his personal life... Any attempt to conquer irrationalism must begin with Kierkegaard.

Who was Soren Kierkegaard? He was born on May 5, 1813, in Copenhagen, Denmark, the youngest of seven children. His parents were of peasant stock. Under a very strict orthodox Lutheran education of a somber and depressing kind, Soren reports that he never really enjoyed his childhood. He says that he was never a child, never young, had never really lived, had never experienced the "joy of life", and had never enjoyed immediate contact with other people. An outsider during his school and university days, gifted, witty, but argumentative and an object of mockery (because of a humpback), he lived in an imaginary world. At the University of Copenhagen he absorbed Hegelianism, the prevailing philosophy of the day. In 1840 he passed the theological examination, entered seminary, and in 1841 delivered his first sermon in a Copenhagen church. In 1840 he had become engaged to Regina Olsen, but broke the engagement in 1841. This break had significant consequences for his literary and spiritual life. It marked the beginning of a very prolific literary activity, which was accompanied by an ever-increasing loneliness and withdrawal from contact with other people. The polemic character of his writings brought him into conflict with the Danish version of the British Punch, the *Corsair*, and with the official state church. Kierkegaard came to regard it as his mission in life to defend true Christian life against its distortion by the church. These constant polemics broke his health; and on October 2, 1885, while walking in the streets of Copenhagen, he collapsed and was brought to the Frederiks Hospital, where he died on November 11.

This brief biographical sketch does not reveal what it was that made Soren Kierkegaard of such great influence and importance in the twentieth century. Although he was a lonely thinker of nineteenth-century Denmark who made no mark on his own age and who died in relative obscurity, he has become a central figure in the genesis of existentialism.

Kierkegaard's influence is based on the translation of his works, first into German in 1909, into Italian in 1910, into French in 1929, and into English in 1938. Among these works are 35 books and a 20-volume journal. His books include *Either-Or* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1844), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), *Stages on life's Way* (1845), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), *The Present Age* (1847), *Purity of Heart* (1847), *Sickness Unto Death* (1849), and *Attack Upon Christendom* (1855).

Although a mere mention of Kierkegaard's basic principles does not begin to suggest the breadth and richness of his thought, perhaps a brief listing of six of his first principles concerning human existence would help us to understand something of his tremendous influence:

(1) "Becoming is prior to being" -- This starting point of all existentialism reverses the formula in metaphysics prevalent since the time of Plato and Aristotle; namely, that essence precedes existence. Plato said that forms were eternal and thus preceded the existence of particulars; Aristotle said that forms were nothing in themselves, but existed only in existing particulars. However, both agreed that in the order of being, essences, substances, natures always preceded their existence. In fact, they both held that the existence of a being necessarily implied that that being had substance, essence, and a nature. However, in Kierkegaard's view existence (primarily human existence) is prior to all forms, essences, or natures. A being's existence determines its essence, not the other way around. This emphasis is directed against every form of determinism.

(2) Human existence must be understood subjectively. Objective knowledge tells us nothing about the realm of human experience. What is needed is passionate involvement and reflection upon one's inner life.

(3) Man is free to decide his own existence, completely self-determining as to his nature or essence. This "dread freedom" brings upon man a great anxiety. Kierkegaard wrote, "When I behold my possibilities, I experience that dread which is 'the dizziness of freedom', and my choice is made in fear and trembling."

(4) Whenever the decision not to decide his own existence predominates in a man's life, then existence is determined for him by hereditary and environmental forces. This abandonment of his individuality and merging of himself into the crowd is unauthentic existence. On the other hand, whenever the decision to assert or to actualize his freedom predominates in a man's life, then he enters authentic existence. He acknowledges his responsibility for what he is and what he becomes, throws off the influences of all determinative factors, and decides what he shall be.

(5) For the existential man the achievement of authentic existence is no guarantee of happiness. On the contrary, it is the acceptance, without illusion, of anguish and loneliness.

(6) The fear of death is the finally decisive limitation to man's freedom. To be fully free, man must be willing to accept death, at any time and in any form. As long as he is unwilling to accept death, society and circumstances can place severe limits upon his choice of mode of existence. He can then choose only among those ways of being which are tolerated by society. However, if he does this, he abandons his individuality and loses authentic existence.

Now, however, Kierkegaard, believing in God, found that this conception of human existence involved him in a paradox, a dialectic, in which man is found to be in a tension between finitude and infinitude, between the relative and the Absolute. He came to the conviction that man's task as finite is to realize

himself as an infinite self. This involves man in an existential passion, an anxious concern to attain his own infinity, his absolute self. But how can this be accomplished?

Kierkegaard believed that this can only be done by a series of existential "leaps" from one stage of existence to a higher: from the esthetic to the ethical, and from the ethical to the religious. However, in the religious stage of existence there are two levels, separated by an infinite gulf. The low level Kierkegaard called "Religiosity A". On this level man knows nothing of a concrete revelation of God in history, in the man Christ Jesus. On the upper level, called "Religiosity B", man is placed before the face of the transcendent God, before the Absolute Paradox, which includes the revelation of the crucifixion and death of Christ. In this encounter, man discovers himself to be a sinner, and finds that the Absolute Paradox demands a complete reversal of man's existence.

This reversal means self-renunciation of one's self as one's own history, the renunciation of one's own freedom as a definitive power of decision. At this point faith, as infinite passion, prompted by the Absolute Paradox, chooses the irrational and the uncertain, i.e., the truth, and believes. At this point our existence transcends itself in a super-existential active choice, which is experienced at the same time as a gift of grace. And in this union of man's freedom and the grace of God before the Absolute Paradox, the process of becoming a Christian becomes a reality. Becoming a Christian, then, means to take this same course ever anew; to repeatedly take this path from offense to faith. Being a Christian means becoming a Christian.

Soren Kierkegaard's existentialist-dialectic philosophy-theology may thus be seen to comprise two basic elements: his theory of human existence and his theory of the Absolute Paradox. The former is united with the latter only with violence.

### SOREN KIERKEGAARD: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

"For anyone who wishes to understand the period in which we live, a knowledge of the basic ideas of Kierkegaard is indispensable... Kierkegaard arms irrationalism, in the form of existentialist philosophy and dialectical theology. Any attempt to conquer irrationalism must begin with Kierkegaard."

-- S. U. Zuidema

#### What is God?

1. God's existence is a becoming, not a being. The history of God is the history of eternal becoming.
2. God is transcendent, in an absolute, qualitative sense. There is an infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity.
3. God is Deus Absconditus. God is secretly present in His creation; hidden, unnoticeable, *incognito*. Thus to attempt to approach God through Natural Theology or the theistic proofs is paganism and blasphemy!

4. God is always Subject and never object. He can be known only as a person is known; i.e., existentially, by His self-communication and our subjectivity. This knowledge brings about a transformation.

### What is Revelation?

1. Divine revelation is historical. Divine revelation appears momentarily upon the horizon of human experience, as a revealed fact in the history of the human race, while remaining essentially transcendent to it.

2. Divine revelation appears in the man Christ Jesus. The becoming-God appears in Christ primarily in his redemptive incarnation and propitiatory sufferings, and secondarily in his sojourn upon the earth. In Christ and in him alone we encounter God.

3. Divine revelation is Absolute Paradox. The fundamental fact of the Christian faith is that the man Jesus is the Son of God, and is God himself. It is thus a unity of an eternal and temporal fact. Christ is simultaneously a historical and a non-historical person, the God-Man. Thus the fact of this divine revelation is an Absolute Paradox, which confronts us as the historical; which confronts us as a sign, a myth which points beyond itself to the non-historical.

4. Divine revelation is absurd. In its first degree (the historical), it is absurd to our thought, an offense to our reason. This means that it can be proven impossible by logic, by science, by scientific history, by rational thought. It is a "fact" that refutes itself, that cannot be a "fact". Yet, even though it is an impossible "fact", it is nevertheless a fact!

5. Divine revelation is an Encounter. It is an experience which takes place in the Moment, in which the eternal now and the temporal present meet. It is the Situation, in which God encounters man.

6. Divine revelation, when encountered, compels decision, either for or against it. Unbelievers reject it. The Christian believingly accepts this revelation as truth, and places his full confidence in the God whom he encounters concretely in Christ.

7. Divine revelation, since it is becoming, is always present. Therefore its call to decision is ever new, ever relevant, ever contemporary.

8. Divine revelation points toward or indicates the place where God's history must occur. Thus there is revelation only as hiddenness, and communication only as mystery or concealment.

### What is Scripture?

1. The Scriptures are a mere record of temporal history. They are a record of that which has already become, and is no longer becoming; of that which is already decided, and is no longer decision; of that which is already fact, and is no longer event; of that which is actual, and is no longer potential. It is not actual authentic (eternal) history. It is an ambiguous sign of what has actually happened.

2. Scripture is nevertheless a witness to Divine Revelation. It witnesses to the mystery of God's becoming, which is the mystery of his person and of his suffering and dying in their redemptive significance. This mystery is meditated through the Absolute Paradox, the self-witness of Christ with respect to his divine sonship.

3. Scripture, when it speaks of the mystery of God's becoming in historical terms, must be viewed as mythological.

4. Scripture, because it speaks in historical terms, is open to scientific historical question and criticism. But this criticism does not affect its witness to the real, authentic history, which transpires in the super-historical moment.

### What is Truth?

1. Real truth is existential (personal) and religious. For S. K., the structure of logic (thought) and the structure of Reality (being) were completely separate. Therefore, a new and different method of contacting Reality is needed. The doorway to Reality via rational thought was slammed shut! Thus philosophical or scientific approaches to truth simply will not suffice! Real truth, essential truth, is the truth for me, truth to which I give my devotion, truth that transforms me!

2. Real truth is paradoxical. The paradox expresses the logical form of the truth of God (the infinite Spirit) as it is received and heard by man (the finite spirit).

3. Real truth is inward or subjective. Propositions about Christ, God, etc., are not truths, but rather possibilities of truth. When an existent existentially responds to these possibilities in decision (i.e., in the venture of faith), then he (the subject) is in truth. These propositions are objective uncertainties when viewed logically, but subjective certainities when experienced existentially.

### What is Faith?

1. Faith is an intense passion. It is the highest passion of man's subjectivity, which transforms him. Faith is not mental assent in response to clear, unequivocal truth.

2. Faith is prompted by paradox. Its object is not rational truth. Faith is aroused only by paradox, which shocks, offends, and stings it. The Absolute Paradox is Jesus Christ as the God-Man, the humble man and teacher.

The supreme example of faith is that of Abraham offering up Isaac. Abraham is squarely faced with a paradox: he must slay the son of promise. He is willing to obey the word of God to him and slay Isaac. But the promise is also the word of God to him. In the passion of faith, he believes both words, risks the venture of faith, and receives his son back again.

The way of Abraham, for S. K., is the way of faith -- inwardness, subjectivity, passion, paradox, the absurd, venture, leap, risk; but above all, transformation. If there is no risk, there is no faith. To risk is to venture all upon an objective uncertainty. The greater the uncertainty, the greater the faith; the less objective certainty the more subjectivity. To demand objective certainty is to put an end to faith.

Thus S. K. opposes knowing to believing. To know is to accept something on rational and objective grounds; to believe is to risk all on an objective uncertainty. Knowing seeks mediated truth (truth without paradox, without tension); believing seeks the absurd. Knowing leaves the knower unchanged; believing transforms the believer.

3. Faith is in a Person, namely Jesus Christ. Faith is not doctrinal, but existential. The object of faith is not a truth to be communicated, but a Person to be chosen.

4. Faith in its subjectivity is totally unique. The existential experience is unique, and is incapable of being doubted or imitated. It is thus self-authenticating.

### What is Human Existence?

1. Human existence is not a state of being, but a process of becoming. Being can be conceived of in logical categories, but becoming defies every logical analysis. Since human existence is pre-eminently a process of becoming, it cannot be systematized logically, and is therefore irrational. Scientific history deals with actualized reality, but genuine history, historical becoming, eludes any such scientific approach.

2. Human existence is a free self-actualization, a becoming one's-self in freedom. Man is the free cause of his "becoming". (Here Romanticism influenced S. K.)

3. Human existence is marked by a dialectic. (Here Hegelianism influenced S. K.) Man is a tension between finitude and infinite, between relative and absolute. His task as finite is to realize himself as an infinite self.

4. Human existence, thus including both human freedom and human tension, involves man in anxiety, pathos, existential passion. This passion is man's anxious concern to attain his own infinity, his absolute self, and his eternal salvation.

5. In the process and passion of human existence, man ought to be preoccupied with himself. He realizes his self through self-reflection. He is thus at the same time becoming a self and becoming conscious of himself.

### On the Stages of Life's Way

S. K. developed his conception of the process of becoming a Christian in terms of a movement, an evolution, proceeding in stadia (stages) from human existence to the Absolute Paradox. He introduces three stadia, involving four steps.

First Stadium: The aesthetic. Typified by the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure of non-Christian Romantics. Characterized by spontaneity, non-reflectiveness.

Second Stadium: The ethical. Typified by the universal categorical imperative of Kantian ethics, and the decadence of the State Church. Characterized by non-spontaneity and very little reflectiveness.

Third Stadium: The religious. Includes two steps:

Religiosity A: Typified by the idealistic philosophy of religion of Hegel.

Characterized by both spontaneity and reflectiveness, but knows nothing of a concrete revelation of God in history, in the man Christ Jesus.

Religiosity B: Typified by Kierkegaard's "Christian faith". Characterized by both spontaneity and reflectiveness, in which the Absolute Paradox confronts a man, and concentrates the religious passion upon Christ alone, who in his historical aspect confronts us as a sign which points beyond it to the becoming of God.

This account of the history of salvation, moving from the pole of human existence to the pole of the Absolute Paradox, views each stadium as being (in principle) independent, but structured in a hierarchical order. Transition from an inferior to a superior stadium is accomplished by a leap, made in passion.

The stadia of the Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religiosity A, are all characterized by immanence (they arise out of our own inward self-decision and the self-determination of our individual existence); whereas Religiosity B destroys all immanence, and places man before the face of the transcendent God, before the strange, foreign fact of the Absolute Paradox.

Having mythologized and thus transformed the Christian doctrine of the incarnation into the concept, "the eternal becoming of God", S. K. immediately added the crucifixion and the death of Christ to the Absolute Paradox. Thus the Absolute Paradox signifies also that God is a God of grace, and looks toward man in forgiveness. He will be encountered only as the God of the forgiveness of sins in Christ.

This leads to a transvaluation of all existential values (*Umwertung alle Werte*). For in the encounter with God, we discover ourselves to be sinners. From an existential standpoint, we thought that our infinite passion to attain our infinite self, our individual being, our existential individuality, our activity toward existential self-emancipation, was truth. But now we discover that it is the very essence of human sin!

Thus the encounter with the Absolute Paradox demands a Reversal of man's existence. It requires the self-renunciation of one's self as one's own history, the renunciation of one's own freedom as a definitive power of decision. At this point, faith, as infinite passion, prompted by the Absolute Paradox, chooses the irrational and uncertain, i.e., the truth, and believes. At this point our existence transcends itself in a super-existential active choice, which it experiences at the same time as a gift of grace. And in this union of man's freedom and the grace of God before the Absolute Paradox, the process of becoming a Christian is a completed fact.

This, then, is the course by which one becomes a Christian. In fact, to be a Christian means to become a Christian. It is to take this same course ever anew. It is to -- actually and existentially -- repeatedly take this path from offense to faith. Since being is becoming, then being a Christian is becoming a Christian!

### Summary

Soren Kierkegaard's existentialist-dialectic philosophy-theology may be seen to comprise two basic elements: his theory of human existence and his theory of the Absolute Paradox. The former is united with the latter only with violence. The radical transition from the immanence of human existence to the transcendence of the Absolute Paradox is so abrupt that those who have come after Kierkegaard have been able to completely reject one of the two elements. Thus Dialectical Theology (Brunner, but especially Barth) is dependent upon Kierkegaard's Absolute Paradox. Thus also Existentialist Theology (Bultmann, Niebuhr, Tillich) is dependent upon Kierkegaard's theory of human existence. And contemporary existentialist philosophers have been able to entirely set aside the Absolute Paradox of Christian Revelation, and yet fully develop the idea of human existence.

## Jean-Paul Sartre

In the twentieth century it has been mainly through the work of Jean-Paul Sartre that existentialism has come to the attention of a wide international audience. Although he is disparagingly looked upon by some of his contemporaries as "merely a writer", yet his influence has been far greater upon this generation than that of Martin Heidegger or Karl Jaspers, both of them professional philosophers. His influence upon university students in Europe, and especially in France, has been tremendous. And his influence in the United States has been considerable. One reason for this great popularity has been the literary forms in which he has couched his philosophy. Besides a number of essays and books, Sartre has written several novels and plays, which have enjoyed wide circulation. Another reason for his influence has been his perceived consistency with regard to his own principles. Sartre has said, "Existentialism must be lived to be really sincere. To live as an existentialist means to be ready to pay for this view and not merely to lay it down in books." Heidegger and Jaspers said much the same thing. However, when World War II came along, Sartre fought in the French resistance, whereas Heidegger joined the Nazis after Hitler came to power, and Jaspers, with a Jewish wife, remained silent. Of course, after the war both Heidegger and Jaspers began to speak out again, but their words sounded somewhat hollow to the new, idealistic generation of university students. Sartre, on the other hand, continued to fight the status quo. Several years after the war, he joined the Marxist party in France; and later he refused the Nobel Prize for Literature (which carried with it a cash award of \$54,000) lest he be limited in some way by the approval of the establishment or by the strictures society would attempt to place upon him in terms of certain obligations. In all of this, Sartre has been perceived at least to be consistent.

Perhaps the three most significant expressions of his philosophy in written form are his essay *Existentialism*, his short story *The Wall*, and his large book *Being and Nothingness* (one of the three great classics of existentialism). Of these three works, his essay *Existentialism* gives the clearest, most concrete explanation of his view; and his short story *The Wall* gives the strongest emotional impact generated by the key motifs of existentialism.

A brief listing of Sartre's basic motifs would surely include the following:

- (1) Existence precedes essence.
- (2) The first, primary, absolute truth is grasped intuitively: *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I exist"). The realization of this truth enables me to perceive the existence of all other men ("intersubjectivity").
- (3) Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself (subjectivity); man chooses his own self; makes himself.
- (4) The choice to be this or that affirms the value of what we choose as good. This involves responsibility, both for myself and all men.
- (5) Thus in choosing myself, I choose man. However, this involves me in anguish, forlornness, and despair.



(6) Anguish is experienced by the man who chooses himself and thus all mankind, fully realizing the responsibility of his action.

(7) Forlornness is experienced by the man who faces the realization that God does not exist, and thus realizes that there is no pre-determined universal human nature and no universal-objective standard of values. Thus everything is possible. Values are defined by actions; i.e., values depend entirely on the choices a man makes. Man must invent values.

(8) Despair is experienced by the man who depends on his own will only, together with the possibilities open to him; who realizes that things will only be as man has decided they are to be. Thus there are no "potential but latent capabilities" in man on which he can fall back; there are only actualities. There is no such thing as a cowardly or heroic nature or constitution; men make themselves cowards or heroes by their actions.

(9) If there is no such thing as a universal human nature, yet there does exist a universal human condition (the a priori limitations of man's fundamental situation in the universe). This condition includes:

- (a) the necessity for man to exist in the world
- (b) the necessity for man to be at work in the world
- (c) the necessity for man to be there in the midst of other people
- (d) the necessity for man to be mortal in the world

(10) Yet there is a sense in which man transcends himself, projects himself, passes beyond himself in seeking a goal of freedom outside of himself. In this sense existentialism is optimistic; and is a doctrine of action and of human self-fulfillment.

#### A Typical Existentialism Position

The following represent key motifs of Existentialism (as a philosophy):

(1) "Existence precedes essence" This starting point of all existentialism reverses the formula prevalent for the preceding two thousand years- that *essentia* precede *existentia*. Existentialists say either that particulars of existence precede forms, or that particulars of existence are all that exist.

Jacques Maritain (a Neo-Thomist Existentialist) expresses the difference between these two kinds of existentialists in a pointed statement:

Let it be said right off that there are two fundamentally different ways of interpreting the word existentialism. One way is to affirm the primacy of existence, but as implying and preserving essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme victory of the intellect and of intelligibility. This is what I consider to be authentic existentialism. The other way is to affirm the primacy of existence, but as destroying or abolishing essences or natures and as manifesting the supreme defeat of the intellect and of intelligibility. This is what I consider to be apocryphal existentialism, the current kind which "no longer signifies anything at all."

Whichever of the two kinds we examine, there appears to be in both the idea that existence (primarily human existence) is prior to all forms, essences, or natures; or, to put it in Kierkegaardian terms, becoming is prior to being.

(2) Human existence must be understood subjectively. Objective knowledge does not tell us anything about the realm of human existence. What is needed is passionate involvement and reflection upon one's inner life.

(3) Man is free to decide his own existence. This tenet is a rejection of all determinism, and an affirmation of man as autonomous and completely self-determining. Of course, this "dread freedom" brings upon man a great anxiety.

(4) Whenever the decision not to decide predominates a man's life, then existence is determined for him by hereditary and especially by environmental forces. This abandonment of his individuality and merging of himself into the crowd is unauthentic existence. Whenever the decision to assert or actualize his freedom predominates a man's life, then he enters authentic existence. He acknowledges his responsibility for what he is and becomes, throws off the influences of all determinative factors, and decides what he shall be.

(5) The awareness of the "death of God" places upon man a sense of absolute aloneness and of the absence of any given structure of meaning whatsoever. Since God, the objective source of meaning, is dead, the only possible source of meaning is the self. Men create, they cannot discover, the principles by which they live. For man without God, the good is man's arbitrary fiat.

(6) Existentialist freedom is thus the inescapable necessity of choosing an end without reason or encompassing purpose, simply as an act of freedom!

(7) For the existentialist the achievement of authentic life is no guarantee of happiness. On the contrary, it is the acceptance, without illusion, of anguish and loneliness. Virtue and happiness are alike false goals. Only dread freedom remains!

(8) The fear of death is the finally decisive limitation to man's freedom. To be fully free, man must be willing to accept death, at any time and in any form. As long as he is unwilling to accept death, society and circumstances can place several limits upon his choice of mode of existence. He can choose only among those ways of being which are tolerated by society.

(Of course, for the religious existentialists motifs #5, #6, and #7 must be modified insofar as they speak of or are based on the "death of God". The religious existentialists would follow Kierkegaard's "Absolute Paradox" instead of Nietzsche's "death of God".)

### Recent Trends in Existentialist Philosophy

Over the past forty years some dramatic changes have taken place in Existentialism.

Martin Heidegger rejected existentialism completely. When he discovered that Sartre was an avowed existentialist, he no longer cared to be called by that name. As a result, Heidegger completely reversed the most basic motif of existentialism, "existence is prior to essence", and replaced it with the motif, "being is prior to existence." He thus called himself an "ek-sistentialist" (which is similar, in our idiom, to calling oneself an ex convict or an ex prize fighter).

Karl Jaspers came to oppose the term "existentialism", because it suggests a dated, restricted school of thought among other schools, a doctrine among doctrines. He came to prefer the term "philosophy of existence", which he considers to be primordial, eternal philosophy itself.

Gabriel Marcel, since 1950, said that he abhorred the label "Christian Existentialist", and preferred to be called a "neo-Socratic".

Jean-Paul Sartre is the only one who continued to use the term "existentialism", but even in his case he appears to have moved to a new stance. In his autobiography Sartre proclaims himself a Marxist, and declares that "no one can go beyond Marxism."

F. H. Heineman (who first used the term "Existenzphilosophie") in his work, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*, asked the question, "Is Existentialism alive?" He answers as follows:

It follows from all I have said that existence cannot become a basis for a systematic philosophy. The axiom, *Existo, ergo sum* ("I exist, therefore I am") is empty, fruitless, and a mere tautology.

However, existence as a subjectively-regulative idea brings unity into the chaos of our personal experience. As such it is of ethical, religious, and metaphysical significance, and can and should be preserved in a philosophy of response. As a general imperative it says: "Your responses shall be existential!" "Within all spheres of your being you shall act in such a manner that you exist in and through your answers!" Morally it implies: "You shall react in such a manner that you are able to accept responsibility for every one of your answers!" As a religious principle it demands: "Reply with absolute responsibility in the face of God!"

In short, existence as a constitutive principle is dead, but it remains alive as a regulative idea. The existentialists were mistaken when they took it as a basis for constructing existentialist systems. They were right in so far as they understood it as a call or appeal. The postulate to become existential in thought and action concerns everybody.

Heineman thus called his own view post-existentialist and meta-analytical, and further developed this view in his book, *Beyond Existentialism*, stating that it is his intention in this book to find a way out of the existentialist crisis and to discover a secure foundation for a new philosophy.

Is existentialism then dead? It lingers on as a philosophy (although it is viewed by many as being in its death-throes), but it lives on as a theology.

The two major voices of the movement in liberal theology known as Existentialism are Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich. Bultmann was born on August 20, 1884, in Wiefelstede, Germany; and Tillich was born on August 20, 1886, in Starzeddel, Germany. Both Bultmann and Tillich came into contact with Karl Barth's new discovery of the writings of Søren Kierkegaard; and under the influence of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the motifs of divine revelation and human existence they both repudiated the nineteenth century Liberalism. However, it was not until the later 1920's that they placed such a heavy stress on human existence.

### RUDOLF BULTMANN

Rudolf Bultmann was born into a Lutheran minister's family on August 20, 1884. Upon completion of his gymnasium schooling he studied at the University of Marburg, Germany, under Wilhelm Hermann (in systematic theology) and W. Heitmüller (in New Testament). Upon completion of his studies he was made an instructor in New Testament.

Having read Barth's *Römerbrief*, and having rejected Hermann's systematics, Bultmann found himself moving in the direction of the new "realistic temper". The influence of Kierkegaard's view of human existence manifested itself in his important work, *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition (The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, first edition, 1921). In 1922 he succeeded Heitmüller as professor of New Testament. Also in the 1920's he collaborated with Barth, Gogarten, Thumeyssen, and Merz in the periodical *Zwischen den Zeiten (Between the Times)*.

During the 1920's and 30's Bultmann was not widely known until 1941, when he presented an essay entitled "New Testament and Mythology" to the *Gesellschaft für Evangelische Theologie*. The ideas in this paper shook the German theological world, especially after it became widely circulated. At this time he began to climb the steps to the throne of German theology, until both Barth and Brunner had to admit in 1950, "*Ja, Bultmann ist jetzt König*." ("Yes, Bultmann is now king.")

What was it that brought Bultmann to this place of prominence? Two factors may be readily discerned: Bultmann's attack on Barthianism, and his insistence on the need for an existential interpretation of the gospel.

With respect to his attack on Barthianism, Bultmann pointed out that the Barthians had made at least three fatal errors.

Their first error lay in the fact that they had attempted to speak to the modern world, but had made only partial concessions to modern science and philosophy. They denied the historicity of Adam as the first man, but insisted on the doctrines of the Fall and of original sin. They denied the historicity of miracles, but insisted on the reality of "God's mighty acts". They denied revealed truths, but insisted on speaking of a genuine revelation of God in Christ.

Their second error lay in the fact that they had refused to recognize that the mythical, obsolete, first-century world-view in which the gospel was couched formed no part of the gospel itself, and that therefore the message of the New Testament must be demythologized; i.e., stripped of its first-century setting, and placed in the context of the modern, scientific world-view, if it is to speak meaningfully to twentieth century man.

Their third error lay in their insistence on the objective reality of God, which ran counter to their insistence upon the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man.

Many of Barth's disciples, believing that Bultmann was applying Barthian first principles more consistently than Barth himself, defected and went over to the Bultmannian camp.

Bultmann retired as Professor of New Testament at Marburg in 1952, the acknowledged king of German theology. Yet it was not long before it was discovered that Bultmann had himself included a fatal inconsistency in his view. Bultmann insisted (contra Barth) that God has no objective reality at all; but claimed that God and revelation do have a subjective reality; i.e., a reality for faith. However, his disciples gradually came to the realization that, if God is not objectively real, but is real only for faith, then the question arises, "Is God real apart from faith, apart from any believing individual? And if not, then does He exist at all, apart from our concepts? Or is He merely a projection of our minds, or an expression of a religious frame of desire? This was viewed as a fatal inconsistency.

In 1954 Ernst Kasemann of Tübingen published a paper entitled "*Das Problem des historischen Jesus*." (*The Problem of the Historical Jesus*). According to Werner Georg Kummel, this paper signaled the death-knell for the Bultmannian school. During the next few years Bultmann's empire crashed to the ground. Many of his former students and disciples rejected one or more of his basic principles; and many once again began a search for the historical Jesus.

Upon his retirement in 1952, Bultmann was succeeded by Werner Georg Kummel, a foe of Bultmannism! Many of Bultmann's former associates and acquaintances were very critical of his views. Ernst Fuchs of Marburg observed, "Where Bultmann stands sometimes only God knows and not even Bultmann!" Emil Brunner said, "Bultmann is a modern Origen, an allegorist of the Alexandrine school. Bultmann has always been a student of Heidegger, who transforms the New Testament for him. Heidegger is an avowed atheist; he bows to no revelation -- understands none, needs none, allows none. He smiles at Bultmann for 'making theology out of my philosophy'." Oscar Cullman of Basel called Bultmann's view "the great heresy" of our times. Barth frequently said, "Whoever denies the resurrection of Christ is not a Christian. Bultmann denies the resurrection of Christ!" On another occasion Barth said, "Thank God, Bultmann doesn't draw the consistent consequences and demythologize God!"

Although Bultmann served as Professor of New Testament at Marburg from 1922 to 1952, upon his retirement he was appointed Emeritus Professor of Theology. He died in 1976, still believing that his former disciples were still his disciples.

## THE THEOLOGY OF RUDOLF BULTMANN

Rudolf Bultmann claimed that there is no interpretation of any document (including the New Testament) without presuppositions; and that our categories, our terms, even our questions, are always affected by philosophy. In this regard he believed Barth to be naive in thinking to develop a theology independent of any philosophy. He believed that we are more honest and more likely to obtain fruitful results if we consciously acknowledge our dependence on philosophy for the clarification of the categories of our thought. This does not mean that philosophy should predetermine the results of our inquiry, but rather that it should aid us in the formulation of questions to the New Testament.

Bultmann believed that what is needed is a philosophical anthropology adequate to our present understanding of human existence (achieved through the disciplines of philosophy and psychology), as well as to the understanding of Paul. He believed that such a framework is available to us in the phenomenological ontology of human existence developed by his one-time colleague at Marburg, Martin Heidegger, whose approach provides a better framework for grasping Paul's understanding of Christian existence than Paul's own framework. For example, Heidegger's distinction between unauthentic and authentic existence is a very clear and precise expression of the intention of Paul in his use of the ambiguous and unclear antithesis of flesh and spirit. Through this kind of exegesis Paul's own intention is given a freedom of self-expression that it can achieve in no other way. But whether or not we continue to use the language of flesh and spirit, one grasp of Paul's meaning is aided by Heidegger.

### Bultmann's Basic Principles

#### (1) God is wholly transcendent

This world is the totality of spatiotemporal phenomena, a closed system of cause and effect, in which the causes of this-worldly phenomena are this-worldly. This is supported by the modern scientific view of the world as a closed, self-contained unity of natural causes and effects. This means that God cannot be introduced as a causal factor into the explanation of this-worldly events. Any failure to find a cause simply means that we do not yet have adequate tools at our command. From this principle there can be no exceptions.

#### (2) God is rationally unknowable

Since God is totally other, knowledge of God cannot be communicated by means of objective, rational assertions, predications, or propositions.

#### (3) God is always free, even from His own being.

By means of this principle, all determinisms are rejected.

(4) God is always Subject, never object; always a self-disclosing Person, never an objective, impersonal thing.

(5) Revelation is kerygmatic

The Christian message (kerygma) is that God has acted decisively for man's salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The kerygma is the proclamation of the act of God in Jesus Christ as the possibility of His act in the here and now.

(6) Revelation is Geschichte

Revelation is not past historical event, but present personal encounter. Being radically transcendent, God is hidden to every eye except the eye of faith. Through the eye of faith events that are otherwise fully explained in terms of this-worldly causes are seen as the acts of God. What in one way is fully and even correctly understood in physical or historical categories is nevertheless seen by faith as having an entirely different meaning, perceived only by the believer.

(7) Truth is found in the Revelation encounter

The event of faith is truth for the believer (and for him only). The event is for him the act of God, the place where transcendence is revealed. As such it transforms the way in which he understands his own existence. It does not give him new information about any other subject.

(8) Faith is irrational response to the Kerygma

In the radical decision of faith (total surrender of the self to God), God's act in Jesus Christ becomes present, in death to the old self and resurrection to the life of freedom in love. This faith is response to the preached kerygma, not intellectual assent to an affirmation of fact. With this faith there comes into being a self-understanding of human existence.

(9) The New Testament is a human witness, in mythological form, to divine Revelation.

Although the New Testament is the one authoritative source of the Kerygma, every proposition in the New Testament is an interpretation, in human language, of the Kerygma, and is therefore couched in mythological form. Myth is an objectifying in a this-worldly plane what belongs to the transcendent or other-worldly. The New Testament has mythologized the Kerygma; i.e., couched the gospel message in the mythical, obsolete, first-century world-view, which attempted to express the transcendent. But the New Testament myths do not furnish use with objective, this-worldly knowledge about otherworldly, divine reality; rather they provide us with expressions of human feelings and attitudes toward life.

(10) The New Testament must therefore be demythologized; i.e., stripped of its mythological language and first-century setting in order to uncover the

Kerygma; and then it must be placed in the context of the modern scientific world-view, if it is to speak meaningfully to twentieth century man.

In order to do this, the New Testament must be interpreted in accord with its central intention: to enable the existing individual to achieve authentic existence.

### Bultmann's Theological Method

Rudolf Bultmann's theological method may be represented by the following four steps:

- (1) Application of the method of the history of religion to the New Testament
- (2) Application of the "form-historical" method of Biblical criticism to the synoptic gospels
- (3) *Entmythologisierung* (demythologizing of the New Testament message)
- (4) Existential interpretation of the demythologized message

The result: THE KERYGMA

### OTHER EXISTENTIALIST THEOLOGIANS

Will Herberg, in his book *Four Existentialist Theologians*, discusses the views of four men from four distinct traditions: Jacques Maritain, Nicolas Berdyaev, Martin Buber, and Paul Tillich. However, when we examine these men, we discover the following.

Jacques Maritain, a Roman Catholic, is a Thomist who uses existentialist language; but he is not an existentialist. It is true that he is the author of *Existence and the Existent*, but this was in 1948, two years before the papal encyclical, "*Humani generis*", appeared. In this encyclical existentialism is specifically rejected because of its irrationalism, subjectivism, pessimism, neglect of substance and essence, and its degradation of human reason.

Nicolas Berdyaev, a Russian Orthodox existentialist, was a philosopher, not a theologian. He never intended to be a theologian, never taught theology, and in fact opposed every kind of system and every objectification of religious truth.

Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher and theologian, was neither an existentialist philosopher nor an existentialist theologian. He called his view a philosophy of Dialogue.

Paul Tillich, a Protestant philosopher and theologian is the only one of the four who could possibly be viewed as an existentialist theologian. As a philosopher he embraced existentialism and employed it to penetrate the structure of human existence. In his view the philosopher formulates the questions of ultimate concern, but only the theologian can answer them. However, the answer that the theologian gives to the questions of ultimate concern turns out to be an ontological rather than an existential answer. Tillich says that "the coming of the



New Being in Christ" is the answer. This "New Being" is experienced by an individual in a particular moment in time, when he is encountered by the God-beyond-god, the Being-beyond-being, the Ground of Being itself; and is thereby transformed in his existence. Thus Tillich asks existential questions but gives ontological answers; and therefore arrives at a theology of essence rather than a theology of existence. He is thus not really an existentialist theologian.

From these examples, as well as others, it would appear that any attempt to employ existential philosophy as a basis for theology must fail, since theology, viewed as the systematic presentation of the contents of the Christian faith, is, by definition of existentialism itself, impossible. If existence is always prior to essence, then theology ("expression concerning God" or "words concerning God") simply becomes impossible. If God has no essence, no nature, no settled character, then all God-language must of necessity be meaningless. And if God-language is meaningless, then one should cease to speak of God. Thus a genuine existentialist theology is discovered to be both logically and empirically impossible.

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#### 4. PROCESS THEOLOGY

Carl F. H. Henry, writing in the March 14, 1969 issue of *Christianity Today*, states:

Process-metaphysics is not a new nor even a modern theory, though its recent form has distinctively fresh features. In its post-Christian format, it tries to correlate the evolutionary view of a growing universe with that of a religious reality which, though directly and necessarily involved in time and space, somehow transcends and guides the process of which it is a part. Unlike traditional Christian theism, process-metaphysics does not totally differentiate God from the universe, but neither does it, like pantheism, identify God with the whole of reality. On the basis of evolutionary theory, process-philosophy assimilates God to the universe more immanently than Christian orthodoxy allows; in fact, it repudiates God's absolute transcendence by making creation inevitable if not necessary to his being. Process philosophers emphasize the temporal flow of all reality; time, as they see it, is an ingredient of Being itself....

Late in the nineteenth century, process-philosophy found a prophet in the French philosopher Henri Bergson (*Creative Evolution*, 1911), and early in this century, in England, it gained quasi-naturalistic statement by Samuel Alexander (*Space, Time and Deity*, 1927) and quasi-pantheistic statement by C. Lloyd Morgan (*Emergent Evolution*, 1926).... Both Bergson and Alexander had influenced Alfred North Whitehead before he left Cambridge for Harvard. Whitehead's subsequent *Process and Reality* (1929) attracted such attention that he is now widely credited as the seminal mind and formative influence in the later definitive statements of process-metaphysics....

... American interest in the process-concept of deity was maintained somewhat through the exposition and development of Whitehead's thought by Charles Hartshorne (*Man's Vision of God*, 1941; *The Divine Relativity*, 1948).

... Since then, the significant development in process-metaphysics has been its growing support by a number of American Protestant theologians as the preferred vehicle for expounding Christian theology. Among them are Bernard Meland, *The Realities of Faith* (1962); John Cobb, Jr., *Towards a Christian Natural Theology* (1965); Schubert M. Ogden, *The Reality of God*, (1967); W. Norman Pittenger, *Process Thought and Christian Faith* (1968); and Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (1968).

-- Carl F. H. Henry, "The Reality and Identity of God", in *Christianity Today*, March 14, 1969, pp. 3-6.

Norman Pittenger, in an article in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, asks "But what is process-thought?" He answers:

I shall not attempt to offer you a detailed exegesis of Whitehead or Hartshorne, neither shall I try to do over again the job which to my mind has been done admirably by Schubert Ogden in his book, *The Reality of God*, published just over a year ago. I shall not concern myself here with the

niceties of process-philosophy, nor with the difference among process-philosophers; rather, I shall speak briefly about five points that seem to me to be found in all representatives of this school. These are points that should be a special interest to the Christian theologian, as I shall hope to show. First of all, let me list them: (a) the world is a processive order; (b) it is dynamic through and through; (c) it is societal or organismic or interrelational or interpenetrative -- any of these words will do, for our purposes; (d) it is a rich complex in which some elements or aspects or moments are more important than others, as a clue to our grasp of what is going on in the world; and (e) basically its character is marked by persuasion rather than by coercion....

A world that is processive, dynamic, societal, open to novel emergents which disclose the depths and heights, and grounded in persuasion; such is the world as process-thinkers portray it. But if God is seen in that context, and if God be no "exception to metaphysical principles" necessary to describe that kind of world, but rather (as Whitehead insisted) is the "chief exemplification" of such principles, then we can say of him that he too is moving, dynamic, in richest relationships with all that is not himself, more active here than there and now than then, and is in his essential nature nothing other than supreme persuasion. God too is "in process" - not that he is becoming more God than he was at some earlier time, but that he is eminently temporal, fulfilling himself as he expresses himself, unsurpassable at every point by anything other than himself (or else he would not be worshipful), yet continually enriched in the opportunities and occasions for his self-expression as the world to which he has allowed relative freedom responds, or fails to respond, to him. He is affected by what happens -- no "unmoved mover", no "first cause", himself related only logically to a creation which is contingent upon him, but actively and deeply involved in the world which matters to him to such a degree that he is not only supremely causative, but supremely affective. And he works chiefly by his persuasion, not by the exertion of arbitrary power. In other words, he is Love -- in the fine words that Wesley addressed to God, "Pure universal Love thou art."

-- Norman Pittenger, "The Reconception of Christian Faith in the Light of Process-Thought," in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Winter 1968): 29-37.

Writing in *Religion in Life*, Pittenger again summarizes the main emphasis in process thought:

(1) the world is made up of events or occasions, not of things or substances; (2) it is a world which is "in process", an evolutionary or changing creation, moving forward in creative advance, although this does not imply a necessary progress (the words "process" and "progress" signify two quite different notions); (3) it is a world of interrelationships and of interpenetration -- a societal world, in which everything affects and influences everything else; (4) it is a world in which choices or decisions, made in relative freedom, both count and have consequences otherwise impossible; and (5) it is a world in which the divine reality, worshipful and dependable and unsurpassable, is ceaselessly at work and is no

exception to the generalizations which mark all other occasions but is itself their chief exemplification.

-- Norman Pittenger, "Picturing God", in *Religion in Life* 49 (Summer 1980), 173.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit paleontologist (1881-1955) was influential in the development of process theology. He espoused panentheism, claimed that there is a symbiotic relationship between God and the world, stressed evolution as a universal process, claimed that both God and universe are therefore evolving, and asserted that God is immanent in the world, "luring" it (and especially man) toward the complete fulfillment of itself and Himself in the "Omega Point".

In an article in the January-March 1988 issue of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Floyd S. Elmore, Assistant Professor of Bible at Cedarville College (Ohio), states:

In summary God in process thought accounts for the orderliness of the advance of the process itself and for the emergence of novelty in the world. God knows all that is possible, provides the initial aim of any occasion to allow for novelty, directs the process toward harmony rather than chaos, and receives into Himself all the good accomplished in creation.

The God of process theology differs greatly from the God of theism. Because the metaphysics of process requires God to be interdependent with the world and not different in His reality or nature from any other thing in the world, God is described as bipolar. God is continually in the process of becoming as much as any part of the world. Becoming implies potentiality and actuality, and these describe God's two poles. In His potential pole, or primordial nature, God provides the initial aims, the possibilities, for all occasions of existence. In His actual pole, or consequent nature, God realizes concretely in the world the vision for the world that He had in His primordial nature, and thereby He maintains a relationship with creation by being its causal ground.

In light of the above, process theologians describe the radical relatedness of God with the world in picturesque terms. For Hartshorne, God is "cosmic wholeness", "a supreme relativist", and "the modally all-inclusive or nonfragmentary being, surpassable only by Himself." God is as related to world as thoughts are to brain cells so that in a real sense, "the world is God's body." For Lewis Ford, "God is the supreme opportunist, the master politician who appreciates how to utilize every situation as it arises." And Pittenger recalls Whitehead's own thought that "God is the fellow-sufferer who understands." God is so intertwined with the world and the world with God that man becomes not only a cocreator of the world but also a creator of God Himself!

-Floyd S. Elmore, "An Evangelical Analysis of Process Pneumatology", in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January-March 1988, 15-29.

Some Process Philosophers and Theologians

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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin  
Charles Hartshorne  
Norman Pittenger  
Schubert Ogden  
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## 5. LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The theology of liberation has assumed three basic forms to date: Marxist, black, and feminist. The single thread common to these forms is that of oppression: oppression of the poor, oppression of blacks, and oppression of women.

### MARXIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation Theology in its Marxist form originated in Latin America in 1965, the same year that Vatican II ended. Most of the influential thinkers within this new theological movement studied in Europe, where they were influenced by the "political theology" of such writers as Jurgen Moltmann, John Baptist Metz, and Karl Rahner.

However, these early proponents of the theology of Liberation tended to react against "North Atlantic" theology (from Europe or the United States) as being irrelevant to the Latin American situation, which to a large extent was characterized by oppression of the poor.

Gustavo Gutierrez of Peru has stated that Liberation Theology is "based on the Gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America; it is a theological reflection born... of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human." For Gutierrez, the task of theology is to "elucidate the meaning of solidarity with the oppressed."

In 1968, at a conference in Medellin, Columbia, the documents produced severely criticized the liberal capitalist system with its "erroneous concept of the property rights of the means of production"; the exercise of authority in Latin America, "justified ideologically and practically", which "frequently acts against the common good and favors privileged groups"; "the increasing domination of international commerce" due to "the international monopolies and international monetary imperialism" and "institutionalized violence provoked by those who hold to their privileges."

However, when the Medellin program was not implemented by the church, the radical thinkers in the movement became frustrated and called for the theology of liberation to become a prophetic theology; i.e., a theology of conflict. This could be done, they felt, only as theology accepts the Marxist analysis of society as the historical scene of the class struggle.

Thus liberation Theology began with a mild emphasis on progress from under-developed nations and peoples to developed; moved on to an emphasis on the need for change from dominated to dominating classes; and finally arrived at a call for revolution by the oppressed against the oppressors.

Marxist Liberation Theology endorses the use of violence by those on whom violence has been committed in the form of restrictions, humiliations, injustices; who are without prospects or hope, and whose condition is that of slaves.

Violence is here defined as the right of armed revolution to overthrow unjust governments; i.e., governments that practice violence in their people.

One implication of the adoption of the Marxist concept of class struggle by Christianity is that the idea of Christian community must be given up, since it prevents the recognition of the division of society into classes. Another implication is that the concept of salvation must be radically changed to mean liberation from sin; i.e., from the oppression and exploitation of the people by capitalism.

Liberation Theology emphasizes "praxis", which stresses reflection and action as distinguished from mere agreement with theological views.

#### Some Liberation Theologians

Gustavo Gutierrez (Peru, Roman Catholic)  
Jose Miguez-Bonino (Argentina, Methodist)  
Juan Luis Segundo (Uruguay, Roman Catholic)  
Leonardo Boff (Brazil, Roman Catholic)  
Clodovis Boff (Brazil, Roman Catholic)  
Segundo Galilea (Columbia)  
Hugo Assmann (Brazil, Roman Catholic)  
Sergio Arce Martinez (Cuba)  
Jon Sobrino (Spain, El Salvador, Roman Catholic)  
Jose Porfirio Miranda (Mexico)  
Richard Shaull (United States, Brazil, Presbyterian)

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Jose Miguez-Bonino, *Christians and Marxists; the Mutual Challenge to Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976)

Ismael Garcia, *Justice in Latin American Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989)

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books)

Daniel L. Migliore, *Called to Freedom: Liberation Theology and the Future of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989)

Robert McAfee Brown, *Theology in a New Key: Responding to Liberation Themes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989)

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J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology -- An Evangelical View from the Third World* (Atlantic: John Knox, 1979)

Raymond C. Hundley, *Radical Liberation Theology: An Evangelical Response* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Bristol Books)

Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa -The Challenge of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988)

Deane William Ferm, *Profiles In Liberation - 36 Portraits of Third World Theologians* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989)

### BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY

James H. Cone, perhaps the best known advocate of this view, writing in *Theology Today*, states:

In considering black religious thought, let us give clearer names to the "two warring ideals" -- clearer, that is, from the point of view of religion. I will call them "African" and "Christian". Black religious thought is not identical with the Christian theology of white Americans. Nor is it identical with traditional African beliefs, past or present. It is both -- but reinterpreted for and adapted to the life-situation of black people's struggle for justice in a nation whose social, political, and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology. It was the "African" side of black religion that helped Afro-Americans to see beyond the white distortions of the Gospel and to discover its true meaning as God's liberation of the oppressed from bondage. It was the "Christian" element in black religion that helped African-Americans to reorient their African past so that it would become useful in the struggle to survive with dignity in a society that they did not make. Although the African and Christian elements are found throughout the history of black religious thought, the Christian part gradually became dominant. Though less visible, the African element continued to play an important role in defining the core of black religion.... Of course, there are many similarities between black religious thought and white Protestant and Catholic reflections on the Christian tradition. But the dissimilarities between them are perhaps more important than the similarities. The similarities are found at the point of a common Christian identity, and the dissimilarities can best be understood in light of the differences between African and European cultures in the New World....

The tension between the "African" and "Christian" elements acted to reorder traditional theological themes in black religion and to give them different substance when compared to other theologies in Europe and America. Five themes in particular defined the character of black religious thought during slavery and its subsequent development: justice, liberation, hope, love, and suffering.

Cone then proceeds to explain how these themes were understood in black theology:

Justice was understood in terms of the God who establishes the right by punishing the wicked and liberating their victims from oppression. Liberation was understood in terms of deliverance of the oppressed from the bondage of slavery -- if not "now" then in the "not yet". Hope was understood in terms of the expectation that the suffering of the victims would be eliminated. The idea of heaven was not so much an otherworldly hope, but the means by which slaves affirmed their humanity in a world that did not recognize them as human beings, a way of saying that they were made for freedom and not slavery. Love was understood in terms of its relationship to God's justice, liberation, and hope. God's love was made known primarily through divine righteousness, liberating the poor for a new future. Suffering created the most serious challenge to black faith. African-Americans turned to two texts to resolve the dilemma between the goodness of God and the suffering of blacks. In the account of the Exodus they found the belief that God is the liberator of the oppressed. In Psalm 68:31 they found an obscure reference to God's promise to redeem Africa ("Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God"). But the tension and the dilemma remained.

Although there were some significant forerunners to Black Theology, including Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr. (pastors of Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York), Howard Thurman (dean of Rankin Chapel and professor of theology at Howard University, and dean of Marsh Chapel and minister-at-large of Boston University, and pastor of the Fellowship Church of San Francisco), Benjamin E. Mays (president of Morehouse College), and Martin Luther King, Jr.; yet after the assassinations of King and Malcolm X, many black theologians began in 1966 to advocate the development of a black theology. Rejecting the dominant theologies of Europe and North America as heretical, and feeling that a new starting point in theology must be defined by people at the bottom and not the top of the socio-economic ladder, they focused on God's liberation of the poor as the central message of the gospel. For the biblical meaning of liberation, black theologians turned to the Exodus, while the message of the prophets provided the theological content for the theme of justice. The gospel story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus served as the biblical foundation for a re-interpretation of love, suffering, and hope in the context of the black struggle for liberation and justice.

Black Theology has largely de-emphasized the Western theological tradition. Black theologians came to believe that European and North American theologians have stifled the indigenous development of the theological perspectives of blacks by teaching them that their own cultural traditions are not appropriate sources for an interpretation of the Christian gospel; that the Western theological tradition as defined by Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Schleiermacher is the essential source for a knowledge of the Christian past. But when black theologians began to concentrate on black culture and history, they felt that their own historical cultural traditions are far more important for an analysis of the gospel in the struggle for freedom than are the Western traditions that participated in their enslavement.

In assessing the present direction of Black Theology, Cone states:

The focus on black culture in the light of the black liberation struggle has led to an emphasis upon praxis as the context out of which Christian theology develops. To know the truth is to do the truth, that is, to make happen in history what is confessed in church. People are not poor by divine decree or by historical accident. They are made poor by the rich and powerful few. This means that to do black liberation theology, one must make a commitment, an option for the poor and against those who are responsible for their poverty.

Because black theology is to be created only in the struggles of the poor, we have adopted social analysis, especially of racism, and more recently of classism and sexism, as a critical component of its methodology.... In our struggle to make a new start in theology, we discovered, to our surprise and satisfaction, that theologians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were making similar efforts in their contexts. The same was true among other ethnic minorities in the First World and among women in all groups. Black theology has been challenged to address the issues of sexism and classism in a global context, and we have challenged them, especially Latin Americans and feminist theologians of the dominant culture, to address racism. The focus on liberation has been reinforced and deepened. What many of us now know is that a turning point has been made in the theologies of black and Third World communities as radical as were Luther, Schleiermacher, and Barth in the sixteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries in Europe.

-- *Theology Today*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (April 1986): 6-21.

In August, 1984, the National Council of Churches of Christ in America sponsored a consultation on a common expression of faith from the perspective of black Christians in the United States. Representatives of several black denominations and representatives of the black constituencies of several predominantly white denominations met at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, December 14-15, 1984. The text of their report appeared in the *TSF Bulletin* of January-February 1986, and it is worthy of note.

#### Some Black Theologians

James H. Cone (Professor of Systematic Theology, Union Theological Seminary in New York)

Gayraud Wilmore (Professor, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta)

James DeOtis Roberts

Major Jones

Itumeleng J. Mosala (Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town)

#### Some Books on Black Theology

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## FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Rosemary Radford Reuther, in an article in *Theology Today*, raises the question of re-contextualizing theology in the experience of women. She writes:

Unlike subordinated races who have preserved some remnants of an alternative culture (such as blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians),... the subordination of women takes place at the heart of every culture and thus deprives women of an alternative culture with which to express their identity over against the patriarchal culture of family and society. Some cultures give women distinct religious rituals and cults and quasi-autonomous social and economic groupings, providing some basis for a women's culture or "sub-culture". But even these female groupings remain largely invisible to the public culture, defined as male culture. Western Protestant Christian society since the Reformation has largely eliminated separate female communities, such as women's religious orders...

The question of Christian identity rooted in the Bible is also raised in a more radical way for feminists than it is for ethnic liberation theologies. Black Theology, Asian, and Hispanic theology tend to see their conflicts with Christianity as going back four or five hundred years with the rise of those forms of racism, colonialism, and slave economies that shaped their particular group into an exploited and dependent folk. The Bible, on the other hand, is seen as a positive side of a liberation gospel that can be used to criticize this later church tradition....

Forgotten is the question that sorely plagued nineteenth century abolitionists, namely, that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is predominantly "pro-slavery" in the literal sense of both taking a slave society for granted and also justifying it for Israel and for the church. Since slavery was an integral part of the patriarchal family, as it was understood in the Bible, the same passages that justify the subordination of women also justify the maintenance of the master-slave relationship... For women, it is clear that the Bible is a patriarchal document that both assumes throughout an androcentric perspective, in which the male is the nonnative human person and interlocutor with God, and which explicitly justifies the subordination of women by myths of women's intrinsic inferiority, dependency, and sinfulness....

Women, faced with the androcentrism and misogyny of the Bible, ask in a much more radical way the question whether it is possible to be feminist and Christian. Some feminists have resolved this conflict in the negative. For them, it is patently clear that the Bible, and the two major religions that spring from it, as well as other historical religions, such as Islam, have, as their essential agenda, the subordination of women....

Some women attempt to retrieve an alternative cultural base by seeking repressed, female-identified religions from some period before the rise of patriarchy....

Other feminists are less sure that such an alternative culture and religion is available in this way... What they can recover of the religions of the ancient goddess worshippers and late medieval women accused of witchcraft does not sound very much like women's liberation. Moreover, they are unwilling to surrender the biblical texts about justice and redemption... But that means

that they must continually wrestle with the basis for their efforts to synthesize feminism and Christianity into a distinctively new cultural expression. Does a feminist, liberation Christianity operate out of a hermeneutical circle of biblical texts which have some justice perspective on contemporary women's experience? Or must one throw the net of cultural sources and resources more widely? Can one explore marginated Christian groups condemned as "heresies", such as gnostics, Montanists, and others who seem to have female symbols of divinity and gave greater religious authority to women? Can one explore non-biblical religions with female images of the divine and enter into dialogue with Goddess religionists today? Can one write new stories out of women's religious experience today and make them paradigmatic for our religious consciousness? In short, given the poverty of the official Christian tradition for symbols and stories affirmative to women, why should women set any cultural limits to their search for alternative sources for their liberation?

Although the feminist version of this issue is particularly obvious, this ambiguity exists also in other forms of liberation theology that seek to contextualize themselves in the older cultures that were swept aside by Western European Christian proselytizing. Latin Christianity, as it was shaped into its successful form in the late patristic period, was a synthesis of New Testament faith and Greco-Roman culture, particularly philosophical culture. Moreover, the church shaped itself institutionally by modeling itself after the political institutions of the Roman Empire. Both as an organization and as a culture, Western Christianity made itself in the model of an imperialist society that claimed for its culture universal normativeness. To seek a liberation Christianity is to turn around that process by which the Christian church identified itself within an imperial ruling class over slaves, women, and conquered peoples. To seek an indigenous Christianity in the context of Asian culture, African culture, or Native American culture is to dissolve that process by which Christianity identified its normative cultural vehicle in a philosophical tradition that began with Plato....

Feminists tend to have a deep suspicion of dichotomized ways of thought and behavior. Whenever two apparently opposite and mutually exclusive options are set in conflict, our suspicion is the some larger context where both have their place has been lost. And so it is with the apparently irreconcilable differences between a biblically-based feminist liberation theology and a feminist spirituality based on a revival of the religion of the Goddess. One suspects that at work here are two different modes of being that have been dichotomized in Western culture and need to find a new whole.

Certainly, for me, the biblical liberation tradition is essential to my feminist (and not just my Christian) identity.... The denunciation of social practices which "grind the faces of the poor and deprive the widow and the orphan" is elaborated in the prophets and the Gospels into a critique of religion as well; not just a critique of other people's religion, but a critique of the deformation of biblical religion itself into forms and rituals that sacralize social oppression, the privileges of religious and social elites, and which ignores God's agenda of justice and mercy.

This denunciation of oppression and oppressive religion is complemented in prophetic theology by an annunciation of a new social order, a new humanity, a new heaven and earth....

This pattern of prophetic theology is precious to all concerned with social liberation because it is the cultural prototype of all such movements in Western

society. Feminism, too, partakes, even if unawares, of this same cultural pattern in which the denunciation of systems of injustice, and their supporting ideologies, and the annunciation of a new vision of liberation, and a historical project of change, are appropriated and applied to the issues of sexism, patriarchal ideologies of women's inferiority, and hopes and prospects for a new humanity of women and men liberated from gender hierarchy.

But this language of ethical struggle and judgment presupposes an alienated world in conflict between a distorted and evil present reality and a lost option pointing to an imagined future. By contrast, those "nature" religions suppressed by biblical religions and dubbed by them "pagan"... often seem to preserve elements of a mode of being where humanity and nature, body and mind, male and female, have not parted company, but remain in the dreaming innocence of an unfallen world. In those religions, the cycles of the seasons and the planets, the rhythms of the body, are the clues to harmonious relationship with ourselves, each other, and the world around us, and with the Great Mother who sustains us all. Harvest homes, winter and summer solstice celebrations, vernal and autumnal equinoxes, puberty and menopause rites, sustain a world where ritual harmonizes rather than dichotomizes the relationship to the reality in and around us.

A feminist liberation theology needs to be able to speak both words. Since patriarchy with its many forms and expressions of alienation and oppression, still very much shapes our minds and social systems, one cannot pretend to live in an innocent world of the childhood of humanity where all that is is good. One needs to engage in the struggle against evil and to have an ethical language for our denunciation and our hope. But one needs also those foretastes of unalienated life that allow us to enter into the promised land and to taste its presence. The feminist dialogue between biblical and pagan spiritualities seems to me to be seeking a way to bring those two modes of being into right relationship with each other. In so doing, it perhaps seeks to heal the most basic and ancient split of human culture and existence.

-- *Theology Today*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (April 1986):22-27.

#### Some Feminist Liberation Theologians

Letty M. Russell (Professor of Theology, Yale Divinity School)

Rosemary Radford Ruether (Professor of Applied Theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary)

Katherine Doob Sakenfeld (Professor of Old Testament and Director of Ph. D. Studies, Princeton Theological Seminary)

Letha Scanzoni

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Dorothy Soelle

#### Some Books on Feminist Liberation Theology

Letty M. Russell, *Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989)

Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in Feminist Perspective - A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster)

Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster)

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Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Women-Church -- Theology and Practice* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988)

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice -- Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990)

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Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace -Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988)

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Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer, eds., *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience -A Reader in Feminist Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987)

Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985)

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984)

Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Mary -- The Feminine Face of the Church*

Dorothy Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*

Lynn N. Rhodes, *Co-Creating a Feminist Vision of Ministry*

Jackie M. Smith, ed., *Women, Faith, and Economic Justice*

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible*



Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine- The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey- Perspectives on Feminist Theology*

## G. Approaches to Theology

Note: the following six approaches all assume revelation as the source.

### 1. The Philosophical Approach

This approach selects from the Scriptures what appear to be necessary or self-evident first principles (presuppositions) of theology, and employs these first principles more or less consistently in its formulation of theological doctrine. However, it fails to check its results with the specific teachings or general emphases of Scripture for modification or correction. As a result this approach tends to omit or distort those teachings of Scripture that conflict with its formulation.

Example: The drawing of the implication that all human beings will be saved, from the scriptural truth that God is love.

Example: The drawing of the implication that in His human nature Jesus was omniscient, from the scriptural truth that He was God in the flesh.

Example: The drawing of the implication that fallen human beings can do nothing good, even in a relative sense, from the scriptural truth that all mankind is holistically depraved.

Critical Axiom: All presuppositions drawn from Scripture, and all formulations and implications drawn from those presuppositions, must be checked against other biblical teachings and against the teaching of Scripture as a whole.

### 2. The Experiential Approach

This approach elevates experience (primarily "religious" experience) to the level of norms of truth, and then presses biblical teaching into a grid derived from those norms. In doing so, this approach tends to distort, omit, or even contradict biblical teaching.

Example: Using the modern experience of tongue-speaking to interpret the phenomenon of tongues recorded in Acts and I Corinthians, instead of the other way around.

Example: Using modern claims of miraculous healings, resuscitations from the dead, and continuing special revelation to decide the question of the continuance of the supernatural sign-gifts.

Critical Axiom: Although experience should confirm biblical doctrine, it should not be the interpreter of that doctrine; rather, experience should conform to and be evaluated by biblical doctrine.

### 3. The Confessional Approach

This approach accepts and adopts some creed, confession, or family of creeds and confessions, and proceeds uncritically to study Scripture to find support for the doctrinal assertions of that creed or confession. By doing so, this approach tends to neglect portions of Scripture not directly connected with its creed or confession, tends to make an operative distinction between normative and non-operative Scriptures, tends to become theologically provincial, and tends to cut itself off from further light and understanding of the teaching of Scripture as a whole.

Example: The adoption of Luther's *Small Catechism* and the *Augsburg Confession*, and the interpretation of Scripture by the assertions found in these documents.

Example: The adoption of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the interpretation of Scripture by the assertions found in that document.

Critical Axiom: Creeds and confessions may be of great help in the understanding of biblical doctrine; yet creeds and confessions must be kept subordinate to and judged by the teaching of Scripture.

### 4. The Traditional Approach

This view adopts some historical tradition or some individual's viewpoint, and proceeds to interpret Scripture in accordance with that tradition or viewpoint. In doing so, this approach tends to omit or distort those portions of Scripture whose teachings do not fit with its assumptions and views.

Example: The adoption of Menno Simons' viewpoint, and the interpretation of Scripture by the assertions of that view.

Example: The adoption of John Wesley's viewpoint, and the interpretation of Scripture by the assertions of that view.

Example: The adoption of John Calvin's viewpoint, and the interpretation of Scripture by the assertions of that view.

Critical Axiom: Theological constructs and systems are to be derived from the teachings of Scripture, not impressed on them.

### 5. The Atomistic Approach

This approach views each Scripture as a distinct entity complete in itself. It seeks to derive the meaning of each Scripture in isolation from other Scriptures and/or scriptural teachings.

As such, this approach encompasses two deep-seated attitudes:

(1) It is determined to preserve each inspired Scripture in its individual integrity, believing that each Scripture is true and fully understandable as it stands.

(2) It fears and distrusts the use of human reason in systematic theological construction, believing that sinful human reason can only distort or adulterate the pure, clear teaching of Scripture.

But by the same token, this approach is prone to adopt interpretations of individual Scriptures that have immediate emotional appeal, or that sound good, or that make sense, or that fit with previous understandings.

Example: Taking promises in Scripture in isolation from other Scriptures that qualify or condition those promises, and holding God responsible to fulfill those promises and fellow believers responsible to trust in them.

Critical Axiom: The whole of scriptural teaching concerning any given doctrine (with rare exception) cannot be found in any individual portion of Scripture. The whole truth cannot be found in any one of its parts.

## 6. The Organic Approach

This approach seeks to discover the teachings of individual Scriptures and to systematize these teachings into a self-consistent, coherent whole, that is itself in accord with the whole of Scripture.

The term "organic" in this context has reference to the interrelated nature of the individual Scriptures and of the individual teachings of Scripture, in somewhat the same manner in which various organs are interrelated in a living organism. In a living organism all of the organs function in such a way as to sustain the life and health of the organism. If a non-vital organ is missing or defective, the life and health of the organism is usually impaired. If a vital organ is defective or missing, the life and health of the organism is placed in jeopardy or extinguished. And if the organs fail to interact properly, the organism breaks down and usually dies.

This organic approach builds on the analogy of the constituent parts and interrelationships of a living organism. This may be seen in our use of the adjective "sound" as applied to doctrine. Sound doctrine is doctrine that is whole, not defective in any part; healthy, not diseased by the intrusion of alien matter; and organically interrelated and functional.

Example: The doctrine of the Trinity, which is grounded in the scriptural facts that God is one (i.e., a unity), and that there are three Persons who are fully God.

Example: The doctrine of the incarnate Son, which is grounded in the scriptural facts that Jesus Christ is one person, and that He has both the characteristics of perfect God and those of perfect man.

Critical Axiom: The whole of a biblical teaching is to be found in the teaching of the whole Bible.

## H. Necessity of Systematic Theology

The attempt to develop a systematic approximation to God's perfect system of truth is necessary for three major reasons:

1. Systematic Theology is necessary because of the God-created correspondence between the structure of reality, the structure of truth, and the structure and operations of the human mind.

a. Objective reality is a system of objects and relationships. There is uniformity and coherence throughout the real universe. All of the objects in the universe are interrelated; i.e., changes in one part cause changes in other parts. The universe is thus a uni-verse, not a multi-verse.

b. Truth is the totality of all assertions that correspond to reality. Truth is a unity, a self-consistent and coherent whole. All truth is interrelated. Thus a science of the laws of true thought is possible (logic), and truth-claims can be tested for soundness or fallaciousness.

c. The human mind is so structured as to be able to know reality by means of true thought. The mind is able to construct a science of the laws of true thought. It is able to construct, as well as test, statements about reality, in order to know whether such statements correspond to reality or contradict or modify one another. The mind has a capability and tendency to interrelate, to see things in truth-relationships.

d. The structure of objective reality, the structure of truth, and the structure of the human mind all correspond to one another by virtue of the fact of Creation. God created man's mind to correspond with the structure of the external universe. Whenever man's mind systematizes the information that comes to him from the external universe, he apprehends truth. Then when he relates truths, he is systematizing; i.e., constructing a system of truth. If rightly constructed, such a system will yield a higher, fuller, and more accurate knowledge of truth than the simple apprehension of separate, unrelated truths about reality.

e. These principles hold true in the realm of theology. If the truths concerning spiritual reality are given in revelation, then we will wish not only to apprehend these truths, but also to systematize them. If spiritual reality is a unity, a system, then there is such a thing as a system of truths concerning spiritual reality, and then we will need to (and want to) discover that system by exegeting, systematizing, defining, and explaining the facts and meanings of God's revelation of truth.

2. Systematic Theology is necessary because of the relative lack of structured configuration in the teachings of the Bible.

a. Although there are some passages in Scripture that are classic texts for specific doctrines, yet in the main the contents of Scripture are like the unorganized observations of scientists, which form the raw material out of which hypotheses, theories, and laws are constructed. So also the student of theology constructs a system of doctrine out of the matter contained in Scripture.

b. The theologian first builds individual doctrines on the teachings of a number of individual portions of Scripture (this assumes exegetical theology) being careful to compare Scripture with Scripture. He then takes individual doctrines and attempts to discover their interrelationships. In doing so, he may find that he has overstated a doctrine so as to make it appear to conflict with another doctrine. In such a case it may be necessary to modify the understanding of individual doctrines lest, by pressing one doctrine beyond the limits of truth set by another, he represents the Scriptures as teaching error.

For instance, the doctrines of faith, hope, and love may be represented erroneously by a failure to systematize them with one another and with such other doctrines as (for example) the will of God.

(1) The doctrine of faith unrelated to the will of God becomes presumption. The promise in Matthew 21:22 -- "And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" -- must be brought into systematic relationship with the truth of I John 5:14-15 -- "And this is the confidence that we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." The "everything you ask" of Matthew 21 must be qualified by the "ask anything according to His will" of I John 5.

(2) The doctrine of hope unrelated to the will of God becomes empty speculation. Specific predictions of the date of Christ's Second Coming, whether based on interpretations of Daniel or Ezekiel, on a theory of sacred numbers, on the mathematics of the Great Pyramid of Cheops, or on a vision newly received, must be brought into systematic relationship with such statements as that found in Matthew 24:36 -- "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." If it was not the will of the Father to reveal to the Son in His humanity the time of His return, it is virtually a moral certainty that God has not and will not reveal the time to modern-day interpreters or self-proclaimed prophets!

(3) The doctrine of love unrelated to the will of God becomes sentimentalism or self-willed indulgence. The common idea, based on an implication drawn from God's characteristic of love, that God is too kind to send anyone to hell, must be brought into systematic relationship with such revelations of God's will as that expressed by Christ in Matthew 10:28 -- "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

The common practice, based on God's command to love all human beings, of some believers yoking themselves with unbelievers to attempt to do the work of God, must be brought into systematic relationship with such commands as that found in II Corinthians 6:14,17 -- "Do not be bound together with unbelievers;" "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord."

3. Systematic Theology is necessary because of the functional needs which have arisen in the history of the Church, specifically the catechetical, didactic, polemic, and apologetic needs. '

a. The need of catechetical instruction as preparation for baptism or as instruction in the foundational truths of the Christian Faith.

The Apostles' Creed appears to have arisen from a number of baptismal confessions in use during the Ante-Nicene period. It exemplifies this need.

F. J. Foakes-Jackson, in his *History of the Christian Church*, speaks to this point:

In the earliest days of the Faith a convert was sometimes admitted to the full privileges of a Christian without any previous probation. All that was required before baptism was a belief in Christ; nor is there any mention in the New Testament of a period of instruction preceding the administration of the rite of Baptism. When, however, the Church became a more organized society, it was considered advisable that those who desired to become Christians should submit to a course of preparation before being finally enrolled as members of the Church. This period of instruction and probation naturally varied in different churches, and sometimes extended over three years.

(Even if one were to take issue with Foakes-Jackson and make a clear-cut distinction between baptism (with no necessary time-interval between conversion and baptism) and entrance into local church membership (with a time-interval between conversion and church membership), catechetical instruction could still have cogency for those wishing to enter the privileges and duties of local church membership.)

John Calvin's *Institutio Christianae Religionis* was written for the purpose of transmitting "certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness." It thus served a basic catechetical-instructive purpose.

b. The need of teaching the whole counsel of God in some uniform manner.

In Matthew 28:19-20 our Lord says: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."

The Nicene Creed represents the results of the felt need for uniform teaching of the truths of the Word of God concerning the deity of Christ.

Philip Melancthon's *Loci Theologici* also reflects this need.

This need of teaching the separate truths of the Word of God in a uniform and self-consistent manner flows from the didactic responsibility of the Church.

c. The need of struggle against false doctrine within the Church (the polemic function of the Church)

In II Timothy 2:15-18, Paul exhorts his son in the faith:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some.

And in Titus 1:7-11 Paul writes:

For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain.

Paul struggles against false doctrine because he knows it can upset the faith of professed believers, and because he knows that such teaching will spread like gangrene, threatening the health and life of the church. In some cases he identifies the proponents of false doctrine by name, and says that they must be silenced by the teaching of sound doctrine.

This need of struggle against false doctrine may be seen in the Church's combat with Gnosticism and Monarchianism in the second and third centuries. It may also be seen in Ulrich Zwingli's *Commentarius de Vera et Falsa Religione*.

d. The need of combating anti-Christian attacks and philosophies (the apologetic function of the Church)

In I Peter 3:15 Peter writes: "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

In I John 4:1 John exhorts: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

In Jude 3-4 Jude says: "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you, appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."



Anti-Christian attacks and philosophies may come from outside the Church or from within it. Both kinds must be defended against and responded to.

This polemic function of the Church may also be seen in the early Church's responses to Jewish and pagan attacks on Christianity in the second and third centuries. It may also be seen in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

In J. I. Packer's foreword to Bruce Milne's *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), Packer speaks to the necessity of Systematic Theology:

The chaplain used to take chapel-going undergraduates for pastoral walks, which is how I came to be shambling along beside him that raw afternoon in my first term. He was urging me to read theology, the subject which he himself taught, as a sequel to the classics degree on which I had embarked. I explained to him that I would rather not, since theology was so bad for one's soul. "Nonsense!" exploded he, with what may have been the loudest snort in history; "theology's the queen of the sciences!" Then he fell silent, and so did I, and thus we finished our walk. I thought him unenlightened. What he thought about me is not on record. But he had every reason to feel miffed. He was right, and knew enough to know that he was right, and I was wrong as an opinionated ignoramus of 18 could possibly be. In my time I have dropped clangers in abundance, but none so daft or discourteous as what I said that afternoon.

Why did I talk such twaddle? The awful truth is that, as a Christian of about six weeks' standing, I was regurgitating what I had heard in the Christian Union that was nurturing me. No doubt there was some excuse for dark suspicions. In the war years Oxbridge theology was not at its best, and as sad experience shows bad theology infects the heart with misbelief and unbelief, the spiritual equivalents of multiple sclerosis. Many who ran well have been progressively paralysed through ingesting bad theology, and the danger remains. Also, theological expertise can feed intellectual pride, turning one into a person who cares more for knowing true notions than for knowing the true God, and that is disastrous too. But this only shows how a good thing can be spoiled. *Corruptio optimi pessima* (corruption of what is best is the worst corruption); nevertheless, *abusus non tollit usum* (misuse does not take away right use). Thankfully I record that by God's mercy I saw in due course that I had been talking through my hat, and I followed classics with theology, after all -- a move that I never regretted, and would not hesitate to recommend to anyone else.

It has been said that a habit of personal Bible study makes the study of theology unnecessary. But in fact you penalize yourself as a Bible student by not studying theology, for theology (that is, an overall grasp of Bible teaching) enriches Bible study enormously. How? By enabling you to see more of what is there in each passage. As the effect of knowing botany is that you notice more flora and fauna on a country walk, and the effect of knowing electronics is that you see more of what you are looking at when you take apart your TV, so the effect of knowing

theology is that, other things being equal, you see further into the meaning and implications of Bible passages than you would do otherwise. The ultimate context of each scriptural sentence is the whole Bible, by which I mean not only 66 books but also biblical teaching; and the better one knows one's Bible in this double sense, the deeper one will see into what particular texts involve. That good theology grows by induction out of Bible study, and must always be taught with reference to its biblical base, is familiar truth. Less familiar, but not less true, is the converse, that Bible study is informed by theology.

This is the case also with Christian witness, which in Scripture means not just relating experience, excellent as that practice is, but primarily proclaiming the Creator as Redeemer, and Jesus Christ as risen Saviour. What has to be said about God and the Son comes from Scripture, but theological study will enable us to see it, and therefore say it, more clearly than would otherwise be possible.

Historical theology too is important here, for learning with and from saints of past days is one dimension of fellowship in the body of Christ, and the great Bible students of yesterday (Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, Edwards and the rest) often have richer insight into key themes than do their current counterparts. And since, as has been truly said, it is beyond the wit of man to invent a new heresy, it is a great help to know the old ones, so that one can spot them when they reappear in modern make-up.

## I. Divisions of Systematic Theology

Although various classifications have been suggested, we will employ the following seven-division outline:

- (1) Prolegomena (Introduction to the Study of Theology)
- (2) Theology Proper (The Doctrine of God)
- (3) Anthropology (The Doctrine of Man and Sin)
- (4) Objective Soteriology (The Plan and Provision of Salvation through Christ)
- (5) Subjective Soteriology (The Application of Salvation)
- (6) Ecclesiology (The Doctrine of the Church and Its Ordinances)
- (7) Eschatology (The Doctrine of Last Things)

## J. Method in Systematic Theology

### 1. The contribution of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF)

Chapter 1, section 6 of the WCF states that "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." Does this suggest that deduction, even if it cannot serve as a completely adequate method, can nevertheless play a role in theologizing? Can sound deductions be made from certain biblical truths? Can sound implications be drawn from certain biblical assertions? If a truth is affirmed by Scripture, can logical inferences be drawn to truths not affirmed in Scripture?

For example, if "all Scripture is God-breathed," can we deduce that everything recorded in Scripture is the Word of God? Can we infer that everything written in the Bible is authoritative? Can we imply that every page of Scripture is true? Can we deduce that whatever can properly be called Scripture is inerrant? Or must each of these inferences be qualified by other facts and truths?

### 2. The contribution of Charles Hodge

In Volume 1 of his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge reduces the methods that have been applied to the study of theology to three: the speculative, the mystical, and the inductive. Having disposed of the first two, Hodge sets forth the third, in which there are four steps:

(1) The theologian comes to the task with certain assumptions, including the trustworthiness of his sense perceptions and reasoning powers, and the certainty of those truths given in the constitution of human nature.

(2) He ascertains, collects, and combines all the facts that God has revealed in Scripture concerning Himself and our relation to Him.

(3) He is guided in his collection of facts by the same rules as govern the scientist; to wit, that the collection must be made with diligence and care, and that the collection should be comprehensive, and if possible, exhaustive.

(4) He derives principles from the facts, instead of impressing them on them. He believes that "the relation of these biblical facts to each other, the principles involved in them, and the laws that determine them, are in the facts themselves, and are to be deduced from them."

Other than the use of the word "inductive", a stress on collecting and combining scriptural facts, and an emphasis on deriving principles from the facts, Hodge does not tell us how we are to go about combining the

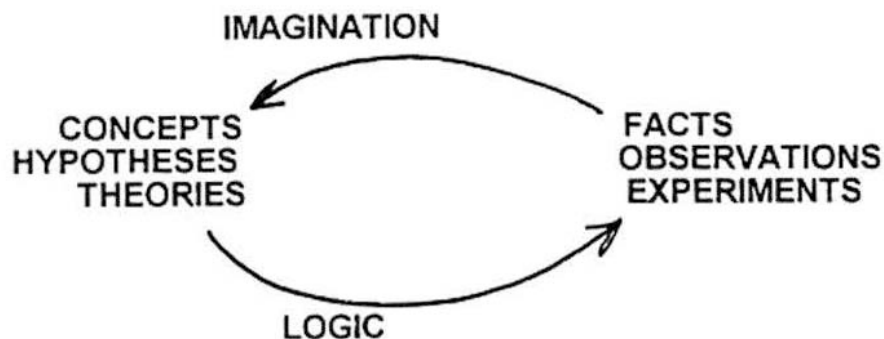
facts or deriving principles from them. He does not offer or suggest a set of operational guidelines by which to proceed in the theological task.

### 3. The contribution of John Warwick Montgomery

#### a. Highlights of Montgomery's paper, "The Theologian's Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology"

Theology was once considered "the Queen of the sciences". This points up the fact that "doing theology" or "theologizing" has a scientific aspect; i.e., it begins with the formation and testing of theories.

The scientist forms and tests theories; i.e., scientific theories. For the scientist, scientific theories are conceptual gestalts, built up retroductively through imaginative attempts to render phenomena intelligible (retroduction consists in studying facts and devising a theory to explain them). Theories in science are mental patterns that attempt to make sense out of facts. These mental patterns arise in the imagination, and are tested by logic. Whenever a theory fits all of the facts, it is said to be verified.



The theologian also forms and tests theories; i.e., theological theories. He attempts to formulate mental patterns (conceptual gestalts) that make sense out of the facts of Scripture. His mental patterns also arise in the imagination, and are tested by logic. Whenever a theological theory fits all of the biblical facts, it is said to be true.

A comparison of this process in science and theology may be charted:

	SCIENCE	THEOLOGY
DATA (facts) (certainty presupposed)	Facts of Nature	Facts of Scripture
Conceptual Gestalts (mental patterns)  (in order of decreasing certitude)	Laws	Ecumenical Creeds
	Theories	Theological Systems
	Hypotheses	Theological Proposals

However, in theological theorizing there is something more than there is in scientific theorizing. In addition to the objective, scientific level, there is the subjective, personal level and the incomprehensible sacral level. This may be illustrated in various ways.

For example, when Martin Luther described his theological method, he said:

Let me show you a right method for studying theology, the one I have used.... This method is the one which the pious king David teaches in the 119th Psalm.... In the 119th Psalm you will find three rules, which are abundantly expounded throughout the entire Psalm. They are called: *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*.

By *Meditatio* Luther meant the reading, study, and contemplation of the Bible (the objective, scientific level); by *Tentatio* Luther meant involvement (the subjective, experiential level); and by *Oratio* Luther meant prayer (the vertical sacral level which puts us into vital contact with the Holy God).

To illustrate further, in classical Protestant theology, faith includes three elements: *Notitia* or knowledge (the objective, scientific element), *Assensus* or assent (the subjective, experiential element), and *Fiducia* or trust (the vertical relation with the living God).

Johann Quenstedt found these elements in John 14:10-12, where verse 10 speaks of knowledge ("Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me?"); verse 11 speaks of assent ("Believe Me that I am in

the Father, and the Father in Me"); and verse 12 speaks of confidence or trust ("he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also").

Just as faith has three aspects or levels, so theology -- which gives expression to faith - has three levels: the objective, the subjective, and the divine, which may be highlighted by the terms "IT", "I", and "THOU".

Moving from the scientific level to the personal level of theological theorizing, it becomes necessary to put ourselves into the picture, to genuinely relive historical revelation, to involve ourselves subjectively. Our question at this level becomes, "How does this relate to me?" Luther insisted that "you should read the story of the Fall as if it happened yesterday, and to you." This is the idea of personal involvement; and it must be a genuine part of theological theorizing.

However, just as theology is more than science, which seeks to formulate theories to fit facts, so it is more than the arts and humanities, which seek to enter personally into the heart of reality. Theology possesses a dimension that is unique to itself: the realm of the holy or sacral. This dimension may be illustrated by three Scriptures:

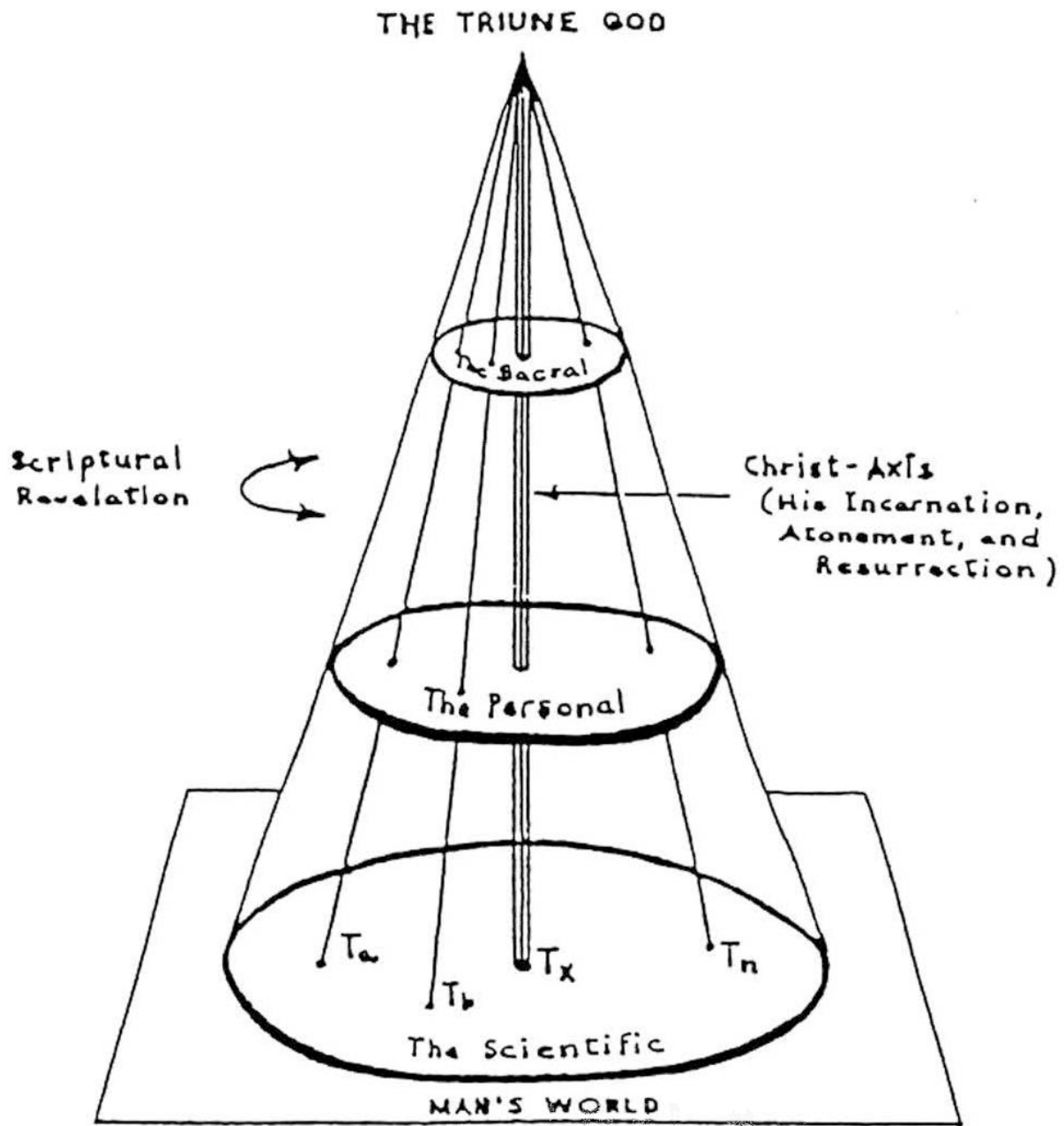
Isaiah 55:8 -- "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord."

Exodus 3:4-6 -- "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said also, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."

Isaiah 6:3-5 -- "And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the threshold trembled at the voice of Him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. '"

On the sacral level of theological theorizing, we recognize the incomprehensibility of God (and thus our inability to understand either Him or His Word exhaustively), and the holiness of God (and thus our own sinfulness); and therefore we recognize our need to approach God in Jesus Christ alone, together with the necessity of the Holy Spirit's illumination and guidance for all sound theological theorizing. All three levels -- the scientific, the personal, and the sacral -- are essential. This may be seen from what reductionisms have produced in the history of theology.

However, if all three levels are essential, how should they be related? What model can be constructed to properly relate these levels? Montgomery provides us with such a model.



In the model the cone represents God's revelation to man as expressed in holy Scripture. The truths of which God's revelation is composed are legion (T-a, T-b,... T-n), but they all center upon the Christ-axis, which is the great truth of Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection. The task of systematic theology is to take the truths of revelation as discovered by the exegete, to work out their proper relation to the focal center and to each other, and to construct doctrinal formulations that "fit" the revelational truths in their mutual relations. Theological theories can be conceived of as cellophane tubes constructed to fit with maximum transparency the truths of revelation; the theologian will endeavor continually to "tighten" them so that they will most accurately capture the essence of biblical truth.

The theological theorist builds his cellophane tubes from bottom to top. He starts in the realm of objective facticity, employing the full range of scientific skills to set forth revelational truth; and he makes every effort not to vitiate his results by reading his own subjective interests into them. But as he climbs, he inevitably reaches a point where he must involve himself subjectively in his material in order to get at the heart of it; here he passes into the personal or artistic level, where the semi-transparent, subjective "I" cannot be ignored. Still he climbs, and eventually -- if he is a theologian worthy of the name -- he finds that his theory construction has brought him into the realm of the Sacred, where both the impersonal "if" of science and the subjective "I" of the humanities stand on holy ground, in the presence of the living God.

Lost in wonder and amazement, then, does theological theorizing find its fulfillment. Commencing in the hardheaded realm of science, moving upward into the dynamic sphere of artistic involvement, it issues forth into a land where words can do little more than guard the burning bush from profanation. Here one can perhaps glimpse theology as its Divine Subject sees it: not as man's feeble attempts to grasp eternal verities, but as a cone of illumination coming down from the Father of lights -- a cone whose sacral level brightens the personal, and the personal the scientific level below it. The truly great theologian, like Aquinas, will conclude his labors with the cry: "I can do no more; such things have been revealed to me that everything I have written seems to me rubbish."

#### b. Critique of Montgomery's paper

"The Theologian's Craft" is an important and helpful contribution to the literature on theological methodology. Very few contributions rival it in scope or depth. However, some questions remain.

For example, what does it mean to "do theology" on the scientific level? How does one go about using the method of retrodution? Is it simply an adaptation of the scientific method?

If the first step is that of collecting the scriptural data concerning a given area of truth, do all of the data have equal weight, or do some have greater weight and some lesser weight? What role does Biblical Theology



play in the weighting of the data? Does the concept of the progress (or unfolding) of revelation affect the relative value of the data? Do N.T. data supersede O.T. data in value? Are the data found in the "didactic portions of the New Testament epistles" crucial? Does the question of literary genre affect the relative value of the data?

In developing mental constructs that attempt to make sense of or render intelligible the biblical data, is the process one of forming and testing small models (those that render intelligible the biblical data pertaining to single doctrines), then forming and testing intermediate models (those that render intelligible the biblical data pertaining to the relationships of individual doctrines), and then forming and testing large models (those that render intelligible the biblical data pertaining to the relationships of doctrinal clusters)? As the conceptual "nets" become larger and larger, and capture more and more data, is each increase in size of the construct paralleled by an increase of subjective certitude? Or is the greatest certitude actually found at the small model level, where construction is closest to the biblical data?

How does Montgomery's personal/artistic/subjective level actually function in forming and testing theological constructs? Does it contribute anything positive to the process? Or does it serve mainly as a reminder of our human involvement in and contribution to our constructs, and of the coloration our finiteness and sinfulness (even as redeemed children of God) add to the models we propose?

How does Montgomery's sacral/holy level actually function in forming and testing theological constructs? Does it contribute anything positive to the process? Or does it serve mainly as a check and a reminder -- a check against our tendency to absolutize our cherished theological sub-creations, and a reminder of the incomprehensibility of God and the sinfulness that remains in us even as we attempt to grasp God's truth?

#### 4. The contribution of Arthur F. Holmes

In Arthur F. Holmes' article, "Ordinary Language Analysis and Theological Method", published in the *Bulletin of the ETS*, summer, 1968, Holmes asserts that deduction and induction are insufficient to explain what goes on in systematic theology. He says:

Theology seems to me to involve hermeneutical assumptions and pre-understandings, the selection of materials, the choice of some preferred materials in interpreting others, the adoption of guiding hypotheses, the use of models, the gradual hesitating construction of conceptual maps.

Holmes proposes that "concept formation means adducing models and developing constructs," and says that "theology is mapwork that explores the logical layout of the models adduced from Scripture." Models are adduced and conceptual or logical maps constructed.

But if adduction is the way we actually do theology, then how can we ascertain the truth-value of the models proposes? Holmes says there are three truth criteria for models. Theological constructs must possess "empirical adequacy" (i.e., must embrace and do justice to the entire scope of relevant data); must "fit" the data properly and closely; and must "cohere" within the overall doctrine of Scripture (i.e., must round out a coherent conceptual scheme).

## 5. The contribution of John Jefferson Davis

J. J. Davis, in *Foundations of Evangelical Theology*, speaks of three models of systematic theology: the "concordance" model, the "synthesis" model, and the "transformational" model.

The concordance model he associates with Charles Hodge and the Old Princeton theologians; characterizes it with the motif, "Christ above culture" (in the sense that it "does not take adequate account of the social context of the theological task and the historicity of all theological reflection"); and says that it sees the task of systematic theology as "an orderly arrangement of biblical doctrines, together with an elucidation of their organic relationships."

The synthesis model he associates with various proponents of liberal theology, including Schleiermacher, Harnack, Fosdick, Shailer Mathews, Bultmann, Tillich, and the Marxist liberation theologians; characterizes it with the motif, "Christ of culture" (in the sense that the gospel is "amalgamated with the highest insights and ideals of the culture," and the culture "becomes a theological norm rather than simply a point of contact"); and says that it sees the task of systematic theology as influencing and persuading the secular culture by making itself timely and relevant.

The transformational model (which Davis espouses) he characterizes with the motif, "Christ transforming culture" (in the sense that "a creatively contextualized evangelical theology actively engages in conversation with the culture, immerses itself in its thought forms," and "seeks to understand humanistic culture not in order to gain its social approval, but in order to persuade, convert, and transform it"); and says that the task of systematic theology is "to provide hermeneutical linkage between the 'what it meant' dimension established by biblical theology and 'what it means' dimension of ministry and mission, established by systematic theology." Davis calls this the method of "contextualization", which he defines as "the articulation of the biblical message in terms of the language and thought forms of a particular culture or ethnic group."

There are several questions that are occasioned by Davis' description of these three models, especially when comparing the "concordance" with the "transformational" models. One question has to do with the content and form. Is the content of the "transformational" model essentially the same as that of the "concordance" model, with only the form being different? Is the emphasis on transformation merely a matter of applying

the teaching of Scripture to culture? Davis admits that "Hodge's model clearly assigns normative priority to the teachings of Scripture, as any orthodox and evangelical theology must. The method also recognizes the nature of biblical revelation as an organic whole, rather than seeing it as a fortuitous collection of historical and religious texts." But Davis asserts that "the concordance model does not take adequate account of the social context of the theological task and the historicity of all theological reflection," even though he admits that "in practice, of course, Hodge and the Old Princeton theologians did interact with their own intellectual and theological milieus."

Another question has to do with the extent to which Davis' transformational model is informed by his eschatological orientation. When *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* was published in 1984, was he already moving toward postmillennialism (his present position), whose great thrust is the present transformation of both hearts of nonbelievers and the structures of society through the proclamation of the gospel?

Yet another rather crucial question for our study has to do with the actual process of doing transformational theology. How does one go about establishing the "what it means" dimension of ministry and mission? What is the starting point? What is the procedure? How does it differ from the method Hodge calls "inductive"? Davis does not tell us how we are to develop or establish transformational theology; and until he does, we cannot assess the cogency or soundness of his method, or follow him to his conclusions.

## 6. The contribution of Millard J. Erickson

In volume one of his *Christian Theology*, Erickson proposes the following procedural steps in theological method:

- (1) Gather all the relevant biblical passages on the doctrine being investigated.
  - (a) Be alert to the presuppositions of the tools consulted and methods employed
  - (b) Do word studies of the key terms relevant to the doctrine under consideration.
  - (c) Closely examine the topic in the didactic portions of Scripture
  - (d) Also give attention to the relevant narrative passages
  - (e) View the biblical material against the historical and cultural background of the time
- (2) Develop some unifying statements on the doctrinal theme being investigated, to coalesce the various emphases of Biblical Theology into a coherent whole. Follow the *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith) in interpretation; i.e., take the whole Bible into account.

- (3) Analyze the meanings of biblical teachings, particularly by getting clear on what we mean by technical terminology or theological concepts.
- (4) Examine various historical treatments of the particular doctrine under consideration.
- (5) Identify the essence of the doctrine, by distinguishing the permanent, unvarying content of the doctrine from the cultural vehicle in which it is expressed.
- (6) Seek illumination from extra-biblical sources, particularly general revelation. General revelation may be found in nature and in man. This suggests that it may be helpful to study the behavioral sciences, the natural sciences, psychology (particularly psychology of religion), and history.
- (7) Give the doctrine contemporary expression by clothing the timeless truth in an appropriate form. This may be done by means of a dialogical approach, in which the culture of a given society provides the questions, and the Bible provides the authoritative answers. The content of theology is provided by the Bible, the form is determined by correlating the answers offered by the Bible with the questions being asked by the culture. Another way in which doctrine may be given contemporary expression is by finding a model that makes the doctrine intelligible in a contemporary context. The aim here is not to make the message acceptable, but understandable. In order to achieve this step, the message must be contextualized. This requires that it first be decontextualized, then recontextualized in length (from a first-century to a twentieth-century setting), breadth (bridging various cultures), and height (various levels of complexity and sophistication, depending on our target audience).
- (8) Choose a central interpretive motif, a particular theme which is the most significant and helpful in approaching theology as a whole. Such a motif lends unity to a system, provides power in its communication, and gives a basic emphasis or thrust to one's ministry.
- (9) Range the theological topics on the basis of their relative importance; and from this develop an outline of major topics and subtopics, noting especially those that are more basic than others and those that need special attention during a given historical period.

Among the various helpful things that he proposes, Erickson leaves some things undeveloped or underdeveloped. For example, in step 2 he does not suggest how one goes about coalescing the various emphases of Biblical Theology into a coherent whole. In step 5 he does not tell us how to distinguish the essence of a doctrine from the cultural vehicle in which it is expressed. And in step 8 he tells us why he thinks it desirable to choose a central interpretive motif, but he does not tell us how one goes about choosing such a motif, or why such a thing is needed.

## 7. The contribution of Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest

In *Integrative Theology*, volume one, Lewis and Demarest define theology as "the topical and logical study of God's revealed nature and purposes"; and state that "Systematic theology not only derives coherent doctrines from the entirety of written revelation but also systematically relates them to each other in developing a comprehensive world view and way of life." They go on to define integrative theology as follows:

Integrative theology utilizes a distinctive verificational method of decision making as it defines a major topic, surveys influential alternative answers in the church, amasses relevant biblical data in their chronological development, formulates a comprehensive conclusion, defends it against competing alternatives, and exhibits its relevance for life and ministry.

Lewis and Demarest state that integrative theology is a science.

Like other sciences, integrative theology works with interrelated criteria of truth (logical noncontradiction, empirical adequacy, and existential viability), accepting only those hypotheses that upon testing are discovered to be (1) noncontradictory, (2) supported by adequate evidence, and (3) affirmable without hypocrisy.

The authors explain their method as follows:

The method used here seeks to involve the reader in six distinct steps: (1) defining and distinguishing the one distinct topic or problem for inquiry; (2) learning alternative approaches to it from a survey of Spirit-led scholars in the history of the church; (3) discovering and formulating from both the Old and the New Testament a coherent summary of relevant biblical teaching by making use of sound principles of hermeneutics, worthy commentaries, and biblical theologies; (4) formulating on the basis of the relevant data a cohesive doctrine and relating it without contradiction to other biblically founded doctrines and other knowledge; (5) defending this formulation of revealed truth in interaction with contradictory options in theology, philosophy, science, religion, and cults; and (6) applying these convictions to Christian life and ministry in the present generation.

Further on, the authors expand on what they mean by the "verificational method", which they say grows out of a critically realistic epistemology. This proposed method includes five steps:

1. Genuine inquiry begins with defining a problem to be researched and becoming aware of its significance.
2. The theological method then discovers alternative answers to the problem by surveying relevant literature or interviewing theologians from many perspectives.

3. All hypotheses, even those whose truth we have assumed for years must be tested for their coherence and viability on standard criteria of truth. If they are true, we need not fear reexamination. True doctrines will not be found self-contradictory, or unrelated to reality in the external or internal worlds of human experience. Sound interpretations of a disputed passage of Scripture will without self-contradiction account for all the relevant lines of evidence: the author's purpose, grammar, and word usage; the immediate biblical context; and the broader theological context. Fitting the external givens, the hypotheses should also fit the internal givens. That is, one should be able to live by it without disillusionment or inauthenticity.

4. After resolving preliminary or subordinate issues between alternatives that are live options, we seek to formulate the overall conclusion to the issue under inquiry. The most coherent and viable position is stated in a way faithful to the revealed truth and at the same time clear and significant for the present generation of Christians and the unreached people we serve.

5. The method applies the conclusion to the burning issues of life by determining worthy ends and values in life and service and, when possible, by suggesting more concrete ways in which to implement the conclusions as persons in families, churches, and nations.

In all of these excellent statements and proposals we still find lacking a specific procedure that spells out what one actually does when he "not only derives coherent doctrine from the entirety of written revelation, but also systematically relates them to each other in developing a comprehensive world view and way of life." How does one go about doing this? It seems that this is the great unanswered question of theological methodology!

## 8. The proposed contribution of the professor

If our task as students of the Word of God is to know, understand, teach, exemplify, and apply the teachings of Scripture; and if all Scripture is profitable; then theology as an imperfect attempt to develop increasingly more accurate approximations of God's perfect system of truth is essentially a process of system building.

We need to concern ourselves, not only with the teachings of individual Scriptures, and with individual doctrines of Scripture, but also with the way the various doctrines of Scripture fit with and relate to each other. This is nothing else than system building, which on a grand scale is what systematic theology at its highest levels is all about.

System building is not a luxury or a game to be engaged in only by the professionals at the top. It is not a toy for the privileged few, or an elitist activity reserved for the influencers of thought. It is a process in which all students of Scripture must be engaged. The question is therefore not whether but how.

Systematic theology as system building should be attempted with critical self-awareness and devotion, in dependence on the Holy Spirit's illuminating ministry. And it should be done with the best of our abilities and efforts, the use of the best tools at our disposal, and in constant submission to the truth of Scripture.

### Kinds of Reasoning

As we theologize, we find ourselves engaged in the process of reasoning. Lest we do this in an unconscious, non-critical manner, we must ask which kinds of reasoning we employ and which kinds of reasoning we should employ (since we are interested not simply in description but prescription). This raises the previous question of what kinds of reasoning there are, and what is involved in each of them.

In the literature on theological methodology we have considered, three basic kinds of reasoning have been mentioned and discussed: induction, deduction, and retrodution or adduction. In passing, it should be mentioned that all reasoning has a basic formula: reason, therefore conclusion.

Induction may be defined in terms of either of its form or its force. As to its form, induction is of two basic kinds: generalization and hypothesis.

A generalization is a general statement about all or most of the members of a class of persons or objects. Particular statements about the individual members of the class are the reasons; the generalization is the conclusion.

Is generalization used in theology? Do we ever collect all relevant scripture reference, and then make general statements that take into account the affirmations common to all or most of the references? The answer is a positive one; and an example of a generalization is collecting the Scriptures that refer to Jesus Christ as having divine characteristics and prerogatives, doing divine works, being called divine names, and receiving worship; and making a general statement about His deity.

A hypothesis is an attempted explanation of a fact or set of facts. Statements about the facts are the reasons; the hypothesis is the conclusion.

Is hypothesis used in theology? Do we ever analyze certain doctrinal positions by hypothesizing what kinds of confirmation we would expect to find in Scripture if those positions were correct? The answer is again positive; and an example of a hypothesis is analyzing the claim that the terms "soul" and "spirit" represent two distinct parts or entities in human beings, and that various aspects or powers of human nature are connected with these parts of human nature; hypothesizing that uses of "soul" will consistently be associated with certain aspects and powers, and uses of "spirit" with certain other aspects and powers; and actually examining the uses of these two terms in Scripture by means of the method of agreement and difference to see whether the hypothesis can be confirmed.

As to its force, induction makes the claim that its conclusion is probable. The degree of probability depends on the weight of the reason (evidence) for the conclusion. The degree of probability can range from slight to overwhelming (sometimes called "moral certainty"), but never attains certainty.

Deduction may also be defined in terms either of its form or its force. As to its form, the most familiar is the syllogism. In a syllogism, the reasons (called the premises) and the conclusion are structured in a special way:

reason (major premise)  
reason (minor premise)  
conclusion

In a syllogism, two features are important: the structure of the argument and the truth of the premises.

Of course, deduction can take other forms. Deductive reasoning can have a single reason for a conclusion (e. g., "He knows this stuff backwards and forwards; therefore he should do well on the midterm examination."). Or it may involve a whole chain of reasoning in which each conclusion serves as a reason for another conclusion (e.g., "She is a bright, personable, good-looking girl; she should have no problem whatever attracting a number of boy friends. Sooner or later she will doubtless discover among those boy friends a very special one. From there it is just a short step to the altar.").

As to its force, deduction makes the claim that its conclusion is certain. In a syllogism, deduction makes the claim that if the structure is sound and the premises are true, then the conclusion must follow. In either a single-link deduction or a deductive chain of reasoning, deduction makes the claim that the conclusion must follow.

Retroduction or Adduction is essentially a variant of the inductive form of hypothesis. The models that retroduction proposes are attempted explanations of sets of data. And yet they are more. They are pattern statements which attempt to make sets of data intelligible, i.e., meaningful; and not simply statements that attempt to explain them.

That is, in hypothesis we are attempting to establish some sort of causal connection between a set of facts and an attempted explanation; whereas in retroduction we are attempting to render facts meaningful by seeing them as part of some sort of pattern of meaning-relationships. In other words, in retroduction the pattern (or model or construct) gives meaning to the individual facts by contextualizing them in a framework of meaning. A hypothesis explains why the facts are the way they are; a retroductive model explains what the facts mean in context.



Retroductive models are tested by logic for self-consistency and coherence, and are confirmed or disconfirmed by the relevant data.

As to their form, retroductive models, conceptual gestalts, or mental "nets" may be of various sizes, and may attempt to "catch" smaller or larger sets of data. They are attempted explanations of the meaning of sets of data. They may be used to interrelate sets of data or models, even very large models.

As to their force, retroductive constructs make the claim that they are probable, and in varying degrees. Certainty is found in the data, not in the constructs.

### Proposal

Thus far various theologians have proposed individual ways of doing theology -- whether inductive, deductive, or retroductive. Is it possible that all three kinds of reasoning actually play a role in theological theorizing?

Let us analyze a specific example of theologizing to see what kind of reasoning is employed.

In formulating the doctrine of the nature of human beings (generic man), we first collect biblical data and draw the generalization that man is comprised of a material part and a non-material part; these two parts function holistically (as a unit) in this life.

We also collect other biblical data and draw the generalization that man survives physical death, not only through a resurrection in the end time, but also in a conscious existence during the interim between physical death and resurrection.

Now since the material part of man decays and decomposes into dust following physical death, we deduce that it cannot be the part of man that survives and consciously exists following death. We further deduce that since the material part of man does not survive physical death, it must be the non-material part that survives death in a conscious existence.

We collect still more biblical data and draw the generalization that in the resurrection the non-material part of man is reunited with his transformed material part.

We now adduce various "models" to see which one best "fits" these generalizations and deductions. We are now aware that a preferred model must account for the data that man in his embodied state prior to physical death functions as a unitary, holistic being; that in his disembodied state following physical death he continues to function in his non-material part as a unitary being, even though his material part returns to dust; and that in his reembodied state following physical resurrection he functions once again as a unitary, holistic being.

Comparing our findings with those of various theologians, we find that simple monistic or dualistic models of man's nature do not account for all of these data, and we therefore deduce that such models are inadequate. However, a model that views man's nature as ontologically dualistic but

functionally monistic appears to "fit" all of the biblical data in their integrity; and we therefore adopt it provisionally.

Holding our model as a hypothesis, and gathering still other relevant biblical data, we find increasing confirmation of our construct, and are strengthened in our confidence that our model represents the teachings of Scripture.

As we further compare it with the models other theologians have proposed, and with the statements of various creeds and confessions, we find that our model holds up rather well, and in fact is actually proposed by a contemporary theologian!

It appears that the process of theological reasoning is too rich, too complex to be reduced to any one kind of reasoning. All three -- induction, deduction, and retroduction -- are involved in doing theology. All three can be used in the service of God!

As we engage in theological system building, it would seem that all three basic kinds of reasoning need to be pressed into service. As to the question of when and where one kind of reasoning is to be employed rather than another, the answer would seem to be a combination of common sense, acquaintance with the kinds of reasoning and the ways they work, and persistence in raising leading questions that are prompted by a desire to clearly understand God's system of truth, and that by their nature call for either inductive, deductive, or retroductive reasoning.

Since we are interested in the teaching of Scripture as a whole, most investigations will begin with collecting data and making doctrinal generalizations. Some investigations will proceed with deducing consequences from doctrinal generalizations, and comparing these conclusions with other doctrinal generalizations and/or conclusions. Some investigations will then adduce hypothetical doctrinal constructs which attempt to relate and make sense of generalizations and conclusions. And many investigations will use induction, deduction, and retroduction a number of times, and in various orders and sequences.

### The Role of Previous Conclusions

Do previous conclusions concerning the teachings of Scripture inform ongoing theological system building? Should they? Is it necessary to address each new question *de novo*, in a vacuum, with no preconceptions or convictions based on previous study? Is it even possible to do this? If it is possible, via carefully controlled, self-conscious, critical assessment of each step, to address each question without preconceptions, is it desirable? Or is the process of system building one of taking into account previous work (with flexibility and the possibility of modification built into the construction process)?

It would seem that previous theological work must always be open to correction, modification, and adjustment, but only in response to new data, new insights, new constructs, or newly perceived relationships. Openness does not necessitate modification! And it is not necessary to think of modification only in terms of minor "tinkering"; it is possible

(when warranted) to come to the conclusion that whole modules of the system may need replacement.

Does this mean that each time we make a modification (small or large) in our theological system, we lose a corresponding amount of confidence that we are developing increasingly more accurate approximations of God's perfect system of truth? Actually, if our modifications are in the direction of a closer "fit" of the biblical data, it should increase rather than decrease our confidence. Each step closer to the truth is a step forward in our understanding. Instead of undermining confidence, this process should enhance it!

## II. Revelation and Theology

### A. General Revelation

#### 1. Confessional statements of the doctrine

##### a. The French Confession of Faith (A. D. 1559)

ii. As such this God reveals himself to men; firstly, in his works, in their creation, as well as in their preservation and control. Secondly, and more clearly, in his Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterward committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures.

##### b. The Belgic Confession (A. D. 1561)

#### Article II

#### By What Means God is Made Known Unto Us

We know him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his eternal power and Godhead, as the Apostle Paul saith (Rom. 1:20). All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.

##### c. The Westminster Confession of Faith (A. D. 1647)

#### Chapter I

#### Of Holy Scripture

I. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

## 2. Preliminary definitions

"Revelation" -- Revelation is divine self-disclosure in significant mode

"General revelation" -- General revelation is divine self-disclosure in mediate, natural mode

"External general revelation" -- External general revelation is general revelation that comes to the recipient from outside of himself/herself

"Internal general revelation" -- Internal general revelation is general revelation that comes to the recipient from within himself/herself

## 3. Biblical teaching concerning the doctrine

### a. Biblical teaching concerning external general revelation

#### (1) Psalm 19:1-4 (verses 2-5 in the Hebrew text)

In the A. V. the text reads as follows:

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.
- 2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.
- 4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

(Note: the underlined words were supplied by the translator)

In the Kittel text of the Hebrew Bible, the text is as follows:

PSALM 19:2-5

(Hebrew enumeration)

ב. הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהִים

God the glory of Piel Act. Participle  
Masc. Plur. > סָפַר  
(are recounting) The heavens

וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מְגִיד הַרְקִיעַ:

the sky Hiph. Act. Part.  
Masc. Sing. > נִגַּד  
(is declaring) his hands the works of

ג. יוֹם לְיוֹם יַבִּיעַ אָמַר

speech Hiph. Impf.  
3 masc. sing > נִבֵּעַ  
(pours forth) to day . . day

וּלְלַיְלָה לַלַּיְלָה יַחְזִיר דַּעַת:

knowledge pül Impf.  
3 masc sing > חָזַר  
(declares) to night and night

ד. אֵין אָמַר וְאֵין דְּבָרִים

words and no,  
nothing speech no,  
nothing of

בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם:

their voice,  
sound Niph. pass. part.  
Masc. Sing > שָׁמַע  
(is being heard) adverb or  
particle of  
negation: (not)

ה. בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ | יֵצֵא קוֹמָם

their chord Qal Impf.  
3 masc. sing > יָצָא  
(has gone out) the earth in all  
(or line)

וּבְקֶצֶה תֵּבֵל מִלִּיהֶם

their words world in the end (or  
extremity) of

A literal translation of the passage reads as follows:

- 1 To the overseer - a psalm of David
- 2 The heavens are recounting the glory of God,  
And the sky is declaring the work of His hands;
- 3 Day to day is pouring forth speech,  
And night to night is declaring knowledge.
- 4 There is no speech and there are no words;  
Their voice is not being heard.
- 5 In all the earth their chord (or measuring line) has gone out,  
And in the extremity of the world their words.

In this translation from the Hebrew, there is a difference from that of the A.V. Verse 3 of the A.V. reads: "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." This translation asserts that their voice is being heard in every speech and language. But verse 4 of the literal translation from the Hebrew reads: "There is no speech and there are no words; Their voice is not being heard." This translation asserts that their voice is not being heard, and that the recounting and declaring of the heavens and the sky is being accomplished without speech and without words. Which translation is correct? And, does it matter?

It is extremely interesting to look at other versions and to see how they translate this verse. When we do this, we discover that some versions say that the "voice" of the heavens is being heard, and some say that it is not being heard.

Examples of the positive assertion (it is being heard) include the following:

- (1) The Septuagint (LXX) reads as follows:

4 οὐκ εἰσὶ λαλιαὶ οὐδὲ λόγοι,  
ᾧν οὐχὶ ἀκούονται αἱ φωναὶ αὐτῶν·

This may be translated: "There are no speeches or words,  
in which their voices are not heard."

- (2) Martin Luther's translation reads as follows:

"Es ist keine Sprache noch Rede, da man nicht ihre  
Stimme höre."

This may be translated: "There is no language or speech  
in which one does not hear their voice."

- (3) The Douay Version (O. T., 1609) reads as follows:

"There are no speeches nor languages,  
where their voices are not heard."

- (4) The New American Bible (a popular recent Roman Catholic translation) reads as follows:

"Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard."

- (5) The New International Version (NIV) reads as follows:

"There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."

Examples of the negative assertion (it is not being heard) include the following:

- (1) The American Standard Version of 1901 reads as follows:

"There is no speech nor language; Their voice is not heard."

- (2) The Revised Standard Version (RSV) reads as follows:

"There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard."

- (3) The Bible: An American Translation (by J. M. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed) reads as follows:

"There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard."

- (4) The Berkeley Version reads as follows:

"There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard."

- (5) The Moffatt Version reads as follows: (the translation is so poetic, it is worth reproducing in its entirety)

"The heavens proclaim God's splendour,  
the sky speaks of his handiwork;  
day after day takes up the tale,  
night after night makes him known;  
their speech has never a word,  
not a sound for the ear,  
and yet their message spreads the wide world over,  
their meaning carries to earth's end."

- (6) The Good News Bible - Today's English Version - reads as follows:

"No speech or words are used, no sound is heard."



- (7) The Living Bible reads as follows: (again, it is worth reproducing in its entirety)

"The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of his craftsmanship. Day and night they keep on telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world."

- (8) The New English Bible reads as follows:

"One day speaks to another,  
night after night shares its knowledge,  
and this without speech or language  
or sound of any voice."

- (9) The Jerusalem Bible reads as follows:

"No utterance at all, no speech, no sound that anyone can hear;"

- (10) The New World Translation (just for interest's sake) reads as follows:

"There is no speech, and there are no words;  
No voice on their part is being heard."

- (11) The Readers Digest Bible reads as follows:

"There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;"

- (12) The New American Standard Bible (NASB) reads as follows:

"There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard."

Why is there this contrast of opposites in these translations? In one group of versions the "voice" of the heavens is being heard; in the other group it is not being heard. On what does the difference turn?

Analyzing the passage in the translation from the Hebrew, we find that in verse 2 (Hebrew enumeration) the heavens are recounting and the sky is declaring God's glory in His handiwork. In verse 3 speech is being poured forth and knowledge is being declared. And in verse 5 their chord has gone out and their words have gone to the extremity of the world. But in verse 4 their voice is not being heard! Verse 4 seems to conflict with verses 2, 3, and 5.

Again, in verse 3 speech is being poured forth, and knowledge is being declared. And in verse 5 their words have gone out to the extremity of the world. But in verse 4 there is no speech and there are no words. Verse 4 seems to strongly conflict with, even contradict, verses 3 and 5.

However, if verse 4 is modified ever so slightly to read, "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard," the conflicts are resolved and the passage is smoothed out. And then verse 4 asserts that their voice is being heard in every speech and language, which seems to be what verses 2, 3, and 5 are also saying! What a simple solution at such a small cost!

But can this small modification be justified exegetically? Is the Hebrew sufficiently ambiguous at the crucial point to allow for the insertion of "where" or "in which", thereby changing the whole thrust of the statement in verse 4?

The crucial Hebrew word is **לֹא** (b'liy), a particle of negation. Ludwig Koehler's *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951; and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) states that **לֹא** means not or without, and that it is sometimes used like the prefix un\_ or the suffix \_less.

So, for example, in Job 30:8 we read of "fools, even those without a name" (nameless). In Job 31:39 we read, "If I have eaten its fruit without money" (moneyless). In Psalm 63:2 we read, "My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." (literally, "in a dry and weary land, waterless"). In II Samuel 1:21 we read of "the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil." In Hosea 7:8 we read that "Ephraim has become a cake not turned." In Genesis 31:20 we read that "Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he was fleeing." And in Job 8:11 Bildad asks, "Can the rushes grow without water?"

Psalm 19:4 says simply, "There is no speech and there are no words; their voice is not being heard."

But the question remains: How can verse 4 be reconciled with verses 2, 3, and 5?

There are two interpretations that attempt to resolve the conflicts and make sense of the passage, while retaining integrity in the exegesis.

One interpretation proposes that the external general revelation of God's glory and handiwork is going forth to the ends of the earth, but that it falls on sin-blinded eyes and sin-deafened ears, so that it is not "heard" (i.e., not subjectively apprehended or perceived by unregenerate human beings). This interpretation explains the statement in verse 4 that "their voice is not being heard," but it does not resolve the conflict between the statement in verse 4 that "there is no speech and there are no words," and the statements in verse 3 and 5 that there is speech and there are words.

A second interpretation proposes that the external general revelation of God's glory and handiwork is not couched in a written or spoken language, but is rather embodied in a (nonpropositional) "language" that transcends all languages and thus reaches all

human beings. This interpretation explains the troublesome statement in verse 4 that "their voice is not being heard" (i.e., with the human ear, as ordinary voices are heard), and at the same time reconciles the statement in verse 4 that "there is no speech and there are no words," and the statements in verses 3 and 5 that there is speech (truth about God is being communicated) and there are words (genuine meaning-content is being conveyed).

But does it make any difference which interpretation we choose? Does it really matter whether the "voice" of general revelation is or is not being heard? Does it make any difference whether or not human beings apprehend and perceive the external general revelation? It may make a difference in the way this passage "fits" or does not "fit" with other pertinent passages. And it may make a significant difference in regard to the application of this passage to both pre-evangelism and unregenerate man's responsibility.

In any case, more data are needed!

However, in passing let us note a poem written by Joseph Addison (A. D. 1672-1719), which was published in *The Spectator*, No. 465 - a poem that beautifully captures the second interpretation. Incidentally, this poem was later made into a hymn. Addison wrote:

The spacious firmament on high,  
With all the blue, ethereal sky,  
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,  
Their great Original proclaim:  
Th' unwearied sun, from day to day,  
Does his Creator's power display;  
And publishes to every land  
The work of an almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shades prevail,  
The moon takes up the wondrous tale;  
And nightly, to the listening earth,  
Repeats the story of her birth;  
While all the stars that round her burn,  
And all the planets in their turn,  
Confirm the tidings as they roll,  
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

What though, in solemn silence, all  
Move round this dark terrestrial ball?  
What though no real voice nor sound  
Amid their radiant orbs be found?  
In reason's ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice,  
Forever singing as they shine,  
"The hand that made us is divine."

(2) Romans 10:16-18

Translation:

16 But not all responded to the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who believed what we heard?"

17 Thus faith is by means of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

18 But I say, they did not hear, did they? On the contrary, "Into all the earth their sound went out, and into the extremities of the world their words."

Note: In the phrase "the word of Christ" in verse 17, the UBS text gives Word of Christ a "B" rating, which indicates that there is some degree of doubt. The evidence for the alternate reading, Word of God, is not as strong. -- 17 ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ κοῆς, ἡ δὲ κοὴ διὰ ῥήματος  
□Χριστοῦ. [Note: Χριστοῦ WH Treg NIV θεοῦ RP]

Commentary:

Verse 18b is obviously a quotation of Psalm 19:4 (English enumeration): "Into all the earth their sound went out, and into the extremities of the world their words." This speaks of what the heavens are telling; and we note that whatever the heavens are telling about God's glory and handiwork has gone to the ends of the earth. This is a general revelation to all mankind (divine self-disclosure in mediate, nature mode), and does not refer to the redemptive gospel.

The question in verse 18a -- "they did not hear, did they?" -- is answered in 18b by the assertion that the general revelation has reached (and reaches) to the extremities of the world. Thus all human beings have heard (and hear) this "word", which reveals God's glory and handiwork.

However, in verse 17 hearing is spoken of as means to faith ("faith is by means of hearing"); and what is heard is "the word of Christ". The order of sequence seems to be: (1) "the word of Christ" is proclaimed; (2) human beings hear this word; (3) faith comes by hearing this word. Thus we have the sequence: word, hearing, faith.

But when in verse 18a Paul says, "they did not hear, did they?", the answer is that they did indeed hear; and the evidence that they did indeed hear comes from Psalm 19:4. But in Psalm 19:4 what they heard was external general revelation!

However, in verse 16 Paul says that not all Israelites (speaking of the nation of Israel during the Old Testament period) responded to the gospel; and he quotes Isaiah as

saying, "Lord, who believed what we heard?" The idea here appears to be that although Isaiah heard the word of the Lord concerning the suffering Servant and His sacrificial death for men's sins, and although he communicated this word to the Israelites of his day, comparatively few believed Isaiah's report and thus few responded in faith to the gospel.

But now we must ask the difficult question: how does verse 16 correlate with verse 18?

Verse 16 is speaking of the special revelation of the redemptive gospel in Jesus Christ, and verse 18 is speaking of the general revelation of God's glory and handiwork in His creation. This would be no problem if the two verses were not connected by verse 17. But they are! And verse 17, as immediately subsequent to verse 16, seems to continue speaking of the special revelation in God's Son; whereas verse 17, as immediately antecedent to verse 18 and joined to verse 18 by the antecedent to the question, "they did not hear, did they?", seems to be speaking (at least partially) of the general revelation in God's creation.

If we begin with verse 16, which clearly speaks of the special revelation of the gospel in Christ; then proceed to verse 17 with the understanding that it continues to speak of the special revelation of the gospel which, when heard, is a means to faith; then when we come to verse 18, which just as clearly speaks of the general revelation of God's glory and handiwork in creation and at the same time refers us back to verse 17 (for the answer to the question in 18a), we have a problem!

Now, however, if in verse 16 we understand that comparatively few Israelites in Isaiah's day listened to (heard) the word concerning Christ and responded in faith; and if in verse 17 we understand that faith comes through hearing the word (whether the word of general revelation of God's glory and handiwork in creation, or the word of special revelation of the redemptive gospel in Christ); and if in verse 18 we understand that the Israelites heard both the word of general revelation and the word of special revelation, but responded to neither one in faith; this may help explain the apparent discrepancy between verses 16 and 18.

Even if we accept this explanation, there is a special problem that requires resolution. It is the reference to "the word of Christ" in verse 17. If this phrase is understood to refer to the gospel of Christ's redemption, then when verse 18 asks, "they did not hear, did they?", and quotes Psalm 19:4 to support the implied answer that the Israelites did hear, then one of two options is true: either the gospel of Christ's redemption is revealed in external general revelation and the Israelites heard the gospel but rejected it; or the sequence of

word, hearing, faith applies to both external general revelation and the special revelation of the gospel, and the Israelites heard both "words" but rejected them. Since the first option is not supported by Scripture in other places, the second option would appear to be preferred.

But why "the word of Christ"? This could be understood to refer to the fact that all things came into being through Christ (John 1:3), and that the "words" that the heavens are recounting (Psalm 19:1, 4) are therefore a revelation of (or "word" concerning) Christ's handiwork, then "the word of Christ" could refer to either or both the gospel of Christ's redemption (of verse 16) and/or the external general revelation of God's glory and handiwork (of verse 18).

Summarizing, then, the teaching of Romans 10:16-18, we note the following: verse 16 tells us that not all Israelites responded in faith to God's special revelation of the gospel that they heard; verse 17 tells us that faith comes by means of hearing and responding to God's revelation; and verse 18 tells us that the Israelites (as well as all other human beings) heard God's external general revelation. Verse 18 also implies that not all of those who heard responded in faith to that "word".

From these considerations we can deduce certain helpful concepts and truths.

First, it is appropriate to speak of revelation generically (i.e., both general revelation and special revelation) in terms of "word". Both forms of revelation are a word from God.

Second, both words convey truth about God. General revelation discloses God's glory and handiwork; special revelation discloses God's grace and justice in the good news of salvation from sin through the redemptive work of Christ.

Third, it is appropriate to speak of a positive human response to revelation in terms of faith. Faith is always a response to a word from God. Since both forms of revelation are a word from God, then human beings can respond to both words in faith.

Forth, in order to get and keep clear on faith as response to distinct forms of revelation, it would probably be helpful to make the following distinctions:

<u>Form of Revelation</u>	<u>Kind of Faith-Response</u>
general revelation	general faith
special revelation in scripture	special faith
special revelation of the gospel; i.e. of Christ as Redeemer	saving faith

(3) Acts 14:16-17

Translation:

16 Who in past generations (or ages) permitted all the nations to go their own ways.

17 And yet He did not leave Himself without a witness of conferring benefits, giving you rains from heaven and fruitful times, filling (or satisfying) your hearts with food (or nourishment) and gladness.

Commentary:

The scope of this statement appears to include all nations of mankind in all generations of their history. Thus a general revelation is being referred to.

The statement "He did not leave Himself without a witness" is equivalent to the statement "He left a witness to Himself".

The witness God left is His manifest benevolence to all mankind, in the form of the benefits of rains and fruitful times and satisfying food.

Although God's witness to Himself is undoubtedly affected by the curse that original sin has brought on creation, this passage appears to affirm the continued existence and meaningfulness of that witness, even though it may be obscured by the results of sin.

Although this passage does not tell us how many human beings have received God's witness, it would at least seem that men possess some capacity to receive this witness if it is properly to be called a "witness" in any meaningful sense.

(4) Romans 1:18-25

Translation:

18 For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon all godlessness and unrighteousness of men, who are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness,

19 Because that which is known of God is manifest among them, for God manifested (it) to them.

20 For since the creation of the world the invisible things of Him, even His eternal power and divinity, are being perceived, being understood by the made things, with the result that they are without excuse.

21 Because that when they knew God they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful, but became

- empty in their reasonings, and their foolish heart was darkened.  
22 Claiming to be wise, they were made foolish,  
23 And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into a likeness of the form of corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and reptiles.  
24 Therefore God delivered them up, in the desires of their hearts, to uncleanness, to dishonor their bodies among them;  
25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Commentary:

Paul uses a very strong expression to describe God's attitude toward those who are suppressing or holding down (κατεχόντων) the truth in their unrighteousness. He says that God's wrath, His great anger (ὀργή) is being revealed against such persons. Why is this so? Paul says it is because that which is known of God is manifest among them, for God manifested it to them; and they are suppressing it.

What is known about God by human beings who are suppressing the truth? What truth do they know? What truth are they suppressing? Paul says that the truth of God's invisible power and divinity is known by means of the visible creation, and that this truth has been manifested since the world was created.

But are sinful human beings in contact with this truth? Paul says that they perceive (καθορᾶται), the truth, and understand (νοοῦμενα) it by the created things, to the extent that they are inexcusable. Why are they inexcusable? Because they not only currently suppress the truth, but when they knew God they did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful, but they became empty in their reasonings and their foolish heart was darkened. They claimed to be wise, but became foolish. Instead of having the Creator as the object of their religious worship, they chose images of His creation and worshipped them. Therefore God let them go their own way, to fulfill their own sinful desires. Paul says that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature instead of the Creator.

Throughout the passage there are both present tenses and past tenses.

With regard to past tenses, in verse 19 God manifested His truth to men. Verse 21 says that a certain point in their self-experience, these sinful men knew God, but didn't glorify



or thank Him. In verse 23 they changed the glory of God into a corruptible image. In verse 24 God let them go their own way. And in verse 25 they changed the truth into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature instead of the Creator.

With regard to present tense, in verse 18 God's wrath is being revealed, and sinful human beings are suppressing the truth. In verse 19 that which is known of God is manifest among them. In verse 20 God's invisible power and divinity are being perceived and understood.

How can both the past tenses and the present tenses refer to the same class of human beings?

Four basic interpretations of this passage have been proposed:

(a) One interpretation proposes that this passage refers to the people who lived just prior to the great Flood of Noah's time; and that these people turned away from the true knowledge of God, lost it, became very wicked and corrupt, and were given over to destruction.

This view certainly accounts for the past tenses in the passage. However, since all of the people who lived prior to the Flood (except Noah and seven relatives) were destroyed in the Flood, none of the present tenses in the passage can apply to them. And yet these same human beings are said to be presently perceiving the truth and understanding it, and presently suppressing it. Thus this view does not include all of the data of this passage; and on this ground must be discarded.

(b) A second interpretation proposes that this passage refers to the transition from the age of childhood innocency, when all human beings know God, to the age of moral accountability, when human beings turn away from the true knowledge of God, lose it, become sinners, and are given over to their depravity and corruption.

This view has the distinct advantage of including both past and present tenses in the life of each individual human being. However, it introduces a concept (the age of accountability) for which it is difficult to find scriptural support.

Although there is a relative sense in which one may speak of childhood innocency (as in Matthew 18:2-4, where Jesus says "unless you are converted and become like children"; or in I Corinthians 14:20, where Paul says "in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature"), yet one must search the Scriptures diligently to find support for the concept that human beings first become sinful and depraved when they reach a certain point in their childhood development.

David's recognition in Psalm 51:5 -- "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" -- appears to be closer to the truth.

Incidentally, Jesus' statement in Matthew 18:2-4 could mean that unless we become humble and acceptant and trusting (not sinless) as little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. And Paul's statement in I Corinthians 14:20 could mean that with respect to evil we should be as babes who are inexperienced (not sinless), but with respect to thought and judgment we should be mature, experienced persons.

(c) A third interpretation proposes that this passage refers to the human situation prior to and following the Fall, when at first all mankind in Adam knew God, but then turned away from God, lost the knowledge of God, became guilty, depraved, and corrupt, became sin-blinded and sin-deafened to God's truth, and were given over to their own sinful religious and moral devices.

This view is attractive because it relates the results mentioned in the passage to the Fall, and thus includes all mankind in its condemnation. It is also attractive because of its simplicity and neatness.

Nevertheless, it faces the difficulty encountered by the first interpretation -- it accounts for the past tenses in the passage, and the before and after aspects of the Fall, but not for the present tense. If mankind once and for all lost the knowledge of God and became blind and deaf to God's truth, it is difficult to see how human beings can presently be suppressing the truth that they are presently perceiving.

(d) A fourth interpretation proposes that this passage refers to the experience of each sinful human being at each moment of his earthly life. It suggests that each sinful human being is presently experiencing external general revelation of God's power and divinity, is presently perceiving and understanding it in terms of the truth it conveys, and is presently suppressing, distorting, and perverting it; and that this process is continuously operating in each unrighteous person in a succession of moments from present to past.

This view stresses both the present and the past tenses in the passage as it reveals the manner in which the unrighteous man interacts with the general revelation that is pouring in upon his senses from every side at each moment of time. It proposes that at one moment the unrighteous man is perceiving the "createdness" of the made things of the universe, is understanding their implications with respect to the eternal power and divinity of God, is suppressing these truths, and is distorting and perverting them into idols created out of his own imagination. It also proposes that the next

moment it can be said of the unrighteous man that in the previous moment of his existence he knew God (as Creator), chose not to glorify or thank Him, changed God's glory into a corruptible idol-image, changed the truth into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator. And it can be said of the unrighteous man that God has let him go his own way.

This interpretation, although complex, has the advantage of including both present and past tenses in the life of each individual human being. This process of succession of moments from present to past also occurs in the life of every human being in all time periods, so that the ongoing revelation that is being perceived is truly general. Thus this view refers to the experiential history of each unrighteous human being at each moment of his earthly existence.

b. Biblical teaching concerning internal general revelation

(1) Psalm 94:1-9

Translation: (from the NASB)

O Lord, God of vengeance;  
God of vengeance, shine forth!  
2 Rise up, O Judge of the earth;  
Render recompense to the proud.  
3 How long shall the wicked, O Lord,  
How long shall the wicked exult?  
4 They pour forth words, they speak arrogantly;  
All who do wickedness vaunt themselves.  
5 They crush Thy people, O Lord,  
And afflict Thy heritage.  
6 They slay the widow and the stranger,  
And murder the orphans.  
7 And they have said, 'The Lord does not see,  
Nor does the God of Jacob pay heed. '  
8 Pay heed, you senseless among the people;  
And when will you understand, stupid ones?  
9 He who planted the ear, does He not hear?  
He who formed the eye, does He not see?

Commentary:

This passage speaks of the wicked exulting, crushing the Lord's people, killing the widows, strangers, and orphans, and then saying, "The Lord does not see it, nor pay heed." The psalmist calls upon his readers and listeners and singers to think, reason, reflect, and draw implications that bear on this foolish and reprehensible attitude of the wicked.

The movement of thought, along whose lines the hearers are to reason, is from a faculty or power in created beings to its counterpart in their Creator. If a created being has the power to hear and to see, shall not the Creator have that power?

The thrust of this passage, then, appears to be that human beings ought to reason from their created powers to similar powers in the Creator. If created human beings can hear, surely God can hear! If created human beings can see, surely God can see! And if God can hear what wicked men say and see what wicked men do, then wicked men should be warned of God's coming judgment of their wicked deeds, and good men should be encouraged, knowing that God will justly redress their grievances against the wicked.

This passage assumes the existence of God as Creator, and then calls on human beings to use their reasoning powers to discover what God is like. As such, this is internal general revelation; i.e., general revelation that comes to the recipient from within himself.

(2) Acts 17:16-31

Translation:(from the NASB)

- 16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols.
- 17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.
- 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, 'What would this idle babbler wish to say?' Others, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,' -- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.
- 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?
- 20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean.
- 21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)
- 22 And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.
- 23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.
- 24 The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

- 25     neither is He served by human hands, as though he needed anything,  
since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;  
26     and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face  
of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the  
boundaries of their habitation,  
27     that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and  
find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;  
28     for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own  
poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'  
29     Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine  
Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and  
thought of man.  
30     Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now  
declaring to men that all everywhere should repent,  
31     because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in  
righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having  
furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.'

Commentary:

This passage finds Paul standing on Mars Hill (the Areopagus), surrounded by temples, and reasoning with his curious hearers. To establish a point of contact and to help apply his message, Paul quotes from the Greek poets Aratus and Cleanthes (both Stoics). Aratus wrote, "Ever and in all ways we all enjoy Jupiter, for we are also his offspring"; and Cleanthes, in a hymn to Zeus, wrote "for from you we are offspring." Since some of his hearers were Stoics (verses 18-19), presumably they would not deny what their own poets had said! Paul then moves quickly from the quotation (which was only formally true, since it was spoken of Zeus or Jupiter) to an argument.

In verse 29 Paul presents a deductive argument. Since human beings are offspring of God, they should not think that God is like a humanly carved statue made of gold or silver or stone by man's creative thought and skill. But this raises another question: If men should not think of God that way, how should they think of Him? And what does being the "offspring of God" have to do with the way we think of God?

Incidentally, Paul is not speaking of being the offspring of God in the redemptive sense of being born-again children of God. Rather, he is speaking of being the offspring of God in the creative sense of being children of God via creation in His image and likeness.

This idea of God being the Father of all human beings in the creative sense may be found in Malachi 2:10, where we read, "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?"; and in Hebrews 12:9, where we read, "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" And if, as in Luke 3:38, it is proper in a genealogy, to speak of Adam as the son of God, then we can say that Adam descended from God as His creation. So it appears proper to speak of human beings as the creative children or offspring of God. And Paul assumes that we can do so.

The force of the "offspring" concept as part of Paul's deduction appears to be that man, being God's offspring, is in some sense like God (this would fit with the assertion that man is made in the image and likeness of God -- *the imago dei*). The corollary seems to be that God is then in some sense like man (since if man is like God, then God is like man).

This being the case, then those ways in which man is Godlike (i.e., in which he reflects the perfections of his Creator) are also ways in which God is like man; we ought to think of Him in those ways.

Thus this passage contains a movement of thought from the limited, finite qualities that constitute the image of God in man, to the unlimited, infinite qualities of God the Creator. Paul says that men ought to think of God in this way, and not to think of God like a humanly-conceived and humanly-crafted image of gold, silver, or stone. As such, the passage provides a basis for asserting that an internal general revelation exists, one that comes to the recipient from within himself.

In verses 30 and 31 Paul speaks of the Athenians' ignorance of the living God as blameworthy, and calls on them to repent of this (willful) ignorance. This suggests that unrighteous human beings are suppressing the internal as well as the external general revelation, and that this suppression is blameworthy.

### (3) Romans 1:28-32

Translation: (from the NASB)

- 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,
- 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

- 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,
- 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;
- 32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Commentary:

Simply by tracing their identity back through the preceding verses, the persons spoken of in 1:32 can be seen to be the same persons spoken of in 1:18. Thus 1:32 speaks of all unrighteous human beings.

The persons in 1:32 are said to know the ordinance or judgment of God. This would appear to mean that they have some sense of the wrongness of the things they are doing (the things spoken of in 1:29-31), some awareness that there will be a reckoning for their wrongdoing, and some apprehension that their wrongdoing deserves and will receive punishment. This sense, this awareness, this apprehension may be viewed as a part of internal general revelation.

(4) Romans 2:14-15

Translation:

- 14 For when the Gentiles, those who do not have the Law, are doing by nature (φύσει) the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves.
- 15 Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing an accompanying witness, and their thoughts accusing or excusing between one another.

Commentary:

In this passage the Gentiles (which includes all persons except Jews) are said to have a law written into their nature. This law is said to work its way out into expression. Interestingly, this outworking is in accord with some of the things specified in the Law of Moses. These expressions of inworked law may be called moral actions.

Inevitably these moral actions become customs, and are eventually codified into moral codes of right and wrong conduct, which codes may be written or unwritten. By having their own moral codes, the Gentiles are a law unto themselves.

The conscience of the Gentiles is said to bear an accompanying witness. This seems to mean that their conscience pronounces judgment on their actions as being either consistent or inconsistent with their own moral codes.

The judgment of God includes the condemnation of the Gentiles for their transgressions of their own moral codes, which are expressions of the outworking of the law written in their hearts. This unwritten law, on the basis of which God will judge the Gentiles, appears to be the Law of God.

A chart may help to put together the various elements of judgment:

DEFENDANTS	JUDGE	LAW	JUDGMENT
All mankind (Gentiles and Jews)	Conscience (for God)	Law of nature, written in the heart by God	In case of disobedience: guilty!
			In case of obedience: righteous!
Jews	Human judges (for God)	Laws of Moses, written on tablets of stone by God	In case of disobedience: guilty
			In case of obedience: righteous!

#### 4. Development of the doctrine

Synthesizing the teachings of the eight passages at which we have looked, it would appear possible to draw from them seven statements concerning external general revelation, and seven statements concerning internal general revelation.



a. Doctrinal formulation concerning external general revelation

- (1) There has been and continues to be an external general revelation; i.e., a divine self-disclosure in mediate, nature mode that comes to the recipient from outside of himself.
- (2) This external general revelation discloses God mediately, by means of the created objects and providential events of the time-space universe.
- (3) This external general revelation discloses God's attributes of glory, wisdom, goodness, power, and divinity, as well as God's works of creation and providence.
- (4) This external general revelation, although marred, is not vitiated or totally annihilated by sin, either objectively or subjectively.
- (5) This external general revelation reaches every part of the world and every person in the world. It transcends all spatial, temporal, and cultural barriers, especially those of language.
- (6) This external general revelation has been and is being perceiving by the senses and apprehended by the minds of all rational beings in the world.
- (7) This external general revelation has been and is being suppressed and perverted by all unrighteous human beings.

b. Doctrinal formulation concerning internal general revelation

- (1) There has been and continues to be an internal general revelation; i.e., a divine self-disclosure in mediate, natural mode which comes to the recipient from within himself.
- (2) This internal general revelation discloses God mediately, by means of man's awareness of his creaturehood and partial likeness to God, God's Law written on man's heart, God's moral judge (the conscience) operating in man's

consciousness, and the continuous working and outworking of these factors, despite the effects of sin on them.

- (3) This internal general revelation discloses God's attributes of rationality, personality, holiness, and justice, as well as God's works of creation and judgment.
- (4) This internal general revelation, although marred, is not vitiated or totally annihilated by sin, either objectively or subjectively.
- (5) This internal general revelation reaches every human being in the world. It transcends all spatial, temporal, and cultural distinctions and differences, especially ethical and moral relativisms.
- (6) This internal general revelation is actually known by all human beings.
- (7) This internal general revelation has been and is being suppressed and perverted by all unrighteous human beings.

## 5. Practical implications of the doctrine of general revelation

At least six implications of practical relevance may be drawn from this doctrine:

- a. General revelation is constantly pressing (both from without and from within) on both the native of Philadelphia and the native of the Amazon basin, on both the native of Moscow and the native of the Philippine rain forests. No human being is without a revelation of God as Creator.
- b. By means of this revelation all human beings have an awareness, a sense of God, although they constantly engage in suppressing and perverting that awareness.
- c. No human being is entirely successful in suppressing and perverting God's general revelation. This means that no human being is a complete atheist, in the sense that he has no religious consciousness at all.
- d. Because of this universal awareness of God that cannot be entirely suppressed, every human being has a point of contact, a God-given preparation for the presentation of the gospel.

- e. Although general revelation reveals a number of God's attributes, and His works of creation, providence, and judgment, yet it does not reveal the grace of God that brings salvation. General revelation simply does not provide a knowledge of God as Redeemer, despite some claims to the contrary.
- f. Since general revelation does not provide a knowledge of God as Redeemer, it cannot be made the basis of anything more than a preparation for the gospel. General revelation cannot be viewed as a means of salvation, even to such as have never had opportunity to hear the message of salvation from sin through Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection. Only a radical new birth, in which spiritual life is imparted to those who are spiritually dead, will suffice; and such a sweeping transformation cannot be brought about by general revelation, but only by the gospel of Christ!

## B. Natural Theology

### 1. Historical statements of the doctrine

#### a. The view of Thomas Aquinas (A. D. 1225-1274)

In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas, following Aristotle's lead, argued that man's knowledge in this life is mediated through the senses; and whatever knowledge he has of divine things must be by inference from or by analogy with his knowledge of material things. It follows that what man can know about God by reason alone is strictly limited. He can know, as Aristotle showed, that there must exist a First Cause over nature, and he can know, by the "negative way" of abstracting from the imperfections of the creatures, something of the perfections of the Creator; but he cannot know anything of God's internal life, nor His purposes toward creation.

In his *Summa contra gentiles*, Thomas makes a distinction between essence and existence, and contends that only the existence of God is demonstrable. The proofs for the existence of God tell us only that nature presupposes the existence of a being that is perfect in precisely those respects in which nature is imperfect. At this point, faith steps forward and joins hands with reason, saying, "This is the one we call God." In Books One through Three, Thomas follows reason as far as it appears to lead; then closes each chapter with a scriptural quotation or a statement of faith from one of the doctors of the Church. But in Book Four he begins each chapter with the authorities and proceeds to expound the truth of revelation, and to cover those parts of the Christian faith that cannot be discovered by reason.

The relation, then between reason and faith is one of complementarity. Reason and revelation cannot conflict; and if reason seems to lead to conclusions contrary to revealed truth, some error is present in the reasoning process. Reason and faith are separate ways of knowing God, each disclosing something of Him that is not given by the other.

Thomas Aquinas held that there were three levels of knowledge concerning God:

LEVEL	KIND OF TRUTH ATTAINABLE
I	Truths attainable by unaided human reason
II	Truths attainable by unaided human reason, but more easily and clearly attainable by revelation
III	Truths attainable by revelation alone

The *Baltimore Catechism No. 3*, published under the auspices of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in 1949, enunciates Thomistic views rather closely. Questions 22 and 23 (with discussion of #23) read as follows:

Q. 22 *Can we know by our natural reason that there is a God?*

We can know by our natural reason that there is a God, for natural reason tells us that the world we see about us could have been made only by a self-existing Being, all-wise and almighty.

Q. 23 *Can we know God in any other way than by our natural reason?*

Besides knowing God by our natural reason, we can also know Him from supernatural revelation, that is, from the truths found in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition, which God Himself has revealed to us.

Supernatural revelation is the communication of some truth by God to a creature through means that are beyond the ordinary course of nature. Some revealed truths, for example, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, are strictly beyond the power of the human mind. We could never know such truths unless God revealed them. Other truths, for example, the immortality of the soul, while not beyond the power of the human mind, are objects of revelation because God has revealed them in a supernatural way. Although these latter truths could be known without revelation, they are grasped with greater ease and certainty once God has revealed them.

What is the Thomistic view of Natural Theology? Is unaided human reason able to formulate theologically significant (i.e., true) propositions concerning God? Thomas Aquinas would appear to answer yes, but only on a rather basic level.

b. The view of John Calvin (A. D. 1509-1564)

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin states the following thoughts:

Book One, Chapter 5, section 2 -- There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and on earth that declare his wonderful wisdom; not only those more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and all natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them....

1. 5. 11 -- But although the Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom (i.e., His lordship over all creation) in the mirror of his works with very great clarity, such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull toward so manifest tendencies, and they flow away without profiting us.... sometimes we are driven by the leading and direction of these things to contemplate God; this of necessity happens to all men. Yet after we rashly grasp a conception of some sort of divinity, straightway we fall back into the ravings or evil imaginings of our flesh, and corrupt by our vanity the pure truth of God. In one respect we are indeed unlike, because each one of us privately forges his own particular error; yet we are very much alike in that, one and all, we forsake the one true God for prodigious trifles....

1. 5. 14 -- It is therefore in vain that so many burning lamps shine for us in the workmanship of the universe to show forth the glory of its Author. Although they bathe us wholly in their radiance, yet they can of themselves in no way lead us into the right path. Surely they strike some sparks, but before their fuller light shines forth these are smothered. For this reason the apostle, in that very passage where he calls the worlds the images of things invisible, adds that through faith we understand that they have been fashioned by God's word (Heb. 11:3). He means by this that the invisible divinity is made manifest in such spectacles, but that we have not the eyes to see this unless they be illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith....

1. 5. 15 -- But although we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us.... Therefore we are justly denied every excuse when we stray off as wanderers and vagrants even though everything points out the right way. But, however that may be, yet the fact that men soon corrupt the seed of the knowledge of God, sown in their minds out of the wonderful workmanship of nature (thus preventing it from coming to a good and perfect fruit), must be imputed to their own failing; nevertheless, it is very true that we are not at all sufficiently instructed by this bare and simple testimony which the creatures render splendidly to the glory of God. For at the same time as we have enjoyed a slight taste of the divine from contemplation of the universe, having neglected the true God, we raise up in his stead dreams and specters of our own brains, and attribute to anything else than the true source the praise of righteousness, wisdom, goodness, and power. Moreover, we so obscure or overturn his daily acts by wickedly judging them that we snatch away from them their glory and from their author his due praise.

1. 6. 1 -- that brightness which is borne in upon the eyes of all men both in heaven and on earth is more than enough to withdraw all support from men's ingratitude -just as God, to involve the human race in the same guilt, sets forth to all

without exception his presence portrayed in his creatures. Despite this, it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe. It was not in vain, then, that he added the light of his Word by which to become known unto salvation;... Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips. Not only does he teach the elect to look upon a god, but also shows himself as the God upon whom they are to look....

In these sentiments Calvin affirms both the reality of the general revelation, and man's inability to formulate a true natural theology. Even aided by general revelation, man is unable to attain a true knowledge of God. Only by means of the spectacles of Scripture can the clear, unconfused knowledge of God be found in general revelation.

c. The view of Emil Brunner (A. D. 1889-1966)

In *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Volume I of Brunner's three-volume *Dogmatics*), Chapter 12 is followed by an appendix that contains a section on "The 'Natural' Knowledge of God; the Problem of the 'Theologia Naturalis'." In this section Brunner writes:

(1) First of all, we must make a clear distinction between two questions which, unfortunately, are continually being confused with one another: the question of the revelation in Creation, and the question of man's natural knowledge of God....

The affirmation of a revelation in Creation has, in itself, nothing whatever to do with a belief in Natural Theology. A theology which intends to remain true to the Biblical witness to revelation should never have denied the reality of revelation in Creation. All efforts to contest the Biblical evidence for such a revelation must lead to an arbitrary exegesis, and to forced interpretations of the text of the Bible. But even apart from explicit Biblical evidence, the Christian Idea of the Creator should itself force us to admit the reality of a revelation in Creation; for what sort of Creator would not imprint the mark of His Spirit upon His Creation?

(2) The question whether the "natural man", that is, the man who has not yet been affected by the historical revelation, is in a position to perceive this divine revelation in Creation as such, in accordance with its nature and its meaning, is a quite

different question. This question, therefore, has not been answered when we have answered the former question in the affirmative, because between the revelation in Creation and the natural man there stands the fact of Sin.

If it is a mistake, and from the statement of the Bible and theology an impossibility, to contest the reality of the revelation in Creation, it is no less mistaken to deny the negative significance of sin for the perception of the truth of the revelation in Creation. Sin not only perverts the will, it also "obscures" the power of perceiving truth where the knowledge of God is concerned. So where a man supports the view of the reality of a "*theologia naturalis*" in the sense of correct, valid knowledge, he is actually denying the reality of sin, or at least its effect in the sphere of man's knowledge of God. Thus, on the one hand, the reality of the revelation in Creation is to be admitted; but, on the other hand, the possibility of a correct and valid natural knowledge of God is to be contested.

(3) Now, however, the problem is complicated by the fact that when we have said that we must question the possibility of a valid knowledge of God (to the natural man), we have not said all there is to say. There is, it is true, no valid "natural theology", but there is a Natural Theology which, in fact, exists. The place to discuss this, however, is not in connection with the doctrine of God, for here it has no theological validity, but in connection with the doctrine of Man; for "natural theology" is an anthropological fact, which no one can deny. Human beings, even those who know nothing of the historical revelation, are such that they cannot help forming an idea of God and making pictures of God in their minds. The history of the religions of mankind provides incontrovertible evidence of this fact. The formation of theological ideas is an empirical fact of the reality of sinful humanity....

(6) This Biblical view of the natural man, and of his *theologia naturalis*, can, and must, be examined in the light of historic facts. What is the result of this examination?

The history of religions shows that mankind cannot help producing religious ideas, and carrying on religious activities. It also shows the confusion caused by sin. The multiplicity of religious ideas of God, and of the "gods", is so vast, and so contradictory, that it is impossible to gather it all up in one positive conception, as the result of research; to reach such a result by a process of elimination is not the task of religion itself but of philosophy. Whither it leads will be shown directly.

Within this welter of religious conceptions of God it is impossible to discover one common denominator. The "higher religions" are contrasted with the primitive religions, and the contradictions are too great to be overcome. There is no common element which could be justice at the same time to the polytheistic personalism of the one, and the monistic impersonalism of the other.



(7) From the beginning of Greek philosophy men have continually tried to reach a clear and certain knowledge of God, not along the path of religion, but by the way of philosophy, by speculative thought, and thus to overcome the irrationalism of the purely religious formation of ideas. These philosophical doctrines of God now confront one another in irreconcilable opposition. Above all, none of them can possibly be combined with the Christian Idea of God. The relation of the "God" of Plato or of Aristotle with the God of the Biblical revelation is that of the Either-Or. The same may be said of every other speculation. The reason for this will be given in the next chapter: the God of thought must differ from the God of revelation. The God who is "conceived" by thought is not the one who discloses Himself; from this point of view He is an intellectual idol.

## 2. Preliminary definitions of the doctrine

Natural theology consists of those theologically significant propositions formulated by unaided human reason. The term "theologically significant propositions" refers to propositions (or statements of affirmations) that convey truth concerning God and His relations to the universe. Natural theology affirms that unregenerate human beings, employing reason alone, can formulate theologically significant statements. The assumption here is that man's power or faculty of reason has not been affected by the Fall, and is thus not corrupt or depraved. The further assumption is that the process of reasoning can be sound or fallacious, but not sinful or affected by sin. Of course, it is admitted that a sinful use can be made of reasoning, but in such a case the sinfulness inheres in the use, not in the process of reasoning itself.

## 3. Biblical teaching concerning the doctrine

- a. The Scriptures at which we have looked in connection with general revelation all have some bearing here. These Scriptures tell us:
  - (1) Human beings perceive general revelation
  - (2) Human beings ought to draw sound inferences from general revelation to the true knowledge of God
  - (3) Human beings suppress the truth of general revelation and pervert it
  - (4) Human beings construct lying idols, false gods out of their imagination

- b. Other Scriptures that bear on this doctrine include the following:

I Corinthians 1:20-21 (NASB)

- 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?  
21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

I Corinthians 8:4-6 (NASB)

- 4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.  
5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,  
6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

Psalms 96:5 (NASB)

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens

Psalms 115:2-8 (NASB)

- 2 Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?"  
3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases  
4 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands.  
5 They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see;  
6 They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell;  
7 They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat.  
8 Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them.

Ezekiel 14:6-8 (NASB)

- 6 Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God, "Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.  
7 For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and then comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the Lord will be brought to answer him in My own person.

- 8 And I shall set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I shall cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the Lord'."

4. Development of the doctrine

- a. Given man's depravity and his sinful suppression and perversion of the true knowledge of God as given in general revelation, it would appear that a true, valid natural theology, in terms of theologically significant propositions formulated by unaided human reason is not possible.
- b. Nevertheless a natural theology, in terms of the construction of other gods, the creation and worship of idols by the human imagination, is not only possible, it is a fact! This fact is amply witnessed to by the Bible and confirmed by comparative religion and cultural anthropology. The problem with all such constructions of natural theology is that they do not yield a true knowledge of the one true and living God!
- c. Whether or not regenerate persons, using the faculty of reason, are able from the data of general revelation to formulate theologically significant propositions, is a question that needs further study and reflection. This question has special relevance for the natural sciences and the social sciences, and is important to both theology and apologetics.

For the present, perhaps we can say that although special revelation is needed for primary theological construction, general revelation may be carefully used for secondary theological construction (i.e., construction within the limits and under the guidance of those principles and truths given in special revelation.

## 5. Chart Study: General Revelation and Natural Theology

## GENERAL REVELATION and NATURAL THEOLOGY

QUALITY	C R E A T I O N		T H E F A L L		R E G E N E R A T I O N		S A N C T I F I C A T I O N		Objective	Subjective
TRUTH	Objective	True	Subjective	True	Objective	True	Subjective	Relatively True	Objective	True
CLARITY	Objective	Clear	Subjective	Clear	Objective	Clear	Subjective	Relatively Clear	Objective	Clear
SUFFICIENCY (CREATOR)	Objective	Sufficient	Subjective	Sufficient	Objective	Sufficient	Subjective	Insufficient for Primary Creativity Sufficient for secondary Creativity	Objective	Sufficient
SUFFICIENCY (REDEEMER)	Objective	Insuff.	Subjective	Insuff.	Objective	Insuff.	Subjective	Insuff.	Objective	Insuff.

C. Special Revelation

1. Historical statements of the doctrine

a. The view of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*

Chapter I

I. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

b. The view of Emil Brunner, as expounded in his *Revelation and Reason*, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), pp. 23-31.

Brunner sets forth six elements in the Biblical idea of revelation:

1. Revelation always means that something hidden is made known, that a mystery is unveiled. But the Biblical revelation is the absolute manifestation of something that has been absolutely concealed. Hence it is a way of acquiring knowledge that is absolutely and essentially -- and not only relatively -- opposite to the usual human method acquiring knowledge, by means of observation, research, and thought. Revelation means a supernatural kind of knowledge -- given in a marvelous way -- of something that man, of himself, could never know. Thus revelation issues from a region which, as such, is not accessible to man....

2. Revelation everywhere includes within itself a negative presupposition; without it man is always in some way or other in a kind of darkness or bondage. In the Bible this darkness or bondage is always absolute, and it is always personal in character. This means that apart from revelation man does not merely feel that he lacks some knowledge which it would be useful or pleasant for him to possess. It is an absolute, a desperately serious darkness. Hence it does not affect the outside of his life, but himself, in the very core of his being. He himself is dark and fettered; he "walks in darkness"; he is "lost". This bondage is a negative personal quality, a negative relation to God; it is sin. The Biblical revelation is always and everywhere related to sin. Through the idea of sin man is characterized as not only, so to say, empty of God, but as one who is separated from God, as one who has closed the door between himself and God....

3. Revelation means everywhere the communication of unusual knowledge, of something particular. In the Biblical revelation the particular character of this knowledge is not only one of degree, but it is fundamental and unconditioned, to such an extent that one hesitates to call it "knowledge" at all. This radical "otherness" of the Biblical revealed knowledge comes out clearly in three characteristics.

(a) Natural acquisition of secular knowledge makes us masters of that which we know.... But in revelation the opposite is the case. God, through His revelation, becomes Lord over me; He makes me His property;... In revelation God makes Himself my Lord, and in so doing He makes me "truly free".

(b) Ordinary knowledge has the effect of enlarging me, or, more exactly, my "sphere", but it does not transform me, myself. It enriches me, but it does not change me.... The knowledge of revelation does not add to my knowledge; it does not make me "educated"; it does not enlarge my "sphere", but it transforms me myself; it changes the one who receives it. For this process of transformation the Bible uses the strongest expressions possible: rebirth, the death of the old, and the resurrection of the new man.

(c) Ordinary knowledge, which is always knowledge of an object, for this very reason always means that I remain alone with my knowledge.... In revelation, however, the exact opposite takes place: since God makes Himself known to me, I am no longer solitary; the knowledge of God creates community, and indeed community is precisely the aim of the divine revelation....

(4) Hence in the Biblical revelation the concern is not only -- as in other religions -- with the communication of some knowledge which is important for life, but with life itself. The darkness of which the revelation makes an end is death, disaster, ruin, destruction; the light which it brings is salvation and life. Revelation is the communication of life, not merely an intensification of the life that already exists; nor is it merely an enrichment of knowledge, but it is the transformation of that which is evil and destructive into saving, eternal life. That is why, as we have already said, the history of revelation is the history of salvation, and the history of salvation is the history of revelation.... Revelation is not concerned with "something", but with myself, and with God Himself, namely, with my salvation and with His dominion over me and His communion with me. God Himself in His love gives Himself to me, and in so doing He does away with the darkness, the godlessness and lovelessness, the bondage and misery, which constitute the "lost state" of mankind without God.

5. Revelation means always and everywhere a knowledge that is unexpected, something that has not gained by our own efforts but, in one way or another, is always a gift, a "disclosure", which we could not have expected. The Biblical revelation, however, means the unexpected in unconditional form -- indeed, that which could never have been expected.

It does not mean that which could not have expected, but that which one would not even dare to expect, because it is the very opposite of that which could be expected along any rational line whatever: that God should love, and give His love to one who has broken faith with Him and has been disobedient to Him. That which is absolutely unexpected, and never could have been expected, is God's forgiving grace.

6. Revelation has always and everywhere the character of a sudden event. It stands out from all ordinary happenings, for the "normal" course of development, and is a kind of "incursion from another dimension." But in the Bible alone is this sudden happening understood in an absolute sense, as the unique, as that which can never be repeated.... Not all Biblical revelation has this unique and unconditional character. Every prophet is indeed unique in his way, it is true, and his message is, at least in part, unique. And yet none of the Prophets is the Unique One, but the later Prophets repeat and carry farther the teaching of the earlier ones. The unique and unrepeatable revelation is that event to which prophecy points as its real meaning, in which He Himself is here, "God with us," the Christ. Here takes place that which, in its very nature, happens once for all, and is therefore unconditioned....

It is... no accident that in the passages in the New Testament where this uniqueness is expressed in logical terms, in actual words, we are directed to an actual event, at an actual spot on the earth, and at an actual time in history, to the Cross, to the sacrificial death of the Son of God, as the decision event of redemption. Here, on the very border line between death and life, between this world and the other, in death, but in this one death, the death of the Son of God, everything is concentrated with which this One, all His life, was concerned.... Here, in the history which is in the strictest sense of the word on the very border line of historical happenings, there takes place that which all other history seeks in vain: salvation, the rescue from the powers of destruction. Here therefore the real revelation takes place, the revelation of the holiness and the mercy of God, of His nature and His will, of His plan for humanity and for the world. Here takes place that which is the fulfillment of all history, and which at the same time bursts the framework of all history: the absolute Event.

- c. The view of Carl F. Henry, as expounded in *God Who Speaks and Shows*, Volume II of *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976), pp. 8-16.

Carl Henry sets forth fifteen theses that "summarize what can be said for divine revelation in terms of the living God who shows himself and speaks for himself":

1. Revelation is a divine initiated activity, God's free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality.

2. Divine revelation is given for human benefit, offering us privileged communion with our Creator in the kingdom of God.

3. Divine revelation does not completely erase God's transcendent mystery, inasmuch as God the Revealer transcends his own revelation.

4. The very fact of disclosure by the one living God assures the comprehensive unity of divine revelation.

5. Not only the occurrence of divine revelation, but also its very nature, content, and variety are exclusively God's determination.

6. God's revelation is uniquely personal both in content and form.

7. God reveals himself not only universally in the history of the cosmos and of the nations, but also redemptively within this external history in unique saving acts.

8. The climax of God's special revelation is Jesus of Nazareth, the personal incarnation of God in the flesh; in Jesus Christ the source and content of revelation converge and coincide.

9. The mediating agent in all divine revelation is the Eternal Logos -- preexistent, incarnate, and now glorified.

10. God's revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form.

11. The Bible is the reservoir and conduit of divine truth.

12. The Holy Spirit superintends the communication of divine revelation, first, by inspiring the prophetic-apostolic writings, and second, by illuminating and interpreting the scripturally given Word of God.

13. As bestower of spiritual life the Holy Spirit enables individuals to appropriate God's revelation savingly, and thereby attests the redemptive power of the revealed truth of God in the personal experience of reborn sinners.

14. The church approximates the kingdom of God in miniature; as such she is to mirror to each successive generation the power and joy of the appropriated realities of divine revelation.



15. The self-manifesting God will unveil his glory in a crowning revelation of power and judgment; in this disclosure at the consummation of the ages, God will vindicate righteousness and justice, finally subdue and subordinate evil, and bring into being a new heaven and earth.

- d. The view of Millard J. Erickson, as expressed in Volume 1 of *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 175-179.

By special revelation we mean God's manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him....

Note that the objective of special revelation was relational.... The knowledge about was for the purpose of knowledge of. Information was to lead to acquaintance...

Special revelation... requires the general revelation.... Special revelation builds upon general revelation....

What God reveals is primarily himself as a person, and especially those dimensions of himself that are particularly significant for faith...

God has revealed himself by a revelation in anthropic form. This should not be thought of as anthropomorphism as such, but as simply a revelation coming in human language and human categories of thought and action... .

God draws upon those elements in man's universe of knowledge that can serve as a likeness of or partially convey the truth in the divine realm. His revelation employs analogical language....

- e. The view of Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, as given in Volume One of *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 110, 120, 122.

Formally defined, "special revelation" refers to the eternal God's disclosure of his redemptive purposes in the Near East (1) supremely through Jesus Christ's character, life, and conceptual teachings (in human words) confirmed by miraculous acts, and also (2) in various ways to prophetic and apostolic spokesmen whose teachings from God in human words were confirmed by their consistency with one another and by signs, wonders, and mighty acts.

Contemporary existentialist, neoorthodox, and biblical theology has repeatedly alleged that what God reveals is himself, not information about himself. "God does not give us information by communication; He gives us Himself in communion."

Again, "there appears a remarkable breadth of agreement in recent discussions about revelation. It is that what is fundamentally revealed is God Himself, not propositions about God."

Summing up the biblical data, Bernard Ramm found that "revelation is both a meeting and a knowing. Something is said in revelation, and what is said is the root and ground of our knowledge of God." Ramm explained further, "Certainly the word 'revelation' is rich in meaning. God's word to the prophet is revelation; God's act is revelation; the return of Christ is revelation. The concept of revelation in Scripture is too rich to be easily schematized; it is also rich enough to be applied to the conceptual side of revelation."

Responding to Barth and Brunner's view, Ramm asked, "But what does it mean to disclose a person? Certainly two people who are deaf, blind, and mute can hardly have any real encounter with each other apart from touch. Real encounter in life between persons is always within the context of mutual knowledge." Any noncognitive concepts of revelation, like those of the neoorthodox, mystics, and new-consciousness groups fail to fit the biblical evidence.

## 2. Preliminary definitions of the doctrine

As a working definition, we will employ the following:

Special revelation is divine self-disclosure in immediate, supernatural mode. Since the Fall, the purpose of special revelation has been redemptive.

In the *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1944), p. 513, under the article "revelation", the following appears:

In the O. T. the noun revelation does not occur; but the verb reveal is used in the sense of making known secrets (e. g., Prov. 11:13) and then of God's disclosure of his will to men (e. g., Deut. 29:29; Isa. 22:14; Dan. 2:19, 22, 28; Amos 3:7). In the N. T. revelation is used for the disclosure by God or Christ or the Spirit of truth concerning divine things previously unknown (e. g., Rom. 16:25; I Cor. 14:6, 26; II Cor. 12:1; Gal. 1:12; Rev. 1:1) or of duty specially required (Gal. 2:2), and then for the manifestation or appearance of persons or events previously concealed from sight (e. g., Rom. 2:5; I Peter 1:13). In theology revelation means the communication of truth by God to man, and is usually applied to such communications as have been conveyed through supernatural agencies.

3. Biblical teaching concerning modes of special revelation

In Hebrews 1:1-2 we read:

God who formerly spoke many times and in many ways to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by the Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the ages.

This suggests that God has used many modes of revealing Himself and a knowledge of His will. Fourteen of these modes are referred to in the following materials.

a. Revelation by means of the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire

Exodus 13:21 -- "And the Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night."

b. Revelation by means of the shekinah glory

I Kings 8:10-12

- 10 And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud (הֶעָנָן) filled the house of the Lord,  
11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory (כְּבוֹד) of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.  
12 Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that He would dwell (לִשְׁכֹּן) in the thick cloud."

c. Revelation by means of the glorious aftermath

Exodus 33:18-23

- 18 Then Moses said, "I pray thee, show me Thy glory!" (כְּבוֹד)  
19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."  
20 But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"  
21 Then the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock;  
22 and it will come about, while My glory (כְּבוֹד) is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.

- 23 Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back (אֶחָצִי), by My face shall not be seen."

NOTE: This passage uses the figure of speech called "anthropolomorphis", which means a description of or reference to characteristics or actions of a nonhuman being in terms of characteristics, actions, forms, or bodily parts of a human being. In this case the nonhuman being is God.

The anthropomorphism "face" (פָּנַי) probably refers to the full, direct manifestation of the glory of God, upon which Moses was unable to look.

The anthropomorphism "hand" (יָדִי) probably refers to the protection with which God shielded Moses from the full brilliance of His glory.

The anthropomorphism "back" (אֶחָצִי) probably refers to a less direct, partial manifestation of the glory of God, upon which Moses could look. Perhaps the term "aftermath" or the term "aftereffects" adequately unpacks the term "back".

The full thought appears to be that, since Moses would be unable to look upon God's glory directly, God protected him and revealed something of His glory by allowing Moses to see its aftereffects.

d. Revelation by means of the Angel of the lord

Exodus 23:20-23

- 20 Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.  
21 Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.  
22 But if you will truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.  
23 For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them."

Isaiah 63:7 9

- 7 I shall make mention of the loving kindnesses of the Lord, the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has granted us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has granted them according to His compassion, and according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.

- 8 For He said, "Surely they are My people, sons who will not deal falsely."  
So He became their Savior.
- 9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His mercy He redeemed them; and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old.

Genesis 16:7-13

- 7 Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness by the spring on the way to Shur.
- 8 And he said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."
- 9 Then the angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority."
- 10 Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count."
- 11 The angel of the Lord said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has given heed to your affliction.
- 12 And he will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers."
- 13 Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "Thou art a God who sees;" for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"

Genesis 32:24-30

- 24 Then Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.
- 25 And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.
- 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking. " But he said," I will not let you go unless you bless me."
- 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob".
- 28 And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with me and have prevailed."
- 29 Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.
- 30 So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."

Judges 6:11-24

- 11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.
- 12 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior."
- 13 Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."
- 14 And the Lord looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?"
- 15 And he said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."
- 16 But the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."
- 17 So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me.
- 18 Please do not depart from here, until I come back to Thee, and bring out my offering and lay it before Thee." And He said, "I will remain until you return."
- 19 Then Gideon went in and prepared a kid and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak, and presented them.
- 20 And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.
- 21 Then the angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight.
- 22 When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the Lord, he said, "Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face."
- 23 And the Lord said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die."
- 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The Lord is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Could these references to the angel of the Lord be O. T. theophanies?  
Note the following striking expressions in the above Scriptures:

Exodus 23:21 - "He will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him."

Genesis 16:13 -- "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"

Genesis 32:20 -- "I have seen God face to face"

Judges 6:14-16, 22-23

"And the Lord looked at him"

"And he said to him, "O Lord"

"But the Lord said to him"

"I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said to him,.. You shall not die."

Are these expressions conclusive? They are certainly provocative of thought. Can an angel pardon transgressions? Is the "angel of His presence.. more than an angel? Do the statements of Hagar and Jacob and Gideon imply that in seeing the angel they believed they had seen God? When in Judges 6 the text alternates between the angel speaking and the Lord speaking, does this imply an identity of personage? Could these all be theophanies, or even Christophanies?

e. Revelation by means of visions

Ezekiel 1:1 -- Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

Ezekiel 40:1-4

- 1 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the Lord was upon me and He brought me there.
- 2 In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel, and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south there was a structure like a city.
- 3 So He brought me there; and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway.
- 4 And the man said to me, "Son of man, see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for you have been brought here in order to show it to you. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see."

Daniel 10:4-11, 14

- 4 And on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris,
- 5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz.

- 6 His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the dream of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.
- 7 Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves.
- 8 So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength.
- 9 But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.
- 10 Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.
- 11 And he said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken the word to me, I stood up trembling.
- 14 Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.

f. Revelation by means of trance

Acts 10:9-17

- 9 And on the next day, as they (Cornelius' servants and orderly) were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.
- 10 And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;
- 11 and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four comers to the ground.
- 12 And there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.
- 13 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!"
- 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."
- 15 And again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."
- 16 And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.
- 17 Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate.



g. Revelation by means of dreams

Genesis 28:10-17

- 10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran.
- 11 And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.
- 12 And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
- 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.
- 14 Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall be spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.
- 15 And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."
- 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."
- 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Genesis 37:5-11

- 5 Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.
- 6 And he said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had;
- 7 for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."
- 8 Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us? So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.
- 9 Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."
- 10 And he related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"
- 11 And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Matthew 1:18-21, 24

- 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came

- together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.
- 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly.
- 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, " Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.
- 21 And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins. "
- 24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife.

h. Revelation by means of Urim and Thummim

Urim and Thummim was a means of revelation by which the high priest attempted to discover the will of God for the nation of Israel in cases in which God's will was not clear.

The Hebrew terms themselves -- אֲוִרִים ("lights") and תְּמִיִּם ("perfections") -- do not throw much light on the nature of this mode of revelation.

The references in which אֲוִרִים is used (13 of them) and in which תְּמִיִּם is used (28 of them) do not give much information.

Exodus 28:30-"And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually."

Numbers 27:21 - "Moreover, he (Joshua) shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, both he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation. "

I Samuel 28:6 -"When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets."

Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65 tells us that the governor told the returned Jewish exiles not to eat of the holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim.

Exodus 28:15-30

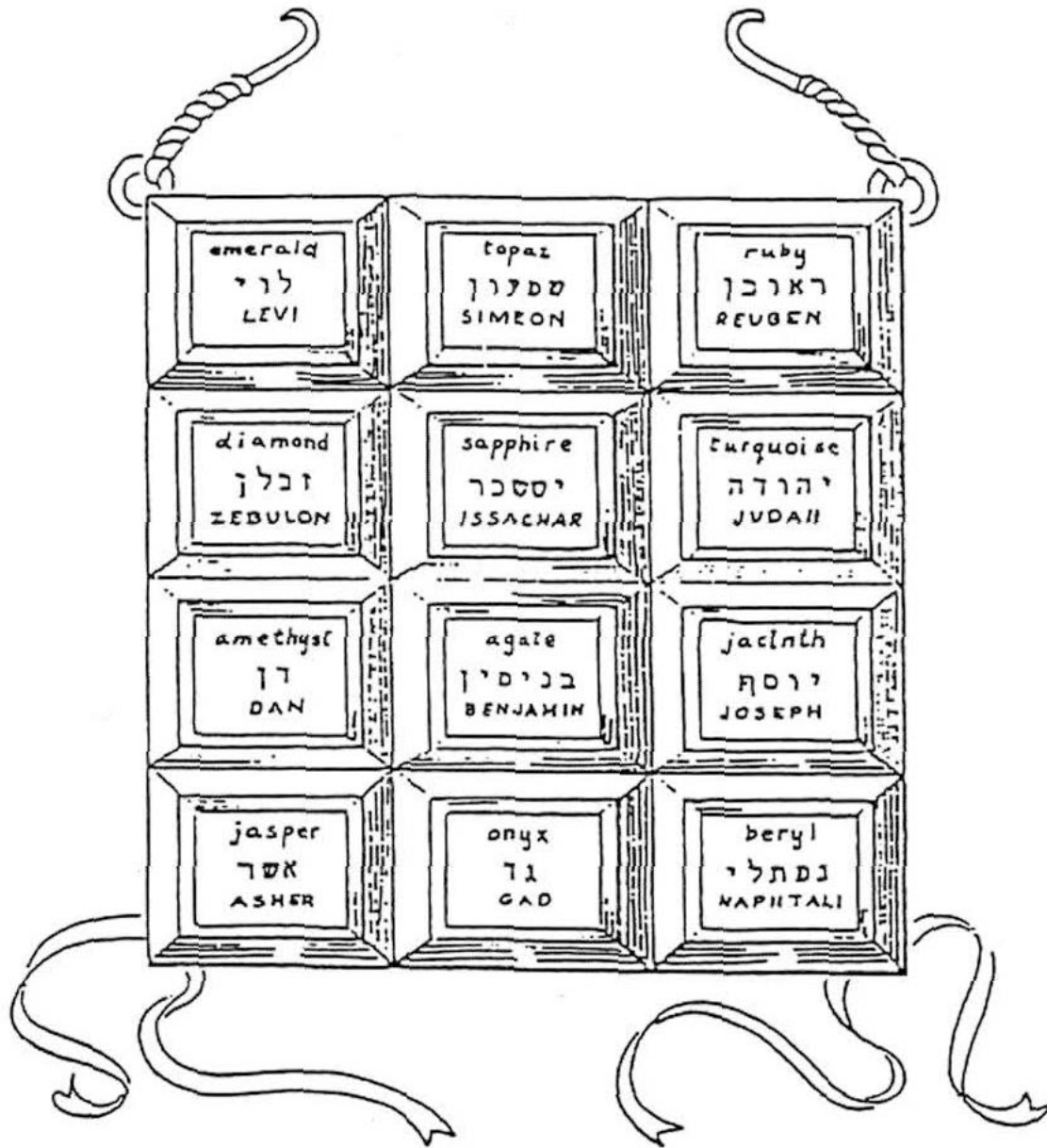
- 15 And you shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skilled workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it; of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen you shall make it.
- 16 It shall be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width.

- 17 And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of ruby, topaz, and emerald;  
18 and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond;  
19 and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst;  
20 and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree.  
21 And the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; and they shall be like the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes.  
22 And you shall make on the breastpiece chains of twisted cordage work in pure gold.  
23 And you shall make on the breastpiece two rings of gold, and shall put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece.  
24 And you shall put the two cords of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece.  
25 And you shall put the other two ends of the two cords on the two filigree settings, and put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, at the front of it.  
26 And you shall make two rings of gold and shall place them on the two ends of the breastpiece, on the edge of it, which is toward the inner side of the ephod.  
27 And you shall make two rings of gold and put them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it close to the place where it is joined, above the skillfully woven band of the ephod.  
28 And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, that it may be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece may not come loose from the ephod.  
29 And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.  
30 And you shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually.

Incidentally, Genesis 35:22b-26 gives us the order of the sons of Israel:

- 22b Now there were twelve sons of Jacob --  
23 The sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's first-born, then Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Zebulun;  
24 the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin;  
25 and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali;  
26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

A diagram of the breastpiece of judgment (shown on the following page) has been suggested:



Two theories have been proposed to explain how the Urim and Thummim actually functioned in revealing the will of God.

One theory proposes that Urim and Thummim refers to the gleaming of the precious and semiprecious gemstones in the high priest's breastplate. Under this view, the high priest could learn the will of God in the following ways:

- If a tribe were selected, that tribe's gemstone would gleam.
- If a tribe were not selected, that tribe's gemstone would remain dark.
- If the answer to a question were "yes", then all the gemstones would gleam.
- If the answer to a question were "no", then the gemstones would remain dark.

A second theory proposes that Urim and Thummim refers to two flat pieces of wood or bone or stone, with different colors or symbols on their two flat sides; and that these two pieces were kept in the pouch formed by the folding of the material of the breastpiece. This theory proposes that these pieces were cast, either on the ground or into the lap, in order to ascertain the will of God. Under this view, the high priest would learn the will of God in the following ways:

If a question were asked and both pieces fell with the same color or symbol up, the Lord's answer was either "yes" or "no", depending on the color or symbol that came up.

If a question were asked and different symbols or colors came up, the Lord's answer was "wait" or perhaps there was no answer.

If a tribe were selected or not selected, that could be ascertained by throwing the pieces after the mention of each tribal name.

If a family or even an individual were selected, that could be ascertained by throwing the pieces after the mention of the family's or individual's name.

Of course, the truth of the matter is that we do not know exactly how the Urim and Thummim worked. That information seems to have been lost in the mists of antiquity! But however Urim and Thummim worked, this was a mode of special revelation.

i. Revelation by means of the lot

It appears that many nations in antiquity used the lot to determine doubtful questions. Stones or inscribed tablets were put into some kind of vessel, were shaken, and were then either cast out or drawn out.

In the O. T. two words are used: GORAL (גֹּרָל) and PUR (פֹּר) .

PUR is used exclusively in the book of Esther, and in two chapters only (chapters 3 and 9), where it is used seven times. In Esther 3:7 and 9:24 PUR is equated with GORAL. From this account comes the name and significance of the Jewish feast of PURIM (פּוּרִים)

GORAL is used 77 times in the O. T. Many of its uses are related to the distribution of the land and of the cities of Canaan among the tribes of Israel.

The courses of the priests (24 each year) to determine which priests were to serve in the temple were ascertained by lot (I Chronicles 24:1-19).

The choice between the sin-offering goat and the scapegoat was made by lot (Leviticus 16:8-22).

In Proverbs 16:33 the writer states: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." It should be pointed out that although providentially we can say that the toss of a coin or the roll of dice are under the control of God, yet this use should be taken in the context of the scriptural use of the lot as a supernatural mode of revelation to ascertain the Lord's will.

In the N. T. the word KLEROS (κληρος) is used 13 times. It is used in connection with the soldiers' casting of lots for the dividing of our Lord's garments as He hung on the cross; and it is used in the decision between Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias as a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26).

j. Revelation by means of miracles

The miracles recorded in Scripture are not merely great works, manifestations of tremendous power, or awe-inspiring wonders. They are that, but they are also signs, witnesses, and testimonies. They are intended to exhibit the character of God and to teach truths concerning God.

In the strict sense a miracle is an event in the external world, wrought by the immediately power of God, and intended as a sign or attestation of the truth of God's message to man.

The miracles of the Bible are confined almost exclusively to four periods of history. Each of these periods was marked by a life- and-death struggle between the true religion of God and the forces of ungodliness. These four periods are:

- (1) The redemption of God's people from Egypt and their establishment in Canaan under Moses and Joshua
- (2) The struggle of God's true religion with false heathen religions under Elijah and Elisha
- (3) The captivity of God's people during the Exile, and God's demonstration of His supremacy over the heathen idols, under Daniel and his companions
- (4) The earthly ministry of our Lord, when miracles attested His person and message, and the ministry of His apostles through the early apostolic age.

The sign-attestation aspect of miracles may be seen in many Scriptures. Two such references will bear mention:

Deuteronomy 4:32-35

- 32 Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it?
- 33 Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived?
- 34 Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?
- 35 To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him.

John 20:30-31

- 30 Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
- 31 but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

k. Revelation by means of audible speech from God

Exodus 19:3-7

- 3 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:
- 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.
- 5 Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;
- 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.
- 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him.

I Samuel 3:1, 7-11

- 1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord before Eli. And word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.
- 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor had the words of the Lord yet been revealed to him.

- 8 So the Lord called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And Eli discerned that the Lord was calling the boy.
- 9 And Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant is listening." So Samuel went and lay down in his place.
- 10 Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel, Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Thy servant is listening."
- 11 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle."

#### Acts 26:12-16

- 12 While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,
- 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.
- 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."
- 15 And I said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.
- 16 But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness, not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you."

#### I. Revelation by prophetic declaration through human instruments

There are literally hundreds of cases in Scripture in which the Word of the Lord came to a man, or came by a man. Sometimes it appears that the message came to the mind of the man first, and he subsequently spoke the message orally or committed it to writing. In other cases it appears as if the message was being given to the prophet as he was uttering it. In either case he is said to have been speaking the Word of God.

#### m. Revelation through Incarnation

The Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as the incarnate Word of God:

John 1:1, 14, 18

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, as we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.



- 18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

John 14:7-11

- 7 If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.  
8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."  
9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"  
10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.  
11 Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves."

Colossians 2:9 -- "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

Hebrews 1:1-3a

- 1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,  
2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.  
3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

n. Revelation through the Scripture as the written Word of God

#### 4. Development of the doctrine

a. Summary of the biblical teaching concerning modes of special revelation

In both the O. T. and N. T. God has disclosed Himself and a knowledge of His will in various special ways. He led the people of Israel through the wilderness and assured them of His presence by means of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. He filled the Solomonic temple with His glory, confirming His promise to manifest His presence in that place. He spoke directly with Moses, and showed him as much of the magnificent splendor of His glory as Moses could tolerate, so that Moses' face actually shone for a time. He sent His angel to His people to show them His will, to lead and guard them, and to bless, encourage, and deliver them.

He showed them future things through visions, communicated His will through trances and dreams. He showed His people what to do in difficult cases of decision, through the high priest's use of Urim and Thummim; and communicated His judgment by means of the lot. He performed miraculous acts for them through chosen persons, so that His people might know that He was dynamically active and ready to intervene in the ordinary course of nature to demonstrate His creative, destructive, and remedial power, and to confirm His Word through His messengers. He spoke audibly to chosen persons, in order to communicate a knowledge of His will. He spoke many times in and through His prophets, and disclosed many things concerning His nature, His works, and His will. He disclosed Himself preeminently in His Son, in whom all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form. And He continues to communicate with human beings through the Scripture themselves.

b. Consideration of the theological aspects of special revelation

J. I. Packer, in *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) recapitulates his position as follows:

What is revelation? From one standpoint, it is God's act, from another His gift.... As God's act, revelation is the personal self-disclosure whereby He brings us actively and experimentally to know Him as our own God and Saviour. As God's gift, revelation is the knowledge about Himself which He gives us as a means to this end....

How does God reveal what has to be revealed in order that we may know Him? By verbal communication from Himself. Without this, revelation in the full and saving sense cannot take place at all. For no public historical happening as such (an exodus, a conquest, a captivity, a crucifixion, an empty tomb), can reveal God apart from an accompanying word from God to explain it, or a prior promise which it is seen to confirm or fulfill. Revelation in its basic form is thus of necessity propositional; God reveals Himself by telling us about Himself, and what He is doing in His world. The statement in Hebrews 1:1, that in Old Testament days God spoke "in divers manners," reminds us of the remarkable variety of means whereby, according to the record, God's communications were on occasion given.... But in every case the disclosures introduced, or conveyed, or confirmed, by these means were propositional in substance and verbal in form.

Why does God reveal Himself to us? Because... He who made us rational beings wants, in His love, to have us as His friends; and He addresses His words to us -- statements, commands, promises -- as a means of sharing His thoughts with us, and so of making that personal self-disclosure which friendship presupposes, and without which it cannot exist.  
(pp. 55-56)

Leon Morris, in *I Believe in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) states:

According to The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* revelation means in the first place, "The disclosure of knowledge to man by a divine or supernatural agency," and secondly, "Something disclosed or made known by supernatural means." Theologians might hesitate over this concentration of knowledge, for some of them would certainly prefer to define revelation in terms of the disclosure of a person. But the point on which we fasten our attention is the word "disclosure."...

It is knowledge that someone else discloses to us. In Christianity the term is important for it means that God has taken the initiative in disclosing himself to man. The knowledge of God is thought of then not as the end product of diligent human search, but as a manifestation of God's grace and of his will to be known. (pp. 9-10)

One of the most frequently quoted and approved statements on revelation is William Temple's famous dictum, "What is offered to man's apprehension in any specific Revelation is not truth concerning God but the living God Himself." This sounds very attractive to the modern student. It liberates him from bondage to the letter of the Bible. And it allows him to make direct contact with God in the moment of revelation, or at least to feel that the men of the Bible had this direct contact, however fallibility they may have reported what they experienced.

But if when we come to the Bible we find no "truth concerning God," what do we find? Fine words about "the living God Himself" cannot conceal the fact that we are left with our own experience of God (or that of the Bible writers). It is the human response that we have in the Bible and not the revelation itself. When we read the Bible rightly, we may have an encounter with God. But on this view it is the encounter, not the Bible that is important. (p. 109)

When much modern theology denies propositional revelation but insists that revelation is a revelation of God himself it is not easy to see what is meant. As Hugo Meynell puts it, "The contention that revelation is primarily of a person, and not of propositions, is not to the point; since that God is revealed as a person, and what kind of person it is that God is revealed to be, and how he is so revealed, can be expressed only in propositions." How can we know God unless we know something about him? What is meant by such knowledge? On the human level I know a number of persons and in each case I know something about the person in question. I cannot say that I know the person unless I can also say that I have knowledge of some facts about that person. I find it hard to imagine what it would be to claim knowledge of a person about whom I know nothing. Even on casual acquaintance I know something, for example the appearance of the person and what he reveals by his words and actions.

So with God. If I know nothing about him it is difficult to put content into the sentence, "I know God." The more I can know about him the more I can know him. This is not to reduce the knowledge of God to a set of propositions. Knowing a person means knowing more than knowing about him. But knowing about him is an indispensable part of knowing him. (p. 115)

What can it mean to talk about revelation as a self-disclosure of God Himself, rather than as a disclosure of information about God?

In the Bible God is described as a Spirit. This means at least two things: God is a personal being, and God's substance is not material or physical. He does not have a corporeal body. He is also described as invisible to human eyes. In addition He is said to be omnipresent, to fill heaven and earth, to be everywhere at the same time.

How can a personal being who does not have a body, who is invisible, and who is everywhere at once, reveal Himself, but communicate no information about Himself? What conception can we have of such a God? What shall we think of such a God without a known nature, without a face, without even a name? How shall we worship or serve such a God, since we do not know who or what He is, what He is doing, or what is His will for us?

The God who discloses Himself, but discloses nothing about Himself, is an unknown God! In fact, the God who discloses nothing about Himself is an abstraction, an empty concept, a form without content. And He is certainly not the God of the Bible, who speaks and makes Himself known! As Paul on Mars' hill did not hesitate to declare to the philosophers and citizens of Athens their unknown god, revealing Him to be the creator, the sustainer, the ruler, the redeemer, and the judge; so God's word in the Bible unhesitatingly declares to modern liberal theologians their unknown god, revealing His nature, His words, and His will!

Much of modern liberal theology stresses the idea of revelation as a self-disclosure, in the sense of a revelation of God Himself. Anything else is discounted as revelation.

Of course, the question arises: What counts as self-disclosure? We may examine this question in terms of God's nature, God's will, and God's works.

Does God's revelation of His nature count as self-disclosure? Not if what we call God's characteristics or attributes are simply qualities that we conceive and then ascribe to God. Not if God's self-disclosure must be a complete self-disclosure of the entirety of God's essence, so that a partial self-disclosure is no disclosure at all. Not if revelation of some divine characteristics (not being exhaustive) is no revelation at all.

Conservative theology holds that when God tells us something about His nature in terms of His qualities or perfections, He is telling us something meaningful about Himself. He is not simply telling us something that He wants us to believe, or something that is good for us, or something by which He wishes to regulate our lives so as to accomplish His purposes; He is telling us who and what He really is! When the Westminster divines formulated the answer to question 4 of the Shorter Catechism, they were attempting to gather up the truths given in God's revelation of Himself, and express them in a brief, but not exhaustive summary. They said, "God is a spirit in finite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

When conservative theologians attribute characteristics to God, they are not creatively constructing and ascribing to God qualities which they believe He has (although they may believe them); rather they are attempting to receptively reconstruct the perfections of God's nature by attributing to God what He attributes to Himself.

But now what about the modern insistence that a self-disclosure must be complete if it is to be a revelation of God at all? This is a very peculiar concept. For when we think about the question of knowledge in general, or even about the distinction between factual and personal knowledge of persons, we immediately recognize that no human being knows anything completely or exhaustively. Even the model of the "renaissance man", who was conversant in every field of knowledge, knows no one field exhaustively. And no "modern man"... even the most brilliant and erudite, knows even one area of one field in the fullness or completeness. No human being knows everything about any thing or person. Our knowledge of other persons (whether factual or personal knowledge) is always partial, never exhaustive. In fact, we do not even know ourselves exhaustively!

Confining our question to the realm of personal knowledge of persons, does this mean that since we can never know a person exhaustively, we cannot know that person at all? If a person does not disclose himself or herself exhaustively, but only partially, does this mean that we cannot say that that person has revealed himself or herself to us, and that therefore we cannot know him or her? Further, since a person does not even know himself exhaustively, how is it possible for him to reveal himself exhaustively, so that other persons can know him personally?

This claim that revelation of God must be exhaustive if it is to disclose God Himself is absurd. We know many persons personally who do not know themselves exhaustively and do not reveal themselves exhaustively. We know them only partially, only to a certain degree; but we know them nonetheless. Although God knows Himself exhaustively (i.e., He knows Himself, both factually and personally, through and through); and although He reveals Himself only partially, condescends to our creaturely limitations, and lisps with us as with small children; yet through the revelation of His

nature and through His Spirit, He gives us an understanding so that we can know Him and do know Him, partially yet truly.

Does God's revelation of His will count as self-disclosure? That is, does God's revealed Law -- defined as the will of God addressed to man's obedience at any given time -- reflect His holy and righteous character? Not if God's nature is completely opposite to His revealed will. Not if God's Law has not really been revealed, but is simply the product of man's attempts to conceive of what God's will might be!

Has God revealed His will? In the Garden of Eden He told our first parents to subdue the earth and rule over all of its creatures, and to take care of the Garden, but not to eat of the forbidden tree. Later God made a covenant with Noah and gave him commands. Still later God gave the people of Israel His ten "words" inscribed on stone. In Exodus 31:18 we read that "When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God." And in Exodus 32:15-16 we read that "Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God, the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets." Again and again God revealed His will through His prophets and apostles, and preeminently through His Son.

But is the revealed will of God completely contrary to His revealed nature? In the Bible we find just the opposite. We discover that God is righteous, and that His revealed will is righteous. In Psalm 119:75 we read, "I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous." And in verses 137-138 we read, "Righteous are you, O Lord, and your laws are right. The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy." And in Psalm 19:7-10 we read that the law of the Lord is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, sure, altogether righteous, more precious than gold, and sweeter than fresh honey! God's justice, righteousness, and holiness are beautifully mirrored in His perfect Law!

But now we must ask, Does God's revelation of His works count as self-disclosure? Do His works of creation and providence and miracle and redemption and judgment reveal His nature? Not if the events represented by these designations are not really divine works at all, but simply the outworking of natural forces operating by chance. Not if these events are sufficiently ambiguous in their origin or character that we cannot assign them to the category of the supernatural. And not if these works are unaccompanied by any explanation of their meaning, so that we are left to place upon them any interpretation that we may wish.

Has God revealed Himself in His works? Does His material universe reveal Him as the divine, powerful, wise, skillful and benevolent Creator and Preserver of the world? Does the nature of man reveal Him as the knowing, personal, holy, and just Lawgiver

and Judge? Does His written word confirm His creative Word? Does the incarnation of the Son tell us anything about God's grace and mercy and condescension and love? Does the sinless character and perfect life of Jesus Christ tell us anything of God's holiness? Does God's provision of redemption through the sacrificial death of our Savior communicate anything of God's marvelous righteousness and justice and love and grace? Does the resurrection convey anything of God's assessment of the value of His Son's atoning work, and anything of God's power in the act of resurrection itself?

It would appear that God's self-disclosure in terms of truth concerning His nature, His will, and His works, must count as revelation. In the disclosure of these truths God discloses something of Himself from God's revelation of Himself. If we are to know Him truly, we need a self-revelation of truth concerning Him. Nothing less will suffice. And this, we are assured, is exactly what we have in Scripture!

But now we must ask concerning the relationship of special revelation to Scripture. As a category, is special revelation greater than Scripture, equivalent to Scripture, or lesser than Scripture?

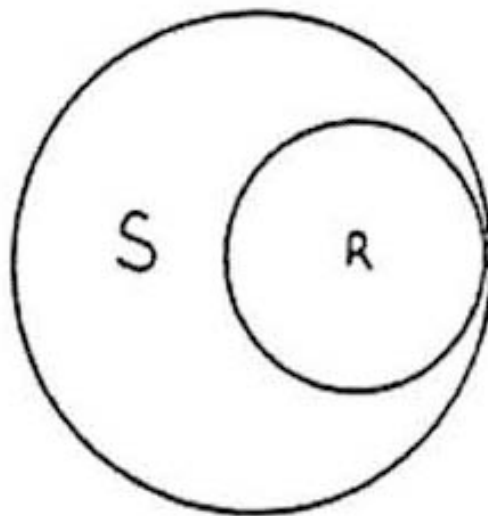


FIGURE 1

In this figure "R" means those events of Special Revelation recorded in Scripture

SCRIPTURE > SPECIAL REVELATION

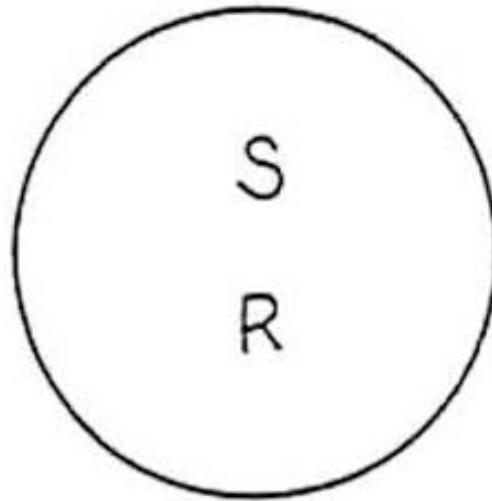


FIGURE 2

In this figure "R" means the whole of Scripture as a Special Revelation (by virtue of Inspiration)

SCRIPTURE = SPECIAL REVELATION

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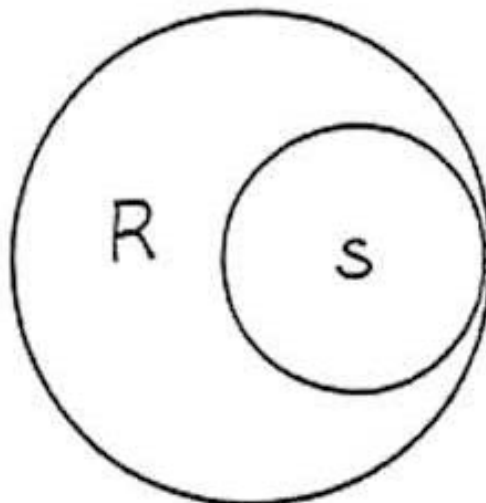


FIGURE 3

In this figure "R" means Special Revelation in all of its various modes, of which Scripture is one

SCRIPTURE < SPECIAL REVELATION

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It would appear that all three figures are correct as long as the different senses of Special Revelation are clearly distinguished.



D. Scripture

1. Historical statements of the doctrine

a. The Second Helvetic Confession (A. D. 1566)

Chapter I. -- Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God

We believe and confess the Canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spake to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.

And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has all things fully expounded which belong to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded of God that nothing be either put to or taken from the same (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19).

We judge, therefore, that from these Scriptures are to be taken true wisdom and godliness, the formation and government of churches; as also instruction in all duties of piety; and, to be short, the confirmation of doctrines, and the confutation of all errors, with all exhortations; according to that word of the Apostle, "All Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine, for reproof," etc. (II Tim. 3:16-17). Again, "These things write I unto thee," says the Apostle to Timothy, "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God," etc. (I Tim. 3:14-15). Again, the self-same Apostle to the Thessalonians: "When", says he, "ye received the word of us, ye received not the word of men, but as it was indeed, the Word of God," etc. (I Thess. 2:13). For the Lord himself has said in the Gospel, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaketh in you;" therefore "he that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me" (Matt. 10:20; Luke 10:16; John 13:20). Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned, nor to be expected from heaven; and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preachers; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good....

Chapter II. -- Of Interpreting the Holy Scriptures; and of Fathers, Councils. and Traditions.

The Apostle Peter has said that "the Holy Scriptures are not of any private interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20). Therefore we do not allow all kinds of exposition. Whereupon we do not acknowledge that which they call the meaning of the Church of Rome for the true and natural interpretation of the Scriptures; which, forsooth, the defenders of the Romish Church do strive to force all men simply to receive; but we acknowledge only that interpretation of Scriptures

for orthodox and genuine which, being taken from the Scriptures themselves (that is, from the spirit of that tongue in which they were written, they being also weighed according to the circumstances and expounded according to the proportion of places, either of like or of unlike, also of more and plainer), accords With the rule of faith and charity, and makes notably for God's glory and man's salvation.

Wherefore we do not despise the interpretations of the holy Greek and Latin fathers, nor reject their disputations and treatises as far as they agree with the Scriptures; but we do modestly dissent from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to, the Scriptures. Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter; seeing that they all, with one consent, will not have their writings matched with the Canonical Scriptures, but bid us allow of them so far forth as they either agree with them or disagree.

And in the same order we also place the decrees and canons of councils.

Wherefore we suffer not ourselves, in controversies about religion or matters of faith, to be pressed with the bare testimonies of fathers or decrees of councils; much less with received customs, or with the multitude of men being of one judgment, or with prescription of long time. Therefore, in controversies of religion or matters of faith, we can not admit any other judge than God himself, pronouncing by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what is to be avoided. So we do not rest but in the judgment of spiritual men, drawn from the Word of God. Certainly Jeremiah and other prophets did vehemently condemn the assemblies of priests gathered against the law of God; and diligently forewarned us that we should not hear the fathers, or tread in their path who, walking in their own inventions, swerved from the law of God (Ezek. 20:18).

We do likewise reject human traditions, which, although they be set out With goodly titles, as though they were divine and apostolical, delivered to the Church by the lively voice of the apostles, and as it were, by the hands of apostolical men, by means of bishops succeeding in their room, yet, being compared with the Scriptures, disagree with them; and that by their disagreement betray themselves in no wise to be apostolical. For as the apostles did not disagree among themselves in doctrine, so the apostles' scholars did not set forth things contrary to the apostles. Nay, it were blasphemous to avouch that the apostles, by lively voice, delivered things contrary to their writings. Paul affirms expressly that he taught the same things in all churches (I Cor. 4:17). And, again, "We," says he, "write none other things unto you than what ye read or acknowledge" (II Cor. 1:13). Also, in another place, he witnesses that he and his disciples -- to wit, apostolic men -- walked in the same way, and jointly by the same Spirit did all things (II Cor. 12:18). The Jews also, in time past, had their traditions of elders; but these traditions were severely confuted by the Lord, showing that the keeping of them hinders God's Jaw, and that God is in vain worshiped of such (Matt. 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7).

b. The Irish Articles of Religion (A. D. 1615)

1. The ground of our religion and the rule of faith and all saving truth is the Word of God, contained in the holy Scripture.

2. By the name of holy Scripture we understand all the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament...

All of which we acknowledge to be given by the inspiration of God, and in that regard to be of most certain credit and highest authority.

3. The other Books, commonly called Apocryphal, did not proceed from such inspiration, and therefore are not of sufficient authority to establish any point of doctrine; but the Church doth read them as Books containing many worthy things for example of life and instruction of manners....

4. The Scriptures ought to be translated out of the original tongues into all languages for the common use of all men; neither is any person to be discouraged from reading the Bible in such a language as he doth understand, but seriously exhorted to read the same with great humility and reverence, as a special means to bring him to the true knowledge of God and of his own duty.

5. Although there be some hard things in the Scriptures (especially such as have proper relation to the times in which they were first uttered, and prophecies of things which were afterwards to be fulfilled), yet all things necessary to be known unto everlasting salvation are clearly delivered therein; and nothing of that kind is spoken under dark mysteries in one place which is not of other places spoken more familiarly and plainly, to the capacity both of learned and unlearned.

6. The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation, and are able to instruct sufficiently in all points of faith that we are bound to believe, and all good duties that we are bound to practice.

c. The Westminster Confession of Faith (A. D. 1647), Chapter 1

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal to them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

X. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture.

d. Articles of Religion of the Reformed Episcopal Church in America (A. D. 1875)

Article V

Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation

All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost: Holy Scripture is therefore the Word of God; not only does it contain the oracles of God, but it is itself the very oracles of God. And hence it containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation....

2. The Inspiration of Scripture

a. Definitions of Inspiration

(1) By Benjamin B. Warfield, in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*

The Scriptures... are conceived by the writers of the New Testament as through and through God's book, in every part expressive of His mind, given through men after a fashion which does no violence to their nature as men, and constitutes the book also men's book as well as God's in every part expressive of the mind of its human authors.... The Biblical writers do not conceive of the Scriptures as a human product breathed into by the Divine Spirit, and thus heightened in its qualities or endowed with new qualities; but as a Divine product produced through the instrumentality of men. They do not conceive of these men, by whose instrumentality Scripture is produced, as working upon their own initiative, though energized by God to greater effort and higher achievement, but as moved by the Divine initiative and borne by the irresistible power of the Spirit of God along ways of His choosing to ends of His appointment. (p. 153)

Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence (or, passively, the result of it,) exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and, therefore, perfectly

infallible. In this definition, it is to be noted: 1st. That this influence is a supernatural one -- something different from the inspiration of the poet or man of genius. Luke's accuracy is not left by it with only the safeguards which "the diligent and accurate Suetonius" had. 2nd. That it is an extraordinary influence -- something different from the ordinary action of the Spirit in the conversion and sanctifying guidance of believers. Paul had some more prevalent safeguard against false-teaching than Luther or even the saintly Rutherford. 3rd. That it is such an influence as makes the words written under its guidance, the words of God; by which is meant to be affirmed an absolute infallibility (as alone fitted to divine words), admitting no degrees whatever- extending to the very word, and to all the words. So that every part of Holy Writ is thus held alike infallibly true in all its statements, of whatever kind. (p. 420)

This, then, is what we understand by the church doctrine: -- a doctrine which claims that by a special, supernatural, extraordinary influence of the Holy Ghost, the sacred writers have been guided in their writings in such a way, as while their humanity was not superseded, it was yet so dominated that their words became at the same time the words of God, and thus, in every case and all alike, absolutely infallible. (p. 422)

- (2) By R. A. Finlayson, "Contemporary Ideas of Inspiration" in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), p. 222.

By revelation Protestant theology historically has understood the act of God by which he communicated to men a knowledge of himself and his will. By inspiration is meant that influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of selected men which rendered them organs of God for the infallible communication of that revelation. By illumination is understood the divine quickening of the human mind in virtue of which it is able to understand the truth so revealed and communicated.

- (3) By J. I. Packer, in *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), pp. 66-70.

### God-Breathed Scripture

We come now to state in outline what we take to be the true view, as it is certainly the historic Anglican view, of the Holy Scriptures. Traditionally, it has been summed up by calling the Bible, as in the marriage serve, "God's Word", or, as in Article XX, "God's Word written". The value of such phraseology is that it at once indicates, first, that what Scripture says, God says (the Word of God); second, that the Scriptures together make up a total presentation of God's

message to men (the Word of God); third, that the Scriptures constitute a message addressed directly by God to everyone who reads or hears them (the Word of God) - in other words, that the Scriptures have the nature of preaching. The "Word of the Lord" conveyed by the prophets in their oracles, and the "Word of God" set forth by the apostles in their sermons, was always a word applying directly to its hearers, summoning them to recognize that God Himself was thereby addressing them, calling on them to respond to His instruction and direction, and working in them through God's own Spirit to evoke the response which it required (cf. I Thess. 2:13). Similarly, the Bible as a whole, viewed from the standpoint of its contents, should be thought of, not statically, but dynamically; not merely as what God said long ago, but as what He says still; and not merely as what He says to men in general, but as what He says to each individual reader or hearer in particular. In other words, Holy Scripture should be thought of as God preaching -- God preaching to me every time I read or hear any part of it -- God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy Spirit. God the Father is the giver of Holy Scripture; God the Son is the theme of Holy Scripture; and God the Spirit, as the Father's appointed agent in witnessing to the Son, is the author, authenticator, and interpreter, of Holy Scripture. This is the position which we shall now try to elucidate, by means of some further study of what biblical inspiration implies. We saw in the last chapter what inspiration was in the prophets: a divine work, taking many psychological forms, whereby, having made God's message known to them, the Holy Spirit so overruled all their subsequent mental activity in giving the message poetic and literary form that each resultant oracle was as truly a divine utterance as a human, as direct a disclosure of what was in God's mind as of what was in the prophet's. Also, we saw that the New Testament extends this concept of dual authorship to cover all the Old Testament, second-person psalms of addresses to God (cf. Heb. 1:8-12, 2:6ff. ) or admonitions from the wise man to his pupil (cf. Heb. 12:5f. ), and third-person narratives of God's words and doings, as well as first-person divine utterances spoken through prophetic messengers. Our Lord quotes the narrator's marginal comment in Genesis 2:24 as what "he which made them... said" (Mt. 19:4f. ). Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that the history of Israel's wilderness wanderings was "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (I Cor. 10:10; cf. Rom. 15:4). Paul also calls the Old Testament as a whole "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2; cf. Acts 7:38), and twice says "Scripture" when he means "God, as recorded in Scripture" ("the Scripture, foreseeing... preached.. ." (Gal. 3:2); "the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up" (Rom. 9:17). Thus he shows that for him biblical statements were, quite simply, words of God talking about Himself. Similarly, in Romans 4 and Galatians 3:6ff., Paul treats what "the Scripture

saith" about Abraham (that he "believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness") as divine testimony to the way of salvation. The New Testament concept of Old Testament inspiration is crystallized in the statement in 11 Timothy 3:16, "all Scripture is inspired by God" (R. S. V.), where "inspired by God" is *theopneustos*, literally "breathed out from God." The thought here is that, just as God made the host of heaven "by the breath of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6), through His own creative fiat, so we should regard the Scriptures as the product of a similar creative fiat -- "let there be Law, Prophets, and Writings" (the three divisions of the Jewish canon in New Testament times). The New Testament faith about the Old Testament was that the real narrator of Israel's history in the Law and Former Prophets (that is, the Pentateuch and historical books), and the real psalmist, poet, and wisdom-teacher in the Writings, as well as the real preacher of the prophets' sermons, was God Himself.

Moreover, we have also seen that our Lord, according to His own explicit testimony, spoke from God, and so did His apostles, to whom He promised His Spirit to enable them to do precisely this in their witness to Himself (see Jn. 14:26, 15:26f., 16:7-15, 20:21ff. ; ct. Mt. 10:19f. ; Lk. 10:16; I Cor. 2:12f. ). Apostolic witness to Christ, spoken or written, thus has the same Spirit -- prompted, divine-human character -- that is, is inspired in the same sense -- as the sacred books of the Old Testament. As, therefore, we should follow the New Testament Christians in viewing the Old Testament as given by God for our learning, so we should read the New Testament as part of Jesus Christ's legacy to us -- as if at each point we heard Him say, "I had Paul(or John, or Matthew, or whoever it is) write this in order to help you." This is what it means to believe in biblical inspiration biblically.

The inspiring process, which brought each writer's thoughts into such exact coincidence with those of God, necessarily involved a unique oversight and control of those who were its subjects. Some moderns doubt whether this control could leave room for any free mental activity on the writers' part, and pose a dilemma: either God's control of the writers was complete, in which case they wrote as robots or automata (which clearly they did not), or their minds worked freely as they wrote the Scriptures, in which case God could not fully have controlled them, or kept them from error. Exponents of this dilemma usually hold that the evidence for errors (false statements purporting to be true) in the Bible is in fact as conclusive as the evidence for spontaneous self-expression by its human writers. But our first comment must be that this is not so. That Scripture errs has been assumed by many, but it cannot in principle be proved, any more than it can be proved that Jesus was not morally perfect. Both questions are actually settled farther back: if Jesus was God incarnate, He could not but be morally perfect, and if Scripture is the Word of the God of truth it cannot be but true and trustworthy at all points. Moreover, the dilemma rests on the

assumption that full psychological freedom of thought and action, and full subjection to divine control, are incompatible; and this is not true either. If the inspiration of the prophets was what all Scripture says it was, it is absurd to deny that the whole Bible could be similarly inspired.

Instead of imposing on God arbitrary limitations of this sort, we should rather adore the wisdom and power that could so order the unruly minds of sinful men as to cause them freely and spontaneously, with no inhibiting of their normal mental processes, to write only and wholly the infallible truth of God. As B. B. Warfield observed, we are not to imagine that when God wanted Paul's letters written "He was reduced to the necessity of going down to the earth and painfully scrutinizing the men He found there, seeking anxiously for the one who, on the whole, promised best for His purpose; and then violently forcing the material he wished expressed through him, against his natural bent, and with as little loss from his recalcitrant characteristics as possible. Of course, nothing of the sort took place. If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters." Of course -- but what a marvel of providential management this was! And, for that matter, what a marvel of condescending mercy it was that God should speak to men at all! And what patience and skill He showed throughout the long history of revelation in always so adapting His message to the capacities of His chosen messengers that it never overran their powers of transmission, but within the limits set by their mind, outlook, culture, language, and literary ability, could always find adequate and exact expression! But such gracious self-limitation is typical of the God of Bethlehem's stable and Calvary's cross.

Inspiration took many psychological forms; here, as elsewhere, God showed Himself a God of variety. The basic form of the process was dualistic inspiration, in which the recipient of revelation remained conscious throughout of the distinction between himself, the hearer and reporter, and God, the Speaker to and through him. The inspiration that produced the Old Testament prophetic oracles, including the Mosaic legislation, and the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and John the divine, was of this kind. But there were other forms, too, in which this consciousness was not present, so that the human authors may well not have been aware of being inspired, in the strict sense of the word, at all. There was, on the one hand, lyric inspiration, in which the inspiring action of God was fused with the concentrating, intensifying, and shaping mental processes of what, in the secular sense, we would call the inspiration of the poet. This produced the Psalms, the lyrical drama of Job (which as it stands is a highly-wrought theological poem, whatever basis it may be thought to have in historical fact), the Song of Solomon, and the many great prayers that we find scattered through the



historical books. Then, on the other hand, there were various forms of organic inspiration, whereby the inspiring action of God coalesced with the mental processes -- inquiring, analytical, reflective, interpretative, applicatory -- of the teacher, seeking to distil and pass on knowledge of facts and right thoughts about them. This type of inspiration produced the historical books of both Testaments, the apostolic letters, and, in the Old Testament, the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. There was, of course, nothing to prevent the same man being the medium at different times of different forms of divine inspiration, and it seems clear that all three were combined in the highest degree in the inspiration of our lord Himself. The importance of these observations lies in the fact that to recognize what form of inspiration each biblical passage displays is always the first essential for interpreting it soundly.

- (4) By L. Gaussen, F. L. Patton, and A. A. MacRae, mediated through the filter of the author of these Class Notes. (This is our working definition)

Inspiration is a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of sacred Scripture, so that their words should convey the thoughts He wished conveyed, should bear a proper relationship to the thoughts of the other books of Scripture, and should be kept free from error in thought, fact, doctrine, and judgment.

b. The Mode of Inspiration

- (1) The five basic modes of Inspiration that have been proposed are:
- (a) The Intuition Mode -- this view holds that Inspiration is simply that natural insight into religious things that is common to all human beings
  - (b) The Illumination Mode -- this view holds that Inspiration is spiritual exaltation of and insight common to all Christians

- (c) The Dynamic Mode -- this view holds that Inspiration is supernatural exaltation and guidance of the human faculties of chosen human beings, which guidance is sometimes infallible and sometimes fallible
- (d) The Organic Mode -- this view holds that Inspiration is infallible supernatural guidance of the human faculties of chosen human beings
- (e) The Dictation Mode -- this view holds that Inspiration is infallible supernatural control of chosen men's mechanical reproduction of divine words

(2) The views of some representative theologians in these five modes:

PROPONENT	INTUITION	ILLUMINATION	DYNAMIC	ORGANIC	Dictation
Theod. Parker	Y				
F. W. Newman	Y				
W. N. Clarke		Y-exaltation			
O. C. Curtis	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
A. H. Strong	N	N	Y	N	N
James Orr	N	N	Y-plenary	N	N
L. Berkhof		N-dynamical		Y	N-mechanical
C. Hodge	N	N	N	Y	N
L. S. Chafer	N-natural	N-mystical		Y	N-mechanical
P. B. Fitzwater	N	N		Y	N
G. P. Pardington	N	N		Y-dynamic	N-mechanical
V. G. T. Shedd				Y	N
H. C. Thiessen	N	N	N	Y	N
B. B. Warfield	N	N	N	Y	N
C. Van Til				Y	N
G. Voetius				N	Y

(3) Development of the doctrine of the mode of Inspiration

(a) Biblical elements included in the act of Inspiration

Element #1 -- All Scripture is God-breathed; i.e., has come from God's mouth.

This element is found in II Timothy 3:16, where we read:

πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος...

Since there has been much controversy concerning the meaning of this Scripture, we will examine it in detail.

The subject of the sentence is **γραφὴ**, which means "something written". The English word "scripture" also means "something written", but in contemporary usage has come to mean "the sacred writings of religion," or "a body of writings considered as authoritative." However, as B. B. Warfield pointed out in Chapter V of *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, **γραφὴ** is used in the New Testament

to denote "the sacred meaning of the Old and New Testaments," or as we call them, "the Scriptures," not merely something written, and certainly not the sacred writings of another religion. , —

Since γραφή is modified by the adjective πᾶσα, whatever the verse is stating about γραφή it is stating about "all" or "every" sacred writing of the Old and New Testaments. Following γραφή there are two adjectives, the grammar of which has occasioned problems for translators. These adjectives are θεόπνευστος and ὠφέλιμος.

θεόπνευστος means "God-breathed" and ὠφέλιμος means "profitable" or "valuable" or "useful" or "beneficial". But what is the grammatical arrangement of these adjectives? Should the translation read (with both adjectives attributive): "All God-breathed and profitable Scripture (is) for teaching, etc."? Or should it read (with one adjective attribute and one predicate): "All God-breathed Scripture (is) profitable for teaching, etc."? Or should it read (with both adjectives predicate): "All Scripture (is) God-breathed, and (is) profitable for teaching, etc."? Notice that in all three translations the copula (is) must be supplied, since the Greek text assumes it.

The first translation is extremely awkward, since "profitable" is a word which seems to need completion (profitable for what purpose or end?), and the completion of words, which follow in the prepositional phrase, "for teaching, for refutation of error, etc." are separated from the word "profitable" by the word "Scripture".

The second translation, although possible, is in need of justification, since it makes one adjective attributive and the other predicate, with no apparent basis or reason.

The third translation, which renders both adjectives as predicate, would appear to be both smooth and consistent -- "All Scripture (is) God-breathed and (is) profitable for teaching, for refutation of error, for correction of faults, for discipline in righteousness."

Accepting this third translation as the best rendering of the text, we learn that all Scripture, i.e., every part of the Old and New Testaments, is God-breathed. The meaning of the word θεόπνευστος does not appear to be that God took human words or human instruments and breathed into them (which might be implied from the English word "inspiration"), but rather that God breathed, and from His mouth came

Scripture. This conception builds on a phenomenon which persons living in the first century would have known about: that of exhaling air in the act of speaking.

Element #2 -- The men who wrote Scripture were borne up, carried along, in their writings, by the Holy Spirit.

This element is found in II Peter 1:21, where we read: "For not by the will of man came prophecy at any time, but being borne up (or carried along) by the Holy Spirit, man spoke from God."

That this does not refer to oral prophetic declarations may be seen from verse 20, where the προφητεία of which Peter is speaking is the written προφητεία, the προφητεία γραφῆς, i. e. the "prophecy of Scripture". Among other things, this verse tells that the initial impulse to set down such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished recorded, and the subsequent enablement and guidance to select such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished included both came from the Holy Spirit of God. On the one hand, prophecy did not come by the will of man; on the other hand, men spoke from God as they were borne up and carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Element #3 -- In one sense the men who wrote Scripture did not write from themselves, but from God.

This element is also found in II Peter 1:21, where we read:

ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι

- "men spoke from God."

Element #4 -- In a different sense, the men who wrote Scripture did write from themselves.

This element has reference to all those aspects of writing included under the general umbrella, "style". A writer's style marks his writing as peculiarly his. In this regard, the writers of Scripture were no exception. They display various styles, revealing their social, cultural, educational, and vocational backgrounds. They employ distinctive vocabularies, use distinctive grammatical constructions, prefer distinct types of discourse (narrative, descriptive, explanatory, or argumentative), and even display differing degrees of psychological and emotional depth. Thus their writings reveal something of themselves as the human authors, even as they reveal something of the divine Author of Scripture. This element may be supported in many places, in both the Old and the New Testament.

(b) Biblical elements resulting from the act of Inspiration

Element #1 -- All Scripture is the Word of God

II Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is God-breathed. The effect of God's breathing out of Scripture is that all of Scripture is His Word. This seeming truism takes on deeper meaning as we consider the fact that Scripture includes statements made by Satan, by demons, by ungodly men, and by godly men speaking foolishly, as well as ordinary garden-variety history. But as a result of Inspiration all of Scripture is the Word of God!

Element #2 -- All of Scripture is profitable for the complete equipping of the man of God for life and godliness.

This effect is found in II Timothy 3:16-17, where we read: "All Scripture (is) God-breathed, and (is) profitable for teaching, for refutation of error, for correction of faults, for discipline in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully qualified, having been equipped for every good work."

This matter of profitableness raises the question: Are there degrees of profitableness? If so, are there degrees of Inspiration?

Lest the question be thought frivolous, let us note two quotations from a landmark work: Dewey Beegle's *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 140-141. Beegle writes:

Some of the great hymns are practically on a par with the psalms, and one can be sure that if Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, Augustus Toplady, and Reginald Heber had lived in the time of David and Solomon, and had been *no more inspired than they were in their own day*, some of their hymns of praise to God would have found their way into the Hebrew canon. (the italics are Beegle's)

Undoubtedly, God's Spirit spoke in this vital way to the troubled soul of George Matheson (the Scottish minister who wrote "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"). This is the kind of inspiration of which the psalms were made. There is no difference in kind. If there is any difference, it is a matter of degree.

At this point, some distinctions must be made regarding the question of degrees, as this question applies to Inspiration, authority, and value.

With respect of Inspiration, either Scripture is inspired (God-breathed) or it is not. Either men spoke from God or they did not. In the nature of the case, degrees are not possible.

With respect to authority, we must make a distinction between the authority of historical truth and the authority of contemporary normativeness. With regard to the authority of historical truth, we must say: either this account of Scripture is historically true (i.e., factual) or it is not; either this person said a thing or he did not; either this event happened or it did not. There are no degrees of historical truth! With regard to the authority of contemporary normativeness, we must say: either this law, exhortation, teaching, or example is binding upon our obedience today or it is not; there are no degrees involved.

With respect to value, it appears that it is permissible and proper to speak of degrees. Although no portion of Scripture is more inspired than another (either it is God-breathed or it isn't), and although no portion is more authoritative than another (either historically or normatively), yet some portions of Scripture are more valuable than others. Of course, we must admit that certain portions of Scripture can be more valuable or less valuable, depending on the context or need. But even in an absolute sense, it would appear obvious that a command or promise related to spiritual things is more valuable than one related to physical things. And a crucial condition of salvation is more valuable than the mention of an obscure personage in a tribal enumeration. Therefore we should probably understand II Timothy 3:16 to mean that some portions of Scripture are profitable for teaching, some are profitable for refutation of error, some are profitable for correction of faults, and some are profitable for discipline in righteousness.

Element #3 -- Not one truth of Scripture can be set aside, nullified, or omitted.

This element is found in John 10:34-36, which reads:

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and the Scripture is not able to be set aside; are you saying to the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming!' because I said I am the Son of God?"

Interestingly, this reference to the "law" is found, not in the first division of the Old Testament (the Torah), or in the second division (the Prophets), but in the third division (the Writings), specifically in Psalm 82. The implication is that all of the Old Testament had the force of law, i.e., was binding on the faith and obedience of the Israelite.

In Psalm 82 we find God judging the human judges of Israel, who are perverting judgment. Because they are doing this, all of the fundamental structures of society are out of order. God commands these judges to judge righteously; and warns them that although He has called them gods, yet they will die like men. The Psalmist calls on God to intervene and judge the earth righteously.

Jesus uses this portion -- part of verse 6 -- to argue for the propriety of calling Himself the Son of God. Properly understood, this is not a clever bit of sophistry on Jesus' part in an attempt to avoid the charge of blasphemy. Rather it is a traditional argument, employing an appeal to incontrovertible authority. Jesus was simply saying, "If it is proper for God to call human judges 'gods' (because they stand in the place of God, judging in the name of God, and exercising the divine prerogative of life and death), is it not more proper that I, who really am God, should call myself the Son of God?" Thus Jesus uses Psalm 82:6 to support the propriety of his own title, the Son of God; and in doing so, He lays down a principle that the Jews would not dare to controvert: the Scripture is not able to be set aside!

Element #4 -- In the act of its inscripturation, no portion of Scripture has been conditioned, as to its truth, by the fallibilities of its human author.

This element is found in II Peter 1:20, where we read, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes into being by one's own interpretation."

The reason it doesn't happen is given in verse 21: "For not by the will of man came prophecy at any time, but being borne up by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God." This argument may be expressed as follows: "Because prophecy did not come by the will of man, therefore no prophecy comes into being by one's own interpretation." Or, to put it another way, "Because men spoke from God as they were borne up by the Holy Spirit, therefore no prophecy comes into being by one's own interpretation."

Many times this text has been understood to mean that no one should place his own private interpretation on a Scripture verse or passage, but should seek the Spirit's interpretation. In practice, however, this generally meant the acceptance of the interpretation of some Bible teacher or pastor. However, the text does not speak of the reader's interpretation, but of the writer's interpretation. The text says that "no prophecy of Scripture comes into being by one's own interpretation," i.e., no Scripture portion has been conditioned by the human author's interpretation. Thus the infallible Word of God is not conditioned by the fallible words of men!



Element #5 -- The truths of Scripture are more certain than the observations of empirical experience; or empirical experiences that confirm the prophetic truths of Scripture give them greater subjective certitude.

This element is found in II Peter 1:16-19, where we read: For we are not depending upon pseudo-intellectual myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but became eyewitnesses of that one's majesty. For (He) was receiving from God the Father honor and glory, such a voice being borne to Him from the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." And we heard this voice borne from heaven when we were with Him in the holy mountain. And we have more certain the prophetic word, to which you do well to pay close attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

The phrase, "the power and coming of our lord Jesus Christ" is this reference appears to refer to Christ's first coming; and to that specific event in our Lord's earthly ministry when He was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. Peter says that they did not build their accounts of Jesus on sophisticated myths, but saw His majesty and heard the voice of God giving Jesus honor and glory. And yet the prophetic word is more certain, more firm, better established, more sure than even these observations based on empirical experience. Sense experience may deceive, but the prophetic word will not; sense experience is of a private nature, but the prophetic word is open, publicly available to Peter's readers; sense experience is in this case unique and irrepeatable, but the prophetic word records for all time this wonderful self-revelation of deity. To this prophetic word, Peter says, they should pay close attention.

Or it is possible that Peter is saying that empirical experiences that confirm the prophetic truths of Scripture give those truths greater subjective certitude (assurance). Under this interpretation Peter was saying that the experience that he and James and John had on the Mount of Transfiguration gave them greater subjective assurance that Jesus was indeed the predicted Messiah of Old Testament prophecy.

Putting together those elements included in the act of Inspiration and those elements resulting from the act of Inspiration, we are strongly pushed in the direction of the organic mode of Inspiration. The organic mode holds that Inspiration is infallible supernatural guidance of the human faculties of chosen human beings; and is the only one of the five basic modes that accounts for all of the data.

c. The purpose of Inspiration

The purpose of Inspiration now appears to have been threefold:

- (1) To move holy men of God to set down such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished recorded
- (2) To guide the writers of Scripture to select such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished to be included in Scripture
- (3) To preserve the writers of Scripture from error in the Inscripturation of such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished inscripturated

- (1) To move holy men of God to set down such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished recorded

II Peter 1:21 states: "For not by the will of man came prophecy at any time, but being borne up by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God."

The initial impulse to write Scripture did not originate in the will of man, but in the will of God.

- (2) To guide the writers of Scripture to select such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished to be included in Scripture

Again, II Peter 1:21 states: "being borne up (or carried along) by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God."

The guidance needed to select events and meanings came from the Spirit of God.

- (3) To preserve the writers of Scripture from error in the interpretation of such events and such interpretation of events in the history of revelation as God wished inscripturated.

II Peter 1:20 states: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes into being by one's own interpretation."

Preservation from the inclusion of error stemming from the author's limited knowledge, mind-set, cultural context, or world-view is guaranteed, not by authorial intent, but by the purpose and guidance of God.

d. The extent of Inspiration

The question here has to do with the extent of God's guidance and preservation in the inscripturation of revelation.

With respect to the writers themselves, how far did God's guidance extend?

- (1) To religious impressions only, the formation of concepts, selection of contents, and choice of words being left to the writer?
- (2) To the initial impulse to write only, i.e., to record an experience of revelation, the selection of contents and choice of words being left to the human author?
- (3) To the selection of general subject matter, of topics only, the specific subject matter and choice of words being left to the writers?
- (4) To thoughts and concepts only, the selection of words being left to the human writer?
- (5) To the very words that the writer chose to express his thoughts?

Any answer that falls short of "the very words that the writer chose to express his thoughts" puts us into a relative stance in which we need an absolute principle of some sort to enable us to distinguish between what is and what is not inspired in Scripture.

With respect to the writings themselves, how far did God's guidance extend?

- (1) To mysteries only (truths unattainable by reason)?
- (2) To the message of salvation only?
- (3) To the words of Christ only?
- (4) To certain types of material only (e. g., to the didactic portions

of the New Testament, such as Romans and Galatians)?

- (5) To matters of faith and practice only?
- (6) To "key" or essential words only?
- (7) To every word (verbal) and to the entire content (plenary) of Scripture?

Any answer that falls short of "every word and the entire content of Scripture" again puts us into a relative position in which we need an absolute principle to enable us to distinguish between what is and what is not inspired in Scripture.

If the extent of God's guidance falls short of the very words the writer chose to express his thoughts, and of every word and thus the entire content of Scripture, then we must search for and find an absolute principle to distinguish inspired from uninspired Scripture.

In such a case, what principle of differentiation can be employed?

- (1) What seems reasonable and just?
- (2) Whatever is true?
- (3) Whatever is needful for salvation?
- (4) Whatever is normative for faith and practice?
- (5) Whatever is of value for faith?
- (6) Whatever is "Word-bearing", i.e., whatever witnesses to Christ?
- (7) Whatever is genuine *kerygma*, i.e., whatever enables me to achieve "authentic existence," i.e., become truly man?
- (8) Whatever the Spirit bears witness to?
- (9) Whatever Scripture itself claims is inspired?

And who should employ this principle of differentiation, so that we may know which Scriptures are inspired and which are not?

- (1) The Church?
- (2) A consensus of all believers?
- (3) Biblical scholars and theologians?
- (4) The individual Christian?

If we receive the witness of Scripture to itself (which amounts to the witness of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture) with regard to the extent of Inspiration, we discover that with one voice the prophets, Christ, and the apostles proclaim that the entirety of Scripture, including the very words that the writers employed, were inspired by God!

e. The relevance of Inspiration for the apographs

Inspiration is a technical term that refers to the original inscripturation of revelation. That is, Inspiration is a unique act that refers only to the autographs of Scripture. Does this have any implications for apographs -- those copies, versions, and translations of Scripture that we presently possess?

If the autographs are the unique products of the special act of Inspiration, and as a result are the Word of God, true, authoritative, inerrant, and infallible; and if the apographs are not the unique product of the special act of Inspiration; then can we properly say that the apographs are the Word of God, true, and authoritative? Is it possible to say, with any conviction, that the Bible we hold in our hands or place on our pulpits are the Word of God? Can we quote from these Bibles and say, "Thus saith the Lord!"? Can we base our witness or our sermons on an apograph and speak with the authority of God?

A theological construct is here proposed to help sort out these problems.

Let the term "inspired" include two subcategories: Inspiration as an act, and "inspiredness" as a quality. Inspiration refers to the act of the Holy Spirit, operative only in the original inscripturation; "inspiredness" refers to a quality inherent in the autographs in a primary, immediate, absolute sense, but also retained in the apographs in a derived, secondary, mediate, and relative sense.

To put it another way, as a result of the act of Inspiration, the quality of "inspiredness" would be found in the autographs absolutely, and in the apographs relatively. Thus the term Inspiration would refer only to the originals, whereas the term "inspiredness" would refer both to the originals and to the copies of Scripture. The term "inspired" would then include both autographs and apographs, both the original manuscripts and copies, versions, and translations of them.

Here then is the construct, in the form of a proposal:

### PROPOSAL

That the term "inspired" Include two ideas:

Inspiration as an act

"inspiredness" as a quality

That Inspiration (an act) refer only to  
autographs (originals)

That "inspiredness" (a quality) refer to both  
autographs (originals) and apographs  
(copies)

That Inspiration refer to autographs  
(originals) in a primary, immediate, absolute  
sense

That "inspiredness" refer to apographs  
(copies) in a derived, secondary, mediate,  
relative sense

This theological proposal would permit us to consider those copies, versions, and translations that we possess, to be the Word of God, true, authoritative, and inspired (in the sense of the quality of "inspiredness"). But can this proposal be supported?

In II Timothy 3:15 we discover that Timothy had known from childhood the holy Scriptures which were able to give him the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. These were the same Scriptures which in verse 16 Paul says are God-breathed and profitable to adequately equip the man of God. Now when Paul spoke of the holy Scriptures which Timothy had known from childhood, of which Scriptures was he speaking? If II Timothy was written in A. D. 63 and if (for argument's sake) Timothy was only 25 years old at the time, then Timothy would have been born in A. D. 38, eleven years before the first book of the New Testament- Galatians -was written, in A. D. 49. Timothy had been raised in Judaism by a Jewish mother. The "Scriptures" on which he had been nourished were undoubtedly those of the Old Testament. But what Scriptures did Timothy's mother and grandmother have in their synagogue (or perhaps, if they were very fortunate, in their possession)? The originals or copies? The overwhelming probability is that they had copies - apographs. Yet Paul says that these apographs are able to give the knowledge of salvation (verse 15); and he goes on to say that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable.

Now it would have not made much sense for Paul to say that the Scriptures that Timothy did not have (i.e., the autographs) were able to make him wise unto salvation, were God-breathed, and profitable to equip Timothy for every good work. Rather, Paul is saying that the Scriptures that Timothy had, which Timothy had known from childhood, were able to make him wise unto salvation, were God-breathed, and were profitable to equip Timothy for every good work.

That is, the copies of the Old Testament books available to Timothy in A. D. 43 (when he was, say, five years old), and the copies of those New Testament books that had thus far been written, put into circulation, and made available to Timothy in A. D. 63 (at the time of the writing of II Timothy) were inspired, in the sense that they carried in them the quality of "inspiredness". In other words, whatever books could properly be called Scripture were inspired.

Again, in John 10:35 Jesus referred to Psalm 82, argued for the propriety of calling Himself the Son of God on its basis, and said, "the Scripture is not able to be set aside." If not one truth of Scripture could be set aside, nullified, or omitted, to what Scripture was Jesus referring? To the autograph of Psalm 82? Or to the copies which the Jews had in the temple and in their synagogues, the words of which they could read for themselves? Most probably the apographs.

Incidentally, this text would argue, not only for the "inspiredness" (and thus the truth and divine authority) of copies, but would also argue for the uncorrupted preservation, in the apographs, of the truths of the autographs, in spite of errors in transmission.

Again, in II Peter 1:19 Peter says that "we have more certain the prophetic word." Peter was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, which predicted the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the prophetic word that Peter "had" was not the originals, but copies. However, when Peter speaks of the manner in which the prophecy of Scripture originally came into being (in verses 20 and 21), he is speaking of the autographs, not of copies. And yet both are inspired. The autographs had the quality of "inspiredness" because of the Holy Spirit's unique act of Inspiration; the copies had the quality of "inspiredness" because they were derived from the autographs. In spite of the fact that the inscripturated revelation was transmitted across centuries, copied, translated, and marred by copyists' errors, its truths were preserved in such a way that Peter could tell his readers to pay the closest attention to the prophetic word which was available to them.

Two important implications flow from this proposal. The first is that the term "inspiredness" represents a relative concept. To the degree (or extent) that copies, versions, translations, and

paraphrases drift away from the text of the autographs, to that degree is "inspiredness" diminished.

Of course, we do not possess the autographs. But we can discover through textual criticism the words of Scripture that are attested by the best textual evidence. And then we may ask: "Can the apographs drift so far from the best attested text that they no longer retain the quality of 'inspiredness'?" This could be possible, particularly as specific points where apographs have deliberately emended the text, or have selected a dubious reading in order to support a theological bias. However, unless the apograph as a whole has corrupted the content of the best-attested text so badly that the text is no longer recognizable, some degree of "inspiredness" would probably remain in the apograph. But even then, a distinction would need to be made between an essentially trustworthy copy of Scripture and an essentially untrustworthy one; the difference being that an essentially trustworthy copy would be one which, with confidence, we could commend almost indiscriminately, and an essentially untrustworthy copy would be one which we could not commend at all, or about which we would have strong reservations.

The second important implication that flows from this proposal is that we can have a tremendous confidence in the fact that we possess not only copies of Scripture that are as provably close in accuracy to the originals as the copies of the Old Testament that the apostles had, but also that what we have is the inspired, true, authoritative, trustworthy, and powerful Word of the living God!

### 3. The infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture

G. C. Berkouwer, in his book *Holy Scripture*, defines inerrancy to mean "an accuracy of all matters discussed in Scripture." He rejects this concept of inerrancy, yet he strongly affirms infallibility.

Clark H. Pinnock, in his monograph *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, defines "infallible" as "incapable of teaching deception." He says that "Inspiration involved infallibility as an essential property, and infallibility in turn implies inerrancy." He also states that "Infallibility is a necessary, not merely an optional, inference from the Biblical teaching about inspiration. It is an intrinsic property and essential characteristic of the inspired text." More recently Pinnock has raised serious questions about his own views of inerrancy and its relationship to infallibility, and no longer links infallibility with inerrancy.

Paul D. Feinberg, in his paper, "The Meaning of Inerrancy", delivered at the Chicago Summit Conference on Inerrancy (October 1978), states that according to the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, "infallibility" means "the quality or fact of being infallible or exempt from liability to err," or "the quality of being unfailing or not liable to fail; unfailing certainty." Feinberg asserts that from the



standpoint of definition only "it would be difficult to maintain a clear distinction between this term and inerrancy." He notes that more recently, however, infallibility has been "a term championed by those who would support what has been called limited inspiration or what today we might better call limited inerrancy." He says, "those who often advance this word to the exclusion of inerrancy would at least defend the inerrancy of the Scriptures in areas that are 'revelational', 'soteriological', or 'matters of faith and doctrine'."

As an example of this use of infallible in combination with a doctrine of limited inerrancy, Feinberg cites Stephen C. Davis, and his book *The Debate About the Bible*, in which Davis says that infallibility means that the Bible is not false, or will not mislead us on matters of faith and practice. However, John H. Gerstner, in his article in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, states that "Davis' own infallibilist position self-destructs, for he admits that his Bible may even err on any crucial doctrine (though he hopes not and thinks it will not), and he admits that ultimate reliance for truth is on his own mind, Scripture notwithstanding." What a strange concept of infallibility!

"Infallibility" is a good word. However, whenever we see it or use it we should realize that in the present climate of discussion it can mean on the one hand that the Bible is "incapable of error," or on the other hand that the Bible "will not fail to achieve the goals and purposes which God intended for it." The first definition affirms inerrancy; the second does not deny inerrancy but does not require it.

James Montgomery Boice, in the Preface to *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, sounds a warning note. He says:

... other persons will argue that infallibility is a better word than inerrancy for describing the soundest evangelical position on Scripture... Unfortunately, the majority of those who choose infallible rather than inerrant do so because they want to affirm something less than total inerrancy, suggesting erroneously that the Bible is dependable in some areas (such as faith and morals) while not being fully dependable in others (such as matters of history and science).

Paul D. Feinberg, in his paper, "The Meaning of Inerrancy", proposes a definition of inerrancy. He says:

Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences.

This definition is more positive and comprehensive than the statement on Scripture in the Lausanne Covenant, which asserts that the Bible is "without error in all that it affirms." As such Feinberg's

definition has distinct advantages.

However, once we have confessed that the Scriptures are inerrant; i.e., wholly true and without error in everything that they affirm, we must make some qualifications. Kenneth S. Kantzer, in his article in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, points out that some people draw unnecessary implications from inerrancy. He says:

The word inerrancy is... by no means free from... abuse and ambiguity. As applied to biblical inspiration, it is used by some to mean: a) exact and precise language throughout the whole of Scripture, b) literal interpretation of Scripture, or c) dictation methodology for the production of Scripture.

Kantzer asserts that inerrancy does not include these concepts.

Paul D. Feinberg also mentions some misunderstandings of inerrancy. He enumerates eight qualifications of the concept

1. Inerrancy does not demand strict adherence to the rules of grammar.
2. Inerrancy does not exclude the use of either figures of speech or literary genre.
3. Inerrancy does not demand historical or semantic precision.
4. Inerrancy does not demand the technical or observational language of modern science.
5. Inerrancy does not require verbal exactness in the citation of the Old Testament by the New.
6. Inerrancy does not demand that the sayings of Jesus contain the exact words of Jesus, only the exact voice (i.e., sometimes we find direct quotation, sometimes indirect discourse, and sometimes free renderings, but the meaning of our Lord's words is captured in the words of the writer).
7. Inerrancy does not guarantee the exhaustive comprehensiveness of any single account or of combined accounts where those are involved.
8. Inerrancy does not demand the infallibility or inerrancy of the non-inspired sources used by biblical writers.

However, in spite of these important qualifications, Clark, Pinnock, in an article in *Biblical Authority*, edited by Jack Rogers and published in 1977, states that he is not comfortable with the term inerrancy, although he says that he still holds it. But the manner in which he qualifies the term seems to dilute it considerably. For example, he asks seven questions about inerrancy, and comments on each one, as follows:

"Question One: Is inerrancy scriptural?., He says that inerrancy is a possible inference from the Bible, but not the only one. We may "choose to draw' the inference or not.

"Question Two: Is inerrancy a logical corollary of inspiration?" (i.e., does inspiration logically require inerrancy) Pinnock says that it does not.

"Question Three: Is inerrancy meaningful?" He says that it is not very meaningful and often misleading to many evangelicals.

"Question Four: Is inerrancy an epistemological necessity?" (i.e., must the Bible be inerrant in order for us to know that its teachings are true). He says that such an argument weakens the evangelical view.

"Question Five: Is inerrancy theologically decisive?" Pinnock claims that our focus should be "upon the saving truth of the Bible to bear witness to Christ," not upon "the precise accuracy of minor details." The emphasis, he says, should be upon "the self-evident authority of Scripture, preached in the power of the Spirit."

"Question Six: Is inerrancy critically honest?" He claims that preoccupation with artificial attempts to harmonize stock problems has prevented evangelicals from handling "newer issues" and from "getting ahead in biblical interpretation."

"Question Seven: Ought inerrancy to be the test of evangelical authenticity?" Pinnock quotes Lindsell, who says that no one who rejects biblical inerrancy has any right to claim the "evangelical badge", and Pinnock states that he regards this view as unjust and extreme, and urges charity toward those who hesitate over inerrancy because of honest questioning.

To be fair, we should point out that Pinnock, while holding to a very qualified inerrancy, sees that there are "flaws and potential dangers implicit in any case for biblical errancy." He asks, "What is there to prevent these evangelicals (who hold to biblical errancy) from handling the Bible like liberals do?" As examples of evangelicals who had handled the Bible using liberal methodology, he mentions Dewey Beegle, in his book *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, and Paul K. Jewett, in his book *Man as Male and Female*.

Pinnock believes that the answer to the issue of errancy, versus inerrancy is the moving of the Spirit of God in mighty power through the church, bringing reformation and revival. Instead of "our strenuous, rationalistic efforts to make the case for the Bible air-tight," and our "obsession with the inerrancy of biblical details," we will have "an overwhelming sense of the power and authority of God speaking through the Word by the Spirit."

Now although this kind of rhetoric is powerful, and seems to sweep away all the troublesome problems, as fresh sea-breezes sweep away sultry air and troublesome mosquitoes and gnats; yet upon analysis this non-solution turns out to be even more troublesome than the problems. The sea-breezes develop into a gale, and then turn into a hurricane!

It is not a problem of either-or: either the Bible is inerrant, or the Spirit moves through the church in mighty power. Rather it is one of both-and: God has given us a true revelation of Himself, has caused this revelation to be truly recorded in Scripture, so that Scripture is God's Word of truth, and God's Spirit wields this true sword of the Word of God and powerfully applies this truth to the minds and hearts and wills both of the lost and of His people, transforming and reviving them and reforming His church in accordance with His perfect will.

Clark Pinnock's views on inerrancy are frankly disturbing, as are the views of Jack B. Rogers, Donald K. McKim, and David A. Hubbard, all of whom are opponents of biblical inerrancy.

One of the reasons these views of Scripture are disturbing is that the matter of inerrancy is vitally related to the question of the authority of Scripture. Gleason L. Archer, in his article in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, speaks to this issue under the heading "Inerrancy Essential for Biblical Authority." Archer writes:

We are faced with a basic choice in the matter of biblical authority. Either we receive the Scripture as completely reliable and trustworthy in every matter it records, affirms, or teaches, or else it comes to us as a collection of religious writings containing both truth and error.

If it does contain mistakes in the original manuscripts, then it ceases to be unconditionally authoritative. It must be validated and endorsed by our own human judgment before we can accept it as true. It is not sufficient to establish that a matter has been affirmed or taught in Scripture; it may nevertheless be mistaken and at variance with the truth. So human judges must pass on each item of teaching or information contained in the Bible and determine whether it is actually to be received as true. Such judgment presupposes a superior wisdom and spiritual insight competent to correct the errors of the Bible, and if those who would thus judge the veracity of the Bible lack the necessary ingredient of personal inerrancy in judgment, they may come to a false and mistaken judgment -- endorsing as true what is actually false, or else condemning as erroneous what is actually correct

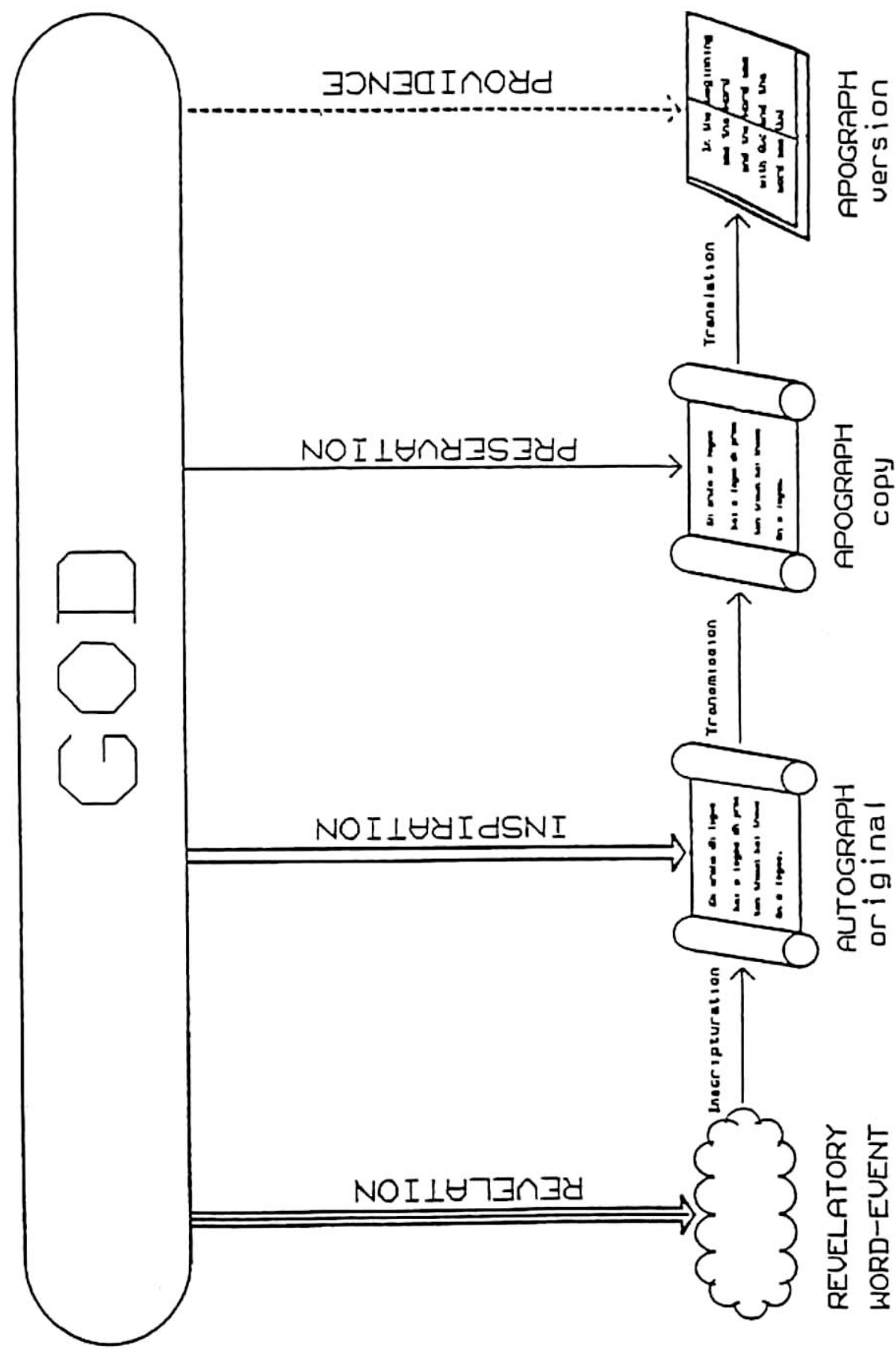
in Scripture. Thus the objective authority of the Bible is replaced by a subjective intuition or judicial faculty on the part of each believer, and it becomes a matter of mere personal preference how much of Scripture teaching he or she may adopt as binding.

In contrast to the view of the Bible as capable of error in matters of science, history, or doctrine, . . . we find that the attitude of Christ and the apostolic authors of the New Testament was one of unqualified acceptance. . .

. . . Despite all the imperfections of the human writers of Scripture, the Lord was able to carry them along into his infallible truth without distortion or mistake.

Both Christ and the apostles affirm, then, that what the Bible says, God says. All these passages add up to this: that accuracy inheres in every part of the Bible, so that it is to be received as infallible as to truth and final as to authority. . . . This, then, is what the Scriptures teach concerning their own infallibility. Not only are they free from all error; they are also filled with all authority, and they sit in judgment on man and all his intentions and thoughts.

As believers living in the twentieth century we are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the Word of God. It is becoming more and more difficult to stand in absolute loyalty to the revealed, verbally and plenary inspired, infallible, and inerrant sacred writings called Scripture. If the present division among evangelicals grows even further, and if the growing tide against the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture continues to advance, then it is inevitable that great harm and damage will come to the whole cause of Christ. Will the Lord at His Return find those on the earth who still believe that the Bible is God's Word, is true, is perfect, is God-breathed, is forever settled in heaven? May it be so!



## STEPS IN THE TRANSMISSION OF GOD'S WORD

STEP	DIVINE ACTIVITY	HUMAN ACTIVITY	RESULT OF DIVINE/HUMAN ACTIVITY	EXAMPLE OF RESULT
1.	Revelation	Experience of Revelation	Revelation History	The Life of Christ
2.	Inspiration	Inscription of Revelation History	Original MSS of Scripture (the autographs)	MS of Isaiah
3.	Preservation	Copying of Scripture	MS copies of Scripture (apographs)	Codex Vaticanus (B)
4.	Guidance	Textual Reconstruction	Best attested text of Scripture	UBS text of the N.T.
5.	Guidance	Translation of Scripture	Versions of Scripture in various languages	A.V., N.A.S.B., N.I.V. (In English)
6.	Illumination and Guidance	Interpretation of Scripture	Teachings of Individual Scriptures	John Murray's commentary on Romans
7.	Guidance	Systematization of the teachings of Scripture	Teaching of Scripture as a whole	L. Berkhof's <i>Systematic Theology</i> .
8.	Guidance and Enablement	Proclamation of the teaching of Scripture	Communication of God's Word	C. H. Spurgeon's sermons

NOTES: Under the heading, "Divine Activity", Step 1 involve, supernatural acts of the triune God; step 2 Involves the supernatural activity of God the Holy Spirit; step 3 involves the special providence of God; steps 4 and 5 Involve the general providence of God; step 6 involves a special providential activity of this Holy Spirit; step 7 involves the general providence of God; and step 8 involves a special providential activity of the holy Spirit.

## STEPS IN THE TRANSMISSION OF GOD'S WORD

Theological Movement	Theological/Culture Relationship	Source of Theology	God/World Relationship	View of Revelation	View of Scripture
Liberal Theology	Theology is radically qualified by modern philosophy and science	Religious Experience	God is Immanent, in the world and in man	Non-objective, non-rational, non-propositional; found in man and especially in Jesus' life and its meaning for faith	A record of religious experiences, and especially those of the man Jesus. Includes some important historical information
Neo-Orthodox Theology	Theology is radically qualified by modern philosophy and science	Religious Experience	God is transcendent, totally other, above history in a supra-historical realm; He occasionally breaks into history.	Non-objective, non-rational, non-propositional; experienced only in Jesus in the present encounter of faith	A witness to Revelation (Christ). The word of man about the Word of God. Can provide the occasion for the encounter of faith, but not the truth-content of faith.
Existential Theology	Theology is radically qualified by modern philosophy and science	Religious Experience	God is wholly transcendent, in an other-worldly sphere. He does not "break into" history of intervene in time-space	Revelation is kerygmatic. God's decisive act in Christ makes possible the transformation, through faith, of the believer's understanding of his own existence	A record of human attempts to achieve authentic existence, couched in an obsolete, mythical world-view, Contains the mythologized Kerygma
Death-of-God Theology	Theology is radically qualified by modern philosophy and science	Religious Experience	"God" is dead; only the man Jesus remains	There is no revelation, either in rational or experiential form	A record of imperfect, pre-scientific Impressions of Jesus' person and life
Process Theology	Theology is radically qualified by modern philosophy and science	Religious Experience	God is immanent, in the universal evolutionary process; yet in a sense He is transcendent	In general, revelation is found in the time-space universe, but especially in the man Jesus as the classic example of love-in-action and the realization of human potential	A record of religious experiences, especially those of the man Jesus



## THEOLOGY PROPER

### I. The Knowability of God

#### A. Historical Background to the Doctrine

Herman Bavinck, in Chapter 1 of *The Doctrine of God*, a translation of the first part of Volume 2 of his magnum opus, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 13-37, discusses the views of various philosophers and theologians on the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility. This discussion is excerpted as follows:

Greek philosophy... frequently taught... unknowability with respect to deity. According to a well-known story, the philosopher Simonides to whom the tyrant Hiero had put the question, "Who is God?" kept on asking for more and more time to frame an answer. According to Diogenes, the treatise of *Protagoras On the Gods* began as follows: "Concerning the gods I am not able to know whether they exist or whether they do not exist. For there are many things which prevent one from knowing; for example, the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life." Camaedes of Cyrene not only subjected belief in the gods to a severe criticism but even denied the possibility of forming a conception of God. Plato rejected all anthropomorphic and anthropopathic descriptions of the

Deity and declared in *Timaeus*, par. 28: "Now to discover the Maker and Father of this Universe were a task indeed; and having discovered him, to declare him to all men were a thing impossible." And similarly he declares in *The Republic* VI, 19 that the godhead or the idea of the good transcends not only whatever exists but "even essence itself." Philo connected this Platonic philosophy with the teaching of the O. T. and held that the name Jehovah was itself an expression of God's unknowableness. According to him God is not only exalted above the imperfections present in finite, changeable, dependent creatures, but also above their perfections. He is better than virtue, knowledge, beauty; purer than unity, more blessed than blessedness. In reality he is without attributes, "bare of quality," and without names. He cannot be described. He is unknowable as to his being. We can know that he is, not what he is. Existence is all that can be ascribed to him; the name Jehovah is the only one that indicates his being.

Plotinus is even more radical. Plato ascribed many attributes to God. Philo complemented his negative theology with a positive in which he defines God as a personal, perfect, omnipotent Being. But according to Plotinus nothing can be said of God which is not negative. God is an absolute unity, raised above all plurality. Accordingly, he cannot be defined in terms of thought, goodness, or being, for all these descriptive terms imply a certain plurality. God, as pure unity, is indeed the cause of thought, being, goodness, etc., but is himself distinct from any of these and transcends them all. He is unlimited, infinite, without form and so entirely different from every creature that even activity, life, thought, consciousness, and being cannot be ascribed to him. Our thought and language cannot attain to him. We cannot say what he is, but we can only say what he

is not. Even the terms "the One" and "the Good", of which Plotinus makes much use, are not to be construed as descriptions of God's being, but only as indicative of his relation to creatures, and suggestive of his absolute causality.

Gnosticism makes the difference between God and the creature even greater. Between the highest God and the world it posits an absolute separation. A revelation not of God but of the eons only, was to be found in nature, in Israel, in Christianity. Hence, there could be no natural theology neither innate nor acquired, nor yet a revealed theology. For the creature the highest God was absolutely unknowable and unattainable. He was "unknown depth, ineffable, eternal silence".

This theory of God's incomprehensibility and of the unknowability of his being became the point of departure and basic idea of Christian theology.... Justin Martyr calls God inexpressible, immovable, nameless. The words Father, God, Lord, are not real names "but appellations derived from his good deeds and functions," God cannot appear, cannot go about, cannot be seen, etc. Whenever these things are ascribed to God in the O. T., they refer to the Son, God's ambassador. Among many also Irenaeus presents the false and partly gnostic antithesis between the Father, hidden, invisible, unknowable; and the Son, who revealed him. With Clement of Alexandria God is "the One". Whenever we eliminate from our thought everything pertaining to the creature, that which remains is not what God is but what he is not. It is not proper to ascribe to him form, movement, place, number, attribute, name. etc. If, nevertheless, we call him the One, the Good, Father, Creator, Lord, etc., we do not thereby express his essential being but his power. "He is even exalted above unity." In a word, as says Athanasius, "He is exalted above all being and above human thought." With this agree Origen, Eusebius, and many other theologians of the first few centuries A. D.

Augustine and John of Damascus also favor this representation. With Augustine the concept of being is basic to the definition of God. He is the self-existing One, even as his name YHWH indicates. This is his real name, "the name that indicates what he is in himself," all other names are "names which indicate what he is for us."... Hence when we say what he is, we are only stating what in distinction from all finite beings he is not. He is "ineffable". "It is easier for us to say what he is not than what he is."... But we cannot think of him as he really is... He is incomprehensible, and must needs be, "For if you comprehend him, he is not God."... If we wish to say anything about him, we struggle with language, "for God is more truly thought than expressed and exists more truly than he is thought."... "God is known better when not known."... In like manner John of Damascus declares God to be "the ineffable and incomprehensible Divine Being."... The fact that God exists is evident, but "what he is in his essence and nature is entirely incomprehensible and unknowable."...

Pseudodionysius (appealed to by John of Damascus) and Scotus Erigena held views concerning God's being which were even more agnostic. The Areopagite taught that there is no concept, expression, or word, by which God's being can be indicated. Accordingly, whenever we wish to designate God, we use metaphorical language. He is "supersubstantial infinity, supermental unity," etc. We cannot form a conception of that unitary, unknown being, transcendent above all being,

above goodness, above every name and word and thought We can only name him in accordance with his works, because he is the cause and principle of everything. Hence, on the one hand he is "without name", on the other hand he "has many names." But those positive names which we ascribe to God because of his works do not disclose his essential being to us, for they pertain to him in an entirely different manner than to creatures. Hence, negative theology is better than positive, for the former teaches us God's transcendence above the creature. Nevertheless, even negative theology fails to give us any knowledge of God's being, for in reality God is exalted above both "negation and affirmation".

Exactly the same trend of thought is met with in Erigena's works. God is exalted above everything that pertains to the creature, even above being and knowledge. We know only that he is, we do not know what he is. Whatever we affirm in regard to him is true of him in a figurative sense only; hence, in reality he is not what we declare him to be. Affirmative theology is figurative, metaphorical. It is excelled by negative theology. "For it is more correct to say that God is not that which is predicated concerning him than to say that he is. He is known better by him who does not know him, whose true ignorance is wisdom." Hence, the best way to supplement his predicates is to prefix "super" or "more than". He "transcends essence, truth, wisdom", etc. Indeed, so highly is he exalted above all creatures that the name "nothing" may justly be ascribed to him.

Although scholasticism expressed itself with greater reservation on several points, and attached greater value to positive theology than was done by Pseudodionysius and by Erigena, nevertheless, it also was in thorough accord with the theory of God's unknowability. Anselm states that the names of God indicate his being "figuratively" only, that the relative attributes of his being cannot be predicated, and the absolute attributes can be predicated only in a quidditative, and not in a qualitative sense.

According to Albertus Magnus God is exalted above all being and thought. He cannot be reached by human thinking, "he can be touched but he cannot be grasped by our comprehension." There is no name which expresses his being. He is incomprehensible and inexpressible.

Thomas Aquinas discerns a three-fold knowledge of God: "immediate vision of God", "knowledge of God by faith", and "knowledge of God by means of natural reason". Man's knowledge by nature falls far short of "the vision of God", which can be obtained only by supernatural grace, and is reserved for heaven though it is very rarely granted on earth. However, even this vision never renders possible a comprehension of God. Here on earth knowledge of God is mediate. We cannot know God as he is in himself. We can only know him as "the first and most eminent cause of all things." We can arrive at the cause from the effects. The same is true with reference to "the knowledge of God by faith", derived from God's special revelation. We thereby know him more fully "according as more and more excellent of his effects are demonstrated to us." But even this knowledge does not give us any "knowledge of God's essence". There is no knowledge of God's being as such. We know only "his disposition of his creatures". There is no name which adequately expresses his being. His essence is highly exalted "above that which we know and say concerning God." Positive names may indicate God's being. They do so in a very imperfect manner, just as the creatures from which these names are

derived imperfectly represent him, God is knowable only "insofar as he is represented in the perfections of his creatures."...

After the Reformation Roman Catholic theology returned to the position of scholasticism, and adopted the doctrine of the unknowability of God's being as advanced by Thomas Aquinas. At the Lateran Council, convened by Pope Innocent III, the view: "God is ineffable" was sealed with the stamp of ecclesiastical authority.

The theology of the Reformation did not bring about any change in this view. Luther in his work *De servo arbitrio* differentiated between "the hidden and the revealed God", between "God himself and the Word of God". In his later years he preferred to speak of God as revealed in Christ. He did not teach, however, that the fullness of God's being was revealed in Christ. On the contrary, there remains in God a dark, hidden depth, namely, "God as he is in his own nature and majesty, the absolute God." This hidden depth is "unknowable, incomprehensible, inaccessible". Later Lutheran theologians did not differentiate so sharply between God's being and his revelation, but all teach that it is impossible to give an adequate definition of God or to ascribe an adequate name to him.

Reformed theologians were in agreement with this view. Their deep abhorrence of every kind of deification of the creature led them to differentiate sharply at every turn between that which pertains to God and that which pertains to the creature. More than any other theologians they emphasized the truth, "the finite cannot grasp the infinite." Said Zwingli, "Of ourselves we are as ignorant with respect to the nature of God as is the beetle with respect to the nature of man." Calvin deemed it vain speculation to attempt "an examination of God's essence." It is sufficient for us "to become acquainted with his character and to know what is conformable to his nature." Later theologians affirmed the unknowability of God's being in even stronger terms. As the finite cannot grasp the infinite, God's names serve not to make known to us God's being, but merely to indicate (in a measure and in a manner suited to our understanding) that concerning God which we need to know. The statements: "God cannot be defined; he has no name; the finite cannot grasp the infinite," are found in the works of all the theologians. They unanimously affirm that God is highly exalted above our comprehension, our imagination, and our language. E. g., Polanus states that the attributes ascribed to God in Scripture do not explain his nature and being. They rather show us, "what is not God's essence and character than what is God's essence and character. Whatever is said concerning God is not God, for God is ineffable. No divine attributes reveal sufficiently the essence and nature of God, for that is infinite. That which is finite, moreover, cannot adequately and fully reveal the infinite."

## B. Preliminary Considerations Regarding the Doctrine

1. Distinctions between apprehend and comprehend, and between inapprehensibility and incomprehensibility

To apprehend means to know. Apprehension is simply  
[omission]

To comprehend means to know fully, exhaustively, perfectly.

Apprehensibility thus means the ability to know. When used in contradistinction to comprehensibility it means the ability to know partially or imperfectly.

Comprehensibility thus means the ability to know exhaustively.

Inapprehensibility therefore means the denial of the ability to know partially. It thus denies the possibility of knowledge.

Incomprehensibility therefore denies the ability to know exhaustively or perfectly. This term allows for the possibility of partial knowledge, but denies the possibility of exhaustive knowledge.

2. Distinction between cognitive or factual knowledge and personal knowledge

Factual or cognitive knowledge is knowledge of facts concerning persons or things viewed as objects; i.e., living or dead persons or things which can be studied, investigated, researched, and analyzed.

Personal knowledge is knowledge of persons viewed as living, self-revealing subjects.

Cognitive or factual knowledge can be gained from the thought and experience of others or from one's own thought and experience.

Personal knowledge can be gained only from personal contact with, communication with, and relationship to living persons. Personal knowledge of another person can be acquired only when that person opens himself, discloses himself, reveals himself to us.

It is possible to have much factual knowledge of a person, but to have no personal knowledge of that person.

Marilyn Monroe, in the latter part of her short life, regretted her reputation and fame as a sex symbol (although she contributed greatly to that image!). She said, "A sex symbol is an object, a thing. And who wants to be a thing?" Millions of fans know her as an object. Very few persons knew her as a subject.

3. Combinations of these distinctions in relationship to the question of God's knowability

Is God cognitively apprehensible or inapprehensible?

Is God personally apprehensible or inapprehensible?

Is God factually comprehensible or incomprehensible?

Is God personally comprehensible or incomprehensible?

### C. Biblical Teaching Concerning the Doctrine

In Scripture we discover that true knowledge of God is possible, through God's special revelation of Himself, through Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, and through the new birth.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 -- "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord."

John 1:14, 18 -- "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."... "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

I John 5:20 -- "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

I John 4:7-8 -- "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

I Corinthians 2:11-12, 14 -- "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,... But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

In Scripture we also discover that exhaustive, perfect, complete knowledge of God is not possible, because of who and what God is, and because of who and what we are.

Psalms 147:5 -- "Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite."

Isaiah 55:8-9 -- "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts."

## D. Development of the Doctrine

### 1. Relevant theological consideration

Thomas Aquinas, in Book One, Chapter 29 of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, sets forth the concept of the analogy of being between God and creatures. God and His creatures belong to two wholly unique orders of being. As a result, Thomas sets forth the concept of the analogy of knowing in Chapters 32-34. Chapter 32 is entitled "That nothing is predicated univocally of God and other things"; Chapter 33 is entitled "That not all names are said of God and creatures in a purely equivocal way"; and Chapter 34 is entitled

"That names said of God and creatures are said analogically." His reasoning is excerpted as follows:

#### Chapter 32

(1) It is thereby evident that nothing can be predicated univocally of God and other things.

(2)... the forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine power; for the things that God has made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way. It is evident, then, that nothing can be said univocally of God and other things....

(7)... nothing is predicated of God and creatures as though they were in the same order, but, rather, according to priority and posteriority. For all things are predicated of God essentially. For God is called being as being entity itself, and He is called good as being goodness itself. But in other beings predications are made by participation, as Socrates is said to be a man, not because he is humanity itself, but because he possesses humanity. It is impossible, therefore, that anything be predicated univocally of God and other things.

#### Chapter 33

(3)... where there is pure equivocation, there is no likeness in things themselves; there is only the unity of a name. But, as is clear from what we have said, there is a certain mode of likeness of things to God. It remains, then, that names are not said of God in a purely equivocal way.

(4) Moreover, when one name is predicated of several things in a purely equivocal way, we cannot from one of them be led to the knowledge of another; for the knowledge of things does not depend on words, but on the meaning of names. Now, from what we find in other things, we do arrive at a knowledge of divine things, as is evident from what we have said. Such names, then, are not said of God and other things in a purely equivocal way.

(6) It is also a fact that a name is predicated of some being uselessly unless through that name we understand something

of the being. But, if names are said of God and creatures in a purely equivocal way, we understand nothing of God through those names; for the meanings of those names are known to us solely to the extent that they are said of creatures. In vain, therefore, would it be said or proved of God that He is a being, good, or the like.

### Chapter 34

(1) From what we have said, therefore, it remains that the names said of God and creatures are predicated neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically, that is, according to an order or reference to something one.

(2) This can take place in two ways. In one way, according as many things have reference to something one....

(3) In another way, the analogy can obtain according as the order or reference of two things is not to something else but to one of them. Thus, being is said of substance and accident according as an accident has reference to a substance, and not according as substance and accident are referred to a third thing.

(4) Now, the names said of God and things are not said analogically according to the first mode of analogy, since we should then have to posit something prior to God, but according to the second mode.

Thomas Aquinas asserts that there are two ways of knowing. God's knowing is qualitatively different from that of His rational creatures. There is no univocal element in these two ways of knowing. And yet terms applied to both God and men are not totally equivocal; there is an analogy. But again it is an analogy by proportion. For example, we may speak of God's goodness and also of man's goodness. Then God's goodness is in God as goodness is to God and man's goodness is in man as goodness is to man.

This sounds eminently reasonable; but unfortunately Thomas, by his denial of a univocal element, has reduced the analogy to equivocation. As Edward J. Carnell points out: "the very things that saves analogy from being sheer equivocation is its univocal element." Without at least one area of meaning common to the two applications of the one term, analogy is lost. Carnell, in his *Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, provides some examples of analogy to point up the need of at least one univocal element, as follows:

(1) "The mind is to the soul as the eye is to the body."

The univocal element in this analogy appears to be "light-admitting faculty" or "instrument of perception"

(2) "The foundation is to the house as the heart is to the organism."



The univocal element here appears to be "sustaining basis" or some equivalent.

(3) "A steamship is like a canoe" (an explanation a missionary might give to a tribesman in the Upper Amazon)

The univocal element in this analogy appears to be "force-propelled conveyance for water transport."

(4) "The boiler is to the engine as the muscle is to the body."

The univocal element here appears to be "source of motive power."

Notice, then, that an analogy is a comparison between two things sharing at least one area of meaning. This area of meaning common to both is the univocal element. If there is no univocal element, then a proposed analogy becomes an equivocation.

If no name, no attribute, no characteristic, no term can be predicated univocally of both God and man, then significant predication about God becomes impossible! Then God has no name, and we should cease speaking about Him (or Her, or It)!

## 2. Synthesis of data and considerations

In connection with the question of the knowability of God we should admit at the outset that there are crucial differences between God and human beings. God is infinite, man is finite. God is eternal, man is temporal. God is the Creator, man is the creature. God is holy, man is a sinner. God is in the light, man is in darkness until he is illuminated by the Light of life.

And yet God created human beings in His own image, with the potential for knowing God truly, but in accordance with man's creaturely limitations.

Of course, without God's revelation of Himself, Christ's atonement, and the new birth, man could never discover or know God.

But God has made provision, and man can know God. And the believer does know God.

How, then, does this all work out in connection with the distinctions made earlier with respect to apprehension and comprehension?

We can say that knowledge of God (both cognitive and personal), although never exhaustive and perfect, is possible and true even though it is imperfect and incomplete. God is both apprehensible and incomprehensible, both factually and personally.

NATURE OF THE BELIEVER'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD		
POSSIBILITY AND DEGREE OF KNOWLEDGE	KIND OF KNOWLEDGE	
	FACTUAL	PERSONAL
apprehensibility	yes	yes
inapprehensibility	no	no
comprehensibility	no	no
incomprehensibility	yes	yes

## II. The Characteristics of God's Nature

### A. Historical Statements of the Doctrine

#### 1. The Belgic Confession (A. D. 1561), Article I

##### There is One Only God

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.

#### 2. The Second Helvetic Confession (A. D. 1566), Chapter III

We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature, subsisting by himself, all-sufficient in himself, invisible, without a body, infinite, eternal, the Creator of all things both visible and invisible, the chief good, living, quickening and preserving all things, almighty and supremely wise, gentle or merciful, just and true.

#### 3. The Westminster Confession of Faith (A. D. 1647), Chapter II, sections

##### I and II

I. There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

II. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them: he is alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, he is pleased to require of them.

4. The Confession of the Free-Will Baptists (A. D. 1834), Chapter II

The Scriptures teach that there is only one true and living God, who is a Spirit, self-existent, eternal, immutable, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, independent, good, wise, holy, just, and merciful; the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe; the Redeemer, Saviour, Sanctifier, and Judge of men; and the only proper object of Divine worship.

The mode of his existence, however, is a subject far above the understanding of man-finite beings can not comprehend him. There is nothing in the universe that can justly represent him, for there is none like him. He is the fountain of all perfections and happiness. He is glorified by the whole inanimate creation, and is worthy to be loved and served by all intelligences.

B. Preliminary Considerations Regarding the Doctrine

1. What is meant by "characteristics"?

Augustus Hopkins Strong, in Volume I of his *Systematic Theology*, states:

The attributes of God are those distinguishing characteristics of the divine nature which are inseparable from the idea of God, and which constitute the basis and ground for his various manifestations to his creatures. We call them attributes, because we are compelled to attribute them to God as fundamental qualities or powers of his being, in order to give rational account of certain constant facts in God's self-revelation.

Millard J. Erickson, in Volume I of his *Christian Theology*, states:

When we speak of the attributes of God, we are referring to those qualities of God which constitute what he is. They are the very characteristics of his nature. We are not referring here to the acts which he performs, such as creating, guiding, and preserving, nor to the corresponding roles he plays -- Creator, Guide, Preserver.

The attributes are qualities of the entire Godhead. They should not be confused with properties, which, technically speaking, are the distinctive characteristics of the various persons of the Trinity. Properties are functions (general), activities (more specific), or acts (most specific) of the individual members of the Godhead.

The attributes are permanent qualities. They cannot be gained or lost. They are intrinsic. Thus, holiness is not an attribute (a permanent, inseparable characteristic) of Adam, but it is of God. God's attributes are essential and inherent dimensions of his very nature.

While our understanding of God is undoubtedly filtered through our own mental framework, his attributes are not our conceptions projected upon him. They are objective characteristics of his nature. In every biblical case where God's attributes are described, it is evident they are part of his

very nature. While the author often expresses his reaction or response to these attributes, the attributes and the response are quite clearly distinguished from one another.

The attributes are inseparable from the being or essence of God. Some earlier theologies thought of the attributes as somehow adhering to or being at least in some way distinguishable from the underlying substance or being or essence. In many cases, this idea was based upon the Aristotelian conception of substance and attribute. Some other theologies have gone to the opposite extreme, virtually denying that God has an essence. Here the attributes are pictured as a sort of collection of qualities. They are thought of as fragmentary parts or segments of God. It is better to conceive of the attributes of God as his nature, not as a collection of fragmentary parts nor as something in addition to his essence. Thus, God is his love, holiness, and power. These are but different ways of viewing the unified being, God. God is richly complex, and these conceptions are merely attempts to grasp different objective aspects or facets of his being.

A working definition:

The attributes of God are those constant characteristics, qualities, or perfections of God's nature, being, or essence, which are revealed in the Scriptures and (to some extent and degree) in the created universe.

## 2. Classification of God's characteristics or attributes

Although God's constant characteristics have been classified in many different ways, we will employ the incommunicable/communicable distinction.

The incommunicable characteristics of God are those which are uniquely God's, which emphasize the absolute distinction between God and His creation.

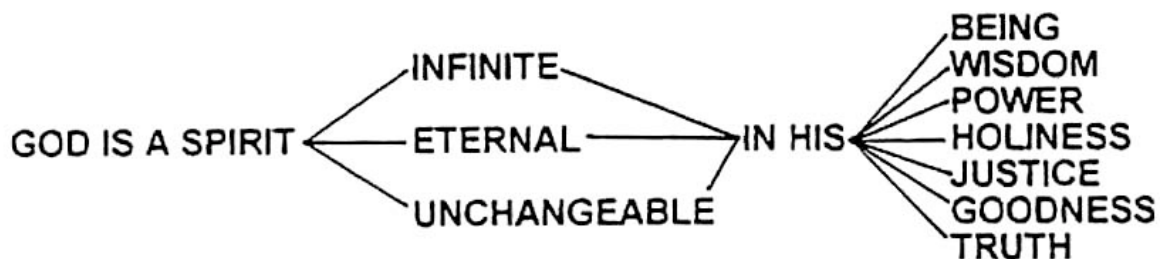
**The communicable characteristics of God are those of which we find some resemblance (on a finite, created level) in man, by virtue of his creation in God's image and likeness.**

3. Enumeration of God's characteristics

The Westminster *Shorter Catechism*, Question 4 asks: "What is God?" The answer given is:

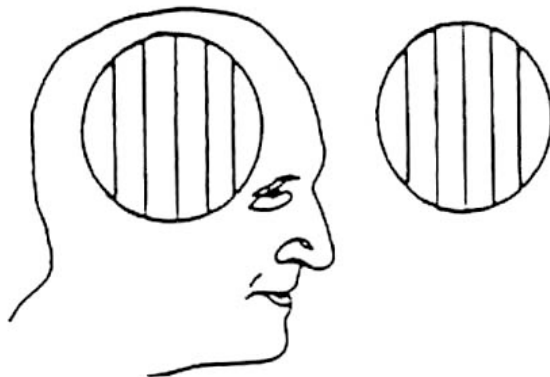
God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

This answer may be diagrammed.

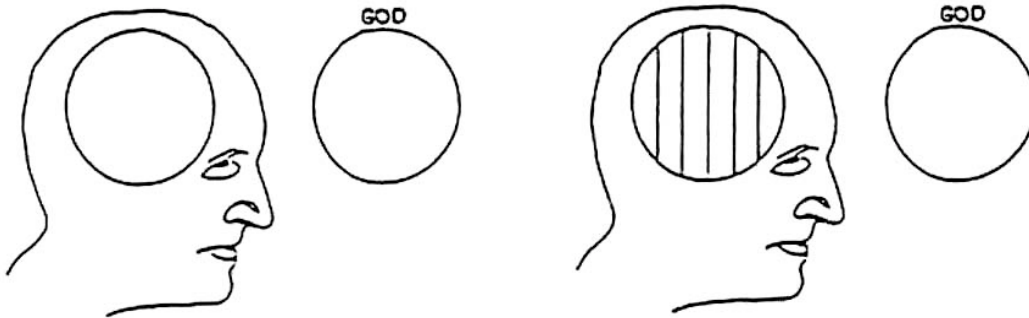


4. Extremes to be avoided in representing God's characteristics

On the one hand, we should not think of or represent God as having separate parts or elements, so that part of Him is good, part just, and part powerful.



On the other hand, we should not think of or represent God as having no distinct attributes in Himself, either by reducing all of His characteristics to one, or by making them differ merely in our subjective conception.



How can we avoid these extremes? By thinking of God as being good, just, powerful, etc. through and through, so that each quality is totally characteristic of God throughout His entire nature.



## C. The Unique (Incommunicable) Characteristics of God

### 1. God's self-existence

#### a. The meaning of self-existence

Self-existence means that God exists from Himself, not from anything outside of Himself. It means that He has the ground of existence in Himself. The term "aseity" expresses this idea.

This characteristic is also spoken of as God's independence, as compared with the dependence of all created things. God alone is existence; all created things derive their existence from Him and depend for their existence on Him. He alone has life in Himself.

This quality is also spoken of as necessary existence. This does not mean that God is logically necessary. It is not possible to construct a valid argument which would prove that, even apart from the created universe, God must exist. There are no prior conditions outside of God which demand His existence; rather, God necessarily exists entirely in and from Himself.

#### b. Biblical teaching concerning God's self-existence

Exodus 3:13-14 -- "Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?' And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

God is the great I AM, the existing One. All other things come into existence; and some of them pass out of existence. God alone is the One who simply exists. All other things have existence; He alone is existence. He is the I AM.

Acts 17:24-25, 28 -- "The God who made the world and things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things.... for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'"

Colossians 1:17 -- "And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." All created things depend on God for their existence.

Romans 11:35-36 -- "Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Revelation 4:11 - "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."



c. The ground of God's self existence

As soon as we speak of self-existence, we must ask the question, Is God's self-existence in His nature or in His will?

Some philosophers and theologians have suggested that God's self-existence is grounded in His will, so that He exists because He wills to exist, and if He chose to will Himself out of existence, He could do so! This suggestion assumes that God has no distinct, settled nature, and that whatever God wills Himself to be, that's what He is.

The Franciscan philosopher John Duns Scotus (A. D. 1265-1308) was Thomas Aquinas' strongest opponent. Whereas Thomas held that God commands good because it is good (thus placing essence prior to existence, or nature prior to will), Duns Scotus said that good is good only because God commands it (thus placing existence prior to essence, or will prior to nature). Scotus' view has been called "Voluntarism". William of Ockham (A. D. 1280-1349) made all morality dependent upon will.

To this we must say that God is who He is; that He does not have a distinct, settled nature; that He always wills to be what He is (i.e., He always wills, not contrary to, but in accordance with, His holy nature); and that, if these things were not so, then He could, by simple command, make good evil and evil good; could, by an act of will, break any and all of His promises; could, by a simple decision, will the universe out of existence; and could, if He grew tired of an eternal existence, simply will Himself out of existence!

Of course, these implications that flow from a denial of God's self-existence as being grounded in His nature are all contrary to Scripture. We are led therefore to the conclusion that God's existence is grounded in His nature; and to the conclusion that the necessity of His existence is not a necessity imposed upon Him from something above Him, nor a necessity demanded of Him from something beneath Him, but a necessity grounded in the very perfection of His nature, whose nature it is to be. "I AM WHO I AM."

In view of God's self-existence, he may be seen to be the ground, the source, the point of reference, and the only correct interpreter of being, of life, of truth, of values, of justice, of power, and of love.

2. God's infinity

a. The meaning of infinity

By infinity is not meant that God is all there is, that His being is the only being, or that no other beings can be distinguished from His being.

As a characteristic of God, infinite simply means that there is no limitation to God's essence, nature, or attributes. For example, God is infinite Spirit. But this does not deny that finite, created spirits exist as distinct from Him.

b. God's infinity as perfection

God's absolute perfection refers to God's freedom from all limitation or defect in His characteristics. God is infinite Spirit, and is characterized by infinite knowledge and wisdom, infinite power, infinite holiness, infinite righteousness and justice, infinite love, mercy, and goodness, and infinite truth and faithfulness.

In this connection two Scriptures should be noted:

Matthew 5:48 -- "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Psalms 145:3 -- "Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable."

3. God's eternity

a. There are three basic conceptions of eternity in the philosophical/theological literature pertaining to this subject:

- (1) eternity = timelessness
- (2) eternity = eternal time; i.e., time without beginning or ending
- (3) eternity = the state of affairs before the first act of creation and after the last event of the consummation; thus eternity may be spoken of in terms of eternity past and eternity future

b. Philosophical background to God's alleged timelessness

In sections 37-38 of his *Timaeus*, Plato says the following:

When the father and creator saw the creature which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the original, and as this was an eternal living being, he sought to make the universe eternal, so far as might be. Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity, and this image we call time. For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, which we

unconsciously but wrongly transfer to eternal being, for we say that it "was", or "is", or "will be", but the truth is that "is" alone is properly attributed to it, and that "was" and "will be" are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same forever cannot become older or younger by time, nor can it be said that it came into being in the past, or has come into being now, or will come into being in the future, nor is it subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause. These are the forms of time, which imitates eternity and revolves according to a law of number. Moreover, when we say that what has become is become and what becomes is becoming, and that what will become is about to become and that the nonexistent is nonexistent -- all these are inaccurate modes of expression. But perhaps this whole subject will be more suitably discussed on some other occasion.

Time, then, and the heaven came into being at the same instant in order that, having been created together, if ever there was to be a dissolution of them, they might be dissolved together. It was framed after the pattern of the eternal nature -- that it might resemble this as far as was possible, for the pattern exists from eternity, and the created heaven has been and is and will be in all time. Such as the mind and thought of God in the creation of time.

-- *The Collected Dialogue of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 1167.

c. Scriptures used to support God's alleged timelessness

Three Scriptures are frequently used to support the conception of God's timelessness:

Isaiah 57:15 -- "For thus says the high and exalted one  
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,  
I dwell on a high and holy place,  
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit  
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly  
And to revive the heart of the contrite."

Psalms 90:4 -- "For a thousand years in Thy sight  
Are like yesterday when it passes by,  
Or as a watch in the night."

II Peter 3:8- But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

d. Seven views of God's relationship to time

- (1) Time is nonexistent for God, and is thus totally meaningless to Him. He has no conception of duration or sequence, and thus no conception of events as past, as presently in progress, or as future. Everything is always "now" for God, and there is no "now" before this "now", or "now" after this "now".

In this view God is often described as existing above time, in a timeless necessity of existence, an eternal present, above all limitations of time.

This view is the classic view of Greek philosophy; and it represents the views of many philosophers and theologians down to the present day.

So Herman Bavinck speaks of time and God:

But one should distinguish between "extrinsic time" and "intrinsic time". By extrinsic time we mean the standard employed to measure motion. In a certain sense this standard is casual and arbitrary. We derive it from the motion of the heavenly bodies, which is constant and universally known, Gen. 1:14 ff. Time, in this sense, shall cease, Rev. 10:6; 21:23 ff. But intrinsic time is something else. It is that mode of creaturely existence by virtue of which beings have a past, present, and future, as so many parts or divisions which can be measured and counted. Now, whatever can be measured and counted is subject to measure and number, and limited thereby, for there always remains a measure and a number which is greater than that which was measured or numbered. Accordingly, the essence of time is not that it is without beginning or end but that it contains a succession of moments; that it is past, present, or future. From this it follows that time -- intrinsic time -- is a mode of existence of all created and finite beings. He who says "time" says motion, change, measurableness, finiteness, limitedness, that which can be numbered, created being. Time is the measure of creaturely existence. "Time is the measure of motion in the movable object." Hence in God there is no time. He is what He is from eternity to eternity. There is in him "no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." God is not an "eternally-becoming" being, but he is eternal essence. He is without beginning and end, and also without succession of moments; he cannot be measured or counted in his direction. A thousand years are with the Lord as one day. He is the eternal "I Am", John 8:58. Hence, God's eternity should rather be conceived of as an eternal present, without past or future. "With God all is present. Thy to-day is eternity. Eternity itself is the substance of God, to which pertains nothing that is mutable." Boethius said concerning

God's eternity that "God comprehends and at the same time possesses a complete fulness of interminable life"; while Thomas Aquinas described this eternity as "a complete and at the same time a full possession of interminable life." *With this agree all the theologians, not only the R. C. but the Lutheran and the Reformed as well.* (italics my own)

- Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 155-156.

To illustrate this agreement, one has only to quote A. A. Hodge:

His eternity. By affirming that God is eternal, we mean that his duration has no limit, and that his existence in infinite duration is absolutely perfect. He could have had no beginning, he can have no end, and in his existence there can be no succession of thoughts, feelings, or purposes. There can be no increase to his knowledge, no change as to his purpose. Hence the past and the future must be as immediately and as immutably present with him as the present. Hence his existence is an ever-abiding, all-embracing present, which is always contemporaneous with the ever-flowing times of his creatures. His knowledge, which never can change, eternally recognizes his creatures and their actions in their several places in time; and his actions upon his creatures pass from him at the precise moments predetermined in his unchanging purpose.

- A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (published 1869, reprinted London: Banner of Truth, 1958), pp. 50-51.

And to show the persistence of this idea, we may quote a contemporary, Millard J. Erickson:

God is also infinite in relation to time. Time does not apply to him. He was before time began. The question, How old is God? is simply inappropriate. He is no older now than a year ago, for infinity plus one is no more than infinity. He simply is not restricted by the dimension of time. God is the one who always is. He was, he is, he will be. Psalm 90:1-2 says, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting thou art God." Jude 25 says, "To the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever."

A similar thought is found in Ephesians 3:21. The use of expressions such as "the first and the last" and the "Alpha and Omega" serve to convey the same idea (Isa. 44:6; Rev. 1 :8; 21:6; 22:13).

God is timeless. He does not grow or develop. There are no variations in his nature at different points within his existence. The interests, knowledge, activities, and even personalities of humans change from childhood to youth to adulthood to old age. With God there is no such change, however. He has always been what he is....

The fact that God is not bound by time does not mean that he is not conscious of the succession of points of time. He knows what is now occurring in human experience. He is aware that events occur in a particular order. Yet he is equally aware of all points of that order simultaneously. This transcendence over time has been likened to a person who sits on a steeple while he watches a parade. He sees all parts of the parade at the different points on the route rather than only what is going past him at the moment. He is aware of what is passing each point of the route. So God is aware of what is happening, has happened, and will happen at each point in time. Yet at any given point within time he is also conscious of the distinction between what is now occurring, what has been, and what will be.

There is a successive order to the acts of God and there is a logical order to his decisions, yet there is no temporal order to his willing. His deliberation and willing take no time. He has from all eternity determined what he is now doing. Thus his actions are not in any sense reactions to developments. He does not get taken by surprise or have to formulate contingency plans.

-- Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 274-275.

- (2) Time is either nonexistent or existent for God in Himself, but its sequence and duration in the created universe are existent, and are subject to God's will.

In this view God can make the arrow of time point forward or backward; and can stretch a day to endure for a thousand years, or reduce a thousand years to the duration of one day. Thus both sequence and duration are subject to God's will.

Thus God could arrange things so that sunlight, which takes 8 1/3 minutes to reach our eyes, could show us, not what the sun looked like 8 1/3 minutes ago, but how it will look 8 1/3 minutes from now!

- (3) Time is either nonexistent or existent for God in Himself. But although time is existent in the created universe in terms of discernible sequence (i.e., time's arrow always points in one direction), and is thus meaningful to God in those terms, yet its duration is subject to God's will. He can stretch days or reduce millennia at will.

In this view time is meaningful to God in terms of sequence, and in terms of duration as a functional determination of His will.

- (4) Time is existent for God in Himself, but the difference between one day and a thousand years, compared with eternity, is so minuscule that, relatively speaking, there is no significant difference between them for God.

Incidentally, one thousand years contain 365,242 days, so that under this interpretation II Peter 3:8 would be saying, "one day is with the Lord as 365,242 days."

- (5) Time is existent for God in Himself, but God's long-suffering and patience toward sinful men is so great that, whether He waits one day or a thousand years, it is all the same to Him; His patience will endure, at least during the present dispensation of grace. But it will not last forever, since the Day of the Lord will come as does a thief for those not ready, but at an appointed time in God's Plan.

This interpretation gains some of its attractiveness from the fact that it takes the context into account, and tries to "fit" with the flow of thought of the passage.

- (6) Time has existence for God in Himself, but time's divisions are measured differently in heaven. One day in heaven ("one day with the Lord") is equal to a thousand years here on earth; and a thousand years on earth are equal to one day in heaven.

This is similar to saying that a year on the planet Pluto is equal to 247.7 years here on earth; and 247.7 years here on earth to one year on Pluto.

- (7) Time is existent for God in Himself, but II Peter 3:8 has reference to the outworking of God's purposes in the created universe. The Lord by supernatural power can accomplish in one earth day what would by natural processes take one thousand years to accomplish. As far as His supernatural power is concerned, a thousand years of natural process can be accomplished in one day by supernatural power.

This interpretation is attractive because it takes into account the flow of thought in the passage. It emphasizes the scriptural truth that God is not limited to working through natural processes. By supernatural power God can bring all of

human history to its completion in a very short time, thus bringing His promises to fulfillment in the very face of mockers and scoffers!

But which of these seven interpretations is correct or at least satisfactory? And if we select one of them, we are still left with the question, "Is there time with God?" and the question, "What is eternity?"

e. A quest for the most basic conception of time

As soon as we begin asking about the most basic meaning of time, we realize that there are some conceptions of time that must be discarded, simply because they are not the most basic one. These include the following;

(1) Calendar time

As soon as we mention calendar time, we must ask, Which calendar?

The Julian calendar, authorized by Julius Caesar in 46 B. C., measured time until A. D. 1582. It assumed that the true year was  $365 \frac{1}{4}$  days long. In A. D. 730 the Venerable Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk, announced that the Julian year was 11 minutes, 14 seconds too long. This amounted to the gain of one full day every 128 years. Nothing was done about it, however. By 1582 the error was estimated to have amounted to 10 days. Pope Gregory XIII decreed that the day following October 4, 1582 should be called October 15 instead of October 5.

The Gregorian calendar, authorized by Pope Gregory XIII, was immediately adopted in most Roman Catholic countries; but many Protestant countries did not accept it until the 18th century. The British government adopted this calendar in 1752 and decreed that the day following September 2, 1752 should be called September 14 instead of September 3. Thus 11 days were dropped. All dates before September 2, 1752 were called Old Style (O. S.). Thus George Washington was born February 11, 1732, O.S., and after 1752 his birth fell on February 22.

The Gregorian calendar, which made every fourth year a leap year and three of every four centesimal years (1700, 1800, 1900, etc.) common years, was adopted by Japan in 1873, by China in 1912, by Greece in 1924, and by Turkey in 1927.

(2) Sidereal or Solar Earth time

Sidereal Earth time is the revolution period of the earth about the sun from a given star back to the same star again.



Sidereal Earth time measures a year as 365d, 6h, 9m, 5s.

Solar Earth is the revolution period of the earth about the sun from vernal equinox to vernal equinox (the vernal equinox is the point where the sun crosses the equator from south to north). Solar Earth time measures a year as 365d, 5h, 48m, 46s.

(Note the difference in the length of a year equals 20m, 23.5s.)

But Sidereal Earth or Solar Earth time is not the most basic conception of time.

(3) Physics time

A definition of time according to physics is "measured duration", i.e., duration measured by a physical device that registers some sort of change.

For example, in 1964 a physical definition of a second of time was adopted, in terms of the burst of atomic radiation emitted by cesium. One atomic second was made equal to 9,192,631,770 cycles of the radiation of cesium. In 1967 this was made a part of the International System of units.

But physics time is not the basic conception of time for which we are searching.

(4) Nonphysical development/decomposition concept of time

Of course, if God is immutable, and does not develop or decompose, then this conception would not apply to God, and would be irrelevant to the question whether or not there is time with God.

But even so, this is not the most basic conception of time.

What, then, is the most basic conception of time? If it is not calendar time, Sidereal or Solar Earth time, physics time, or nonphysical development or decomposition time, then what is it? What conception of time is left?

To answer this question, we must perform a thought experiment, which will require concentration of thought and imagination.

Imagine yourself transported to another galaxy and to a solar system in that galaxy and to a planet in that solar system. Imagine yourself seated in an arm chair which has been placed on the surface of that planet. The planet has a very dense cloud cover that admits only dim light from its sun.

The side of the planet on which you are located always faces the sun. Since you are always facing the sun, the dim light that filters through remains constant; and there are no sunrises, high noons, sunsets, or nights. Nothing grows on your planet; your gray, rocky surroundings are barren of any living thing. Nothing moves around you, and all is completely still and quiet

Image that you are sitting in a relaxed position with your arms resting on the arms of the chair. You are unable to move your body, your limbs, your head, your lips, your eyes. You cannot blink. You are conscious (and cannot sleep!), but can detect no pulse or respiration in your body. In fact, you cannot even feel your body. Yet, curiously, you are alive (even though you can't prove it!).

You can think, but have absolutely no recollection of how you got to this planet or into your "philosopher's chair"!

In such a situation of complete sensory deprivation, you lose all sense of the passage of time. Since nothing changes physically, you lose the concept of duration. You lose all track of seconds, minutes, hours, days, even weeks. You cannot tell how long you have been sitting there. And since nothing is moving, you lose any sense of sequence based on physical events occurring in succession.

Under such conditions, is any sense of time left to you? Is there a concept of time that is independent of physics time, and yet significant?

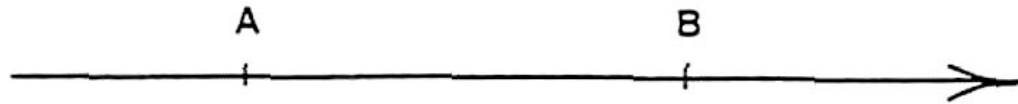
What about a conception of time that is tied to nonphysical self-experience? If you can still think while sitting motionless in the armchair, could you experience a succession in your own thoughts? Could you experience a succession in your feelings?

If this is a meaningful conception of the most basic idea of time, can we frame this conception in some useful definition? Let us adopt the following:

In its most basic sense time is a  
unidirectional continuum of experience,  
involving before and after relationships in  
sequential order

(a continuum is something marked by absolute, uninterrupted extension in space or time)

If we attempt to picture this definition, we arrive at something like the following:



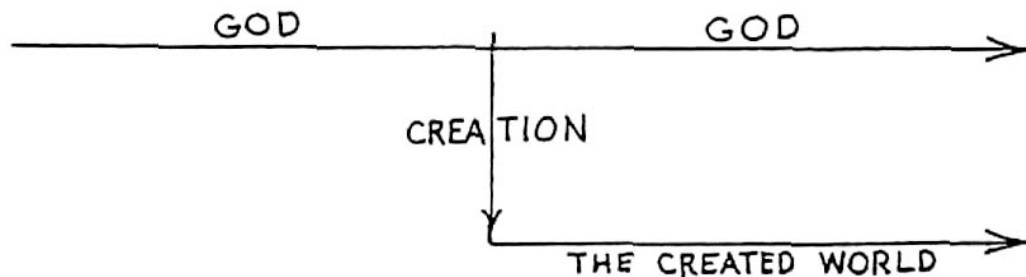
In this picture the long horizontal line represents the continuum of experience, the arrow represents the unidirectional nature of the continuum, and points A and B represent two events that are sequentially ordered in the experience of the subject.

f. The relationship of God to this most basic conception of time

Is there time in this basic sense with God? Does God experience before and after relationships, not simply outside of Himself (in the created universe), but within Himself, in His self- experience (i.e., His experience of Himself)?

There are two great (and crucial) scriptural events which help us decide whether or not there is time with God in this sense.

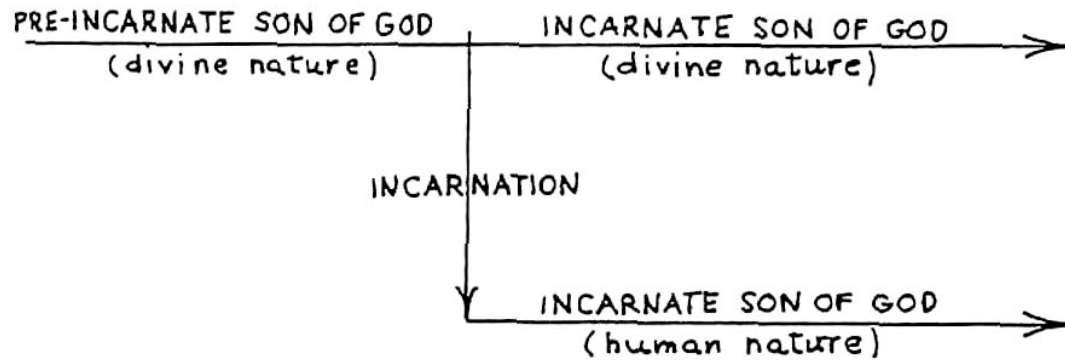
The first such event is that of original creation.



By His word God brought the created universe into existence. Before the created universe began to exist, there was only God, nothing else. After the created universe began to exist, there was the Creator and the creature, the true God and His handiwork.

Thus in God's own self-experience there was a point before He created, and then a point when He created. These two points in His self-experience are sequentially related: the first point came before the second. Thus there was time with God in the sense of our definition: a unidirectional continuum of experience, including before and after relationships in sequential order.

The second crucial event in scripture that helps us decide whether or not there is time with God is that of the Incarnation of the Son of God.



At the Incarnation the Son of God took into personal union with Himself a sinless human nature. Before the Incarnation the Son of God was God and had only a divine nature. After the Incarnation event the Lord Jesus Christ was the God-man, and had both a divine nature and a human nature.

In the self-experience of the Son of God there was a point before He became incarnate, and then a point when He became incarnate. There two points in His self-experience are sequentially related: the first point came before the second. Thus there was time with the Son of God in the sense of our definition: a unidirectional continuum of experience, including before and after relationships in sequential order.

These two great scriptural events help us decide the question whether or not there is time with God in this most basic sense. We are forced to the conclusion that there is time with God. We can properly speak of God before and after He created the universe, and of the Son of God before and after He became incarnate. And these events took place not simply in the space-time history of the created universe; they were genuine events in God's self-experience!

g. Some Scriptures that speak of God and time

Psalm 102:24-27 -- "I say, 'O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days,  
Thy years are throughout all generations.  
Of old Thou didst found the earth;  
And the heavens are the work of Thy hands.  
Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure;  
And all of them will wear out like a garment;  
Like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed.  
But Thou art the same,  
And Thy years will not come to an end."

Psalm 106:48 -- "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, 'Amen. ' Praise the Lord!"

Ephesians 1:3-4-"Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him."

Psalm 90:1-2 -- "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.  
Before the mountains were born,  
Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world,  
Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God."

John 17:5, 24 -- "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.... Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world."

I Peter 1:20 -- "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."

h. Does Revelation 10:6 conflict with this proposal?

In the A. V. Revelation 10:1-6 reads as follows:

- 1 "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:
- 2 And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,
- 3 And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.
- 4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.
- 5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,
- 6 And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer."

The significant assertion, in course, is that "there should be time no longer." The word translated time is CHRONOS. What does this statement mean?

New Testament commentators are divided on this question. Some of them take time in the absolute sense and say that time itself will cease, come to an end, and no longer exist. Others take the assertion to mean that, with respect to the Consummation, there shall be no further delay.

Curiously, those who take Revelation 10:6 to mean that time itself will cease offer nothing more as corroboratory evidence than the first interpretation of II Peter 3: 8 (page 223 of these Notes). Some do not offer any biblical evidence. They do offer philosophical ideas about God's timelessness, which stem originally from Plato, but these ideas do not count as evidence.

Those who take the assertion to mean that there will be no further delay in bringing the mystery of this age to its consummation, point out that verses 6 and 7 go together; that verse 7 states that the time which shall be no longer is connected with the trumpet of the seventh angel, which shall announce the completion of the mystery of God; that in Revelation 11:15 the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. and the announcement is made that "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever;" and that after the pouring out of the seven vials (or bowls) of God's wrath, Christ Himself will return to rule the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 19, 20).

The seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials take place before Christ's Return, and therefore before the Millennium of one thousand years. Therefore, if after the accomplishment of the angel's oath that "there shall be time no longer" there is a period of one thousand years, then the oath cannot mean that there will be no more "time" in the absolute sense!

It would therefore seem to make better sense and fit the Scriptures associated with Revelation 10: 6 as well as the eschatological events of the period to take the disputed assertion to mean that there will be delay no longer. It is assuring to note that both the NASB and the NIV translate the verse in this way.

i. How, then, shall we define God's eternity?

The proposal presented here is that there is time with God, that there is succession in God's self-experience "before creation" and an "after creation" in God's self-experience, and that the designations, "B. C." and "A. D." are at least as meaningful to the Son of God as they are to us.

We further propose that God is dynamic and not static (i.e., active and not passive), that God's exercise of will and God's actions succeed one another in His self-experience, that there is past, present, and future with God, and that, although God knows the end from the beginning, He has not yet experienced the end.

We further propose that eternity is not timelessness, but rather infinite time.

Technically, we would then define eternity as follows:

Eternity is an infinite, unbounded  
unidirectional continuum of experience;  
including before and after relationships in  
sequential order

We would further propose that God alone is eternal. The physical universe, angels, Satan, demons, and human beings are not eternal. Thus we would distinguish between God's existence and experience, which are eternal (i.e., unbounded by beginning or ending time); and man's existence and experience which are temporal and unending (i.e., bounded by a beginning time, but not by an ending time).

God's infinity as to time could then be represented as follows:

$$-\infty, \dots, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, \dots, +\infty$$

But man's infinity as regards future time would need to be represented as follows:

$$0, 1, 2, 3, \dots, +\infty$$

4. God's omnipresence
  - a. The meaning of omnipresence

Just as the infinity of God in relation to time is His eternity, so the infinity of God in relation to space is His omnipresence.

God's omnipresence may be defined as the infinitude of His being in relation to all of His creatures, whether rational beings, nonrational living creatures, or nonliving material things.

Omnipresence means present everywhere; and this characteristic states that God's presence is everywhere and in all places. He is equally present with all of His creature.

When God is said to be ubiquitous, it means that He is present everywhere at the same time.

When God is said to be immense, it does not mean that He is enormously large. Rather, it means that His essence or being fills all space. It means that He is completely present, in all of His qualities, in every location in space.

- b. Modes of presence in space

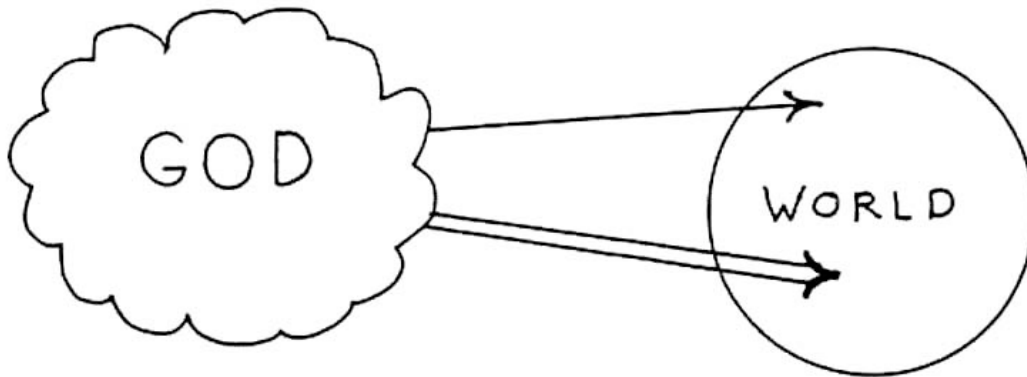
Charles Hodge states:

Theologians are accustomed to distinguish three modes of presence in space. Bodies are in space circumscriptively. They are bounded by it. Spirits are in space definitively. They have an *ubi*. They are not everywhere, but only somewhere. God is in space *repletively*. He fills all space. In other words, the limitations of space have no reference to Him. He is not absent from any portion of space, nor more present in one portion than in another. This of course is not to be understood of extension or diffusion. Extension is a property of matter, and cannot be predicated of God. If extended, He would be capable of division and separation; and part of God would be here, and part elsewhere. Nor is this omnipresence to be understood as a mere presence in knowledge and power. It is an omnipresence of the divine essence.

- Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*  
(Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume 1, pp.  
383-384.

The Socinians and Deists held that God's essence is confined to heaven (wherever that may be) and that He is elsewhere only as to His knowledge and the effects of His exerted power.





c. Views of God's relationship to the time-space universe

Deism holds that:

God is absent from the universe in location

God and the universe are made of different kinds of stuff

God and the universe are not identical

Theism holds that:

God is present in the universe, but transcends it in location

God and the universe are made of different kinds of stuff

God and the universe are not identical

Panentheism holds that:

God is present in the universe in location and confined to it

God and the universe are made of different kinds of stuff

God and the universe are not identical

Pantheism holds that:

God is present in the universe in location and confined to it

God and the universe are made of the same kind of stuff

God and the universe are identical; God is the universe, the universe is God

A chart of these views appears on the following page.

## VIEWS RELATING TO GOD AND TO OTHER BEINGS

VIEWS RELATING GOD TO OTHER BEINGS	ESSENCE		IDENTITY		LOCATION	
	Transcendent (different)	Immanent (same)	Transcendent (other)	Immanent (other)	Transcendent (absent)	Immanent (present)
DEISM	✓		✓		✓	
(impossible view)	✓			✓	✓	
(possible, but ??)		✓	✓		✓	
(impossible view)		✓		✓	✓	
THEISM	✓		✓		✓	✓
(impossible view)	✓			✓	✓	✓
(possible, but ??)		✓	✓		✓	✓
(impossible view)		✓		✓	✓	✓
PANENTHEISM	✓		✓			✓
(impossible view)	✓			✓		✓
(possible, but ??)		✓	✓			✓
PANTHEISM		✓		✓		✓

Some persons have confused Theism with Pantheism. Because Theism holds that God is omnipresent, they think that it is pantheistic. But although both Theism and Pantheism hold that God is present everywhere and in everything, Theism holds that God is distinct from every created being, whereas Pantheism holds that God and created reality are identical.

Charles Hodge expresses the view of classic Christian Theism when he says:

Everywhere in the Old and in the New Testament, God is represented as a spiritual Being, without form, invisible, whom no man hath seen or can see; dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, and full of glory; as not only the creator, and preserver, but as the governor of all things; as everywhere present, and everywhere imparting life, and securing order; present in every blade of grass, yet guiding Arcturus in his course, marshalling the stars as a host, calling them by their names; present also in every human soul, giving it understanding, endowing it with gifts, working on it both to will and to do. The human heart is in his hands; and He turneth it even as the rivers of water are turned. Wherever, throughout the universe, there is evidence of mind in material causes, there, according to Scriptures, is God, controlling and guiding those causes to the accomplishment of his wise designs. He is in all, and over all things; yet essentially different from all, being over all, independent, and infinitely exalted. This immensity and omnipresence of God, therefore, is the ubiquity of the divine essence, and consequently of the divine power, wisdom, and goodness. As the birds in the air and the fish in the sea, so also are we always surrounded and sustained by God. It is thus that He is infinite in his being, without absorbing all created beings into his own essence, but sustaining all in their individual subsistence, and in the exercise of their own powers.

- Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*  
(Washington, Scribner, 1871), Volume 1, pp  
384-385.

d. Biblical teaching concerning God's omnipresence

I Kings 8:27 (II Chronicles 2:6) -- "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built?"

This is part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the recently-completed temple. Although the temple was spacious (for Solomon's time) and beautifully adorned, Solomon expressed a

profound insight when he deduced that if the sky and the heaven of heavens could not hold God in and contain Him, how much less could the temple?

If, as we believe, the Israelites held to a three-level concept of heaven (the first heaven being the air above the ground, in which the birds flew and clouds drifted by; the second heaven being the sky (what we would call space), where the sun, moon, and stars moved; and the third heaven or heaven of heavens being the realm where God resided and the angelic hosts made their home), then Solomon appears to be saying that God transcends even the heaven of heavens. This is an advanced and profound concept!

Isaiah 66:1 -- "Thus says the Lord,  
Heaven, is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.  
Where then is a house you could build for Me?  
And where is a place that I may rest?"

Here is the divine counterpart of Solomon's human expression! God says that heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool. Does God intend to convey the idea that He is so tall that when He sits down on His throne in heaven, His feet extend all the way down to earth, which He uses as a hassock or footstool? Of course, we understand this as an anthropomorphism!

What then is God saying? Well, for one thing He is saying what Solomon said -- that no temple is large enough to hold Him. This suggests the concept of immensity. God is present in heaven and on earth at the same time. He is a great God, and His greatness should inspire awe and reverence in us. He cannot be confined to any one location at a given time, for He is in all locations!

Jeremiah 23:23-24 -- "Am I a God who is near, declares the Lord,  
And not a God far off?  
Can a man hide himself in hiding places  
So I do not see him? declares the Lord.  
Do I not fill the heavens and the earth? declares the Lord."

Here the Lord declares His omnipresence. He is both near and far at the same time. Here we learn that the reason no one can find a secret place that will hide him from the sight of God is not that God can see from a great distance and look into dark places and pierce through the densest rock with His gaze, but rather that God fills heaven and earth! Thus if a human being finds a really remote secret place, he will not be hidden from God, for God already fills that secret place, and thus sees everything!

Acts 17:27-28 -- "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being."

Here we learn that God is not far from each human being. He is near every human being in the world, wherever he or she may be. In fact, we live "in" God and move "in" God and have our being "in" God. The conclusion appears inescapable: God is everywhere! In a very significant sense, God is our environment! We live in Him and move in Him.

Psalm 139:1-12

- 1 O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me.
- 2 Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
Thou dost understanding my thought from afar.
- 3 Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are  
intimately acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue,  
Behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all.
- 5 Thou hast enclosed me behind and before,  
And laid Thy hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is too high, I cannot attain to it.
- 7 Where can I go from Thy Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Thy presence?
- 8 If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there;  
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.
- 9 If I take the wings of the dawn,  
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
- 10 Even there Thy hand will lead me,  
And Thy right hand will lay hold of me.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,  
And the light around me will be night,"
- 12 Even the darkness is not dark to Thee,  
And the night is as bright as the day.  
Darkness and light are alike to Thee.

In verses 1-6 we learn that the Lord knows everything about us as human beings. Although one might get the impression from the second half of verse 2 ("you perceive my thoughts from afar") that God is far away and knows us from a distance, that idea is ruled out by verses 7-12, where we learn that God is not far away from us, but rather very near. In fact, wherever we go, God is already there! No matter whether we go up to the heavens (to the heights) or down to Sheol (to the depths), or far away to the most remote place on the earth, God is already there. We cannot get away from the very presence of the Lord, for His presence is everywhere!

There is no place on the earth or in space to which we can go and escape from God. God is everywhere. Everywhere there is a "where", God is there! And He is no more in one place than in another.

If we ascend to the highest altitude (the summit of Mount Everest (29, 028 feet), God is already there. If we take off in an

airplane and fly to the highest altitude achieved in an aircraft (23.39 miles), God is already there. If we blast off in a spacecraft and orbit the earth at an altitude of 150 miles, God is already there.

If we descend into the deepest mine (the East Rand Proprietary Mine in South Africa, with a depth of 11, 246 feet), God is already there. If we descend into the deepest part of the ocean (35, 802 feet in the Marianas Trench of the Pacific Ocean), God is already there.

No matter where we go or are, God is already there before we arrive!

e. Questions regarding the spirit world and the physical world

(1) Can a spirit and a material object occupy the same space?

I Corinthians 2:11 says: "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him?"

Luke 23:46 says: "And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.' And having said this, He breathed His last."

Human beings are constituted of a nonmaterial and material part. The nonmaterial part is sometimes referred to as spirit. The spirit of man occupies the same space as his body.

There should therefore be no problem acknowledging that the Spirit of God occupies the same space as the body of a human being.

(2) Can two spirits occupy the same space?

Matthew 12:43-45 states:

- 43 Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it.
- 44 Then it says, "I will return to my house from which I came"; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.
- 45 Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.

Demonic possession means that an evil spirit takes over, gains control over a person's spirit, by entering and dominating the space that person's spirit occupies. In such a case two finite spirits occupy the same space.

When the Holy Spirit indwells a believer, he not only occupies the space that that believer's spirit occupies; He also enters into personal saving relationship with that believer and makes of that believer a home and a temple.

(3) Can angels and demons occupy the same space?

This again is the question of whether two spirits can occupy the same space. The added dimension in this case is the uncongeniality of natures of these spirit beings. However, if God fills the heavens and the earth; and if demons are not everywhere but only somewhere in space; then God and demons occupy the same space, in spite of the obvious uncongeniality of their natures. Why then should it be thought problematic to have an angel and a demon occupying the same space, but perhaps in two distinct realms?

(4) Are spirits bound by the time-space continuum?

The space-time continuum is a four-dimensional continuum with four coordinates, the three dimensions of space and that of time, in which any event can be located.

If angels sometimes come to earth from heaven, and if heaven is a great distance from the earth, then does it take time for angels to travel to their destination?

Granting that angels have a location (an *ubi*) in space, can they move through space more rapidly than the speed of light in order to get somewhere quickly (especially if God tells them to hurry!)?

Could Jesus' human spirit move directly to paradise at His death, or did His spirit require some time to get to paradise?

What did Jesus mean when He said, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me."? (John 15:26)

How can the Spirit come to be sent, if, as Psalm 139 says, we cannot go anywhere to successfully escape the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Some Christians have the conception that during the O. T. period the Father was in heaven, the Son was in heaven, and the Spirit was in heaven (with occasional visits to earth); that during Christ's earthly ministry the Father was in heaven, the Son was on earth, and the Spirit was in heaven; that during the present N. T. period the Father is in heaven, the Son is in heaven, and the Spirit is on earth; that during the Millennial Kingdom of Christ the Father will be in heaven, the Son will be on earth, and the Spirit will be in heaven; and that during the eternal state the Father, the Son, and the Spirit will be in

heaven, which will then be on earth. Now there is a certain amount of truth in this conception, but there may also be a certain amount of error in it if it emphasizes only spatial presences. If all of these focalized manifestations of the Trinity have the effect of limiting or confining the persons of the godhead to certain portions of space, then the scriptural teaching on omnipresence is in effect denied.

When Satan "prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8), does he require time to move through space, or can he get to distant places very quickly?

Is there some other way that finite spirits can move through space in a very small amount of time, rather than being bound by the space-time continuum?

f. The relationship of God's omnipresence to His localized manifestations.

When Christians pray, "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9), where do they think heaven is? Is it "up"? But if Christians at various locations on the surface of our earthly globe all point "up", then "up" is always away from earth but in all different directions in space!

And if God is localized in heaven, what implications does this have for God's omnipresence? After all, God said He fills the heavens and the earth. (Jeremiah 23:24)

What did Jesus mean when He said, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst?" (Matthew 18:20) And what did He mean when He said Oust as He was leaving His disciples to go to heaven), "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

How can localized manifestations of God such as the various modes of special revelation and God's omnipresence be reconciled?

If space can be thought of in terms of realms or dimensions, so that the same space contains the realm of physical things, the realm of earthly human beings, the realm of angelic spirits, the realm of Satan and demonic spirits, the realm of God and heaven, and the realm of Hades; and if these realms are coextensive but in different dimensions, then it would not be difficult to see how at death a human spirit could move from the realm of earthly human beings to the realm of heaven by simply passing from one dimension into the other without having to move any distance in space. It would be possible to see how demonic spirits could pass from their realm into the realm of earthly human beings simply by passing from one dimension to the other. And so on.

If the realm of God and heaven can be thought of as being all around us, but veiled from our eyes by a great invisible curtain, and if God can be thought of as breaking through from the other side of



that invisible curtain from time to time in local and partial revelations, then perhaps we can begin to understand how the omnipresence of God can be reconciled with localized manifestations of God. Perhaps we can think of God's omnipresence as a universal background or field, and special revelation as expressions of that background in particular locations in space.

In 2 Kings 6 we find the king of Aram sending horses and chariots and a strong force to capture Elisha in the city of Dothan. The army surrounded the city by night. In verses 15-17 we read:

"When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh, my lord, what shall we do?' the servant asked. 'Don't be afraid, ' the prophet answered, 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'O Lord, open his eyes to he may see.' Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

If we can accept the idea of different but coextensive realms or dimensions, then most of the spatial language in Scripture begins to make sense. Then God is transcendent in heaven (in another dimension) at the same time He is omnipresent in the world in space. We can add the idea of God being resident in heaven, but omnipresent in the world. Then the Son of God can come from heaven to earth by simply passing from one dimension into another. Then Christ's ascension into heaven means passing from our earthly dimension into the transcendent heavenly dimension. Then being absent from the body and being present with the Lord means passing from our earthly dimension into the transcendent heavenly dimension. Then angels and demons can come to earth and go from earth by simply passing from one dimension into another. Then Christ's Second Coming means passing from the transcendent heavenly dimension into earthly dimension.

Thus when we think of God as "up", we can avoid the problem of "up" pointing in all directions in space by understanding "up" to refer to God's transcendence in the heavenly realm. God is greater, higher, and infinitely exalted above us; and thus it is appropriate to look up to Him.

The same thing can be said of Sheol or Hades or Hell being "down" or in the depths. "Down" can refer to a negative transcendence, that is beneath the inherent dignity of human beings viewed as God's image-bearers, beneath the moral and spiritual level of ordinary life on earth, and a realm of shame and corruption and contempt. It does not need to be thought of as a place at the core of the earth; i.e., "down" in the spatial sense.

g. Practical relevance of God's omnipresence

- (1) One implication of God's omnipresence is that God is everywhere without exception.

No matter where we may go, God is already there. As far as space is concerned, God is no more present in a church building than in our home. He is no more spatially present at a Bible conference than at our place of work. He is no more spatially present in a great tabernacle than in a large supermarket. He is not more spatially present in a believer's home than in an atheist's home. He is no more spatially present in a cathedral than in a pool hall. He is no more spatially present in a hospital than in a house of prostitution. He is no more spatially present in Philadelphia than in Moscow. He is no more spatially present on earth than on the moon. He is no more spatially present in heaven than in hell. And He is no more spatially present in the body of a believer than in the body of an unbeliever. God is everywhere without exception!

The idea of God being present in hell may occasion some pause, especially if hell is defined primarily as "separation from God". Hell is certainly separation from God's favor and grace and mercy, but there is nothing in this that requires spatial separation.

If the objection arises from such Scriptures as Habakkuk 1:13 -- "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (A. V.) -- then it should be remembered that God beholds human beings committing all kinds of iniquity every day. In fact, Habakkuk 1:13 goes on to address the Lord and say: "wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devour the man that is more righteous than he?" (Incidentally, the NASB translates Habakkuk 1:13a to say, "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor.")

If we realize that God is omnipresent, and is therefore present in hell, not in blessing but in judgment; and if we recall that the wrath of God rests on sinners in hell; then perhaps this implication of God's omnipresence will have a rationale and not be too difficult to accept.

- (2) However, presence is not manifestation. God is everywhere, but He does not reveal Himself everywhere in special manifestations of His power and glory, or in grace or judgment. And yet He does manifest His presence; and we have experienced His power and grace in our churches, at Bible conferences, in tabernacles, in the homes of believers, in cathedrals, in hospitals, and in the lives of fellow believers, in a way that we have not experienced in certain other places. And we often pray that God will make His presence known in our midst as we gather to worship Him, by pouring out His Spirit and giving us blessing and conviction, joy and victory.

So a second implication of God's omnipresence is that we need to ask God to manifest His omnipresent presence in our midst.

- (3) A third implication of God's omnipresence is that God is always with each one of us personally.

To the believer, this realization holds great comfort. We need never try to go somewhere to find God, for He is always here. As the godly monk in Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, said to the repentant profligate priest Urbain Grandier, who was waiting in a cell to be burned alive, "God is here and Christ is now."

As believers we can pray and know that God is there with us, whether we are driving a car, flying in an airplane, riding a bus or train, or kneeling in our bedroom. God is always just a prayer away in this sense.

As we do our work in the world, we can know that God sees everything we do (no matter how important or how menial), whether we do it well or do it shoddily, and whether we do it for Him or for ourselves or someone else. As we live in our homes, we can know that God sees everything that goes on, and that all that happens is open to His eyes.

As we live our lives, we can live them in His power and for His purposes and glory, knowing that the resources we need to do this are readily available, because He is with us.

For the nonbeliever, this truth is not comfortable at all! God knows every thought and desire, sees every action, and hears every word of the nonbeliever, not from a distance, but from within! God's Spirit is spatially present in the nonbeliever, and convicts and pursues him; and sometimes the nonbeliever is converted and becomes a believer.

This is expressed beautifully in Francis Thompson's poem, "The Hound of Heaven":

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
    Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
    Up vistaed hopes I sped;  
    And shot, precipitated,  
Down Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,  
    From those strong Feet that followed, followed  
    after.  
    But with unhurrying chase,  
    And unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
    They beat -- and a Voice bear  
    More instant than the Feet --  
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

Halts by me that footfall:  
Is my gloom, after all,  
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He whom thou seekest!  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."

- (4) However, a fourth implication of God's omnipresence is that an objective acknowledgement of the truth of His omnipresence is not the same as a subjective realization and appropriation of the reality of His omnipresent presence, especially in favor and fellowship and blessing.

In the Scriptures the idea of the nearness of God is used a number of times.

In Psalm 34:18 we read that "the lord is near to the brokenhearted."

In Psalm 145:18 we learn that "the lord is near to all who call upon Him."

In Isaiah 55:6 we read: "Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near."

In Hebrews 7:25 the writer says that "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

And in James 4:8 we read, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

Now although "near" is a spatial term, these references have nothing whatsoever to do with the lord being or drawing near in space. The nearness spoken of in these places is not proximity in space, but proximity in relationship. Drawing near to God means getting closer to Him in humility and in dependence, in love and in trust, in personal knowledge and in communion.

Two human beings can live in close proximity in the same house, and yet be virtual strangers as far as shared interests, sympathy, and love are concerned. They can grow more "distant" day by day until they find they share nothing. And yet they can be in and move in the same space.

Our drawing near to God and God's drawing near to us has nothing to do with space. It has to do with relationship. And yet the objective reality of His omnipresence makes the subjective realization and appropriation of His presence a genuine possibility. We can draw near to Him in love because He is near in space. He is so very close to us that we live and move and exist in Him. And He invites us to be with Him now, even as we will be with Him forever. -

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## THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN VARIOUS PSALMS

REALM	MODE OF GOD'S PRESENCE	PERSONS AND THINGS IN GOD'S PRESENCE	CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S PRESENCE
divine spiritual realm	omnipresence	the three Persons of the godhead	constant, universal, direct, unveiled, totally interpenetrative
heavenly spiritual realm	omnipresence	angels, human beings in heaven	constant, universal, direct, unveiled
worldly spiritual realm	omnipresence	ministering angels, Satan and the demons	constant, universal, indirect
			occasional, local, direct (but veiled) manifestation
worldly spiritual-physical realm	omnipresence	human beings on earth	constant, universal, indirect
			occasional, local, direct (but veiled) manifestation
worldly physical realm	omnipresence	living non-human things, non-living things	constant, universal, indirect
			occasional, local, direct (but veiled) manifestation
present underworldly spiritual realm	omnipresence	disembodied human beings in Hades	constant, universal, indirect
eschatological underworldly spiritual and spiritual-physical realm	omnipresence	Satan, demons, reembodied human beings in Sheol (Hell)	constant, universal, indirect

5. God's unchangeability (immutability)

a. The meaning of unchangeability

- (1) According to Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 127:

By the immutability of God we mean that in essence, attributes, consciousness, and will God is unchangeable. All change must be to the better or the worse. But God cannot change to the better, since He is absolutely perfect; neither can He change to the worse, for the same reason. He is exalted above all causes and even the possibility of change. He can never be wiser, more holy, more just, more merciful, more truthful, nor less so. Nor do His plans and purposes change.

- (2) According to William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d. ), Volume One, p. 351:

The Immutability of God is the unchangeableness of his essence, attributes, purposes, and consciousness.

- (3) According to Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), Volume 1, p. 257:

Immutability. By this we mean that the nature, attributes, and will of God are exempt from all change. Reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, whether of increase or decrease, progress or deterioration, contraction or development. All change must be to better or to worse. But God is absolute perfection, and no change to better is possible. Change to worse would be equally inconsistent with perfection. No cause for such change exists, either outside of God or in God himself.

- (4) According to Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1958), p. 104:

God is unchangeable in his essence, nature, and perfections. Immutability and eternity are linked together; and indeed true eternity is true immutability, whence eternity is defined the possession of an immutable life. Yet immutability differs from eternity in our conception. Immutability respects the essence or existence of a thing, eternity respects the duration of a being in that state; or rather, immutability is the state itself, eternity is the measure of that state. A thing is said to be changed, when it is otherwise now in regard of nature, state, will, or any quality than it was before; when either something is added to it or taken from it; when it either loses or acquires. But now it is the essential property of God, not to have any accession to,

or diminution of, his essence or attributes, but to remain entirely the same. He wants nothing, he loses nothing, but doth uniformly ex1sts by himself, without any new nature, new thought, new will, new purpose, or new place.

b. Scriptures that speak of God in connection with repentance

(1) Scriptures that affirm that God repents (what is it that is changed?)

- (a) Genesis 6:5-7 -- God was greatly grieved that His unique creation, man, had so corrupted himself. God's attitude, expressed in terms of human feelings, changed.
- (b) Exodus 32:7-14 -- God's attitude toward His people, Israel, who had corrupted themselves, is expressed in terms of anger. The proposed harm which He said He would bring upon Israel was changed, partly as a result of Moses' intercession.
- (c) Judges 2:6-23 (esp. 20-23) -- This appears to be a change of God's action, in accordance with the conditional promise made in Joshua 23:4-5, 12-13.
- (d) I Samuel 15:10-11, 35 -- This appears to be a change in God's attitude toward Saul's continuance in the kingship, based on Saul's disobedience and sin. God chose him, then rejected him.
- (e) II Samuel 24:10-16 -- After David chooses a three-day pestilence as punishment for the sin of numbering the people, God stops the pestilence before it reaches Jerusalem. The destroying angel's direction is changed, and his progress is halted.
- (f) Jeremiah 18:1-10 -- This appears to enunciate a general principle of conditional destruction or blessing on a nation, and to apply that principle to Israel as a warning. If conditions change, God's actions will change.
- (g) Jeremiah 26:1-19 -- Again, this appears to speak of conditional misfortune or blessing upon the temple and Jerusalem (cf. vss. 3, 13, 19). If conditions change, God's actions will change.
- (h) Joel 2:12-14 -- This appears to be a conditional destruction (i.e., the predicted invasion of destroying locusts); if the people will turn from their wickedness and turn to the Lord, perhaps the destruction may be averted (vs. 14).
- (i) Jonah 3 -- Here is a case of an unexpressed condition (repentance), on the basis of which God had decided to

spare Nineveh (temporarily) from destruction. "Who knows?" the king said, "If we change, perhaps God's threatened action will change."

(2) Scriptures that deny that God repents (what is it that is not changed?)

- (a) Numbers 23:16-20 -- God's covenanted relationship with Israel is not changed. His purpose concerning Israel remains unchanged. God has blessed; He will not curse Israel.
- (b) I Samuel 15:24-29 -- God's word concerning the rejection of Saul from the kingship is not changed. Saul has disqualified himself as king; God will not change His mind.
- (c) Psalm 110:4 -- God's purpose concerning Christ's unending priesthood is unchanged. God has spoken; He has confirmed it with an oath; He will not change His mind.
- (d) Jeremiah 4:19-29 -- God's purpose to destroy Jerusalem and desolate the land is fixed; Israel's cup of iniquity is full; God's longsuffering has come to an end. His mind will not change.
- (e) Romans 11:29 -- God's purpose concerning Israel is unchanged; His gracious covenants are irrevocable; God will graft Israel back into the olive tree of His blessing.
- (f) Hebrews 7:11-22 -- This repeats the statement concerning God's purpose concerning Christ's unending priesthood. It is unchanged.

(3) Analysis of what is changed and what is not changed in these Scriptures

- (a) God's nature and attributes are not said to change.
- (b) God's Plan and purposes with respect to creation, the Fall, the history of redemption, and the final consummation are not said to change. No midcourse changes or corrections or emergency procedures in the outworking of God's Plan are necessary.
- (c) God's inscripturated Word does not change, in the sense that a previous statement is contradicted by a later statement; or a statement turns out not to correspond to reality, thus necessitating a change.



- (d) God's oral predictive cases where there IS a conditional element in the prediction, whether explicit or implicit.
- (e) There are some instances in Scripture in which an anticipated action on God's part is changed, but these are usually coupled with a change in human response or reaction to God's anticipated action.
- (f) There are some instances which speak of a change in a divine intellectual or emotional reaction to a human action or state, but such instances also involve a change from a former human action or state.

Thus we find no change in God's nature or attributes, God's Plan or purposes, God's inscripturated Word, or God's predictive word where the prediction is unconditional.

Possibilities of change occur in God's predictive word where conditions are involved, God's anticipated actions in response to changes in human reactions, and God's intellectual and emotional reactions in response to changes in human actions.

- c. Implications, for immutability, of the combination of God's characteristics of infinite perfection and eternity

Thus far we have learned that God is infinitely perfect, and that He is eternal. We can now combine these and draw their implications.

God is infinitely perfect  
God is eternal  
Therefore God is immutable

Or to put it another way:

God is infinite perfection in His being  
God's being is eternal  
Therefore God's infinite perfection is eternal

Eternal infinite perfection is immutable  
infinite perfection  
Therefore God's infinite perfection is immutable

If God is infinitely perfect (perfect without limitation), and if He is infinitely perfect eternally, then He is unchangeable. If He were less than perfect in some respect, then He could become more perfect in that respect; and thus would not be unchangeable. But if He is completely perfect in all respects, and has been so from all eternity, then he must be unchangeable.

d. The relationship of Christ's divine unchangeability to His incarnation

In John 1:14 John says: "And the Word became flesh."

The Son of God, a divine Person from all eternity, took into personal union with Himself a human nature, and thereby became a divine-human person.

Becoming human in the incarnational sense was not like putting on a new set of clothes, or like taking on a new behavioral role; nor was it similar to the entering of a spirit into a body. It was an actual becoming.

The Son of God actually became what He had not been before the incarnation. It is not that He "put on" human characteristics so as to appear like us; He actually became human. And He became human without ceasing to be divine. The Son of God became the God-man! The Word became flesh!

Here we must again make a distinction between God's nature and God's experience, as well as a distinction between the physics concept of time ("duration measured by physical change") and time in God's self-experience ("a unidirectional continuum of experience, including before and after relationships in sequential order").

The Son of God, viewed not as static but as dynamic, experienced the "before" of his preincarnate state of glory, and then experienced the "after" of His incarnate state of humiliation. But more: the Son of God, who had been a divine Person from all eternity, became what He had never been before -- a real human being. Although the change from glory to humiliation may be viewed as a mere change in outward circumstances (although this may not adequately capture the full thrust of Philippians 2:7), the change from divine to divine-human involves the very Person of the Son of God. He (the Person) became (began to be what He had not been before) man.

What does this do to the immutability of the Second Person of the Trinity? Doesn't the concept "became" indicate change? The answer is that the Son of God changed and yet did not change. He changed by becoming man; but by remaining God He did not change. That is, this is a change, not by subtraction of His divine attributes, but by addition of His human attributes.

Thus in one sense the Son of God was immutable in His incarnation by remaining fully God; and in another sense the Son of God changed in His incarnation by taking into union with His Person a human nature. This was a real becoming! But it was not a change in the divine nature.

e. The problem of Hebrews 13:8

Hebrews 13:8 states "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever."

On the one hand we must affirm that the Son of God, as God, has always been what He is and what He ever will be. As God there is no becoming in His essence, or His nature, or His attributes; there is only being. Another way of stating this is to say that there is no potential in God's nature that is not fully actualized. There are no characteristics that are undeveloped. God's attributes are perfect and complete. All of His perfections are essential; none of them are accidental. As such, God is not in process of becoming.

On the other hand, God is living, dynamic, active. He thinks thoughts, feels emotions, purposes to do certain things, and puts forth efficiency to produce effects. Immutability does not deny the distinction between the infinite potential of God's power and the actual expressions of that power. That is, the assertion that there are some things in God's Plan that He has not yet done but will do (e. g., create new heavens and a new earth) does not conflict with the doctrine of immutability, since in this assertion a distinction is made between the infinite, unchanging perfection of God's attributes, and the ongoing, unfolding, changing expression of those attributes in actions.

These considerations enable us to see that Hebrew 13: 8 does not deny the change from the Son of God's preincarnate state of glory to His incarnate state of humiliation, or from His incarnate state of humiliation to His incarnate state of exaltation. Nor does this Scripture deny the real change from the single-nature character of the Son of God preceding the incarnation event to the dual-nature character of the Son of God following the incarnation event. Since these changes must be admitted, this Scripture cannot deny them!

One interpretation proposes that the emphasis here is that Christ was the God-man from the recent historical past (i.e., when He was first preached to the readers by Paul and then by Peter), and continues to be the God-man today, and for ever.

The other major interpretation proposes that the emphasis here is that Christ has been divine (and thus immutable with respect to His divine nature) from eternity past, continues to be divine, and will be divine to all eternity.

Neither interpretation conflicts with the doctrine of the immutability of God.

D. The Partially Shared (Communicable) Characteristics of God

1. The personhood of God

The answer to question 4 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* begins with the clause, "God is a Spirit." Sometimes the emphasis in the word "spirit" as used in Scripture is on the idea of "nonphysical" or "incorporeal" being; other times the central thrust in the word (especially in the N. T. ) is "personal being" or "person".

When Scripture speaks of God, angels, demons, and human beings as "spirit", it views them as persons. Spirits are persons. God is Spirit. Human beings in their present earthly state are spirits in union with bodies. They are persons.

But what is a person?

A person is a being with a personal nature, personal faculties and powers, and distinct, individual existence or personality

Personal faculties include the intellect, the emotions, the will, the conscience, and self-consciousness.

Personal powers include believing, thinking, reasoning, knowing, discriminating, feeling, desiring, purposing, deciding, evaluating, judging, and interacting with other beings.

When we say that God is a personal being we mean all these things. And when we say that human beings are persons, we mean all these things.

John 4:24 is sometimes quoted in connection with this characteristic. The verse says either "God is spirit", or "God is a spirit." If the first translation is preferred, then this text is stressing God's essential nature as noncorporeal spirit. If the second translation is preferred, then this text is stressing God's noncorporeal nature and personhood.

The rest of John 4:24 says that "those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." If this is understood to mean that acceptable worship is rendered by those who worship God in their spirit (from the inner part of their being) and in truth (out of sincere hearts), then the text would appear to be saying that God is a spiritual being, and those who worship Him must worship Him in their spirit and from their heart. In such a case, this text would appear to have more to do with the spiritual nature of worship than with the personhood of God.

## 2. The knowledge of God

### a. The meaning of knowledge

#### (1) According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*

Knowledge 1. the act, fact, or state of knowing; specif. a) of acquaintance or familiarity (with a fact, place, etc. b) awareness c) understanding 2. acquaintance with facts; range of information, awareness, or understanding 3. all that has been perceived or grasped by the mind; learning; enlightenment 4. the body of facts, principles, etc. accumulated by mankind

#### (2) According to Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, p. 393:

By knowledge is meant the intellectual apprehension of truth. It presupposes a subject and object; an intelligent subject that apprehends, and something true that is apprehended.

Knowledge is apprehension of truth, acquaintance with fact, recognition of information as factual, personal or factual familiarity with a person

### b. The content and extent of God's knowledge

Charles Hodge states:

This knowledge of God is not only all-comprehending, but it is intuitive and immutable. He knows all things as they are: being as being, phenomena as phenomena, the possible as possible, the actual as actual, the necessary as necessary, the free as free, the past as past, the present as present, the future as future. Although all things are ever present in his view, yet He sees them as successive in time. The vast procession of events, thoughts, feelings, and acts, stands open to his view.

This infinite knowledge of God is not only clearly and constantly asserted in Scripture, but is also obviously included in the idea of an absolutely perfect being. Such a being cannot be ignorant of anything; his knowledge can neither be increased nor diminished. The omniscience of God follows also from his omnipresence. As God fills heaven and earth, all things are transacted in his presence. He knows our thoughts far better than they are known to ourselves. This plenitude of divine knowledge is taken for granted in all acts of worship. We pray to a God who, we believe, knows our state and wants, who hears what we say, and

who is able to meet all our necessities. Unless God were thus omniscient, He could not judge the world in righteousness. Faith in this attribute in its integrity is, therefore, essential even to natural religion.

-- Ibid., p. 397.

The Bible teaches that God knows Himself, all things possible, and all things actual. He knows Himself through and through. He knows all things possible by knowing His power. He knows all things actual by knowing His Plan.

Matthew 11:27 -- "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

I Corinthians 2:11 -- "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God."

Matthew 11:21, 23-24 -- "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes....

And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

II Kings 13:19 -- "So the man of God was angry with him and said, 'You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed it. But now you shall strike Aram only three times.' "

I Chronicles 28:9 -- "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for He searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you for ever."

I Samuel 2:3 -- "Boast no more so very proudly,  
Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth;  
For the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
And with Him actions are weighed."

I Samuel 16:7 -- "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have

rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Proverbs 5:21 -- "For the ways of a man are before  
the eyes of the Lord,  
And He watches all his paths."

Hebrews 4:13 -- "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Psalms 147:4-5 -- "He counts the numbers of the stars;  
He gives names to all of them.  
Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength;  
His understanding is infinite."

Isaiah 46:9-10 -- "Remember the former things long past,  
For I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is no one like Me,  
Declaring the end from the beginning  
And from ancient times things which have  
not been done,  
Saying, 'My purpose will be established,  
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'"

Proverbs 15:3 -- "The eyes of the Lord are in every place,  
Watching the evil and the good."

1 John 3:18-20 -- "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him,  
in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things."

c. The basis of God's knowledge

God is infinite, without limitation. His knowledge is infinite. But can we say something meaningful concerning the basis of His knowledge?

God knows all things in Himself and from Himself. He knows all things by knowing Himself.

He knows all things possible by knowing His potential power. Since God is all-powerful, there is no limit to what He could do, except the limits inherent in His own nature. For example, God cannot lie, cannot fail, cannot break His promise, etc.

He knows all things actual by knowing His Plan, His purposes. God has a Plan, in which He has foreordained everything that comes

to pass. God foreknows as actual what He has foreordained. Whatever does not exist, or whatever will not come into existence or whatever is only possible, cannot be known as actual. Only that which is or will be actual can be known as a certainty.

Since things in the world do not exist or happen without God's preservation or government, and since all things are preserved and governed by God, and since all of God's act or preservation and government were planned before the first act of creation, then God has foreordained either to efficiently cause certain things, or to permit certain things. His inclusion in His Plan of actual things that He will either cause or permit renders all events certain. And yet He is not the author of sin. He causes all good; He permits all sin.

A scriptural paradigm of this conception is found in Acts 2:23, where Peter says, "this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." God, by His predetermined Plan, permitted evil men to nail Jesus to a cross. Although God foreordained His Son's death before the foundation of the world, and therefore foreknew that His Son would die in this manner, yet the responsibility for the evil rested on the perpetrators, not on God.

Because God has chosen to efficiently bring about certain things and to permit certain things, and has included them all in His great Plan, therefore He foreknew all things. If He hadn't decided what things to actually cause and what things to actually permit, then all things would still be in the realm of possibility, and could not be known as certainly future. Even God cannot know as actual, things that are only possible. But if He decides to bring them out of the realm of possibility and to make them actual by including them in His Plan, then He can know them as actual. In this way God's foreknowledge may be seen to depend on the foreordination of His all-inclusive Plan.

d. Implications of God's infinite knowledge (omniscience)

- (1) God knew that, after He created human beings, they would fall from their original state, and experience much sin, suffering, and sorrow. Yet He decided to go ahead in spite of this knowledge.
- (2) God knew that, if human beings were to be saved from their sins and the terrible results of their sins, it would cost Him a great deal. Yet He decided to send the Son to become incarnate and to live a perfect life and die a sacrificial death.
- (3) God knew the end of history from the very beginning, as well as every detail of every real circumstance that would come into the lives of His redeemed people. He knew this as actual because He ordained it as such. And having determined to cause all good things and permit all evil things, He determined that He would work all things together so that they would bring Him glory and bring His redeemed people good.



- (4) Although God knows all things, He knows as actual only those things He has decided to actualize in His Plan. He does not know as actual, things that are only possible (although he knows them as possible).

e. The question of the "eternal Plan of God"

In the Westminster *Confession of Faith*, Chapter III, Section 1 we read:

God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

This term "the eternal plan of God" or the phrase "from all eternity" is used in much of the literature.

A. A. Hodge, in his work, *The Confession of Faith* (1869) states:

God has had from eternity an unchangeable plan with reference to his creatures. As an infinitely intelligent Creator and providential Ruler, God must have had a definite purpose with reference to the being and destination of all that he has created, comprehending in one all-perfect system his chief end therein, and all subordinate ends and means in reference to that chief end. And since he is an eternal and unchangeable Being, his plan must have existed in all its elements, perfect and unchangeable, from eternity.

However, as soon as we begin speaking of an "eternal Plan", we run into some rather severe problems.

If God's Plan is eternal, and if God is eternal, then it follows that His Plan is as eternal as He is, and therefore that His Plan never had a beginning.

If God's Plan never had a beginning, but always was, then it would seem that it is in some sense necessary. If it was never formulated, never conceived, never brought into being, then it is difficult to see how it could be the product of a free determination by God, as a product of His thought and will.

And if God's Plan is necessary, then it would follow that various aspects of the Plan are also necessary. This would mean that creation was necessary, not the product of God's free self-determination. Then it would follow that redemption was necessary, not the product of God's gracious and loving and free decision.

But creation and redemption are not portrayed in Scripture as

necessary acts, arising from an eternal Plan, but rather as actions freely chosen by God as expressions of His good pleasure and purpose. An eternal and therefore necessary Plan would annul the meaning of these terms and actions.

If we can disabuse ourselves of the notion of God's timelessness and see that God's Plan was carefully and freely formulated according to God's purpose and good pleasure at some point in God's self-experience, then we can strip away necessity from God's Plan and retain His goodness and kindness expressed in creation and His grace and mercy expressed in redemption through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what does this do to the omniscience of God's foreknowledge? Does it imply that God did not know what He was going to do before He freely decided what He was going to do? Does it imply that omniscience includes in its objects only what God knows as actual? Does it imply that the content of God's foreknowledge increases with each aspect God decides to incorporate into His Plan? The proposal presented here implies all of the above!

### 3. The wisdom of God

#### a. The meaning of wisdom

(1) According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*:

wisdom 1 the quality of being wise; power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience, understanding, etc.; good judgment; sagacity 2 learning; knowledge; erudition (the wisdom of the ages) 3 (Now Rare) wise discourse or teaching 4 a wise plan or course of action

(2) According to Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, pp. 401-402:

Wisdom and knowledge are intimately related. The former is manifested in the selection of proper ends, and of proper means for the accomplishment of those ends. As there is abundant evidence of design in the works of nature, so all the works of God declare his wisdom. They show, from the most minute to the greatest, the most wonderful adaptation of means to accomplish the high end of the good of his creatures and the manifestation of his own glory. So also, in the whole course of history, we see evidence of the controlling power of God making all things work together for the best interests of his people, and the promotion of his kingdom upon earth. It is, however, in

the work of redemption that this divine attribute is specially revealed. It is by the Church, that God has determined to manifest, through all ages, to principalities and powers, his manifold wisdom.

Of course, those who deny final causes deny there is any such attribute as wisdom in God. It is also said that the use of means to attain an end is a manifestation of weakness. It is further urged that it is derogatory to God, as it supposes that He needs or desires what He does not possess.... It is not thus the Scriptures speak. We are called on to worship, "the only wise God". "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all," is the devout exclamation of the Psalmist. (Ps. 104:24) And in contemplation of the work of redemption the Apostle exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33).

- (3) According to William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.), Volume One, pp. 356-357:

Wisdom is a particular aspect of the Divine knowledge. I Tim. 1:17, "God only wise". It is the intelligence of God as manifested in the adaptation of means to ends. The Hebrew and the Greek (words) primarily signify skilful, expert.

- (4) According to Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), Volume I, p. 286:

Omniscience, as qualified by holy will, is in Scripture denominated "wisdom". In virtue of his wisdom God chooses the highest ends and uses the fittest means to accomplish them.

The wisdom of God is that characteristic by which He selects the highest ends and uses the most appropriate means to attain them

- b. The end, goal, or final cause of God's wisdom

Henry C. Thiessen, in his *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 126, says:

Wisdom is the intelligence of God displayed in the choice of the highest ends and of the fittest means for the accomplishments of those ends. Though God sincerely seeks to promote the happiness of His creatures and to perfect the saints in holiness, neither of these is the highest possible end. That end is His own glory. All His works in creation... preservation... providence... and redemption... have this end in view.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 7, asks, "What are the decrees of God?" and answers, "The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

#### 4. The power of God

##### a. The meaning of power

- (1) According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*:

power (1) the ability to act, the ability to exert effort  
(2) exerted energy, force, might

- (2) According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*:

power 1 ability to do, act, or produce 2 a specific ability or faculty (the power of hearing) 3 great ability to do, act, or affect strongly; vigor; force; strength; 4 a) the ability to control others; authority; sway; influence b) (pl.) special authority assigned to or exercised by a person or group holding office c) legal ability or authority; also, a document giving it 5 a source of physical or mechanical force or energy; force or energy that is at, or can be put to, work

- (3) According to William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.), Volume One, pp. 358-359:

The Power of God is the Divine essence energizing, and producing outward effects. It is the Divine activity *ad extra*. The immanent activity of the essence *ad intra*, as seen in the trinal distinctions and their intercommunion, does not come under the category of the Divine power. For this is necessary and constitutional activity. It is not optional with God to be triune. Eternal generation and spiration are not, like creation, providence, and redemption, acts of power, in the sense that if God so please they need not be performed. The Divine power is optional in its exercise. God need not have created anything. And after creation, he may annihilate. Only when he has bound himself by promise, as in the instance of faith in Christ, does his action cease to be optional. It cannot be said that God may keep his promises, or not, as he pleases.

- (4) According to Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, pp. 406-407:

We get the idea of power from our own consciousness. That is, we are conscious of the ability

of producing effects. Power in man is confined within very narrow limits. We can change the current of our thoughts, or fix our attention on a particular object and we can move the voluntary muscles of our body. Beyond this our direct power does not extend. It is from this small measure of efficiency that all the stores of human knowledge and all the wonders of human art are derived. It is only our thoughts, volitions, and purposes together with certain acts of the body, that are immediately subject to the will. For all other effects we must avail ourselves of the use of means. We cannot will a book, a picture, or a house into existence. The production of such effects requires protracted labor and the use of diverse appliances.

It is by removing all the limitations of power, as it exists in us, that we rise to the idea of the omnipotence of God. We do not thus, however, lose the idea itself. Almighty power does not cease to be power. We can do very little. God can do whatever He wills. We, beyond very narrow limits, must use means to accomplish our ends. With God means are unnecessary. He wills, and it is done. He said, Let there be light; and there was light. He, by a volition created the heavens and the earth. At the volition of Christ, the winds ceased, and there was a great calm. By an act of the will He healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the dead. This simple idea of the omnipotence of God, that He can do without effort, and by a volition, whatever He wills, is the highest conceivable idea of power, and is that which is clearly presented in the Scriptures.... The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and doeth his pleasure among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth, is the tribute of adoration which the Scriptures everywhere render unto God, and the truth which they everywhere present as the ground of confidence to his people. This is all we know, and all we need to know on this subject...

b. The potential and the actualization of God's power

Stephen Charnock, in *The Existence and Attributes of God* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1958), pp. 363-364, states:

Power sometimes signifies authority, and a man is said to be mighty and powerful in regard to his dominion, and the right he hath to command multitudes of other persons to take his part; but power taken for strength, and power taken for authority, are distinct things, and may be separated from one another.... The power of God is not to be understood of his authority and dominion, but his strength to act...

This power is divided ordinarily into absolute and ordinate. Absolute, is that power whereby God is able to do

that which he will not do, but is possible to be done; ordinate, is that power whereby God doth that which he hath decreed to do, that is, which he hath ordained or appointed to be exercised; which are not distinct powers, but one and the same power: his ordinate power is a part of his absolute;. for if he had not a power to do everything that he could will, he might not have a power to do everything that he doth will....

It follows, then, that the power of God is that ability and strength whereby he can bring to pass whatsoever he please, whatsoever his infinite wisdom can direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of his will can resolve. Power, in the primary notion of it, doth not signify an act, but an ability to bring a thing into act; it is power, as able to act before it doth actually produce a thing. As God had an ability to create before he did create, he had power before he acts that power without. Power notes the principle of the action, and therefore is greater than the act itself. Power exercised and diffused in bringing forth and nursing up its particular objects without, is inconceivably less than that strength which is infinite in himself, the same with his essence, and is indeed himself. By his power exercised, he doth whatsoever he actually wills; but by the power in his nature, he is able to do whatsoever he is able to will The will of creatures may be and is more extensive than their power, and their power more contracted and shortened than their will; but, as the prophet saith, "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure," Isa. 46:10. His power is as great as his will; that is, whatsoever can fall within the verge of his will, falls within the compass of his power. Though he will never actually will this or that, yet supposing he should will it, he is able to perform it. So that you must in your notion of divine power enlarge it further than to think God can only do what he hath resolved to do; but that he hath as infinite a capacity of power to act as he hath infinite capacity of will to resolve.

William G. T. Shedd, in *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d. ), Volume One, p. 359, states:

The Divine power is Omnipotence. Ps. 115:3, "Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased;" Rev. 4:8, "Holy Lord God Almighty;" Gen. 17:1, "I am the Almighty God." Omnipotence is called the "word" or "command" of God. Ps. 33: 6, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. He commanded and it stood fast." This denotes the greatness of the power. Creation requires only God's fiat. The Divine power is not to be measured merely by what God has actually effected. Omnipotence is manifested in the works of the actual creation, but it is not exhausted by them. God could create more than he has, if he pleased. He can do more than he has done, should it be his will. He could have raised up children to Abraham from the stones in the bed of Jordan; he could have sent in aid of the suffering Redeemer twelve legions of angels.

Henry C. Thiessen, in his *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 126, states:

By the omnipotence of God we mean that He is able to do whatever He wills,...

The possession of omnipotence does not, however imply the exercise of His power, certainly not the exercise of all His power. God can do what He wills to do; but He does not necessarily will to do anything. That is, God has power over His power; otherwise He would act of necessity and cease to be a free being. Nor does omnipotence exclude but rather imply the power of self-limitation. God has limited Himself to some extent by the free will of His rational creatures. That is why He did not keep sin out of the universe by a display of His power; that is also why He does not save anyone by force.

c. God's power and His nature

William G. T. Shedd, in *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.), Volume One, p. 360, states:

God cannot do anything inconsistent with the perfections of the Divine nature. Under this category, fall the instances mentioned in Heb. 6:18, "It is impossible for God to lie;" and 2 Tim. 2:13, "He cannot deny himself;" and James 1:13, "God cannot be tempted." God cannot sin: (a) Because sin is imperfection, and it is contradictory to say that a necessarily perfect Being may be imperfect. (b) God cannot sin, because he cannot be tempted to sin, and sinning without temptation or motive to sin, is impossible. God cannot be tempted, because temptation implies a desire for some good that is supposed to be greater than what is already possessed. But God cannot see anything more desirable than what he already has; and his understanding is infallible, so that he cannot mistake an apparent for a real good. All such cases, when analyzed, will be found to imply something contradictory to the idea and definition of God. If it could be supposed that God is capable to be tempted and to sin, it would prove that he is not infinite. God is not able to die, to see corruption (Acts 2:27), to become non-existent. This would be finite weakness, not almighty power. Says Augustine (*De Symbolo*, l.i), "God is omnipotent, and yet he cannot die, he cannot lie, he cannot deny himself. How is he omnipotent then? He is omnipotent for the very reason that he cannot do these things. For if he could die, he would not be omnipotent." Again he remarks (*De Civitate*, V. x.) that "the power of God is not diminished when it is said that he cannot die, and cannot sin; for if he could do these things, his power would be less. A being is rightly called omnipotent, from doing what he wills, and not from suffering what he does not will."

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, p. 409, says:

By absolute power, as understood by the schoolmen and some of the later philosophers, is meant power free from all the restraints of reason and morality. According to this doctrine, contradictions, absurdities, and immoralities, are all within the compass of the divine power. Nay, it is said that God can annihilate Himself....

It is, however, involved in the very idea of power, that it has reference to the production of possible effects. It is no more a limitation of power that it cannot effect the impossible, than it is of reason that it cannot comprehend the absurd, or of infinite goodness that it cannot do wrong. It is contrary to its nature. Instead of exalting, it degrades God, to suppose that He cannot be other than He is, or that He can act contrary to infinite wisdom and love. When, therefore, it is said that God is omnipotent because He can do whatever He wills, it is to be remembered that his will is determined by his nature. It is certainly no limitation to perfection to say that it cannot be imperfect.

d. The limitations on God's power

Millard J. Erickson, in his *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), Volume 1, pp. 277-278, states:

There are, however, certain qualifications of this all-powerful character of God. He cannot arbitrarily do anything whatsoever that we may conceive of. He can do only those things which are proper objects of his power. Thus, he cannot do the logically absurd or contradictory. He cannot make square circles or triangles with four corners. He cannot undo what happened in the past, although he may wipe out its effects or even the memory of it. He cannot act contrary to his nature—he cannot be cruel or unconcerned. He cannot fail to do what he has promised. In reference to God's having made a promise and having confirmed it with an oath, the writer to the Hebrews says: "So that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we... might have strong encouragement." (Heb. 6:18) All of these "inabilities," however, are not weaknesses, but strengths. The inability to do evil or to lie or to fail is a mark of positive strength rather than failure.

Stephen Charnock, in *The Existence and Attributes of God* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1958), pp. 375-379, states:

The impossibility of God's doing some things, is no infringing of his almightiness, but rather a strengthening of it. It is granted that some things God cannot do; or rather, as Aquinas and others, it is better to say, such things cannot be done, than to say that God cannot do them; to remove all kind



of imputation or reflection of weakness on God, and because the reason of the impossibility of those things is in the nature of the things themselves.

(1) First, some things are impossible in their own nature. Such are all those things which imply a contradiction; as for a thing to be and not to be at the same time, for the sun to shine and not to shine at the same moment of time, for a creature to act and not to act at the same instant.... Some things are impossible to be done, because of the incapability of the subject; as for a creature to be made infinite, independent, to preserve itself without the divine concurrence and assistance....

(2) Some things are impossible to the nature and being of God.... If God were able to deprive himself of life, he might then cease to be; he were not then a necessary, but an uncertain, contingent being, and could not be said "only to have immortality" as he is, I Tim. 6:16.... And this is not part of weakness, but the perfection of power....

Some things are impossible to that eminency of nature which he hath above all creatures; as to walk, sleep, feed, these are imperfections belonging to bodies and compound natures. If he could walk, he were not everywhere present... If he could increase, he would not have been perfect before.

(3) Some things are impossible to the glorious perfections of God. God cannot be anything unbecoming of his holiness and goodness, anything unworthy of himself, and against the perfections of his nature. God can do whatsoever he can will. As he doth actually do whatsoever he doth actually will, so it is possible for him to do whatsoever it is possible for him to will. He doth whatsoever he will, and can do whatsoever he can will, but he cannot do what he cannot will. He cannot will any unrighteous thing, and therefore cannot do any unrighteous thing. God cannot love sin, this is contrary to his holiness; he cannot violate his word, this is a denial of his truth; he cannot punish an innocent, this is contrary to his goodness; he cannot cherish an impenitent sinner, this is an injury to his justice; he cannot forget what is done in the world, this is a disgrace to his omnipotence; he cannot deceive his creature, this is contrary to his faithfulness. None of these things can be done by him, because of the perfection of his nature.... As when we say of a good man, he cannot rob or fight a duel, we do not mean that he wants a courage for such an act, or that he hath not a natural strength and knowledge to manage his weapon as well as another, but he hath a righteous principle strong in him which will not suffer him to do it; his will is settled against it. No power can pass into act unless applied by his will. But the will of God cannot will anything but what is worthy of him, and decent for his goodness....

(4) Some things are impossible to be done, because of God's ordination. Some things are impossible, not in their nature, but in regard of the determined will of God. So God might have destroyed the world after Adam's fall, but it was impossible; not that God waned power to do it, but because

he did not only decree from eternity to create the world, but did also decree to redeem the world by Jesus Christ, and erected the world in order to the manifestation of his glory in Christ: Eph. 1:4, 5, the choice of some in Christ was "before the foundation of the world".... So though it was possible that the cup should pass from our blessed Saviour, that is, possible in its own nature, yet it was not possible in regard of the determination of God's will, since he had both decreed and published his will to redeem man by the passion and blood of his Son. These things God by his absolute power might have done, but upon the account of his decree they were impossible, because it is repugnant to the nature of God to be mutable. It is to deny his own wisdom which contrived them, and his own will which resolved them, not to do that which he had decreed to do. This would be a diffidence in his wisdom, and a change of his will. The impossibility of them is no result of a want of power, no mark of an imperfection, of feebleness and impotence, but the perfection of immutability and unchangeableness.

Augustus Hopkins Strong, in his *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), Volume I, pp. 286-288, asserts:

Omnipotence. By this we mean the power of God to do all things which are objects of power, whether with or without the use of means.

(a) Omnipotence does not imply power to do that which is not an object of power; as, for example, that which is self-contradictory or contradictory to the nature of God.

Self-contradictory things: "*facere factum infectum*"-- the making of a past even to have not occurred (hence the uselessness of praying: "May it be that much good was done"); drawing a shorter than a straight line between two given points; putting two separate mountains together without a valley between them. Things contradictory to the nature of God: for God to lie, to sin, to die. To do such things would not imply power, but impotence. God has all the power that is consistent with infinite perfection -- all power to do what is worthy of himself.... Even God cannot make wrong to be right, nor hatred of himself to be blessed....

(b) Omnipotence does not imply the exercise of all his power on the part of God. He has power over his power; in other words, his power is under the control of wise and holy will. God can do all he will, but he will not do all he can. Else his power is mere force acting necessarily, and God is the slave of his own omnipotence....

(c) Omnipotence in God does not exclude, but implies, the power of self-limitation. Since all such self-limitation is free, proceeding from neither external nor internal compulsion, it is the act and manifestation of God's power. Human freedom is not rendered impossible by the divine omnipotence, but exists by virtue of it. It is an act of omnipotence when God humbles himself to the taking of human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

William G. T. Shedd, in his *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.), Volume One, pp. 359-360, states:

The Divine power is limited only by the absurd and self-contradictory. God can do anything that does not imply a logical impossibility. A logical impossibility means that the predicate is contradictory to the subject; for example, a material spirit, a corporeal deity, a sensitive stone, an irrational man, a body without parts or extensions, a square triangle. These are not objects of power, and therefore it is really no limitation of the Divine omnipotence to say that it cannot create them. They involve the absurdity that a thing can be and not be at the same time. A logical impossibility is, in truth, a nonentity; and to say that God cannot create a nonentity, is not a limitation or denial of power.

e. Summary of these emphases

The power of God is that characteristic by which He is able to do whatever He pleases, whether immediately or mediately, whether apart from means or by means of existing materials and/or secondary causes, whether in regard to nonliving things, nonpersonal living things, or persons

Of course, to assert the possession of this ability is not to assert the necessity of its exertion. God is able to do whatever He pleases; there is no necessity that He do anything except as He wills it.

However, it can be asserted that whatever God does, He does because He has willed it; and that whatever God wills, He wills not contrary to, but in accordance with, His nature. Thus His actions express His will, and His will reflects His nature.

It flows from this principle that there are some things which God cannot do:

God cannot look favorably or complacently on sin. Habakkuk 1:13 says, "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, And Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor."

God cannot be tempted with sin, cannot be enticed to moral evil. James 1:13 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."

God cannot lie. Titus 1:2 speaks of "the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ago" and Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that He should lie."

God cannot deny Himself. II Timothy 2:13 states, "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself."

f. The sovereignty of God

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, pp. 440-441, states:

Sovereignty is not a property of the divine nature, but a prerogative arising out of the perfections of the Supreme Being. If God be a Spirit, and therefore a person, infinite, eternal, and immutable in his being and perfections, the Creator and Preserver of the universe, He is of right its absolute sovereign. Infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, with the right of possession, which belongs to God in all his creatures, are the immutable foundation of his dominion. "Our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever He pleased." (Ps. 115:3) "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35) "All that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine." (I Chron. 29:11) "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." (Ps. 29:1) "Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all." (I Chron. 29:11) "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine." (Ez. 18:4) "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" (Is. 45:9) "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" (Matt. 20:15) He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (Eph. 1:11) "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Rom. 11:36)

From these and similar passages of Scripture it is plain, (1) That the sovereignty of God is universal. It extends over all his creatures from the highest to the lowest. (2) That it is absolute. There is no limit to be placed to his authority. He doeth his pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. (3) It is immutable. It can neither be ignored nor rejected. It binds all creatures, as inexorably as physical laws bind the material universe.

This sovereignty is exercised, (1) In establishing the laws, physical and moral, by which all creatures are to be governed. (2) In determining the nature and powers of the different orders of created beings, and in assigning each its appropriate sphere. (3) In appointing to each individual his position and lot. It is the Lord who fixes the bounds of our habitation.... (4) God is no less sovereign in the distribution of his favours. He does what He wills with his own. He gives to some riches, to others, honour; to others, health; while others are poor, unknown, or the victim of disease....

Although this sovereignty is thus universal and absolute, it is the sovereignty of wisdom, holiness, and love.... This sovereignty of God is the ground of peace and confidence to all his people. They rejoice that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; that neither necessity, nor chance, nor the folly of man, nor the malice of Satan controls the sequence of events and all their issues. Infinite wisdom, Jove, and power in heaven and earth has been committed.

g. Practical implications of God's power (physical, moral, or spiritual)

- (1) God has the power to supply everything that would be good for us.
- (2) God has the power to do for us that which is wise and loving. We know that He does all things well.
- (3) God has the power to do great and mighty things in and through us to forward His kingdom. He has the power to give us grace, boldness, and courage to witness for Him, and is able to melt the stony hearts of those to whom we witness.
- (4) God has the power to make us victorious in our daily lives. He can enable us to overcome sin, self, the world, temptation, and Satan. He is able to renew our strength to walk in the Spirit, to live in and for Christ, and to live above adverse circumstances.
- (5) God has the power to bring revival to our hearts, our churches, and our country.
- (6) God has the power to carry us safely through death, to bring us safely to heaven, and to keep us safely forever.

"Once God has spoken; Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God." (Psalm 62:11)

"Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

## 5. The holiness of God

In the Scriptures the idea of holiness appears to have two basic areas of meaning.

On the one hand the holiness of God is that characteristic by which God is distinct from and infinitely exalted above all of His creatures in glorious majesty. On the other hand the holiness of God is that characteristic by which He is free from all moral impurity and characterized through and through by moral perfection.

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, pp. 413-414, says:

Holiness of God. This is a general term for the moral excellence of God. In 1 Sam 2:2, it is said, "There is none holy as the Lord;" no other Being absolutely pure, and free from all limitation in his moral perfection. "Thou Holy One of Israel," is the form of address which the Spirit puts into the lips of the people of God. "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is Holy." (Ps. 99:9) "Holy and reverend is his name," (Ps. 111:9) "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." (Hab. 1:13) "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for Thou only art Holy." (Rev. 15:4) Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil; and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection. Freedom from impurity is the primary idea of the word. To sanctify is to cleanse; to be holy, is to be clean. Infinite purity, even more than infinite knowledge or infinite power, is the object of reverence. Hence the Hebrew word QADOSH, as used in Scripture, is often equivalent to *venerandus*. "The Holy One of Israel", is He who is to be feared and adored. Seraphim round about the throne who cry day and night, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, give expression to the feelings of all unfallen rational creatures in view of the infinite purity of God. They are the representatives of the whole universe, in offering this perpetual homage to the divine holiness. It is because of his holiness, that God is a consuming fire. And it was a view of his holiness which led the prophet to exclaim, "Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Is. 6:5)

Augustus Hopkins Strong, in his *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), Volume I, pp. 269-274, states:

Holiness is self-affirming purity. In virtue of this attribute of his nature, God eternally wills and maintains his own moral excellence. In this definition are contained three elements: first, purity; secondly, purity willing; thirdly purity willing itself....

A. Negatively, holiness is not

(a) Justice, or purity demanding purity from creatures. Justice, the relative or transitive attribute, is indeed the manifestation and expression of the immanent attribute, is indeed the manifestation and expression of the immanent attribute of holiness, but it is not to be confounded with it.

(b) Holiness is not a complex term designating the aggregate of the divine perfections. On the other hand, the notion of holiness is, both in Scripture and in Christian experience, perfectly simple, and perfectly distinct from that of other attributes.

(c) Holiness is not God's self-love, in the sense of supreme regard for his own interest and happiness. There is no utilitarian element in holiness.

(d) Holiness is not identical with, or a manifestation of, love. Since self-maintenance must precede self-impartation, and since benevolence has its object, motive, standard and limit in righteousness, holiness the self-affirming attribute can in no way be resolved into love the self-communication.

B. Positively, holiness is

(a) Purity of substance -- In God's moral nature, as necessarily acting, there are indeed the two elements of willing and being. But the passive logically precedes the active; being comes before willing; God is pure before he wills purity. Since purity, however, in ordinary usage is a negative term and means only freedom from stain or wrong, we must include in it also the positive idea of moral rightness. God is holy in that he is the source and standard of the right.

(b) Energy of will -- This purity is not simply a passive and dead quality; it is the attribute of a personal being; it is penetrated and pervaded by will. Holiness is the free moral movement of the Godhead.

(c) Self-affirmation -- Holiness is God's self-willing. His own purity is the supreme object of his regard and maintenance. God is holy, in that his infinite moral excellence affirms and asserts itself as the highest possible motive and end. Like truth and love, this attribute can be understood only in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Millard J. Erickson, in his *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 284-285, says:

There are two basic aspects to God's holiness. The first is his uniqueness. (This aspect of God's holiness could be considered another attribute of greatness, in this case with respect to moral matters.) He is totally separate from all of creation. This is what Louis Berkhof called the "majesty-holiness" of God. The uniqueness of God is affirmed in

Exodus 15:11: "Who is like thee O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" Similar expressions of the loftiness, the exaltedness, the splendor of God, are found in 1 Samuel 2:2 and Isaiah 57:15.... The Hebrew word for "holy" (*qadosh*) means "marked off" or "withdrawn from common ordinary use." The verb from which it is derived suggests "to cut off" or "to separate".

The other aspect of God's holiness is his absolute purity or goodness. This means that he is untouched and unstained by the evil in the world. He does not in any sense participate in it.

The glorious exaltedness of God's holiness may be seen in several Scriptures:

Psalms 99:5, 9 -- "Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His footstool; Holy is He." "Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His holy hill; For holy is the Lord our God."

Exodus 3:4-5 -- "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' "

Isaiah 57:15 --        "For thus says the high and exalted One  
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,  
'I dwell on a high and holy place,  
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit  
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly  
And to revive the heart of the contrite.' "

Revelation 4:8-11 -- "And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.' And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.' "

Exodus 19:10-13, 23 -- "The Lord also said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on



the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.'... And Moses said to the Lord, 'The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai for Thou didst warn us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.' "

I Samuel 6:19-20-"And He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck down of all the people, 50, 070 men, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Beth-shemesh said, 'Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up from us?'"

The moral perfection of God's holiness may also be seen in several Scriptures:

Joshua 24:19 -- "Then Joshua said to the people, 'You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins.' "

Habakkuk 1:13 -- "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil,  
And Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor."

Isaiah 59:1-2 -- "Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short  
That it cannot save;  
Neither is His ear so dull  
That it cannot hear.  
But your iniquities have made a separation  
between you and your God,  
And your sins have hidden His face from you,  
so that He does not hear."

I Peter 1:14-16 -- As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

Leviticus 20:26 -- "Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the lord am holy;  
and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine."

Revelation 21:2, 3, 27 -- "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.... and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. "

A consideration of God's holiness should produce certain effects in our lives:

- (1) A sense of God's holiness should produce an awe, a reverence, a godly fear before the majesty on high the high and Holy One.
- (2) A sense of God's holiness should produce a sense of unworthiness, of our sinfulness, in the presence of the One who cannot look favorably on sin.
- (3) A sense of God's holiness should produce a hatred of sin, a love for holiness, and a true desire for purity.
- (4) A sense of God's holiness should produce a great carefulness about our thoughts, words, and actions, lest we offend the infinite majesty and awful purity of the One who is pure light and a consuming fire!
- (5) A sense of God's holiness should produce in us a true regard for the Person, Name, Word, Worship, and Will of the one, true, living, and holy God.

## 6. The justice of God

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, pp. 416-417, states:

The word justice, or righteousness, is used in Scripture sometimes in a wider and sometimes in a more restricted sense. In theology, it is often distinguished as *justitia interna*, or moral excellence, and *justitia externa*, or rectitude of conduct. In Hebrew TSADIQ means, in a physical sense, straight; and in a moral sense, right, what is as it should be. And TSEDAQAH means rightness, that which satisfies the demands of rectitude or law. The Greek word DIKAIOS has the physical sense of equal; and the moral sense of, conformed to what is right; and DIKAIOSUNE is either that which divides equally, i.e., equity in the moral sense, or that which satisfies the demands of right. The Latin *justus* and *justitia* are commonly used in the wide sense for what is right, or as it should be....

When we regard God as the author of our moral nature, we conceive of Him as holy; when we regard Him in his dealings with his rational creatures, we conceive of Him as righteous. He is a righteous ruler; all his laws are holy, just, and good. In his moral government He faithfully adheres to those laws. He is impartial and uniform in their execution. As a judge he renders unto every man according to his works. He neither condemns the innocent, nor clears the guilty; neither does He ever punish with undue severity. Hence the justice of

God is distinguished as rectoral, or that which is concerned in the imposition of righteous laws and in their impartial execution; and distributive, or that which is manifested in the righteous distribution of rewards and punishment. The Bible constantly represents God as a righteous ruler and a just judge. These two aspects of his character, or of our relation to Him, are not carefully distinguished. We have the assurance which runs through the Scriptures, that "The judge of all the earth" must "do right." (Gen. 18:25) "God is a righteous judge." (Ps. 7:11, marginal reading) "He shall judge the world with righteousness." (Ps. 96:13) "Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." (Ps. 97:2) Notwithstanding all the apparent inequalities in the distribution of his favours; notwithstanding the prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous, the conviction is everywhere expressed that God is just; that somehow and somewhere He will vindicate his dealings with men, and show that He is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works.

As the sense of guilt is universal among men, and as the manifestations of sin are so constant and pervading, it is mainly in its relation to sin that the justice of God is revealed.

As the justice of God is specially manifested in the punishment of sin, it is of primary importance to determine why sin is punished.

One prevalent theory on this subject is that the only legitimate end of punishment is the reformation of the offender.

It is of course to be admitted, that the good of the offender is often the ground or reason why evil is inflicted. A father chastises a child in love, and for its good. And God, our heavenly Father, brings suffering upon his children for their edification. But evil inflicted for the benefit of the sufferer, is chastisement, and not punishment. Punishment, properly speaking, is evil inflicted in satisfaction of justice.

Augustus Hopkins Strong, in his *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), Volume I, pp. 290-294, states:

By justice and righteousness we mean the transitive holiness of God, in virtue of which his treatment of his creatures conforms to the purity of his nature -- righteousness demanding from all moral beings conformity to the moral perfection of God, and justice visiting non-conformity to that perfection with penal loss or suffering.

(a) Since justice and righteousness are simply transitive holiness - righteousness designating this holiness chiefly in its mandatory, justice chiefly in its punitive, aspect -- they are not mere manifestations of benevolence, or of God's

disposition to secure the highest happiness of his creatures, nor are they grounded in the nature of things as something apart from or above God.

(b) Transitive holiness, as righteousness, imposes law in conscience and Scripture, and may be called legislative holiness. As justice, it executes the penalties of law, and may be called distributive or judicial holiness. In righteousness God reveals chiefly his love of holiness; in justice, chiefly his hatred of sin.

(c) Neither justice nor righteousness, therefore, is a matter of arbitrary will. They are revelations of the inmost nature of God, the one in the form of moral requirement, the other in the form of judicial sanction. As God cannot but demand of his creatures that they be like him in moral character, so he cannot but enforce the law which he imposes upon them. Justice just as much binds God to punish as it binds the sinner to be punished.

(d) Neither justice nor righteousness bestows rewards. This follows from the fact that obedience is due to God, instead of being optional or a gratuity. No creature can claim anything for his obedience. If God rewards, he rewards in virtue of his goodness and faithfulness, not in virtue of his justice or his righteousness. What the creature cannot claim, however, Christ can claim, and the rewards which are goodness to the creature are righteousness to Christ. God rewards Christ's work for us and in us.

(e) Justice in God, as the revelation of his holiness, is devoid of all passion or caprice. There is in God no selfish anger. The penalties he inflicts upon transgression are not vindictive but vindicative. They express the revulsion of God's nature from moral evil, the judicial indignation of purity against impurity, the self-assertion of infinite holiness against its antagonist and would-be destroyer. But because its decisions are calm, they are irreversible.

William G. T. Shedd, in his *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.), Volume One, pp. 365-370, says:

Justice is that phase of God's holiness which is seen in his treatment of the obedient and the disobedient subjects of his government. It is that attribute whereby he gives to everyone what is due him. The notion of debt or obligation necessarily enters into that of justice. Sin is indebtedness to law....

Rectoral justice is God's rectitude as a ruler, over both the good and the evil. It relates legislation, or the imposition of law. God, both in rewarding and punishing, lays down a just law. The reward and the penalty are exactly suited to the actions. Job 34:23, "For he will not lay upon man more than right."

Ps. 89:14, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." Distributive justice is God's rectitude in the execution of law, both in reference to the good and the evil. It relates to the distribution of rewards and punishments. Rom. 2:6, God "will render to every man according to his deeds." I Pet. 1:17, "The Father without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work." Isa. 3:10, 11, "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him." Distributive justice is twofold: (a) remunerative justice; (b) retributive justice.

Remunerative justice is the distribution of rewards both to men and angels. Remunerative justice is the expression of the divine love..., as retributive justice is of the divine wrath.... It proceeds upon the ground of relative merit only. The creature cannot establish an absolute merit before the creator....

Retributive justice (sometimes denominated punitive, vindicative, of, in the older English, vindicative, avenging, or revenging, L. C. 77) is that part of distributive justice which relates to the infliction of penalty. It is the expression of the divine [ORGE]. In a sinless world, there would be no place for its exercise, and it would be comparatively an unimportant aspect of the general attribute of justice. But in a sinful world, retribution must hold a prominent place; and hence in the Christian religion, which is a religion for a fallen race of beings, retributive justice comes continually into view. Hence when justice is spoken of without any qualifying word to show that some other aspect of the attribute is meant, punitive justice is intended. Passages of Scripture which present it are: Rom. 1:32, "The judgment of God is, that they which do such things are worthy of death." Rom. 2:8, "Who will visit tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." 2 Thess. 1:8, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance... on them that know not God." Acts 28:4, "Vengeance... suffereth not to live." Rom. 12:19, "Vengeance... is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

The justice of God is that characteristic by which He imposes righteous laws and impartially executes them, and by which He righteously distributes rewards and punishments

These two aspects are frequently spoken of as God's rectoral justice and God's distributive justice. God's distributive justice may be further distinguished into remunerative justice (rewards) and retributive justice (punishments).

In connection with these distinctions we may state that Scripture represents God as a righteous ruler and a just judge.

## 7. The goodness of God

### a. The meaning of goodness

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, p. 427, states:

Goodness, in the Scriptural sense of the term, includes benevolence, love, mercy, and grace. By benevolence is meant the disposition to promote happiness; all sensitive creatures are its objects. Love includes complacency, desire, and delight, and has rational beings for its objects. Mercy is kindness exercised towards the miserable, and includes pity, compassion, forbearance, and gentleness, which the Scriptures so abundantly ascribe to God. Grace is Jove exercised towards the unworthy.

William G. T. Shedd, in his *Dogmatic Theology* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d. ), Volume One, pp. 384-390, states:

The Goodness of God is the Divine essence viewed as energizing benevolently, and kindly, towards the creature. It is an eminent, or transitive attribute, issuing forth from the Divine nature, and aiming to promote the welfare and happiness of the universe. It is not that attribute by which God is good; but by which he does good. As good in himself, God is holy; as showing goodness to others, he is good or kind...

Goodness is a special attribute with varieties under it. 1. The first of these is Benevolence. This is the affection which the Creator feels towards the sentient and conscious creature, as such. Benevolence cannot be shown to insentient existence; to the rocks and mountains. It grows out of the fact that the creature is his workmanship. God is interested in everything which he has made. He cannot hate any of his own handiwork....

2. Mercy is a second variety of the Divine Goodness. It is the benevolent compassion of God towards man as a sinner. This attribute, though logically implied in the idea of God as a being possessed of all conceivable perfections, is free and sovereign in its exercise....

Grace is an aspect of mercy. It differs from mercy, in that it has reference to sinful man as guilty, while mercy has respect to sinful man as miserable. The one refers to the culpability of sin, and the other to its wretchedness. The two terms, however, in common use are interchangeable. Grace, like mercy, is a variety of the Divine goodness.

Both mercy and grace are exercised in a general manner, towards those who are not the objects of their special manifestation. All blessings bestowed upon the natural man are mercy, in so far as they succor his distress, and grace, so far as they are bestowed upon the undeserving. Matt. 5:45, "He maketh his sun to rise upon the evil."

Psa. 145:9, "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." Ps. 145:15, 16, "The eyes of all wait upon thee."

Augustus Hopkins Strong, in his *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), Volume I, pp. 236-266, 289, says:

By love we mean that attribute of the divine nature in virtue of which God is eternally moved to self-communication.

A. Negatively:

(a) The immanent love of God is not to be confounded with mercy and goodness toward creatures. These are its manifestations, and are to be denominated transitive love.

(b) Love is not the all-inclusive ethical attribute of God. It does not include truth, nor does it include holiness.

(c) Nor is God's love a mere regard for being in general, irrespective of its moral quality.

(d) God's love is not a merely emotional affection, proceeding from sense or impulse, nor is it prompted by utilitarian considerations.

B. Positively:

(a) The immanent love of God is a rational and voluntary affection, grounded in perfect reason and deliberate choice.

(b) Since God's love is rational, it involves a subordination of the emotional element to a higher law than itself, namely, that of truth and holiness.

(c) The immanent love of God therefore requires and finds a perfect standard in his own holiness, and a personal object in the image of his own infinite perfections. It is to be understood only in light of the doctrine of the Trinity.

(d) The immanent love of God constitutes a ground of the divine blessedness. Since there is an infinite and perfect object of love, as well as of knowledge and will, in God's own nature, the existence of the universe is not necessary to his serenity and joy.

(e) The love of God involves also the possibility of divine suffering, and the suffering on account of sin which holiness necessitates on the part of God is itself the atonement.

By mercy and goodness we mean the transitive love of God in its two-fold relation to the disobedient and to the obedient portions of his creatures.

(a) Mercy is that eternal principle of God's nature which leads him to seek the temporal good and eternal salvation of those who have opposed themselves to his will, even at the cost of infinite self-sacrifice.

(b) Goodness is the eternal principles of God's nature which leads him to communicate of his own life and blessedness to those who are like him in moral character. Goodness, therefore, is nearly identical with the love of complacency; mercy, with the love of benevolence.

The following is proposed as a definition of goodness:

The goodness of God is that characteristic by which, for the benefit and well-being of His creatures, He manifests His delight in those reflections of the perfections of His nature which are found in them

Goodness includes benevolence, love, mercy, grace, and lovingkindness.

Benevolence is God's concern for the welfare of all conscious beings, expressed in the outpouring of benefits on them

Love is a settled purpose of desire and will to seek the well-being of the one loved. Agape-love is love that involves some form of sacrifice on the part of the lover

Mercy is kindness toward the miserable. It includes pity, compassion, longsuffering, and gentleness

Grace is unmerited favor toward unworthy, guilty sinners. It is "everything for nothing to those who deserve the exact opposite." It is God's favor to those who deserve wrath and condemnation. It takes two basic forms: common grace and special grace. It may also be distinguished in various modes, such as preparatory (or prevenient) grace, saving, grace, enabling grace, overcoming grace, dying grace, etc.

Lovingkindness is God's covenant favor toward His people



Stephen Charnock, in *The Existence and Attributes of God* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1958), pp. 538-543, writes:

Pure and perfect goodness is only the royal prerogative of God; goodness is a choice perfection of the divine nature.

This is the true and genuine character of God. He is good, he is goodness, good in himself, good in his essence, good in the highest degree, possessing whatsoever is comely, excellent, desirable; the highest good, because the first good; whatsoever is perfect goodness is God, whatsoever is truly goodness in any creature is a resemblance of God. All the names of God are comprehended in this one of good. All gifts, all variety of goodness, are contained in him as one common good. He is the efficient cause of all good by an overflowing goodness of his nature. He refers all things to himself as the end for the representation of his own goodness. "Truly God is good," Ps. 73:1. Certainly, it is an undoubted truth; it is written in his works of nature, and his acts of grace: Exod. 34:6, "He is abundant in goodness."...

1. We mean by this, the goodness of his essence, or the perfection of his nature. God is thus good, because his nature is infinitely perfect, he hath all things requisite to the completing of a most perfect and sovereign being. All good meets in his essence, as all water meets in the ocean. Under this notion all the attributes of God, which are requisite to so illustrious a being, are comprehended. All things that are have a goodness of being in them, derive to them by the power of God as they are creatures....

2. Nor is it the same with the blessedness of God, but something flowing from his blessedness. Were he not first infinitely blessed and full in himself, he could not be infinitely good and diffusive to us; had he not an infinite abundance in his own nature, he could not be overflowing to his creatures..

3. Nor is it the same with the holiness of God. The holiness of God is the rectitude of his nature, whereby he is pure, and without spot in himself. The goodness of God is the efflux of his will, whereby he is beneficial to his creatures. The holiness of God is manifest in his rational creatures, but the goodness of God extends to all the works of his hands. His holiness beams most of all in his Jaw, his goodness reacheth to everything that had being from him....

4. Nor is this goodness of God the same with the mercy of God. Goodness extends to more objects than mercy, goodness stretcheth itself out to all the works of his hands; mercy extends only to a miserable object, for it is joined with a sentiment of pity, occasioned by the calamity of another. The mercy of God is exercised about those that merit punishment, the goodness of God is exercised upon objects that have not merited anything contrary to the acts of his bounty. Creation is an act of goodness, not of mercy: providence in governing

some part of the world, is an act of goodness, not of mercy...

5. By goodness is meant the bounty of God. This is the notion of goodness in the world; when we say a good man we mean either a holy man in his life, or a charitable and liberal man in the management of his goods.... The goodness of God is his inclination to deal well and bountifully with his creatures. It is that whereby he wills there should be something besides himself for his own glory. God is good in himself, and to himself, i.e. highly amiable to himself; and therefore some define it a perfection to God, whereby he loves himself and his own excellency; but as it stands in relation to his creatures, it is that perfection of God, whereby he delights in his works, and is beneficial to them. God is the highest goodness, because he doth not act for his own profit, but for his creatures' welfare, and the manifestation of his own goodness. He sends out his beams, without receiving any addition to himself, or substantial advantage from his creatures. It is from this perfection that he loves whatsoever is good, and that is, whatsoever he hath made, for "every creature of God is good." 1 Tim. 4:4....

6. The goodness of God comprehends all of his attributes. All the acts of God are nothing else but the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names, according to the objects it is exercised about.... When Moses longed to see his glory, God tells him he would give him a prospect of his goodness: Exod. 33:19, "I will make all my goodness to pass before thee." His goodness is his glory and Godhead, as much as is delightfully visible to his creatures, and whereby he doth benefit man. "I will cause my goodness." or comeliness, as Calvin renders it, "to pass before thee:" What is this but the train of all his lovely perfections springing from his goodness? The whole catalogue of mercy, grace, long-suffering, abundance of truth, Exod. 34:6, is summed up in this one word. All are streams from this one fountain; he could be none of this were he not first good. When it confers happiness without merit, it is grace; when it bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy; when he bears with provoking rebels, it is long-suffering, when he performs his promise, it is truth; when it meets with a person to whom it is not obliged, it is grace; when he meets with a person in the world, to which he hath obliged himself by promise, it is truth; when it commiserates a distressed person, it is pity; when it supplies an indigent person, it is bounty; when it succours an innocent person, it is righteousness; and when it pardons a penitent person, it is mercy -- all summed up in this one name of goodness.... This attribute, saith one, is so full of God, that it doth deify all the rest, and verify the adorableness of him. His wisdom might contrive against us, his power bear too hard upon us; one might be too hard for an ignorant, and the other too mighty for an impotent creature; his holiness would scare an impure and guilty creature, but his goodness conducts them all for us, and makes them all amiable to us. Whatever comeliness they have in the eye of a creature,

whatever comfort they afford to the heart of a creature, we are obliged for all to his goodness. This puts all the rest upon a delightful exercise, this makes his wisdom design for us, and this makes his power to act for us. This veils his holiness from affrighting us, and this spirits his mercy to relieve us. All his acts toward man are but the workmanship of this. What moved him at first to create the world out of nothing, and erect so noble a creature as man, endowed with such excellent gifts? Was it not his goodness? What made him separate his Son to be a sacrifice for us, after we had endeavoured to raze out the first marks of his favour? Was it not a strong bubbling of goodness? What moves him to reduce a fallen creature to the due sense of his duty, and at last bring him into an eternal felicity? Is it not only his goodness? This is the captain attribute that leads the rest to act; this attends them, and spirits them all in his ways of acting. This is the complement and perfection of all his works; had it not been seen in creation, nothing of his compassions had been seen in redemption.

8. The truth of God

Augustus Hopkins Strong, in his *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), Volume I, pp. 260-262, says:

By truth we mean that attribute of the divine nature in virtue of which God's being and God's knowledge eternally conform to each other.

A. Negatively:

(a) The immanent truth of God is not to be confounded with that veracity and faithfulness which partially manifest it to creatures. These are transitive truth, and they presuppose the absolute and immanent attribute.

(b) Truth in God is not a merely active attribute of the divine nature. God is truth, not only in the sense that he is the being who truly knows, but also in the sense that he is the truth that is known. The passive precedes the active; truth of being precedes truth of knowing.

B. Positively:

(a) All truth among men, whether mathematical, logical, moral, or religious, is to be regarded as having its foundation in this immanent truth of the divine nature and as disclosing facts in the being of God.

(b) This attribute therefore constitutes the principle and guarantee of all revelation, while it shows the possibility of an eternal divine self-contemplation apart from and before all creation. It is to be understood only in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology* (Washington: Scribner, 1871), Volume One, pp, 436-437, states:

Truth is a word of frequent occurrence and of wide signification in the Bible. The primary meaning of the Greek word... is openness; what is not concealed. But in the Hebrew, and therefore in the Bible, the primary idea of truth is, that which sustains, which does not fail, or disappoint our expectations. The truth, therefore, is, (1) That which is real, as opposed to that which is fictitious or imaginary. Jehovah is the true God, because He is really God, while the gods of the heathen are vanity and nothing, mere imaginary beings, having neither existence nor attributes. (2) The true is that which completely comes up to its idea, or to what it purports to be. A true man is a man in whom the idea of manhood is fully realized. The true God is He in whom is found all that Godhead imports. (3) The true is that in which the reality exactly corresponds to the manifestation. God is true, because He really is what He declares Himself to be; because He is what He commands us to believe Him to be; and because all his declarations correspond to what really is. (4) The true is that which can be depended upon, which does not fail, or change, or disappoint. In this sense also God is true as He is immutable and faithful. His promise cannot fail; his word never disappoints. His word abideth forever. When our Lord says, "Thy word is truth," He says that all that God has revealed may be confided in as exactly corresponding to what really is, or is to be. His word can never fail, though heaven and earth pass away.

The truth of God, therefore, is the foundation of all religion. It is the ground of our assurance, that what He has revealed of Himself and of his will, in his works and in the Scriptures, may be relied upon. He certainly is, and wills, and will do, whatever He has thus made known. It is no less the foundation of all knowledge. That our senses do not deceive us; that consciousness is trustworthy in what it teaches; that anything is what it appears to us to be; that our existence is not a delusive dream, has no other foundation than the truth of God. In this sense, all knowledge is founded on faith, i.e., the belief that God is true.

Milliard J. Erickson, in his *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 289-291), says:

### Integrity

The cluster of attributes which we are here classifying as integrity relates to the matter of truth. There are three dimensions of truthfulness: (1) genuineness-being true; (2) veracity-telling the truth; and (3) faithfulness-proving true....

#### 1. Genuineness

God is real. He is what he appears to be.

#### 2. Veracity

God represents things as they really are.

### 3. Faithfulness

His faithfulness means that he proves true. God keeps all his promises.

Truth is that characteristic of God by which He is real, says what is real, and can be depended on. He is the truth, i.e., He is genuinely and eternally the one and only God and the ultimate standard of all truth; He tells the truth, i.e., whatever He says corresponds to things as they really are; and He is dependable in what He is and says, i.e., His nature and His promises can be counted on

### III. The Trinity of God

#### A. Historical Statements of the Doctrine

##### 1. The Apostles' Creed (in three stages of its development)

Stage #1 -- A. D. 150 (attested by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian)

I believe:

- I. In one God the Father Almighty.
- II. (1) And in Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord  
(2) Born of the Virgin Mary  
(3) Under Pontius Pilate crucified and buried  
(4) The third day risen from the dead  
(5) Ascended into heaven  
(6) And seated on the right hand of the Father  
(7) From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
- III. (1) And in the Holy Spirit  
(2) The holy Church  
(3) The forgiveness of sins  
(4) The resurrection of the flesh.

Stage #2 -- A. D. 350 (attested by Rufinus of Aquileia in A. D. 390, Marcellus of Ancyra in A. D. 350, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine, etc.)

I believe:

- I. In One God the Father Almighty
- II. (1) And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord  
(2) Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary  
(3) Under Pontius Pilate crucified and buried  
(4) The third day He rose again from the dead  
(5) He ascended into heaven  
(6) And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty  
(7) From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
- III. (1) And in the Holy Spirit  
(2) The holy Catholic Church  
(3) The forgiveness of sins  
(4) The resurrection of the flesh.

Stage #3 -- A. D. 700 (an official revision, made in Rome and quoted in the Psalter of Pope Gregory III (A. D. 731-741), as well as in many other places)

I believe:

- I. In God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.
- II. (1) And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord

- (2) Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary
- (3) Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and  
buried; He descended into hell
- (4) The third day He rose again from the dead
- (5) He ascended into heaven
- (6) And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father  
Almighty
- (7) From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe:

- III. (1) In the Holy Ghost
- (2) The Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints
- (3) The forgiveness of sins
- (4) The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

## 2. The Nicene Creed of A. D. 325

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things  
seen and unseen;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the  
Father; unique, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God,  
Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one  
substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made, those that  
are in Heaven and those that are on earth, Who for us men and for our  
salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; He  
suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into Heaven, and is  
coming to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

But those who are saying, "There was a time when He was not,"  
and "Before He was begotten He was not." and "He came into being  
out of non-being," or are saying that His essence or substance is  
different, or created, or altered, or changed, the holy, universal, and  
apostolic Church accurses.

## 3. The Constantinopolitan Creed of A. D. 381

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven  
and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,  
begotten of His Father before all worlds, Light of light, very God of very  
God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by  
Whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation  
came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the  
Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under  
Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose  
again according to the Scriptures, and

ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And (we believe) in the Holy Spirit, the lord and Giver-of-Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spake by the prophets...

4. The Chalcedonian Creed of A. D. 451

Following the holy fathers, we teach with one voice that the Son (of God) and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as one and the same (Person), that He is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, very God and very man, of a reasonable soul and (human) body consisting, consubstantial with the Father as touching His Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching His manhood; made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of His Father before the worlds according to His Godhead; but in these last days for us men and for our salvation born (into the world) of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to his manhood. This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son (of God) must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably (united), and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence, not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophets of old time have spoken concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ hath taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers hath delivered to us.

These things, therefore, having been expressed by us with the greatest accuracy and attention, the holy Ecumenical Synod defines that no one shall be suffered to bring forward a different faith, nor to write, nor to put together, nor to excogitate, nor to teach it to others. But such as dare either to put together another faith, or to bring forward or to teach or to deliver a different Creed, to such as wish to be converted to the knowledge of the truth from the Gentiles, or Jews or any heresy whatever, if they be bishops or clerics, let them be deposed, the bishops from the episcopate, and the clerics from the clergy; but if they be monks or laics, let them be anathematized.

5. The Athanasian Creed (fifth-sixth centuries A. D.)

1. Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith (*catholicam fidem*):
2. Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity (*Trinitatem in Unitate*);
4. Neither confounding the Persons (*personas*): nor dividing the substance (*substantiam*).
5. For there is one Person of the Father: another of the Son; and another of the Holy Spirit.



6. But the Godhead (*divinitas*) of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is: such is the Son: and such is the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father uncreated (*increatus*): the Son uncreated: and the Holy Spirit uncreated.
9. The Father unlimited (*immensus*): the Son unlimited: and the Holy Spirit unlimited.
10. The Father eternal: the Son eternal: and the Holy Spirit eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal (*unus aeternus*).
12. As also there are not three uncreated: nor three unlimiteds, but one uncreated: and one unlimited.
13. So likewise the Father is omnipotent (*omnipotens*): the Son omnipotent: and the Holy Spirit omnipotent.
14. And yet they are not three omnipotents: but one omnipotent.
15. So the Father is God (*deus*): the Son is God: and the Holy Spirit is God.
16. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord (*dominus*): the Son Lord: and the Holy Spirit Lord.
18. And yet not three Lords: but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord:
20. So we are forbidden by the Catholic Religion (*catholica religione*) to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords.
21. The Father is made (*factus*) of none: neither created (*creatus*), nor begotten (*genitus*).
22. The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten.
23. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten: but proceeding (*procedans*).
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three Sons: one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.
25. And in this Trinity there is nothing before or after (*nihil prius, aut posterius*): nothing greater or lesser (*nihil majus, aut minus*).
26. But the whole three Persons are coeternal (*coaeternae*) and coequal (*coaequales*).
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.
29. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
30. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man;
31. God, of the substance (*substantia*) of the Father; begotten before the worlds (*ante secula genitus*): and man, of the substance (*substantia*) of his mother, born in the world.
32. Perfect God: and perfect man, of a reasonable soul (*ex anima rationali*) and human flesh (*humana carne*) subsisting (*subsistens*).

33. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead (*divinitatem*): and less than (minor) the Father as touching his manhood.
34. Who although he is God and man; yet he is not two but one Christ.
35. One; not by conversion (*conversione*) of the Godhead into flesh: but by assumption (*assumptione*) of the manhood into God.
36. One altogether; not by confusion (*confusione*) of substance: but by unity (*unitate*) of Person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and man is one Christ;
38. Who suffered for our salvation: descended into Hades (*inferos*): rose again the third day from the dead.
39. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
40. From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
41. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;
42. And shall give account for their own works.
43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting: and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.
44. This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.

6. The Belgic Confession (A. D. 1561), Article 8

According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct, according to their incommunicable properties; namely, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things, visible and invisible; the Son is the Word, Wisdom, and Image of the Father; the Holy Ghost is the eternal Power and Might, proceeding from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the Holy Scriptures teach us that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost have each his personality, distinguished by their properties; but in such wise that three persons are but one only God. Hence, then, it is evident that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and likewise the Holy Ghost is neither the Father nor the Son. Nevertheless these persons thus distinguished are not divided nor intermixed; for the Father hath not assumed the flesh, nor hath the Holy Ghost, but the Son only. The Father hath never been without His Son, or without his Holy Ghost. For they are all three co-eternal and co-essential. There is neither first nor last; for they are all three one, in truth, in power, in goodness, and in mercy.

7. The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (A. D. 1833), Article 2

We believe that there is one, and only one, living and true God, an infinite, intelligent Spirit, whose name is Jehovah, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth; inexpressibly glorious in

holiness, and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love; that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct and harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.

8. John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.5 and 1.13.20

Say that in the one essence of God there is a trinity of persons; you will say in one word what Scripture states, and cut short empty talkativeness.

When we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood a single, simple essence, in which we comprehend three persons, or *hypostates*.

9. Heinrich Schmid's *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*

The doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, is that in which a peculiar and incomprehensible application of the term three to the divine persons is taught, but in such a manner that not anything composed of three, but three persons of one essence are postulated. God is triune, therefore, because, in essence one, He has three modes of subsistence.

10. William G. T. Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*

Theology... asserts that God is one in respect to essence, and is three in respect to personal distinctions.

B. Biblical Teaching Concerning the Doctrine

1. The Old Testament data summarized

Benjamin B. Warfield summarizes the data nicely in his article on the Trinity in *Biblical and Theological Studies*. He writes:

The older writers discovered intimations of the Trinity in such phenomena as the plural form of the Divine name *Elohim*, the occasional employment with reference to God of plural pronouns ("Let us make man in our image," Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8), or of plural verbs (Gen. 20:13; 35:7), certain repetitions of the name of God which seem to distinguish between God and God (Ps. 45:6, 7; 110:1; Hos. 1:7), threefold liturgical formulas (Num. 6:24, 26; Isa. 6:3), a certain tendency to hypostatize the conception of Wisdom (Prov. 8), and especially the remarkable phenomena connected with the appearances of the Angel of Jehovah (Gen. 16:2-13; 22:11, 16; 31:11, 13; 48:15, 16; Exod. 3:2, 4, 5; Judges 13:20-22)... Passages like Ps. 33:6; Isa. 61:1; 63:9-12; Hag. 2:5, 6, in which

God and His Word and His Spirit are brought together, co-causes of effects, are adduced. A tendency is pointed out to hypostatize the Word of God on the one hand (e. g., Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6; 107:20; 147:15-18; Isa. 55:11); and, especially in Ezek. and the later Prophets, the Spirit of God, on the other (e. g., Gen. 1:2; Isa. 48:16; 63:10 Ezek. 2:2; 8:3; Zech. 7:12). Suggestions -- in Isa. for instance (7:4; 9:6) -- of the Deity of the Messiah are appealed to.

## 2. The New Testament data summarized

Again, Warfield summarizes this data:

The fundamental proof that God is a Trinity is supplied thus by the fundamental revelation of the Trinity in fact: that is to say, in the incarnation of God the Son and the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit. In a word, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are the fundamental proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is as much as to say that all the evidence of whatever kind, and from whatever source derived, that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh, and that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, is just so much evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity; and that when we go to the New Testament for evidence of the Trinity we are to seek it, not merely in the scattered allusions to the Trinity as such, numerous and instructive as they may be, but primarily in the whole mass of evidence which the New Testament provides of the Deity of Christ and the Divine personality of the Holy Spirit.

A most excellent work in this subject area is that of Edward Henry Bickersteth, entitled *The Trinity* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957). The book is subtitled *Scripture Testimony to the One Eternal Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*; and it is filled with Scripture and solid exposition. This work was formerly published under the title *The Rock of Ages*; and is well worth having in a theological library.

## 3. Particular New Testament Scriptures relevant to the subject

### a. God sends His Son into the world

John 3:16 -- "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Galatians 4:4 -- "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law."

Hebrews 1:6 -- "And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship him.'"

I John 4:9 -- "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him."

b. The Father and the Son send the Spirit

John 14:26 -- "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

John 15:26 -- "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me."

John 16:7 -- "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."

Galatians 4:6 -- "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father!'"

c. The Father addresses the Son

Mark 1:10-11 -- "And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.'"

d. The Son communes with the Father

Matthew 11:25-26 -- "At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.'"

Matthew 26:39 -- "And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'"

John 11:41-42 -- "And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.'"

John 12:27-28 -- "Now my soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.' There came therefore a voice out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'"

e. The Holy Spirit prays to the Father

Romans 8:26 -- "And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the

Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;"

f. The three Persons are mentioned together in certain Scriptures

Matthew 3:16-17 -- And after being baptized, Jesus went immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'"

Matthew 28:19 -- "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

I Corinthians 12:4-6 -- "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons."

II Corinthians 13:14 -- "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all."

I Peter 1:1-2 -- "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure."

These Scriptures stress mainly the distinctions between the Persons of the Godhead. Further Scripture evidence for the Trinity may be found in those references which reveal the deity of Christ and the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit.

C. Development of the Doctrine

1. A summary of the biblical teaching

The Bible does not use the word "trinity", but it does teach each of the distinct truths out of which the theological doctrine of the Trinity has been constructed. The Bible simply tells us that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4); and that there are three distinct Persons who are God. The Father is called God (Jude 1 -- "to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father"); the Son is called God (Titus 2:13 -- "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."); and the Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3-4 -- "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.'").

Negatively, the doctrine does not teach that God is one Person. God is three Persons.

The doctrine does not teach that God is three Gods. God is one God.

The doctrine does not teach that there are three divine essences. There is only one essence that is divine.

Positively, the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there is one Being that is divine, but that three Persons participate in that one Being.

The doctrine teaches that there is only one God, but that there are three Persons who are that one God.

The doctrine teaches that there is one essence (combination of characteristics) that is fully divine, but that there are three divine Persons who fully share that essence.

Thus God is a "tri-unity", a "three-in-one," a trinity, because God is at the same time one and three (but in different senses). God is one in divine essence, and three in divine Persons.

The Trinity, therefore, is the doctrine that there are three Persons who are characterized, through and through, by a unique combination of divine attributes, qualities, and perfections, which combination is the same for all three.

However, although the Persons of the Trinity are equal in essence, they are subordinate in their working. This is the theological distinction between essential equality and economic subordination.

The three Persons of the Godhead are equal in essence (they all have the same essential qualities or attributes), but they are unequal in their working. They accomplish different functions in the outworking of God's Plan; and are involved in superordinate/ subordinate working relationships even while they are equal in essence.

It would appear that all three Persons are active in the divine works of creation, providence, redemption, and judgment, but that they do different things in carrying out these works. To take one of these divine works as an example, the Father initiates redemption by sending His Son into the world, the Son accomplishes redemption by becoming incarnate and by making an atonement for our sins, and the Spirit applies redemption by uniting us to Christ and to the benefits of His atoning work. While the three Persons of the Trinity are implementing the Plan of the Trinity, they are involved in unequal working relationships. Scripture teaches, for example, that the Father sends the Son. The Son does not send the Father. Here is a definite order in working relationships. And Scripture teaches that the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not send the Father or the Son. Again there is an order in their working.

However, even as we distinguish the plurality of Persons and

the subordination of their working, we must stress the unity of the Godhead. God is One.

## 2. The unity and plurality of the Trinity

Deuteronomy 6:4 exhorts and commands: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" And James 2:19 says, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."

Isaiah 44:6 says, "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel  
And His Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:  
'I am the first and the last,  
And there is no God besides Me.'"

Both the Scriptures that speak of God's unity and God's uniqueness send the message that God is one, and that there is only one true and living God. But how are we to understand this scriptural stress? Does it mean that God is one in the sense of a numerical oneness -- one individual or one Person?

Both Dynamic Monarchianism and Modalistic Monarchianism understood God's unity in this way. But in doing so Dynamic Monarchianism denied the personal nature of the Logos, and asserted that Jesus were merely a man. And Modalistic Monarchianism or Sabellianism asserted that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were simply one divine Person who reveals Himself in different modes according to circumstance.

On the other hand, could God's oneness be understood in the sense of a dynamic unity which allows for a plurality of Persons?

It is fascinating to note that the word translated "one" in Deuteronomy 6: 4 (ECHAD) is also used in Genesis 2:24, where we read: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one (ECHAD) flesh." Here in Genesis 2 ECHAD is used of two persons who become one in a dynamic unity even while they remain two persons. In the Trinity, the unity of God is located in the dynamic unity of three divine Persons who share one divine essence and life. And yet it is not a unity that is formed by three Persons who become one; it is an eternal unity of a single, simple, and indivisible essence. Without this emphasis, the doctrine of the Trinity can easily drift into Tri-theism, in which the three Persons are viewed as three Gods.

The Unitarians and Jehovah's Witnesses both believe that the doctrine of the Trinity does reduce to Tri-theism, and that this can be shown by simple reason. "After all", they claim, "if the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, doesn't that add up to three Gods?"

Of course, the only meaningful response to this criticism is to emphasize the clear teaching of Scripture. And Scripture clearly



teaches that God is One, and teaches with equal clarity and force that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are equally, distinctly, and contemporaneously God.

The oneness and uniqueness of God has been mentioned. And the distinctness of the Persons has been shown in the cases of interaction between them. We cannot dismiss either aspect of this truth. And we cannot smooth out the problem by viewing interaction between the Persons as mere appearance contrary to reality.

Thus we are shut up to the scriptural assertions and representations, and must formulate the doctrine so as to fit the biblical data, rather than ignore or distort the biblical data to favor a preferred theological model.

### 3. The mystery of the Trinity

Millard Erickson states:

The Trinity is incomprehensible. We cannot fully understand the mystery of the Trinity. When someday we see God, we shall see him as he is, and understand him better than we do now. Yet even then we will not totally comprehend him. Because he is the unlimited God and we are limited in our capacity to know and understand, he will always exceed our knowledge and understanding. We will always be human beings, even though perfected human beings. We will never become God. Those aspects of God which we will never fully comprehend should be regarded as mysteries that go beyond our reason rather than as paradoxes which conflict with reason.

William G. T. Shedd says:

The great mystery of the Trinity is, that one and the very same substance, can subsist as an individual whole in three persons simultaneously. That a substance can be divided up, and distributed, so as to constitute a million or a billion of individuals, as in the instance of the human nature or species, is comparatively easy to comprehend. But that a substance without any division, or distribution, can at the same instant constitute three distinct persons, baffles the human understanding. In the sphere of matter, this would not only be incomprehensible, but absurd. A pint of water could not possibly be contained in three different pint cups at one and the same instant. But spirit is not subject to the conditions of matter; as the whole human soul may all of it be in every part, and every point of the body, at one and the same instant, so the Divine essence may all of it be in each of the three Divine persons simultaneously.

Augustus Hopkins Strong writes:

1. The mode of this triune existence is inscrutable.

It is inscrutable because there are no analogies to it in our finite experience. For this reason all attempts are vain adequately to represent it:

(a) From inanimate things- as the fountain, the stream, and the rivulet trickling from it (Athanasius); the cloud, the rain, and the rising mist (Boardman); color, shape, and size (F. W. Robertson); the actinic, luminiferous, and calorific principles in the ray of light (Solar Hieroglyphics, 34).

(b) From the constitution or processes of our own minds -- as the psychological unity of intellect, affect, and will (substantially held by Augustine); the logical unity of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Hegel); the metaphysical unity of subject, object, and subject-object (Melancton, Olshausen, Shedd).

No one of these furnishes any proper analogue of the Trinity, since in no one of them is there found the essential element of tri-personality. Such illustrations may sometimes be used to disarm objection, but they furnish no positive explanation of the mystery of the Trinity, and, unless carefully guarded, may lead to grievous error.

2. The Doctrine of the Trinity is not self-contradictory

This would be, only if it declared God to be three in the same numerical sense in which he is said to be one. This we do not assert. We assert simply that the same God who is one with respect to his essence is three with respect to the internal distinctions of that essence, or with respect to the modes of his being....

3. The doctrine of the Trinity has important relations to other doctrines.

A. It is essential to any proper theism.

B. It is essential to any proper revelation.

C. It is essential to any proper redemption.

D. It is essential to any proper model for human life.

Augustine, in the concluding chapter of his great work, *De Trinitate*, writes:

O Lord our God, we believe in Thee, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the Truth would not say, Go, baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit, unless Thou wast a Trinity. Nor wouldest thou, O Lord God, bid us to be baptized in the name of Him who is not the Lord God. Nor would the divine voice have said, Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God, unless Thou wert so a Trinity as to be one Lord God. And if Thou, O God, wert Thyself the Father, and wert Thyself the Son, Thy Word Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit your gift, we should not read in the book of truth, "God sent His Son;" nor wouldest Thou, O Only-begotten, say of the Holy Spirit, "Whom the Father will send in my name;" and "Whom I will send to you from the Father." Directing my purpose by this rule of faith, so far as I have been able, so far as Thou hast made me to be able, I have sought Thee, and have desired to see with my understanding what I believed; and have argued and labored much. O Lord my God, my one hope, hearken to me, lest through weariness I be unwilling to seek Thee, but that I may always ardently seek Thy face." Do Thou give strength to seek, who hast made me find Thee, and hast given the hope of finding Thee more and more. My strength and infirmity are in Thy sight: preserve the one, and heal the other. My knowledge and my ignorance are in Thy sight; where Thou hast opened to me, receive me as I enter; where Thou hast closed, open to me as I knock. May I remember Thee, understand Thee, love Thee. Increase these things in me, until Thou renewest me wholly. I know it is written, "In the multitude of speech, thou shalt not escape sin." But O that I might speak only in preaching Thy word, and in praising Thee!... O Lord the one God, God the Trinity, whatever I have said in these books that is of Thine, may they acknowledge who are Thine; if anything of my own, may it be pardoned both by Thee and by those who are Thine. Amen.

4. Important truths to be stressed when presenting the doctrine of the Trinity

a. The unity of being and plurality of Persons of the Trinity are equally ultimate. These distinctions are inherent, basic, and eternal.

The triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) is one personal Being. The three members of the Trinity are three interacting Persons with distinct existence. Scripture does not permit this doctrine to be understood in terms of Modalism, in which God is one Being and one Person who manifests Himself in differing forms or modes at various times, or in terms of Tri-theism, in which God is three Persons and three Beings. The correct representation is that God is one Being and three Persons.

b. The three Persons of the Trinity interpenetrate one another, not only in terms of essence (defined as the sum of all characteristics or attributes of God's nature), but also in terms of thinking, feeling, willing, and acting.

Each of the three Persons thinks, feels, wills, and acts in harmony or consonance with each of the others, even when one of the Persons is the primary agent in carrying out some specific aspect of the Plan of God. Of course, when we introduce the incarnation of the Son, we must make some qualifications in terms of mutual interpenetration, once the Son became incarnate. For example, the Father and the Spirit did not think, feel, or will all of the things the incarnate Son thought, felt, or willed, even though they knew all of His thoughts, empathized with all of His feelings, and acquiesced in all of His decisions. In addition, the Father and the Spirit did not do all of the things the incarnate Son did. The incarnate Son alone grew in wisdom and understanding, the incarnate Son alone completely subordinated Himself to the Father's will and the Spirit's leading, the incarnate Son alone suffered weariness and hunger and thirst and suffering, the incarnate Son alone prayed, "If it is your will, Father, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but yours be done." the incarnate Son alone experienced the agonies and cruel death of the cross, and the incarnate Son alone was resurrected to newness of life.

c. The essential equality and economic subordination of the Persons of the Trinity must be kept distinct. The three Persons are eternally equal in essence (defined as the sum total of characteristics or attributes), but assume superordinate/subordinate relationships in the outworking of God's Plan.

The fact that different Persons of the godhead carry out different functions in the implementation of God's purpose implies nothing about essential subordination, but only expresses the subordinate relationships the three Persons have assumed in order to carry out the design of the triune God.

### SUMMARY

- (1) The three Persons of the Trinity share a oneness of being while preserving distinctness of personality (thus oneness yet individuality)
- (2) The three Persons of the Trinity share a unity of essence and a consonance of activity, while preserving distinctness of individual action (thus unity and harmony, yet uniqueness)
- (3) The three Persons of the Trinity share an equality of essence, while assuming subordinate relationships and carrying out differing functions in implementing the Plan of the Triune God (thus equality, yet inequality and difference)

## VIEWS OF THE GODHEAD

	ONE BEING	TWO BEINGS	THREE BEINGS
ONE PERSON	<p>Monarchians</p> <p>Unitarians</p> <p>Jehovah's Witnesses</p> <p>Modernists</p> <p>Jesus Only</p>		
TWO PERSONS	<p>Some Evangelical Christians who in theory hold that Father and Son and Spirit are distinct Persons (yet one Being), but in practice treat the Spirit as non-personal</p>	<p>Some Mediating Christians who hold that the Father and Son are distinct Persons and Beings, but view the Spirit as non-personal (in theory and in practice)</p>	
THREE PERSONS	<p>Classic Evangelists</p>		<p>Tri-theists</p>

## ERRATA

p. 14 is an ➔ as an

43 mid "objection" ⇒ "objective"

110 Greek Septuagint of Psalm 18 (19) from

<http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek->

[texts/septuagint/chapter.asp?book=24&page=18](http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/septuagint/chapter.asp?book=24&page=18)

115 Missing 2 greek phrased from the UBS greek NT text ·Rom. 10:17

116 middle "produced" ⇒ "proceed"

121 middle "different" ⇒ "difficult"

46 Add personal pronoun endings to Hebrew (2 places)

223 e. 1<sup>st</sup> § being ➔ begin