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BELIEVERS' CHURCH
THEOLOGY

Revised Edition

*The Systematic Theology Lecture Notes
of*

Stanley A. Nelson

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San Rafael, California 94903

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ISBN 0-9729320-0-3

PRELIMINARIES

Getting to Know One Another

Because faith is very personal, I feel it is essential for us to share pilgrimages. That is a reason for theology—that is, to share correctly one’s faith with another. John Calvin once wrote that one can know theology by studying God or studying humanity.¹ He was saying that knowing and understanding ourselves is essential for us to come to know and understand God. And I think most often we come to know God through the grids of our own personality and experience. So sharing who we are is a beginning step in doing theology.

Since I will be asking you to share information about yourself during our time together, it is only fair that I share about myself. Again, this is part of the process of doing theology correctly. It will be essential for you to have some understanding of my own pilgrimage.

My childhood home was in South central Kansas. I was born on a farm about six miles from Turon, a rural town of about 400 people and several large grain elevators. My father and mother were wheat farmers, and I was born in the midst of the depression. My father passed away when I was eight years old; he died in March, and in August of the same year I made a profession of faith in our little church in Turon. They had to move the pulpit and lift a trap door to gain access to the baptism tank below the platform. There were some curtains between the tank and the congregation, and these were closed and reopened by the deacons as we climbed into the tank, and again after the baptism had been concluded. I am pleased to tell you that the water was heated even back then!

Years after my conversion I made a discovery. In my prayers, I found that I had been praying to God as Father; I rarely prayed to Jesus. Reflecting on this, I began to understand that, in missing my father, I had related to God as Father. I thought of God as “a good daddy.” This way of understanding God was a shaping influence on my faith.

I made a rededication of my life as a senior in High School. My mother had remarried and we had moved several times. I had experienced a general drifting away from my early commitments, and for a long time I considered this rededication to God as my true conversion experience. I would say things like this about my baptism, “I didn’t really know what I was doing then.” But, over the years, I couldn’t stay satisfied with that interpretation—God had been *real* to me as an eight year old. So I reached back and realized that I may not have understood fully as a child, but I was nevertheless responding to the initiative of God in my life. I now look at my rededication as an adult experience with God. So I have linked those two experiences—baptism and rededication—together.

As I have studied and learned, I have found that this is often the experience of those with early conversion experiences. There follows a rededication that is sensed as more real than the initial relating to God, and there is a tendency to discount what God had done earlier in life. Both of our children, Lisa and Jim, had also made early professions, and for a while we reviewed their decision on the anniversaries of their baptism. We did that to help them keep their religious experiences integrated.

I have a BA in psychology. I understand now that I chose this degree out of a desire to understand how things worked within myself—I wanted to know why I respond to things the way I do. I earned my M. Div. and Ph. D. degrees with majors in systematic theology and historical theology, studying under W. Boyd Hunt and James Leo Garrett. Both of these men have written systematic theologies that have been recently published.

Before entering the Ph. D. program, I married Norma Baird of Denver, a music student. Both of us had parents living in Colorado at the time, and we had a beautiful Christmas wedding with poinsettias lining

¹ Calvin, 37.

the later of the church. Poinsettias have continued to be a symbol of our love in these forty-plus years of marriage.

Both while in school and afterward I pastored churches, serving in Texas, Kansas, and North Carolina. I pastored for more than fifteen years in all, not including four years pastoring in California while teaching at Golden Gate.

When I finished the Ph. D. program, Norma and I volunteered for foreign mission service. We were serving the University Baptist Church in Wichita at the time. Norma had desired overseas service long before I was willing to consider it, but, in the process, it was discovered that I had a diabetic problem. For that and some other reasons, we were turned down for foreign mission service at that time.

After five years serving the Wichita church, we accepted an invitation to pastor the Ridge Road Church in Raleigh, N. C., where we remained about three and a half years. While pastoring both of these churches, I assisted the missionary Journeyman program as a teacher of theology. This program had started in 1965 and I taught that first year and was part of the first commissioning service that sent Journeyman students to their overseas assignments. Each year I was invited to return in that capacity, and I treasured that teaching opportunity that gave me a chance to be involved in those young people's lives.

In 1969 the personnel department of the Foreign Mission Board was reorganized and I was asked to direct the Missionary Journeyman Program and also to work in the personnel selection department. I served in that capacity until 1981, when Norma and I again volunteered for overseas service. My diabetes seemed to be well controlled, Norma had received her third masters degree in social work, and I knew of an opportunity in Ogbomoso, Nigeria, where she would be able to teach music and social work while I was teaching theology. We were appointed in November of that year and left for Nigeria the following January in the midst of a snowstorm that covered the eastern United States. When we arrived in Nigeria, it was 100°!

While serving the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, I was contacted by Morgan Patterson, then the academic dean of Golden Gate. He wanted us to return in the fall of 1983 to teach theology because Dr. Ed Humpherys was planning to retire at that time. Norma and I felt that it was too soon to leave Nigeria, so we negotiated to come to Golden Gate in January, 1984. We were therefore associated with the Baptist Foreign Mission Board for a total of 15 years. I have been serving here at Golden Gate for more than twelve years.

Norma continues to be active in social work, traveling from San Francisco to San Jose each day to work with developmentally disabled children. She is the Assistant Administrator of the Community Service Division of the San Andreas Regional Center. Both of our two children are married. Lisa our older child is has a degree in history from the University of San Francisco and Jim, our younger child, graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Chico State. Lisa is living and working in San Francisco and Jim is married and living in Buffalo New York. Jim's wife Vesela has completed her residency for a Ph.D in art appreciation at Sycacuse University.

My 1988 half-sabbatical at Oxford made it necessary to teach the two semesters of systematic theology in a single semester, and I liked the immersion that this gave both me and my students so much that I have repeated the one-semester approach whenever the seminary has been able to accommodate it. But another aspect to my teaching of theology that turned out to be even more important came about when Dr. Robert Cate become the Dean. The sabbatical had given me an opportunity to reflect on approaches to teaching theology and, in a presentation to the faculty upon my return, I spoke about the way I felt the subject might best be taught. Dr. Cate invited me out to eat the next day (we went to the Sizzler and had the salad bar—the school always had a lavish travel and entertainment budget!). The essence of Dean Cate's words were, "Just do it." He told me about his wanting to change the way he taught Old Testament, and he spoke about his disappointment that he had never had a chance to try it. He suggested that I restructure my course along the lines that I had suggested to the faculty by the fall of 1989, and that was the first class that followed the method that we will use this year. It is a "narrative approach," built around four significant shaping periods affecting theology.

The Way We Will Do Theology

Because I want to know how things tick, I have worked hard to understand some things in my life and some of the things that have happened in the Baptist convention. I have wondered why my compatriots differed so much from each other. Almost all those in convention leadership roles have had a similar theological education, so why do such great differences exist? I have at least a partial answer to offer: Our theological learning was not anchored in history. Theology instruction has been patterned after philosophy and the way that philosophy is taught.

In philosophy, ideas are related to other ideas. Therefore if one idea changes there is a domino effect on what has been learned. After a graduate leaves seminary he would find that different ideas surfaced while doing pastoral or denominational work, and with the new idea the theological teaching of the seminary would be restructured, reshaped, or ignored. Now this is only a suggestion to explain our great diversity, so please bear with me while I explain.

The “philosophical method” was the way I was taught theology. Ideas were related to other ideas, and those with yet other ideas. We talked of God, then sin, then Christ, then redemption, etc. But look at both testaments! Theology is never presented as a series of interdependent, abstract ideas. It is always associated with historical events, and these events convey and teach theology.

- In the Old Testament, the coming out of Egypt is the foundation for understanding the redeeming work of God. Out of that struggle, insights to the nature of God were realized and those insights become the core understanding of God. So following the Exodus the redeemed could say, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...” (Ex. 34:6). This understanding related to what God had done in the deliverance from Egypt, and it was the believers’ witness to the historical acts of God.
- In the New Testament, the redeeming work of God is embodied in the story of Jesus—his life, death, and resurrection. John’s words, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” (John 3:16) are anchored in the incarnated Christ and what was done on our behalf.

Therefore, the approach that I will be taking this semester will be a return to the “basics.” The approach is called “Narrative theology” because it is based on an underlying narrative in Scripture. Even though not all Scripture is narrative (there are also commands, gossip, curses, explanations, teachings, etc.), there is always an implicit narrative context that provides the conditions for understanding.

There seems to me to be a universal demand and appreciation of narrative. Stories are rooted in the very nature of our being. The very use of language seems to be anchored in stories. At some deep level we sense that the story is the only way to account adequately for ourselves and our world. Words become stories, each word connecting with other words, and the interconnections ring out meanings that have continuities, depicting characters and circumstances in ways that cohere with each other. Stories develop in time and space among people. It is the power of the *story* that is the basis for the narrative approach to theology.²

Since the revealings of God were historical and the understanding of God within Scriptures is anchored in history, why not break the old patterns of teaching theology? Why not change the pattern I taught in Ogbomoso, and even the pattern I taught when I first came to Golden Gate? Why not move away from the philosophical model and follow a model more in keeping with how theology was biblically formed?

So what I will be attempting to do is narrative theology, and there are variations in narrative theology, and this is my own approach. Even though I had no mentor or model to follow when I developed the course, I have appropriated understanding from many places. The overall contemporary influences come from Dr. Jim McClendon, J. Howard Yoder, and Stanley Hauerwas, who have been most influential on my thinking. The first of these is a Baptist, the second a Mennonite, and the third a Methodist. Beside these three, there are a host of others whose contributions I will attempt to acknowledge as we move through the course.

² Peterson, 117ff.

In this narrative approach I have chosen four historical events. I will attempt to show how these events shaped our understanding of certain doctrines. I will begin with *The Anabaptist Story*. In this story there is a clear focus on the doctrine of the church—a doctrine which, for me, is the only correct starting point for doing theology because any other starting point must involve speculation. Then I will attempt to set out *The Baptist Story*. In this story we have our theological roots and I will attempt to deal with the doctrines that have shaped us in their beginnings and how these doctrines may be understood in today's setting. *The Enlightenment Story* will follow; this period brought a confrontation between theology and modern thinking and doctrines most effect by the Enlightenment will be studied. The last historical period will be *The Patristic Story*, where we shall affirm what we have in common with all who are professed believers.

I wish to make a concluding remark as we leave the preliminaries. Sometimes students make the mistake of equating that the accumulation of information and knowledge. Please don't do this. Much information can be accumulated without ever gaining knowledge. Knowledge has to do with how you integrate what you learn into your life and behavior. You can accumulate many facts during this course but miss the purpose of the study of theology. *Knowledge in theology means an integration of what is learned into life*. This is my hope for you as we begin our study together.

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INTRODUCTION

I. Theological Presuppositions

I want to share my understanding of the way to do theology. I probably have some hidden presuppositions that are shaping me, but the list below represents the presuppositions of which I am aware as I come to this study. They are the convictions that shape my theology.

A. Theology Is To Be Done By and For the Church

It is all right to discuss theology in the public arena. Theological study, however, is meant for believers. The world listening to our discussion is like a stranger within our gates. In the biblical world we are to treat strangers kindly, and know that there will be some dialogue that will overlap—but they are not of us.

Historically, one of the reasons seminaries were moved away from a college setting was that the seminary faculty found themselves dialoguing with professors of other disciplines. That exchange was good, but it was also seductive—the seminary professors found themselves answering questions which theology was not primarily given to answer. On a college campus a seminary can find itself majoring in secondary church. Theology is *for* the people of God and *by* the people of God, that is, theology is meant to aid and assist believers seeking to validate their experience and to understand their beliefs and obligations. We are to ask, “What must the church teach if it is really to be the church?” *This question is where theology should begin.*

Since the church is to be the teacher and a doer of theology, a word is needed about how the word “church” should be understood. I offer the following as a working definition, which comes from my understanding of Scripture:

The church is an anticipatory embodiment of God’s initiated reign.

Theology, therefore, is to help equip the church to fulfill God’s intentions in our world. What the church is now is a foreshadowing of what the world will be. The church is to be the location for doing and living out theology. This conviction forms the basis of what is called Believers’ Church Theology.

That the church is to be the location for doing theology implies three cardinal convictions:

1. Since Jesus has been raised, then the end of the world has begun. Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruits of the new age (1 Cor. 15:20, Rom. 1:4, Acts 2:36).
2. The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost empowers the church. The Spirit’s presence provides a foretaste of the fulfillment of this new age. Listen to how Paul states this conviction, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Where Jesus spoke of the presence of the reign of God in his ministry (Matt. 4:17), the early church spoke of the presence of the Spirit. The *language* changed as a result of the experience of Easter, but the *emphasis* is the same. The future of salvation has begun. *By the empowering of the Spirit, the church is to mirror God’s designs for what the world will be.*
3. The locus of the believer’s discipleship is the church. A central task of the church’s ministry is to provide guidance for the faith community in a manner appropriate to this new age. Discipleship is embodied within the church.¹

These convictions are different from the convictions which motivate many theologians in their writing. What I am presenting to you is a *believers’ church* theology. Evangelical or Reform theologies will rarely place the church as the cardinal doctrine from which to do theology.

¹ Le Master, *Discipleship*, 42.

Please don't accept this view too readily, for it is a distinctive. Even some of my fellow faculty members will not agree. But for me, this is a basic conviction, and the conviction for the shaping of my theology.

B. The Work of Theology

The work of theology is to clarify and interpret the work of God both in the church and in the world. John 1:9 ("the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world") was a favorite verse of Augustine, who understood it to mean that God confronts every person, at every moment of every day.² In that constant confrontation, God maintains human life and seeks to penetrate human life.

From Genesis 4:1, where Eve says she had a son with the help of God, to the end of Revelation, where "the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come" (22:17), the task of the believer is to cooperate with the activity of God. In 1 Cor. 3:9, Paul says "we are God's fellow workers,"³ and for me this is the basis for all in the Christian living (cf. Gen. 5:24, "...walked with God"). God is at work in the world, the believer is to sense what God is doing and seek to cooperate with God's activity.

In days gone by while directing the Missionary Journeymen Program, I would say to those about to depart for their overseas assignment, "be a part of what God is doing." Personally, *I* have never introduced Jesus Christ to anyone either here in the States or on foreign soil. However, *Christ* is confronting every person; the believer's task is to clarify the work that God is doing in that confrontation. Being a co-laborer best describes how one is to interpret God's work. Being a co-laborer is an insight which has also helped me understand other aspects of the believer's faith. *Prayer* is cooperation with God. *The Christian life* is cooperation with God. *Missions* is cooperation with God. From within the church, we model how God desires to work in the world.

Theology is to interpret the work of God. Every person puts their world of experience together in some manner, and the way he or she does so is that person's theology. So as far as I am concerned, I have never faced atheism, but I have seen theological atheism many times. Those who put their world together without God are theological atheists—yet, they are still doing theology. Perhaps there are a few exceptions, but people are instinctively believers—that is, they need to believe in a coherence about our world. The way one shapes that belief is a person's theology.

Also, whether a believer knows it or not, every Christian is already a practicing theologian. Since all are putting their world together and interpreting their experiences, it becomes important to know what one is saying about the world and about God. Since believers are doing theology, one may ask, "what are you teaching about God?" But the germane question is, "do you have good theology or bad theology?"

Some students have argued against the need of having a course in theology—they say, "Let's be practical. Can't we memorize and quote Scripture and thus meet the needs of those whom we serve?" The answer is a shaky "absolute maybe." For me, there can be no spirituality without theology, just as there can be no theology without spirituality.

Are you aware that Baptists have provided one of the great resource pools for the cults because of this pragmatist approach? Suppose a cultist shows you a verse that you do not know, and he or she then interprets that verse in a way that brought new insights that affected other passages of Scripture. The cultist would challenge you, "Do you believe the Bible? If you do, then you must follow this teaching that others have hidden from you." The pragmatic approach leaves a believer with no defense for the statement, "the Bible says...."

But even memorized Scripture is set out in a theological way. Captions under which the verses for memorizing are placed reflect a theology. It is important that the theology behind these headings are valid, but too often they are not. Often verses memorized are given an individualized rather than an intended

² Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 2–4.

³ See also 2 Cor. 6:1,

corporate interpretation. For instance, 2 Tim. 2:2 is often taught as related to individual discipleship. But the verse deals with the “holy history of God’s activity” with his people. So 2 Tim. 2:2 has a far richer meaning than the caption for the verse might indicate.

Within the New Testament itself, theology can be seen at work to clarify and interpret God’s work. It does this in three principal areas:

1. The Struggle with False Teachings (Polemical Reason)

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...” (1 Pet. 3:15).

In the New Testament early seeds of Gnosticism were apparent and were being opposed by the Christian community. This is evident in 1 John and perhaps other places in the New Testament. Refuting false teachings is one of the needs for theology.

One of the earliest Christian writings after the close of the New Testament era was Irenaeus, who wrote a treatise entitled “The Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely so Called” and is popularly known as “Against Heresies.” It was written in 182–188, so the polemical task came very early.

2. The Preparation for Baptism (Catechetical Reason)

There is the need to answer those outside the faith, but there is also a need within the faith to interpret faith’s meaning. What we believe needs to be understood. Baptism in the New Testament was a crucial experience for this kind of teaching. Certain understandings had to be achieved during the New Testament era before baptism could be administered. Catechetical teachings developed at this point. Baptism is where biblical discipleship began in the believer church tradition.

Much needs to be known before a person is baptized. Paul calls teaching a “trust” in Romans 6:17, and returns to the subject in 12:7, 15:14, and 16:17. Also, many things need to be learned after baptism, “teaching” being specifically mentioned in the Great Commission itself (see Mat. 28:20). Some have suggested that the entire book of 1 Peter maybe a baptism catechism—1 Pet. 3:21–22 being the baptism itself, the verses before containing material that prepares the candidate for baptism, and the material after having post baptismal teachings.⁴

3. The Need for Straight Thinking (Apologetic Reason)

See 2 Tim. 2:15. One of the fundamental impulses of the Christian is to propagate the gospel, and this calls for straight thinking.

Language is constantly changing—we must say things that communicate what we want to say. Formulated beliefs constantly remain under the judgment of Scripture.

Communicating themes of God, humanity, sin, grace, etc., to a society that is rationally oriented remains the theologian’s task. Historical attempts to do so include:

- Origen (c 185–253) *On First Principles* (c. 229);
- F. D. E. Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith* (1821) and *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers* (1799).

C. Theology and Behavior Are One

In some theologies you will find the statement “doctrines are practices.” This is what I mean when I say theology and behavior are one. What one believes is shown in how one behaves—there is no difference

⁴ Selwyn, *passim*.

between belief and action in the New Testament. If one says he believes something and his actions are different, then it is the actions that indicate what is really believed. *Behavior stems from belief.*

Doctrine and behavior (ethics) were not a separate disciplines until George Calixtus (1586–1656) a Lutheran theologian, made the distinction.⁵ I believe that the distinction has been detrimental to the Christian community, resulting in the idea that one can believe right but act wrong. The New Testament community would regard that as a is heresy.

The first volume of Jim McClendon's systematic theology is entitled *Ethics, Systematic Theology*. He begins his study of theology with ethical behavior. I offer to you that this is the correct way to study theology. This is the believers' church approach.

Doctrines or beliefs are to be understood as *practices*. We only believe as we should when we see doctrines of belief as practices for Christian behavior. Some illustrations may be helpful.

- The doctrine of the resurrection contains a teaching about the meaning and fate of the human body (1 Cor. 15:35ff). What God did for Jesus, shows what God plans to do for us. Our bodies are not trivial or insignificant. The body is both resilient and fragile. It needs care. It needs nourishment. Quite obviously, the body is a consumer. Consumption, in the Christian view, is essentially a good thing—but consumption must be understood in the context of resurrection. Your body is a gift that will last. The belief in the resurrection is to be a practice of life.
- Or consider the doctrine of covenant. We have a new covenant in Christ. But the teaching of covenantal fidelity really takes place when it is integrated into the lifestyle of the faithful family and its community. We celebrate covenant symbolically on wedding days and also on their anniversaries. This is the new humanity's response to the consumer attitude toward sexuality, which would place the age of sexual maturity and perfection at about 20 years of age and use the sexuality of 20 years old to market its garbage. The new covenant is to become a basis for behavior.
- The last illustration is reconciliation. In Jesus Christ we are brought back into God's friendship; and at the same time, in Jesus the way is opened for us to have deep and fruitful friendship with one another. Yet friendship takes a long time to build. Friends bear with one another. They carry each other's burdens, and sometimes carry each other. Mutual forgiveness is the single most important talent for this, the most difficult of all human tasks. To forgive, our heart has to be freed, at least a little bit, from the compulsion to fight for yourself and your own interests. That is why the message of what God has done for us in Jesus can set us free to forgive.

Perhaps it is time for formal education to reintegrate much of what has happened in Western educational approach. Divisions have been made to allow for the specialists and the result is a fracturing of the believers understanding. We could unite:

- Missions and church history. Mission is but contemporary church history. Let them be one. Missionaries would make far fewer mistakes if they knew the history of those who had gone before them.
- Theology, ethics, and perhaps even evangelism—much damage has been done by some evangelism that was without a theological base, and theology without a concern for the lost lacks a focus.
- Preaching and pastoral care—how one relates to people out of the pulpit is how one should share in the pulpit. The way one counsels and the way one preaches should be deeply related.

⁵ Garrett, 4; Pelikan, 1:3.

D. The Evidence of Fallibility

If there is a belief in sin, then human error is not only possible, but inevitable. Furthermore, if we understand sin as pervasive, then I am not always aware when I am presenting false materials. The best of my intentions can be fraught with that which is wrong.

Have you ever fooled yourself? Have you thought you were right, only to find out later that you were wrong? If you have, then you understand the principle of fallibility. The best of intentions and the best of preaching may be wrong.

Do I teach heresy? What do you think? I like to respond to that question by quoting one of my spiritual ancestors, Balthasar Hübmaier, who said “As [a] man I may very well err, but will be no heretic” [because] “any man may set me in the right way with the spiritual Word.”⁶ Am I a heretic? No, for I am willing to change. I am willing to be corrected by the Word of God.

The conclusion to the 1646 revision of the London Confession clearly presents early Baptist convictions. That revision includes this paragraph:

Also we confesse that we know but in part, and that we are ignorant of many things which we desire and seek to know: and if shall do us the friendly part to show us from the word of God that we see not, we shall have cause to be thankful to God and them. But if any man shall impose upon us anything that we see not to be commanded by or Lord Jesus Christ, we should in his strength, rather embrace all reproaches and tortures of men, to be stript of all outward comforts, and if it were possible, to die a thousand deaths, rather than to do anything against the least tittle of the truth of God or against the light of our own consciences.⁷

H. Wheeler Robinson has a chapter entitled “The Ministry of Error.”⁸ The title of that chapter greatly perplexed me when I first came across it, but then I reflected on my own fallibilities. For example, here is what I do with some of my old sermons that I pull out when invited to preach—I Christianize them.

It is possible that some of my cherished and tenaciously held convictions might be false? Yes! So what I hold must always be subject to rejection, improvement, or reformation. Cf., 1 Thess. 5:21, “Test everything. Hold on to the good.”

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) once said: “So much truth rides into history on the back of error, and so much ‘error’ is but a neglected portion of the whole truth, which is an error and becomes a part of the truth.”⁹ Absolute truth belongs to God alone. The symbol of cherubim with flaming sword placed at the gate of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24) makes this emphasis. Humans cannot re-enter the garden or eat of the tree of life. That tree is God’s alone. Absolute knowledge of life is the possession of God and will never be our possession.

This understanding means that as I do my theology that I will be a *confessional* rather than a *creedal* theologian. I will tell you what I believe, and not what you ought to believe. Because of the current confusion over the differences between these two positions I want to set out the fundamental contrast in the approach. The distinction between confession and creed was sharply understood by early Baptists. The differences may be perceived in the following construction:

- A confession affirmed what the framers believed, while a creed specified what should be believed.
- A confession defined what the community held to be true, while a creed defined what must be held to be in community.

⁶ Vedder, 83.

⁷ Lumpkin, 149.

⁸ Robinson, 21ff.

⁹ Miller, et al, 59.

- A confession gave information and provided a spiritual heritage for those within, and was therefore a *guideline*, while a creed disciplined and excluded those who differed and placed the differing without, and was therefore an *authority*.
- A confession was normally an expression of a voluntary group of believers choosing to be a community, while a creed was the characteristic expression of a hierarchical church often seeking to be a religious authority in a given area, state, or government.

E. Theology Is Done in Conflict

The theologians who have blessed me most have been those who were engaged in fighting battles. Their perceived opponents threatened them and they felt much of the faith would be a lost if the opponents won. This does not mean they were always right or their conclusions correct. But theology must have a passion, and without a passion theology is merely an academic study.

Perhaps every theologian who teaches or writes has opponents in mind. Sometimes the theologians tell you who their opponents are and sometimes you have to guess. Luther wrestled with the Pope and Roman Catholicism, and his doctrine of justification by faith has that context. Calvin wrestled with developing Western culture and attempted to form a church-state in Geneva. His battles were real to him and to some degree he has instructed us, both in the area of democracy and the weakness of church-state union.

John Mackay (1889–1983) speaks of the proper way to do theology by making a contrast between two distinct approaches to Christian truth, that of the “balcony” (not the balcony of a theater or church building but that which protrudes from the second floor of a Spanish residence and allows one to view from above the passerby below) and the “road,” or the scene of action. Mackay contended that the authentic approach to Christian truth was from the “road,” not from the “balcony.”¹⁰ One needed, in other words, to be immersed in the struggle of life to do good theology.

Theology in its normative expression is produced by a believing community in search for its identity and reacting to a perceived threat where the community feels most vulnerable. Theology then is both a reaction and an identification.

Some theologians today are fighting liberalism, some fundamentalism, maybe even yet some communism, and so forth. Let me share with you who I perceive to be my theological opponents. On the road upon which I am traveling, I fight three enemies—Constantinian Christianity, Individualization, and Neo-Pelagianism.

1. *Constantinian Christianity*

Out of my believers’ church commitments I continue to affirm what I sense to be a basic spiritual ancestry, that is, the concept of the fall of, and the need of the restoration of, the New Testament church. The believers’ church generally marks the fall of the church with Emperor Constantine (AD c. 280–337), who’s efforts to affirm, elevate, and politicize the church so profoundly altered it that the Reformation left the church-state union in tact, even though they changed the identity of the “state” in the equation. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, therefore, came to be labeled by the Anabaptists as mere “partial reformers.” Much of what is happening today in ecumenism is the continued attempt to work out the doctrinal implications that were not accomplished at the time of the Reformation. It is from a believers’ church stance that I wish to do my theologizing, so Constantinianism is an opponent.

Constantinianism will continue to be developed throughout the course, but a basic summary of Constantinianism are seen in the following three errors:

- 1) Compromising the demands of the gospel in order for the church to gain worldly power and prestige.

¹⁰ Mackay, Chapter 2.

- 2) “Baptizing” uncritically a dominant cultural practice, attitude, or other characteristic which is in tension with the demands of God’s reign.
- 3) Seeing the church as just another form of human social organization with no peculiar moral identity (so there is the Lions Club, the Rotary, and the church). All these organizations become “networked.”¹¹

One illustration of Constantinianism is an indirect carry over in labeling as “Christian” things that are inanimate. Examples include a

- “Christian” campus,
- “Christian” radio, or
- “Christian” High Adventure.

Nothing inanimate should be called Christian. This also applies to any direct carry over of Constantinianism into the practices of the church. Infant baptism, for example, is a practice that asserts that one can be passive and yet become a Christian. Such a church is composed of part professing and part non-confessing members, and membership in the church is often based on such factors as cultural acceptability.

Unless one’s will is involved by a conscious decision, one cannot call something “Christian.” Christian means making a choice to respond to the offer of the grace of God.

The believers’ church tradition says that to be a Christian an act of the will is necessary!

2. Individualization

Western culture continues to isolate the individual. The sense of belongingness and rootedness continues to lessen. Loneliness is one of the larger complaints within contemporary Western culture. Corporate passages within Scripture are given individualistic interpretation because the sense of corporateness is missing from the experience of the congregation and the minister. The “body of Christ” is distorted in our thinking because of our coming at the concept by individualization. We rarely think of the body as corporate but rather about how the individual will be affected. Listen to Sunday morning prayers—many are just individual prayers prayed in public. In most prayers the corporate sense is missing.

It is quite unlikely that any first century person would have perceived himself or herself to be autonomous from a social network. It is an important objective of this course that we attempt to regain the mind set of first century believers.

Please distinguish between *individualism* and *individualization*. They are not the same. Individualism allows one the freedom to develop. Individualization, on the other hand, is the rejecting of communal responsibilities or the ignoring of corporate sensitivities. Believers’ church absolutely requires an open and transparent interdependency among the individuals comprising the church.

3. Neo-Pelagianism

The United States has only produced one major philosophy and that is pragmatism. That philosophy in a popularized form has penetrated every facet of our culture, including, unfortunately, the structures and practices of the churches. Churches measure themselves by size—budgets, baptisms, and growth.

To achieve success the gospel is marketed. Grace comes automatically after certain human performances. God must do what he has promised in response to human activity. That activity may be a prayer offered, money given, or faithfulness demonstrated. Or, in evangelism, it is sometimes said, “you take a step to God and he will meet you.” Be careful—*does human initiative causes God to respond?* The Christian faith has always regarded this as heresy.

¹¹ Le Master, *Discipleship*, 153.

Pragmatism leads to Neo-Pelagianism, a false doctrine that teaches that new human activities can be developed according to institutional needs. What is being packaged is a human-centered, anthropological gospel. Neo-Pelagianism says that human initiative can obligate God to respond (cf., Job 41:11, Rom. 11:35). The pragmatic philosophy that says “if it works it’s right” becomes “if it works it’s of God.”

This phenomenon is universal in Western culture, but I believe it may be more prevalent in believers’ churches. Perhaps it is related to a sense of insecurity among pastors who feel they have to demonstrate the marks of “success” to maintain their employment. This also may account for the fact that so many of our churches have lost the ability to worship. Worship is God-centered, and to have that sense in the Sunday morning service would be vastly different than a pep rally or gospel entertainment. Worship centers in God, Neo-Pelagianism centers in humans. Evaluate what transpires in a Sunday morning service—where is the center of focus? Is it God-centered, or human-centered? Is it worship, or pep rally?

F. Conclusion

You can make theology so broad that it is only Bible study. That approach may bless many, but it leads to sloppy thinking and the loss of direction. We have sloppy thinking now. This is very much a part of the problem in Western civilization and within Western churches. Knowing the opponents sharpens theological presentations.

II. The Doing of Theology

A. Definitions of Theology

When Christianity emerged into the Graeco-Roman world, its best thinkers tried to make their beliefs intelligible to that world, and they inevitably turned to the language and concepts of Greek philosophy. In the study of theology we have a peculiar blend or synthesis of Hebraic thought and Greek philosophic spirit. The Patristic period is fascinating for I see it as a missionary endeavor—crossing cultures from Hebrew thinkers to Greek thinkers. In the crossing of cultures you form blended thoughts, and it was in this environment that marked the beginning of theology.

1. The Etymological Definition

- *theos* means God, and
- *logos* mean word.

So theology is a *word from God* or a *word about God*.

This should be rejected as inadequate. It permits random ideas that pop up to be considered theology, and this is just not true.

2. General Definition

“Theology is the study of all things pertaining to God.”

But we are not dealing with theology in this sense, we are dealing with *Christian* theology. This definition is too vague. It is not wrong—but astrology can be called theology, and I don’t want you do that.

3. A Preliminary Definition of Theology

*“Theology is an effort to think about the basic **convictions** that created a **community of faith** around the person of **Jesus Christ**.”*

Note the key words:

- *Convictions*, if altered, change everything else. Convictions are held about God, ourselves, creation, the meaning and destiny of our lives. These convictions are personal and confessional—

individual and corporate. They come from inward reasoning and reflection on the Scriptures and one's encounter with Christ and the Christian community. Some psychologists tell us that a person usually has no more than five basic convictions out of which they live their lives. Around these five basic convictions all their living is shaped. The convictions driving us may be known or unknown; theology is to help us determine and form proper convictions.

- *Community of faith*—theology is what the church believes, teaches and confesses on the basis of the Word of God. This reaches back to the New Testament and to the believers who have preceded us, and also encompasses those believers who are present today. The Spirit of God works with the individual, but the Spirit of God also works within the community of faith. The community of faith was guided by the Spirit to provide and preserve the Scriptures for us. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan (1923 – —) has asserted that Christian doctrine is “what the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God.”¹² There must be an essential interrelatedness among these three—believing, teaching, and confessing—they determine how the individual deals with the corporate.
- *Jesus Christ*—this conviction is what makes it Christian.

Note the implications from this definition:

- Theology does not profess to have complete or perfect knowledge of God, humankind, or destiny. According to Paul “we know in part” and “now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror” (1 Cor. 13:9a, 12a).
- Theology has a goal of establishing a community of faith. Its aim is practical and functional. Its task is to help bring humans into a redemptive fellowship with God and to help them grow in God's likeness.
- Theology is to be measured by the Biblical revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 4:6). Those who work to transform the Christian faith into some contemporary world-view or philosophy which omits God's work in Christ as central, contradict this truth.

4. A Systematic Theology Definition

“A Christian **systematic** theology is an effort to think **coherently** about the basic convictions that created a community of faith around the person of Jesus Christ.”

Key Words:

- *System*—a humanly devised scheme for putting together the beliefs and/or convictions of a community of faith. Systematic theology has the Christian faith as its object of study. Here faith and doctrines are used similarly.
- *Coherently*—a key concept in systematic theology—ensures that the beliefs and/or convictions fit together, or at least are not mutually contradictory.

5. Conclusions

- Theology is to analyze Christian convictions. Systematic theology is not to write laws for Christians, or act as lord over faith. *It is Christian obedience seeking understanding.*

Theology is not a theory of what has happened or what will happen, but rather a description of something that actually takes place in human life. In other words, experiences of God and Christ come before theology which concerns itself about those experiences.

An analogy might be helpful: Perhaps one can liken Systematic Theology to crossing the Atlantic in a plane. To cross is a 6–8 hour flight. The immensity of the ocean can be compared to one's own significance or insignificance. On a map the ocean might be about 9 inches. How can you relate

¹² Pelikan, 1:1ff.

your experience of an 8 hour flight to that 9 inches on a map? But remember that the map is based on personal experiences of many others who have flown or sailed. Those who crossed before us, and those who drew up the map did so in proportion. The map is not the experience of the crossing rather it only places the experience in relationship to the rest of the world.

The map of systematic theology combines many impressions. The experiences of God and Christ come before theology. Someone had to cross the Atlantic before a map could be made. One must experience God before one can do theology.

- b. Theology is a reflection on experience; it is not a substitute for experience. It is an attempt to state something in a limited way. Theology is essentially the distillation of Christian experience of God. The map is charted from maps of the past, corrected and revised. New equipment gives new and perhaps better ways to interpret it. John 7:17 is a basic assumption in doing theology—true knowledge is equivalent to doing the will of God. The Christian faith is not a *gnosis* but a way of life—yet not just any way of life, but one informed by the word of God.
- c. Theology is a part of Christian worship and prayer. If one never experiences the ocean, then the map will have limited impact on you. Having seen the ocean, then awe and wonder can be yours as you look at a map. It is that awe and wonder that cause worship and prayer to be in perspective.

B. Formative Factors in Theological Study

Many theology books contain a section near the beginning on what they call “sources of theology.” Here one can find many disparate items. I find it better to talk about *formative factors* rather than *sources*. Some of these formative factors may operate unconsciously, so that the one doing theology would not even be aware of them. It is, however, necessary to gain an awareness of these factors if we are to understand our own shaping of faith.

These formative factors are not to be seen as a recipe where one “takes a little experience, a little revelation, a little reflection and shake it all together well.” Rather, we shall try to weigh these factors, for they are not of equal importance. The list that I shall give is not inclusive of all possible formative factors, but are those factors that I sense are most needed in theology.

1. The Scriptures

This is the normative source and basic factor in formulating theology.

Yet, within Scripture there are those events which are more significant than other events:

- the coming out of Egypt,
- the Cross and Resurrection, and
- the kerygma.

Warning: Bible study is no automatic guarantee of good theology. We can use the Bible to undergird our prejudices; Dagg, a Baptist theologian of the South, used his theology to make Scripture support slavery. The quoting of Scripture is subject to the presuppositions and contextualizing of the quoter.

In 367, Athanasius’ Easter Letter included for the first time the 27 books we have in our New Testament canon, and in 398 the Second Council of Carthage affirmed that list. The purpose of a canon is to be a norm (Canon means norm). *A canon does not contain all truth, but no truth of God will contradict the norm.*

The *Didache* almost made it, as also did the *Epistle of Barnabas*. I would not be greatly (but maybe a little) upset if the *Didache* made it; but I would be greatly upset if Barnabas had made it into the canon. The Scriptures do not claim to have all the revelation of God. God has done more than what the norm contains—in fact, the world could not hold what God has done, according to John 21:25. However we do not need more than the canon—we have a norm. Canon means a measuring line or a rule. By this norm we will measure all truth about God.

2. Tradition—Witness of the Believer's Past

From the beginning, to be a follower of Christ was to belong to a community, or, better, to constitute a community. We have a legacy because our spiritual ancestors knew God and they have given us their history. The biblical word for that faith history is called *tradition*.

Tradition has a twofold usage in Scripture:

- Negative: Mark 7:1–13, esp. 5–8.
- Positive: 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6.

In the positive sense, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead,” but “traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”¹³

We learn from those who went before us. We study their struggles, victories, and failures. We honor and maintain those things which they modeled for us and that has been honored by God.

Individualization says that we don't need the past. One goes to God as if no other one has attempted such a search. Individualization has to invent the wheel in every generation. But, God has led and guided and blessed many that have gone before. What they have learned is a heritage given to us. Our task is to build on that foundation and not to start over.

The contributions of the past come from the community of faith or from individuals within that community. Their insights and convictions have given us an enriched heritage.

There are two major ecclesiastical traditions that we have inherited:

- Creeds—(those of 325, 381, 431, and 451). These creeds are from the time of undivided Christianity. All Christian groups hold to these creeds, and that includes Baptists. Granted, you may not know them, but your ancestors did. They have great importance and will form the last section of our study this semester.
- Confessions. These attempt, in a non-binding way, to focus on reasons for belief. They are guidelines for the people of God and those who follow. We will look at the *Schleitheim Confession* and the *London Confession* of 1644 as confessions that have impacted us.

N.B. Impatience with the past often makes us prisoners of the present. “It is not the remembered past, it is the forgotten past that enslaves us.”¹⁴ But if tradition is placed above Scripture, then it is wrong.

3. Experience—the Witness of Believers Present

a. Corporate Experience

The church, the people of God, model the way to know and relate to God. Our experience of faith comes from participation in a community of faith. The form of the person's experience varies from individual to individual and even from one particular community to another.

One cannot be a Christian by oneself. Through the Bible, a Christian witness, or in some other way you have been touched by the corporate body of believers. J. Robert Nelson's, *The Realm of Redemption* emphasizes this point. You see that corporate sense in the title of his book. Even if you are alone and pick up a Bible or a tract, there is a heritage of belief behind what you are reading. This understanding is valid in all areas of our relationship with God.

Theology speaks out of experience of a life of faith, but the corporate dimension must be kept if one's experience is not to become subjective, introspective, and individualistic.

¹³ Pelikan, 1:9.

¹⁴ C S. Lewis, *The Great Divide*.

b. Individual Experience

I will say little about individual experience here; as products of your generation, this is your strength. We will talk more about it with the Anabaptist Story. But there is a qualification that must be placed on experience. Experience is to be understood relating to the biblical narrative. Experiences that matter for the Christian life are not mere flashes of feeling; experience is lived through and lived out in company with other believers. Our experiences which matter are those that constitutes our share in the Christ story. With that understanding, individualization disappears.

The biblical stories of Israel, of Jesus, and of the church, are intimately related to the stories of our lives. The narrative of Scripture functions as a hermeneutic that relates our own experience to the Scriptures. These two—scripture and experience—are joined to make a valid religious experience because it from the story of Jesus from which such individual experiences are based. So if an individual experience does not match the biblical story, then the experience is invalid. If it does match, then it is valid.

What would it mean to take up Jesus' cross (Matt. 16:24) in our situation? How may we be faithful to the Lord in our present circumstances? In pursuing such questions, believers are engaged in the practical reason of faithfulness to the risen Lord. They seek to behave in a manner decisively informed by the example of Jesus as a Lord who requires obedience, who is the paradigm of what faithfulness to God entails.

4. Culture

Culture may be generally understood as "learning through the skin!" It is the kind of knowledge which we know, and yet do not know how we learned it. Because we have learned from our culture we often assume that what we know is universal. This assumption is detrimental in theological thinking.

Let me attempt to share some illustrations of cultural influences on our own culture. Consider these three questions:

- How do you snap your fingers?
- How do you motion someone to come to you?
- How do you to eat a slice of pie? From which end do you start?

This kind of learning through the skin is hardly ever never questioned and therefore is difficult to change. No one can escape sharing in the mentality or intellectual climate of his or her culture. Theologians who try to exclude their culture from their writings are deceiving themselves.

Culture is a collection of beliefs, values, assumptions, commitments, and ideals expressed in a society through popular literary and artistic forms and embodied in its political, educational, and other institutions.

Since one can rarely appreciate and understand the extent of our culture upon ourselves, it is virtually impossible for us to avoid being ethnocentric—yet ethnocentrism is detrimental in the sharing of the gospel. It is better for theologians to explicitly recognize and accept the cultural factors in their thinking, present what they believe, and then leave to the next generation the task of showing their biases. Recognition of the cultural factors is equivalent to acknowledging that there is no final theology. The work of theology needs to be done again and again.

But there is also the other side of the story. Culture's influence can be seen within the Scriptures. As an example, Christ does transcends Jewish culture, but he is also a part of that culture. To remove culture from Christ would be the docetic heresy. The gospel will come to us through Jewish culture. There is a need for us to come to understand the culture of the biblical world and affirm it as the channel through which God's message has come. This is why the historical aspects of the Bible must be affirmed. *Some of the gravest mistakes in preaching today can be seen in the attempt to elicit "principles," that are then applied as "universals," from the Bible.* We have so-called "biblical principles" for marriage, parenthood, and even

“biblical principles for the Christian businessman.” This approach is a denial of the historicity of the Bible. This will be examined in greater detail as we study *The Anabaptist Story*.

Let me illustrate the way culture influences our reading of Scripture by telling the familiar story of the disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13–35). The setting of the story is after the crucifixion. Emmaus is about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem where these two disciples had been attending the Passover celebration. Through some means they became familiar with the Jesus story; they even had become hopeful of his messiahship. But then came the darkened sky, the shaking of the earth, and the announcement that He was dead.

As these two disciples were walking back to their home discussing the Passover events, a stranger with a brisk walk overtakes them. He inquires about their discussion, and the disciples found it hard to believe that anyone could have been in Jerusalem and not be discussing the events concerning Jesus. Nearing their home, the disciples invite the stranger to stop for a repast and to refresh himself before continuing his journey. The stranger accepts the invitation, all the while instructing these disciples about the message of the Old Covenant. In the breaking of bread the Stranger, who was acting as the host, was recognized. With the recognition, the risen Christ was gone and the disciples questioned each other, with burning hearts, what they had heard.

There is an assumption from western culture that these two disciples were men because, in our culture we usually associate the word “disciple” with that gender. But in eastern culture (and in Greek Orthodox thought), the disciples are a man and his wife. Because Jesus is invited into the home, they are seen as a couple, and the home is seen as their residence.

5. Rationality

Note a distinction here—a distinction that is important to me. I am not doing what many theologians do in this section; rather than “rationality,” they discuss “reason.”

Reason must not be reified (to reify is to treat as existing in a substantive way, or as a concrete, material object). We reified the soul in days gone by, regarding it as an actual component of the body, but now understand “soul” the way the ancient Hebrews did—as the “total person.” Reason is not a material object that is identified with the brain.

Rationality is a function of life. Myers-Briggs personality typing teaches us that people look at the world differently. Let me attempt to illustrate this. Norma and I were vacationing at a Bed and Breakfast, and were sitting on a grassy knoll. In front of us was a valley with a brook and there was a parking lot on the other side. I asked Norma to describe what she saw, and found myself utterly amazed as I listened to her words. Married for many years, I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. We were looking at the same view, but I did not see what she described. When I did identify something that she was describing, it was not important to me. When it was my turn to describe and her turn to listen, she was similarly astonished.

Even people steeped in the same culture things differently, and this is why I dislike the use of the word *reason*. Reason implies that there is a universality to thinking. That is, that people given the same facts will always come to the same conclusions. This is simply not true.

If reason is correct, we will all come to the same conclusions regarding the events at Emmaus, just as Norma and I would have seen the view from the grassy knoll the same way. The same facts can result in different conclusions. This is because of the way we have learned to think. Were the “disciples” a couple or two men? I don’t know. In some ways it is not important, but it does show the effects of cultural conditioning. *Because of that cultural influence, I prefer to speak of rationality and not reason.*

Traditionally, reason has been used in two ways in theological studies:

- a. *Speculative reasoning.* This kind of reasoning comes to us from the Greeks. Speculation conceives of what ought to be and then perceives truth based conformity with that conception. In certain ways speculative reason can be a blessing, but in theology it has wreaked havoc.

Speculative reason can not give truths of God. The truth of God comes by revelation, not speculation. I reject this approach in doing theology.

Let me remind you the Hebrews did not think speculatively. They found God confronting them in their culture and history. Speculation can lead us astray in theology, and I will challenge speculative reason, especially in the study of God in *The Patristic Story*.

- b. *Elucidatory reasoning.* In most cultures there will be some process akin to this concept. Culture teaches us to evaluate and critique, and this is what elucidatory means. The elucidatory approach sifts, analyzes, expounds, and (generally speaking) brings into the light that which is being considered. It is a technique that can be used in Biblical studies, but can only be properly used in theology when the affects of cultural conditioning are taken into account. When I use the word “rationality,” this is the type of reasoning that I really mean.

Again, reified reasoning suggests that all who have the ability to reason should come to the same conclusions, assuming, of course, that they have the same facts to begin with. Since this just does not happen, I will be considering rationality to be elucidatory reasoning qualified by culture.¹⁵

There may be similarities between cultures, even as there are similarities among all people about the meaning of life and death. But because there are similarities does not mean that there are not vast differences as well. To reify reason is a mistake both in philosophy and theology. Rationality is the term that is more accurate; rationality is a function of the individual thinking process which acknowledges the influence of culture.

6. Summary

The believers’ church maintains that “with the open Bible in hand, a humble believer can experience and know God.” That is, Christ may step out of the pages of the Bible and make himself real. No dealing with the formative factors of doing theology should ever undercut that conviction.

But our day was never foreseen by those who went before. Our spiritual ancestors never imagined that someone might pick up a Bible and make pronouncements concerning God and what God wants, and that the person would expect an acceptance of his message. Those in the believers’ church tradition have been severely and correctly criticized on this point.

The believers need, as Calvin taught, the spectacles of faith and the illumination of the Holy Spirit to rightly understand Scripture. Scripture has a history and that history needs honoring. Further, because of human sinfulness and cultural influences, human distortion is almost inevitable in any pronouncement.

Here is the way a believers’ church theology might correctly affirm the authority for knowing the will of God. There are three components in our coming to understand God and God’s will for us.

- First, there are Scriptures. This is where most in our Western culture stop. They pick up the Bible, read, and proclaim. This is not adequate.
- Secondly, there must be a gathered people—the community of believers. The awareness of this community, its struggle and learning concerning God, is an essential ingredient to their understanding of the scripture and its application. “The community of believers,” the gathered people, is a recognition of believers stretching back to the New Testament day.
- Thirdly, there must be the presence of the Holy Spirit. The illumination of the Spirit is essential for understanding the will of God.

So our understanding of God comes from Scripture, the gathered people, and the presence of the Spirit. Each of these components becomes essential in the believer’s quest to know and understand. The model for this approach may be seen in Acts 13 and 15. In Acts 15, after gathering, hearing from the people of God,

¹⁵ Macquarrie, 14ff.

and reading Scripture, the Jerusalem counsel used the phrase “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (v. 28). That beautiful statement is the way we can come to know the will of God.

Why have Baptists historically sent “messengers” rather than “delegates” to conventions? It is based on this belief. To conclude what is right before the people gather does not allow God to work in his fullness. With the gathered people, the willingness to be obedient to Scripture, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, then right decisions can be made.

C. Theology of a Divided Church

Ephesians 4:5 says, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism,” but a thousand sects exist. Why is the church divided? Certainly, the divided church is a testimony to the fact that there are a multitude of different theologies. Usually we see the church divided into:

- Catholic,
- Lutheran,
- Anglican,
- Reformed,
- Orthodox, and
- Believers—the group that, hopefully, you have embraced in your view of the church.

The first five groupings have produced their thoughts and generally their theology has blessed us. Their approaches are rather well known, as are the names of many of their theologians. What is not so well known is the believers’ church theology, and it is this theology that I will be attempting to present this semester. There are four marks that indicate some distinctiveness of the Believers’ church approach to theology when compared to the other groups:

- No authoritative creed.
- No single set of doctrines marking us from others.
- No private revelations that separates us from other Christians.
- Authority for decisions rests with the people of God (congregationalism).

It may be asked, “can there be a believers’ church theology?” This is what I will attempt to answer during the course (and what you will attempt to answer at its end).

There are few believer church systematic theologies out there. Thomas Finger has a systematic theology, but I did not find it satisfying. Jim McClendon’s two volumes, called *Ethics* and *Doctrine*, have made a contribution. There have been occasional writings that deal with certain aspects of theology, and they have been helpful. But, by and large, the field of believer’s theology is rather sparse.

Why is it that those of the believers’ church have written so little? Perhaps for a multitude of reasons, but here are some suggestions:

- Without the state support that characterizes the magisterial denominations, theologians have struggled to survive.
- Revival awakenings have had an impact on us. Revivals often conflict with theology—in fact, theology and revivalism have sometimes become either/or propositions. There are many in our churches who harbor a basic distrust of learning.
- Internal conflicts have deterred the writing of theologies. We have been engaged with conflicts with modernism and fundamentalism, and these are time consuming.

- Another reason might be the reticence of theologians who view themselves in a servant's role to assume the authoritarian stance associated with proposing what others should believe.

I wish to make two concluding observations concerning the divided church—perhaps we may be looking at the situation in reverse. We see the church divided and ask how we can get it back together, but what if that is not the right approach? I wonder, in our confession of the Lordship of Christ, whether we do not begin together and then learn to be different. What if we start in unity and then learn diversity. If we understood the divided church in that way it might make a difference. Further, is there any real substance for holding that the New Testament churches had a structure out of which they worked? The house churches mentioned in Romans 16 seemed to be one, yet had a great variety; they had no structure or organizational unity.

D. Conclusions

Before we come to the first of our four stories, let me make three observations that should affect you and your approach to the semester's study.

1. *Theology Must Be Personal*

Self knowledge is important. If you don't know yourself, you will not know God; or better, to the degree that I know myself am I able to know God.

If you need counseling—get it. Cf. Jimmy Swaggert or Jim Bakker.

John Calvin began his *Institutes* as follows:

Our wisdom, is so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes, and gives birth to the other. For in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves; ... the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves... In the second place those blessings which unceasingly distill to us from heaven, are like streams conducting us to the fountain. Here again, the infinitude of good which resides in God become more apparent from our poverty... On the other hand, it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.¹⁶

2. *Theology Is Witness—It Cannot Be Taught*

I never impart theology to another. My task is to witness. The witness needs to have a coherence—the coherent thinking about the basic beliefs that formed the community of faith around the person of Jesus Christ.

Theology classes can actually depersonalize the student when they attempt to conform the student to the cultural image of the “church organizational person.” Theology is learned from the inside out, not the outside in—in a real sense, it cannot actually be “taught.”

If I can't *teach* theology, then what am I to do? *Witness*. I can share my pilgrimage. You will make appropriations, rejections, acceptances, or have some other responses. I am a pilgrim on journey and you are invited to join if you want. I journey, seeking. I have many convictions—basic things that cannot be altered without effecting all else—and one of the more basic is that we each are on a journey.

You and you alone are responsible for what you believe.

¹⁶ Calvin, 37f.

3. Theology—*The Responsibilities of the Student*

From the material shared in the class, what is your responsibility in this study? While the changing availability of materials and other factors have caused me to make changes in the course syllabus from year to year, there are some general aspects of the course that do not change. Here are my expectations of you.

- a. *Master some facts.* I will as occasionally ask you to memorize some definitions. Definitions appear here indented and in bold type. Memorization is essential for establishing a mental “stack post” around which further learning takes place.¹⁷ *N. B.* By “memorize” I do not mean “paraphrase.” When I ask for a definition on an examination, I will want you to echo the definition precisely. Points will be taken off for each missing or misplaced word.

I will also expect you to become familiar with the material covered in my lectures. This book of lecture notes will help you keep the lectures in the context of the course outline, but it necessarily only includes only a fraction of the material that will be covered in class. Learning theology is not just accumulating information; it requires a dialog that can only take place when you are present. Some of the concepts may not become clear to you until you or another student asks a question that sparks a class discussion.

Memorization and familiarization are two essential ingredients of theological study.

- b. *Utilize associative learning.* Associative learning is the taking of experiences from one area and bringing them to another. The ability to put a fact here with a fact there and see the relationship between them is part of doing theology.

Let me illustrate. I am a jogger, and jog three mornings a week. There are some twenty different routes that I use in the city of San Francisco. I have been jogging since 1972, and used to run over 1000 miles a year (although I only run about 850 miles a year now). In this experience I have learned about my body. Jogging is one thing, and my body is another, yet they go together. I am able to explain every pain in my leg or foot, and am also able to relate how my jogging created the pain. By keeping the two together, I have learned much about my anatomy from my running.

When something transpires on campus, or in the chapel, you need to relate it to what you are learning in this class. A sign of being a creative and growing person is the exercise of associative learning. Learn to see the relationship between events.

- c. *Make a creative/evaluative response.* It is perfectly okay if you plan to earn a C grade in this course; it has been my experience that those who succeed at that level very often make the finest pastors, missionaries, and other Christian workers. If a B or an A grade is important to you, however, I will expect you do some additional work—probably a book review and/or a case study (see the syllabus for details). Unlike the quizzes and examinations required of all students, these are assignments that do not have “correct,” or even necessarily a “clear,” answers. This means that you will have to do theology yourself, that is, you will do your own theology. This is what will be transpiring following your seminary days anyway—so let’s get started now.

This is how the course is set up. My desires may or may not succeed, but you need to understand my strategy.

With the presuppositions and tasks of theology covered, we now move to our first story—*The Anabaptist Story*.

¹⁷ Students not raised in the farm belt may not have come into contact with this term. When a crop was harvested and arranged in stacks on the open field, vertical poles were used to steady the pile. It is the same way with definitions. Each student will conceptualize theological concepts slightly different because no two persons have exactly the same cultural and experiential contexts. But we can each benefit by anchoring our definitions during the duration of our study.

THE ANABAPTIST STORY

I. The Beginning in Zurich

The Anabaptist Story was initiated in a brief historical period that was marked with other important events. Figure 1 will help contextualize the period.

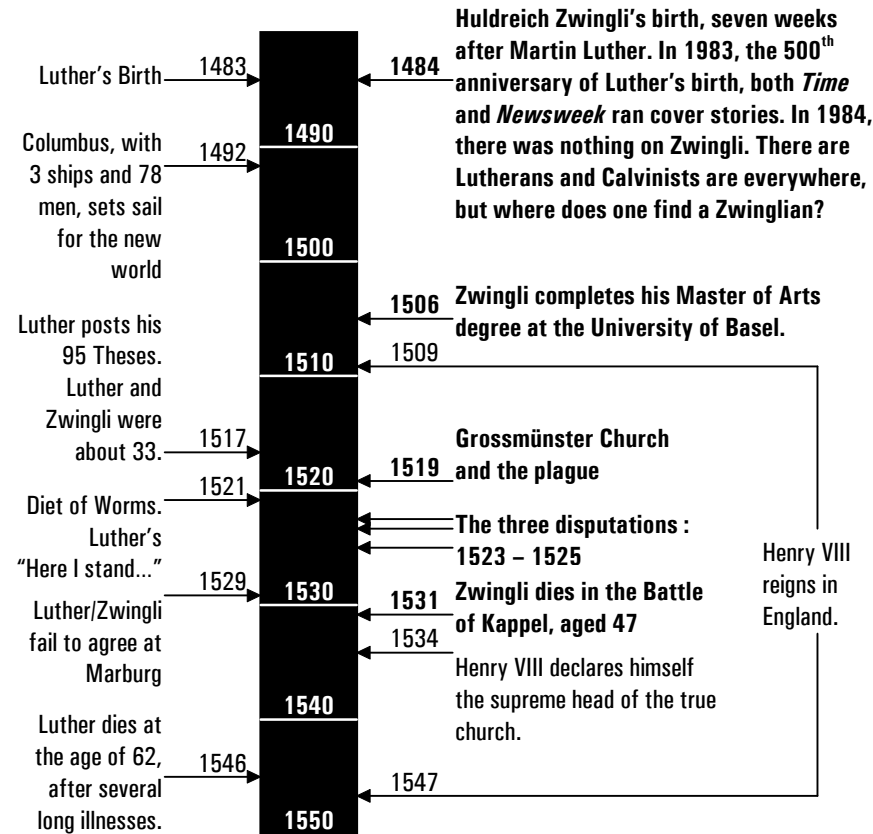


Figure 1. Luther and Zwingli in Historical Context.

A. The Man Ulrich (Huldreich) Zwingli

Zwingli, who was bred a mountain man, was an amazing combination of intellect, passion, and wit. He was political to the core, but central to understanding his life and work is the fact that he became a devout student of Scripture. He was transformed and shaped by the Word yet, like all of us, his

vision was limited by his own peculiar place and time—the freedom-loving city of Zurich in the early sixteenth century.¹

- Zwingli was a humanist and studied New Testament. An admirer of Erasmus, in 1515 they held a meeting and Zwingli adopted Erasmus' method of inquiry—the “humanist method” (see p. 4).
- The pacifism among the Anabaptists was mentored through Erasmus.
- In 1516–17, Zwingli was pastor in the town of Einsiedeln and had a sexual encounter while there. This was not all that uncommon, but it did impact his life because Zwingli will preach against the prohibition that priests barred priests from marriage. He later married secretly and then, sometime later, declared the marriage publicly.
- He resolved to preach nothing but the gospel (was this the effect of the liaison?).
- It was that resolve that he took with him when he moved to the Grossmünster church and became the people's priest in Zurich. He preached his first sermon and assumed responsibilities on New Years Day, 1519, at the age of 35.

After arriving in Zurich, a plague decimated the city. Nearly three of every ten people in the city died. Zwingli ministered to the victims and was struck with the disease himself, but recovered. He identified with the people and became an important bridge in the relationship of the people to the city. He composed a “Plague Hymn” about his ordeal.

The first four stanzas were written as the disease first struck.

Help me, O Lord,
My strength and rock;
Lo, at the door
I hear death's knock.
Uplift thine arm,
Once pierced for me,
That conquered death.
And set me free.
Yet, if thy voice,
In life's midday,
Recalls my soul,
Then I obey.
In faith and hope
Earth I resign,
Secure of heaven,
For I am Thine.

¹ *Christian History*, Zwingli, 3:1, 3. The astute theology student will always consider a writer's cultural context when seeking to understand that writer's work.

The next four stanzas were written as his health deteriorated.

My pains increase;
Haste to console;
For fear and woe
Seize body and soul.
Death is at hand,
My senses fail,
My tongue is dumb;
Now, Christ prevail.
Lo! Satan strains
To snatch his prey;
I feel his grasp;
Must I give way?
He harms me not,
I fear no loss
For here I lie
Beneath thy cross.

Zwingli nearly died from the bubonic plague in September, 1519. He did recover and he chose to finish the hymn:

My God! My Lord!
Healed by the hand,
Upon the earth
Once more I stand.
Let sin no more
Rule over me;
My mouth shall sing
Alone to thee.
Though now delayed,
My hour will come,
Involved, perchance,
In deeper gloom.
But, let it come;
With joy I'll rise;
And bear my yoke
Straight to the skies.²

The plague also awakened spiritual concerns and enhanced his desire for study of Scripture and the reading of reformed authors like Luther. Zwingli

- attacked Roman Catholic doctrine and practice, and
- corresponded with Luther regarding Luther's attacking Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. This was the time of the Diet of Worms.

Zurich, like most of Europe, accepted a church-state relationship. One had to be a member of the church to be a citizen in the city.

² *Christian History*, Zwingli, 3:1, 19.

In 1521 Zwingli found himself in conflict with bishop of the diocese because of Zwingli's attack on the regulations pertaining to Lent. The Zurich city council defended Zwingli, but the effect of this was to begin a process that eventually resulted in the city council removing itself from the episcopal authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

In November, 1521, he began a study group. This group began with ten men. Some in that group were Simon Stumpf, George Binder, Conrad Grebel, Valentine Tsuchude, J.J. Amman, and Felix Manz. Reublin, Blaurock, Brotli, and Hübmaier were also most likely in the group.

This began as a cultural, not a religious, group. They would read Plato, for example. The influence of Erasmus moved them to the study of biblical languages. This was the humanists approach. Humanism had a great deal of appreciation for antiquity, and this was the motivation for their study the biblical languages. Zwingli had a greater place for reason than Luther, and, in fact, was more a humanist than Luther.

They became more an evangelical group. This was the *modus operandi* of their biblical study:

- They gathered at 7 AM in the Cathedral everyday except for Sundays and Fridays.
- They read the Latin text of a particular passage—Zwingli would lead in examination.
- They would then look at the Hebrew or Greek, and if they were studying an Old Testament passage, also the LXX.
- They would do an exegesis in the local (German) dialect.
- They then moved to the practical—how to use the passage.
- One would bring expository sermon in German.³

In 1522, after Zwingli had resigned the priesthood and was immediately re-employed by the city council as evangelical pastor in the same post. About this time, the Reformation movement began to show a splintering.

- In Wittenberg, Carlstadt was destroying images and Luther returned and restored order.
- Princes and cities sought to free themselves from Roman Catholic control. The Reformation rode on a political happening (but then don't all events like revivals?).

³ Locher, 27–32.

B. The Disputations in Zurich⁴

In March 1522, a group of Christians in Zurich broke the Lenten fast citing Zwingli's assertion of the sole authority of Scripture as their justification. Although Zwingli, himself, did not break the fast, he had full knowledge of the event and came to the defense of those who did. He published works defending their action and openly preached of the right to obey only Scripture. When the bishop of Constance sent a commission to repress the happening, the cantonal government all but ignored the authority of the bishop and took matters into their own hands. The Zurich council ruled that although the New Testament imposed no fast, fasts should be maintained in order to keep the peace within the canton. The compromise holds great importance because it set the precedent of cantonal authority over the local church, even as above the authority of the bishop.

Zwingli believed that the ultimate authority of the church is the Christian community, "the local assembly of believers under the sole lordship of Christ and of the divinely inspired Scriptures that bear witness to redemption through him." This authority was to be exercised through civil government acting on the commands of Scripture and for the benefit of the community. The situation in Zurich was one in which the cantonal government gradually implemented the reforms of Zwingli, the community's popular leader and trusted interpreter of Scripture, at least partially persuaded by the prospect that the civil government's authority would be increased by allowing Zwingli's changes in religious policy. Thus the religious power structure in Zurich centered on the city council acting on Scripture as interpreted by Zwingli.

In Zurich there were three classes of people seeking to remove themselves from Roman Catholic control:

1. The anti-Catholics. We might call these "*negative* Protestants."
2. The libertines. They wanted the freedom to indulge in their own desires. We might call these "*permissive* Protestants."
3. The evangelicals. Persons who wanted to see the "Word of God" honored. They might be called "*evangelical* Protestants."

1. The First Disputation, Jan 29, 1523

Zwingli had persuaded the council to let him resign his position in order to be under the direct authority of the cantonal government. This was late in 1522.

The council's official hiring of Zwingli and the disputation's affirmation of his authority marked Zwingli's break with the Roman hierarchy and set the Swiss reformer on the road of independence. At this disputation, Zurich became an evangelical city through the act of the council. The civil

⁴ Cf., Gilmore. "The Anabaptist and the Rise of the Baptist Movement," by W. M. S. West.

government's supremacy in matters of religion in the canton had been established.

The city accepted Reformation teaching by issuing a decree. They removed themselves from being under the Pope. The Mayor and members of the city council decreed, "that Master Zwingli may continue to preach the holy gospel ... until he be instructed differently." Zwingli was basically responsible for this action, but those who were studying with him were also a part of the representing body that was asking for this to be accomplished.

What was meant by the city's acceptance of the Reformation teaching was not clear. Luther, in his Address to the German Nobility (1520), had denied that the pope was over secular rulers, or over the Scripture. It was, according to Luther, the secular power—not the pope—who could call a council for the reformation of the church. Probably this was all that was being implied by the council's action.

2. The Second Disputation, Oct. 26–28, 1523

Nothing really had happened in Zurich in the 10 months since the Jan 1523 decision. Everything was the same, with an occasional priest implementing something new or changing something in the practices of the church. The three days of debate centered on the three questions that had prompted the disputations—tithes, images, and the mass. As many as 800 priests and laymen may have been present.

The debate was straightforward on two of the three issues. The Council rejected both the view of the mass as a sacrifice and the use of images within the church. The Roman Doctrine which made the mass a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ was judged false and contrary to the Word of God. The third question, that of the tithe, was not addressed.

Now something was about to happen that may, at first, seem inconsequential. When this ruling about the mass and the images was made and the council was about to move on, Conrad Grebel stood up and addressed the Council, asking that the Council give instruction on the future celebration of the Lord's Supper (formerly called the "mass"). The Council had ruled that the mass was not right, but what *was* right? The council gave nothing to take the place of what was dismissed.

- It is important to note that Grebel was still giving the Council authority over the church.
- Zwingli replied for the council. He said that it was necessary to leave to the city council the decision as to the timing and the ways and means of carrying out the proposed reforms.

This was on Oct. 27, 1523. Lets do a little contrast and comparison here that will provide us with some understanding of what was to follow. Note carefully

the personalities of Grebel and Zwingli: Grebel is aggressive and Zwingli is cautious. These traits will be significant as the story develops.

Their goals were the same: Both Zwingli and Grebel were wanting the elimination of the abuses under the Roman Catholic system. But Grebel wanted it sooner. As with most reformations, there will be those who wish to proceed slowly and those who wish to have speed. Zwingli was willing for it to come about slowly. The people, he felt, were not ready for change; they needed more instruction in the Word of God.

The beginning of a rending between these men went like this:

Zwingli: "Milords (the council) will discern how the mass should henceforth be properly observed."

In response to Zwingli's words to Grebel, Simon Stumpf said, "Master Ulrich, you have no authority to place the decision in Milords' hands, for the decision is already made: the Spirit of God decides. If therefore Milords were to discern and decide anything that is contrary to God's decision, I will ask Christ for his Spirit and will teach and act against it."

Right here is a key—the word of God is above civil authorities in the matter of religion. Had Luther said that? No! This is a characteristic of the radical reformation.

Zwingli responded that the city council initiated the reform and now has the right of decision making concerning the reform. All the magisterial reformers—Zwingli, Luther, Calvin—have an inherent commitment to the state church. Later the radical reformers will refer to the magisterium as "partial reformers" Although this was a term of derision, I feel that there was a correct interpretation of what was transpiring.

Now before us we have two roads—Zwingli, holding to state church reform by the city council, and Grebel and his associates who are advocating that the free church be reformed by the Word of God.

From Oct. 1523 onward, the relationship between Zwingli and Grebel became more and more strained. Ludwig Hätzer, now a member of the group, gave an exposition from Ephesians to Hebrews in the study group. In June 1524, Hätzer criticized Zwingli for not adhering to the Word of God with all strictness. That phrase "with all strictness" sounded repeatedly in many of the groups that splintered from the radical reformation. Conrad's group was expecting a church of confessing Christians. The split beginning here was due to a difference in ecclesiology. The doctrines of Christ and of salvation were both the same—but the issue was, "what does it mean to be the people of God."

In effect, the Reformation in Zurich was indefinitely postponed after the second Disputation. When Easter 1525 came, the churches were still having mass—but without sacrifice. They were still having infant baptism, and the

cup was still not being given to the congregation. In essence, they were practicing all the Roman Catholic trappings of religion with only a few modifications. Keep in mind that this issue had begun in Jan 1523, and over two years had passed. Wayne Pipkin calls these people “impatient.”⁵ Is a two-plus year wait a mark of impatience? Yes, I believe they were impatient, but they had curbed that impatience and were attempting to work within the system.

Another hint of the coming breach between Zwingli and Grebel and his followers is in a letter written to Thomas Münzer, which is now in the archives of St. Gall in Zurich. Münzer was one of the so called Zwickau prophets who criticized Luther and Grebel had read some of his tracts. They had never meet, but Grebel felt that they had some things in common. Grebel wrote the letter, but Münzer never received it (they, too, had problems with postal delivery in that day).

In the letter to Münzer, Grebel criticized Zwingli and envisioned a restoration church after the primitive New Testament church model. The church would be built upon the confession of faith and baptism of its believers. The Lord’s meal would be a simple meal, and the services would be held in the evening with only words of Scripture being read. The service itself would be held in the home of some believer.

There is an interesting mention in the letter—it mentioned that a Christian should not make war. Could this be perhaps a subtle criticism of Münzer based upon what they might have heard about him?

Things were fermenting.

In December, 1524, Felix Manz wrote the Zurich council setting out the argument against infant baptism and asked that Zwingli reply in writing. Manz wanted to have a written debate. He had hope for the debate, because formerly Zwingli had been in agreement with the group on the matter of rejection of infant baptism. In an informal discussion Zwingli had said that infant baptism was wrong.

It was the question of infant baptism which became the first major issue to divide Zwingli and the radicals, with each side holding different views on theology and authority. We of today must see infant baptism not just as practiced today, but as a rite identifying one as a citizen of Zurich. It was, therefore, needed for secular reasons—what a birth certificate is for us, infant baptism was for them. It certified their citizenship and their parentage. The religious reasons for baptism were seen as secondary or non-existent. Everybody in medieval Europe was therefore a “Christian.” This was an understanding that emerged from centuries of Constantinian Christianity.

⁵ H. Wayne Pipkin, “Impatient Radicals, the Anabaptists,” *Christian History* 3, 1:26.

As 1525 began, Grebel made several attempts to persuade Zwingli to his position. The group continued in their study and discussion on every Tuesday evening, but Zwingli only attended twice—clearly, he was avoiding this group. The division was widening and all parties involved were sensing it. About this time Grebel wrote, “the Christian church is the congregation of the few who believe and live right.” Zwingli received the message and responded, “we must proceed slowly and eliminate the Catholic rites in a forbearing manner.”

Balthasar Hübmaier wrote to Zwingli reminding him of his former stance.

In 1523 ... I conferred with you in Graben street upon the Scriptures relating to baptism; then and there you said that I was right in saying that children should not be baptized before they were instructed in the faith; this had been the custom previously and therefore such were called catechumens. You promised to bring this out in your exposition of the Articles.... Anyone who reads it will find your opinions clearly expressed.⁶

Compare this with Article Eight in Zwingli’s dissertations: “From this follows first that all who dwell in the head are members and children of God, forming the church or communion of the saints, which is the bride of Christ, *ecclesia catholica*. ”⁷

Why do Luther and Zwingli come down of the side of infant baptism? At least a partial answer arises from the social order of the day. Infant baptism brought the child into the church and into society. To reject infant baptism would be to undermine the medieval concept of the church and state. So Anabaptists, by rejecting infant baptism, were considered anarchists.

3. The Third Disputation, Jan 17, 1525

Zwingli and Grebel and his group each put forth the views of their respective sides on baptism. The issues were decided, in essence, before the disputation; the council meeting was only a formality. The decisions, already made, were announced in two decrees:

- *First Council decree, Jan 18, 1525.*

“all infants must be baptized eight days after birth and those who do not bring infants to baptism will be banished from the city.”
- *Second council decree, Jan 21, 1525.*

⁶ Gilmore, “The Anabaptists and the Rise of the Baptist Movement,” by W. M. S. West, 234.

⁷ *Christian History* 3, 1: 22.

Forbade all opponents of infant baptism from meeting together and Grebel and Manz from speaking in public. Those of the study group not native to Zurich were banished from the city.

C. The Formalization of Anabaptists

1. The Home of Felix Manz

What do you think happened on the evening of Jan. 21—on the same day when the council had forbade the opponents of infant baptism from meeting together? The group did just that, probably in the home of Felix Manz. I have stood before what has been suggested as that probable house in Zurich. The meeting was probably on the second floor. The emotions that were present we can only imagine. At least they must have sensed that they were at the crossroads. In their conversation they became convinced that they must either turn back and abandon their position or go forward to translate their study and learning into practice.

They entered into a time of group prayer. Following that prayer, George “Blaurock” Cajacob (nicknamed Blaurock because he wore a blue coat), stood up and asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him on his profession of faith. The baptism was by effusion. After Blaurock’s baptism, Blaurock baptized all the others in the company.

At this moment the Evangelical Anabaptists Movement was born.

An old Hutterite account of the meeting describes what took place:

They came to one mind in these things, and in the pure fear of God. They recognized that a person must learn from the divine Word and preaching a true faith which manifests itself in love, and receive the true Christian baptism on the basis of the recognized and confessed faith, in the union with God of a true conscience, [prepared] henceforth to serve God in a holy Christian life with all godliness, also to be steadfast to the end in tribulation And it came to pass that they were together until dread (*Angst*) began to come over them, yea, they were pressed in their hearts. Thereupon, they began to bow their knees to the Most High God in heaven and called upon him as the Knower of hearts, implored him to enable them to do his divine will and to manifest his mercy toward them... After the prayer, George Cajacob arose and asked Conrad [Grebel] to baptize him, for the sake of God, with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with that request and desire, Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no ordained deacon to perform such work. After that was done the others similarly desired George to baptize them, which he also did upon their request. Each confirmed the other in the service of the gospel, and they began to teach and keep the faith.⁸

⁸ Durnbaugh, 70.

Thirty-five baptisms took place in the week of Jan 22–29, including four servants, thirty self-employed farmers, and one woman. All took place in Zollikon on the eastern shore of Lake Zurich some three miles from the city. The services during which these baptisms occurred followed this pattern: Bible reading, exposition which challenged the hearers, baptism for the converted in the name of the Trinity, then the observance of the Lord's meal. Their study group with Zwingli was the model, at least to a degree, of what is being done now.

2. Summary

These were the acts leading to the radical reformation that began in Zurich:

- a. Personal disillusionment with Zwingli. Grebel and the others who were humanists turning biblicists (see p. 48) were disappointed because of the temporizing of Zwingli, who had been their friend and teacher.
- b. Political disappointment in the council. They had hoped for an election of a truly Christian council that would endorse the radical reformation that would implement at once the reforms as preached by Zwingli. They were naive in the art of politics.
- c. They sought to contact those outside of Zurich who they felt were of kindred spirit. There was an attempt to establish contact with Münster and there was even an attempt to contact Carlstad. These two men were supposedly struggling for a similar reform.
- d. The loss of the debate on infant baptism on Jan. 17, 1525.
- e. The baptism of Blaurock, and then the others in that service.

3. Reaction to the Movement

- a. Zurich authorities could not let this go on. All those known to have been involved were arrested and, from that moment on, Anabaptists were a hunted people.
- b. On December 16, 1527, the council opened an inquisition on Felix Manz, Jacob Falk, and Henry Reiman. All these were drowned to death. Drowning, they felt, was a fitting punishment for rebaptizers (some cynics of that day dubbed the penalty "the third baptism").
- c. At the Diet of Speyer, in 1529, all the heads of Europe and the church passed a sentence of death upon all Anabaptists. Because of their view on infant baptism—which was seen as against the state just as much as against the church—they were considered anarchists and therefore dangerous to "Christian Europe."
- d. Most of the Anabaptist leadership had been killed by 1530—the attempt to obliterate the movement nearly succeeded. The movement continued but the leadership now fell to those who were without the same commitments, biblical training, and skills.

4. Conclusions

- a. The Anabaptist movement was a child of the Reformation in general and the Zwinglian Reformation in particular. They are my people in the same sense as Luther is mine in his “the just shall live by faith” exposition.
- b. Anabaptism originated as a religious movement and not a political movement. Although it challenged the church-state relationship, it did so from a theological and not a political position. The movement was born in an academic and theological milieu with middle class people. The movement centered around the problem of ecclesiology.
- c. Believers’ baptism was first put into practice as an organizing center of the church in Zurich on Jan, 21, 1525.

II. The Doctrine of the Fallen Church

From within the Anabaptist story emerges the doctrine of the fallen church.

Can there be a doctrine that is biblical and that is not in the Bible? Try to name such a doctrine; perhaps the trinity? But hints to the trinity are within the Bible. The Evangelical Anabaptists will develop a doctrine that has a source outside of Scripture—and you will have to judge whether it is a biblical doctrine or not. This doctrine, however, will be echoed in John Smyth, Roger Williams and a host of reformers or would be reformers. I feel that it is a biblical doctrine.

To be a reformer in the 1500s you would have had tremendous regard for the traditions of the historic church. The existing church was the true church, but things were wrong with the church. The church had fallen on evil, and into unworthy hands. The problem they faced was how to achieve moral and spiritual purity in order that the church could be usable to God. This was why reform was important.

So there developed the idea of a fallen church. That which the church was to be, it was not; if the church did not meet the biblical model then it had to have *fallen*—fallen away from the intentions of God. Every Reformer held to the view because, otherwise, there was no need for reform. The fact you are calling for the church’s reform means something had gone wrong with the church. When and where did the church go wrong? When and where did it fall?

This doctrine was a presupposition which each reformer brought to the interpretation of the church. When and where did the church fall? Every Reformer held to this doctrine, but every reformer dated the time of the church’s fall differently. *The key to understanding the Reformer’s doctrine of*

*the church is to learn when—that is, with what historic innovations—they considered the fall as having taken place.*⁹

A. Zwingli's Dating of the Fall of the Church

Zwingli accepted practices within the church that were explicitly specified in Scripture. Accordingly, he regarded the church as having fallen in the early 600s with the rise of the papacy and Gregory I. I don't know that this was ever directly stated by Zwingli, but George Williams¹⁰ has suggested these dates and the reasons for the dating will be in the material that I will be sharing with you.

Zwingli opposed the abuses of the medieval concept of the church that came about through the papal institution. He looked upon Constantine and what Constantine had done in a positive light. It was not Constantine, but rather the monarchical papacy that Zwingli opposed. So when Zwingli talks about reform, he wants to go back to the 600s and the situation before the papacy began exercising its power. The Constantinian era was viewed by Zwingli as a triumph for the early church.

B. Luther's Dating of the Fall of the Church

Luther accepted practices within the church as long as they were not contrary to explicitly stated Scripture. He thus considered the church as having fallen about the time of the abuses of Boniface III. This would be in and around the 607 time frame. Therefore he did not regard the order of the papacy as being wrong, nor did he object to the way that the church was structured, but rather he felt that it was the *abuses of power* that needed reform. Luther had been a Roman Catholic and wanted to stay that way; he would have remained Roman Catholic if only they would have let him. Luther can accept the monarchical papacy, but not the abuses of the papacy.

Luther and Zwingli had similar views and this is why they can agree on most things, as seen in the Marburg Colloquy in 1529. The difference between Zwingli's and Luther's dating of the fall of the church can explain their differing views on the Lord's Supper, the one issue that continued to separate them at Marburg.

In general it can be said that Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin maintained that a fall had occurred. The pope's sweeping claims to temporal power, the dragging of the church into the political arena, and the moral deterioration of the church—these were general areas where the magisterial reformers felt that the fall had taken place. This enabled the Reformers to consider themselves as the

⁹ Cf., the Roman Church which, of course, will deny such a doctrine and, thus, the need for reform. John 16:13 is interpreted as justifying each innovation as an instance of the "spirit of truth" guiding the Church "into all truth."

¹⁰ Williams, 19ff.

continuation of the true church and to consider the papal church as the work of innovators. It was the abuse of the system that caused the fall, and by correcting the system they were in continuity with the historical church.

C. Anabaptist's Dating of the Fall of the Church

Where Luther and Zwingli opposed the abuses of the medieval concept of the church, the Anabaptists attacked the concept itself. Where Luther and Zwingli looked upon Constantine as a positive period, the Anabaptists did not.

For the Anabaptists it was the illicit union of church and state that caused the fall of the church. The Anabaptists will date the Fall of the Church at AD 313—Constantine's Edict of Milan. It was at that point that Christianity received official recognition and acceptance, even though Christianity did not become the official religion of the Roman empire until AD 380 under Theodosius I. Because of the union of church and state and the developed rite of infant baptism, the church was flooded with hordes of nominal Christians and unregenerate peoples. For the Anabaptists, the need was the removal of the historic perversions that came from the union of the church with the state. This removal was to be accomplished by the practice of believers' baptism. The concept of believers' baptism as a covenant would remove the unregenerate membership from the church. It was this concept that became the organizing principle around which the Anabaptist sought to restore the "Ancient Church."

To illustrate the issue, the Christian church in the sixteenth century may be compared to a tree. There were several opinions as to what should be done with the church at that time. The Roman Catholics wanted to keep the tree just as it had grown, even though some of the branches were withered and some rotten. The tree was sacred—it should not be touched. Reform-minded Catholic humanists, of whom Erasmus would be the best example, wanted the tree pruned of dead wood, so that it might bear better fruit. Major tree surgery was called for, said the Protestant Reformers. The only way to save the tree was to cut off whole limbs in order to get back to the healthy trunk. Finally, there were the Radical Reformers—the Anabaptists—who contended that the entire plant above ground was sick and the only solution would be to cut it back to the healthy roots and let new life spring up from them.¹¹

Most likely the Radical Reformers were influenced by humanism in speaking of the church's fall. Renaissance people were fond of speaking of the golden period of Greece and Rome, followed by the dank, dark, and dismal Middle Ages. This widespread interpretation of secular history helped the Anabaptists come to their understanding of church history.

When Emperor Constantine began to favor Christianity, and was himself baptized shortly before his death, the church started on a downward path.

¹¹ Littell, 48–65.

Unlike the traditional Christian view which, since Eusebius, has seen Constantine's conversion as the beginning of the glorious period of Christian influence and dominance, the Anabaptists saw that event as a tragedy of tremendous proportions.

D. A Historical Study of the Fall of the Church

There was an almost imperceptible, gradual process that took place in the Patristic era that changed the nature of the church. When one looks at the end-result of this process in the Roman Catholic Church and considers its New Testament starting point, the vast difference becomes apparent.

Two major factors moved the *ekklesia* (the termed used for the New Testament people of God) to the "church" (the institutionalized organization), and these factors were interrelated. The factors were the development of a formal legal authority and the development of the sacramental view of salvation around the New Testament ordinances.

The sacramental view of salvation developed around both the Lord's Supper and Baptism. The saving grace of Christ would be experienced in these rites controlled by the church. In our discussion I will center only on baptism because of the Anabaptists thesis that baptism is an initiatory rite for entering the *ekklesia*. If time were available both ordinances would receive scrutiny.

1. The Institutionalizing of the Ekklesia

It was said that "Christianity had two great battles to fight in the Patristic era. The first battle was *without*—the battle against persecution. The second battle was *within*—the battle on discipline and purity. It has been said that one battle was won and the other battle was lost, but I want to disagree with that conclusion—I believe that both battles were lost. The church that won the battle over persecution was not the same church as the New Testament *ekklesia*. The *ekklesia* had already changed; the church's very nature had been altered. Here are the reasons for this changed nature:

a. Syncretism—The Problem of Growth

In the first three centuries, it is estimated that between 5 and 10 million people were won to Christianity. This was a tenth of the Roman Empire. Gal. 4:4 needed to be understood as more than just the New Testament. Sometimes the church would triple overnight. The need for leaders was great. Early leaders in the church were from Judaism, but later Judaism rejected the Christian message. The Judaic leaders had an Old Testament background and were able to perceive and to interpret the New Testament message, but the leadership that came from the Gentile converts had a pagan background and had understandings that were vastly different.

The Gentile converts, being from a different culture, lacked an understanding and means of communicating the gospel. How long does it take for

Christianity to filter into the sub strata of a culture? I don't know. But the resulting syncretism had two emphases—some church rites carried with them magical overtones, and the external signs of church membership were magnified.

b. Purism—The Problem of *Discipline*

A large number of persecutions transpired in this time period before legality was offered to the church. Most of these persecutions were local, but there were two exceptions which had Empire-wide overtones:

- The Decian persecution in 250, which produced the Novations.
- The Diocletian persecution in 303, which produced the Donatists.

The question that arose from these persecutions was how the church should deal with the lapsed. Should they serve the church as members? Should they be served the Lord's meal? Should they have full membership as if they had never renounced their faith? Suppose one's husband had died because of faithfulness to Jesus Christ and another's husband had renounced Christ under the same persecution, was freed, and later came back to the church proclaiming a faith in Christ? How should the people of God deal with the matter? How will the widow of a martyr feel toward the lapsed? What is the role of the lapsed in the church?

The answers to those questions affected the very nature of the church. Augustine used the wheat and tares analogy (Matt. 13:24–30) as a basis for his solution.

c. Civil Religion—The Problem of *Dominance*

The Edict of Milan (313) made Christianity a legal religion. When Theodosius I made Christianity mandatory in 380, he required the baptism of every person a rite of citizenship to the Empire. Where at one time no Christian could serve in the military because of their allegiance to someone greater than Caesar, now every soldier had to be Christian to serve—a remarkable change.

- Leadership in the churches was now based on organizational skills and loyalty to the state, where before Constantine leadership had been based on spiritual gifting.
- The persecuted church becomes the persecuting church. Those not professing Christianity were often debarred from offices.

The statement “the church exists only where the bishop is present” became the teaching of the church, and represented a fundamental difference with the New Testament “where two or three ...” (Matt. 18:20). This position may be traced back to Cyprian, but was actualized after Constantine. Its purpose was

to correct and prohibit heresy, and in turn it became a heresy itself, at least from the Anabaptist point of view.

d. Authoritarianism—The Problem of *Schism*

Two forces were at work here. The first was the modeling of the church after the government, and the second was the development of church leaders having a mode of authority originating in the culture. This use of authority intruded into the spiritual organism and brought a different kind of nature to the church—rank and formal authority of jurisdiction. The church had become a hierarchy.

2. *The Sacramentalizing of the Ekklesia*

When the ordinances were conceived of as a sacrament, a fundamental change in the structure of the *ekklesia* took place. I would love to use the word “sacrament” here if it meant what it did when it was first used, an “oath of loyalty” (Tertullian).

- a. The use of “sacrament” as a conveyer of God is a failure to understand the doctrine of grace. Grace conveyed through specially ordained channels becomes the norm of the church in the post-Constantinian period. This approach suggested an impersonal and quasi-material force or sub-personal pneumatic power conveyed through ordained channels. Grace in the New Testament, on the other hand, was understood as being the initiative of God.
- b. The use of “sacrament” as a conveyer of God is a failure to understand the doctrine of baptism.
 - Baptism as a conveyer of God has Christ’s baptismal waters filled with a sanctifying potency.
 - Bishops began praying over water before baptism so the waters would have the same potency for those they baptized.
 - Infant baptism developed next. Baptism in the New Testament and in much of the Patristic period had a required catechism, but this cannot be done with infant baptism.

Infant baptism obscured the New Testament doctrine of baptism. Water baptism was viewed as a cleansing from original sin and confirmation as a means to conveying the Holy Spirit. Division between catechism and baptism developed as a way to handle the problem. Augustine fleshed out the doctrine, relating it to original sin. Under the impetus of Augustine infant baptism spread throughout the church. From the fifth century on, infant baptism became the general practice of the church. It was only challenged by a few isolated communities.

Baptism, through its application to infants, progressively lost its New Testament significance until it could be used as a mere outward sign without any inward spiritual significance. At the time of the Anabaptists, it was primarily a mark of citizenship.

III. The Doctrine of the Regenerate Church

Just as the doctrine of the fallen church emerges from the Anabaptist Story, so also does the Doctrine of the Regenerate Church. It was in 1525 that Conrad Grebel attempted to influence Zwingli and the division between the two men began to widen. As has been noted above, Grebel wrote “The Christian church is the congregation of the few who believe and live right,” and Zwingli’s response was “we must proceed slowly and eliminate the Catholic rites in a forbearing manner.”

On that evening when Grebel baptized Blaurock, and in turn Blaurock baptized the rest of the group the Anabaptists, there was no turning back. They were going forward and attempting to implement what they believed they had found in the Scriptures at whatever cost. And the cost for most of them was to be their lives.

The church is for believers and for believers only. That is the theme of the radical reformers. They thought this was the New Testament message. They thought that they were conforming to the teachings of Christ. They were saying that the church did not need the support of culture or Empire. Even if the multitudes left the church because of Christ’s difficult commands, leaving only the few, that would be all right. The Anabaptists called for a regenerate church. And it is to this doctrine that I now direct your study.

A. The Nature of the *Ekklesia*

This study presupposes that there is a relationship between the *ekklesia* and the person of Christ. Moltmann, has said, “There is only a church if and as long as Jesus of Nazareth is believed and acknowledged to be the Christ of God.”¹²

To understand the nature of the church, I am assuming the church’s relationship to Christ and will not overtly develop this theme even though it is, indeed, a needed task.

It is from three areas, and an implication from those areas, that I will attempt to develop the nature of the *ekklesia*—from the word *ekklesia* itself, from the biblical images used for the people of God, and from the Anabaptists belief of contemporaneity. These three themes give the Anabaptist understanding of the nature of the church.

¹² Moltmann, 66f.

1. Etymology

- *Ek* means out.
- *Klesis* means calling.

So the word means *called out* as an accomplished fact or *called out* as a process.

The word *ekklesia* is theologically neutral. Within the Scripture the word may refer to religious or non-religious (secular) assemblies. The basic meaning of *ekklesia* is a meeting or a gathering.

2. Old Testament Usage

The LXX uses *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew noun *qahal* as follows:

- Ps. 26:5, a “gathering” of evil doers.
- Ex. 32:22–32, the “gathering” of an army.
- 1 Chron. 13:1–2, the “gathering” of military officers.
- Josh. 8:35, the “gathering” of a whole nation.
- Deut. 4:10, 10:4; 18:16, the “gathering” of Israel.

Only in the New Testament will the term take of special significance.

3. New Testament Usage

Ekklesia is used in a similar way as in the Old Testament in Acts 7:38, *ekklesia* being translated “assembly.”

a. Synoptic gospels

Ekklesia is used only three times and all in of Matthew.

- In Matt. 16:16–18, *Ekklesia* is used in the *future* sense and may have the following possible interpretations:
 - Some have suggested that the *ekklesia* was founded upon Peter who had the right to pass it on to his successors.
 - Others have suggested that the *ekklesia* was founded upon Jesus himself, the rock and the chief cornerstone. The identification of Christ with the rock (*petra*) is not to be dismissed lightly, especially since 1 Cor. 10:4 and 1 Pet. 2:6 make such an identification (Doctrine of Perspicuity¹³).

¹³ Doctrine of Perspicuity: Using Scripture to explain Scripture.

- Others say the *ekklesia* was founded upon apostolic faith as represented by Peter. Note that Peter does have a unique place among the disciples. He is present in the three major Pentecosts in Acts: he opens the doors of the *ekklesia* to the Jews in Acts 2, to the Samaritans in Acts 8, and to the Gentiles in Acts 10. Peter's priority is seen in various contexts in the New Testament. He is named first among the twelve disciples, he identified Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi,¹⁴ and he is present at the transfiguration, at the Mount of Olives, and also at Gethsemane.

The foundational role of Peter is seen in all these events, but a qualification needs to be made. Paul exercises authority in his area in Gal. 2:11. James exercises authority in his area, the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). So Peter's areas of authority are limited. When Paul challenges Peter's attitude on Jew-Gentile relations in Gal. 2:11, the question was decided by the Jerusalem council. John 20:23 indicates that the apostolic authority given in the Gospel of Matthew to Peter is here seen given to the whole community. The later hierarchical structure of the Roman Church is therefore obviously not authorized in the New Testament witness.

- In Matt. 18:17, *ekklesia* is used two times.
 - Some affirm there must have been an organized *ekklesia* at this time, for Jesus speaks of the church.
 - Others affirm that Jesus is giving a principle to the group. This is how they should decide matters of discipline when matters of relationship failed and so this principle can rightly be applied to the church when it comes into existence.
 - Another view is that the passage is to assert that Jesus was speaking historically in the Old Testament sense about the synagogue and its structures of discipline and that he approved the synagogue approach and thereby the concept became a part of the *ekklesia*. Jesus was using *ekklesia* here in its etymological meaning and not in a theological meaning.

In conclusion, we can consider this question: Is the authority of the apostles transferable? *NO!* What happened to the authority of the apostles when they died? Only one authority can still be valid, namely, loyalty to the tradition of the primitive witness. Since the death of the Apostles, the apostolate has validity only in one form, as the norm of original tradition fixed in writing, the norm of the original witness, i.e. the New Testament.

¹⁴ Mark 8:27ff, Matt. 16:13ff, Luke 9:18ff.

Ephesians 2:20, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” emphasizes the accompanying truth that the canon alone is not the foundation of the church, but is foundation only in combination with the spiritually filled, oral exposition of Scripture, v. 21f. The canon is the successor of the apostolic authority, but spiritual interpretation is also needed.

b. Acts

- In Jerusalem

Ekklesia was first used of the Christian community gathered at Jerusalem, cf. Acts 5:11, 8:1,3. They were gathered at Jerusalem and were still going to the synagogue or the temple at the time. Because they were a community which had received the Spirit of the Messiah, they were a Christian community.

Do you feel the non-institutionalism here?

- Outside Jerusalem
 - *Ekklesia* used *singularly*: indicates local congregations, cf. 11:26, Antioch; 13:1, Antioch; 14:27, Antioch; 18:22, Caesarea; 20:17, Ephesus.
 - *Ekklesia* used *plurally*: refers to a number of local communities, cf. 15:41, strengthening the churches; 16:5, also strengthening the churches.
 - *Ekklesia* used in the sense of *whole*: Acts 9:31 and 20:28 speak of the *ekklesia* of the whole people of God.

The *ekklesia* is not divided into smaller units. It is not the *ekklesiae* added up which makes the *ekklesia*, but rather the *ekklesia* is found in every *ekklesia*. And yet you can speak of each individual *ekklesia* as *ekklesia*.

P. T. Forsyth used a metaphor saying that the local church is the “outcropping of the church composed of all true believers.” As the “outcropping” each *ekklesia* is the same nature as the formation of which it is part, so the local congregation shares the nature of the body of Christ. Even as a new sprouted tree has all the characteristics of treeness.”¹⁵

Acts 2:42 gives the *ekklesia*’s self-understanding:

- The *ekklesia* depends on the apostolic message for its existence.
- The *ekklesia* depends on apostolic fellowship for its continuation.

¹⁵ Forsyth, 65f.

- The *ekklesia* centers its life around the cultus for its essence, i.e., the bread, baptism, and prayers.

c. Paul

As in Acts, Paul uses both singular and plural forms.

- *Individual*: Rom. 16:1, 1 Cor. 1:2, in reference to particular cities.
- *Plural*: the churches in Judea, 1 Thess. 2:14; Gal. 1:22, etc.
- *Whole*: The body of Christ, 1 Cor. 12:28, cf. Col. 1:18; 24; Eph. 1:22f; 2:14–21; 3:6–10; 4:4; 5:22–33; Gal. 1:13; and Phil. 3:6.

Observation: The more mature a Christian community is, the less use it will make of apostolic authority. Only where it was essential to assist the primitive witness in its purity does Paul make use of his apostolic authority, in order to call back the *ekklesia* to truth in Christ, Gal. 1–2.

d. John

John never uses *ekklesia* in his gospel, but in Revelation he uses *ekklesia* 20 times, each referring to a specific congregation. The epistles of John use *ekklesia* only in a singular sense.

e. The Remainder of the New Testament

The word *ekklesia* is absent in the ten remaining books of the New Testament—Mark, Luke, John, 2 Tim, Titus, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John and Jude. *Why?* They used images of the church, and these images can give us insights on how they understood the church.

4. Images

The nature of *ekklesia* is not learned from a word study alone. To find the nature of the *ekklesia*, the New Testament images need to be studied as well. The New Testament is a gallery of pictures that set forth the idea of the *ekklesia*.

A Manual of Ecclesiology, by H. E. Dana,¹⁶ a classic in days gone by, taught me the basics for an understanding of the *ekklesia*. A word study is really inadequate to understand the concept. Why do so few New Testament books contain the word *ekklesia* if it is so important?

Paul S. Minear gives 96 images for the church. He sees these as words and pictures as channels of thought rather than receptacle of ideas with fixed meanings. From these images suggested by Minear I will set forth several, and fill out their meaning.

¹⁶ Dana, *passim*.

- a. *Saints and Sanctified.* *Ekklesia* may be viewed from the standpoint of God's action in calling and setting apart.
- b. *Believers and Faithful.* *Ekklesia* may be viewed from the standpoint of communal response. *Ekklesia* understood from believers—people faithing God and then being faithful to God.
- c. *Slaves and Servants.* *Ekklesia* may be viewed from the standpoint of faith's basic duties. We have been enlisted as slaves, servants, stewards, and ministers. Obedience sets out the meaning of the *ekklesia*.
- d. *People of God.* *Ekklesia* may be viewed as the continuation and consummation of the covenant community, both the Old Testament covenant and New Testament covenants.
- e. *Kingdom and Temple.* the *ekklesia* may be viewed in terms of the central institution of Israel's worship (Rev. 1:6, 5:10).
- f. *Household and Family.* the *ekklesia* may be understood as a gathering of God's people.
- g. *A New Exodus.* The *ekklesia* may be viewed as a continuing struggle with the world (James 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1).
- h. *A Vineyard and Flock.* The *ekklesia* may be viewed in agricultural analogies of growth and productivity Mark (12:1–12; Luke 12:32; John 1:1–16).
- i. *One Body in Christ.* The *ekklesia* may be described as being incorporated into its Lord (Rom 12:5; Eph. 1:2).
- j. *The New Humanity.* The *ekklesia* may be viewed as the beginning of a new creation (Eph. 2:14).

Some Old Testament parallel expressions are carried into the New Testament.

- Israel of God: Gal. 6:16, cf. Rom. 9:6.
- Seed of Abraham: Gal. 3:29.
- The elect race: 1 Pet 2:5–10.¹⁷

During the time between his resurrection and final coming, Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the community. *What a gallery of pictures to interpret the ekklesia!*

5. Believers' Church Uniqueness—Contemporaneity

Where the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans saw the church as continuous from the time of Christ and placed great weight on its historical development, the Anabaptists placed their emphases on the contemporaneity of the historical

¹⁷ Minear, *passim*.

and the eschatological. So I will want to talk about “this is that” and “then is now” to interpret these ideas.



Figure 2. The terms "This is That" and "Then is Now."

Tradition was important to the Anabaptists. They were humanists however, and going back to the original sources was of primary importance. Because of the Constantinianization of Christianity, the tradition must be critiqued by the Scripture and compared to the original sources. This “looping back”¹⁸ was the humanist way to gain truth.

This led the Anabaptists to a theological position that the church was not to be determined by the developmental model as used by the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans, which at this time had tradition and Scripture as equal or nearly equal. Rather, the Anabaptist felt that it was the Spirit which had guided the canon and continued to guide the church, and tradition needed to be critiqued from the norm of the Scriptures.

Nor did the Anabaptists hold to the succession model—that they could trace their origins back to the New Testament and therefore they were the true church. The Landmark and other groups attempt to trace the connecting links back to the New Testament as a proof of the rightness of their beliefs. The Anabaptists did not do this.

Instead of taking the above approaches, the Anabaptists held to a *contemporaneity* of the church. The church *now* is the *primitive* church. We are to see ourselves as contemporaries with the historical Jesus. His commands of old are also commands to us. For instance, the Lutherans and the Calvinists viewed the Great Commission as addressed to the disciples and not to the believers of that time, the Anabaptists took the words of the Great Commission as being addressed, and obligatory, to them. All the commands of Christ in the Scripture were addressed directly to them. They also believed that the church now is the church to come. The church, through the earnestness of the Spirit, has a foretaste of what the future is to be—it is to do the will of God as the will of God is to be done in heaven.

¹⁸ I am indebted to John Howard Yoder for this term. Looping back is an important discipline in the process of auditing the church’s response to changes that are imported from the culture. It is a concept taken from nature. When a vine grows, it ventures away from its axis—but it always “loops back” to its original axis to attach itself. It is a conviction of mine that the church “loop back” from time to time to verify its practices, teachings, etc., with the Scriptures.

When I was with Grandfather and Grandmother Zink, I used to look at pictures in what was called a stereopticon. In a stereopticon you would set two pictures at the end of a long staff and would let you view those pictures and give a depth dimension that you could not have otherwise. I always marveled that flat photographs could be seen in depth. Authentic Christian faith exercised in the church is like a stereopticon. One sees the present in correct perspective only when it construes the present by means of prefiguring God's past while at the same time construing the present by means of the prophetic future—God's future.¹⁹

To understand the contemporaneity of the church, I will use the two prophetic symbols of our faith—Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In each of these there is a blend of the past and future that focuses into the present. In baptism there is a remembrance—death, burial and resurrection, so in baptism that past becomes a part of the believer's present. There is also being raised to "walk in newness of life." This newness of life is but a foretaste of the future—of God's intention for the believer. The past and the present become forged together to make the present a holy moment.

a. "This is That"

Joshua 24:5–8 gives an Old Testament understanding of "This is That." Several decades had transpired between the coming out of Egypt and this event, yet Joshua says, "you came to the sea." Did they? No, absolutely not. Did they? Yes, absolutely yes.

So with Jeremiah 6:16—"Thus says the Lord, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths. Where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find rest for your souls.' But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'"

You *can* walk the ancient paths. You *are to* walk the ancient paths.

Language about one set of events and circumstance under divine guidance can be applied to another set of events of circumstances. Let me illustrate; Joel 2 and Acts 2 illustrate "this is that." But Joel did not speak directly to Pentecost. Still, under divine guidance, it applied.

With this way of interpreting the Bible, the present Christian community became the primitive community and the commands of the past were commands for the present. The events in another time and place can display redemptive power here and now.

The Bible does not say how this is done—it only assumes it. It is done immediately and mystically. It is not enough to say we are people of the Book. We are, but we are more; we are people of the book *and* of the Spirit. This immediately and mystically is the work of the Spirit that makes the past the present and that shapes the present.

¹⁹ cf., Le Master.

With this way of interpreting the Scripture, there is a vast difference between the Anabaptists and the other reformed advocates.

b. “Then is Now”

“Then is now” in baptism and the Lord’s supper, is seen in the phrases “walking in newness of life” and “until the Lord comes.” The future impinges on the present. Love and joy, for example, are fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22); they are experienced now but will be fully experienced in the future, cf., 1 Cor. 10:11.

The Anabaptists pictured the church as an outcropping of heaven itself, a foretaste of the “great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb...” (Rev. 7:9). That picture governed their understanding of worship and fellowship. The church is to live as if it were the end of the world, and to manifest in their lives God’s intentions for the world, as presented in Gen. 1–2.

Politicians—those who attempt to work in the world—should be able to glimpse the world the way it ought to be by looking at the local church. Anyone who makes the comparison between our present culture and a rightly constituted believers’ church will see that we have a long way to go, mutual acceptance being just one example (Gal. 3:26–28).

6. Conclusions

a. *Ekklesia* is a fellowship

The *ekklesia* is a new humanity reconciled with God and by God in which all within the fellowship become brothers or sisters. *Ekklesia* is never conceived of as an institution, but exclusively a fellowship of persons. Institutionalizing the church is okay until it begins to impinge on this fellowship.

b. The *Ekklesia* Is Bounded

The *ekklesia* exists from Pentecost to the final coming (parousia). It could not be the fellowship that Christ desired until there was the coming of the Spirit. The *ekklesia* is bounded—it has a beginning and an end. The *ekklesia* is limited.

c. The *Ekklesia* Works Confessionally

The *ekklesia* did such things as decide policy, such as the matter of circumcision (Acts 15). But it had no fixed creeds, no liturgy, no permanent pastors, and no New Testament in concrete form. It was a combination of unity and diversity. Did it work? That is the miracle of the *ekklesia* which Paul and other Christians themselves regarded with astonishment. *It worked.*

It worked confessionally. In the confessional approach, beliefs were birthed—Christ is Lord. In confessing shared experiences, decisions were reached. Confession provided a fellowship in which the sharers invited hearers into a fellowship from which one could receive the word that was being shared. Today we have specialists giving authoritarian messages instead of a confessional approach. Worship, therefore, has turned to institutional goals—attendance, offerings and services—to enhance the institutions.

There will always be an institutionalizing, but the organization must stay at the service of the event which birthed it. Where an institution stands in the way of contemporary obedience to God's call to his people to move on with Him in history. If the institution stands against that, then the institution becomes sin. The priority of the event must be recognized and honored even over the institution.

IV. Fellowship Practices

From Within the Anabaptist Story emerged Fellowship Practices.

In becoming radical reformers the Anabaptists started anew. This involved several practices which for that time were startling and different. We are the inheritor of these practices in much the same way as we are the inheritor of Luther's rediscovered concept of "Justification by Faith," that is, that the believer is to live by the faithfulness of God. It was on the profession of faith that the Anabaptists began again. Normally infant baptism would never call for the need of a confession of faith. Confirmation, when it occurred, and in this time confirmation was far from being universal, was a ratification of infant baptism which had removed original sin. For the Anabaptists there was the profession of faith and following the profession would be baptism. Baptism was the beginning of the Christian walk. So it is these three experiences—profession of faith, baptism, and the Christian living—to which we turn to now.

A. The Practice of the Profession of Faith

There are two traditional ingredients considered in the initial experience of the believer—faith and repentance. The order of treatment normally indicated much about one's theological commitment. In this class I will treat faith and repentance together, or attempt to do so. Until there is an experience with Christ there can be no human response. This is a major thesis of all reformed theology, including the Anabaptists.

- If repentance is thought of as a human activity, then it is Pelagian theology.
- If faith is thought of as an individual choosing to believe in Christ, then it is also a Pelagian theology.

I see faith and repentance as being the *same experience* viewed differently.

1. The Components of the Initial Experience

While I do not like to see conversion reduced a series of stereotypical steps, I am comfortable describing the initial experience as having three *components*.

- a. *Awareness*. Awareness comes upon the initiative of God; it is a *gift* of God. I have said earlier, with Augustine, that John 1:9 reveals that initiative. We can train ourselves to reject God's light—atheism is something that is learned. My conviction that the evangelist's task is to clarify and interpret the work that God is already doing among non-believers applies here.
- b. *Insight or illumination*. Eph. 2:8—the work of Holy Spirit. This will be discussed later in the course.
- c. *Decision*. If decision is thought of as our giving a pledge to God, then it can be seen as a human activity. If decision is affirming and responding to God's activity within us, then decision is an appropriate human activity. *It is important to understand that the initiative is with God, that is why it is of grace*. A non-Pelagian decision is the affirmation—the appropriation—of God's work in our lives.

What happens if church membership is based on Constantinian Christianity rather than decision? When the catechism is added, you have a reformed Constantinianism. This what was prevalent in the Reformation times.

Decision can never be based on an act of choosing. This is the problem with apologetics—when we use reason to clarify what God is doing, it is good apologetics, but when we attempt to win a convert by “convincing” him or her to choose Christ, we have left God's grace out of the picture and have accomplished nothing. The same might be said for revival sermons; the preacher can bring awareness, and can even press for decision, but only the Holy Spirit can provide insight. It is essential that a candidate manifest all three of the above components—awareness, insight, and decision—before being baptized. Otherwise, the result may well be “non-believers’ baptism.”

The human part in religious experience can be seen in having services with warmth which nourishes and fosters the decision when the insight comes. However, one must wait for insight. When the individual and God have a work to do, then the community has a work to do. The community helps ratify the relationship and honors the decision by receiving the professing believer as a new Christian and as part of the community.

2. *Metaphors for the Initial Experience*

Traditionally, several biblical metaphors have been interpreted in a narrow manner. We will need to work through these with care, as the biblical writers use of metaphor was based on Hebrew thinking, not Western thinking.²⁰ Hebrew thinking tends to be holistic, while Western through tends to be linear.

I will want to suggest that the concepts of faith and repentance are both found in the metaphors that follow.

- a. *“Take up your cross.”* Matt. 10:38, “anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

There is a faith recognition of Christ and a decision to choose obedience. It is faith that has the illumination to see God present in Jesus, but in choosing an obedient life rather than a self-centered life, there is repentance. Both faith and repentance can be seen in the call and decision to follow him.
- b. *“Follow me.”* Matt. 16:24, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Matt. 19:21, the Rich Young Ruler—“go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” Matt. 4:19, “come follow me ... and I will make you fishers of men...”

This is a change of direction, which is repentance, and a walk after Christ, which is faith. Both faith and repentance are present.
- c. *“Lose your life.”* Matt. 16:25 “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

This is saying that the life now being lived is not adequate and you surrender that life. So faith and repentance are both present in the metaphor.
- d. *“Become a little child.”* Matt. 18:3, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

This presupposes that you are an adult. One turns back to childlikeness. Is that turning back not an act of repentance? So, taking life as a child is a call for faith.

²⁰ The proper interpretation of ancient texts is especially challenging when encountering metaphors because it is difficult to know the idioms in the ancient culture. Be careful to avoid Westernizing biblical metaphors. What, for example, does it mean to say that the “husband is the *head* of the wife as Christ is *head* of the Church” (Eph. 5:23)? The “head” metaphor means “authority” in the West, but it meant “source” to Paul—Christ is the *source* of the church as man was the *source* of the woman (Gen. 2:21–25).

- e. “*Crucified with Christ.*” Gal. 2:19-20, “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ.”

Something must die and something must be let go. Faith and repentance are involved in the call to be crucified with Christ, and yet to live, and the life that is lived is lived by faith in the Son of God. Faith and repentance are both present.

3. Conclusion

- a. Faith and repentance are one act viewed from different perspectives, for believing in God.
- b. The plan of salvation. The Bible speaks of repenting, believing and confessing, but interestingly, never all three in the same context. Why? The language of the Bible is fluid, and each of the words expresses what is happening and encompasses the totality of the initial experience. Each word carries the complete experience of salvation but is viewed from a different perspective.

The Western mind makes these ideas linear and attempts to prioritize them and give them an order to produce the initial experience. The plan of salvation is linear thinking. Any one of the concepts of repenting, believing and confessing, have the salvation experience within it.
- c. Profession of Faith was normally made at baptism, Rom. 10:9–10. The baptism was in 10:9, while 10:10 is a commentary on 10:9.

B. The Practice of Believers’ Baptism

Let me review once more what to me is one of the more remarkable, yet little known, events in Church History. The evening of Jan 21, 1525, when the council had forbade the opponents of infant baptism from meeting, the group gathered together, probably in the home of Felix Manz. They sensed that they were at the crossroads and realized that they must either turn back and abandon their position or go forward to translate their biblical study and learning into practice.

They entered into a time of group prayer. Following that prayer, George Blaurock stood up and asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him on his profession of faith. After that Blaurock baptized all the others in that company. *This was the moment that the Evangelical Anabaptist Movement was born.*

1. Believers’ Baptism Opposes Infant Baptism

Reformed theology appropriates *circumcision* as its model for infant baptism. A few words in passing are appropriate.

- a. Circumcision and baptism were considered different practices in the New Testament. In the circumcision controversy of Acts 15, baptism is not mentioned. The two simply were different ceremonies. Consider Acts 15:1, “unless circumcised...”
- b. Jews who were circumcised to enter the old covenant were baptized to enter the new covenant. It is wrong to assume that, because circumcision and baptism are both rites of admission, they are therefore interchangeable. John’s baptism was scandalous because he was baptizing Jews who had been circumcised, Luke 7:29–30.
- c. The New Testament *contrasts* circumcision and baptism, rather than *compares* them, Col. 2:11f and Eph. 2:11. Circumcision is contrasted with spiritual circumcision, which is consummate in baptism, which does away with circumcision. Circumcision was a sign for the old covenant while baptism is a proclamation in the new covenant.

2. Proselyte Baptism as the Background for Believers’ Baptism

We can gain insights into believers’ baptism from Jewish antecedents.²¹

a. The Beginnings of Proselyte Baptism

The major question is, “when did proselyte baptism begin?” Some say AD 65. That is the date of the Jewish synod where Jews stated that all Gentiles were unclean. But did the synod originate the concept or did they formulate an existing practice?

Here is a practical solution. A Gentile, because he did not observe Levitical regulations concerning purity, was unclean as a matter of course, and therefore could not be admitted into the Jewish communion. Therefore, proselyte baptism is as old as the Levitical code. Also, according to John 1:19f and Mark 11:29–30, The Sanhedrin’s inquiry concerning John’s baptism centered not upon its form or meaning, but only upon John’s authority to perform it. The practice itself appears to be accepted as familiar. Had John’s baptizing been an innovation, we would expect their question to be, “why baptize?”

b. The Meaning of Proselyte Baptism

- 1) An *initiation* ceremony. The marking of a break with an old life, and a joyful acceptance of the new life.
 - For Gentiles to become Jews:
 - The ceremony was for *convinced and instructed* converts.
 - A Gentile becoming a Jew would know what was being done. It was a *volitional* choice.

²¹ Gilmore, “Jewish Antecedents,” 75–83.

- The act was not repeated. If an entire family accepted baptism, the children born subsequently were not baptized. Also, children who were baptized too young to do so of their own volition, retained the right to renounce their baptism as soon as they reached the years of maturity.
- A proselyte was considered a new born child after being baptized.

2) *A witnessed ceremony.*

The type of preparation required of proselytes before baptism is described in the Babylonian Talmud.

The rabbis say: If anyone comes nowadays, and desires to become a proselyte, they say unto him: "Why do you want to become a proselyte? Do you not know that the Israelites nowadays are harried, driven about, persecuted and harassed, and that sufferings befalls them?" If he says, "I know it, and I am not worthy", they receive him at once, and they explain to him some of the lighter and some of the heavier commandments, and they tell him the sins connected with the laws of gleaning, the forgotten sheaf, the corner of the field, and the tithe for the poor; and they tell him the punishments for the transgressions of the commandments, and they say to him "Know that up to now you could eat forbidden fat without being liable to the punishment of being "cut off"; you could violate the Sabbath without being liable to the punishment of death by stoning; but from now on you will be liable... If he assents to all, then circumcise him at once, and when he is healed they baptize him, and two scholars stand by and tell him of some of the light and some of the heavy laws. When he has been baptized, he is regarded in all respects as an Israelite.²²

3) *A dedicatory ceremony.*

Every part of the body reaches water. Nothing is kept back from the water and so nothing is kept back from God.

With this a Gentile became a Jew. This is the baptism background which would have been familiar to the people of Jesus' and John's day.

3. The Baptism of Jesus and Believers' Baptism

a. Jesus' Baptism Was a *Messianic* Baptism

In Matt. 3:13–17, Jesus comes with a purpose to his baptism. If He had walked from Nazareth, then it had been a long and purposeful walk.

1) *The relationship between the baptized and the Baptizer*

²² White, 60.

Consider the conversation “I need to be baptized by you.” What was troubling John was status, authority, lesser to the greater, and the pupil to the teacher. So he says that he is not worthy to bear Jesus’ sandals.

To “fulfill all righteousness” retains the subordination of John. Jesus’ submission to John is a clear approval of John’s ministry and message.

2) *The symbols at Jesus’ baptism*

a) The Open Heaven

This theophany serves as a summons to Jesus. It is a manifestation and an equipping for the task of ministry.

The rending of the heavens, Mark 1:10, cf. Isa. 64:1, “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.”

There is a question concerning the experience—is it an outward or inward experience? That is,

- Would an unbeliever have seen it?
- Would a believer have seen it?

Cf. John 12:28–30. Was the voice thunder, or angel? To Jesus, it was the voice of God.

Cf. Acts 9:7, “heard the voice but saw no one,” and Acts 22:9, “behold a light but did not understand the voice.”

The most likely answer is that the manifestation was not seen but that there was an awareness of something significant taking place.

b) The Dove.

Matt. 3:16, cf. John 3:34. The Holy Spirit is permanent and measureless with Jesus.

The purpose of the Spirit here was to equip the Messiah and to mark the beginning of the Messianic Age. Cf., Isa. 11:2, “The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD,” and Joel 2.

There is no reasonable doubt that early Christians thought of Isa. 42:1f and Isa. 53 as the anointing of the Messiah with the Spirit. This was fused in a composite concept of Jesus. These passages were understood as revealing that a suffering servant would be the manner of God’s redemptive work.

c) The Voice.

There was a blending of Ps. 2:7 and Isa. 42:1. The psalm is messianic; when God appointed a king over Israel, an anointing with oil (Ps. 2:2) was always performed. The blending of the two passages in Matthew 3:16 shows that the New Testament community understood that *Jesus is King*. See Table 1.

The humanity of Jesus meant that he learned. He contemplated the meaning of Messiah. That he was the Messiah was not in doubt, but its meaning was. There is no truer index of Jesus' life than the combination of Ps. 2:7 and Isa. 42:1, the *Son of God as King* and the *Servant of the Lord*. The going of Jesus into the wilderness was to integrate the meaning of the suffering servant/King into his life.

Matt. 3:17	"And a voice from heaven said, <i>"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."</i>
Psalm 2:7	"I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, <i>"You are my Son; today I have become your Father."</i>
Isaiah 42:1	<i>"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight..."</i>

Table 1. The blending of Messianic passages in Matt. 3:17.

For you who want authority in your office, who revel in the status (read "authority") passages from corporate America instead of the synagogue, please mediate on this baptismal scene.

b. Jesus' Baptism Related to Believers' Baptism

- 1) Jesus' baptism was unique—it was a *messianic* baptism.
 - His baptism was foundational, the beginning of his redemptive work.
 - No writer of the New Testament relates Jesus' baptism with the believers' baptism—Jesus was acknowledged the Son of God at baptism.
- 2) Jesus' baptism has similarities with believers' baptism.
 - It was a volitional act.
 - It was beginning of ministry.
 - It was by immersion.
 - It was empowering for service.
- 3) A believer is baptized because of what the messiah has *done*—not because the messiah was *baptized*.

4. The Theology of Believers' Baptism

a. Introduction

Three terms for baptism have been used.

- 1) *Sacramentum*, a soldier's oath of allegiance. Used by Tertullian and others.

As soldiers took the oath of allegiance to fight under the banner of the Emperor, so a Christian takes baptism as an oath of allegiance to serve Jesus Christ.

Later, *ex opere operato*, it became an assertion that the sacrament itself is the instrument of God. Baptism is seen as valid irrespective of the qualities or merits of persons administering or receiving it. It is understood as grace conveyed primarily through sacraments as if it were a metaphysical substance. God's saving activity was seen as being administered without consent of the individual (and even at the point of a sword).

- 2) As a *Symbol*

Zwingli took this position at the Marburg Colloquy. It is usually interpreted as obedience to Jesus' command. So the word "ordinance" is used. Ordinance means that Christ *ordained* these acts for the well-being of the church, cf. 1 Cor. 11:24f and Matt. 28:19, "This do in remembrance of me."

- 3) *Prophetic symbolism*

- a) Prophets acted out their message in symbolism.

More than once we have seen that the prophets of Israel resorted to symbolic, dramatic actions when they felt that words were not enough. That is what Ahijah did when he rent the robe into twelve pieces and gave ten to Jeroboam as a token that ten of the tribes would make him king (1 Kings 11:29–32). That is what Jeremiah did when he made bonds and yokes and wore them in token of the coming servitude (Jer. 27). That is what the prophet Hananiah did when he broke the yokes that Jeremiah wore (Jer. 28:10–11). That is the kind of thing that Ezekiel was continually doing (Ezek. 4:1–8; 5:1–4). It was as if words were easily forgotten, but a dramatic action would print itself on the memory. Consider also Isa. 20 and Jer. 18–19.

John's baptism would have this kind of symbolism in the background of his thinking, and his hearers would be thinking in such a context.

- b) Characteristics of biblical symbolism.

- The act is the result of God's command. Compare this with magic, that is, something done to change the will of God.
- The act bears a resemblance to the event being symbolized.
- The act is accompanied by a word of explanation to avoid any misunderstanding.
- The act brings assurance.

So the prophet has done what God said, and it will be as God wills. In a certain sense, then, the act brings will of God nearer to completion.

c) Biblical symbolism interpreting believers' baptism.

- Believers' baptism is a command of God, Matt. 28:19.
- Immersion symbolizes the event.
- The rite is satisfactorily performed only when understood by the candidate.
- The act makes one's prior conviction *more real*, cf. prayer.²³

To Jesus and the Jewish nation, a symbol was not regarded with the modern sense of "mere symbolism," but as an act which clarified God's message and make prior convictions more real.

b. Definition of Baptism as a Prophetic Symbol

I define believers' baptism as follows:

Baptism is a biblical symbol to portray, adequately present, and make more real the New Testament experience of salvation based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and to initiate one into a fellowship of believers.

This definition has both individual and corporate aspects. When George Blaurock was baptized by Grebel and in turn baptized the others, there was understanding of baptism as an act of initiation into a believers church. This was the moment in the Reformation time that the believers' church was reborn. Baptism was the initiation into the new covenant. Believers' baptism was the door to the regenerate, or believers', church.

c. Observations

- 1) The practice of baptism has helped to make the content of faith firm and the gospel understood in believers' churches. For many, such

²³ cf., Gilmore, "Jewish Antecedents," 75–83.

symbols are more important than Scripture in the grounding of faith, as many do not know the Bible as well as others.

- 2) Tying ethics to baptism emphasizes Christian living, Col. 3:9–10 and Gal. 3:27.²⁴ There is the old robe (sins, etc.) being taken off, the baptism itself, and the new robe (righteousness, etc.) being put on. These are strong messages that emerge from the primitive church.

C. The Practice of Christian Living

The Anabaptists were interested in Christian living. Grebel had written that “the church is of the few who believe and live right.” Please note “Christian living,” not “Christian life.” What is the difference? Constantinianism would have a *static* concept—you are a Christian and you live your life, therefore, the way you live is the Christian life. The Anabaptist would seek a *dynamic* interpretation. Christian living is a dynamic, and one is seeking to pattern after the Sermon on the Mount. The Christian life is, therefore, “everything you do is Christian.” Christian living, similarly, is attempting to live a life *worthy* of Christ.

1. As Seen in Metaphors of Relationship

In this section I want to deal with biblical metaphors of Christian living. These metaphors will deal with the experience of being related to Christ and the implications. A comprehensive listing of the metaphors would be take more time than we have, but I will list several and mention others. These will underscore what the Anabaptists were saying—being a Christian is a *way of living* and not a *status*. Behavior and beliefs are related.

In each of the metaphors I will attempt to project the background of the metaphor. With each metaphor I will deal with the human predicament, will speak of God’s activity, and will set forth a benefit to be received. The metaphors, however, all stand for a single reality—the believers relationship to God. No one metaphor covers all the aspects and ramifications of the believers relationship to God and relationship with the community of faith. They are all speaking of *one reality*. The metaphors represent the Hebrew way of thinking which is encompassing and holistic, compared to Western thinking which is linear.

a. Adoption

- *The metaphor:* The procedure of the Roman empire for a slave to become a son. The act by which one who is not a natural a child was legally made a child and heir.
- *The human predicament:* An alien—one not belonging or having roots. It speaks of vulnerability.

²⁴ Humphreys, 133ff.

- *The activity of God:* The bringing of one into a family relationship.
- *The benefit:* One becomes a member of a new family, receiving a new identity and a new name. Picture the delight of a Roman slave adopted into a noble family with all the rights and privileges.
- *Biblical Usage:* Five Times in New Testament:
 - Rom. 9:4, the relationship between God and Israel. The origin of Israel's sonship is special status conferred by God and was oblivious to any merit. Heritage was a peculiar blessing given. Abraham was *chosen*.
 - Gal. 4:1–5, the relationship between God and the believer. Relationship is determined by God and is apart from merit. It is accomplished by Christ and accepted at the time of conversion.
 - Rom. 8:15–19. The present fullness of sonship may be obscured by the suffering of the believer.
 - Also, Rom. 8:23 and Eph. 1:5.

Therefore, one has an initial experience and becomes an adopted child. He or she is then placed in a new family and given a name. As a member of that family, the child is expected to keep the family's honor and tradition as a son or daughter. There is an initial experience and its consequence in living—so there is "Christian living."

b. Regeneration

- *The metaphor:* the birthing of a child.
- *The human predicament:* Undelivered life, struggling to born. A woman heavy with child and complicated birthing problems.
- *The activity of God:* Seeking to find a mid-wife. Midwifery is a cooperation with God in helping new life to come into existence. God works through others to assist a new life to spring forth.
- *The benefit:* New life, new birth, and the beginning of a pilgrimage.
- *Biblical usage:* Titus 3:5, Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21.
- *Related concepts:*
 - A new creation, 2 Cor. 5:17.
 - Death and resurrection: Rom. 6:1ff; "made us alive", Eph. 2:1–5; "word planted in you", James 1:21; 1 Pet. 1:23.

The initial experience and the continuing result are tied together. New life comes and then there is a life to be lived. The initial experience and the continuing experience are united. The term has to do with a changed outlook and a direction. It is a radical term designed to highlight the difference between those who are born of God and those who are dead, in that they have now emerged into new life.

c. Justification

- *The Metaphor*: a courtroom setting, awaiting a pronouncement.
- *The human predicament*: Guilt and accompanying anxiety for guiltiness.
- *The activity of God*: The giving of a judicial pardon, “you are guilty but not charged.” One is pardoned, a description of an action.
- *The benefit*: A gift of right standing. The entering of new relationships with a proper standing in community.
- *Biblical usage*: Paul’s central teaching that humanity is not in a right relationship with God and that it cannot put itself right. Romans 3–5, esp. 4:2–8.
- *Theological Reflection*:
 - Thomas Aquinas—God makes a person righteous and bestows sanctifying grace.
 - Martin Luther—God declares a person righteous. This is seen as a forensic act in which a person is declared righteous on the grounds of faith in Christ. It has been decided in terms of a “victory” for Luther, but it is a lesser victory when justification is seen as only one of many metaphors and not carrying the weight that Luther wanted it to bear. It is a descriptive metaphor more than a forensic act.

Out of the Reformation a common theological delineation was

- justification for the *beginning* of the Christian life,
- sanctification for the *continuation* of the Christian life, and
- glorification for the *concluding* of the Christian life.

This is not valid, however. You still need to be put in right relationship with God, even after your conversion. When you professed faith you were set apart. Sanctification also marks the beginning and the end of Christian living. At the beginning of the Christian life there is a glorification of the believer. Both the gospel of John and 2 Cor. 4 speak of the glory that comes to a believer when

they have believed. The Reformation delineation which casts the three terms as descriptions of three *stages* in Christian living is linear thinking. *Be holistic!*

d. Sanctification

- *The metaphor:* An altar standing before the place of worship (the holy of holies). One must pass the altar before coming into the presence of God.
- *The human predicament:* Uncleanness. The would-be worshiper is unfit to proceed into the presence of God
- *The activity of God:* A Cleansing fire from off the altar which purges. Isa. 6, Ps. 51:7, “cleanse me with hyssop.”
- *The benefits:* One becomes set apart, a saint.
- *Biblical usage:*
 - Old Testament: Ex 3:2–6, the burning bush; 10:1; Num. 11:18; Isa. 8:13; Micah 6:6–8;
 - New Testament: Matt. 5:48; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 9:13; 10:10; 1 Pet 2:9.
- *Observation:*

The tenses of sanctification as an act, then as a process, and finally as a culmination:

 - As an act, Eph. 5:26; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 10:10.
 - As a process, that is, something to be realized, 1 Thess. 4:3–8; 2 Tim. 2:21, cf. 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 12:14; 2 Cor. 3:18.
 - As a culmination 1 John 3:2, to “be like him.”
- *Theological reflections:*

Can a person live above sin? Yes and no; it depends on the definition of sin.

e. Other Metaphors

Redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, and union with Christ are examples of other metaphors that could receive similar treatment.

f. Conclusions

Particular metaphors have been emphasized by various leaders or movements in our history:

- *Regeneration* has been the characteristic emphasis within Calvinism.
- *Sanctification* has been the characteristic emphasis with pietism, a movement.
- *Justification* has been the characteristic emphasis with Lutheranism.

It is better not to limit oneself to just one metaphor as has been the tendency in the above list. Instead, bear these three observations in mind:

- 1) All eight of the metaphors in this section have the initial, continuing, and culmination aspects. For each, one could say, “has been,” “are,” and “will be.” Many of the historical movements in church history have made the mistake of using just a single metaphor.
- 2) None of these metaphors say all that can be said about our experience with God. We need to look at all for a fuller understanding of our experience.
- 3) Metaphors emphasize the life of a people on the way and living in community. This is an aspect of Christian living which is often neglected in theology. Used correctly, they only *describe* because Christian living is always seen in a context and never in isolation.

2. As Seen in Congregational Decision Making

a. Background

Let me take you now to a Swiss-Austrian border town, in February 1527, some two years after the birth of the Evangelical Anabaptists in Felix Manz home in Zurich.

Religious and theological waves had flowed over Europe. Luther at Wittenberg, Zwingli at Zurich, and a host of others across the continent had led out in Reformation. In the wider upheaval there were some—Grebel, Blaurock, Manz, Hübmaier, Sattler, Denck, Hätzer, and others—who realized that the old European foundations were undermined. The return to believers’ baptism was only a symptom of the new vision they hoped and prayed would replace the old, doomed Constantinian patterns of Europe. By 1527, with the banishment of Michael Sattler from Strassburg and the execution by drowning of Felix Manz in Zurich, the radical Reformers knew that the magisterial Reformers such as Luther and Zwingli would not go beyond the partial Reformation they were now endorsing.

Michael Sattler and others adopted a method that was to have historic consequences—a dialogue of those concerned. They called a meeting for dialogue and decision, beginning on a day in February, near a centrally located but quiet border town of Schleithem.

We have no first-hand report of that meeting, but we do have the resulting documents—the constitution of seven articles, the disciple, and the covering letter that summarized their work.²⁵

Here is how the radical believers' church worked:

- 1) The participants met as equals. As a security measure, no names appear on the documents, so the references are only to “brothers and sisters,” to “sons and daughters of God,” and to “members of God.”
- 2) The participants engaged in dialogue. Those who had favored the state-church compromise in one area or another gave way to those who reluctantly favored a separate, radical church. Yoder remarks that, perhaps uniquely in Reformation history, *minds were changed in the course of the discussion!* The believers' church movement acquired at Schleithem had a free church ecclesiology and thereby survived to the present time. (Michael Sattler had come out of the Benedictine order and there is some influence of that here).
- 3) The participants possessed a sense of living in the last days, and such was the tone of the meeting. The meeting was dominated by the sense of danger from the authorities, but also by the sense of eschatology already breaking in—the ethics of the resurrection was the major concern. “Baptism,” says a Schleithem document, is for “all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Baptism was understood to be the initial step in discipleship.
- 4) The participants acted in a community of love. The dialogue process was that of expressed love. Most important for present purpose, the dialogue process gave concrete expression to community love that guided the conference, and the community love shaped the ethics of the movements. These people were united concerning baptism, the ban, the bread, concerning separation from evil, concerning shepherds of the church, the sword of the world, and finally the swearing of the state's oath.

The Articles were the setting forth of a simple but effective structure for church life. It focused on just those points that the old Constantinianism of the Roman South and the New Constantinianism of the Reformed, Lutheran North had made impossible. The structure of Schleithem set the conditions for the free church.²⁶

- 5) The participants envisioned a role for the pastor:

²⁵ Lumpkin, 22–35.

²⁶ McClendon, 1:269–272.

We are agreed as follows on pastors in the church of God. The pastor in the church of God shall, as Paul has prescribed, be one who out-and-out has a good report of those who are outside the faith. This office shall be to read, to admonish and teach, to warn, to discipline, to ban in the church, to lead out in prayer for the advance-ment of all the brethren and sisters, to lift up the bread when it is to be broken, and in all things to see to the care of the body of Christ, in order that it may be built up and developed, and the mouth of the slanderer be stopped.

This one moreover shall be supported by the church which has chosen him, wherein he may be in need, so that he who serves the Gospel may live of the Gospel as the Lord has ordained. But if a pastor should do something requiring discipline, he shall not be dealt with except on the testimony of two or three witnesses. And when they sin they shall be disciplined before all in order that the others may fear.

But should it happen that through the cross this pastor should be banished or led to the Lord [through martyrdom] another shall be ordained in his place in the same hour so that God's little flock and people may not be destroyed.²⁷

Zwingli would latter complain that no Anabaptist could be found who did not have a copy of this Schleithem document. It was one of the great documents of religious history in how it shaped a people.²⁸

Now I want to put together decision making out of this context of Schleithem and contrast it to decision making in our present church context.

b. Presuppositions

- 1) Decision making was a community affair. This is because of the fallibility of the individual. They did not want to have authority over anyone—they had seen the fruit of authority in the Zwingli church.. Instead, they wanted community, because an individual can get it wrong more easily than a concerned community. Pastors with authority had given them nothing but havoc and would even be the cause of their deaths!

Decision making was seen as a concerned community of acting in dialogue. The community may divide itself into separate roles, and to constrain individuals into those roles, but authority was not centered in one man or woman. They recognized that community could still be fallible, but that fallibility was regarded as being less likely in a corporate context.

No one over me and no one under me!

²⁷ Lumpkin, 27.

²⁸ Lumpkin, 23.

- 2) Congregational government shaped discipleship. They were not *conscripted* into the service of Christ, but had been *invited* to be friends with God. In John 15:12–15, Jesus makes it clear that we are not to just be servants, but also friends; that we can think, not just do as we are told. The way to govern a church is a way to be friends with Jesus.

There is a remarkable Old Testament reference to friendship in Ex. 24:11.²⁹ This concept of fellowship with God is unique to Judaism and Christianity.

- 3) Christian living was understood as co-operation with God. Acts 15:28, according to Franklin Littel, was one of the most common verses found in Anabaptist writings. I want you to memorized this verse: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us....” This gives an insight to the decision making process.

Decision making enhances maturity. The emphasis in this approach is upon community. It calls for trust in God to be present in all of life and a belief that God is active in all of life working for maturity. According to Ephesians 4:11–16, maturity is the goal of Christian living.

All human activities are secondary to the relating to God and others in a mature way. How does one foster maturity? Let me attempt to answer by reflecting on the parent-child relationship as a possible analogy.

- You want your children to think their own thoughts. If they think your thoughts they will never mature. My cousin Merlin, after his father’s death, is an example. He had had some 20 years working on the farm with his father, but when his father died he didn’t know how to farm because his father had never entrusted him to make any decisions. Children mature when they trust in their ability to work through situations.
- You want your children to honor their own feelings. The repressing of feelings is not helpful. Maturity means honoring your own feelings. Jesus got angry, and he honored his feelings. We must learn how to express negative feelings in a constructive way. Targeted anger is redeemable, but untargeted anger can never be reclaimed and redeemed. Jesus had targeted anger toward those who abused the temple. If we repress our emotions, our ability to make right decisions suffers. We have a right to be angry at the mess in the world, but our anger must be targeted.

Feelings are God-given, and you want your child to respond appropriately.

²⁹ This passage has the people “seeing” God, but note the sapphire pavement. They saw God’s feet reflected in the sapphire; they did not look at God directly.

Genesis 2:19, the naming of the animals, shows God's desire for us to make decisions. Adam did not beg God to help him name the animals; God wanted him to be a decision maker. To make decisions is a sign of maturity; when you can't make decisions, you can't be successful.

To mature is to develop all one's capacities to the best that one can. Recognize both strengths and weaknesses, turn to God for further wisdom, understanding, and power, 2 Tim. 1:7.

c. Biblical Model for Decision Making

Matt. 16:19 and Matt. 18:18 are models for decision making the tough "gray area" decisions that can't be easily be resolved by clear biblical teachings.

In rabbinic thought, decision making was a matter of morals. There are clear commands, but where there are no clear commands their is to be "binding and the loosing."

- to *bind* is to make obligatory. One "must do it."
- to *loose* is to make non-obligatory.

For the gathered people bind and loose implied:

- a commitment to be willing to forgive, and
- evaluative listening, the careful weighing of words.

The community's decision then stands in heaven.

In summary, the method for decision making required

- Scripture,
- the gathered people, and
- the Holy Spirit.

The process could be impeded, however, by a failure of all members of the community to abandon personal agendas. The desire to win an argument quenches the Spirit, cf., 1 Thess. 5:19. Compare this process with Robert's Rules of Order, which provides a mechanism for a majority to overcome the objections of a minority. Robert's Rules have the potential of corrupting the church by making the church a democracy. The church is not a democracy, but a theocracy; we are to discern and follow the will of God.³⁰

³⁰ Can you find a democratic "vote" in Scripture? Numbers 14 comes close—the people outvoted God. The consequence was decades of additional wandering in the wilderness.

When evaluative listening and openness for forgiveness are included, the will of God may be claimed for decisions made by a gathered community in dialogue. This is the community decision making process of Schleithem, a rich heritage passed on to us. The promise of the presence of Christ to actualize a definition of his will in a given future circumstance was given not to professional exegetes but to the community which would be gathered in his name with the specific purpose of “binding and loosing.” Classical Protestantism tended to deny the place of this conversational process in favor of its insistence on the perspicuity and objectivity of the words of Scripture. The free church alternative recognizes the inadequacies of the text, Scripture standing alone uninterpreted, and appropriates the promise of the guidance of the Spirit throughout the ages, but it locates the fulfillment of that promise in the assembly of those who gather around Scripture in the face of a given real moral challenge.³¹

A hermeneutic of “community” may be seen in 1 Cor 14:25ff. The way God leads is that the Spirit gathers believers around Scripture. The Spirit, the gathering, and the Scripture are indispensable elements of the process. A technical exegete alone could not replace the actual conversational process in empirical communities where the working of the Spirit is discerned in the fact that believers are brought to unity around this Scripture.³²

The church, after Constantine, reversed the New Testament attitude towards war/violence, money, and social stratification; it thereby changed the very nature of what it means to be a church. The official Reformation of Luther and Zwingli had made significant changes, but did not fundamentally reverse the structural decisions of the age of Constantine. The radical reformers restored the New Testament standards as their goal. The radical reformers differed with their mainstream contemporaries not so much about what Jesus said but about whether it was to be taken simply and seriously as moral guidance³³.

V. Summary and Conclusions

A. The “Two Stage” Theories of Salvation

The two stage doctrines of Christian living are to be scrutinized and most likely rejected. They included the Spirit over the Word, as with Karlstadt and those that opposed Luther, and the placing of reason over the Scripture, as did the rationalists that opposed Calvin. Moving to our day, we will find this approach in the “Great Commission” Christians, some discipleship programs, the Deeper Christian Life (who describe yieldedness is a distinct experience which not all Christians have), or an emphasis on the Spirit filled life. Be

³¹ Yoder, 17ff.

³² Yoder, 17ff.

³³ Yoder, 136ff..

careful of the super Christians, however; the highest calling is to be a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Instead of seeking subsequent experiences, *magnify the initial experience*.

These two stage theories tend to separate what the New Testament seeks to keep in close relationship: becoming a Christian and having a fruitful life.

B. Doctrines

From the Anabaptist story these doctrines have been seen:

- The fallen church.
- The regenerate church and its nature from the word “*ekklesia*” and images.
- Contemporaneity—“This is that,” and “Then is Now.”
- The practices of the church—profession of faith, believers’ baptism, and Christian living. Also, the faith and repentance metaphors and decision making.

C. Observations

1. Embodied Theology

These Lectures are an attempt at Embodied Theology. That is, seeing the context for the doctrines and why they developed and why they are important. So rather than seeking similarities to philosophy you should be sensing a relationship to church history. Is this happening? The Anabaptist story should be known and understood and, if that has been done, then the doctrines will have been embodied. Rather than remembering “fallen church” as an “idea,” you will have identified with those who lived through a difficult historic period and developed a doctrine to help them focus their reforms.

2. Beginning with the Anabaptist Story

That we began our study with the Anabaptist story marks these emphases:

- The Anabaptist distinction is in the doctrine of the church. This doctrine distinguishes us from many evangelicals and other groups at the point of what it means to be the people of God. Therefore the approach in this course is to begin with a narrowness; we will then move to areas of commonality with other Christian groups. This is not saying we are the only people of God, but it is saying that, as a people of God, this is our reason for being separate. Gaining our identity enables us to relate to others. Without a firm identity, our relating will be hazy and fuzzy.

- Our relationship to the Anabaptist is the same as our relationship to the Reformation—we are inheritors and benefactors of what went on. It is the Mennonites and the Amish that are more directly descended from the Anabaptists movement, but all of us in the believers' church movement are benefactors. We benefit from what they learned and practiced as we benefit from Luther's helping us to regain the understanding of justification by faith or Calvin's sovereignty of God.

3. *A Theological Weakness*

One of the disappointments that come often to those who have heroes is to learn of their feet of clay. But if there is an understanding of "human fallibility" we should not be surprised at this. In my great admiration of the Anabaptists, I need to point out a weakness. In no way does this weakness diminish their contribution, but it is an Achilles heel. The Anabaptists and all their successors will need to watch for this weakness.

The Anabaptist heritage rejected the need for an official interpreter of Scripture. The study groups around Zwingli interpreted Scripture and they taught that every believer had that privilege. Scripture interpretation was not the dominion of any Priesthood. The humblest believer could find in his Bible what was necessary for salvation under the direction of the Holy Spirit. But blessings often have dangers as well.

The Reformation offered various approaches to Scripture interpretation.

- Luther taught that any practice could be accepted as long as it was not contrary to the Scripture. So the authority of the pope was acceptable, but not the abuses.
- Zwingli accepted only the practices explicitly specified in the Scripture. The Anabaptists followed Zwingli. But here is where the problems began.

During the Second Disputation this conversation took place:

Grebel: The Lord's Supper can only be observed in the evening and is to be observed with ordinary bread and each person will put the bread into his mouth instead of the pastor "pushing it in."

Zwingli: The sort of bread is not clearly answered in the Bible. So every congregation may have their own opinion. The time of the day is not mandatory or one must wear the clothes of Christ to the observance.

Now here is the tendency that must be guarded against—the tendency of becoming a *biblicist*.

Biblicists take all the words of Scripture to be equally binding and make them equally applicable for believers. Because the Anabaptist correctly believed that God was "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8), at times

they felt it necessary to literalize a biblical account. This was not the normative practice, but it was the occasional happening particularly in their encounters with the magisterial reformers.

To the credit of Zwingli in the above conversation with Grebel, he was *biblical*—but Grebel was being a *biblicist*. Grebel's idea that the observation of the Lord's Supper should be observed only in the evening was a *biblicist's* approach.

Failure to distinguish between being biblical and being *biblicists* continue to plague us today. Let me attempt to clarify the problem.

To be biblical, as I am using the term, means to accept from Scripture as binding those things that arise out of the nature of the gospel. The gospel is defined as the "life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ," cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–3. A *biblicist*, on the other hand, is one who holds that all statements of the Bible are equally binding on believers today. The distinction between being biblical and being a *biblicist* can be further clarified by the terms "essential" and "incidental."

- For one to be biblical means accepting those scriptures that reflect or present the gospel as binding. Where the gospel is encased in Scripture, that practice is to be continued. That is considered *essential*. The practices within scripture which reflect or contain the gospel are mandatory for the believer's practices today.
- Being a *biblicist*, on the other hand, means seeing all the Scripture as being equal. Those things which are *incidental* to the gospel are equally considered to be as binding as the gospel.

Again, practices which are *incidental* arise from the temporary circumstances existing at the time of the apostles. Practices that are *essential* arise from the nature of the gospel.

For me this is the key to understanding the terms *biblicist* and *biblical*, attempting to distinguish between what is essential and what is not essential. Note the following *incidental* practices—that is, they arose out of the temporary circumstances existing at the time and place of the apostles. As cultural expressions, they should not be binding:

- *Greet with holy kiss*, cf. 2 Cor. 13:12. This is a command, but reflects the custom of hospitality.
- *Wash one another's feet*, cf. John 13:15. This is a command, but reflects the custom of hospitality.
- *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy*, cf. Ex. 20:8. That one should set aside Saturday is a command, but reflects the old covenant.

- *The silence of women in the church*, 1 Cor. 14:34. This is a command, but reflects the social customs.
- *Many of the dietary practices of the Old Covenant*. There is no gospel involved in these practices, but they reflect good dietary practices of the day.

Or further, how would a biblicist justify the following?

- *Sunday School*. We are to teach, but the Sunday School approach to education reflects our culture.
- *Preaching every Sunday*, cf. Acts 20:7. Preaching to *believers* seems to be dialogical.
- *The Cooperative Program*. The use of banking principles in the churches reflects our culture.
- *Pulpits, choirs, pews, hymnals, etc.* There are no biblical accounts for such aids to worship.

I think that it is fair to state that no one is a biblicist on all issues, but all who are biblicists do pick and choose among the commands of Scripture.

Now, what is *essential*? Those things that arise out of the nature of the gospel. A biblical person would most likely see the gospel arising out of the following:

- *Baptism*. The death, burial, and resurrection are portrayed.
- *The Lord's meal*. Again, the death, burial, and resurrection are portrayed.
- *Proclamation*. Here is the setting forth of the death, burial, and resurrection.
- *Celebration*. Here is rejoicing because of the freeing of the believer by the death, burial, and resurrection.
- *Confrontation*. Here is setting forth the death, burial, and resurrection and challenging one who has gone astray to return.

Each of these practices contain the nature of the gospel. The believers' church has no options here. We maintain those practices which contain the gospel, but we are free to follow or not to follow those practices which reflect the culture of the biblical world, and to regard those commands as incidental. Regretfully, the difference between being biblical and being a biblicist is not always clear.

The Anabaptists were biblical and from time to time tended to slip into being biblicists, as seen in the above conversation between Zwingli and Grebel. This problem is also seen in the many successors of the Anabaptists.

The Anabaptist Story has provided a major distinctive in believers' church theology. The doctrine of the church is what differentiates us from other groups. This is why the doctrine of the church is the first doctrine treated.

Now, with *The Anabaptist Story* told, we are ready to move to the second story—*The Baptist Story*.

THE BAPTIST STORY

I. The Theology-Making Baptists

The last publication of Calvin's *Institutes* was in 1559, and during the next several decades interpretations of his doctrines began to diverge. The situation came to a head at the University of Leyden, where the dispute tended to cluster into two camps, each associated with a teacher at the university. As in so many such disputes, the doctrinal positions of the two sides became associated with political positions which would ultimately have a great deal to say about how the matter was actually settled.

A. Synod of Dort (1618 – 1619)

The Synod at the Dutch city of Dort was convened to settle the issue, and “five points” emerged as centers of the debate. These are shown in Table 2—note that the first letter of each point forms the acronym “TULIP.”

The TULIP	<i>The Remonstrance</i> (Arminian) Modifications
Total depravity of the “natural man”	Humanity is depraved so that divine grace is necessary. There was no disagreement on this point.
Unconditional election	Christ elects or reproves on the basis of foreseen faith or unbelief
Limited atonement	Christ died for all, but his death is only efficacious for believers
Irresistible grace	The grace of God may be resisted
Persistence of the elect	Whether all will persevere in the faith until the end needs further investigation

Table 1. The “TULIP” of the Dort Debate.

The side associated with Franciscus Gomarus prevailed at Dort and eventually became known as “the Calvinism of Dort,” “five-point Calvinism,” and eventually, even just “Calvinism.” *The Remonstrance*, a book published by Jacobus Arminius’ followers before the debate took place, modified four of the five points and articulated the position of the other side. That view became known as “Arminianism” (even though Arminius, himself, had died before the synod actually met). Both of these positions would persist as theological signposts that would influence the Baptists and many other groups right up to the present day.

The victors, of course, claimed their view as the true “Calvinism,” but the student should remember that both Gomarus and Arminius were “Calvinist” scholars. Furthermore, the TULIP did not come from Calvin, himself, but from the Synod that met more than 50 years after his death.

Although the synod took place in Holland, interested parties from other countries participated. One of these was a man named William Ames, who’s involvement in the proceedings was to have important consequences for the Baptist Story. He was a man who had been forced to leave his native England because of his puritanical views.

An exile and alien in a new land, Ames was not an official delegate to the conference. He did serve, however, as a consultant to the moderator of the synod, Johannes Bogerman, at a salary of four guilders a day.¹

¹ Ames, 7.

B. The Theological Issues at Dort

The five points of the TULIP are obvious consequences of the presupposition that “predestination” means that God is omnipotent and in control of history² and decreed the election of certain humans before the foundation of the world. Humans are *totally depraved*, their salvation being out of their own reach and completely dependent upon this prior decree of God. Because of God’s sovereign decree, the status of the elect was guaranteed—it was *unconditional*, not in any way depending on the person’s actions or attitudes. Furthermore, since only those covered by God’s decree require atonement, atonement was *limited* to the elect. Since a decree of God could never fail to prevail, it followed that God’s grace toward the elect was *irresistible* and it would be impossible for him or her to fall away (*perseverance of the elect*).

Arminianism, on the other hand, understood the electing process of God to be one of *foreknowledge*, rather than decree. Each person’s response (or lack of response) to the gospel was foreknown by God before the foundation of the world. This slight distinction impacted four of the five points, and those modifications may be seen by examining Table 2. Note that it is better to say that the Arminian view is a *modification*—a *nuancing*—of “Calvinism,” and not a denial of all of its five points.³

It was the “Calvinist” view that formed the theology of Puritanism, and it was that theology from which Baptists would emerge historically. The Dort TULIP can be seen in the *London Confession of Faith* of 1644, to which we now turn.

C. The *London Confession of Faith*, 1644

1644 was a special time. The “Long Parliament” was in session. Charles and Parliament were battling—a civil war was being waged. The Westminster Assembly had been called in 1642, and 151 of the leading theologians were meeting and would later (1647) publish the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

The descendants of the J-L-J Church, now pastored by Henry Jessey, were also meeting at that time. They wanted to be recognized as a legitimate religion by Parliament, but to do so they needed to present a document that articulated their beliefs and to have that document accepted. Fifteen men representing seven churches came together to accomplish that task. The document they wrote, the *London Confession of Faith*,⁴ is important to us; it is through that confession that the direct lineage of the Baptists can be traced.

None of these fifteen men had any formal training. They simply wanted to be honest in their beliefs and to set forth their faith. Look at the *Confession* and compare it with the theology of *A True Confession*⁵ of Separatists with respect to the separation of Church and State and other issues. There is a vast difference in almost all of the doctrines.

Because the writers of the *London Confession* used the separatist *A True Confession* as their model, it has often been assumed that they were working out of separatist theology. But there is convincing evidence that the theological guide for the writers of the *London Confession* was William Ames.⁶ Ames had been a

² Was Shakespeare influenced by the debate on predestination? The issue that led to the Dort synod was gathering steam during the (c. 1600) time frame of *As You Like It*. Consider Act 2, Scene 7, 139ff: “All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances....”

³ Note the rationality of both of the flavors of Calvinism that were debated at Dort—both positions are the result of “Greek linear thinking.” Also note that the verb “to know” is used cognitively, not relationally, in these paragraphs. As we proceed through the Baptist Story and beyond, the student is encouraged to critique these approaches to election. Are they biblical? Are they understandings that Hebrew thinker of the first century might have had? Election will be picked up again later in The Baptist Story.

⁴ Lumpkin 153ff.

⁵ Lumpkin, 82ff. Separatists were those Puritans who felt that there was no possibility of reconciling with the state church and that, therefore, it would be necessary for them to separate from the official church. A great number were forced to emigrate to Holland, and it is from this group that the American “pilgrims” of 1620 would emerge and form what we know as “Congregationalism.”

⁶ Nelson, S. A., *passim*.

compatriot of Henry Jacob (see p. 6) in Holland, and the *Confession* writers held him in high regard. His work, *The Marrow of Theology*⁷, had a profound effect on the writers of the *London Confession*. From *The Marrow of Theology* they corrected, altered, or rewrote nearly every statement from the Separatist document that they saw fit to incorporate. Semi-separatist Ames and his work was therefore much more the theological home of the *London Confession* than the Separatist confession itself, even though they share the same format.

The London Confession reflects the Calvinism that would be sustained by the Dort Synod and differs somewhat from the Calvinism that was to be set forth in the soon to be published *Westminster Confession*. The *London Confession* reflected the Calvinism of Dort, at which Ames had been a participant.

- Article 21–24, contained the five Points of Dort (the TULIP).
- Article 32, sets forth the Baptist belief of baptism as the initiation into the church. Taking Ames' two marks which make a church, profession of faith and covenanting with God, these writers added baptism as essential for entrance into the visible church.
- Articles 39–40 indicated the Baptist belief in immersion baptism.

This is the *Confession* upon which Baptist would stake their identity. Apparently, legal toleration of these Baptists was granted on March 4, 1647.⁸

The Baptist Story needs to be understood within the context of its historical period.

1. General Religious Background

The general religious background for The Baptist Story includes the Lollards, the Reformation on the Continent (both Lutheran and Reformed), and particularly the reform or attempted reform of the church in England. It could also be said to include elements of the Anabaptist movement, there being some Anabaptists in England during this period of time. Though there is no documented connection between the Anabaptists and Baptists, the parallels are many.

That Baptists distanced themselves from the Anabaptists is no doubt due to the fact that Anabaptism was being regarded as a capital crime—a resurrection of the old Justinian Code, which had been aimed at the fourth century Donatists. The London Confession begins with a disclaimer of any Anabaptist connections, but note these facts:

- During the reign of Henry VIII (1509–1547) some Anabaptists were deported.
- On May 25, 1535, twenty-five Dutch Anabaptists were examined at St. Paul's and fourteen were burned. Two were burned in Smithfield, the rest were sent to other towns across the country to suffer and be martyred.

I take these facts to reflect that either Anabaptists *were* widespread or that there was a *fear* that they were widespread. What had happened was that, in the early part of the sixteenth century, Anabaptists were persecuted in Holland and they came across the channel to England. Later we find the English separatists semi-separatists like Ames fleeing back to the Continent when persecution came. These movements across the Channel facilitated an exchange of ideas.

Were there any relationships between these Anabaptists and the Baptists? We find that Baptists will later meet in some of the same locations that these Anabaptists had, but to this date there is no documented proof of any actual contact. But the Anabaptists were providing a seed-bed for a Reformation in England. In our day we say that “ideas have legs.” If this were true in those days, one has to wonder whether Browne and other separatists might have been willing to admit, had the Anabaptist had not had such a bad

⁷ Ames, *passim*.

⁸ Lumpkin, 146,

name, that they had at least *heard* of the Anabaptists. Baptists were in Norwich, and Dutch Anabaptists were also there. Particular Baptists were at Aldersgate, as were the Dutch Anabaptists. It sometimes seems as if the silence about Anabaptism was almost too complete. Since there is no documentation of a direct influence of Anabaptists on the development of Baptist in England, historians tend to trace the primary source of the Baptists to those who attempted the reform of the church in England—the Puritans.⁹

2. Political Background

a. Henry VIII (1509–1547)

Henry VIII broke with the Church of Rome but was not interested in any real reformation of the church of England. He wanted Roman doctrine in the English Church without Papal authority. He issued an Act of Supremacy in 1534 that separated the Church of England from obedience to Rome although the church remained essentially Catholic in doctrine and practice. The Act of Supremacy declared Henry “... the only Supreme head in earth of the Church of England.” He dissolved the monasteries and annexed their revenue to the state. Many within the church wanted more thorough reforms.

A group called the Puritans developed who basically wanted to change the church. They wanted a Calvinistic theology together with the abolition of things Catholic. Puritan sources are many, and I will not attempt to locate the cause of Puritanism here—but I will deal with its effect.

b. Edward VI (1547–1553)

Henry VIII was followed by his son, the boy King, Edward VI. He was the son of Henry and Jane Seymour, Henry’s third wife but his only son. Edward’s reign was a short and troubled.

Edward had been trained by Protestant advisers. He moved England definitely toward Protestantism. Images were removed from the Churches, devotional life was stressed, and the marriage of ministers legalized. In 1549, the Church of England adopted a new prayer book, which guided worship liturgy, and in the 1552 revision, he prescribed even more Protestant styles of worship. In 1552 the Church adopted a new doctrinal standard, the 42 Articles, later reduced to 39, which had a distinctly Calvinist flavor. Under Edward, the Protestant sympathizers, who had been exiled during the latter years of Henry VIII, returned to England to disseminate their views—views which had been made even more Protestant by contacts with Zwinglian and Calvinistic reform movements in Europe. During the Edwardian era, clergy could be married, Catholic practices were modified, doctrine and worship moved toward the Protestantism of the Calvinistic variety, and a limited toleration allowed the rapid spread of these viewpoints.

c. Queen Mary (1553–1558)

Edward died and “Bloody” Mary (so called by the Protestants) came to the throne. She was the daughter and the first born child of Henry VIII by Catherine of Aragon. She dismantled the Protestant system of Edward and restored the Catholic system, eventually restoring the Roman allegiance which had prevailed before the Act of Supremacy. She renewed several acts leading to the persecution of Protestants with the result that many went into exile as they had earlier under her father Henry VIII. Protestants had to flee for their lives. Some went to Zurich and others to Strasbourg. Here again they came in contact with Reformed and Lutheran teachings. I feel that, somehow, they had to know about Anabaptists teachings as well—if only second hand.

There were 280 martyrs under Mary, and some of these martyrs were Anabaptists. The Anabaptists had to hold their worship services in hiding. Later the separatist used some of the same locations for their worship. Doesn’t this suggest at least some implication of mutual knowledge and interaction?

⁹ Gilmore. But cf., Estep.

d. Queen Elizabeth (1558–1603)

Elizabeth Tudor, the second born and the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, succeeded Mary. The restlessness of the people was mounting, and civil war threatened. Mary's own increasing disappointment was suddenly relieved by death. She died a disillusioned and embittered woman on November 1, 1558. Perhaps, to most Englishmen, her death was a welcome relief from a terrible nightmare.

Elizabeth's reign saw the return of those interested in reforming the Church of England. Elizabeth enacted religious laws which consciously combined elements of Catholicism and Protestantism. Centering around her own Act of Supremacy and Act of Uniformity, both in 1559, this religious system was known as the "Elizabethan Settlement." After years of fluctuation between Catholicism and Protestantism, English religion was now settled. The settlement was a compromise, a *via media*, having both the strengths and weaknesses inherent within it. Yet Elizabeth was not genuinely interested in church Reformation—she wanted a course somewhere between Rome and Geneva, the pope and Calvin. The church was almost shipwrecked on the rocks of compromise. The Protestant exiles who returned came to build Geneva's version of the early church in England's green and pleasant land, but were to meet with disappointment. Puritans emerged among the returned Marian exiles striving to purify church life and establish patterns in accord with Scripture. The Puritans sought to reform the church from within along Calvinistic Presbyterian lines.

The Convocation of Canterbury in 1563 was perhaps the turning point. Reforms for the church had been proposed and Puritan programs were nearly enacted. A victory would have meant simplified worship patterns, a modifying of church polity from Episcopal to Presbyterian, and more Calvinistic doctrines.

The Puritan party was defeated by only one vote, 59–58. At this point, the Puritans fragmented; some accepted the defeat and others rebelled. Some, more conservative, were troubled over the issue of ceremonies. Queen Elizabeth had no sympathy with Puritanism and sought to enforce religious conformity by law. After several centuries in which everyone was almost automatically a Christian and a church member, many in England could neither understand nor accommodate the militant new spirit which insisted upon a church so "pure" that it seemed to leave little room for human frailty.

Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, published *The Advertisements*, articles enforcing uniformity. In 1566 he stated that clergymen must wear vestments and must subscribe to *The Advertisements*. Vestments were abhorrent to Puritans, and, in London, 37 out of 100 ministers refused to sign and were deprived of their churches. Similar actions took place all over the country, with a resulting shortage of ministers. Ignorant men, either with no religious education or not educated at all, were appointed in their place.

The time for separation was right.

e. James I (1603–1625)

With the death of Elizabeth, the throne fell to Henry VIII's brother Arthur's great grandson, who was James VI of Scotland. When he became king of England, he was known as James I.

James was a Stuart king, and came from Scotland where Presbyterianism was the state religion. When he came to London, everyone thought they would at last have a Puritan church. He kept to his Calvinism, but he left his Presbyterianism in Scotland. He feared Presbyterian church polity because he saw in it the seeds of democracy which might not support the monarchy. 300 Puritans were ejected from parishes in the opening years of James reign. He stated that "a Scottish Presbytery as well agreeth with the monarch as God and the devil." It is James I who sent representatives to the Synod of Dort and later insisted that his name be a part of that document. He condemned Thomas Helwys to prison and forced a transliteration of *baptizo* into the King James Bible in 1611.

King James sent a delegation to Dort and worked against Arminianism. When his name did not receive enough prominence in the resulting document, he made them revise it to include his contribution.

f. Charles I (1625–1649)

Charles, the son of James I, dismissed Parliament in 1629. In 1640 he was forced to convene Parliament for war with Scotland. So the Long Parliament produced the Westminster Assembly, a group of 151 clergy whose task it was to advise Parliament on religious matters. They produced the *Westminster Confession*, the hallmark of Presbyterian Calvinism.

3. Particular Baptist Background

From your church history, you will know that there were two major groups of Baptists in England—the General and the Particular Baptists. Those names indicate a theological position regarding the death of Jesus Christ and in some ways capture the dynamics of the period. Because of time constraints and because the General Baptists confessions have had little impact upon Baptists of today, the discussion of the Baptist Story will center on the Particular Baptists.

a. Henry Jacob

Henry Jacob's public career began about 1596 when he had "some speech with certen of the separation" and "was requested by them" to give the reason for his defense of the State Church."¹⁰ This indicates that he had a non-separatist stance at that time.

In 1604, Jacob published a work entitled, "Reasons taken ovt of Gods Word and the best hymane Testimonies proving a necessitie of reforming ovr Chvrches in England." On hearing of the publication of the book, the Bishop of London sent a messenger, requesting Jacob to come to speak with him. A servant reported the message to Jacob, and he, not knowing but possibly suspecting the object of this invitation, called upon the Bishop and was immediately made a prisoner. After a time, as his imprisonment continued, Jacob's wife and four small children found themselves in much distress. Accordingly, he sent a request for his release, and explained that the publication of his book was really a very reasonable proceeding. In his conduct Jacob showed himself to be entirely different type of person from Robert Browne, Henry Barrowe, and John Greenwood, all who were of the separation and all of whom were much more outspoken than he. The separatists did not show respect to high clerical dignitaries. Jacob, on the contrary, was more political, and well understood how to bear himself in the presence of superior ecclesiastics, so that their displeasure would be somewhat mollified by his conciliatory manner of speech and shrewd argument.

This procedure did not avail at once on the Bishop of London to a display of leniency, though it should be said that Jacob's previously mentioned request for release may not have been written very long before he was allowed to make a subscription to three articles. When this had been signed during a private interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury on April 4, 1605, as he intimates in another place, he was released on bail for half a year.

It appears that Jacob kept a copy of the text of this document, either for the purpose of refreshing his memory or to justify himself. To his private text he added various reservations and explanations, and says, "Whosoever do make any other sense of my words they do me wrong." He evidently felt quite justified in giving his own private interpretation to the text he had subscribed to, and he signed those three articles with those interpretation in mind. In fact, this seems to have been the only way of dealing with the bishops of that day, unless one wished to pass one's life in some dreary prison.

In a supplication to King James signed by Jacob and others in 1605, the aims of Jacob type of Puritanism was expressed.¹¹ In brief, they desired pastor, elders, and deacons in their congregations and they did not wish to be compelled to follow any human traditions. They were willing to take the Oath of Supremacy, to remain in "brotherly communion" with the church of England, and to pay all ecclesiastical and civil dues. In the case of any offense being committed by any of them, they agreed to be tried before any civil

¹⁰ Burrage, 1:282.

¹¹ Burrage, 1:285.

magistrate and also, evidently, by the governing body of the congregation to which they individually belonged.

In 1605, before Jacob left England, he wrote *A true Visible or Ministeriall Church of Christ is a particular Congregation being a spirituall perfect Corporation of Believers, & having power in its selfe immediately from Christ to administer all Religious means of faith to the members thereof*. This spoke of a church which was autonomous and free to exercise its own practice. This was how was such a true church to be constituted and gathered:

By a free mutuall consent of Believers joyning and covenanting to live as Members of a holy Society together in all religious & vertuous duties as Christ & his Apostles did institute & practise in the Gospell. By such a free and mutuall consent also all Civill perfect Corporations did first beginne.¹²

The advocacy of covenants was also present here. It should be noted that Jacob was not a separatist at this time, and never became one. The term “semi-separatist” seems best suited in describing him. It was evident that Puritans were advocating views which had been ascribed only to separatists in early days of the separation, but Burrage thinks that Jacob, in the summer of 1605, went to Holland and became a minister of the English Merchant Adventurers in Middelburg. There he is said to have formed an Independent (or Congregational), Puritan church where he put his ideas into practice. Francis Johnson had been pastor of the there before Jacob’s arrival.

Jacob was probably well established in his position when Richard Clyfton and John Robinson arrived in Amsterdam about 1608. These men had been staunch separatists with whom Henry Jacob would often interact. Three other semi-separatists in Holland—Mr. Parker, Dr. Ames, and Mr. Jacob—also supported separatist teachings in their individual congregations, interacting and supporting each other in their theological convictions.

For a time they sojourned in Leyden; when all three boarded together and had their victuals dressed by some of our acquaintance, and they lived comfortable, and then they were provided for as became their persons.¹³

Two facts, rarely understood, have emerged from these pre-beginnings of the Baptists: that Jacob followed Francis Johnson, a contributor to *A True Confession*, in pastoring a church in Holland, and that Jacob had later roomed with his compatriot, William Ames, who wrote *The Morrow of Theology*. It is from these two sources that first Baptist confession, *The London Confession of Faith* of 1644, was forged, as has been described above (see Page 2).

Jacob returned to England in 1616. He left such an impression behind him, that the Independent Puritans were for some years known as “Jacobites.” It should be noted that Puritan ministers in Holland, and especially “Jacobites,” required church members to subscribe to a covenant before they might partake of “the Communion.”¹⁴

b. The J-L-J Mother Church

When Henry Jacob returned to England, he boldly instituted in London an Independent Puritan congregation in 1616. This was the first church organized on English soil to follow in general the principles enunciated several years before by Jacob and was located near Southwark in London. The growth of Independent or Congregational Puritanism in England at first appears to have been rather slow, but by c. 1640 it was evidently spreading in various parts of the country.

Before 1645 neither separatism nor Independent Puritanism seems to have been really strong in London. The Independent Puritans of London reported “as yet to consisting much within One thousand persons;

¹² Burrage.

¹³ Burrage, 1:292.

¹⁴ Burrage, 1:303.

men, women, and all who to this day have put themselves in any known Congregation of that way, being reckoned.”¹⁵

The Gould Manuscript in the Regent’s Park College, Oxford, tells a story of Henry Jacob starting a church in London. Along with nine who are listed in the manuscript and several others not recorded, he appointed a day of fasting and prayer. The matter of the proposed organization of the congregation was considered. At the end of the day it was decided to institute the church, and those who wished to have a share in the undertaking,

joyning together joyned both hands each with other Brother and stood in a Ringwise: their intent being declared, H. Jacob and each of the Rest made some confession or Profession of their Faith & Repentance, some were longer some were briefer, Then they Covenanted together to walk in all Gods Ways as he had revealed or should make known to them.”¹⁶

I wish I could tell you that this was the moment that the Baptists were born. While there was such a moment with the Anabaptists story, the Baptist story is not punctuated in this way, but evolving. We are not yet where we can mark our beginning, but this is certainly a part of the event that will cause the Baptist separation.

This little congregation liked the title “The Ancient Church.” Do you sense the doctrine of the fallen church that we already studied in The Anabaptist Story? Again, here is a group of people wanting to go back to the primitive church as a source for their identity.

c. Theological Evaluation

a) The Semi-separatists.

Let’s review the theology of this period from the Jacobite point of view.

1. They had the view that a congregation needs to be a believing group who make profession of faith and then covenant to walk together before God and with one another. This is in line with the theology of William Ames.
2. They refused to say that all within the establishment church were lost, and they continued to worship with the church of England. They would refer to “steeped churches” and “churches without a steeple.” They attended steeped churches, but regarded their worship as being centered in the meeting that they held in their homes. The home was the “church without a steeple.”
3. The church was to be a voluntary group, as opposed to the state church concept of a territorial church.
4. The term the “Ancient Church” used by separatists groups reflected that their authority was in the New Testament and not in human traditions. Jacob did not call his church by that name, but said that they had fellowship with the ancient churches.

b) Their similarities with the Anabaptists.

- They shared a dating of the fallen church and the authority of the New Testament. They did not reflect as much understanding of the Patristic period as the Anabaptists had, but they did have an awareness of Patristic Theology and its development.
- A voluntary covenant was required for admission into the church.

c) Their dissimilarities with the Anabaptists.

- They remained within the system, not separating from the established church.
- A profession of faith, and not baptism, was the way that the covenanting was made.

¹⁵ Burrage, 1:311.

¹⁶ Burrage, 1: 314.

So there were similarities between this group and the Anabaptists, but these believers were really building with a different theology. These pre-Baptists were Puritans reflecting Puritan theological thoughts and moving toward Baptist convictions.

II. The Doctrines of Dort Revisited

Since Baptist beginnings are theologically rooted in the Synod of Dort, let us review Dort's teaching and then speak to that theology as understood today. In this section, therefore, the five doctrines of the TULIP will be reconsidered.

A. Election

At the time of the London Confession, "High Calvinism" had become a popular theological stance. That doctrine had a "supralapsarian" ordering of events:

1. God created the human race.
2. God elected some to eternal life and others to damnation. This was called "double predestination," and differed from the "single predestination" of Dort which made no mention of the damned.
3. God permitted sin to enter human history so the reprobate might be justly damned.
4. God sent Christ to save the elect.

The Calvinism of Dort had been single predestination and infralapsarian, a doctrine that reverses the order of events 2 and 3, above.

I. Biblical Materials

Election has parallel or similar words, such as "determination," "predestination," "foreknowledge," "ordain," "known," and "chosen." All of these words need to be considered in the discussion.

Some writers, like Fischer Humphries, want to treat the doctrine of election as a metaphor along with sanctification, redemption and the other words that I treated in the section on the metaphors of relationship. But I am not satisfied with that. The word is a metaphor perhaps, but indeed it is more.

a. Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the major emphasis of election is on the choosing of an individual for special tasks. Before we deal with this, let's look at the choosing of Israel.

In Deut. 4:37 and 7:6–7, God chooses Israel because he loves her and gives no reason for that love. The choice produced something new—Israel was not a people, and it was the *choice* that *made* her a people. It was a new creation, and I think it best to understand it not as a *selection* of Israel over other nations, but rather as the *creating* of Israel. The choice of Israel was that they were to be a people of God, a people who were no people before. The choice of Israel was for a purpose; Israel was to assume the role of a servant of God to the peoples of the world. I suggest that John 15:16 continues that theme.

The act of *choosing* in the Old Testament has these antecedents:

- 1) Chosen to a definite office.
 - As king: 1 Sam. 10:24; 16:8–10, 12 and 2 Sam. 16:18.
 - As priest, 1 Sam. 2:28. Cf. Num. 16: 5, 7; 1 Chron. 16:13.
- 2) Chosen in dynastic succession.
 - The succession of the chosen person's descendants to occupy the office.

- Saul and Eli are the exceptions, as there was a rejection of these two. Judas will be the New Testament counterpart to Saul and Eli. Election refers to that which initiated an activity that had continuity.
- 3) Chosen for legitimacy.
The individual obtains office by means other than regular, socially established, accepted convention.
- 4) Conclusion: At a later time all great leaders were considered chosen—Jacob, Jer. 33:24–26; Abraham Neh. 9:7. Cf. Hag. 2:23.
It is interesting that, the Judges were never considered chosen.

The culmination of this thrust in the Old Testament is the “chosen servant” of Isa. 41:8–9; 44:1–2. “Servant” and “chosen” are nearly interchangeable. A missionary emphasis can be seen here.¹⁷

b. New Testament

- 1) Jesus is the elect one.
“My elect one,” a term given to David in Ps. 89:3 and to the “servant” in Isa. 42:1, is now applied to Jesus, cf., Luke 9:35 and 23:35. Also compare the accounts of Jesus’ baptism.
- In 1 Pet. 2:4 and 6 Jesus is identified with “chosen” cornerstone of Isa. 28:26.
- The ministry of Jesus as the chosen one becomes the hermeneutical key for the understanding of the Doctrine of Election.*
- I suggest, to understand election, that one must see how election is worked out in Christ. In the following passages in Acts, God’s sovereignty is seen in that God’s designs are met, *but never apart from human responsibility.*
- a) Acts 2:22–23. There is no contradiction between God’s definite plan and foreknowledge and the guilt of those who crucified and killed Jesus.
 - b) Acts 3:13–15. Free choice killed the author of life, but God’s sovereign will and power raised Jesus from the dead. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of humanity are seen in tandem.
 - c) Acts 4:23–30, especially, v. 28. The high priest protested that preaching was intended to bring the blood of Jesus upon the members of the Sanhedrin and Jewish people. He was right. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of mankind are, again, in tandem.
 - d) Acts 5:38–39, Gamaliel’s advice. God allows mankind to make plans, but in the end such plans may not succeed. Only the plan of God succeeds.
 - e) Acts 7:51–53. Mankind’s resistance of God.

The early proclamation about the death of Jesus is the pattern of election. God does have a goal in human life and history toward which he is working. Christ is the elect one in the death and resurrection. In his death he is both the rejected and the accepted one by God.

God has put limits to mankind’s freedom and these limits do not eliminate human responsibility. They do deny human sovereignty. Mankind does not have the final decision over the outcome of history and of the human destiny.

This is the model for our understanding election. The culture of Calvin’s day and the Synod of Dort, however, had kings that saw themselves as monarchs with absolute power. The culture of that period helped to shape the way election was understood, *away from the biblical model.*

¹⁷ Buttrick, *IDB*, S.v. “Election,” by G. E. Mendenhall, 2:76-82.

2) A Christocentric reconstruction.

a) Election is through Christ.

Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected man.

- As electing God, He says “I will be your God.”
- As elected man, He says “I will bear your guilt and rebellion.”
- As electing God, He is “Jesus Christ for us.”
- As elected man, He is “Our election and believers partake in his election.”

Eph. 1:4: *Christ* is the predestined one in death and resurrection.

- The rejection of God results in death.
- The acceptance of God results in resurrection.
- Jesus was rejected of God—he bore our sins.
- Jesus was accepted of God—he knew no sin.

The Cross is the setting forth of a rejected sinner and an accepted Son of God. Jesus was rejected because he bore our sins and accepted because he knew no sin of his own. So, in Christ, God says “no” (the cross) and “yes” (the empty tomb).

b) Election was to suffer and die.

Election is *costly* to the elected, Rev. 13:8. Cf. Acts 2:23 and Luke 24:26.

In the death of Christ the wrath of God was actualized. He suffered the rejection of God, so in Christ is God’s “no.”

But God has chosen our lot for himself; election was to reprobation. The consequence of Christ’s choice is that sinful humanity is not rejected but accepted, so Christ is God’s “yes.”

So, in Christ, God says “no” and “yes.”

c) Election actualizes God’s faithfulness.

As the electing God and the elected man; God stands with Jesus at every point, even in his dying.

Jesus trusted God’s faithfulness and walked the path before him into the rejection and dying. God’s faithfulness and Jesus’ faithfulness is justified by the resurrection, Rom. 1:3–4. He suffered rejection due to our sins. Now we believe. We believe the whole significance of his coming, his death and his resurrection was the execution of God’s eternal will and purpose. If you are in Christ, then what He has done is yours. Our rejection is actualized in his dying and our life is actualized in his raising.

Therefore,

- Faith in Jesus Christ is our election.
- He is the elected one—if I am in Christ, I am elected. If I am not in Christ, I am not elected.¹⁸

¹⁸ Richardson, S.v. “Predestination,” by T. H. L. Porter, 264-272.

2. Theological Reconstruction

Perhaps the doctrine of election can best be understood in the following manner:

a. Predestination of Christ

- Eph. 1:3–5: Christ, before creation, is the chosen one and we are chosen in him.
- 1 Pet. 2:8: Christ is the chosen One, the cornerstone.

When predestination shifts away from Christ to creature, all becomes confused. All becomes a “mathematical formula.”

b. Predestination in Christ

1) Of the believer.

In Romans 8:28–30, “foreknew” is experiential. God loves before we love. If one loves God, one is *known* by him; cf., Gal. 4:5–9 (where Paul gets caught in a Pelagian trap, and then immediately corrects himself). There can be no double predestination. Cf. The cognitive “know” of 1 Cor. 8:1 (Paul doesn’t “know all things,” he “knows” about food sacrificed to idols.)

To the Hebrews the meaning of “know” was experiential, cf. 1 Kings 8:38, Isa. 47:8–10, or to know the essence, Gen. 4:1. Predestination properly means being conformed to God’s image.

When speaking of the “lack of knowledge,” as in Isa. 1:3, the prophet is not speaking of theoretical knowledge, but experience.

To know God, in the Hebrew way of thinking, is to be *redemptively related* to God, cf. Jer. 31:34 and John 17:3.

So understand “foreknow” like we understand “God loved us first.” God loved us first and he knows us first. The two phrases mean the same thing. So it is after experiencing God that we know our predestination (Rom. 8:29, meaning that God loved us before we loved him). So God know us before we know him and predestines us to be conformed to Christ, then God calls us, then he puts us into right relationship and honors our obedience.

Cf. Rom. 9:11–13; 2 Tim. 2:20–21, 22–24.

2) Of the Apostles.

The twelve are chosen and called, Luke 6:13, cf. John 12:16. This was a second, special calling—a specialization.

Judas chosen but disqualified, John 13:18. The Old Testament models of Saul and Eli are the background here.

Peter is chosen for opening the work of God to the Gentiles in Acts 15:7—there can be a designation in election for a more specialized work.

3) Of the Church.

The Christian community is referred to as “God’s elect,” Titus 1:1. This community is “in Christ.”

The language of election used of Israel is applied to the church, cf. Isa. 45:4 and Acts 13:17ff. The church is the “chosen race,” 1 Pet. 2:9, Isa. 43:20f. Also, cf. 2 John 1:1, “elect lady” (the church, in Christ).

3. Conclusions

- a. Being an elected one in Christ involves our willingness to participate in God’s redemptive task. The involves privileges and sufferings as it did with Jesus, not favoritism:

- When Israel took their election to be favoritism they bore a negative witness to the world.
- When we, the church, take election to be favoritism we bear a negative witness to the world.

Evangelicals do not see the corporate church as a suffering servant. They want to do things as individuals. The believers' church has gone beyond that.

The suffering servant role is the best image of being an elected one.

- The sovereign, electing God and the elected people have a goal in human life and history. The way to reach that goal is in Christ and his people, i.e. the church.
- The doctrine of predestination was first clearly set out in the works of Augustine in the declining years of the Roman Empire. Then it was addressed by Calvin in Geneva within the Church-State concept, and then at the time of James I and the 1600s in Europe. In each of these time frames, the Emperor or the King were supreme. Culture reinforced Augustine's perception of sovereignty.

4. A Observation

In candor, this presentation on election is a doctrine with only a history of about 50 years.¹⁹ In the testing for authenticity—Scripture, church past, church present, and personal experience—we have little in the church past to validate this concept. Like the doctrine of the fall of the church, we project here a fallen doctrine. We go back to the New Testament and say that our spiritual ancestors did not bless us in this area, and in saying that, we admit that there is a certain risk in the doctrine. One chink in the way we do theology is missing, so you need to put a question mark over this approach and know that it is yet to be tested for the witness of the church.

B. Atonement—The Work of Christ

Introduction

The developments following the Synod of Dort are an important part of the Baptist story.

a. The Move to the Right

The theology of Dort set forth the work of Christ under the rubrics of unconditional election, limited atonement and irresistible grace (the "ULI" of the five TULIP points). It was not long until these concepts developed further, for doctrines are never static. The concept of *supralapsarianism* began to dominate.

- God created the human race.
- God elects some to eternal life and others to damnation.
- God permitted sin to enter human history so the reprobate might be justly damned.
- God sent Christ to save the elect.

b. Three Pastors Named John

Only rarely do we read of Particular Baptists doubting the deity of Christ, but there are other ways that a people of God can die. Orthodoxy, as well as non-orthodoxy, can kill.

In the 1700s, Particular Baptists moved to the right of Dort. This is called "hyper-" or "high-Calvinism." Some Particular Baptists would not preach or apply the gospel to the unsaved. Some fell into Antinomianism, an extreme form of Calvinism which assumed that even personal behavior was foreordained, thus excusing individuals for any lapses in moral conduct. This was a change for Particular Baptists, for in the 1600s local churches sent pastors to evangelize in surrounding areas. Associations

¹⁹ It was chiefly the work of Karl Barth, who treated it under the heading "The Doctrine of God."

raised money to send out preachers, as in 1654 when London Particular Baptists sent a delegation to evangelize in Wales. Three of these pastors illustrate the hyper-Calvinist attitude of the era.

- John Skepp.

He pastored in London sometime after 1710. He opposed Pelagianism and Arminianism, and made no effort to awaken the unconverted. He felt that doing so would despoil God of the sole glory of the sinner's conversion. He was influenced by Tobias Crisp, an Anglican rector in Wiltshire, and Presbyterian Joseph Hussley of Cambridge.

A side-light—Skepp had been under a cloud for scandalous conduct for some years, but was later rehabilitated. These can be people who tend to over compensate.

- John Brine, 1703–1765.

He was the successor to John Skepp at the Curriers' Hall in Cripplegate. He also made no effort to address the unconverted, and contented himself with what he considered clear statements of doctrinal truth, without making any application of his subject.

- John Gill, 1697–1771.

The most eminent Particular Baptist of his age and almost universally considered the leading Baptist spokesman for Hyper-Calvinism.

Gill pastored the Horseleydown church in Southwark, London, and held an endowed lectureship on Wednesday evenings at the Great Eastcheap which attracted the intelligentsia of London of all denominations for 25 years. He was scholarly and pedantic, and was the first individual to have single-handedly written a commentary on the entire Bible.

Gill's Parents had withdrawn him from school when a requirement was placed upon him to participate in daily prayers with children belonging to the Church of England. He developed his Hyper-Calvinistic theology in a book called *The Body of Divinity*, which became the standard textbook on Hyper-Calvinism of this period. Election to eternal life was from eternity and did not depend upon nor begin with the believer's faith or perseverance in faith. Election was

free and sovereign; God was not obliged to choose any; and as it is, he choose whom he will ... and the difference in choosing one and not another is purely owing to his will.²⁰

Gill believed a person had been justified from eternity past and only becomes aware of his standing when he believes on Christ. He and his followers thought that to invite sinners to the Savior would interfere with God's showing mercy on whom he will show mercy; consequently Calvinistic Baptist preachers "largely ceased to warn, exhort and invite sinners."

c. The Moderation of Fuller and Carey

- 1) Andrew Fuller was the most important leader in the moderation of supralapsarianism. Breaking with the non-invitation of Hyper-Calvinism, he began an invitation type practice. John Wesley and John Whitefield and the writings of Jonathan Edwards had a profound influence on Fuller. We have a debt to these men and this movement.

Fuller grew up in a Hyper-Calvinistic church where the gospel was never addressed to sinners. While some majored on the devotional aspects of religion, Fuller's strength turned to the intellectual and practical aspects of the faith. One theological development was accelerated by an unfortunate experience in the Soham church the year after his conversion at age 16. Finding a fellow church member frequently drunk, young Fuller chided him. The drunkard excused himself by citing Hyper-Calvinist views that he could not help himself and, therefore, should not be held accountable. The ensuing dispute in the church of this members behavior, led to the dismissal of

²⁰ Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 1:311.

the pastor, and revealed that most church members accepted Hyper-Calvinism. Later, as Fuller served as pastor of this rather unlovely church, their opposition to his more evangelical views forced him to clarify his thoughts.²¹

In 1785 Fuller published *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. Underwood says of Fuller that he was “the soundest and most creatively useful theologian that Particular Baptists had ever had.” I tend to agree with this assessment.

Fuller honored Gill and said that he himself was a learner from Gill—but he made modifications in Gill’s theology, such as these:

- The human inability to come to the Gospel is also moral accountability. You are accountable for your inability to come to Christ.
- Christ died for all men, but the benefits only apply for those who believe.

These modifications were moves back to the left and toward Dort orthodoxy.

Fuller advocated a simple life style. He had a plaque displayed on his study door which said, “He who steals my purse steals money; he who steals my time steals my life.” Fuller stood over six foot tall—interesting when compared to William Carey (1761–1834), who was not more than 5-feet.

- 2) Carey put feet to Fuller’s theology. In 1781, he heard a sermon preached by a Robert Hall, Sr., entitled “Help to Zion’s Travelers.” The sub-title of the sermon was “an attempt to remove various stumbling blocks out of the way of relating to doctrinal, experimental and practical religion.” William Carey said, “I do not remember having read any work with more rapture.” The sermon was advocating the use of *means* to assist the unsaved in the conversion experience (an example of means would be the urging of persons to respond to the work of the Spirit in their lives).

The Hyper, or High Calvinists said of Gill that this emphasis was “duty faith,” that is, humans had an accountability to hear and respond to the gospel. Fuller and Carey said that the unsaved have the ability to turn to Christ. Hyper-Calvinists considered this heresy. But Fuller, in his book, made a distinction. He said the sinners have the *duty* to respond but they do not have the *ability* to carry it thorough. So Fuller was still a Calvinist.

Hyper Calvinism was, however, on a toboggan slide. Some taught that the lack of faith is no sin because grace causes one to believe. Others said that a preacher should preach the gospel but not give moral exhortation because that would be to do the work of God. To give an invitation and lead someone to Christ would be stealing glory from God. God was responsible for all.

Fuller stated that the Old and New Testaments abound with exhortations to “hear the word of God,” to “hearken to His counsel,” to “wait on him,” to “seek his favor,” all which imply an obligation. But salvation is not a reward for faith for that would reduce faith to a work performed by the sinner.

Carey was never considered a good speaker. Slight of stature and prematurely balding, he had an unimpressive personal appearance. He preached for an entire summer in a church and did so poorly the church refused to recommend him for ordination, and it wasn’t until a year later the church voted reluctantly to recommend that he be ordained. Carey took a little church but, to support his growing family, he also cobbled shoes and opened a school. He thirsted for knowledge and showed a remarkable ability to learn—especially languages. He kept a book propped upon his cobbler’s stand and learned Greek, Hebrew, Dutch, French, Latin and several other Indo-European languages. One of his interests was map making. The story is often told of his taking shoe leather from the cobbler’s shop to stretch a make-shift globe with various continents made of leather tanned different colors. In teaching geography, Carey thought of the world population

²¹ McBeth, 182.

without Christ. During class he would often pause and say to himself, “Pagan! Pagan!” as he viewed the home-made globe. That concern for world conversion welled up in Carey to become a consuming passion.

In 1787, Carey attended the Minister Fraternal meeting of the Northampton Association and proposed the following topic for discussion: “Whether the command given the apostles to teach all nations was not binding on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world” (the contemporaneity of Biblical events is a presupposition here). The revered Dr. Ryland Sr., was said to have retorted, “Sit down young man. You are an enthusiast! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without consulting you or me.”

In May 1792, Carey preached from Isa. 54:2–3. Carey’s sermon had only two points—“Expect Great Things from God, Attempt Great Things for God.” Note the Calvinism in the title. Faith must precede works. This sermon was one of the turning points in Christianity. The sermon was inspiring, yet it appeared that Fuller, who was presiding, would close the meeting without any specific action. Carey tugged at Fuller’s coat and pleaded, “Oh, sir, is nothing to be done? Is nothing again to be done?” The association adopted the following resolution, “Resolved, that a plan be prepared against the next Ministers meeting in Kettering, for forming a Baptist society for propagating the gospel among the Heathen.” Carey went to India but he was not the first missionary there. His serving under the auspices of a society, however, became the prototype for the modern mission movement.

The story of Carey is almost legendary, but it was at a high cost:

Carey’s domestic situation complicated his appointment, for his wife Dorothy flatly refused to go. She was never in sympathy with her husband’s mission interests and never shared his world vision ... Carey accepted appointment as a missionary to India, and the date for sailing was set before Dorothy was even told about it. Carey urged her to go with him, but she at first refused. So Cary took their oldest child, Felix, and set out for the ship. However, the sailing was delayed, and Carey [thinking that the delay was a sign from God] took the opportunity to rush back home and plead once more with Dorothy to join him. With many tears, she yielded and had only a few hours to pack all her possessions for herself and four children, bid farewell to family and friends, and leave England forever. She was scarcely aboard ship when she came to regret her decision, and she adapted poorly in India. The heat and humidity took their toll, and she was subject to severe fevers. Their grinding poverty, the uncertainty of their existence, and the death of one child proved more than she could cope with, and she lapsed into a deep and debilitating depression. For the last thirteen years of her life, she lived in a single room, with padded walls, behind a locked door.... Dorothy Carey, ... paid a high price for Baptist missions and never knew why.²²

Note: the missionary movement did not stem from General Baptists who held universal atonement—Christ died for all. Instead, it sprung from Particular Baptists, but these particular Baptists also believed that Christ died for all but the benefits of Christ were limited to the believers. Carey believed that God had believers in India and went to awaken them to God’s gift. It would be the “this is that” and “then is now” theology that begets mission, not the theology of the magisterial reformers.

d. Summary

The Baptist Story has a fourfold use of the term, “Calvinism”:

- John Calvin.
- The Calvinism of Dort.
- The Hyper-Calvinism of John Gill, characterized by no invitations, a lack of faith not being regarded as sin, and supralapsarianism.
- The moderate Calvinism of Fuller and Carey:
 - Single predestination,

²² McBeth, 186.

- the use of means in presenting the gospel, and
- universal atonement with limited application.

This moderate Calvinism is our heritage theologically. Add to this the Anabaptists understanding of the nature of the church and you have the essential building blocks of a believers' church theology. These two concepts moderate Calvinism; and become the essential parameters of our theological heritage.

I now want to develop the work of Christ in greater detail. Moderate Calvinism, as seen in Fuller and Carey, has an emphasis on evangelism and missions. While the work of Christ is to be shared with those outside the church and believers are to reach out to the whole world, in this section we will only deal with the theology of atonement and let your evangelism and mission professors to do their thing (even though I believe that theology alone can properly teach missions and evangelism; did not missions and evangelism burst forth only after there was a proper understanding of theology?).

1. The Biblical Witness

a. Presuppositions

- 1) The Christian gospel will no longer be the good news if Christ's death ceases to be at its center. Fully a third of the gospel writings deal with the last week of Christ's life (clearly, they are not just biographies).
- 2) The New Testament meaning of Christ's death is expressed in a variety of ways. To center on only one may be to neglect part of the biblical record. Care must be taken.
- 3) The doctrine of the work of Christ has never received authoritative definition by the church. The history of this doctrine is a story of a series of attempts by individual thinkers who interpret the meaning of Christ's sufferings, death, and resurrection. This fact is the key in our approach. We will not teach the rightness of any one theory, but will look at the various theories and how they come about, their strengths and weaknesses, and then reconstruct a theory for today.
- 4) The key to the study of the cross is the doctrine of salvation, and primarily the forgiveness of sins. Here the contribution of Athanasius was pivotal. While a young man, Athanasius wrote *The Incarnation of the Word*, in which he argued that Jesus was truly divine; that is, the incarnation of the eternal Word of God. Throughout his long life Athanasius defended that view against Arius and his successors who denied it. Humanly speaking, it was due largely to Athanasius that the church accepted the doctrine that Christ was divine; as a result, Christianity was not reduced to an exotic sect of Judaism or a general philosophy.

The reason for Athanasius' persistence and clear thinking was his concern for the matter of salvation. Athanasius lived and worked in Alexandria which was the intellectual center of Neo-Platonism. Athanasius taught that the person of Christ must be viewed through the work of Christ. Only God could forgive sin and this meant Jesus must be viewed as God, and what Arius was doing by making Christ less than God and was therefore mitigating against our salvation.

b. Biblical images of forgiveness

The study now will be concerning four biblical images on forgiveness. I will set forth these four images pictorially. Please don't take them as a theory. Hear them more as parables, and listen to their dominating theme.²³

- 1) *A payment to be made.*

The picture: The scene is a slave market or a prison camp. There are men and women who have lost their freedom. They are being sold into slavery, or they are confined as captives within enemy territory. A person steps up and pays a prescribed price, that is a ransom, to purchase the slave or the captive and freedom is then given.

²³ Cf. Guthrie, 245ff.

We are the slaves or the prisoners. Jesus is the Redeemer.

The Scriptures: Mark 10:45 (“many” here refers to the remnant, not “everybody”), 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18; Titus 2:14; Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:13.

The emphasis: We are ransomed at a great price. We are trapped and cannot free ourselves. All human effort is to no avail. Jesus is the one who, at great cost to himself, makes us free.

2) ***A battle to be won.***

The Picture: The scene is a battlefield. God and the devil are at war for the possession of humanity whom the Devil has stolen, tricked, or lured from the Kingdom of God. The Devil has carried off his victims to a kingdom of darkness. Christ comes as the mighty warrior of God who invades the realm of the Devil to bring mankind home again to where humanity rightly belongs. It is a deadly, a costly, a real battle. On Good Friday, Jesus has lost his life and the powers of darkness believe they have won a glorious victory. But then on Easter morning, God calls forth that mighty warrior from the grave and humanity is delivered from the kingdom of darkness and translated into the kingdom of light.

The Scriptures: Mark 3:23–27 (the parable that interprets Jesus’ ministry—Jesus binds Satan and plunders Satan’s kingdom); Col. 1:13; 2:15; 1 Cor. 15:24–28 (there is only one throne in heaven).

The emphasis: Victory at great cost. The seriousness of humanity’s predicament and the power of God’s triumphant love are to be seen. We cannot find our way out from the darkness of the evil kingdom, but the mighty warrior cares so much for us that, with a costly struggle, he enters into that darkened kingdom, rescues us, and brings us to his home in the kingdom of light. We are to participate (i.e., “co-labor”) in that victory.

3) ***An offering to be presented.***

The Picture: The scene is in a religious place. In that religious place there is a bloody altar where sacrifices are repeatedly made. Humanity is guilty before God and deserves God’s wrathful punishment. A priest comes forward who is to be a mediator between God and humanity. The priest makes a sacrifice. A lamb or goat is brought in. Bleating, it is led to the priest. The priest, straddles the goat. He reaches down and tilts the chin up. He takes a knife from his sash and, with a deft stroke, slits the throat. Cries of terror come from the mortally wounded animal and the blood pulsates into a prepared container until the animal is dead. The life was in the blood, and they could see the life ebbing away. The animal is placed on the altar. Fires are begun; the sacrifice continues.

The offering of the blood is a sign of the people’s sorrow for their disobedience, of their willingness to offer their own lives to God, and the desire to be cleansed from sin by the fires from the altar. By identifying with the animal, the worshippers consider themselves to have been cleansed.

But the picture enlarges. An offering is being made that is similar but yet so very different from all the other sacrifices which have been made on the altar. For you see it is not by the blood of bulls and goats, but by the priest himself that this sacrifice is made. The priest willingly climbs on that altar. He does not have to do that—he does it voluntarily. It is his blood pulsating and his life poured out in this sacrifice. Those worshippers who surround him find the forgiveness of sins by identifying with him. He himself was the lamb which was slain before the foundation of the world, but for us who are sinful and defied, in our time and in our space, he lives out that long planned sacrifice.

The Scriptures: Mark 14:22–24; John 1:29 (“sin of the world” is singular, as it must be. See “Human Nature,” Page 33); Rom. 3:25–26; 1 Cor. 5:7; especially the book of Hebrews, esp. 2:17 and chapters 8–10.

The Emphasis: Christ's costly offering of his life as a sacrifice for human sins. The stress is on the unity of the Bible. The Old Testament sacrificial system is blended into the work that Christ has done for those who seek him, and our oneness with all those of days gone by who gathered around ancient altars in worship become evident. We all are the people of God stretching forward from the time of Abraham to this day.

4) *A verdict to be removed*

The Picture: The scene is a courtroom. God, who is the judge, sits behind the desk. Those of us who have broken his laws stand before him. The judge is handed the records of the lives we have lived. The records are opened and the judge looks over what is written. Not only are deeds recorded, but our thoughts and intentions are also noted. All things about us are naked and open with him with whom we have to deal. Our past is reviewed. We flush and feel a choking feeling of certain and deserved condemnation. Never have we stood in such light and purity as standing before this judge. We have fallen short, very short of what the law has prescribed for us. The judge lifts his face and looks full into our face. The sense of despair and the coming deserved punishment overcomes us. The gavel falls and the verdict is rendered. Guilty. Rightfully we are guilty. We have broken the law of God and the sentence is our assignment to death and hell. We do not protest, because the verdict is just.

As the verdict sounded, one like us, blood of our blood, flesh of our flesh, steps forward. He is like us, but different. He has obeyed the law perfectly. He moves to our side. His light encompasses us. He asks to take our sentence on himself. At his cost we can go free. He is willing to take our death and our punishment upon himself. He is willing to suffer the consequence of God's judgment in our place. The verdict is moved from us to the one like us.

Now we who were enemies of the law have been acquitted. The verdict against us has been removed.

The Scriptures: Rom. 5:6–11; 2 Cor. 5:16–6:1 (note, again, the need for participation—being God's co-laborer); Col. 1:19–20.

The Emphasis: God in Christ has reconciled us to God. That reconciliation was costly. He took upon himself those things that should have been ours. He was made to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

2. The Historical Witness—Theories of Atonement

In the West, we speak of "theories," but the Bible uses metaphors. But each of these theories has defects, even though they also contain some truth.

Introduction

The Atonement has been viewed historically in four ways. Table 1 illustrates these as theaters, presenting the period and cultural background of each.

He died because of the way he lived. Theology cannot separate the reasons why Jesus died from the reasons why he lived, or the meaning of his death from the meaning of his life.

a. Substitutionary Model

The Substitutionary theory of Christ's work seeks to explain how he turned God's wrath aside. It is often called "objective" because it seeks to explain condemnation and redemption as an actual relationship between God and humankind as a whole, relationships which exist whether or not any individual acknowledges them. Christ's saving work was primarily directed towards altering this relationship, not people's "subjective" feeling or character.

Anselm of Canterbury seeks to demonstrate the rational necessity of Christ's suffering by defining sin in a manner which is apparently clear apart from biblical teachings. Sin, briefly, is "not to render God his due."

Since God is the supreme governor of the universe, the seriousness of sin becomes apparent for it is not fitting for God to pass over anything in His Kingdom undischarged. The Law requires that the giver's honor be maintained, so those who rob God of it must either pay back what they owe or else be punished. Observations:

- This model has no reference to specific features of Christ's life. We hear almost nothing about Jesus' approach to Gentiles, the poor, women, to the demonic—about all the concrete emphases of his kingdom ministry.
- Christ's resurrection has little importance for this model.
- This model fits smoothly with sociopolitical conservatism. God's character as universal law-giver, assumed then that society ought to be governed by fixed, divinely sanctioned and rigidly enforced laws.
- This model has a rational character. God's purpose is justice, and human sin is against that justice, the rest follows deductively with compelling, obvious clarity.
- It tends to view God as "schizophrenic." On the one hand, God hates sin—yet he kills his son so that he can love. (No. God was present at the cross).

b. The Moral Influence (Subjective) Model

This model is subjective because it focuses on the way in which Jesus enhances our religious and moral development; it may be traced to Peter Abelard (1079–1142). Christ's cross is not so much a propitiation of God's wrath as it is a demonstration of God's love (e.g., the hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*). The model seldom provides an influential expiation of Christ's death.

Horace Bushnell (1802–1876) was searching for a position between the traditional Reformed orthodoxy and the newly rising Unitarianism of his own day. He designates his own position with the term "vicarious sacrifice" yet interpreted it as an expression of a universal moral law. Bushnell insists that God governs things not only through the law of vicarious love but also through justice. In order to curb the effects of sin, God instituted natural and civil laws.

Bushnell felt that the substitutionary theory separated Jesus' death too widely from his life. To remedy this he showed how Christ's consistent exercise of vicarious love amidst a hostile world, as expressed in his specific words and deeds led to his death.

- Moral influence theorists usually regard the emphasis on sacrifices as representing a lower stage of Old Testament religion.
- When moral influence advocates read the Old Testament, they stress the social dimensions of Yahweh's covenant and the ethical and social emphases of the prophets. When they read the Gospels, they find Jesus renewing the message of the prophets and proclaiming the dawning of God's kingdom.

c. The Ransom, or *Christus Victor* Model

This model envisions humanity in a desperate situation from which Christ alone can rescue. The force from which one seeks deliverance is neither God's wrath nor human sin understood in legal terms but the bondage imposed by evil powers.

What is the force from which humanity seeks deliverance? It might be called human sin. For all humanity has turned away from God. Nevertheless for the *Christus Victor* motif this turning away was also a turning towards death and the Devil. Humans seek deliverance not just from their sins (legally or morally considered) but from oppression by these powers. God exercises wrath primarily by turning humans over to the dominion of these powers. When people choose to follow Satan, God hands them over to Satan. After Christianity became Rome's favored religion, however, this sociopolitical understanding of powers rapidly declined. During the Reformation, Martin Luther revived *Christus Victor* imagery.

	Ransom, or <i>Christus Victor</i>	Satisfaction	Penal Substitution	Moral Influence
Period	Patristic, c. 100–451	Middle Ages, c. 500	Reformation, c. 1500	Modern, c. 1800
Modern Repres.	Greek and Eastern Orthodox	Roman Catholic	Protestant	Liberal
Cultural Back- ground	War and slavery. Focuses on the victim in war. The majority of people are captives. Ransom from captivity.	Feudalism. The seriousness of satisfying the offended majesty of the feudal lord.	Breakup of the Holy Roman Empire, recovery of Civil vs. Canon Law. Assumes that the basic law of God's universe provides that sin must be punished.	Reflects the Age of Enlightenment or reason. Stress is on God's love, minimizing the importance of sin.
Idea	Jesus' death was a ransom for the release of captives. Jesus' resurrection was a victory over Satan.	Jesus' death satis- fied the gravity of sin's offense against the majesty of God and also was supereroga- tory, thus acquiring a treasury of merit dispensed through the sacramental system.	God's wrath must be propitiated and sin expiated. Christ took our punishment and died in our stead. In Christ, sin is forgiven and Christ's righteousness is imputed.	Christ's death was an exemplary demonstration of brotherly love. It was neither propitiatory nor expiatory.
Weak- ness	Tends to blame only the devil and to shift emphasis from the Cross to the resurrection, neglecting Christ's death as an atonement for sin. It goes beyond scripture when speaking of a ransom to Satan.	Overemphasis on God's wrath and Christ's suffering to the neglect of the power of redeeming love. Has a Quantitative and sacramental view of the benefits of Christ's death (the mass replaces once- for-all atonement.)	The older formulation tended to subordinate God's love to his wrath, neglecting John 3:16 and neglecting the need for a dynamic for a new life (the Holy Spirit and regeneration).	How can Christ's death be a demon- stration of love if man is not lost in sin? The Cross was the height of folly if it was not necessary (no merit in suffering just to suffer).
Further Reading	Gustaf Aulen, <i>Christus Victor</i> . Kent S. Knutson, <i>His Only Son, Our Lord</i> .	Anselm, <i>Cur Deus Homo?</i> John R. Sheets, S.J., ed., <i>The Theology of Atonement</i> .	R. W. Dale, <i>The Atone- ment</i> . Leon Morris, <i>The Cross in the New Testament</i> . W. T. Conner, <i>The Cross in the New Testament..</i>	Hastings Rashdall, <i>The Idea of the Atonement</i> . Harnack, <i>What is Christianity?</i> (Abelard).

Table 2. The Four Theories of Atonement.²⁴

How did Christ liberate creation from the powers? Jesus' resurrection which completed his triumph over the powers and was also the starting point for the new dispensation, for the gifts of the Spirit which continues this work in the Church.

²⁴ Adopted from W. Boyd Hunt, Systematic Theology Notes, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

- *Christus Victor* interrelates Jesus' life, death and resurrection more coherently than do our other two models. Paul speaks of evil powers in at least four ways:
 - Satan, the devil,
 - religions and philosophies,
 - rulership: principalities, dominions, thrones, and
 - forces which oppose God. The powers could be deceived not because Christ intentionally tricked them but because of their own assumptions about power and how it is exercised.

d. Satisfaction Model

This model emerged from the feudal culture of the middle ages, in which an offense against a lord could be mitigated by some form of compensation. It is the model embraced by Roman Catholicism and implemented in the system of penance. The grace of God manifest in the death and resurrection of Christ created a treasury of grace that is dispensed through "superogation"—the sacraments.

3. Conclusions

- 1) We are blessed that no one theory can be said to be the orthodox position. We need to shape our view of atonement for our culture, and this has not yet been done.
 Ours is a culture of sensateness—an obsession with the senses. Because it gets harder and harder to shock, the decline continues—even accelerates. Television lies when it idealizes people in their 20s and portrays sex and violence as it does. Our culture has problems. People are *lonesome*. These four theories do not deal with loneliness, purposelessness, and alienation.
 The Scriptures speak of the fullness of Christ, eternal life being portrayed in terms of quality, not just quantity. We are in decline—our culture is on its way out—but *God can continue to work*. When evaluating political issues, we should ask, "what is best for the Kingdom of God?", not "what is best for our culture."
- 2) Jesus' self-understanding as a suffering servant is important. We violate this understanding when we lapse into triumphalism in our attitudes and worship.
- 3) Jesus' person and work are to be understood as one.
- 4) The cross was once for all. It was a *cosmic* even—sufficient for all sinners, even in the event that there are civilizations on other planets.
- 5) There will always remain a mystery in the atonement. Jesus did something for me that I cannot do for myself; this is true even if I can't fully explain what he did for me.

C. Scripture and Revelation

Let me look with you at the *London Confession of Faith of 1644*. I want to review with you the first eight articles of the Confession. Article I deals with God as he is himself and the oneness of believers. Article II speaks of God as Spirit who gives being, movement, and preservation to all other things and affirms the trinity. Article III speaks of the nature of God and single predestination. Article IV is of God's creation and sin entering the world. Article V treats the fallenness of mankind and election. Article VI is salvation through Jesus Christ. Then article VII and VIII speak of Canonical Scriptures and purpose of the written word.

So the Confession begins with experiences with God, and then treats his nature and work, fallen humanity, and Scripture. This is the way it normally is—one begins with an experience with God, and then uses Scripture to interpret it.

Now we need to go forward to 1677, a 33 year jump. The time of the Commonwealth had passed. Charles II (1660–1685)²⁵ was on the throne and he brought with him Anglicanism, conformity laws, and a new wave of repression. The Clarendon Code was put into effect to suppress dissents in the years 1661 to 1665, acts that were primarily aimed at the Presbyterians but which affected all dissenters alike. King Charles actually favored the restoration of Catholicism. In 1673 Parliament passed the Test Act which barred non-conformists from all military and civil offices.

Persecution brought dissenting groups nearer to one another and especially brought Baptists and Congregationalists nearer to Presbyterians. It was important that Dissenters form a united front, which might be demonstrated by a show of doctrinal agreement among themselves.

With the easing of persecution in the late 1670's, Particular Baptists felt that they needed to publish a new confession. They sent a circular letter to the churches in England and Wales for representatives to be sent to a general meeting in London in 1677. 107 churches sent messengers. A William Collins, a pastor in London, had worked on altering the Westminster Confession in certain places to make it conform with what he thought represented Baptists beliefs. At the meeting he produced his work and it was basically approved.

The purpose of the Confession was stated this way: “our hearty agreement with them (Presbyterian and Congregationalists) is that wholesome Protestant doctrine, which, with so clear evidence of Scripture they have asserted.”²⁶

The *London Confession* of 1644 was out of print. Copies were scarce, and the contents were not generally known. While essential agreement with 1644 was claimed in an introductory note to the 1677 confession, the general ignorance of the earlier confession made that claim questionable. The need for more full and distinct expression of views, appeared to be the real reason for the new Confession. A brief comparison between the two documents reveals numerous and marked differences:

- Treatment of Scripture, Sabbath, and marriage were added. (Scripture had become more available since the 1644 Confession).
- The Second Confession was more complete and ordered, being modeled after Westminster. Its views of the church and ordinances were altered, being made more Calvinistic. Calvinism, in fact, was more pronounced in the whole Confession.
- The Philadelphia Confession adopted the *Second London Confession* in 1742 and the Confession was an influence in our country for a number of years, and is now being advocated by some contemporary Baptist theologians.²⁷

Now look with me to the *Second London Confession* of Faith and notice the opening articles.

Article 1. Scripture as an infallible rule²⁸ of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. The Apocrypha was not accepted.²⁹ Inward illumination of the Spirit of God, is said to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.

Article 7. All things in Scripture are not alike, etc.

²⁵ Charles II was followed by James II (1685-1688) and he was followed by the time of William and Mary and toleration.

²⁶ Lumpkin, 236.

²⁷ The Philadelphia Confession added two articles. See Lumpkin, 351.

²⁸ Regarding the rule, cf. McGrath.

²⁹ “...unto which nothing is to be added...”, Lumpkin, 250.

Article 9. That the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself. What the article means may be seen in relating Acts. 2:38 (repentance, baptism, and then forgiveness), 3:18–19 (repent and then forgiveness), and 10:43 (belief, and then forgiveness).

Chapter II was concerned with God and the Holy Trinity.

Now, what difference does it make to begin a confession with Scripture, rather than first treating the nature of God? What changes does this bring about? It is the influence of Hyper Calvinism. Calvin does not begin his institutes with Scripture, the confession of 1644 did not begin with Scripture, but this confession does.

We will now look at the three doctrines that deal with Revelation—manifestation (pre-biblical), inspiration (biblical), and illumination (post-biblical).³⁰

1. *Manifestation*

A definition for manifestation is as follows:

Manifestation is God entering history in particular events and for redemptive purposes. This act becomes normative for all God's dealings with his creation.

The focus here is pre-biblical.

a. *Vehicles of Manifestation*

As a modified Calvinist it my belief that a living and sovereign God can choose all sorts of ways of manifesting his presence, but no means will be sufficient to give adequate expression to that presence.

1) In the Old Testament

- a) *Inanimate objects*, such as the burning bush, Ex. 3:1–8; fire, 1 Kings 18:38, cf. 1 Kings 19:11–12, Elijah at Horeb.
- b) *Animals and the sacrificial system*; Baalam's ass, Num. 22:5.
- c) *Phenomena of nature*: Storms, Job 37:4–5, Ps. 29:3; Clouds, Ex. 19:9.
- d) *Psychical events*. Dreams: Gen. 40:5–23,; The the baker's and cup bearer's dreams are tested; Deut. 13:2f; Num. 12:6; visions (no loss of consciousness) Isa. 6:1–13; cf. 1 Kings 19:11; Amos 9:1.
- e) *Angel of Yahweh*. Angels (meaning "messenger"), are representatives of God but are yet distinguished from Yahweh. As in Gen. 16:7–14, Yahweh uses angels to answer prayers and to protect the clan. They are used always for good, Gen. 24:7–10. They can do the work of Yahweh; in Ex. 33:2, the Angel is to win the battle, and the people are simply to cooperate. Sometimes they warn, even having a sword in their hand, Num. 22:31.

The function of the angel is comparable to a prophet who identifies himself with the one who sent him, yet remains fundamentally a distinct personality, Haggai 1:13. It is interesting that the Angel of the Lord is not mentioned in the prophets. The Angel did the work of the prophet when there was no prophet.

- f) *Prophetic consciousness*. When God wishes to manifest himself through an act in history, he first makes sure of the choice of a prophet to whom he can entrust his word before that word is enacted in the event.
 - Sometimes a prophecy will be announced ahead of the event—Amos announces the coming ruin of Israel.
 - Sometimes it is announced contemporaneously with the event. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are contemporaries with the fall of Judea.

³⁰ Hendricks. Here Hendricks models this approach on John Calvin.

- Sometimes it is announced after the event, Ex. 4:31.

The key is Amos 3:7: “Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets.”

2) In the New Testament

- The incarnation*, John 1:14, 2 Cor. 5:21. Christians are convinced that the ultimate medium of God’s manifestation is Jesus Christ.
- Written Old Testament records*. In Matt 5:17, Jesus says, “do not think that I came to abolish...”; John 5:39, “you diligently study the Scriptures ...”; Luke 24:44–46, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms”; Matt. 21:42, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone the builder rejected ...’”; Matt. 22:29, “... you do not know the Scriptures, or the power of God.”
- Mighty works of Jesus*. Matt. 11:2–6, the report to John; Luke 7:18–23.
- Apostolic witness*, Acts 2:14–42; 3:12–26; Acts 4:31, prayed and the place was shaken. New Testament Christians have same attitude about Jesus and his sacrifice that Israel had about the Exodus, Luke 9:30f.³¹

b. Characteristics of Manifestation

Manifestation is an event by which God discloses himself. In disclosing himself God concedes to human powers of apprehension, but He remains the initiator and the master of his self-disclosing activity.

1) *It is by divine initiative.*

- God chooses the place: 1 Kings 14:21 (a city); 2 Kings 21:7 (a temple).
- God chooses a people: 1 Pet. 2:9 (to carry out his intentions); John 1:13.
- God chooses a person: Luke 9:35, Luke 23:35 (Jesus Christ is the chosen one).

2) *It is for servanthood.*

- The Old Testament remnant, Isa. 41:8–10 (“fear not” always attends a battle cry; the people are to return from Babylonian captivity); 42:19; 43:1–10; 44:1–45:4.
- The New Testament church.

3) *It is unlimited.*

- Nebuchadnezzar, Jer. 25:9 (my servant), cf. 27:6; 43:10.
- Cyrus as “messiah,” Isa. 44:28–45:3.

Note: each time a choosing for manifestation takes place it is for a view of punishment or the saving of Israel.

Response: Deut. 6:5, “Love the LORD...” and 8:6ff, “Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways...”

4) *It is historical.*

Deut. 26:5–11 (The Wandering Aremean) and Acts 13:16–25 both present *Helisgeschichte* (salvation history). One cannot learn about God by speculating, but by what God has done in history.

Is this series of events recorded in the Bible peculiar or does the difference lie in the interpretation of the events? Is God in the rest of the world’s history the same way that he is in those events if

³¹ Conner, 81.

there were eyes to see? Does the difference lie in the history or in the interpretation of history? God is in all races and nations. It is in the interpretation, but also in history.³² The Cross is unique and in one culture and in one time.

- 5) *It is cultural conditioned.* God is limited by the medium through which he works. God worked through the nation Israel as Israel, Moses as Moses, etc. Cf. Matt. 13:58, Jesus “did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.” God takes the particular person in his or her situation with ideas, outlook and methods of thought and deals within that culture.³³ Compare Ex. 20:3 (“You shall have no other gods before me”) with Isa. 45:5 (“I am the LORD and there is no other; apart from me there is no God”). This shows God’s self-limitation at work. The Bible is culturally conditioned, and God meets his people where they are. The people of the Exodus thought that there were many gods. By Isaiah’s time, however, the people’s understanding had become theologically enlightened.

One does not need to know all these things (e.g., learning the culture of the ancient Hebrews) in order to be saved. But one needs understand these things to properly interpret Scripture. It should also be recognized that culture includes many incidental characteristics.

- 6) *It is redemptive.* The purpose of God’s manifestation is that we come to know him. You know your friend by what he or she does—manifestation tells us of God. Spiritual truth has as its purpose the bringing of one into fellowship with God.
- 7) *It is final in Christ.* Every other manifestation of God is partial and ambiguous, but in Jesus the clearest and highest understanding of God is given. The word “final” is used in the sense of quality—Jesus is not the last manifestation of God.

The manifestation of God achieves its consummation in Jesus Christ in whom all that was scattered and fragmentary in former times is gathered into unity and fullness, Heb. 1:1–2.

Not everything, even in the life of Jesus, is equal in manifestation concerning God. Consider these pivotal manifestations:

- John 13:3ff, the upper room. Cf., wearing the “apron of humility” (1 Peter 5:5).
- Matt. 27:45–50, the cross and resurrection.

These two events are, for me, the pinnacles of God’s manifestation, for *they give the clearest understanding of the nature of God and his relationing to the world.*

2. Inspiration (*Interpretation of the Manifestation*)

A definition of Inspiration is as follows:

Inspiration is God giving the ability to rightly understand, record, and transmit the meaning of manifestation.

This concerns itself with God working to accomplish his purposes by giving understanding to the meaning of manifestation. *The focus here is biblical.*

We are dependent upon people who are gifted to tell us that God is speaking. Moses told Israel that God was at work in the Exodus; Isaiah told Israel that God was speaking in military defeats; the apostles told the church that God was in Christ reconciling the world. We are dependent upon witnesses to the manifestations of God to identify God for us in those events.

³² Conner, 78ff.

³³ Conner, 85.

There are only two ways to know about an historical event; either we must be present when it happened or we must depend upon the testimony of someone who was present. But they gave us more than a *record*—they gave us an *interpretation* of what they saw as the activity of God.

Illustration: “Jesus dies”—that is a manifestation. “For our sins” is an interpretation. This is by inspiration. Others may have seen the manifestation, but did not have understanding. To not have the inspiration is to not know the meaning of the event.

a. Old Testament

The idea of inspiration is more implicit than explicit in the Old Testament. Such terms and expressions as these are commonplace:

- Ex. 4:30, “Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses.”
- Job 32:8, “But it is the Spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty that makes him understand.”
- Jer. 32:1, etc. “the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.”

b. New Testament

Jesus claims to speak what he has heard from his Father. The Apostles claim to report what they have seen with Jesus. Paul claims a direct authority from God for most of his expressions.

Two major passages speak to inspiration.

- a) 2 Tim. 3:16–17. This refers to the Jewish Scriptures.
 - *Timothy and tradition*, 3:14, “...continue in what you have learned...” Tradition is not a formality, but a guide for life.
 - *The Christian interpretation of Jewish Scripture*, 3:15. “from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures.” This refers to Jewish parents training their children—a reference to the LXX.
 - *Every Scripture is inspired*, 3:16a. The word “inspired (*theopneustos*) means “God breathed.” The term does not occur elsewhere in the Bible. The same understanding is reflected in 2 Pet. 1:19–21. Every Scripture is divinely authoritative. God is its source.

Application of inspired Scripture, 3:16b–17.

- “For teaching.” The meaning is that of doctrinal instruction based upon Scripture. Cf. 1 Tim. 4:13, 16, Titus 2:7.
- “For reproof” is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. It is used in the sense of correcting wrong conduct in the community, “refuting error and rebuking sin,” cf., Ps. 39:11.
- “For correction” is also not found elsewhere in New Testament. The word denotes reformation or improvement of life or character. For training in righteousness. Righteousness means right conduct. The present text requires that the phrase be understood in terms of Christian formation or development of character.

In conclusion, the texts are to be used pastorally in the life of the fellowship. They are the divine authority for teaching sound doctrine, opposing error, correcting wrong conduct, encouraging right living, and for developing Christian character. The result—that the man of God (perhaps a designation of Christians in general, but especially Timothy and the Christian leaders) may be prepared and qualified for whatever tasks they may face in the church or the world. The text is saying that no accumulation of skills, no matter how great, is sufficient for Christian ministry, *unless those skills are based on Scriptural foundations, and the breath of God.*

There is no theory given here; the passage is silent on the “how” of the inspiration. Its emphasis is on purpose and the result of God’s inspiring activity and has two purposes, both of which ought to be mentioned when the passage is preached:

- Scripture helps bring a saving encounter, and
 - Scripture provides instruction in holy living.
- b) 2 Pet. 1:20–21 (also a reference to the Old Testament).

The inspiration of holy men is prior to the Holy Scripture, for there were inspired prophets in the time of Oral transmission, cf. 1 Sam 10:1–13. The Key is this—inspiration is for redemptive purposes. This passage, in particular, is against the false prophets of chapter 2. It is, in effect, an expansion upon what is meant by the Spirit’s working with the “man of God” in 2 Tim 3, and is meant to give guidance and comfort through a community and the community’s appropriation of Scripture.

One is never free to make of Scripture what one will, and the reason is based upon something the Holy Spirit does among us. As we share a common experience thorough time and space, the Christian enters into a common property of the Spirit. The writer of Scripture assumes here that his readers will understand and that the Holy Spirit will be with them. The property of all false teachers, the passage teaches, is that their teaching is “private”—that is, is not the same as is held among “us,” and the reason for this is that they are outside the community of the Spirit which binds us to the writers of Scripture. The right interpretation is that which is public and available in the community of the Spirit—i.e., the Church. He goes on to make the point most emphatically by telling his readers that we are not dealing simply with competing interpretations among believers, but with radically different kinds of people—those “inside” and those “outside.” The picture he draws is not first and foremost of an inspired Scripture individualistically interpreted, but an inspired *Church* in which, and under which, the Scriptures can be only be read and understood. Prophecy is God’s gift. Its interpretation must be in accord with God’s intentions, so it follows that the community and/or tradition is needed for its proper interpretation. To claim that Scripture is inerrant and that one can privately interpret it, and thus know the mind of God, is opposed by this passage.

Although both passages pertain to the Old Testament since New Testament had not yet been formed, Christians would later use them as a guide for interpreting the New Testament writings as well.

3. *Illumination*

The third component in revelation is illumination. Manifestation and inspiration precedes illumination, but illumination is also an essential ingredient of the doctrine of revelation.

Illumination is the God given ability to understand the inspired record of manifestation in things sufficient to salvation and for daily living.

a. **Biblical Materials**

By definition, this is post-biblical. Note how this understanding is seen in Simon Peter’s witness to Cornelius, “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism...’”, Acts 10:34. In reflecting on the former experience of seeing the sheets let down out of heaven (Acts 10:9ff) and standing now in the presence of these Gentile proselytes, Simon Peter understands. This understanding is because of the illumination given by the Spirit of God.

The witness of the Holy Spirit to the Word of God enables the believer to understand its saving content. We are to cooperate with God, so God provides a means to understand the Scriptures (Ps. 119:27; 73, Matt. 16:17). In Acts 16:14, God “opens [Lydia’s] heart” to understanding—an essential for the conversion experience (e.g., Wesley’s Aldersgate experience). 1 Cor. 2:12–13 has some theological reflection by

Paul—we can't know God's revelation from reason, but only through the Holy Spirit. See also Eph. 1:18; 3:9–10.

The words of the Bible have no revealing virtue in themselves; in themselves they are “the letter which killeth,” but as testimonies of faith they may become the medium of the life giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6).

The Spirit is the agent of the extension and continuation of the manifestation and inspiration; for by the work of the Spirit, the historical witness to Christ has itself the virtue of revelation by the Spirit's illumination. Cf. John 13:20; Rom. 1:16–17; 1 Cor. 1:18; John 14:16.

The Lord promised that when the Spirit would come, He would lead them (the believers) into all truth (John 16:13). Without the Spirit you can understand that Solomon was David's son, but you cannot understand the redemptive nature of God. It takes the Holy Spirit to make the Bible “living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword, ...” (Heb. 4:12).

b. Theological Reconstruction

- 1) Illumination is closely bound with inspiration and manifestation.
- 2) Illumination has to do with God's presence among his people in every generation.
- 3) Illumination works with human capacities but isn't the product of them. One cannot control illumination; one can only follow God.
- 4) Illumination has a narrow focus on “things sufficient to faith.” It doesn't claim to give an infallible interpretation of the Bible. Any claim to infallible interpretation is against Scripture, and against the gospel.

In illumination there is a freedom for God to do a new thing. There may be new manifestations but they will be dependent on the original manifestations (John 16:13–15). Manifestation, inspiration, and illumination comprise the doctrine of revelation.³⁴

4. Excursus on Inerrancy

The late B. B. Warfield (a Presbyterian who taught at Princeton University) posited that the words of Scripture themselves are inspired, but only in the original autographs. What we have today are copies of the autographs and, being copies, they may have errors. Inerrancy asserts that everything in the Bible must be true; that is, as Howard Lindsell puts it, the “Bible is free from error in whole and in part.”³⁵

a. Inerrantist presuppositions

- 1) God is God and whatever God does is true. God gave us the Bible. The Bible is perfect because God is perfect.

If the believer shifts from the view of an inerrant Bible all biblical beliefs will be destroyed. This is the “slippery slope” theory. Inerrancy is based on deductive logic:

The Bible is the Word of God.

God is truthful and cannot lie.

Therefore the Bible is truthful and cannot contain a lie.

The same logic may be expressed negatively: if the Bible is not true, then God is a liar and there is nothing left for us to stand on.

The inerrantist reasons that “If inspiration allows for the possibility of error, then inspiration ceases to be inspiration. So men were kept from error by the Holy Spirit.”³⁶ No indication of how

³⁴ Much of the discussion in this section was adopted from William L. Hendricks' Systematic Theology notes.

³⁵ Lindsell, 27.

³⁶ Lindsell, 31.

this was done is put forward, however. This logic approach has the following implication: If the Bible contains even one error, it cannot be trusted in any area. The Bible is foundational and it must be secure.

- 2) The words of the Bible are true only in the sense in which the human authors conveyed them. Therefore, we must determine how they thought, what influenced them, and so forth.
- 3) The human authors were not necessarily without error. Many of his personal convictions may have been wrong. But inerrancy means that these opinions and convictions did not affect the message itself.
- 4) Inerrancy does not rule out the use of literary devices—poetry, figures of speech, paradoxes, inexact quotations, folklore, etc.
- 5) The human authors were middle-eastern, not Western; They did not think metaphysically or according to the rules of logic.

b. Inerrantist qualifiers

- 1) Grammatical irregularities do not invalidate truth.
- 2) Progressive revelation need not imply errors or falsehood.

When Jesus speaks of the mustard seed (Mark 4:31), he is not making a botanical statement for all time and places. He was making an agricultural analogy for Palestine.

- 3) Variant readings exists among the manuscripts. These result from the transmission process. It is “possible to misread some words when the vowels are missing and centuries have elapsed.”³⁷

Note: In the Bible we do have has errors or the possibility of errors.

- 4) Things reported in the Bible are as they appeared to the human authors, which may or may not fit a modern context of understanding. A biblical author, for example, will not be aware that sunsets depend on particulate matter in the upper atmosphere.
- 5) Bible writers were preserved from error in what they taught but not in what they thought. Paul did not err in what he taught, but did not recollect how many people he had baptized, cf. 1 Cor. 1:16.
- 6) The Bible contains problems not yet explainable.

The order of the temptations differ in the two accounts, for example:

- Matt. 4, Stones, Jump, Worship.
- Luke 4, Stones, Worship, Jump.

It is further denied that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole, round numbers, the topical arrangement of materials, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.³⁸

c. Observations on Inerrancy

- 1) Inerrancy uses deductive logic and those who oppose inerrancy tend to use inductive logic.

Deductive Logic begins from certain general assertions, or premises, which it regards as absolutely true. In then seeks, by means of correct reasoning, to derive, or unpack, other truths which are already implied or entailed by these premises.

Inductive reasoning begins from particular truths or facts (historical research, for instance, is inductive). Induction seeks, moving in the reverse direction from deduction, to establish general

³⁷ Lindsell, 37.

³⁸ *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, (10/ 78), Article 13, Truth.

truths. Induction, strictly speaking, cannot establish an absolutely true conclusion. Archaeology might demonstrate ten instances in which the Bible has correctly reported historical facts. Yet one cannot conclude from that that the Bible always will correctly report historical facts. This use of inductive reasoning fell under suspicion with the beginning of the scientific revolution. The problem was that the premise could not be checked. One simply had to accept the truth, because they seemed to be taught by reason, Scripture, or church authorities.

A deductive view of truth underlies the inerrantist's view of Scripture.

- 2) Continuing the deductive logic question, suppose God permitted later copies of Scripture to have errors—what was the purpose of an errorless original that God did not preserve?

Lindsell says, “Those who scoff at the inerrancy of the autographs because they cannot be produced for examination have no better case arguing for the errancy of the text they cannot produce.”³⁹ If you can't produce the original autograph, you can't prove or disprove inerrancy.

- 3) Jesus' use of the Jewish Scriptures.

Six times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said “you have heard that it was said to the people long ago ... but I tell you...” (Matt. 5:21; 27; 31; 33; 38; 43.).

Jesus reinterpreted, extended or replaced teaching embedded in Jewish practice and piety.

- *Extended*: Murder and adultery were extended to inner thought. Love was extended to enemies.
- *Reinterpreted*: Divorce was tightened up.
- *Replaced*: Oaths and retaliation were abolished.

Jesus' use of Scripture in the Sermon on the Mount indicated that Scripture was not closed but open and yet being shaped.

d. Concluding observations

- 1) No conciliar council has spoken on inspiration.

If, through the centuries, our ancestors had been unable to resolve the problem, then there is a certain arrogance if we pronounce that we have the only valid theory.

It was in 1870 the Roman Catholic church in Vatican I defined the pope as inerrant while speaking *ex cathedra*. It was after that time and perhaps in response to that position that the inerrancy of Scripture was fleshed out.

The question on inerrancy is phrased in a difficult way. It is a question like “do you still beat your wife.” Do you answer that Yes or No? Do you believe in an inerrant Bible? To say No, means you believe in an *errant* Bible, and no one accepts that. Neither Strong, Conner, nor Mullins, three prominent Baptist systematic theologians, have held to inerrancy. Strong opposed inerrancy, and neither Conner nor Mullins addressed the issue.

- 2) *The Baptist Faith and Message*, based on the *New Hampshire Confession*, says this.

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end and truth without any mixture of error for *its matter*. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.

“Its matter” is key to current debate.

³⁹ Lindsell, 37.

J. Newton Brown, the chief drafter of the New Hampshire Confession could have taken “Matter” from John Locke, or he could have coined it. Matter means essence, so truth “without mixture of error” means that those things that are essential have no error, but does not say that the Bible is inerrant.

Do not add false criteria (Prov. 30: 5–6). My own attestation concerning Scripture is, “Scripture inexplicably takes me to the heart of God.” This speaks redemptively and to the nature of God.

e. Theological reconstruction

What does the Bible say about itself? Listen and obey and it will give directions for the problems we are facing. Hear in the Bible means listen with the intention of obedience. The Bible is redemptive in purpose and 2 Tim. provides the key for understanding Scripture.

1) Interplay between the divine and the human.

The model of Christ’s incarnation can help understand the interplay between the divine and the human in the Bible. It is essential to see both humanity and divinity in the Scripture and in Christ. 2 Cor. 4:7, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” Knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Christ.

The writing of Scripture requires human effort, cf. Luke 1:1. The basic problem with most objective theories of inspiration is that they are all too cheap or too shallow. The general mental image is that God decides to give a manifestation and to inspire, so poof! Luke did interviews, etc.

“When the time had fully come...” (Gal. 4:4) is the manner of God’s working. What we are talking about is a lifetime process. God’s schooling of one individual, preparing another one, orchestrating events, granting a manifestation, guiding the interpretation, etc. This is a far grander sweep than most theories allow.

2) Balance of subjective and objective.

Theories of inspiration fall into two groups, the subjective and the objective. A subjective theory focuses inspiration on the writer, the subject who wrote on the basis of his or her own understanding, language and culture. An objective theory focuses on the writing with less emphasis on the writer. So the “dictation theory” is seen making little emphasis on the writer. (The Dictation theory needs balance).

Biblical materials do not deal with “how” they are inspired. They say only, “God breathed.” The creation story, for example, does not tell how the universe was created, but simply that God did it, Gen. 1:1.

Two dimensions are evidenced:

- An encounter with God—manifestation.
- The content of that encounter—interpretation of manifestation.

The Bible is to be judged by results, and not process. The internal coherence and external accomplishment speaks of inspiration. John Calvin spoke of the Bible as the “spectacles” for beholding God.

3) A Believers’ Church distinctive—the contemporaneity of Scripture.

- “This is that”—Joel 2 and Acts 2.
- “Then is now”—1 Cor. 10:11.

Scripture addresses us—we differ on the Great Commission with the Reformers.

Models of perceiving, “Law,” Ps. 119; “Hammer,” Jer. 23:39; “two-edged sword,” Heb 4:12, “Living letter,” 2 Cor. 3:2–3.

- 4) Scripture and Revelation: Scripture is a part of revelation. It relates to inspiration. But revelation encompasses three aspects—manifestation, inspiration and illumination. But the gift of Scripture allows us to critique revelation. Scripture comes into existence by divine inspiration, not naturalistic impulses (2 Pet. 2). It becomes the word of God by the Holy Spirit to the community, and then to the individual.
 - a) Scripture is not God—God alone is to be worshipped.
 - b) Scripture is to be loved and treasured, Ps. 119:11. Illustration: Matt. 4—the temptations and Jesus’ use of Scripture, Deut. 8:3, 6:13, 6:16. These verses need to be seen as narrative. The bread is the manna of the wilderness; the leaping from the temple is the testing of God in the wilderness; the bowing down is to worship other gods, cf. 2 Tim. 2:15.
 - c) Scripture is unique and unparalleled—a clarification of the nature of God. Scripture is more than a record of revelation, it is itself part of the revelation.

D. Human Nature

The Baptists of the 1600s were characterized by the TULIP of Dort. Thus far in our discussion I have discussed *Unconditional Election* under “Election” and *Limited Atonement* was under “The Work of Christ.” We will now discuss *Total Depravity* under “Human Nature.”

1. The Confessions of 1644 and 1677/1688

The *London Confessions* held to a Federal Headship theory regarding the fall in the Garden of Eden. This theory held that when Adam sinned, we all sinned. Adam was in a covenant with God and we were in Adam’s loins. As our head, his sin caused all of those yet unborn to become sinners. Adam’s sin was imputed to his prodigy.

The sin into which all humans are born is called total depravity.

a. Total Depravity

Article V of the 1644 *Confession* reads

All mankind being thus fallen, and become altogether dead in sinnes and trespasses, and subject to the eternall wrath of the great God by trangression.⁴⁰

Article XXIV sets forth the preaching of the Gospel as that which normally begets faith, yet faith is dead until being made alive by God.

That faith is ordinarily begot by the preaching of the Gospel, or word of Christ without respect to any power or capacite in the creature, but it is wholly passive, being dead in sinnes and treepasses, doth beleeve, and is converted by no lesse power, than that which raised Christ from the dead.⁴¹

Total Depravity then does not mean, “as bad as can be,” that is, “totally bad,” but rather that nothing within humankind merits God’s saving grace. Nothing within us can save us. Lost humanity is totally unable to deliver itself from sin.

The *Second London Confession*, nearly 35 years later, stated the human situation similarly in Article VI:4. This confession was the one based on the *Westminster Confession* but changed to reflect a Baptist emphasis:

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made oppositie to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.⁴²

⁴⁰ Lumpkin, 158.

⁴¹ Lumpkin, 163.

⁴² Lumpkin, 259.

This Westminster-based idea of sin led that confession to the acceptance of infant baptism as a way to remove the consequences of “original corruption” from the life of the newborn.

It should be noted that these confessions allowed for humanity to be capable of many ethically good actions. Humanity can include respectable citizens who can be good neighbors. But they do affirm that no aspect of who we are, including our rationality, has remained unaffected by sin. This was the understanding of total depravity in the confessions.

b. The Transmission of Sin

How does sin come to those who were in Adam’s loins? Adam was the head of the human race and he acted on our behalf. His act has effected all future generations. The *Second London Confession* witnesses to this in article VI:2.

Our first parents ... so became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity ... whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil.⁴³

So there is Federal Headship from Adam. Because of the covenant relationship between Adam and God, and because of the breaking of that covenant, we are affected by that rupture. Sin is imputed to all Adam’s descendants—so we are all sinners.

c. The Human Being

In the confessions, human beings are referred to as possessing body and soul, a view called dichotomy. This view perceives humans to be made up of two essential parts—a soul which is immortal and a body which is perishable. The soul was viewed either a pre-existent, as taught by Origen, or created at birth, as taught by Tertullian. The soul was regarded as essentially good, but the body was considered essentially evil. Because the body is material and therefore evil, the body is the prison house of the soul.

There was an alternative view held by some at this time. That view, called trichotomy, viewed humans as being composed of *three* parts—body, soul and spirit. Basically the view is built on 1 Thess. 5:23, where Paul is offering a benediction for the church at Thessalonica.

Taking a benediction and concretizing it, I feel, is wrong. Why not do the same with the words of Jesus in Mark 12:30? Jesus said to love God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” By concretizing the words of Jesus, it would be possible to say that humans are in *four* parts. But both Paul and Jesus were emphasizing the total person; by speaking of various aspects of who we are, they asked God’s blessings on all that we are.

Note that in both views—dichotomy and trichotomy—the soul is viewed as eternal and good, and the body as perishable and evil. This understanding of humans has led to much bad theology, particularly on how material things are to be treated. In our biblical studies we have gone to a position beyond that of the confessions. We have come to look at a human as one whole being with tension, that is, *we are a tension-filled unity*.

2. Baptist Theology Revisited—the Human Predicament

In attempting to understand Scripture, the following affirmations need to be made to describe the human predicament.

a. We Are Living Souls

We are living souls, cf. Gen. 2:7 and 2:19. Humans are created by God as living souls. That is, everything that came alive was called soul, or living being.

⁴³ Lumpkin, 258–9.

Soul means “total self,” cf. Ps. 142:4; Ezek. 18:4, and especially Luke 12:19, where the Rich Fool decides to “eat, drink, and be merry.” You do not understand “soul” until you understand that a soul can *eat!* The witness of Scripture is this: you do not *have* a soul, you *are* a soul.

The idea that we have immortal souls comes from Greek thought, and is a distortion to the Scriptural witness. 1 Cor. 15:53 says, “the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” Only God is immortal, and immortality is a gift to us.

- 1) As living souls we have *flesh*, which is defined as follows:

Flesh is having the capacity to cooperate with evil and the demonic pressures of the world.

Flesh is used in the Bible as physical flesh. At times, the Bible speaks of physical flesh as idolatry, cf. 1 Cor. 15:39. Also, flesh at times may refer to human life, cf. Isa. 40:5.

But when flesh is used in a theological sense, it refers to a direction of life. Theological flesh is seen in Gal. 5:20, where the acts of flesh are spoken of as “idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions...” and stand in opposition to Spirit.

- 2) As living souls we have spirit.

Spirit also refers to a direction of life. It is a direction opposite to that of flesh, cf. Gal. 5:22–23 and 1 Cor. 2:10–11, a theological reflection of spirit. Spirit is the inner essence of existence. To walk by or in the spirit is to channel one’s life by God’s strength.

This is a definition of spirit:

Spirit is having the capacity to cooperate with God when energized by the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, the biblical witness would say that persons are total beings having flesh and spirit. It is in the total being, this unity in which there is a tension. God created us with many parts and capacities, but all make up a whole. Humans possess both spirit and flesh—they are best defined as a *tension filled unity*.

b. We Are Sinners

Beside being living souls, the Scripture will witness to the fact that humans are sinners. The *First* and *Second London Confessions* both speak of our being in Adam. The scripture speaks of Adam in three ways.

- 1) The three Adams.

- a) Representative Adam.

Consider the first and second Adam, Rom. 5:12–21 and 1 Cor. 15:20–28. Sin originated in and through Adam and from Adam it spread to all humanity. This is validated by the universality of death. These passages *contrast* the two Adams.

Would Adam have died had he not sinned? Jesus did not sin; was there an aging process going on? Was there a tree of life that, if eaten from would keep the first couple from ever dying? Were they driven from the Garden so they would not eat and live forever? In *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus says, “Yes,” Adam would have died. The first Adam was *complete*, but the second Adam was *perfect*.

The second Adam was *before* the first Adam.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul talks about resurrection. Most who write on this verse speak of universalism—death is universal and comes about by the first Adam, resurrection is universal and comes about by the last Adam. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive” (v. 22). Clarification comes with reversing the statements: “participation in the obedience of Christ puts people right with God.” Participation in what the first Adam did causes death; participation in obedience in what the second Adam did gives resurrection.”

- Adam is a representative of what all of us are and do.
- Christ is a representative of what all of should be and should do.

b) Individual Adam.

Individual Adam can be seen in Genesis 4. Individual Adam is a man who had a wife and sons, Abel, and Cain who killed his brother Abel. God appointed him another seed named Seth.

In Gen. 4:1, Adam “knew” his wife (sexual intercourse is, in Genesis, an individual act).

Hebrews were concrete thinkers and to ask them to think abstractly would be impossible. This is why the Genesis narratives have real people—Adam, Eve, Abel, Cain, etc. The account constitutes a concretized beginning.

c) Corporate Adam.

The word “Adam” is used over 500 times in the Old Testament. The word has a corporate or collective sense which refers to all humanity. Gen. 5:2 illustrates this well.

I want to deal with *Chapter 4* of Genesis. When a student says to me, “Do you believe the Genesis account of Adam?”, I always know what they are talking about—the first 3 chapters of Genesis. I answer, “Yes, but I also believe Genesis 4. Do you?”

One of the ways to know yourself is to know what you avoid. You avoid those things you don’t know how to deal with. I’ll bet my ordination papers that very few of you, if any, have preached on Gen. 4, and particularly the latter part of the chapter in the last year. If you chose to disagree with my conclusions in this section, I want to say that, out of fairness, you must nevertheless deal with the same material. Position yourself, and give your statement on Gen. 4. Is that fair? (When we have a theological position and want to keep it we will consciously or unconsciously avoid those things which threaten our position.)

Gen. 4:14–15 speaks of the “mark of Cain.” Members of other tribes were motivated to slay Cain, so God placed a protective mark on Cain to show his mercy and protection.

- Where did these other tribes come from?
- V. 15 has the law of vengeance; members of other tribes would be killed in blood revenge if one of them killed Cain.

Now consider vv. 16–17, the wife of Cain. Where did she come from? The idea that Cain’s wife was his sister or children born in the Garden before Cain and Abel appears to be unfounded and the result of defective reasoning. Some have gone so far as to say that Cain married his sister and it was their children from whom who God protected Cain! I, too, would like protection from my children, but that is not the kind of exegesis that I can accept. It is defending an idea and not seeking truth. Likewise, the claim that there were children born in Paradise before Cain and Abel is also without support.

Now look at Gen. 4:17, “he built a city” called Enoch. Who could possibly populate a city? How far out did the city limit sign go? How big was the city? Where did the people come from? Use the rules of interpretation that you are willing to use elsewhere in the Bible. Do not work here to defend presuppositions, but to seek truth.

A question: from reading of Genesis 4, do you really have a sense that there are only three people on earth—Adam, Eve and Cain? Is that your conclusion? Not until Gen. 5:3 is Seth born.

A possible solution was offered by Augustine. He suggested that those who find a difficulty here have failed to realize that the writers of the Scriptural story were under no obligation to mention the names of all who may have been alive at the time, but only of those whom the

scope of his work required him to mention. All that the biblical writer had in mind, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was to trace the succession in the definite lines from Adam to Abraham and then from the children of Abraham to the people of God.⁴⁴

Conclusions:

- God created humanity—it is the individual Adam that the redemptive line is through, cf. Luke 3.
- Because scripture speaks of a *first* man it does not necessarily mean an *only* man. First does not necessitate only. In all other areas of creation, God created in abundance.
- Adam was the one through whom the redemptive work of God will come.

Augustine's suggestion was that God created corporate Adam in which the individual Adam sinned, and then a representative Adam came to redeem us. The redemptive line to the representative Adam came through the individual Adam. We may not agree with Augustine, but let us work with equal diligence to interpret the fourth chapter of Genesis.

2) The Matrix of Sin.

Why is "sin" singular in John 1:29? How do "sins" grow out of "sin"? By analysis of the Genesis 3 account and by a study of the remaining parts of the Bible, I offer the following possible understanding of sin, centered from the Gen. 3 experience.

There is a good bit of argument over the basic sin of the garden. Some have indicated that the basic sin is idolatry, others have argued for unbelief, and there are many other suggestions. What I want to attempt is to set forth the *interrelatedness* of sin; that may perhaps grant us an insight to the original sin which is our sin. I am presenting this as a "matrix," but am not attempting to present a list of sins. People define sin in different ways; also, there is no significance in the sequence of these items.

a) *Unbelief* is Placing God outside the divine center.

Unbelief is the turning away from God and a refusal of dependence on him. Because this pictures the Garden experience best for me, this where I wish to begin. I do believe that I could begin with any of the following points as well, but we shall begin with sin as unbelief.

Unbelief is not a momentary shaking of faith; rather, it is an act or an attitude of the entire person who turns away from God to live in this world as if God were not in the universe. It is, in other words, a defiance of God. Unbelief, so understood, is a dreadful estrangement from God. It is the inordinate choosing of the lesser. Unbelief causes an estrangement from one's own self and from others, because estrangement from God leads to estrangement from others.

b) *Pride* is Placing the *self* in the divine center.

To refuse one's proper dependence and subordination to God is to desire oneself inordinately. So an inordinate self-centeredness and self-seeking arises.

Hubris is a word most often used to define pride. Popular usage of the word pride has made the word without much meaning. The word can be used with reference to the Oakland Athletics or the San Francisco Giants ball clubs, or having pride in one's clothing—that is, to look nice. It can be used with reference to a music performance, as "he showed a great deal of pride in the performance."

Pride, hubris, in the theological sense, designates the self-elevation or self-exaltation which the human being does at the expense of faith in God. Human beings have been created to have a God center to their lives. The sin of hubris, is the exaltation of self to that center.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *City of God* XV, 8.

Chronologically, before we human beings sinned we recognized *God* as the center of our being; after we sinned, we thought of *ourselves* as the center of our being.

- c) *Avarice* is cluttering the divine center with things.

Avarice is an inordinate desire for finite goods. It arises after unbelief and pride have altered the self's mode of being in the world from a life lived in communion with and dependence on God to an inordinate desire for finite goods.

Under avarice, sensuality should also be discussed. Thomas Aquinas understood original sin as concupiscence. He thought that all sinful acts grow out of some inordinate desire or love for something which, in itself, is good. If a person loved some temporal good things inordinately, that person did so because of an inordinate self-love.

Things are not wrong in themselves—they become sin because they are in the wrong place; they clutter the divine center.

Churchgoers sometimes speak of a return to the “real world” after the benediction is said. But the “real world” is only evident in the community of faith. The secular world outside is illusion—it is buried in things. It is part of the privilege of being in the community of faith that we can know the real world. One does not need to compete to know God.

- d) *Idolatry* is worshipping the clutter in the divine center.

Idolatry is giving oneself to self-chosen values. It is a perverse devotion of one's entire being to inordinate attachments of self to some finite good hence making of it one's god.

John Macquarrie has argued that this is the basic sin. He does this because of his belief that human beings are creatures of God and derive whatever meaning and life they have from God. Sin, therefore, is humanity's fall into disorder and alienation from God.

Human beings, who were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and for God (Gen. 2:15), seek to live their lives as if God were not. When they do this, they establish their lives upon other beings: upon idols or upon other persons, excluding God to make room for finite entities. To forget God, to take God out of the center of one's life, is to fall into idolatry. This is precisely the perversion of human life by sin about which Paul was speaking in Romans “because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator,” Rom. 1:25.

Luther said it this way: “a man must worship, and if he does not worship God he will worship the devil.” Do you remember that song some years back by Bob Dylan, “You've Gotta Serve Somebody”?

From these four concepts we see the condition of the human heart. This does not mean that there are no other sins, but these are the *core* or essential sins, theologically speaking. When Jesus died, he died for the core of all sins—the core from which all sins come. The list presented above is not an exhaustive enumeration of particular sins, but it does list essential features present in all sins.

Sin is not a pure seeking of evil for its own sake. Sin is not sheer malevolence; rather sin is the perverted, corrupted seeking of a genuine good. Hence sin is not an evil substance but a voluntary defection of humanity from its proper good and order. We are in God's image.

- 3) The Effects of Original Sin.

We deceive ourselves into believing that if we could discover the origin of sin, we could explain it, and if it could be explained, then we could control sin and therefore reduce the problem. This is a Freudian concept of naming to control.

In the Federal Headship theory of the Baptist spiritual ancestors, sin was imputed to Adam's successors. All humans were guilty because they were all in the loins of Adam. There is also the biological theory teaching that sin is in the procreation, but this view has had little support from

the Baptists. The task of this section is to set forth an understanding of this doctrine and to state the effects of original sin.

a) Biblical materials.

The biblical passages which are most generally associated with the doctrine of Original Sin will have a cursory treatment.

- Gen. 2–3, which have been dealt with above.
- Ps. 51:5, which is a Jewish penitential psalm. Note that nothing here is said about damnation. Further note that the Psalmist is speaking of “my sin, my iniquity, my transgression”—he is talking about *his* sin, not his mother’s sin.

Which came first? David, or his sin? The psalm is not saying that David was a sinner before he was born; the sin came about because he was born into a sinful world.

The word “conceive,” may have been used in parallel with the term “brought forth.” The NIV reads, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” The verse is saying that there is a total involvement in human sinfulness from the very beginning.

- Eph 2:1–5, “Children of wrath.” It also speaks of “our sinful nature.”

But note, v. 1 says “you were dead in *your* transgressions and sins,” not *Adam’s* transgressions and sins. You are a sinner because you have sinned, not because Adam sinned.

Again—what comes first? Our “nature” or our “actions”? Augustine formulated the Catholic answer: nature comes first. But Paul says that we are children of wrath. We are sinners because of our own actions; not sinners because of what Adam did (Rom. 5:12).

What does it mean to have a sinful nature? The image most have is that we are born with such a nature and out of that nature we do acts of sin. But that idea may be inverted—actions or behavior form our nature in Hebrew thought. Our sinful nature becomes our sinful nature because of the practice of sin in our lives. The Ephesian passage speaks of the way we lived, and our following the ways of this world. This is what all have done. In doing this we shaped our nature and sought to fulfill its cravings.

- Rom 5:12–21. Disobedience makes sinners, obedience to Christ makes one right with God. Note v. 12, “death spread to all because all have sinned.” This is not “death for Adam had sinned.” The federal headship theory does not apply here. Cooperate personality is behind these concepts.

The Reformers understood sin as the tinder, the kindling wood of sin, as being within us. We need not be taught to sin. While this potential exists in every human person, the manner and degree of expression is different for every person. Ernst Cassirer said, “When the doctrine of Original sin was denied at the time of the Enlightenment, the traditional litany of human miseries still had to be accounted for on other grounds.” The biblical materials affirm that the first person sinned and all since have sinned. *Do not accept the view of inherited guilt.*

Cooperate personality is the background for much of what was considered Federal Headship idea. There is a distinction between corporate and individual responsibility for sin; consider the family groups in Joshua 7—when one transgressed every member of the group was guilty, cf. 2 Sam. 21:6; 2 Kings 9:8.

Corporate responsibilities became limited, Ex. 20:5; Ex. 34:7; Deut. 5:9; the iniquities of the fathers is to be visited upon the children, but are limited to the third and the fourth generation.

Jer. 31:29–30; Ezek. 18 and 33:10–20—no son is to be held accountable for his father’s crimes, *so the idea that original sin can be passed is not valid.*

- Original sin means the inability of fallen creatures rightly relate to God except upon the initiation of God.
- Original sin effects all creation, humanity, nature and the environment. All need the redemption of God.

b). Children and Original Sin.

Adam was “born” into an idea world. We were born into an evil world.

Consider the term of “age of accountability.” Is this a biblical idea? In Romans 7:7–10, Paul is alive until his knowledge of the Tenth Commandment brought spiritual death.

- Look back at Rom. 4:15, cf. 5:13; 7:8. Knowledge of the law is the basis for transgression: “where there is no law there is no transgression,” where transgression is understood as having knowledge of sin (Gen. 2:9). Paul speaks of three stages—life, death, and life.
- There is a state of sin in which has tendencies that lead to actual transgression. Paul distinguishes sin from transgression in Rom. 4:15.
- Paul was born alive, not dead, but the law brought spiritual death until Christ make him alive again, Cf. Rom. 7:9, alive; 7:10, dead; 7:25, alive.

This is a common concept in Jewish culture, cf. Gen. 8:21, “The LORD smelled the pleasant aroma; and said in his heart, ‘Never again will I curse the ground on account of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood...’”, where “childhood means the age of accountability, not infancy.

The beginning of evil is imagination, for which responsibility is recognized at adolescence.⁴⁵

So the believers’ church tradition has a witness to bear here. There is an age of accountability. This makes a difference on how we view children and the matter of original sin. Children are born (spiritually) alive, then they (spiritually) die, and then in Christ are to become alive.

Therefore, here is a statement on children:

Children are innocent even though sharing with all humanity the effects of sin. They may sin but they bear no moral or religious responsibility for sin, and they are innocent of understanding. Responsibility comes with rational and moral apprehension. Until by their own attitude they place themselves outside the sheltered sphere, the child is safe within the love that saves.⁴⁶

Theologically, for children, the divine center of life is not God—they have sinful tendencies (grabiness, etc.), but are yet innocent; God watches and cares. Because they are not yet accountable (still alive) then with knowledge and deliberate act they enthrone self in the divine center. They may do those acts repeatedly until they grow to accountability, but they are not responsible until there is knowledge. Children will do the four essential sins.

Kolberg and others speak to these concepts in other areas.

- 4) Conclusions. This chapter speaks of the effects of the original sin, understood as uninherited sin. We *choose* to sin. That is why sin is so hideous.

⁴⁵ Moody, 288ff.

⁴⁶ Gilmore.

- a) Sin is religious.

Sin is best seen as being against God. If there would be no god, there would be no sin. Crime is against community, immorality is against persons, but sin is only or at least primarily against God. Cf. Ps. 51:4, David “against you, you only, have I sinned” and the Prodigal “sinned against heaven and against you,” Luke 15:21.

- b) Sin is voluntary.

One must never attempt to remove the responsibility for sin from the individual choice. Sin is rooted in the rebellious heart and we are responsible individually. This is not the psychological view, it is the Biblical view. “I knew it was sin and I chose to do it.”

- c) This is a fallen world. Something is fundamentally wrong with our world. The entire cosmos groans, Rom. 8:22. The world is not the way it was intended to be.

- d) There is a *Catch 22* of sin. Sin means that any act humanity performs to free itself from self-centeredness is an act of the self, and thus re-enforces self centeredness on a new and deeper level. (Illustration of a *Catch 22*: There is a desk in an apartment complex. You cannot enter until you have a pass. Where does one get a pass? On the seventh floor of the apartment building).

- e) Sin is parasitic. Nothing is “only evil.” There cannot be pure, 100% sin. Sin must live on something that is good—it involves the perversion of the good.

E. The Perseverance of the Saints—TULIP

The TULIP is a rational, or linear, concept. The ideas all are tightly held together. If you are elected in the “TULIP” sense of election and if the Spirit is the sovereign God, then it is irresistible. If one can not respond because of total depravity, and all is the work of God, it follows that the elected one for whom Christ died will be preserved by God or else the death of Christ is vain.

First London Confession:

Those that have this precious faith wrought in them by the Spirit, can never finally nor totally fall away; and though many storms and floods do arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon, but shall be kept by the power of God to salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being formerly engraven upon the palms of God’s hands.⁴⁷

Second London Confession:

Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and Sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his Elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without Repentance (whence he still begets and nourisheth in them Faith, Repentance, Love, Joy, Hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality) and although many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding through unbelief and the temptations of Satan the sensible sight of the light and love of God, may for a time be clouded, and obscured from them, yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto Salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palms of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all Eternity.⁴⁸

Both confessions witness to the security of the believer. Both confessions have a beautiful pastoral exhortation, “and though many storms and floods to arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fasted upon.” I would make an observation about the presentation of the perseverance of saints as expressed in the confessions. The perseverance of the saints, as presented, is human centered; they hold on and persevere. The perseverance

⁴⁷ XXIII, Lumpkin 163.

⁴⁸ XVII.1. Lumpkin 272.

of God is more Christ centered; that is, it is God who initiates and maintains the relationship. *It is Christ who does the holding on.*

The important factor in this doctrine is that, having begun with God, it is not human effort that keeps us with God, cf. Phil. 1:6. We must work to keep the doctrine centered in Christ.

F. Conclusion to Section

The basic doctrines that emerge from out of the Baptist story are ours, but the doctrines had been framed in a way that placed the human response more central than I have felt to be correct. I have attempted to redefine them with a Christ centeredness.

The Baptist story essentially took place between the 1644 *First London Confession of Faith* and the 1677/88 *Second London Confession of Faith*. These two generations shaped several of our historical beliefs.

The TULIP of Calvinism has been modified:

T	Total Depravity	Without the initiative of God, one can not come to God. Humanity is not “as bad as it can be,” but is nevertheless irredeemable without God’s initiative (John 6:37). We cannot come to God on our own.
U	Unconditional Election	Christ is the electing one and the elected one. If one is in Christ, one is elected; If one is out of Christ, one is not elected. God did not elect saints, he elected Christ. Salvation is in Christ.
L	Limited Atonement	The saving work of Christ is pictured under the four biblical images. Those in Christ benefit from his death in full, but the nature of God in Christ blesses the world. Christ died for all, but only those who appropriate Christ’s death participate in the benefits of his death.
I	Irresistible Grace	This doctrine is best studied in the context of The Holy Spirit (see The Patristic Story).
P	Perseverance of the Saints	The focus should be on the perseverance of God.

For most Baptists, the “T” and “P” are the strongest convictions, but the “U”, “L,” “I” points have been modified. That is why we are “modified Calvinists.”

I have built the Baptist story on the foundation of Dort, but I have added the doctrine of Scripture/revelation. This was done in the context of the *First London* and *Second London Confessions* and their change of emphasis on Scripture.

Now we are to move to our third segment, *The Enlightenment Story*. It differs from the other stories, having a non-religious and often anti-religious character. The Enlightenment will shape and challenge our thinking and our doctrines. Five doctrines will be particularly effected—Creation, Providence, Miracles, Prayer, and Eschatology.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT STORY

Introduction

One of the watersheds in human history was the Enlightenment—yet there has been little study of this period in relation to theology. Many modern problems in philosophy and theology began in the period of the Enlightenment and we are still working on their solutions.¹

The English term “Enlightenment” passed into general circulation only in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The German term *die Aufklärung* (which literally means “the clearing up”), and the French term *les lumières* (“the lights”), date from the eighteenth century, but do not convey much information about the nature of the movement. Enlightenment is a loose term, defying precise definition. It embraces a cluster of ideas and attitudes characteristic of the period 1720–1780.

The term “Age of Reason,” is often used as a synonym for the Enlightenment, but is misleading. Reason had been used in every age, but the difference lay in the *manner* in which reason was used. Enlightenment thinkers expected human reason to have the ability to penetrate all the mysteries of the world and to demolish the old myths that been the cause of oppression.

Prior to the Enlightenment, Scripture had come to be regarded as the sole reliable source of all truth. In Scripture, God had not only revealed himself, but had also revealed geology, science, astronomy, etc. The flood of Enlightenment discoveries and ideas decimated this understanding, dragging the church through debates that continue to rage today. For the contemporary Christian (or would-be Christian), the Enlightenment has forced each of us to make a choice.

- *One can deny the Enlightenment.* Few will take this position consciously, but many will act as if the Enlightenment never took place, eyeing academics and scientific investigation with suspicion. This view is associated with “obscurantism.”
- *One can place the Enlightenment over Scripture.* Those who adopt this view regard the Scriptures as a book of human origin that, at best, can provide us with examples of right living. The labels associated with this view vary from “atheism” to “Unitarianism” to “liberalism.”
- *One can embrace the Enlightenment and yet maintain the Scriptures as being the revelation of God,* but recognize that Scripture was written *before* modern science. This path understands God as allowing humanity to pursue science—to investigate his creation. Such an interpretation is not shared by Eastern religions, which regard the cosmos as being built of, and thus inhabited by, divine substance (pantheism).

It is the third path that this section will follow. You may or may not be comfortable with it. If your faith sprung from the first view, you will probably see the Enlightenment as threatening. But my job is to witness theology to you, not tell you how to believe. I hope that you will bear with me as we take this approach to understanding the tremendous impact of the Enlightenment period. When examined with a right understanding, I think you may ultimately conclude, as I have, that the Enlightenment can enrich our theology.

1. General Overview

Although there was great diversity among the various nations, the adherents of the Enlightenment held in common a great distrust of all authority and tradition in matters of intellectual inquiry. They held that truth could be attained only through reason, observation, and experiment. This is the powerful legacy that effects us today.

¹ Hodgson and King, “Introduction: The Task of Theology” by Robert H. King, 25–27.

The following list, gathered by Bernard Ramm, itemizes some of the general characteristics of the Enlightenment mentality:

- a. Whatever was claimed as truth must justify itself before the bar of reason.
- b. There was a necessity for literary and historical criticism of all documents of the past—secular, ecclesiastical, and biblical.
- c. There was the need for freedom to advance human welfare.
- d. There was the belief that ethics is autonomous and not dependent on religion or theology (cf., Jer. 17:9).
- e. There was a fundamental suspicion of all truth claims grounded in authority, tradition, or divine revelation. The phrase “These truths are self evident ... life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness” from the Declaration of Independence is an illustration from which two observations may be made:
 - Truth tended to be regarded as self evident.
 - There was an inclination toward utilitarianism, a philosophy that sought “the greatest good for the greatest number of people.” (But what is the greatest good for the Kingdom of God? That which is the greatest good for God, or that which is the greatest good for the greatest number of people?)
- f. There was high evaluation of science and the virtues of the progress of scientific knowledge—an optimism that looked upon science as “our savior.”
- g. There was the affirmation that tolerance is the supreme disposition in matters of religion.

The Enlightenment also produced a list of “politically correct” words. Some words were “out,” others were “in.”

- Words *approved* by the advocates of the Enlightenment: reason, freedom, nature, happiness, rights, tolerance, deism, rational Christianity, natural religion, social contract, science, autonomy, harmony, and optimism.
- Words *disapproved* by advocates of the Enlightenment: authority, antiquity, tradition, church, revelation, supernatural, and theological.²

A dominant belief from the Enlightenment was that Christianity must be rational and capable of withstanding critical examination. In keeping with the Enlightenment mentality, Christianity was assumed to have a rational beginning that could be deduced from reason. Further, reason could then judge revelation and remove any irrational or superstitious elements.

This brought a threat to the intellectual credentials of Christianity.

Those of the Enlightenment sought to diffuse knowledge as much as to create it and, where possible, to use their scientific method in the service of the humanitarian ideals of tolerance, justice, and the moral and material welfare of humanity.

The American and French Revolutions of the eighteenth century may be taken as symbols of the dominant ideology of the Enlightenment—the perceived need to break free from the oppression of the past. The past was experienced as something corrupt and dead, serving the vested interests of outdated structures of authority—political, moral and intellectual.

In this country, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin were not “Christians”—at least not Christians in the way we understand the word. Deism would be a more accurate description of their religion. They had seen the oppression by state churches and did not want them in the new world. Many of the people had come here for religious freedom, and these groups also resented the state church

² Ramm, *Heritage*, 64–74.

approach and had suffered from it. The two streams merged and gave us the First Amendment that grants freedom of, and freedom from, religion—and it is there that one finds the hand of God in our Constitution.

Where the Enlightenment was most powerful, it resulted in a dramatic decline in church attendance. Peter Gay calls the mentality that emerged from the Enlightenment “modern paganism” (a “pagan” is person who has no religion). So school teachers became more important in the community than pastors, and modern universities were based on modern paganism or humanism.

Let me work a little with Thomas Jefferson:

Jefferson, himself, was not a particularly religious man, though he was a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia and remained a member in good standing throughout his life. He believed that one’s religious beliefs were a private matter between a person and God. Indeed, some have felt that Jefferson kept his beliefs private because they were out of sync with those of his church and many of his fellow citizens. Jefferson was a Deist who denied that God worked outside the natural order of the universe. Perhaps more importantly, he was a man of the Enlightenment who honored reason above all.³

Toward the end of his life Jefferson put together his version of the Gospels, which included what he believed to be the authentic teachings of Jesus. Non-authentic in Jefferson’s view were the miracles of Jesus and any notion that Jesus was anything other than a man. The idea of the trinity was offensive to Jefferson. There was only God in Jefferson’s eyes, and that view caused him to look with favor on Unitarianism. Nevertheless, in spite of Jefferson’s unorthodox views, he considered himself to be a “disciple of Jesus” and a real Christian.

2. The Enlightenment Challenge

The Enlightenment presented a great challenge to Christian believers. With the freeing from false myths and invalid beliefs, there also came a blurring of the crucial distinction between *choosing* and *constructing* beliefs; that is, between making beliefs one’s own (the approach of the Hebrew thinker), and making one’s own beliefs (the Enlightenment’s “toleration” approach).

Said another way, the central problem that the Enlightenment raised for Christianity was that of *the authority in the scientific age of a book written in a pre-scientific age*. How can that which cannot be confined within the limits of testing and observation, and which is operative outside of the laboratory, have any validity? How can a book written before scientific knowledge have validity? How to meet that challenge was a dominant question, and, in some ways, that question yet remains unresolved.

When the believing community was confronted by the Neo-Platonism of the Patristic period, they rose to meet that challenge. They appropriated some of the Neo-Platonism and rejected other aspects of that philosophy. They pointed out the failures and inconsistencies of the Neo-Platonism belief structure. The Christian community’s greatest thinkers took that task of resolving the confrontation and, with a few exceptions, did well.

Where the Christian thinkers succeeded in the Patristic period, the challenges offered by the Enlightenment—in many ways similar—have never been satisfactorily met. For this reason, the spirit of the world has prevailed over the churches; Christian thinkers of the Enlightenment were simply not equal to the challenge. Where the Enlightenment has been most powerful, it resulted in a decline in church participation and influence.

a. Positive Elements in the Enlightenment

But the Enlightenment has also benefited the community of faith. Before the Enlightenment the Bible was interpreted in a variety of ways. The Bible was read and readers would see their own world reflected. This is why you sometimes see Jesus dressed in middle-aged garb. There was no sense of time. The Enlightenment gave a sense of time and history.

³ Saul.

Prior to the Enlightenment the Bible could be interpreted by allegory or spiritualization. One might read the Bible and come up with an outlandish interpretation (this is yet true of some preaching today!). These kinds of a-historical interpretations have become more difficult to any serious student of Scripture today.

b. Negative Elements in the Enlightenment

But there was a negative side. History was studied in skepticism. The study of Jesus historically meant to work as a historian and to use the same assumptions and methods. It was like the study of Caesar or Alexander. You collect the sources, analyze them, date them, test for reliability, seek their bias, determine what sources they have drawn on. Then you attempt to determine why they were composed. There would be an effort to separate the legendary accretions. This was thought to be the historical process.

The historical process looked at the biblical record as a window one might look through to see what lay on the other side. In the process the focus moved off of the gospels as Good News and into an exercise that was basically skeptical. They were cut up into the smallest possible units (pericopes) because it was assumed that by studying these smallest units one could best understand how the books were put together. Interest centered on the process by which the New Testament, or the books of the Old Testament, were produced, rather than what the text actually said.

Some professors and some preachers have communicated this critical attitude in their preaching, emphasizing the historical barrier dividing the first century from the twentieth century. The purpose of teaching and preaching was deemed to be the making of a bridge between the first century and the present, a practice that continues to be advocated in some circles today. The result of this process was a loss of focus on the *message* of the Scriptures. Attention was taken away from the primary purpose of the Scripture, which is to make disciples and provide guidance.

Remember a contribution from *The Anabaptist Story*—there was an emphasis on the contemporaneity of the Scripture. The message of Jesus can address the believer. The historical context can be transcended and the commands are to us, the believing community. The reading of the Scriptures is a call to radical discipleship. All this emphasis in methodology can cause this message to be lost.

3. Theological Responses to the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment caused a variety of theological responses. While most of these were inadequate, two major responses are to be noted because they still effect us.

a. Liberalism

Some have suggested that romanticism may be a better handle for this response to the Enlightenment. The reason for this suggestion is that F. D. E. Schleiermacher, who is considered the founder of liberalism, made his response to the Enlightenment with an appeal to the human imagination. Where the Enlightenment appealed to human reason, Schleiermacher recognized that there was a sense of mystery which arises from realizing that the human mind cannot comprehend even the finite world, let alone the infinity beyond it.⁴ On that mystery he based his response.

Because of the impact of his contribution, a brief look at Schleiermacher's life and thought are necessary.

1) The Beginnings of Liberalism—Schleiermacher

Friedrich Daniel Ernest Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was perhaps the most influential theologian after Luther and Calvin. He was the son of a military chaplain in the Reformed tradition and had begun his education among the Moravians. The Moravians were very close to traditional Lutheran theology but were noted for their pietism in the spiritual life. The word *piety* is important. Pietism taught that a dedicated life was important. It was, in fact, an attempt to carry out the Reformation in the area of Christian living. Pietists felt that both the life of the believers and the church needed reform.

⁴ McGrath, 87.

Schleiermacher as a young man encountered the Enlightenment and was deeply impressed. He found himself in such disagreement with the theological emphases of the Moravians that he left their school at Barby and transferred to the University of Halle.

Schleiermacher's Enlightenment mentality can be seen as a blend with pietism in his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultural Despisers* (1799). While he never fully leaves pietism, the work shows the influences of Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant. He wanted to win back the educated classes to religion, claiming that they had wrongly reduced religion's essence to knowledge acquired through reason and expressed in rational doctrines. He believed that this was the wrong approach.

By religion, Schleiermacher meant a feeling (*Gefühl*) of absolute dependence. This was directed toward the infinite. Religion was dependent on intuition and feeling and independent of dogma. His grand synthesis may be summarized as follows:

- The Enlightenment criticism of orthodoxy was right. The late Reformation formulation of mechanically dictated Scripture and of Lutheran orthodox dogmatic theology were not adequate.
- German romantic idealistic philosophy offers a far richer ground for Christian faith than does the moralistic, rationalistic religion in place at the time of the Enlightenment.
- The whole range of Christian theology can be reinterpreted and we can be both modern and Christian. Liberation (and some feminist) theology are attempting to do the same thing today.

2) Contemporary Interpretations of Liberalism

Liberalism is a word often used in today's theological parlance. It is a confusing word because of varied interpretations. Let me attempt to make some delineations that may be helpful.

- a) *Historical liberalism.* This was influenced by Schleiermacher's influence mainly with respect to its subordinating external authority for the inner authority of subjectivism.

The dominant opinion with the universities today is that the Enlightenment is over. Most academics recognize that understanding, especially in the areas that deal with anything beyond the purely physical and objective—disciplines that operate within interpretive frameworks and traditions. There is no reason why a theologically informed perspective cannot compete on equal ground with any other perspective on the university campus. Regretfully, this understanding concerning the demise of the Enlightenment has not yet been understood by many theologians who are yet fighting battles that have been surpassed by a large number of their peers.

In educational circles there are few, if any, liberals left in the classical sense. There is a general acknowledgment that historical liberalism is no longer tenable.

- b) *Methodological liberalism.* By this term I mean a continuation of Enlightenment methodology in theological study. That is, that theology should utilize critical methods in its attempt to understand the biblical message. This methodology is evident in all higher critical approaches to biblical study.

I would like to make the following observations about critical methods. *The Bible has withstood critical examination.* If the Jewish community would ever move to the use of biblical criticism, our theologies might grow closer together. If the Muslims would ever use the tools of biblical criticism on the Koran, I do not believe that their faith would stand. I would say the same about the Mormons and similar groups.

I would agree that these tools of criticism can be abused, and that fact that they often are abused lends a certain validity to the reaction against them. Critical methodology can take study away from its central purpose—*discipleship and Torah*.

- c) *Popular liberalism.* The popular understanding of liberalism is that in theological study one comes to believe "less and less." The discipline of the methodological tools of the Enlightenment, in other words, cause believers lose their faith.

Regretfully, this has happened. But the reason for the happening was perhaps not so much the methodology as it was the focus. When the focus is on the tools themselves, then negative consequences to a believer's life may result. But, on the other hand, when the methodology is used with the right focus, it can clarify faith and give a more articulate expression of what is believed. The wise practitioner will keep a balance between personal faith and objective tools.

b. Fundamentalism

The second major response to the Enlightenment has been fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is not a single-dimensional term as it embraces a multitude of groups. While I respect for the roots of fundamentalism—the need to rediscover the first century New Testament “fundamentals”—I will also want to talk with you about obscurantism.

Some treat fundamentalism as a pejorative term, but I do not.

1) Doctrinal Fundamentalism

Doctrinal fundamentalism probably had its beginnings in the Niagara Conference of 1895. This was a non-denominational meeting that included A.J. Gordon, H.A. Ironside, C.I. Scofield, A.C. Gaebelein, Nathaniel West, William Eerdman, and Henry Parsons.

The Enlightenment had brought many changes and there were many who were willing to forget the past and interpret for the present. They became known as “modernists,” and the Niagara Conference was organized to formulate a response to them. That response is called doctrinal fundamentalism, and may be summarized in its five point concluding statement:

- The inerrancy of Scripture,
- the deity of Christ,
- the virgin Birth,
- a substitutionary Atonement, and
- Christ's bodily resurrection and return.

Later, the deity of Christ and the virgin birth were combined and the fifth point became Christ's personal, pre-millennial, and imminent second coming. Notice that these points contained *no reference to the church or to the believer's behavior!* Doctrinal fundamentalism was an intellectual belief—and this tends to remain a mark of much of the evangelicalism that was rooted in Niagara.

Bible Schools began to appear to propagate these doctrines. The preaching of evangelists like D.L. Moody (1837–1899) contributed to the movement, and the founding of such institutions as the Moody Bible School began to typify the movement. In subsequent conferences at Niagara, the focus turned to a fascination with prophetic passages. Under the influence of J. N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, pre-millennial dispensationalism permeated the movement with such ideas as pre-tribulational rapture, which later led to the dividing of the movement.

Oil businessmen (Union Oil, now Unocal), Lyman and Milton Stewart became key figures. They founded the Los Angeles Bible Institute, now known as Biola and also financed *The Fundamentals* (1919), an apologetic “testimony to the truth” which was mailed to every clergyman in the United States. It contained twelve tracts that were written on biblical fundamentals and it was from these tracts that the term “fundamentalism” came to identify the movement.

2) Negative Fundamentalism—Obscurantism

Obscurantism is the denial of the validity of modern learning. It is the stock method used by people who feel that modern learning threatens their beliefs. These fundamentalists have a solution to the Enlightenment—they simply ignore or deny it. They continue in their world as if the Enlightenment had

never happened. Evolution, modern geology, anthropology, and biblical criticism were subjected to continuous rejection. I remember a preacher dismissing modern geologic dating by telling me that “God created old rocks.”

In the early days of television, some fundamentalists referred to the antenna on the roof as “the devil’s tail” because it showed that the devil had gained entrance into the home. Things are different now—these fundamentalists are on television asking for offerings. I think their first position was more correct!

Religious obscurantism is not the only kind—there is also a secular version. You can find obscurantism in the flat earth society and similar groups. During my years in Nigeria, Muslims would tell me that our going to the moon was a Hollywood production. The moon is sacred and God would not allow us to walk on the moon.

Because obscurantists must live in a modern technological society which they can neither deny or ignore, they select out those elements which they must accept in order to live in that society. Science has brought about television and automobiles, which they accept; but they reject that part of science that deals with geology and want “old rocks” that have been recently created out of nothing.

While denying the rights of modern science, the obscurantists abundantly use that science in the proclamation of their own views, embracing the computer and electronic media with enthusiasm. In essence, these fundamentalists do not have a theology which enables them to live in the modern world with consistently.⁵

4. Conclusion and Summary

To capitulate to the Enlightenment as liberal theology has done is a betrayal of the faith. But to ignore the Enlightenment and gloss over the problems it has presented to the believing community, as the obscurantists have done, is also to betray the faith.

Here are the two lasting contributions that the Enlightenment has made to today’s perception of reality:

a. The Perception of Self

The Enlightenment tended to regard the self as separate from the world. The world was perceived as the sum total of particles that can be observed, analyzed and controlled. Individualization is clearly seen here. It is quite unlikely that any first century person would have perceived himself or herself to be autonomous from a social network. At this point the Enlightenment has made a permanent and lasting difference in the way we view the world.

This point of Enlightenment emphasis upon the individual provides a convenient point of contact with Pietist spirituality.⁶

b. Autonomous Truths

The Enlightenment taught that truths of reason are autonomous; that they could be ascertained without any appeal to history in general, or any specific component in particular.

According to Enlightenment thinkers, the past could only be known fragmentarily. The past afforded only “approximation knowledge,” to anticipate Kierkegaard’s luminous phrase.⁷

Doctrinal formulations were regarded as historically conditioned, perhaps appropriate to their time, but having questionable modern relevance. While historical criticism may have been an appropriate tool for the

⁵ Ramm, 19–20.

⁶ McGrath, 137.

⁷ McGrath, 137.

evaluation and correction of doctrinal formulations, history was deemed incapable of disclosing rational truth.

The Enlightenment affected all the major doctrines of the Christian faith, but I have selected five doctrines that I feel have been especially impacted by the Enlightenment mentality. These are the doctrines of creation, miracles, providence, prayer and eschatology. I will want to set forth these doctrines in response to the Enlightenment.

Creation and eschaton—the beginning and the concluding work of God—are intimately related, and may therefore be treated together. Look about and ask, “what has God willed?” The answer is, “all that is!” Then ask the follow up question, “why are things as they are?” This is to question God’s *purpose* in the Creation, and leads to the question, “how will things end?” There is a continuum (Figure 1)—God creates (Creation), God has an objective (Eschaton), and God uses providence and miracles and hears prayer to make his goals secure. He will make course corrections where necessary.

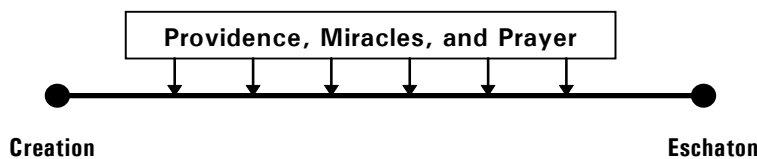


Figure 1. God works through Providence, Miracles, and Prayer between the poles of Creation and the eschaton.

These are the questions that this unit of study will address. Creation and eschatology have similarities in study. They require the same, or at least similar, hermeneutical tools. The doctrines of providence, miracles, and prayer are perhaps best viewed in the light of creation and the goals to be achieved in the eschaton. These three

doctrines relate to God securing and accomplishing his purposes. As we deal with these doctrines the emphasis will be more on redemption than on the “how” or the “when.”

I. Creation

A. Definition of Creation

The following is a definition for the doctrine of creation:

Everything which exists is a result of God’s action, either by his will or by his permission.

B. Possible Approaches to Creation

1. Scientific (The Causal Approach)

This is a modern approach that dates from the time of the Enlightenment.

“The whole history of science,” writes Stephen W. Hawking, “has been the gradual realization that events do not happen in an arbitrary manner, but that they reflect a certain underlying order.”⁸ When Hawking added that this order “may or may not be divinely inspired,” he recognizes a kinship between his assessment and that of most of the world’s religions. The situation today is quite different from that which prevailed in both science and theology at the beginning of the twentieth century. Newtonian mechanics, still in the saddle in his day, maintained that all future positions and velocities of particles are completely determined by the forces that act on them. When precise information is given regarding masses, forces, initial conditions, and velocities, in other words, exact predictions of the future behavior of particles could be calculated.

⁸ Hawking, 122.

Although there has been much change in the way academia views science, the Enlightenment mentality prevails with the majority of the people. For most it is yet through reason, observation, and experiment that truth is validated. Figure 2 demonstrates the popular understanding.

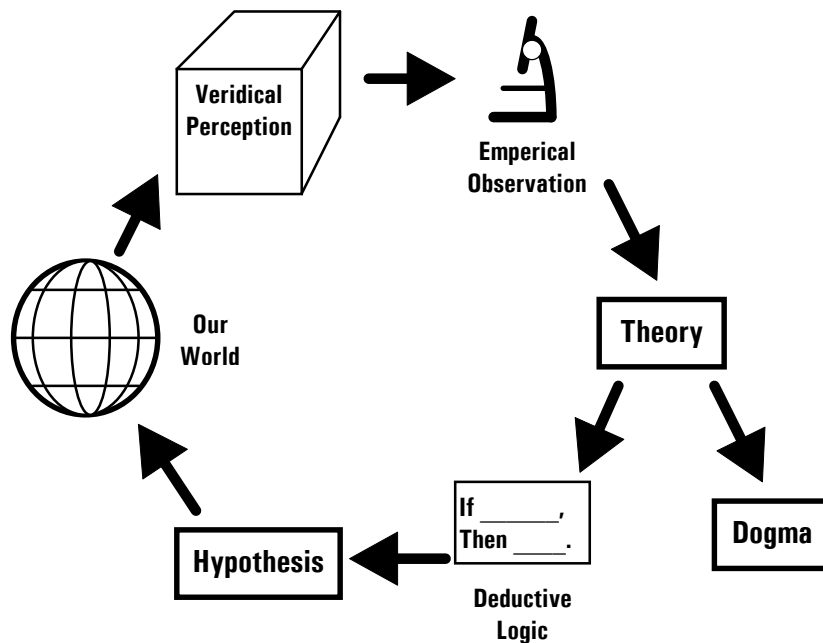


Figure 2. The scientific approach is said to be self-correcting. Theories become dogma after they have survived experiment and are verified by other researchers.

Note that this Enlightenment approach has a great many weaknesses:

- a. This approach says nothing about God and is therefore limited concerning a basic need of life.
- b. It includes a primary a concern on the how and the when of origins, a concern that is secondary, tertiary or perhaps even absent in Scripture.
- c. Because science has a self-correction aspect, it has an aura of superiority—particularly in relation to some claims of Christianity which, or course, cannot be tested in the laboratory.
- d. *Science is not our enemy.* An innate drive of the people of God is to build educational institutions on the university level which include departments of science.

2. Philosophical (The Speculative Approach)

The philosopher would ask the question, “Is there anything which is and has always been, from which all things come?” The Greeks followed this way of reasoning. It is an ancient approach. The philosopher’s interest is in ontology and timelessness—eternal elements like water, fire, air, and wind. This reasoning leads to a cyclical view of history—re-incarnation. Many of the cults have adopted this approach.

Ecclesiastes gives a sage’s response to this view. The sage notes that nothing can be learned from speculation about the elements (Eccl. 1:3–9); that philosophy teaches us nothing (Eccl. 8:16–17); that we cannot know the future (Eccl. 7:14).

3. Theological (The Relational Approach)

This is the Hebrew approach. The biblical writers ask about origins because of a concern about the meaning and destiny of their existence. Yahweh made the earth (Gen. 1:1, Isa. 45:8-12). Therefore, Yahweh is *Lord*—he is entitled to the rights of ownership that come with his role as creator.

In the biblical world there is a relationship between creation and redemption. The fact that Yahweh is Lord speaks to that. Isaiah 40 gives witness to this understanding.

- Vv. 12–17, *God is infinite*.
 - v. 12, God measures the waters and marks the heavens.
 - v. 13, God had no counselor.
 - v. 15, By comparison, nations, are a drop in the bucket.
- Vv. 18–24, *God cannot be compared to created objects*.
 - vv. 18–20, Idols are rejected.
 - vv. 21–23, God sits on vault of the earth; we are like grasshoppers.
 - vv. 23–24 God judges the earth.
 - vv. 25–26, The wonders in the heavens, stars, etc..
- vv. 27–31, *God is inexhaustible*. He is never weary or tired. Relate to him; run, and do not be weary; walk, and do not faint.

The Hebrew response is to be ours. To do more with creation than the Hebrews do—to say more about creation than they do—is to misuse the Scriptures. They relate to creation seeking meaning and destiny of their existence. The biblical key to creation is relational.

C. Biblical Materials

Gen. 1–3; Ps. 8, 19, 104; Job 37–41; Isa. 40, 45, John 1; Col. 1.

1. Theological Affirmations on Creation

a. The Creation is Good

Despite suffering and death it is *good* to be on the earth. This is my Father's world. Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. Creation is *good*.

b. The Creation Differs from God

Nothing in creation should be glorified—only God is worthy of praise. Creation is a summons to worship—its purpose is to point toward God. There is a clear break between the Creator and the created (Isa. 40:18–24).

c. Creation in Light of Covenant Faith

It is redemption first and then creation. The Exodus experience was before the writing of the book of Genesis and the creation accounts. Consider the testimony of Prov. 3:19–20; also, Jer. 10:12–13. Ps. 104:23–26.

Creation is absent in the early summary of faith. Why? The reason for the movement of the doctrine of creation from the periphery to a part of the center of Israel's faith is found in the nature of faith itself. In Israel, faith is in the decisive historical events which people perceived God and heard his call: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the out-of-Egypt-bringing God. Neighbors of the Exodus viewed creation as timeless events, cyclical, to be re-created each year. Having experienced the redemptive God, the Hebrew people saw that "God as Lord" meant that He is Lord with no equal, so the creation story moved toward the core of the faith confession. Cf. Deut. 26:5–10, where Israel's witness has no reference to creation, and Neh. 9:6–31, where Israel's faith begins with creation.

The movement is not from “God as creator” to “God as redeemer,” but the opposite—from “God as Redeemer” to “God as creator.”

Ps. 24:1-2; 89:11; and 95:5 all have the confession that the earth is the Lord’s. This is the way of saying that God is Lord.

d. Creation Is Dynamic

The “get dominion” in Gen. 1:28 teaches that there must have been things to with which to wrestle and problems to solve for this command to be possible. How do you view going to the moon? If the moon was created by God, then how are we to apply “gain dominion” to the moon’s use? Is it for military use? How? The real question is, “How is the moon to be used?”

“Tending the garden,” or cultivating the ground (Gen. 2:15), is to loosen up the earth so roots can breathe. Was Adam to carry water to the plants? In Nigeria, creation was understood to have taken place in the dry season. Creation does not produce a ready-made world anymore than selfhood is ready-made at birth. Selfhood must be attained.

The Genesis accounts of creation (Gen. 1–2) were composed to bear witness to the children of Israel who had lived amid the cultures of other nations that worshipped gods that manifested themselves in objects along their path or in the sky. These things cannot possibly be gods, according to the creation accounts, because they are only mere objects that had been made with complete redemptive freedom by Yahweh. Further, they assert that Yahweh himself is personal, redemptive, and yet transcendent. Genesis was to give them a foundation that could withstand the contrary testimony of their neighbors and adversaries.

Because the creation is dynamic there was the possibility that it might fall and become corrupt; but creation is not itself evil. It is a *good* thing (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) that had become spoiled.

2. The Biblical World View

The accounts of creation and the world view of the Bible are pre-scientific. Cf. Ex. 20:4. It makes the assumption of a three storied universe (Figure 3).

- Heaven is the dwelling place of God. There are waters above the firmament, Gen. 1:6–8; Ps. 148:4. The sun, stars, and moon are above the land.
- The Land.
- There are pillars beneath the land, holding the land above water. Within or between these pillars are fire and Sheol.

“Abyss” means that the world is surrounded by the water (chaos) which, unless held back, would engulf the firmament—the expanse of atmosphere which surrounds the earth. Therefore God created the Earth in the midst of water, and resides above those waters. See Figure 3.

The heavens and the dwelling place of God (Isa. 40:22).

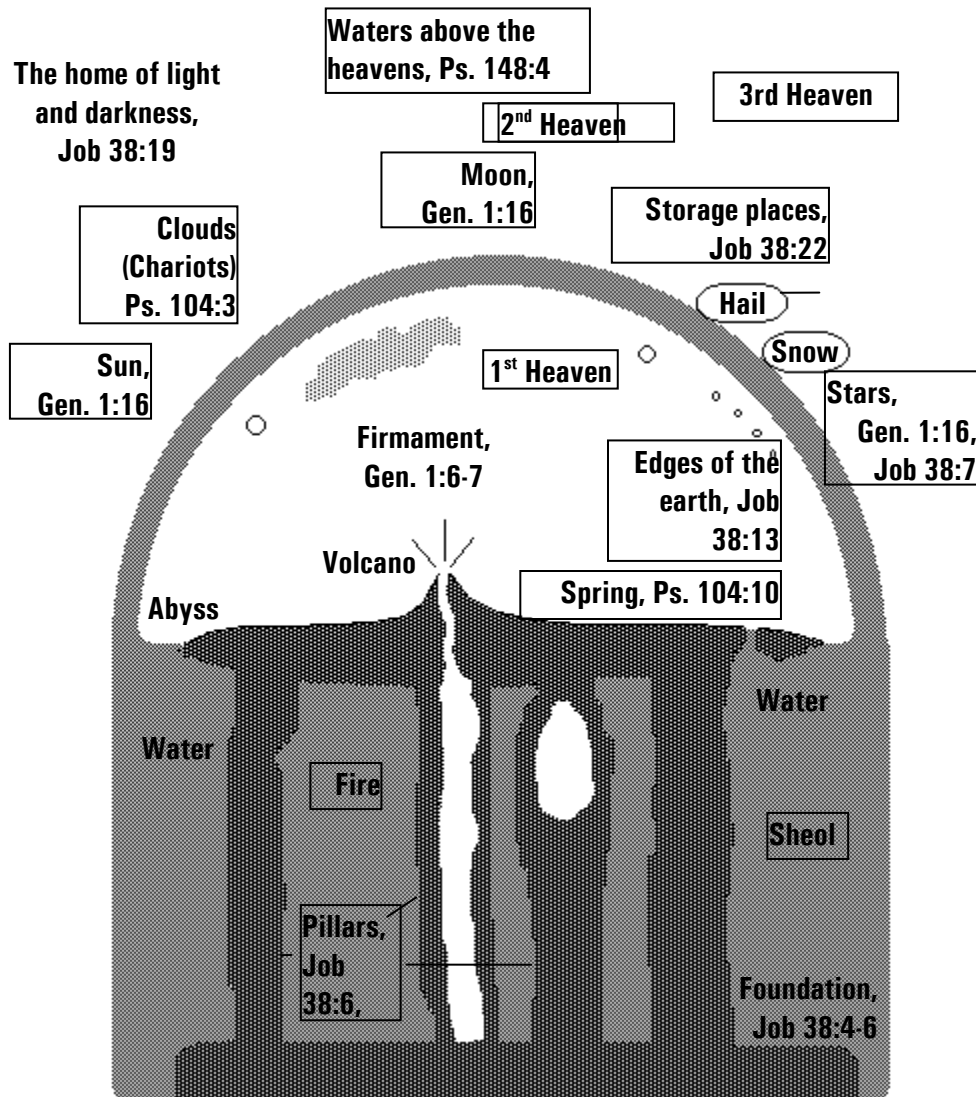


Figure 3. The Cosmos as understood by the authors of Genesis, Job, and the Psalms.

- The firmament holds back the heavenly ocean. Ps. 148:4; Ps. 104:5–9, cf. Job 38:8–11.
- The Earth of pillars, cf. Ps. 24:1–2; 104:5.
- The heavens contain a storehouse of hail and snow, Job 38:22.
- God resides above the waters, Isa. 40:22, Ps. 29:10, 104:3.
- Sheol is below the earth, cf. Ps. 115:16–17.
- The Abyss, cf. Gen. 7:11, cf. Gen. 1:6. The habitable world is surrounded by waters of chaos.
- The water jars of heaven, cf. Job 38:37.
- From the windows of heaven pours the rain, cf. Mal. 3:10.

D. Summary and Conclusion

1. A Christological Creation

The New Testament views creation Christologically. God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the new creation are related. The God that created is Jesus, Eph. 1:9–10.

In Jesus Christ, God restores the human pattern intended at the original creation. 1 Cor. 15:20–28; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 2:5–9.

2. Creato-ex-nihilo

Creato-ex-nihilo means the free and spontaneous creation by the initiative of God. While the actual phrase “creation out of nothing” is found only in the Apocrypha (2 Macc. 7:28), the Hebrew *bara* is taken to carry that nuance by many interpreters. God's usual method of creating may be process, but a *creato-ex-nihilo* understanding in Gen. 1:1 (heaven and earth), 1:21 (sea creatures), and in 1:27 (humankind—a three-fold *bara*) affirms his complete Lordship in at least three essential ways:

- God's creative work was not constrained by (and therefore not subordinated to) any prior conditions or materials.
- God created in freedom; he did not *have* to create, *chose* to create.
- God did not create out of divine substance; Pantheism is denied, and we are to worship the Creator, not the creation.

Creato-ex-nihilo is also suggested in Rom. 4:17, “calls things that are not as though they were,” and Heb. 11:3, “that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

The basic characteristic of creatureliness is dependence. Because God is Lord, creation is dependent.

3. Creation Is Both an Act and a Process.

Because the universe utterly dependent on God, there is also a biblical witness to the moment by moment continuing creation by God. God sustains the universe, cf. Acts. 17:28. It is this understanding that leads us into the next study on providence. Jesus has an important role in this process, Col. 1:17.

4. Creation Is Eschatological

Creation looks forward in hope toward the end when creator's purpose of creation is accomplished. Creation anticipates a consummation. It is not a cycle, but a fulfillment of original intentions—God first and last, alpha and omega. Creation “groans” for the eschaton, Rom. 8:22.

Isa. 44:6, “I am the first, I am the last”, repeated in 48:12f, means the creation (“first”) and the eschaton (“last”). The significance is this: in creation, the eschaton, and all points between—God is redemptive. All this is rooted in the creation.

II. Providence

Introduction

The doctrine of creation involves the concept of providence. Providence follows creation as a next step. The two doctrines are inseparable. Providence is not something outside of, or contrary to, the process of creation. The same God who gave being to the world continues to govern the world's affairs. He is not an absentee landlord. Providence is another way of asserting God's constant creating and sustaining relationship with his creation.

A. Definition

Providence is God's continuing activity in sustaining and guiding creation to the goal which He has purposed. God continues to act toward his creation with the same purpose and in the same spirit in which he created.

It has been noted that Augustine understood John 1:9 to teach that the world depends for its existence at every moment upon God. So there is no real distinction between creation and providence. In some ways the world is being re-created in every successive moment.

Here are some terms that are related to providence: Oversee, determine, predetermine—all implying God is at work in the present with a view to the future outcome of his purpose. “Order and predictability remain the characteristic features of the world of everyday experience,” while unpredictability and flexibility mark the micro-level. All that happens is ultimately God's responsibility, but this does not require that every individual happening has meaning in terms of God's intention. A world of chance and accident is not only logically compatible with belief in God; there are positive reasons for supposing that an element of pure chance (where no causal explanation can be conceived of in our present state of knowledge) acts constructively to create a richer environment that would otherwise be possible. Such a world is particularly well equipped to produce beings fit for fellowship with God. Providence centers in insistence that randomness is limited by its occurrence in a determinate order, and that divine action on the macro-level finds ways of turning the aggregates of micro-events to good ends. Cf. Eccl. 9:11.

B. Biblical Materials

1. Scriptures

- a. God's providence over all. Ps. 103:19, Eph. 1:11.
- b. God's providence over his handiwork. Job 37–41, esp. 38:12, 34–38.
- c. God's providence over nations, Job 12:23, Ps. 66:7; Acts 17:26.
- d. God's providence over the individual. Jer. 1:5, Gal. 1:15–16.
- e. God's providence in redemptive history. His providence in macroevents, Isa 40–42 (with reference to Babylon), is infinite, incomparable, and inexhaustible. This also applies to microevents, as in Matt. 10:29–31, directing the destinies of nations and numbering the hairs on our heads.
- f. God's providence over believer's lives. Deut. 8:3, Phil. 4:19, Matt. 6:8, 30–32. These verses imply that God is at work in the present assuring the future outcome of his purpose.

Romans 8:28 is the great verse that sets out how God works in believer's lives. But this verse is often misused. The contrast between the KJV and NIV illustrates this:

KJV	NIV
And we know that <i>all things</i> work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.	We know that in all things <i>God</i> works for good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Table 1. Understanding Romans 8:28.

God works in this process by bringing good out of adverse situations and events. *God*, not *things*, has the last word on behalf of those who are called according to his purpose. All things do not work for the good. God works for the good in all things—a vast difference.

The term is synergism—human and divine cooperation. The history of the word originally had to do with salvation and was rejected by many creeds and confessions out of the Reformation era. But within the faith, that is for a believer, it sets forth the relationship of the human and the divine. God is able to accomplish by working with a believer.

Rom. 8:28 says this: God called; and we respond in love, then synergism results.

God's providential care for his people is compatible with their having to encounter worldly disaster and ill success. The New Testament is marked with the sign of the cross. Providence has nothing about it of predeterminism, and God's power does not consist in his control of every human choice and action. Rather, we could say that God's providence and power in the Bible consist in his ability, despite anything that human beings may do or not do, always faithfully to keep his promises.⁹

The Bible does speak of chance. There is chance in life, Eccl. 9:10. But in the providence of God, chance is not allowed to remain chance. In the book of Ruth, Ruth happens to go to the field of Boaz (2:3), and the story develops from there. God works with the chance for redemptive purposes. In the story of Joseph, Midianite traders happen to pass by, and Joseph is sold to them by his brothers (Gen. 37:28). This is a chance happening that will be used by God. In 2 Sam. 11 it happens late one afternoon that David sees from his roof a woman bathing. Yet, in every one of those narratives, there is a profound sense of God's guidance in the history and God can bring good out of evil. God uses the most human of emotions—Amnon's lust, and Absalom's ambition, and Hushai's loyalty—to carry out his purpose of putting Solomon on the Davidic throne (2 Sam. 12:24 to 1 Kings 2:46). Just as in the story of Joseph, God uses the brother's hatred, treachery, and lies to send Joseph ahead into Egypt and thus to save his chosen people in the time of famine, cf. Gen. 45:4–8. What we call chance is an opportunity for God's working.¹⁰

The "all things" in Rom. 8:28 means this: *God can bring good out of evil*. God is truly a redemptive God.

2. Biblical Illustrations of Providence

- a. Providential care in the story of Joseph (Gen. 45:5 and 50:20). In spite of the intentions of the human agents, God turned the event into good.

Joseph set his personal history within the wider history or the community. The Hebrews understood their history as working out of a destiny to which God had called Abraham and his descendants. God made a covenant with his people, and their history is interpreted in terms of the covenant relationship.

God remaining faithful renewing the covenant and guiding the people toward their destiny.

It would have been a different story had things been different in Potiphar's house.

- b. Even Cyrus, who was outside of the covenant people, was used to accomplish God's purpose in Israel (Isa. 44:28–45:1). In this case it was not love, but action that was needed to accomplish God's redemptive purpose. God will keep his covenant. The Persian king Cyrus is even called the Lord's "anointed one" and the "shepherd" who will "fulfill the purpose" of God.

Faith in the providence asserts a definite movement in events, and overcoming of deficiencies and distortions and a fuller realizing of potentialities.

- c. A supreme example of God's providential rule over human circumstance in all history is seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:36, cf. 3:13–15, 4:10–11, 24–28). The Romans and the Jews intended to destroy a disturber of the status quo, but God turned defeat into victory.

The cross was evil. The only truly good life that ever existed was nailed to a cross. But God can bring good—redemption—out of evil.

⁹ McGrath, 93.

¹⁰ McGrath, 93.

C. Summary and Conclusions

1. God's Personal Interest

Providence grows out of a belief in God's personal interest, especially with those who have responded to his call in covenant relationship. Cf., Job 19:25–26. Providence is to affirm God's purpose in all creation and care and concern for humanity. God's permission has room for regularity and human freedom.

2. Providence Is a Middle Doctrine

Providence involves all things which transpire between creation and eschatology. Therefore, it is a "middle" doctrine (see Figure 1).

3. The Problem of Evil

Evil is to be overcome, not explained. The regularity of nature which blesses can also hurt. God uses evil! It is better to be silent and to remember that God chose to redeem the world by a man tortured to death.

4. Relationship of Grace and Judgment

Providence should be seen as grace and judgment—it will show both God's favor and God's judgment. It is a belief in an ordering of history by a God who is holy and righteous as well as merciful, so providence might be experienced as a discipline and the prophets have as much to say about God's judgment as about God's favor.

The image of the Cross is a blessing, but it is also a judgment.

A mature view of providence recognizes that in each act of providence there may be both judgment and favor, both wrath and grace. We may regard a series of events as grace if we move with them, or as judgment if we move against them, but in either case the direction is toward an ever fuller being.

Sometime ago I did a little meditation on what I called "the shadowside of prayer." The Scripture was Acts 12:18–19. The answer of prayer that brought joy in the home of Mary with the disciples and the early Christian community when Peter was delivered from prison in vv. 6–17 had an effect in other homes as well. The text states "In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, they cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed." It is strange how we repress passages in the Scripture. We do so because of our preconceived concepts. The crossing of the sea experience of Ex. 14 is sounded with a note of joy—Israel is set free. The armies of Pharaoh are destroyed. But the armies of Pharaoh were men who had wives and mothers and dads. The joy on the Sinai side of the sea is matched with the grief and wailing on the Nile side of the sea. Do these who lost their lives not count? Why do we not speak of them? The greatest difficulty I feel in teaching is in the fact that students (and perhaps even myself) struggle with the concept of history. History is *real*. History calls for a real incarnation with God at work in our midst as a suffering servant. Since history is real, then an answered prayer has a shadowside. Peter is delivered and guards are executed. One event relates to the other. Our faith is so superficial that we fail to look at the shadowside. The purpose here is to link the activity of God in answered prayer with the consequences of answered prayer in a world where time and history matter. It is a dangerous belief if providence is purely seen as divine favor for individuals or nations. If we feel special divine favor and a sense of being appointed to a divine destiny and that becomes overwhelming and tyrannical toward others, then we have turned a grace into a judgment on ourselves.

The Cross of Christ is the supreme manifestation of divine providence. It has a dialectical character—judgment and favor are both seen in the cross. We believe in God's providence by faith, not because we can see it or because it is written in large print in the careers of our more virtuous and successful friends and acquaintance. Indeed, we believe that God controls the outcome of history, and that he is good and wise. Our belief in his providence is part of our trust in him.

III. Miracles

The providential hand of God can again be seen in miracles. God will do those things that are essential for his witness and to fulfill the goals that he has set that lead to the eschaton. The intentions of God in creation shall ultimately be achieved.

A. Definitions

For an understanding of miracles, these three definitions can clear away some confusion.

1. Minimal Sense

A miracle is an event that excites wonder. In that sense every event might be called a miracle. Idealists want to get away from the idea of sporadic interventions by a God who would be standing outside the world, but since they wish to stress God's presence, they prefer to say that everything can be called a miracle. To many poets, every bush is a burning bush, aglow with God.

2. Religious Sense

A miracle is an event in which one perceives an act or manifestation of God. Such an act may be a vehicle for revelation, for grace, for judgment, or all of these together. Such an event could take place in any of the world religions.

3. Christian Sense

A miracle is a token of the new order inaugurated by the coming of Christ.

It is more to reveal God's nature and purpose to believers than it is to provide proofs to convince unbelievers.

The discussion that follows will emphasize the Christian sense of miracles, though in candor all three will be in the Scriptures.¹¹

B. Presuppositions

One's presuppositions will unconsciously color his or her idea of miracles. Your view of the universe will indicate, maybe without your even being aware of it, what you feel to be the purpose and possibility of miracles.

1. The Closed View of the Universe¹²

This view holds that a miracle is an event which breaks into the order of nature. Miracles involve a local and temporary suspension of the laws of nature, such as the miracles of healing. They imply that there is a "law" which is suspended so that the miraculous events may take place. Miracles do not fit with the world system; they are therefore always viewed as an intrusion.

The idea of a closed universe is foreign to biblical faith. If we believe that everything is result of a cause, miracles will be hard to accept. Often a compromise is unknowingly made—if a miracle occurs it is to be explained as the result of some natural law that has not yet been discovered.

Most of us have had education through public schools where this view of the universe was sublimely taught to us. Our most powerful learning, however, is not what is taught but what is caught. It is much harder to retrain cultural learning than educational learning.

¹¹ Richardson, S.v., "Miracles" by Barnebas Lindor.

¹² Hodgson & King, "Creation and Providence" by Julian N. Harth, 163.

Miracles are defined as the breaking of the laws of nature, which are conceived as unbreakable. But there is no basis for this assumption. What we have called laws of nature are nothing but scientific descriptions of the observed regularities of nature.

There are those who say that we do not know all of the laws of nature, and what today may seem a miracle may tomorrow be amenable to natural explanation. Study Bible editors that feel the need to explain “manna” as a rare but verifiable natural phenomenon¹³ tend to view the universe as closed.

2. Open View of the Universe

This is the belief that God created the universe, that he sustains the universe, that he controls the universe. There is and can be interaction between the creator and the created. Quantum physics has questioned the concept of fixed laws of nature and substitutes a more fluid view.

It is hard for many to move away from a fixed universe to an open universe in thinking. Causal connections are intuitively made. The shift from a mechanical to an organic view speaks of new levels and new forms of relationship and this is far more congenial to belief in God’s action in both nature and history.

This view does presuppose a “limit situation” where all superficial supports and interpretations have been stripped away so that existence is disclosed in a fundamental way. This makes one notice event dimensions which might normally escape us. Then the interaction is more apparent. Miracles become an interaction of the creator with creation.

3. A Non-Fallen View of the Universe

This view implies that God intends for everyone to be in perfect health. The faith-healers hold this view. It is, in essence, a denial of history. My past, my parent’s past, and my nation’s past impact upon me, so sickness is not always a sin. My propensity for baldness does not imply that I am a sinner, but is an inherited trait. If I wanted a full head of hair at this age, I should have selected different parentage.

That sickness is against God’s will, that God wills health, is a denial of history. This is the unfallen world view. Miracles, then, are deemed to be a restoration to an unfallen condition.

C. The Occasioning of Miracles

1. Old Testament

- a. Miracles are associated with the Exodus, Ex. 15:1, 21.
- b. They are associated with Elijah and Elisha as a response to threats upon the faith.
- c. There are some miscellaneous miracles in Daniel and Jonah.

Note: we do not find miracles in Abraham or Isaac, Amos, Malachi, etc. *Why?*

2. New Testament

- a. Miracles are associated with the birth of Jesus.
- b. They are associated with the ministry of Jesus.
The healing miracles have a distinctive background in messianic expectation, Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 61:1.
- c. There are miracles associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- d. Miracles are associated with the inauguration of the church.

¹³ Metzger, Note on Ex. 16:14.

3. Conclusion

a. The Supreme Miracle

The greatest miracle of all is that God has entered human history in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, who was born of the virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, but was raised from the dead by the power of God as a testimony of God's presence, and has ascended to be with the Father. The Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection make up this supreme miracle.

b. The Frequency of Miracles

Miracles do not occur evenly throughout the Bible. The biblical witness to miracles is reserved for the early Old Testament and early New Testament, and then lessens. That fact is significant.

c. When Miracles Are Most Likely

Miracles are most likely to occur when

- there is a need to validate the birth, ministry and resurrection of Jesus,
- a need to establish a new work (e.g., church planting), or
- in the case of a serious threat to the continuation of the faith (e.g., Elijah and Elisha).

D. Theological Reconstruction

1. The Purpose of Miracles

a. The Validation of Salvation History

Exodus, national unity, restoration, coming of Christ, resurrection, and the establishment of the church all relate to salvation history.

b. Signs Pointing to Something Beyond

Miracles are eschatological signs of what God intends for all his obedient creation. They are tokens of a new order inaugurated by the coming of Christ. A good interpretation may be found in the book of Revelation. The eschaton is the goal to which the signs point.

- 1) Exorcism, the casting out of demons, portends or gives a sign of the final imprisonment of the devil. Cf. Rev. 20:3.
- 2) Healings, the removal of pain or tears, portends a time when the hurts of life are over. The redeemed are not bound by sickness and finiteness. Cf. Rev. 7:17.
- 3) Resurrection, the dead being raised, portends a time when the last enemy, death, is ultimately defeated. Cf. Rev. 21:4.
- 4) New creation, the believer becoming new, portends a time when all of creation is renewed. There will be a new heaven and a new earth—all things become new, Isa. 66:22, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:1.

2. Miracles in Our Day

Could these tokens occur today? The Christian experience says that they could and that they sometimes they do. The power and purpose of God still abides, hence miracles are still a live option. The goals and purpose of creation are yet to be fulfilled so God will do, where needed, the miracles necessary to achieve those ends.

Christian experience affirms the continuance of miracles. God's purpose and power continue. This is compatible with the view of an open universe.

3. Guides for Believers

a. Miracles Reflect God's Nature

Miracles reflect God's nature and purpose to believers. This is different from the providing of proofs to convince unbelievers.

One of Jesus' temptations was to leap from the pinnacle of the temple and he refused (Matt. 4:5, Luke 4:9). Such demonstrations are not a way to win disciples. Later, Jesus said, "if they will not believe Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded by the chief miracle—one raised from the dead," Luke 16:31 (my paraphrase).

b. Interpretation of Miracles

Miracles do not have an unequivocal interpretation. From one point of view, an event may be an ordinary one, and from another point of view, the event will be a manifestation of God.

The Cross, for example, was a unique event in history, but it was also a regular means of execution in that day.

c. God Works through Process

God's usual Way of working is through process. Our preoccupation with the spectacular is abnormal.

The miraculous is most expected in establishing or maintaining a work of God that is in jeopardy. God works redemptively today through the Holy Spirit, and the Bible is to nurture and further the Christian community. The miracles of Jesus were signs of this coming age or of messianic salvation. Martin Dibelius rightly summarized the meaning of these signs when he said

the powers of the Kingdom are already present, yet not as a force that changes the world but as the strength that radiates from One, the only one who is familiar with it and mandates it. What He makes men see in the form of healing or of encouragement, of criticism and of promise, is not the Kingdom but the signs of the kingdom.¹⁴

d. Miracles and Eschatology

Miracles have an implication for eschatology. The divine purpose in creating and sustaining the world, and the acts of preserving the community of the faithful, imply a full termination of the world and its history.

IV. Prayer—the Contemplative Life

Introduction

There are many approaches to prayer as a study, but I have chosen to speak of prayer as related to the development of a contemplative life. I prefer to approach the subject in this way because it is an alternative to the notion that prayer is something that must be done to achieve "success." That approach reduces prayer to technique, or even as a tool or a weapon, and I don't want to do that. In the believers' church tradition, just as in the synagogue, there is an emphasis on corporate prayer that is important—Jesus gave us a model for that prayer (Matt. 6:9–13, Luke 11:2–4)—but Jesus also prayed alone, a fact that was so important to the New Testament community of faith that it is mentioned repeatedly in the gospels. It appears that those prayers were most intense at the time of the Lord's baptism and at Gethsemane—those occasions where his redemptive work was especially intense.

The individual prayers of believers must be seen holistically—as a part of one's whole walk with God. As we turn to the subject of prayer, I think it is best to characterize that life as a lifestyle—a "contemplative" lifestyle.

¹⁴ Dibelius, 88.

1. Analogies of Christian Living

In 2 Timothy 2:1–7, Paul began by writing, “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” He then wrote about “holy history”—the past redemptive work of God—saying, “the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others,” cf. 2 Tim. 1:9–10.

Paul then gave three analogies for Christian living. Each of these models provide a way to communicate the story of redemption by life and words.

- *The Soldier, v. 4*

The soldier obeys commands. A Christian living for the “soldier” paradigm is to learn what is expected and then to do it. The lives of these Christians can be seen in terms of obedience and faithfulness to God’s commands.

Perhaps the Master Life program is a good example of the soldier analogy, as it is the “soldier” types who seem to have most enthusiastically endorsed this program. Master Life is a worthy life style; by obedience and faithfulness, the soldier type shares the redemptive story.

- *The Athlete, v. 5*

“Athlete” Christians have a strong internal drive and internal discipline. They know that which they need, responding to internal commands, like “Do what the body tells you.” They set goals and train; they have their own training agenda and regimen.

“When you run,” the athlete types tell you, “listen to what your body says and do it.” They say the body talks—it says either “slow down” or “push harder.” This advice proves beyond any doubt that I am not an athlete. In all the years of my running I have never heard my body say anything but “slow down,” “taper off,” or “it won’t hurt to walk a bit.” But my experience does not invalidate the fact that athletes actually do sense their bodies talking to them.

The “athletes” sometimes seek out religious books. They pick up a book and will read to sense whether the material in the book meets their needs. Then they will start a quest for another book. They keep searching—hunting for what they need at the given time. They sense when they have found what they are seeking. This is a worthy life style. By internal demands and internal drive, the athlete type shares the redemptive story.

- *The Farmer, v. 6*

Since the “soldier” obeys external commands and the “athlete” obeys internal commands, what is the farmer? The farmer is one who understands life as being lived with God and in cooperation with God. He sees himself or herself as being a co-laborer with God in God’s tasks, cf. 1 Cor. 3:9 and 2 Cor. 6:1.

To “co-laborer” is a biblical expression, but another metaphor that could apply equally well is “mid-wife.” Just as the midwife assists mother in bringing new life into the world, the “midwife” metaphor pictures person assisting God in the in-bringing of a new spiritual birth. Exodus 1:15ff tells of the two midwives that assisted with the birth of Moses, and presents a model for the work of midwifery.

The farmer waits and senses the right time to plant. The soil is prepared, the rains come, the seed is planted, but it is God who gives the increase. To the farmer, sensing what is to transpire and when it should transpire is the key to making a crop.

So in this farmer model of Christian living, God seeks a sensitive person—one who will wait with intuition or who will quickly respond to the gentle nudging of the Spirit. These people must possess patience, awaiting the rains and the gentle blowing wind which brings a ripened harvest.

God is at work in the world. He is at work in every life. One attempts to see the season and those things which are proper to be done. One doesn't witness and attempt to harvest when it is winter; instead, one waits for spring when the soil is warm and ready to be turned. Co-operation with the Spirit's work is what God seeks. So in this life style it is not the learning of programs or techniques. Rather, it is the sensitizing of one to God who then is enabled to read other lives and determine what God is wanting to accomplish at a given time. A key link in the Joseph story would have been missing had Joseph not been sensitive to the two fellow prisoners who had been disturbed by a dream the night before (Gen. 40:6). This is a worthy life style. By co-laboring with God, the farmer type shares the redemptive story.

I, perhaps, feel more comfortable with the farmer lifestyle because I am an introvert with some intuitiveness. I tried hard to be the soldier, but I failed—I just didn't like people telling me what to do and then having to determine how to respond. I do not enjoy attempting to give orders either. I have also tried the athlete's approach, but I don't like the continual searching for something new and trying to determine if it is what I need. I am better with the farmer metaphor as my model.

But it is wrong to think that these are the only life styles that are pleasing to God. One of the purposes of a church is to help believers explore and discover their most natural way of living out their faith.

Paul ends this section of 2 Tim. 2 by saying, "Reflect on what I am saying for the Lord will give you insight into all this" (v. 7).

Developing a contemplative life has many aspects but I will deal only with the discipline of prayer. And with prayer, which itself has many aspects, I will deal only with contemplation, rather than considering prayer as intercession, adoration and petition.

2. Presuppositions

Here are the presuppositions that I have made in the study of the Farmer's Metaphor of a Contemplative Life.

a. The Farmer's Basic Understandings

- 1) God is present in all human experiences, Rom. 8:28. The verse reads, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." First, the verse emphasizes that God is in "all things" and "works" in all things. I do not understand this to mean that God causes all things, but rather is present in all things that occur. Secondly, for the events of life to have religious meaning it is important that a believer "love him." If one's attitude is apathetic or hostile, then there will be no sensing of God at work. Third, for the events of life to have religious meaning, one needs to be "called." From the believer's church tradition, we understand there is only one call—"out of darkness into light," 1 Pet. 2:9. The call to which this text refers is discipleship or fellowship, so religious experience is the understanding that God is in all the events of life. If my desire is to follow, and if I maintain an attitude of love, then I can sense God working in the events of life.
- 2) God is a self-communicating God. He communicates through:
 - his creation,
 - people,
 - events,
 - prayer,
 - relationships, and
 - scripture.

3) God can be experienced in a variety of ways:

- psyche,
- imagination,
- body,
- mind,
- heart, and
- history.

God is primarily experienced in and through history. All experience is judged by the cross and resurrection.

- 4) God communicates incarnationally, through the grids of our own personalities. He loves diversity.
- 5) God waits and longs for us to respond. The highest desire of God is for us to be friends, John 15:15.
- 6) God leaves us free to decide on how, or if, we will respond.

b. The Farmer's Co-Laboring Task

Here is a partial list of ways that a “farmer type” may co-labor with God:

- 1) Help people recognize God's communication to them.
- 2) Help people recognize those areas of unfreedom that keep them from responding to God. We all have such areas, and cannot find them by ourselves—but we can find them in the corporate context of the community of faith. Jesus wants us to be free.
- 3) Help people grow in affective and intimate relationship with God.
The image of midwifery can apply here: bring to life that what is already there and struggling to be free.
- 4) Help people to notice, savor, and respond.
 - Noticing involves a sensitivity that catches your attention. In Hebrew thought all actions are purposeful. The focus here is outward. Continue to pay attention—make suggestions in response to what a person is saying. Suggestions call for a relationship, so one takes the risk of becoming vulnerable. Just being noticed, for most, is valuable.
 - Savoring is continued noticing and interacting and calls for a response. If one is affirmed, then one senses God at work. Rejoice—this is savoring!
 - Responding is giving one's own contemplativeness to others. Remember that God is always giving Himself away—He is a self-communicating God. So there will be experiences and the experiences will be normative and not extraordinary. God doing it all the time.

Now, a look at a contemplative life.

A. Definition of Prayer

Prayer is a response to God.

If I were to write a book on prayer, I would most likely call it “Taking the Second Step.” I may have read a hundred definitions of prayer, but I like this definitive title the best. God's activity always precedes human response, so prayer is taking the second step. Because of this, I wish to define prayer as “a response to God.”

I grew up being told that “prayer is asking and receiving.” John R. Rice had a book by this title and I read it and studied it as a teenager. But seeing prayer as “getting” can enhance self-centeredness, while prayer’s purpose is to help us become God-centered.

B. Models of Prayer

Prayer is personal, and hard to speak about. It may be even more difficult (and just as inappropriate) to speak about prayer than it is to speak about one’s relationship with one’s spouse. In that way it is unlike other areas of life—it deals with one’s innermost attitudes, feelings, and identity. Because it is the center of one’s relationship with God, reducing prayer to “technique” may hinder that relationship. The relations of a husband and wife are personal, and to attempt to teach a technique for relating between them would be wrong, even though they actually will have evolved a technique. Only if a prayer life has utterly collapsed should any techniques be offered. Technique in prayer is to miss the point of that which is intimacy between one and God.

In teaching theology, I try not to tell students what to believe. To do that would not be a Baptist way. But I do try to give components which students might then use to put together their own beliefs.

Barry Bonds’ swing cannot actually be taught! It is something natural with Bonds, and to tamper with that swing might make him into a .200 hitter. R.E.O. Brown once advised “It is always wise...to speak little about prayer but give attention to the things that make prayer possible.”

1. The Evangelical Model

The evangelical prayer model works this way. The person is up before dawn and greets the new day with quiet contemplation and with the study of Scriptures. There is much stress on this sort of axiom: “God first thing in the morning, and God will then be with you the rest of the day.” Forget God in the morning you forget Him throughout the day. Seek the Lord early.

A personal note here. Because I consider myself a historical theologian, I find it necessary to point out that this model is somewhat recent. The model began with the Pietist movement, seeking to complete the Reformation in the lives of church members. I’m a backpacker. When I contemplate Paul taking trips on his missionary journeys, I ask whether he followed this methodology. Did Paul read his Bible every morning? The Scrolls were kept in the synagogue. Paul did not have access to the Scriptures as we do—but there were parts he had memorized. He may have quoted some verses as he put on his pack. If some of the journeys were as difficult as I understand, he must have crashed at night and awakened the next day to get on with the march. There was no greeting the sunrise in meditation as a general practice on his missionary journeys.

2. The Orthodox Model

This model of prayer usually centers on the pastor and has the pastor as a student of the Word. Some outstanding, dedicated lay people also fit into this model. It regards prayer is a search for knowledge and truth.

Here is the way it works. See this picture in your mind—the pastor has an open Bible before him. Preferably it is the Greek New Testament, or perhaps the Hebrew Scriptures. Several commentaries are about, and the desk is filled, but neat. The preacher’s glasses have been set down on the pages of the open Bible. He closes his eyes in meditation. He has been at study and his heart has been moved. He pauses in the study of the Word to lift up his grateful heart to God. New truths have broken out from the Word of God and on the following Sunday the congregation knows that it will be blessed; their pastor has heard the Word of God!

In candor, when I was a pastor, I really tried to follow this model. The problem was this—when I closed my eyes in meditation one of two things happened. If the telephone didn’t ring, I was so tired that I would drop off to sleep. I even adopted the New Testament motto of “watch and pray,” hoping that the phone would not ring and that I would stay awake.

Truths have come from the Word of God into my life in a different manner. I am a “slow cook” person. That is, when I work on something, I read, let it simmer, put it in the personal unconsciousness, and then when I pull it out again, it hopefully has some quality to it. My biggest failures have taken place when I didn’t do this. My actual preparation may often take place right before the event, and that is OK if the simmering has gone on. But if there was no simmering, then usually I experience a tragedy.

So as a pastor I would read *Time*, *Newsweek*, Bible commentaries, church history, theological journals, and made notes, having no idea how they would all fit together. Then on Friday I started what I called the great chess game. I put pieces of paper out on the table and tried to weave them into a whole. That is the way I built my sermons. The week’s experiences in pastoring, the week’s experience in study, and the week’s experience within—from that, hopefully, a message would be birthed that would bless the people.

I was deeply moved as a student by James Stewart. He was the prince of preachers in my day. He stated that he would not go to bed on Sunday evening until he knew what he was going to preach the following Sunday. That approach would mean 5 sleepless nights for me. This was one aspect of his approach I could not follow.

3. Organizational Model

This model centers more on the workers of the congregation but also on some preachers as well. It views prayer as serving the institution.

The model assumes that participating in the life of the church helps one to be devout. Acts of loving service can be effective forms of prayer. Instead of hours in prayer or study these people serve the institutional church. It is forgotten that when Baptists moved to “full time pastors” it was for the pastor to be able to spend time with study and prayer. Now some of my former students have told me that on the platform before they preach is their only prayer for the week. The unspoken presupposition is something like this: in the going and coming to the church building there is service rendered to Jesus and therefore one’s life is acceptable to God.

To force this person into a strict schedule or rigid routine of prayer would be unproductive. But formal prayer is often meaningful. They can learn to love to celebrate the goodness, love, and power of God.

I accept this approach.

4. The Traditional Model

The traditional model of prayer is a blending of our own words with Scripture. This approach is often followed by all the above in preparation and study, but for some it is followed as a way to prayer. The model uses the senses and calls for spiritual discipline.

- a. *Reading.* The truth of God is found in Scripture, but God also reveals His Presence in other books, in nature, in people, in events of history, or in providence. A passage of Scripture is selected, possibly in a planned schedule. Commentaries or secondary works can, and often are, used as well.
- b. *Reflecting.* This involves welcoming the study into our lives—receiving God’s truth, then meditating on insights. In meditation, one discovers the beauty and goodness of God’s truth and seeks to apply it to our situation and need.
- c. *Responding.* Once the truth is accepted we can relate its meaning to our lives. It is necessary to ask what changes do we want to make as a result of this truth. Our response is expressed through words, thoughts, desires, gratitude, praise, or petition. Here the “ACTS” model of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication may be used to structure a prayer.

- d. *Resting.* We seek the union of love. We need to give ample time and attention to the word, truth, or task at hand. The passages on “waiting on the Lord” are applicable here.¹⁵

These four models are ways of responding to God. If prayer is response to God, then one may find in these or other models a way to make a response to the God who is confronting one at every moment.

C. The Contemplative Life Style

This model will not deal with prayer as intercession or supplication, but rather is dealing with a life style. The model sets forth how a believer is to live a life pleasing to God based on the farmer analogy. Do hear that if you are a soldier or an athlete, this will not work for you. There must be fifty life styles that pleased God in Heb. 11. You have an obligation and the church is to assist you in the discovery of who you are and give you the freedom to develop who you are before the Lord.

1. Consciousness of Presence

One experience that has stayed with me took place when I was living in Sylvia, Kansas. I rededicated my life. Then I asked to preach at my home church some 11 miles away. Down in the basement, where my brother and I were living and where I felt privacy I practiced out loud the sermon that I was going to preach. I must have practiced it a hundred times. It was always 17 minutes long, but the day I preached it, I spoke every word and did it in 8 minutes. But in practicing the sermon one day, I discovered my mother was listening. Did that make a difference? Very much so! Her presence while I was speaking changed the whole atmosphere of what I was doing. I was chagrined, mortified, hurt, and somewhat angry that she would eavesdrop on me.

The word piety has fallen in bad state of repair. What the word means, however, is what one does and thinks in the presence of a power greater than oneself. Living in the presence of one who is a power greater than oneself makes many changes in life and conduct. Kierkegaard once noted that the academic dons knew everything about God except that he was watching and listening them!

We need to regain a sense of piety. It makes a significance difference in how life is lived.

2. Oscillation of Scheduling

We are to live lightly and not be heavily earnest in occupation or pleasure. It is not a legitimate job requirement to be asked to give absolute loyalty to your employer. Only God is to be Lord. We are to live a life without idols.

Modern life has many advantages: transportation, communication, washing machines, clothes dryers, dish washers, and so forth. But there are also disadvantages. One of the great disadvantages is the constant interruptions of life. Rarely does one have any personal time they can count on without being interrupted. First it was children, perhaps a mate, even pets, and, of course, work. We are standing in that maze of puzzlement. We complain that we have no time to call our own. The older models were built on blocks of time, and that is rarely a possibility for me. The contemplative life style needs the awareness of oscillation.

One way that a believer can help achieve a contemplative life style is to examine his or her daily schedule and seek ways to integrate prayer and the consciousness of God into life's flow. How, upon awakening, dressing, or driving to work, can one utilize life's routine to either educe or maintain a consciousness of the presence of God? Not having blocks of time, can a believer develop a life style that will use the routines of life to sense and respond to God, and then seek blocks of time on an occasional basis?

Please see the discussion in the next section for possible suggestions on how this might be accomplished.

3. Responding to the Spirit

Consider Acts 16:6–10 and 1 Cor. 2:10–16.

¹⁵ Michael.

God draws us toward the good—toward Himself. God does not force us. Our freedom remains central in the experience of a contemplative life.

a. Prerequisites

- One must seek good physical health. Getting adequate rest and sleep is essential.
- One must maintain good mental health; if there is a need for counseling, seek it out. It is essential to break the negative patterns of our lives.
- One must prioritize life. Times of the day need to be set aside. Prioritizing life is the best guarantee that we will not be engulfed by the world. There must be a deliberate attempt on the part of the believer to conduct life according to a chosen standard. This is why adopting a rule is a good approach. I would say “a rule for life,” but life changes. Even so, a rule is a helpful tool to make priorities stick; it is important to prioritize life toward God.

b. Centering Down

Centering is an effort to bring the outward-directed forces of life under control. It is learning to be able to “be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). This practice, often associated with the Quakers, serves as a way to become sensitive to God and maintain that sensitivity.

The phrase “pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17) has an understanding applicable to “centering.” Though there is little context for the phrase in First Thessalonians, there is a broader background providing a possible understanding.

The hours of prayer were kept by some Jewish adherents, cf. Ps. 55:16f and Dan. 6:10-11. Jesus’ disciples kept the hours of prayer as well, cf. Acts 3:1, 10:30. The *Didache* required the reciting of the Lord’s Prayer three times a day. Perhaps the exhortation of Paul to “pray continually” meant that the church people at Thessalonica were not to stop keeping the hours of prayer.

If believers today could adopt such a rule like keeping “the hours of prayer,” they would have a method of maintaining a sensitivity to God.

Centering down means experiencing the freedom that comes only from living in tune with the Spirit, cf. 2 Cor. 3:17. We are no longer the slaves of forces that block our response to God’s presence, and we are more loving because we have become more responsive to the Spirit in our lives and in ordinary activities.

The goal of the contemplative life is to love God and others with our whole heart, soul, mind and body, Deut 6:5. We are to become what we have been created to be—children of God led by the Spirit of God.

The matrix of sin is reversed in unbelief. Where unbelief placed God outside the divine center, here faith places God—or attempts to place God—in the divine center, and then to live out of that divine center.

I have said I will not dwell on technique; but there is one technique that I will suggest. It may be remembered with the acronym **EnTER**.

En	Eph. 1:18	Enlightenment
T	1 Thess. 5:18	Thanksgiving
E	1 Thess. 5:21	Examination (test everything; know what is going on inside)
R	1 Thess. 5:23	Restitution

V. Eschatology

Introduction

The consummation of all things in God is the conclusion or goal, not the appendix of Christian theology. It is always a vital part of theology. There is also the anticipation of the eschaton that impacts and shapes Christian behavior—that “eschatology,” in other words, is as often used when speaking of God’s goals as it is of speaking of end times. These two aspects will be the emphasis of this study.

The doctrine of eschatology appears most often in the final chapters of classical systems of theology—often with hell being the last concept discussed. What a somber note on which to end the study of theology!

Since eschatology is the goal of creation—human and world—it is possible to deal with the goal by relating it to creation, and setting forth the purposes and intentions of God which are to be realized in the eschaton. Therefore, we shall end our theological studies not with eschatology but with a study of the trinity, a doctrine that makes Christianity distinctive and unique.

Because we have a meager time budget to do this study, I come with apologies for the omission of many items. Among things that will not be covered are the concepts of everlasting life, life, death, hope, the Antichrist. But again, you will be able to note the approach to the doctrines that are presented and get an idea of how I would approach other areas as well. I will attempt to have a consistent hermeneutic.

In most living religion that has a belief in God or gods there will develop some kind of eschatology. This doctrine is being dealt with as a part of Enlightenment story, so keep in mind the premises of the Enlightenment story as we deal with the subject.

1. An Overview

The Westminster Shorter Catechism states “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” This catechism of 1647 was written near the time of the *First London Confession*. The statement blends the present and the future. The present—we are to glorify God. The future—we are to enjoy God forever. This appears to me to be the right dynamic.

Eschatology is popular today because there is a natural curiosity—the coming year 2000 will spark a lot of interest as well. You should ask those who put great weight on that year—the turn of the century—how they know that God adopted the Gregorian Calendar which didn’t begin until the 1600s. Might not God have kept the Jewish calendar that has a different dating system than ours? Or perhaps even the Chinese calendar?

An interest in eschatology that is based on promise fulfillment may be very healthy. The approach presupposes that, in our present existence, something is lacking. Humans hope for what they lack. I sense a lack in my own life and the eschatological promises speak to the hunger and the hurt in my life. Eschatology has a legitimate place in theology. Far from being the last chapter of Christian theology, eschatology is the basic stance that governs the theology as a whole. It deals not simply with the events of the end-time but is much more concerned with how the presence of that end affects the very constitution of the gospel and every aspect of Christian thought and behavior.¹⁶

2. Definitions

- a. Etymological definition: Eschaton means last, final, or ultimate things.
- b. Theological definition:

Eschatology is what happens to persons and/or the world at the conclusion.

¹⁶ Finger’s book is a theology from an Anabaptist perspective and makes eschatology central in his theology.

The doctrine deals with the last things for individuals, history, and the world, and further how those concepts impinge on our current behavior— “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat” (2 Peter 3:11–12; in a theophany, everything melts away at the appearance of God). So eschatology is also what impinges on persons who are following Christ now. These two dimensions are important in this study. 1 Cor. 10:11 says that we live between the resurrection and the return. *The key understanding of the return shapes our ethical conduct.*

A. Presuppositions

1. Suggestions, not Assertions

Just as in the study of the doctrine of creation, this is an area where I will make humble suggestions rather than dogmatic assertions. Our knowledge of God will not exhaust God’s eternal dimension. Mystery will yet remain.

2. Symbolic Language

The borders beyond human experience can only be described in symbolic language. The languages of creation and eschatology are basically symbolic. That says that, heaven and hell can not be photographed but rather must be interpreted (Niebuhr). The furniture of heaven and the temperature of hell are not proper areas of speculation.

3. The After Life Is Not Systematic

The Bible does not give a systematic perspective of the after life. Redemption is God’s purpose and the key to the interpretation of this doctrine and all of the doctrines treated under the Enlightenment story. Both creation and eschatology open history to novelty and have therefore, been much abused. But enough is said within Scripture for hope and certainty.

The goal and the purpose of creation will be actualized in the eschaton. This is one of my theological convictions that colors much of what will be presented in this section. I do not feel the Bible presents anything like a complete systematic view of last things, but hints are given and they are adequate for our proper use. To insist on more than these hints is to seek to know what God has not opened to us. There is a difference between God’s eternal dimensions and our historical dimension. God can move freely into our dimension because he is Lord of both eternity and history. But we, who are bound by history, cannot participate fully in his dimension until he permits us to do so 1 Cor. 13:12.

4. A Hermeneutic: Past and Future

The best insight into what God will do is found by looking at what God has done. Creation and eschatology are rightly studied together both heremeneutically and from the challenges of the Enlightenment. This is also the key to the doctrine of hope.

B. Eschatology and the New Testament Church

The Eschatology of the New Testament Church may be viewed from two perspectives, one positive and one negative.

1. Living in Anticipation

Believers are to live in anticipation of the eschaton. To me this is the most important emphasis to be made in eschatology, and this is the most often omitted.

The early church was driven by the power of the soon-coming of Jesus. That seems to be clear. That intense expectation did not take the form of doctrinal statements, but rather it took the form of life stance.

What should be our position if we are truly ready following the New Testament model? The word that says what attitude is to be is “anticipation.”

“*Ante*” means “that which comes before,” as the antenna on TV set. A bug has antennae, or feelers. In card games, “up the ante” means “out front.” In our study, it means an eagerness that grabs the thing before it is present. A linebacker anticipates where ball carrier is going to go; this is an illustration of anticipation.

The dynamic behind the early church was living in anticipation of the coming of Jesus. That is best seen as that anticipation shapes our ethical behavior (2 Pet. 3:8–14, Heb. 6:13–20, 1 Thess. 4:16–18).

When the church accepted the Constantinian offer that made it a part of the establishment—a branch of the Roman Empire—the church leadership felt that they “had it made.” With that the dynamic of that anticipation was lost; the church became distorted.

I will deal more completely on this when I we talk about the kingdom of God.

2. Errors Concerning the Parousia

There are two ways to go wrong on coming of Jesus.

a. Calendarizing

Efforts to fit events of the Bible into the world’s historical calendar are called “calendarizing.” Specifically, it is the practice of predicting a date for the return of Christ, the end of the world, or whatever.¹⁷ Here are some other examples:

- The Antichrist is assigned to be a particular historical person. There have been many “antichrists.” Most really fit the bill!
- Kings mentioned in Old Testament prophecy assigned to modern nations, e.g., the “common market being the 10 toes of Daniel.” (There are now thirteen or more countries in Common Market!).
- Every single calendarizer up to this generation has been proved wrong. The cumulative batting average for no one knows how many thousand self-proclaimed pros, is .000. Those at the plate now say “the evidence is so much clearer now.” “The signs are unmistakable.” “This time we have got it right.”

All former calendarizers have said the same thing. Harold Camping, in his book *1994*, proposed a range of dates in that year for the “Last Day and return of Christ”¹⁸ Watch out for the “dating game,” as it is still being done. God has no intention of enabling us to locate the events in or detail them as a part of our historical future. The New Testament as a whole very much discourages calendarizing.

Occasionally, a prognosticator may get something right just as a blind pig will sometimes find an acorn. This is a matter of “time and chance” (Eccl. 9:11).

- 1) *The track record.* There is no evidence that prophecies ever made it possible for anyone to make an accurate prediction as to just when, where, and how an event would occur. The sayings of Jesus counsel against trying to get at the secrets of God by the doping out of signs, which is what calendarizing does.
 - Matt. 12:36ff, Jesus is talking about the coming day of judgment.
 - Matt. 16:1–4.

¹⁷ Adopted from Vernard Eller’s Deere Lectures, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992.

¹⁸ Camping, 531.

- Mark 8:11–13.
- Mark 13:5–6.
- Mark 13:21–23.
- Luke 11:29ff.
- Luke 17:20–24.
- Luke 21:7–8.
- John 21:20–23.
- Acts 1:8.

Putting these all together spells out something less than enthusiastic support from either Jesus or the church that produced the Gospels for any effort to get “one up” on things and writing history before it happens. Jesus opposed calendarizing because to calendarize is to undercut the very eschatological stance that Jesus was intent to teach—that we are to live in tension. Jesus opposed calendarizing because it leads people into thinking they know something they have no chance of knowing. The reason they have no chance of knowing is that God never intended they should know. And the reason He does not want them to know is that, if they did, there no longer would be any cause for them to be constantly awake and perpetually ready. See Matt. 24:42–44 (cf. parables Matt. 24:45–52; 25:1–13; 25:14–30), cf. Rom. 13:11–13; 1 Cor. 7:29–31; 1 Thess. 5:1–2; Heb. 10:25; 36–37 and James 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7 and 17, 5:8–11; 2 Pet 3:8–10; 3:11–13).

- 2) *Misunderstanding “the time is short,”* Rev. 16:15; 3:3b. Some take this to be a calendar claim, “I know when the end is coming and it is right away.” But these interpretations conflict with the “surprise” element—the thief theme. That the time is short has a better interpretation—it was never meant as a license for calendarizing. Jesus, Paul, the writings of the Gospels, etc., give documentary evidence that the expectation of the return was current in the church during almost every decade from AD 33 on to the end of the century. Yet writers continued to state the expectation that the time was short without apparent difficulty, and the time that was stretching out to something like 70 years.

In looking back, these writers saw all that God already had done in the way of bringing his promise to fulfillment. They saw the arrival and work of God’s Messiah, his atoning death and victorious resurrection. They saw the coming of the Holy Spirit, the creation of the new faith community and its missionary outreach, and they said, “The day is far gone, and the time is short.” No matter what the dates or times which the Father has set within his own control, it is evident that the interval between what God has done and what yet must happen is short (Figure 4). The end could come at any time; the time indeed is short. The obligation of the church is to keep on making this statement until the end itself comes. It is when the church fails to announce that the time is short that she has fallen away from the truth of the matter. Eschatological expectancy was the motivation and content of Jesus’ preaching, service ministry and atoning work. It is the basis of the ethical teachings of the New Testament. It was the source of the early church’s life and the explanation of her distinctive character. It was the dynamic and definition of her mission in the world. Christianity is truly Christian only insofar

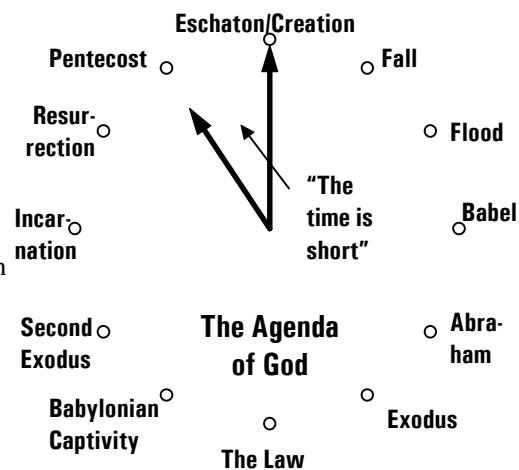


Figure 4. “The time is short,” seen with the whole agenda of God.

as it shares the eschatological expectation; outside of it there hardly are grounds for claiming the name “Christian” any more than a candy that does not taste of lemon can claim to be “lemon-flavored.”

To restore the church to a vital sense of expectancy is all important. The biblical expectancy of perpetual readiness is entirely immune to the disappointment of the calendarizers who make money writing books to tantalize the saints.

I expect the Lord soon. I know he is coming, but he never even intimated that I should know when. If he comes today, great—that’s when I am expecting him. If he doesn’t come—I’ll expect him tomorrow. He can’t break an appointment with me, because he never made one.

Biblical eschatology puts more of its emphasis upon what the expectancy of those future events has to say about the quality of life and action now. The question that should always be before the community of faith is, “What should I do to be ready?”

- 3) *Misunderstanding signs.* The signs Jesus acknowledges are of a different sort from those that could be used as a basis for calendarizing the future.

The purpose of the signs of Matt. 24:1–44—war, famine, deception, persecution, etc.—was not to enable future prognosticators to set dates but to assure the disciples that despite their troubles God would not fail. In the face of opposition, the disciples must not lose sight of their mission. All these events had already happened by the time Paul was planting churches, because he taught his disciples to expect Christ to return in their day (1 Cor. 15:51–52; 2 Cor. 5:1–10).

The Lord is at hand (James 5:3; 7–9; Rev. 22:20; 1 Cor. 16:22).

The *parousia* is imminent—Christ could come at any moment. The last days began at Pentecost, Acts. 2:17.

The anticipation of Christ’s coming is a joyous expectancy, not a nervous anxiety. It is a Blessed hope, Titus 2:13. It has significance in our lives:

- Urgency, “go, missionize.”
 - Encourage—no sacrifice in Christ’s service is too great.
 - Ethical concerns—we want to please Him.
 - Expectancy—a great day is coming.
- 4) *Misunderstanding time.* It is doubtful whether anyone in the first-century world would have defined present reality with future-oriented thought. In traditional peasant societies which are pre-Einsteinian, pre-Industrial Revolution, pre-Enlightenment, pre-Newtonian, and pre-monastic, time was predominantly present-oriented, functional, and non-directional. The past existed with the present while the future would be already on the horizon.¹⁹

It is doubtful that the incarnate Jesus viewed time as a linear progression running from past to present and then to the future. Time was thought to move in terms of generations, epochs, and ages—the end of one was understood as the beginning of another. The danger of using “last,” “final,” or “end” in the post-Enlightenment world to describe expectations of the first century is to compartmentalize time, thus making the apocalyptic symbols seem otherworldly. The biblical symbols were a relational network which constituted their “present age.”

b. Not to Expect Christ At All

The second error is not expecting or giving up on the coming of Jesus, 2 Pet. 3:1–4.

¹⁹ Malina, 19–30.

C. Eschatological Glossary

Perhaps the foremost issue in current studies of eschatology is the discussion concerning the nature of the kingdom of God. Did Jesus preach an in-breaking of a supernatural kingdom in the imminent future, or did he see the kingdom realized in his ministry, or did he see in his ministry the beginning of a kingdom that was to be fulfilled later?

1. Schools of Eschatology

a. Thoroughgoing Eschatology

The Thoroughgoing Eschatology school is represented by Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss.

Schweitzer wrote that Jesus believed himself to be Israel's messiah of the end-time. When the consummation did not arrive as expected, he embraced death in order that the *parousia* might be forcibly brought to pass.

Jesus came to call Israel back to the mission of being a light to the Gentile nations. Before the Son of Man would come and receive a kingdom for his reign on earth Israel was to repent. Israel did not repent so Jesus proclaimed his mission as that of the suffering servant of the Lord whose death would be followed by the coming of the Kingdom.²⁰

The wheel rolls onward and the mangled body of the one immeasurable great Man who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to his purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory that is His reign.²¹

Because the kingdom did not come as Jesus expected, he was compelled to suffer and die.

The implications of this view are many, but let me list three—two which I regard negatively, and one positively:

- The ethical teachings of Jesus were designed only for a brief interim period between his ministry and the imminent *parousia* (cf. Scofield—who came to the same conclusions but with a completely different premise that was based on Seven Age Dispensationalism, discussed below).
- The death of Christ did not bring in the Kingdom. Therefore, the proclamation of the Kingdom was replaced by the teaching of the church. (Jesus chose his disciples, however, to inaugurate the kingdom. They were not chosen to found the Church).
- The eschatological teachings of Jesus must have a central place in the interpretation of the New Testament. This is why the school received the name it did—Thoroughgoing Eschatology. The eschatology is through out the New Testament; that is, it is thoroughgoing. *This is the contribution the school made.* From this time forward, eschatology becomes a central New Testament doctrine that must be addressed in any doctrinal study.

b. Realized Eschatology

This view was developed by C.H. Dodd. See also, T.F. Glasson.

The fulfillment of the last things came in the ministry and the passion and triumph of Jesus. Jesus is himself the fulfillment of the hope of the people of God, the “amen” to all of God’s promises, cf. Jer. 28:6.

The second coming of Christ was Pentecost. For the individual it occurs at the time of one’s death. In other words, there is no future cosmic agenda in theology.

²⁰ Schweitzer, 368.

²¹ Schweitzer, 369.

Jesus did not merely proclaim the coming of the Kingdom but announced that it was already here. Cf. Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20; Mark 1:15, Matt. 4:17; Luke 10:9–10. *John the Baptist marks the dividing line.* Before John, it was “the law and the prophets”; after him it was “the Kingdom of God.” Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22; Mark 9:1.

This view did restore some balance to the theological scene.

The central emphasis of realized eschatology is that the kingdom is here. Jesus is “first and last.” He is the fulfillment of hope.

c. Inaugurated Eschatology²²

This view holds that Jesus saw the Kingdom as connected with his ministry, but not as being fully revealed and operative until subsequent vindications were to bring it about. Therefore:

- The kingdom is *present*, Luke 11:20; Matt. 12:28.
- The kingdom is *future*, Luke 11:2; Mark 9:1; 13:26.

Now here is where the believer’s church makes its contribution. This will be the major mark that differentiates many Evangelicals from those of our believer’s church tradition.

Where is the kingdom to be located; where will you look to see the kingdom? The answer is in 1 Cor. 10:11, and has two dimensions:

- The Kingdom is *present* (Luke 11:20; Matt. 12:28).
- The Kingdom is *future* (Luke 11:2, Mark 9:1; 11:26).

So the Kingdom will be consummated in the future, but it is also in the present. On that sorry church of Corinth, the end of the ages had come!

Here is where the believers’ church differs from many evangelicals who tend to spiritualize and speak of the kingdom “within the heart.” The believers’ church tradition points to the *church* as the location of the inaugurated kingdom. The kingdom was inaugurated at Pentecost and is now located in the church that was empowered at Pentecost. Therefore the church is a foretaste of the future Kingdom; it is to mirror God’s intentions for the world; it is *now* what the world someday *will be*—obedient to the Lord. This is the basis for the believers’ church understanding of the newness of life through baptism (Rom 6:1–10) and the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:23–26). History and the future are inseparable from the church of the present.

2. Dispensationalism

a. Two Age Dispensationalism

This refers to the two ages and the two covenants—present and future—found in Matt. 12:32, Gal. 1:4; Heb. 6:5 (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12 and 1 John 2:28–3:3).

b. Seven Age Dispensationalism.

This refers to an elaborate system of seven ages and eight covenants, that developed under the auspices of John N. Darby’s (1800–1882), Plymouth Brethren. A Christian religious body, it was so named because it first centered in Plymouth, England.

The teaching combines elements from Calvinism, Pietism, and millennialism. Thoroughgoing eschatology was also part of dispensational teaching, but perhaps only unconsciously.

1) Teachings

- There are seven periods of time. The passages in the Scripture that are appropriate to each period must be determined by rightly dividing the word of truth. Also it is to be

²²Fuller, *passim*. Also, Werner Gerog Kummel.

remembered that the church period is not a period but rather a parenthesis between the 69th and 70th “week” of Daniel and that even the Old Testament prophets did not see the Christ event.

- There are two tracks of salvation—one for Israel (law) and another for the Church (grace) in the New Testament.
- If Israel had accepted Christ the millennium would have come and Jesus would not have had to die.
- The next item on the agenda is the dawning of the millennial age (see “Programmed, or Dispensational Pre-Millennialism” on p. 37), and the first act of the kingdom in that dispensation is the “rapture.” 1 Thess. 4:16–17.

2) History

The teaching was systematized in the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909 and revised in 1917, 1963, and again recently.

This teaching is an integral part of Dallas Theological Seminary founded by C.I. Scofield. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the school’s first president, has an eight-volume theology. C. F. Lincoln’s “Biographical Sketch” in Systematic theology, Volume 8 has this to say, “Lewis Sperry Chafer claimed that not having had academic training in theology he was free to interpret the Scripture with unclouded objectivity.” Is there a touch of obscurantism there?

- a) Teachings of the Scofield Bible. The seven dispensations are innocence, The garden of Eden; conscience, Gen. 3:23; Human government (Gen. 8:21); Promise (Gen. 12:1); Law (Ex. 19:8); Grace (John 1:17); and the kingdom (Eph. 1:10). The covenants are Edenic, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New. A dispensation is “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God”²³
- b) Some implications of Scofield’s theology
 - Christ’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s prayer proclaim righteousness on legal grounds; therefore they are a part of the Jewish dispensation of the law, rather than of a doctrine of grace which characterized the church age or dispensation of grace. Therefore these passages do not apply to the Christian (cf., Schweitzer’s view).
 - The church age is a historical parenthesis not seen by any prophecy (See Figure 5). Based on the 70 weeks of prophecy of Dan. 9, the 70 weeks are interpreted as meaning 490 years. 483 of these years are thought to refer precisely to the period from the rebuilding of Jerusalem recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah to the time of Christ. Then there was a startling interpretation. The 69 weeks are not immediately followed by the 70th week. This leaves a host of prophecies yet to be fulfilled when the 70th week comes and these fulfillments will be in the a seven year period which is before the final period that Christ sets up the millennial kingdom.

²³ C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 5.

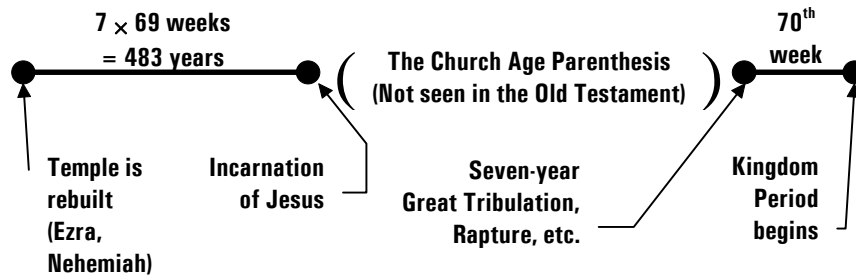


Figure 5. The seventieth week of Daniel, as envisioned by the Seven-Age Dispensationalists, precedes a millennial kingdom age. Advocates vary on whether the “secret rapture” is to occur at the beginning, middle, or end of the seventieth week.

- The events that take place during the seven year period will include the appearance of an united apostate church, and a corresponding emergence of a political leader known as the Beast spoken of in Revelation who will reunite the 10 nations that have grown out of the Roman Empire (the 10 toes of Daniel).
- The Jews in unbelief return to Palestine, and then the conversion of some will take place. A 3 ½ year tribulation follows; and then personal return of Christ with all his saints forming an army that will engage and defeat the combined forces of the Gentiles in a place in the Near East known as Armageddon.
- With Christ victory the millennial reign at Jerusalem will commence. The long postponed seven years allowed a time for the literal fulfillment of prophecies that dealt with the restored nation of the Jews.

According to this view, the living saints of the church would at the outset be rescued from the turmoil of the seven years by a secret rapture by which they would be taken out of the world to meet Christ in the air.

c) An evaluation.

Bernard Ramm states, “The sharp division of the church and Israel, each going its own unique course though history into eternity is a remarkable piece of theological heresy.”²⁴ A similar view was held by B. W. Newton, a Plymouth Brethren who disputed Darby’s conclusions.²⁵

D. The Final Consummation

I will deal with four doctrines in this discussion—the ultimate coming; general resurrection, the last judgment, and eternal destinies. Remember to view these in their corporate context; it is unlikely that any first century person would have perceived himself or herself to be autonomous from a social network.

1. The Ultimate Coming

a. Biblical materials

Terms:

- *Parousia* means “presence,” 1 Thess. 2:19, “For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?”

²⁴ Bernard Ramm, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, 186.

²⁵ F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1968), 180.

- *Epiphaneis* means “appearing,” 1 Tim. 6:14, “To keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- *Apokalupsis* means “revealing,” 1 Cor. 1:7, “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- *Erchomai* means “coming,” Matt. 24:30, “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky.”
- *Hemera* means day, Matt. 7:22. Key passages: John 14:3; Acts 1:11; Heb. 9:28, “will appear the second time,... to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 5:1–11; 2 Thess. 2:3–8; 1 Cor. 1:4–8.

b. Presuppositions

- 1) The ultimate coming must be related to the first coming. The Christ who comes in the ultimate triumph is the Lamb slain. The two comings are one redemptive act of God. The first coming inaugurates, the second consummates.
That Jesus’ disciples misread the first coming, grasping it only after the resurrection and Pentecost, should cause us to be aware of the danger of misreading the ultimate coming.
- 2) Interpret the final consummation in the light of the goals of creation.
- 3) Jesus being raised, indicates that the end of the world has begun. Rom. 8:29, “firstborn”; 1 Cor. 15:20, “first fruits”; 1 Cor. 10:11, “fulfillment of the ages.”

c. The Millennium Stalemate

- *mille* = Latin for 1000.
- *chilia* = Greek for 1000.

If the importance of belief in a 1000 year reign of Christ upon the earth were measured by the space it occupies in the Bible (Rev. 20:2–7), it would be a footnote to the discussion on the Kingdom of God.

There are four traditional views:

- 1) *Historical pre-millennialism.*

This view is expressed by George Ladd in his *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*, and *The Blessed Hope*. It was also the understanding of Justin Martyr, Papias of Heirapolis, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Tertullian in the Patristic Period.

In historical pre-millennialism, rapture and the ultimate coming are together—the saints are gathered to meet Christ in the air (1 Thess. 4:16) and the saints return with Christ to earth. This is the “Saint U-turn” interpretation. The millennium is the validation of the goals of creation and the re-creation of Christ. The symbols do not have to be quantified. Embodiment is essential. It teaches that an embodiment of God’s promises are essential, but the symbols do not need to be quantified; that literalization of symbols can be misleading.

Mark 13:24–27 projects the tribulation followed by the rapture. Cf., 2 Thess. 2:1–12.

- 2) *Programmed or Dispensational Pre-Millennialism.*

This view holds that, midway in Christ’s ministry, Jesus postponed the Kingdom until the millennium. Israel and the church are sharply distinguished, the Jews returning to Palestine as a sign. There will be a pre-tribulational rapture of the saints, who are called to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16). Christ then returns to heaven, accompanied by the saints, so this is called the “Christ U-turn” interpretation. This view is articulated by J. N. Darby and popularized in the *Scofield Bible*.

Note that the early Christians would never expect that they would be removed from tribulation, Matt. 24:26–31, 2 Thess. 2:1–12.

3) *Post-millennialism.*

The ultimate coming follows the millennium. The Song “Rise up oh men of God” stresses this view. Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Hodges, B.H. Carrol, and W.T. Conner held this view.

The thesis of post-millennialism is that the kingdom would be brought in by evangelism. Advocates commonly make the pope the great harlot of Rev. 18. This view has not had much support since World War II, but is coming back in Reconstructionism.

4) *A-millennialism.*

This view denies any distinct, future earthly utopia. Millennium to be understood spiritually as the present reign of Christ.

With the conversion of Constantine, a-millennialism began to dominate and historical pre-millennium declined. The elevation of the suffering church to official recognition and its leaders to the robes and perquisites of royalty gave birth to the rise that the millennium had arrived.

Augustine²⁶ and many of the Reformed leaders held this view.²⁷ But note that the early Augustine agreed with the Epistle of Barnabas; it changed when he wrote the *City of God*.

Most writing Baptist theologians share this approach.

d. Conclusion

Because of my holding that the promises of God need be embodied but that symbols should not be concretized, it should not be difficult for the student to determine which of the four views give me the greatest comfort. None of the views are completely adequate, but I lean toward the historical pre-millennial view.

2. General Resurrection

Scriptures: 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:12–58; Matt. 22:23–33; Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:21; John 5:28–29; 6:39–40, 44, 54; 11:24; Luke 14:14.

a. Meaning of the Resurrection of the Body

The resurrection of the body means continuity of personal existence on an eternal plane. This is to be contrasted with the Greek idea of a disembodied soul.

As regards the nature of the resurrection of the body, Paul’s sole point is to stress that, for all the identity of a person, there is also a radical discontinuity. “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies, but God gives it a body which he has chosen.” 1 Cor. 15:36–38.

So, in the transition to the after-life, there is both continuity and discontinuity. The physical body is perishable and mortal, but the perishable puts on immortality. What the seed of planted wheat is to the head of ripened wheat is the biblical analogy of the life to come, 1 Cor 15:42. The seed withers and dies and a full head of wheat eventually emerges. The degree of continuity between this life and the life to come is unknown (e.g., the ages of the saints in heaven, etc.), but “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Cor. 15:50.

When Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17, Luke 9:28–36, Mark 9:2–13), they were recognizable. Their being recognized speaks to some degree of continuity.

²⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XX–XXII.

²⁷ Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope*.

b. Basis for the Resurrection of the Body

- 1) *The Resurrected Christ*, 1 Cor. 15:1–58. The resurrection of Jesus as a central point of faith is also fundamental in the consideration of our resurrection.

Jesus is the first born of the dead, Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5, cf. Rom. 8:29.

Just as the resurrection of Christ was not simply restoration to life but exaltation to victory, so it is with the resurrection of those that are in him. The purpose of their “coming to life again” is that they may reign with Christ, Rev. 20:4.

The resurrection of Christians and the *parousia* of Christ are essentially one. The trumpet that marks one (1 Cor. 15:52) marks the other (Matt 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16). And it is the trumpet of the victory of God in Christ, the purpose of whose death and resurrection was that “whether we wake or sleep, we might live with him.” (1 Thess. 5:10) or the more resounding phrase of Rom. 5:17, “reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” (Can the trumpet be found in the Old Testament? Consider Lev. 25:9).

- 2) *The Indwelling Christ*, Eph. 4:30. “Do not grieve... sealed to day of redemption.” Life in Christ is eternal. Rom. 6:11 gives a foretaste; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:16.

c. Importance of the Resurrection

- 1) God’s love breaks through the boundaries of death—it is not just for a moment. Cf. the Hymn of *Agape*, Rom. 8
- 2) The relationships of life continue.

History is real. What is done in this life has consequences. How we treat our bodies is important and in some degree will have lasting effects. How we deal with our problems is important. My unsolved problems on earth must be dealt with; I will either have the courage to deal with them now, or I will face them later. “If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment,” 1 Cor. 11:31, a verse that is in the context of the Lords’ supper. One of the purposes of our pilgrimage is to know ourselves so we may be shaped like Christ. One will enter into heaven with the level of maturity that he or she possesses at death, and the maturing process will continue beyond death. *This is the purpose of the Christian Life*. We are to live life so that the transition to heaven will be as small as possible.

Work on it now.

3. The Last Judgment

If the theme of judgment were not even mentioned, we would have to invent it ourselves because we are creatures with freedom and responsibility. As one wag put it, Christianity isn’t important unless “somebody around here gets dammed.” Or as T.S. Elliot put it, if we eliminate the doctrine of final judgment we convert God into Santa Clause.

Without judgment and discrimination, good is indistinguishable from evil and all human decisions are without consequences. “Everybody shall get toys and be glad.”

a. Based on the Nature of God

The justice of God will be discussed in the Patristic Story.

A Judge in the biblical world is not primarily one who rewards and punishes, but one who creates and restores order.

b. Judgment Begins Now

- 1) Judgment is always taking place. Both death and the last judgment must be looked on as a process.

- 2) The wicked are already under condemnation, John 3:18, 36. This is best viewed as an existing state of affairs fully and ultimately revealed, rather than an act of conviction and sentencing.
- 3) Must Christians face judgment? Unambiguously, yes! We face it in this life when we abuse the freedom granted by God and we will face judgment in days to come.

c. Purpose of Judgment

The purpose of judgment is

- 1) to bring to light each person's character,
- 2) to finally manifest eternal destinies, and
- 3) to let justice reign.

d. Seriousness of Judgment

- 1) No one deceives God, Gal 6:7.
- 2) Nothing escapes or remains hidden, Rev. 20:12.

e. Criteria of Judgment

- 1) *God's ultimate judgment is based on Jesus Christ.*

Ultimate judgment has appeared in history in the person of Christ. Christ is God's basis for deciding what is good and fulfilling for his creatures.

- 2) *God's ultimate judgment makes history real.*

Our decisions are made in time and space and affect God and eternity. We are responsible for our decisions.

- 3) *God himself is the ultimate judge.*

Why do the innocent suffer? Why do the ungodly go unpunished or prosper? Did not some of the judgments of the earthly Christ surprise his disciples? Yes. So the possibility exists that some of God's decisions in the ultimate judgment may not fit our idea of justice.

4. Eternal Destinies.

Genuine freedom requires the dual possibility of heaven and hell. This is seen in the "sheep and goat" judgment of Matt. 25:34, 41. Heaven and hell obtain their true meaning only after that judgment has taken place.

a. Hell

- 1) There are several biblical expressions translated "hell."
 - a) *Sheol* is a picture of "a land of gloom and deep shadow," Job 10:21, or "like the slain who lie in a grave, whom you do not remember any more, who are cut off from your care," Ps. 88:5. Cf., Ps. 88:10–12, "Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?"
 The idea is that of the unseen state, i.e. a place where persons are not able to function as they do in the substantial world, so it is an *insubstantial* state. There are no tangible fulfillments; people are always seeking, but never finding.
 - Could hell mean that unbelieving, idolatrous persons express all selfish desires but do not have a tangible way to find fulfillment?
 - Could hell mean the unbelieving, idolatrous person's desires of for self-gratification will never be filled?
 - b) *Gehenna*, Matt. 5:22.

This is the smoldering valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem. It was once the site of child sacrifice. In New Testament times the garbage of Jerusalem was dumped in this valley and a smoldering fire was kept burning.

- Could hell mean the loss of fellowship with God? That a relationship with God was counted as worthless and was cast away?
- Could hell mean the casting off of the glorious destiny God designed for humans and counting that destiny as worthless?

Fire is the symbol for destruction, so hell is “loss.”

c) *Outer darkness*, Matt. 22:13.

Darkness is the opposite of light. Scripture often uses light as a metaphor for salvation, and darkness as a metaphor for lostness. Cf. John 13:30.

The picture that hell is a group of organized rebels joined in camaraderie against God is a distortion. There is no fellowship among the residents of hell, because the center of each self is thinking only of itself.

- Could hell mean isolation and loneliness? That is, living a life of darkness?
- Could hell mean rejection of everything redemptive and whole because of a life in darkness?

2) Human freedom and decision making.

It is a fact that people do reject God; they do it repeatedly and frequently. God lets go in order that humans may do as they choose—see the tri-fold “God gave them over” in Rom. 1:24; 26; 28. Do we read this, “God gave them up?”

There is a correlation between the unpardonable sin and the persistence of sin into eternity. If every person will ultimately be saved anyway, then is a person really free? Cf., Matt. 12:32.

3) Hell and the presence of God.

Sinners don’t want to be in the presence of God (Rev 6:16). For them, being in the presence of God is hell, and God (not Satan) is the warden of hell. God is in hell (Ps. 139:8).

Hell means being cut off from God, or more accurately, cutting oneself off from the redemptive purposes of God. Hell, therefore, can begin in this life. A person’s concern for self can become so obsessive that the self is all that matters—unbelief and idolatry. Sin places God outside the life, and the self-centeredness dominates.

Hell exists because God confirms mankind’s decision—but so does heaven for the same reason. C.S. Lewis said that there were only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “your will be done.”²⁸

b. Heaven

“Behold I make all things new,” Rev. 21:5.

Heaven represents, above all, the full consummation of the personal relationship to God which gives the Christian life its meaning—when the concern for self is fulfilled through a life that flows out to God and to others.

In this sense, heaven is for sinners and hell for the “good” people. That is, salvation is for people who know their need and seek God, and hell is for the satisfied.

²⁸ Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 72.

- 1) Biblical images of heaven—*presence, protection, provision.*
 - a) *The absent tabernacle.*

The tabernacle means the presence of God. No tabernacle in the New Jerusalem means that God dwells intimately with his people, Rev. 21:1–4. That there is no sea means that there is no separation. Separation is the basis of “holy,” and is a frequent device in the creation (the firmament separates sea, the Sabbath separates the week, etc.). So there is no more separation from God.
 - b) *The open gates.*

The protection of God is sufficient; one does not need walls and closed gates for protection. The gates in the New Jerusalem never close, Rev 21:9–25.
 - c) *The plentiful garden.*

The provision of God in the garden, Rev. 22.²⁹
- 2) Heaven is a state and place where God accomplished his eternal purposes. The isolation of hell compares with the corporate fellowship in heaven. In heaven, there is a true community of believers, an intimacy with God and fellow believers that is characterized in the creation account as nakedness without shame (Gen. 2:25).

There is an added dimension—heaven is the place of Jesus Christ.

Heaven is the third of the three states of salvation: initial; process; and culmination.

Observation: If, on earth, I have been a reserved person and have guarded my approach to others, how will I behave in heaven? Some speak of running toward God and throwing their arms around Him. It may take me time to approach the presence of God. I will need time to grow and gain perspective, to re-evaluate. I will need time to hurt and grow. Even now when in meditation and prayer, I find I want to withdraw when it becomes too intense.

Summary and Conclusion

1. God Is Ultimate in History

History is not a meaningless succession of events, but has point and purpose and is proceeding toward a goal appointed by God.

Note: during the deadliest and most desperate times, Christians are most convinced that God is in control and human history has a purpose. In persecution, Christians love the book of Revelation.

2. Jesus Christ Was the First and Last Act of God

Jesus is the alpha and omega. The only significant thing that can happen after his incarnation, cross, and resurrection, is the end. God’s agenda has been completed in the cross-resurrection event, 1 Cor. 10:11.

3. Treat Symbols as Symbols

In this section, I have encouraged you to say no more about specific matters than the Biblical materials allow. The concretizing of symbols has lead to terrible misrepresentations of God’s work and His intention for the world.

4. Christianity Has an Eschatological Flavor

There is an ultimate in faith. What we say, how we live have eternal significance.

²⁹ Summers, *passim*.

It is a failure to not relate eschatology to the rest of God's working. Eschatology impacts lives now. Treating this subject last often distorts how the doctrine impacts other doctrines.

5. Creation and the Eschaton

Creation and the Eschaton symbolize the self-limiting and unlimiting of God. Providence, miracles and prayer are best seen in the believer by cooperating with the intentionality of God in achieving his goals and purposes.

6. The Enlightenment's Impact.

The Enlightenment has engendered modern paganism, and running out in Western civilization. But today the dominant opinion within the universities themselves is that the Enlightenment is over. A basic Enlightenment inconsistency is the assumption that authority and reason are opposites. The idea that truth can be known only through reason, observation, and experiment has proven false. Most academics recognize that the sciences, especially those that deal with anything beyond the purely physical, are not objective but operate within interpretive frameworks and traditions. If the Enlightenment rationality has dissipated, then so have the intellectual reasons for the *a priori* exclusion of theologically informed perspectives. That is, there is no reason why academia should not allow room for a theologically informed perspective to compete on equal ground with any other perspective.

a. The Bible Is a Pre-Scientific Book

The Enlightenment spawned many attempts to defend the authority of a pre-scientific Bible in a scientific age. This was the ultimate question that was asked in the beginning of this unit of study. What we have done has been to:

- Reject liberalism—a feeling of absolute dependence. This is a failed attempt to cope.
- Reject obscurantism—a negative fundamentalism which denies modern learning. This is also a failed attempt to cope.
- Emphasize the redemptive story of the Bible.

But remember, we have utilized some Enlightenment tools in Biblical studies, such as critical study and the historical conditioning of doctrine.

b. Some Enlightenment teachings Have Been Rejected

- We have rejected the notion of the truth of reason as autonomous. This has resulted in two wrong practices:
 - Individualization, and
 - a diminished respect for history.

c. Non-Confrontational Treatment

We have treated the thrust of the Enlightenment non-confrontationally. I have attempted to see what the biblical witness was attempting to say, and say it their way—keeping true to biblical culture. There is non-scientific truth. Biblical truth must correspond to the nature of God as perceived in Christ.

THE PATRISTIC STORY

Course overview

Before we begin our fourth story, a moment of review is needed. Each of the stories has been presented for the purpose of embodying theology—that is, so that you will have a context for each doctrine, complete with problems, conflicts, winners, losers, and some who have sacrificed much to uphold an aspect of doctrine that was important to them.

A basic problem I was positing as our study began was explaining how the theologies of some of my compatriots diverged so drastically since the days that we studied together. We were together in the lectures, we took the same examinations, and our theologies have drifted apart. I suggested that the problem was that we had been taught theology on a philosophical model—as a series of ideas that were detached from the history from which they emerged. Ideas were related to ideas. They were presented in an orderly fashion, their relationships were seen and accepted, but the structure that bound them together was not substantial. Later, beyond the seminary, we each encountered other ideas. Some of my classmates, for example, picked up the concept of an authoritative pastor. As such ideas became accepted, a different ordering of doctrines developed.

Now I can't be sure that this thesis is right, but I am avoiding the philosophical model in an effort to help you base your theology within a historical context rather than one built upon a network of ideas. The course has been constructed to *embody* doctrine—that is, to show the cultural milieu from which doctrines were shaped and why they were important in that context. Therefore, I am taking a narrative theological approach.

Our first story was the Anabaptist story. I chose to begin with that story because of my background in counseling. I felt that it was essential to gain self-identity before we could critique other movements or people. Although I am not linearly connected to the Anabaptists, it was their contribution to ecclesiology that gave me my theological identity. They struggled for a regenerate, or believers' church. Also, I am not linearly connected to Martin Luther, yet his defense of faith and his doctrine of "justification by faith" is also mine. Do not mistake believers' baptism and the doctrine of the regenerate church as the sole possession of the Baptists; there are those that can hold to a believers' church and not to believers' baptism, such as the Pentecostals. And how about Quakers? Other evangelical groups fall into this area also. The understanding of believers' church which the Anabaptists gave us has richly enhanced us; it helped us know who we are. For me, it is my self-identity—the believers' church, i.e. what I believe needs to be evidenced in the way we do church.

The second story was the Baptist story, the story of our own denominational parentage. It is here that we have a direct, traceable line. The 1644 *London Confession of Faith* was our first major attempt at a theological statement. Because we hold to the sovereignty of God and the inability of a human to initiate a relationship with God, I have attempted to make “pelagianism” a dirty word for you.

We are *modified* Calvinists—that is, the thoughts of Calvin had been pushed to the right of Calvin and part of our formation was to modify those doctrines back toward the middle. So the TULIP played an important part of our theological heritage. Regarding the death of Christ, we have modified Calvinism to say, “Christ died for all but the benefits of that death only apply to a believer.” Further, we modified Calvinism by saying it is proper to use means to aid people in their relationship with Christ—an understanding that energized Carey and led him to India to help the elect learn of their election. We also modified election from being understood as an arbitrary, anthropocentric choosing of individuals towards a *Christocentric* election of the Son.

The third story was the Enlightenment story, a secular one that impinged on our faith, and we examined the ways that the church responded to that movement. Following the Reformation, a methodology of study had saturated the Western world. Science became looked upon as a savior, and “objective truth” became a goal that could only be tested in the laboratory. From my perspective, this was an essential development, and purged the church of such pre-Reformation ideas as purgatory and pre-scientific cosmology. But we of the Christian faith also had to face a new challenge: How can we have a pre-scientific book to be our authority in a scientific world?

Five major doctrines took the blunt of the Enlightenment attack—Creation, Providence, Miracles, Prayer, and Eschatology. I have attempted to shape these doctrines as a response to the Enlightenment, and in so doing I have attempted to share my conviction that the purposes of these doctrines are primary redemptive—they are not given for the *hows*, but for the *whys* of life. I want you to see that the creation story, being written after the exodus event, was not meant to be a scientific account but a witness of faith. I wanted you to understand providence, miracles, prayer, and eschatology *redemptively* and within the scope of an *open* universe—one that allows room for God to accomplish his goals and to give us the assurance that his goals will be achieved. I wanted you to see science as our compatriot but not our master, and to see how that one may be an effective witness to a scientific world by pointing out the many things of immense importance that science cannot answer. I wanted you to see the hopelessness of being an obscurantist, denying the legitimate claims and benefits of science.

I now come to the fourth story—the Patristic story—and want to say just a word about my intentions. Having begun with a study of doctrines that deal with our self-identity, we are now going to move toward other doctrines that

affirm the broader Christian community. We will deal with the doctrines that are commonly held and accepted by the vast number of believers and in nearly every denomination. They show the many points commonality we share with Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox—basically with all groups which lay claim to the term “Christian.” (But please allow for the exceptions. There are heretical groups that claim Christianity, but I am not speaking of those movements.)

The Patristic Story then is to tell us of the doctrines that we hold in common—the beliefs concerning the nature of God, the person of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the Trinity. Though we hold these beliefs in common does not mean that there is a unilateral interpretation of the doctrines.

Introduction

The Patristic period and Patristic theology embrace the study of the formation of Christian thought during the age of those who are called the Church Fathers, c. AD 100 to 400. These range from Augustine in the West to John of Damascus (in the 700s) in the East. During the Patristic age the doctrines of authority (that is, the formation of the canon), the person of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity were especially controversial and reached somewhat specific formation, usually by conciliar action.

It should be noted that the non-reformed churches regard the Patristic period as continuing up to the Reformation. But there were four ecumenical councils—Nicea in 325, Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451—that are recognized by all Christian groups. It is with these four councils that I shall mainly deal in this presentation. Of the four councils, most attention (only because of time) will be given to Nicea.

Two further notes.

- The *nature of God* never had special conciliar attention given to it, yet it undergirds almost all the theological discussions of this period.
- I am approaching this period in a way that, to my knowledge, is unusual if not unique. I think it is best to understand the Patristic Story as a *missionary story*. It deals with taking the gospel from Hebrew soil and culture and crossing over to Greek soil and culture. What does that do to the gospel? What are the dangers of taking words and concepts and placing them in another culture? Every missionary faces that problem. Can an American understanding of the gospel be transported to Nigeria and then be understood appropriately, or is there the need to work through the Nigeria culture and express the beliefs in their terms and their culture. Missionaries have always said the latter.

1. Overview of the Patristic Period

To help you understand the patristic era as a *missionary* story, I would like to begin with an overview of just a few of the differences between the two cultures that found themselves in conflict. We have already talked about some of these, and I will expand on others in this section.

The Early Church View

Hebrew emphasis

Holistic Anthropology

Simplicity

Inclusiveness

The illegal, underground church

God is known through relationship

The Constantinian View

Greek emphasis

Dichotomy, Trichotomy

Elaborateness

Exclusiveness

The favored church

God is known by his attributes

a. Moving from Jewish to Greek Perspectives

There was a movement from historical events where there were the manifestations of God were observed by a prepared prophet who shared their meaning—our doctrine of revelation—to the philosophical categories of Plato and Aristotle and others. The witness that is given in the New Testament to Jesus as the Christ and Lord and Savior and what we will see at Nicea with the term *homoousia* are worlds apart.

Bainton says:

The Christians in their encounter with the pagan world despoiled the Egyptians. Just as the Israelites, when they escaped from Egypt carried off some of the gods of their oppressors, so the Christians utilized the ideas and intellectual methods of their opponents in fashioning their replies.¹

But how will those appropriations reflect on the nature of the gospel? We have already considered the differences in anthropology—that the Hebrews understood “soul” to mean the total person in a tension-filled unity, but the Greek view regarded the soul as an inner essence that had been put into a sinful body.

b. Moving from Simplicity to Elaborateness

This movement can be seen both in the organizational structure of the church and in theology itself. If you could compare the New Testament church at Corinth with the sees of Constantinople or Alexandria, you would be struck by the change. Perhaps Romans 16, where we have several house churches, is the place to see the contrast most clearly.

¹ González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 1:14.

When one moves from one culture to another, it is easier to transmit the legalism and the trappings of the religion than the essence and the core of the faith. The trivial and the ephemeral receive the emphasis because they can be most easily propagated and understood.

This can be seen by comparing the New Testament idea of a servant to the view in the concluding days of the Patristic period, where the bishop served a church wearing a crown. Does that reflect a change? It is a change of great magnitude.

c. Moving from Inclusiveness to Exclusiveness

A reading of Acts 15 deals with an early ecumenical council. The purpose of the council was to deal with the Judaizers who wanted Jewish customs to be a part of the Christian gospel. The council concluded by saying “abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication” (v. 29). I really don’t believe that is exactly what Paul wanted—he will later say that it really doesn’t matter whether meat had been offered to idols; eat and don’t ask questions (1 Cor. 8:8). He was willing to accept a compromise because they were attempting to be inclusive. (Is this a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy?)

Let me add only one more—in my Patristic Theology course I deal with several other movements as well.

d Moving from Illegal to Favored Status

The church had begun as a persecuted body, struggling to adapt itself to an environment that was hostile and also fighting such foes as Judaism, and later Gnosticism, and later a host of other challenges. With the succession of Constantine and the 313 Milvian Bridge experience, and later his ascension to the throne of the Roman Empire, the situation radically changed. Except for the interlude when Julian was emperor (361–363), the church was to enjoy the often embarrassing favor of the state.

These are some of the changes that took place in this movement:

- Christian leaders began to mimic state leaders.
- Leadership now required organizational skills more than spiritual gifting.
- External signs of membership become magnified.

After Chalcedon the curtain began to fall on the church’s first doctrinally creative period. By the end of the sixth century in the West, the reign of formalism and scholasticism were well under way. Doctrinally, creativity would not break out again until the Reformation.

2. Periods in the Patristic Era

a. The Apostolic Fathers

This is a reference to the early Christian writers who immediately succeeded the apostles and whose period of activity extended over the years of approximately AD 90–140, and perhaps somewhat later. These writers were providing occasional theological essays that mainly responded to contemporary needs. Do not look for any systematic theology in their writings—but do recognize that they provide a connecting link with the Apostles and furnish a starting point for the history of doctrine.

Among these writings are those of Ignasius, Polycarp, Papias, the Book of *Second Clement*, the *Didache*, and some others that give us insights into the religious thought at the time. Barnabus, written from Alexandria in about 130, was considered quasi-canonical, as was *Second Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. These works had great receptivity among some of the churches.

b.. The Apologists

The Apologists wrote between AD 130 and 170. These writers included Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Athenagoras. As you would expect from apologists, they used *Greek thought* to battle those in *Greek culture*. Subtle changes in the interpretation of the gospel began to appear among these writers. All knowledge was said to originate in the *Logos*. God was spoken of and described in negative terms, that is, God is *not* this or *not* that. They were addressing the outside world—something that had not been done before. This had not been done by Paul, nor had it been done by the Apostolic fathers. It was both a great and a dangerous effort.

c. The Old Catholic Period

The interval between AD 170 and 325 is called “Catholic” in the sense that means “universal.” I have some of my beliefs stemming from this period and, in a sense, I am *catholic*—but that does not mean that I am *Roman Catholic*. The Roman church as I understand it developed in the 600s. We shall look at the doctrinal teaching primary from the Nicea conference of AD 325.

3. Constantinian Christianity

a. The Theological Turmoil

Many things happened through the Patristic era that made Constantinian Christianity possible. Bishops were over geographical areas and they had authority over other churches. There were two presbyters in Alexandria, presbyter now being used in the catholic sense of hierarchy, that office being under the bishop. In many ways these two men were rivals. The bishop of Alexandria was a man with a name similar to that of the city— Alexandria.

One of the presbyters, Arius, was holding forth some doctrines that, by AD 317, started to cause concern in the churches.

Arius was described as “tall and thin, a learned man, a clever logician or austere appearance and serious bearing, and yet of very fascinating manners; at the same time proud, ambitious, insincere and cunning.”²

1) The Theology of Arius

Arius’ theology included three aspects that concern us:

- a) The absolute sovereignty and unity of God. In Greek thought of Arius and his colleagues could only abide the process of one giving his essence to another as one of division. God, once divided, would therefore no longer be perfect, and the result would be more than one God.
- b) Jesus Christ is the Word or *Logos* of God. The word was created by God and therefore cannot be one with God. The Scripture calls Jesus the “firstborn,” and therefore (Greek thought again) there had to have been a time when the Word was not.
- c) Jesus Christ is therefore a creature—but before all and above all other creations of God.

In 321 Arius was deposed from his office of presbyter of Alexandria. His opponent was Athanasius, a fellow presbyter, and these rivals were to meet again and again as the controversy developed.

2) The Theology of Athanasius

Athanasius’ strength was not as a systematic theologian but rather as one who had a tenacious grip on two or three vital theological insights. He also had a logical skill that enabled him to sort out the ambiguities, evasions, and deviations in the positions of his opponents which would obscure or vitiate his primary tenets of faith.

Athanasius’ thought would have these foci:

- a) Salvation is from God. To say that Jesus Christ is our redemption is to say that Jesus Christ is God himself.
- b) The nature of God is redemptive. Arians were thinking of God as a remote being who can have no emotions.
- c) Humans are capable of receiving the gift of immortality from the hand of God. Humans are not immortal by nature but are destined for immortality. Salvation is primarily the restoration of our destiny which was lost through misdeeds.

² Hefele, 242.

Given these three foci, it is not too difficult to see how the main lines of Athanasius' theology worked itself out.

b. The Political Turmoil

Upon the death of Constantius in 306, Constantine was proclaimed Emperor and became ruler of the empire in 312. Yet, afterward, he had to defeat his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge.

According to two Christian chroniclers who knew Constantine, on the eve of the battle he had a revelation. One of the sources, Lactantius, says that it was in a dream that Constantine received the command to place a Christian symbol on the shields of his soldiers. The other chronicler, Eusebius, says that the vision appeared in the sky, with the words, "in this you shall conquer." In any case, the fact remains that Constantine ordered that his soldiers should use on their shield and on their standard or labarum a symbol that looked like the superimposition of the Greek letters chi and rho. Since these are the first two letters of the name, "Christ," this labarum could well have been a Christian symbol. Although eventually Christians saw in this the great moment of Constantine's conversion, historians point out that even after this event Constantine continued worshipping the Unconquered Sun. In truth, Constantine's conversion was a long process...³

Shortly after that victory, toleration and imperial favor were given to Christians. Please note that Christianity did not become the state religion at that time—this was not to happen until 380 with Theodosius I. But the rise of Constantine it is still regarded as the beginning of what we call Constantinian Christianity, a Christianity that mixes political aspirations with religious aspirations, the gospel coming out the loser. Christianity became a mark of citizenship, and the church served the state rather than its Lord.

Constantine's domestic policy was to knit the Christian Church with the secular state as closely as possible. He made this decision before he made his personal confession of faith. Therefore, since Constantine became involved in the internal affairs of the church, a situation developed that the church received direction from someone who had never made a profession of faith!

In 313 the Donatist schismatics in Africa appealed to Constantine to settle their controversy. He heard the case in 316 and decided against the Donatists.

To cement the Empire he need a united Christianity. So an ecumenical conference was called for 325 in Nicea, not far from Constantinople. The emperor presided over this council, though unbaptized, and this foreshadows the Byzantine theory of the emperor as supreme ruler of the Church and the State alike. (Constantine was not actually baptized until just before his death,

³ González, *The Story of Christianity*, 1:107.

but deferment of baptism was common in those days. Those of us with a commitment to a believers' church look at this practice with concern.)

Now it is also important to credit Constantine—he did humanize the law of debt and criminal law, he mitigated the conditions of slavery, and he made grants to support poor children. Criticism of Constantine must be balanced. He was a humane leader in his time.

c. The Calling of the Council

The council was called by the Emperor to establish harmony throughout his domain. It began on May 20, 325, and continued to meet until July 25 of that year. More than 300 bishops were in attendance and, for many of them, persecution was still a living memory. This great assembly, gathered under the imperial cloak and to which all who came had use of the Imperial court, was viewed as a true miracle of God. This factor needs to be felt in the discussion which follows, as it accounts for the tremendous influence that Constantine had in the course of the proceedings.

Only six of these 300 bishops were from the West, but the significance of these six, especially Hosius of Cordovia, was large. There were a small pro-Arian group and a small orthodox group, but most attending were uncommitted.

d. The Diphthong Difference

Three similar-sounding compound Greek nouns were featured in much of the debate. The nouns attempted to express the relationship between God and Son:

- *heter ousia*: Arius “Other nature”
- *homo ousia*: Athanasius “Same nature”
- *homoi ousia*: Eusebius “Similar nature”

It was Athanasius against the world. He prevailed out of his sheer persistence, but the matter was not fully settled for decades. Is any theological question ever fixed politically? *No!* In politics, compromise may be the way out of every kind of difficulty; but this is not the way one does theology. Please remember two things:

- God is his own best evangelist, and
- the arm of government corrupts the nature of the church.

e. The Aftermath

From Nicea, Constantine banished Arius and his followers to an exile. But Athanasius' victory was short lived. It wasn't long before there was a slow trickle of Arians returning to key positions in the Roman Empire. Years later,

Constantine banished Athanasius and invited Arian supporter Eusebius of Nicomedia back into favor. This change was not due to theological factors, but political ones. Eusebius had showed a willingness to compromise, and compromise is a concept politicians like. Athanasius' uncompromising stance was deemed harmful to Constantine's kingdom.

Because Constantine wanted to use the church as a binding force in the Empire, he was anxious to rid himself of anyone who upset the consensus. When Constantine banished Arius, he set a risky precedent that politics determines theology. When theological argument failed, and even before making use of such arguments, one could always make use of the resources of politics and have one's enemy banished.

There were two fundamental reasons why Athanasius abhorred Arianism:

- It approached polytheism, and
- it implied that salvation comes from a creature.

The thought of Athanasius stems from a specific soteriological concern. Athanasius reasoned that if Christ were but a creature, he could not save. We were created out of nothing, and in sinning we turned back toward nothingness. What Christ achieved in saving us was to reverse this process, salvation was conceived of as a re-creation. Salvation could not be accomplished by one who was himself a creature. So Athanasius understanding required that Christ be "the same nature" as God.

Athanasius was banished five times, but was clever as a fugitive as this account shows:

Being aware that Athanasius was planning to hide in the desert, the imperial authorities sought to arrest him. According to some biographers of Athanasius, he was a passenger being carried upstream on the Nile when a faster ship was about to overtake him. "Have you seen Athanasius?" shouted some soldiers from the other ship. "Yes," Athanasius answered quite truthfully. "He is just ahead of you, and if you hurry you shall overtake him." Soon the other ship was lost ahead of Athanasius.⁴

4. The Consequences of Constantinian Christianity

- a. Triumphal art scenes vs. servant images of Isaiah and baptism. (Serving is more important than "winning.")
- b. Liturgy reflected the imperial court, full of splendor and pomp.
- c. Parallelism developed between Christ and the Emperor—the Triumphant Christ emerges. Christ is pictured wearing a crown.

⁴ González, *The Story of Christianity*, 1:180.

- d. Mass conversions detracted from depth of conviction and the moral life of the church.
- e. Martyrdom no longer being possible, many gave themselves to a substitute martyrdom—the monastic life. Hundreds flocked to Egyptian desert to become hermits.
- f. Creeds were written for bishops. These replaced the confessions of faith that had been written by and for the local church and which had a local in character.⁵ (The New Testament community was confessional; so was the New Testament, itself).
- g. The Church and the state become one and the nature of the New Testament church had been altered. It wasn't to be rediscovered until 1525 at the hands of the Anabaptists.⁶

Summary of Constantinianism:

- 1) There was a compromising of the demands of the gospel in order for the church to gain worldly power and prestige.
- 2) There was an uncritical “baptizing” of a dominant culture and social order that was in tension with the exigencies of God’s reign, and
- 3) The church was seen as just another form of human social organization with no peculiar moral identity, rather than being a foretaste of the new age and distinct from the larger society.

I. The Person of Christ

Nicea said:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, The Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth. Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.

This relationship of the Son to the Father is set forth in the New Testament but the implications are not clearly spelled out there. The Nicæan implications became clear when the crossing of cultures took place; that which was recorded in the Bible by a culture steeped in the Hebrew way of thinking had to be properly set forth in another culture composed of a people having a non-Hebrew way of thinking. What does “Son” mean, what does “proceed from

⁵ González, *The Story of Christianity*, 1:124ff.

⁶ There were some vanguards of Anabaptism somewhat earlier, but the events of the Anabaptist Story were the ones that have most affected us.

the Father” mean? The need to interpret those concepts and others like them was what caused the theology of Nicea to be written. In other words, the need for the Bible to be interpreted by a non-Hebrew culture caused difficulties that the theologians of the period needed to solve, and we are among the ultimate beneficiaries of that process. The questions that were raised were the right questions, and we need to regard the crossing of cultures as something that helps our understandings—a factor that, to me, suggests that the gospel is somehow enriched each time the gospel is carried to a new culture.

A. The Messianic Prophecy in Jewish Scriptures⁷

1. Introduction

In Acts 17:2–4 we read, “And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying ‘This Jesus whom I proclaiming to you is the Christ.’” *What Scriptures did Paul use to reason with the Jews in the synagogues?*

Again, in Acts 18:4–5, “And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.” *What Scriptures were presented by Paul in attempting to persuade both the Jews and the Greeks?*

What Paul did with the Jewish Scriptures is what I want us to discover. The messianic promises are present in Scripture, but how do we recognize the promises and how do we present the promises to show that Jesus is the Messiah? How would we go about emulating what Paul did?

One other passage is perhaps helpful before we attempt to answer the question. In John 4:25, the Samaritan woman says “I know that the messiah is coming, the one called Christ, when he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” That testimony of the Samaritan woman brings us to the study of the Christ event. The Samaritan woman was of a mixed race and from the intermarriage of non-Jews left behind in Palestine when the rest were of the Jewish population was deported to Babylon as exiles. Her access to the Scripture was limited, not having even all the Jewish Scriptures but only the first five books. She had her own separate worship at Mount Gerizin near Jacob’s well (a temple had stood at Mount Gerizin, but was destroyed about 109 BC under the Maccabean ruler John Hyrcanus). She was a woman and therefore has been excluded from many of the religious practices that many of the men would have had—yet, even so, she had an awareness of the coming Messiah.

⁷ Stagg, 19-30.

Actually, it was *she* who introduces the subject of the coming Messiah, and it was *she* who did so as if the thought needed no explanation. The idea of a Messiah was part of the current cultural coinage, so the idea could crop up normally even in a chance meeting between two strangers. The concept of a Messiah must have been in the air. What is also interesting is the lack of general agreement about who the Messiah was to be and what he would do. How can we account for the multitude of possible interpretations on the identity and the work of the Messiah?

There are two questions that need to be answered—what passages Paul used, and why there were so many varied interpretations of the Messiah's identity. *Why was there so much confusion about the Messiah?*

2. The Nature of Prophecy

The root of the Hebrew term *Messiah* means “anointed.” In the Jewish Scripture it stands for God's anointed one. It is used 39 times in the Jewish Scriptures, 29 of these times for the king of Israel or Judah. In Isaiah 45 it is even applied to Cyrus, the king of Persia who is God's chosen one to be an instrument for at least a time. The term was also applied to the high priest, upon whom certain functions fell (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22, Dan. 9:23–26). It also may refer to the patriarchs as seen in Ps. 105:6, “O offspring of Abraham his servant, sons of Jacob, his chosen one!”, and 1 Chron. 16:22.

The basic idea of the “messiah” is that a person is been ‘anointed’ of Yahweh. The anointing can be used for the preparation of several roles, but as seen from the discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the term had many applications in Jesus' day. What is the way to understand messianic prophecy? There are three approaches have been given.

a. Prophecy as Blueprint

Some will view the prophecies of the Old Testament as blueprints. The view may be similar to the doctrine of predestination. Prophecy is viewed as the determination of God. God states that he will do a certain thing, then history is worked out under the guidance of God. So we are to look at prophecy and see what it says and watch as it unfold as it is accomplished.

The blueprint approach asserts that God's designs are fixed. God determines what is to transpire and, by predestined acts, God cause the plan to work through. So the coming of the Messiah has an Old Testament blueprint that we can see and follow.

But if the blueprint concept is correct, then how do we explain the wide diversity of beliefs concerning the Messiah at the time of Christ's coming? If it is a blueprint within the Old Testament then it should be just the matter of looking at the plans and watching the plan unfold. If it is a blueprint, then we ought to be able to read clearly and trace God's actions to the conclusion.

There should have been no surprise in Jesus' coming, and no confusion as to the who, when, where, and how of his office.

All through the gospels, however, Jesus deals with those who have various concepts about the Messiah—John the Baptist, the Pharisees, the common people, the Samaritan woman. Why are there so many varied concepts?

Here are some of the concepts at the time of Jesus' coming:

- *A messianic deliverer.* You have heard this understanding often mentioned in sermons. A warrior will deliver God's people. In the Jewish war against the Romans in AD 66–73, the people of Jerusalem held out under heavy siege in the confidence that God would intervene and give messianic deliverance. The same faith sustained the group of Jews who held the fortress of Masada, until by mass suicide they avoided capture by the Romans in AD 73. All of these ideas persisted after the Christ event. So these people did not see Scripture fulfilled in Jesus. Did they misread the blueprint? *Or was it that there was no blueprint?*
- *The Essene community.* These people held that two messiahs and a teacher of Righteousness were to come. The Essenes were a priestly community of Jews who had withdrawn from the rest of the world to cultivate their holiness and to await the expected messiahs to come. They expected two Messiahs, one a warrior like David and the other a priestly Messiah like Aaron. The Davidic Messiah was the general in battle, but the priestly Messiah was supreme. Even a teacher of Righteousness would accompany the two Messiahs. The teacher of righteousness was to put all things in their proper order. They understood all of this from their reading of the Jewish Scripture. If there was a blueprint where did they miss it? *Or was it that there was no blueprint?*
- *The pretenders.* Then there were leaders who claimed to be Messiahs, like Simeon bar Cocheba. When Simeon bar Cocheba (son of a Star) was leading the armies of the Jews against the Romans in the war of AD 132, Rabbi Akiba claimed that he was the Messiah, and many of the people accepted this claim. This too was after Jesus. Why the misreading? Is there a blueprint that they didn't see, or couldn't find, *or was there no blueprint?*

Now if prophecy was the reading of a blueprint, then there should not be this kind of disagreement. So I believe that the nature of prophecy must be somewhat different from prophecy as blueprint.

b. Prophecy as Proclamation

Some will say that prophecy is a proclamation and as proclamation it meshes into the historical events of the time. To look for a predictive force in the

prophecy is to place a strain on the nature of prophecy. With this concept prophecy as proclamation might have some predicative element, but it would be of a very secondary matter. The confusion of the New Testament times comes from the fact that people were looking at the proclamations of Jewish Scripture and attempting to read predictions into things which were not there. Prediction is not an interest of Scripture. So the confusion in New Testament times is attempting to see predictions where there was only proclamation.

But don't you feel that there is more to prophecy than just proclamation? Proclamation was there, but the proclamation was tinged with an eschatological flavor. What was central to Jewish Scripture was the promise that God will be the salvation of his people. The focus of interest was the coming of God and his kingdom and this had messianic overtones.

c. Prophecy as Promise and Fulfillment

This is the view that prophecy has a predictive element but must also have an historical context. The word of God has historical moorings but it also may have even a greater consequence beyond the historical event. The danger of our day is that we read predication contained in the passage and miss the historical happening. This can lead to a distortion of Scripture.

Let me illustrate with Isaiah 7. The Christmas season has been shaped by Handel's music and has popularized that interpretation of Isa. 7. But let's look at the passage. I want to see the two elements—historical mooring and the predictive element, and how the two mesh together.

Ahaz, had a bad foreign policy. Rezin was the king of Aram (better known as Syria), and Pekah, son of Remaliah, was King of Israel. These two decided to join forces in a war against Jerusalem. So Syria and Israel were fighting Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Furthermore, Ahaz was seeking Egyptian help—a no-no from the divine perspective.

- v. 2: The Arameans had camped in Ephraim and Judah was terrified.
- v. 3: Isaiah went to meet Ahaz, telling him that he should not go to Egypt. Ahaz's decision, however, had been made.
- v. 10: The LORD tells Ahaz to ask for a sign.
- v. 12: Ahaz gives a pious response. His mind is already made up, so he can be pious.
- v. 14: God's gives a sign: an unmarried girl (a virgin), will get married and have children. By the time it takes for the child to be born, the threat will be over.
- v. 15: As the child grows, he will first be weaned—he "will eat curds and honey." Then he will reach the age of accountability, "when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right."
- v. 16: By that time the two kingdoms will both be destroyed.

Here is the historical situation and the promise of God. There *has been a fulfillment* historically of God's promise, but the promise will have a *greater fulfillment* later in Christmas story where the verse will be used with the birth of Christ.

There are two presuppositions in this approach

- 1) *Historical*: The Word of God had meaning to the people to whom the word was given. The blueprint approach would not have this characteristic. The prophecy as proclamation would discount any predictive element. I do find in God's dealings with me that he gives me his word which first speaks to the present, and then points beyond.
- 2) *Future*: the promises in the word of God may have a grander fulfillment

The first task of biblical studies is to determine what it meant to those to whom the word of God was given. The further responsibility is to go beyond that to the more complete and grander fulfillment. But if one goes immediately to the grander fulfillment there is a subtle implication that history is not real and that God's work with historical people really was unnecessary. It also is to discount the very real value that the Scriptures had to the ancient people, relegating it to the role of sealed predictions lying in wait for modern interpreters to harvest. Rushing to the fulfillment is to misuse the word of God.

Look at 2 Cor. 1:20, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so thorough him the Amen is spoken by us to the glory of God." I understand this to mean that all promises have meaning to those to whom the promises were given, but that the *fuller* meaning, or the *fullest* meaning, is in Jesus Christ.

This was Paul's insight and the way that he presented Jesus as the Christ in the synagogues. There is the historical context and the grander fulfillment. So when Paul reasoned with those in the synagogues, he would have been making this approach. Cf. Gen. 3:15; Gen. 49:10 , etc.

Let me attempt one more illustration: consider our salvation experience. In finding Christ (or, better, Christ finding us), we received the promise of salvation. This is our experience, but that salvation has a greater and a more grand fulfillment than that which we perceived at the time of our conversion, that is, if we understand salvation as past, present, and future. The conversion experience *saved* us, but we *are being* saved, and we *will be* saved. The grander fulfillment is yet to come. There is the experience as a historical reality, and with a fuller realization.

B. The New Testament Community's Witness to Jesus

1. Introduction

I next want to bring this study to the current debate in Christology. The caption above reflects my position. Let me give an brief overview.

There are three ways that one may approach Christology today. They are all present on the current theological scene.

- a) *From above.* This has been the traditional view. One begins with Jesus being in eternal union with God. When sin came into the world, he came down and became incarnate. After his death, he is resurrected and returns to heaven. All this is known beforehand; that is, Jesus did not do this as a reaction to an unexpected fall. We, however, are witnesses to this story as it unfolds. We are invited to stand near the throne of God to see the marvelous plan work itself out. This view emphasizes the divinity of Christ—it has its beginning in deity. Cf. Phil. 2:5–11 the *Kenotic* theory. It tends toward denying Jesus' humanity.
- b) *From below.* This view begins with the humanity of Jesus—the historical Jesus who walked in Galilee. Jesus is God, but is disguised as a man. Peter discovers that Jesus is the Christ at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16). This view struggles with the divinity even as the first view struggled with the humanity. This is the position of Pannenburg and others writing today. It tends toward denying Jesus' divinity.
- c) *From the New Testament community's witness.* This is an alternative view and the one that I feel is most consistent with my other presuppositions. It centers in the fact that the New Testament witnesses to the incarnation had reason to believe that Jesus was both God and man.

We cannot go *over* the witness of the early Christian community—we cannot invade the third heaven. Nor can we go *around* the witness of that community—we can't know about Jesus by consulting extra-biblical sources. We can only go *through* that witness—we must listen to what the disciples or the followers of Jesus said about him. From that witness we can go above or go below, i.e. deal with humanity and divinity. So it is the New Testament witness that we shall look at in the following discussion.

2. The Authority and Person of Jesus⁸

What is new about the message of Jesus is not only its *content*, but that Jesus linked his *message* with his *person*.

⁸ Stagg, 55-64.

At first glance Jesus comes on the scene like a rabbi, or a prophet or teacher of wisdom. But closer examination discovers some characteristic differences between him and these models. The contemporaries of Jesus were obviously aware of the differences. “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority!”, Mark 1:22, 27.

Six times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared “you have heard that it was said to the people long ago ... but I tell you ...”, Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28, 31–32, 33–34, 38–39, and 43–44. Jesus made decisive declarations about murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and love for enemies with this formula. He boldly reinterpreted, corrected, or replaced teachings deeply embedded in religious piety and practice. He did it in his own name, and did it not tentatively but with finality. Matthew’s concluding comment following the Sermon on the Mount is that Jesus “taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (7:29). For their authority, the scribes quoted earlier scribes, confusing the *antiquity* of a saying with its *validity*. Jesus exercised full authority over all previous writers and speakers, assuming a final authority within himself, cf. Mark 11:27f.

In the exercise of authority Jesus is claiming authority proper to God alone. The *authority* question is bound up with the *identity* question. Jesus assumed authority above what was proper to Moses, or the prophets, or his own contemporaries. Only in terms of identity is such authority proper. The use of this authority implies Jesus’ self-understanding of his Lordship.

- *Authority in charging the disciples.* He called the disciples to himself personally, cf. Matt. 4:18–20, 10:37.

He used phrases like “take up the cross,” and “deny oneself.” By denying oneself, Jesus did not mean simply denying *something* to oneself—this is an action that any non-Christian can take. He meant that to follow him, one must reject the self-centered, self-serving approach to life, embracing instead Jesus’ own way of putting God and others first.

As you listen to the demands they say something very significant. *Only God has a right to make such a demand.* For Him we are to be willing to lose all—family, property, and even life itself.

- *Authority over fasting.* In religious practices nothing is more sensitive than tampering with the established structures or rites. Jesus refused to come under the dictates of a religious calendar, finding his authority within his own consciousness rather than in externals.

In early Judaism fasting was required one day a year, and that was on the day of atonement (Lev. 23:26–32). But by the time of Jesus, it was considered a test of piety to fast twice a week (Luke 18:12). It was in asserting his authority over such rites as fasting that Jesus gave his far reaching parable on new wines which call for fresh skins,

Mark 2:22. To put new wine in old and brittle skins invites the loss of both; for as the new wine expands in fermentation, the old and brittle skins are broken and both wine and skins are lost. Jesus refused to limit the new life he offered to the old wineskins of ceremonial religion. He demanded openness to new forms and new structures. He could be comfortable worshipping in the temple and in fasting. However, Jesus never permitted such structures, forms or rites to be an end in themselves. The externals of religion were wineskins to be used or replaced as necessary. Such was bold authority that Jesus found within himself and he freely exercised.

Additional authorities. Jesus claimed authority over the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8), the temple (Matt. 12:6), and sin (Matt. 9:2). The New Testament witness shows that he has authority over the storm (Matt. 8:26), and even had “all authority on heaven and earth” (Matt. 28:18).

- Unlike the rabbis, Jesus does not merely quote authority, but gives fresh interpretations of the Jewish law and goes beyond that law. His message has the authority of his person.
- Unlike the prophets, Jesus does not distinguish his own words from the Word of God. He says simply: “*Amen, amen*, I say to you” (that is “Truly, truly, I say to you”). He evidently understood himself to be the mouth—the voice—of God. This is a claim without parallel in Judaism.

The message of Jesus is the place to begin Christology. The message of Jesus is linked to the person of Jesus. That is the foundational building block.

3. The Ministry and Conduct of Jesus

One of the best attested traits of Jesus’ ministry is that he would eat at the table with sinners and tax collectors; in other words, that he associated with those who at that time were labeled as godless. Persons are “sinners” not because they transgressed the law, but because they did not hold to the Pharisaic interpretation of the law. The Pharisees’ idea of sin, in other words, was connected to a person’s profession, and Jesus associated with members of dishonorable professions (Mark 2:15ff; Matt. 11:19; Luke 15:1ff). In our time the list might include garbage collectors, sanitation workers, and street cleaners. How many of these have we eaten with lately?

Jesus was, therefore, viewed as the companion of sinners and tax collectors, Matt. 11:19. This conduct on the part of Jesus had only an indirect connection with his criticism of society or with social changes. In the East a sharing of the table meant a sharing of life. In Judaism, it meant a communion with one another in the sight of God. Every meal could be an ultimately a prefiguration of the eschatological meal, and of the eschatological communion with God.

The meals Jesus takes with sinners and tax collectors are best seen as eschatological meals, anticipatory celebrations of the banquet of salvation in the final age. When, therefore, Jesus accepts sinners to share this *table* with him, *he is indirectly accepting them into communion with God*.

This behavior of Jesus toward sinners implies an unparalleled Christological claim. Jesus himself voices it indirectly when he is attacked for his behavior toward sinners (Luke 15:2), he narrates the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11ff), which is really a parable of the Father's forgiving love. Jesus identifies his own activity with the action of God toward sinners. *Jesus acts as one who stands in God's place*. In him and through him God's love and mercy become real here and now. It is not a long step from this eating with sinners to what Jesus says in John; "he who has seen me has seen the Father," John 14:9.

4. The Choice and the Calling of the Twelve

The implicit Christology of the earthly Jesus can be seen in yet another way—the choosing and calling of the Twelve.

It can hardly be denied that, as a historical fact, Jesus gathered a band of disciples. In particular, the choice of the Twelve goes back to him. At first glance, Jesus is hereby acting simply as a Jewish rabbi who gathers a group of disciples—but there are significant differences between discipleship under the rabbis and discipleship under Jesus. The difference is already clear from the fact that *one could not ask Jesus to be accepted as a disciple*; Jesus chose with sovereign freedom those whom he desired, Mark 3:13. *He called them* to follow *Him*. Furthermore there is no question, as there was with the rabbis, or a temporary master-disciple relationship that would last until the one-time disciple became a teacher in turn. There is but one teacher, (Matt. 20:24f; 23:8). Therefore the ties binding the disciples of Jesus to their master are more extensive than with the rabbis; they share his journeying, his homelessness, and his dangerous destiny. There is an undivided community life, a sharing of destiny for better or for worse. The decision to follow Jesus means a breaking of all other ties; it means leaving everything (Mark 10:28). Ultimately one risks one's life and even the gallows (Mark 8:34). Such a radical and wholehearted following amounts to a confession of Jesus and this implies a Christology.

5. Jesus' Addressing of God⁹

One of the bedrock aspects of the New Testament is Jesus calling God *Abba*. This has such rich overtones, but intimacy with the Father is clearly implied. Jesus also distinguishes between "*my Father*" (Mark 14:36) and "*your Father*" (Luke 6:36; 12:30, 32). He never includes himself with his disciples by saying "*our Father*." The Lord's Prayer is not evidence to the contrary, because he begins it by saying, "When you pray, say...." There are good reasons for

⁹ Schillebeeckx, *passim*.

asserting that the substance of this differentiation goes back to Jesus himself. *The exclusive “my Father” points to an incommunicable and unique relationship between Jesus and God.* He is God’s Son in a special and unique way. He is the Son, who alone makes of us sons and daughters of God.

6. The Community’s Addressing Jesus

Many highly suggestive titles are given to Jesus—Messiah, Son of God, Lord, Savior, and so on. It is clear that the first Christians regarded Jesus as both the *source* and the *object* of their religious experience, i.e., their experiences were understood to depend on him and to derive from him. The conviction that Jesus was a present and living reality, the source of authentic experience of God, is deeply embedded in the New Testament. Jesus is simply not understood as an example of *how* we experience God, but as the *source* of our experience of God—and even as the *object* of our experience of God, so that Jesus may be said to be experienced in the same way as God was experienced in Jewish Scriptures. This can be seen in the title the New Testament community gave to Jesus.

- a. *As the Christ (Hebrew) or Messiah (Greek).* The words are interchangeable—both mean “anointed of God.” Jesus’ anointing occurred at the time of his baptism.
- b. *As Lord.* Occasionally the New Testament transfers an Old Testament reference to “the Lord.” One of the more striking examples of this may be seen by comparing Joel 2:32 with Acts 2:21. Joel refers to a crucial period in the history of the people of God, in which the Spirit of God will be poured out upon all men (Joel 2:28). On this great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:31), everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (that is, Yahweh) will be saved, Joel 2:32. The prophecy is alluded to in Acts 2:17–21, in context of the day of Pentecost, ending with the assertion of Acts 2:21, that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” It is then made clear, in what follows, that the “Lord” in question is none other than “Jesus of Nazareth,” whom God has made “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).
- c. *As Son of God.* Paul’s interpretation of the natural son and adopted son. Rom. 9–11.

7. Conclusions

- a. This approach that goes *through* the New Testament witness avoids the two-nature Christology, so the difficulty of coping with the relation between the human and divine nature in Jesus does not dominate. Rather, we see the two-nature doctrine indirectly and in its substance grounded in the relationship of Jesus to his Father and Jesus related to his disciples. We come to Jesus for forgiveness, and we sense both natures. These are *relational* and not *cognitive* concepts. They accompany the Hebrew, not Greek, world view.

- b. We avoid a separation between Christology and soteriology. Jesus is the mode in which the self-communicating, self-outpouring love of God exists on the human scene; he is this for us. The being of Jesus is inseparable from his mission and service; conversely, his service presupposes his being. If Jesus had not come and had not lived the life he lived, there would be no salvation.
- c. We understand the cross and death as a result of his life and teaching. Jesus message of his kingdom and his saving understanding of his death are in no way exclusive of one another. The violent death of Jesus is the concrete form taken by the breakdown of the old aeon. God's almightiness is absorbed into outward, self-imposed weakness. God takes the human condition—the human destiny—upon himself, with all its consequences. Jesus enters into abandonment by God. The death of Jesus on the cross is the final elucidation of what his message had been about the coming reign of God. Did God die on the cross? It is better to look at it this way: God enters into our death.

C. The Faith of the New Testament Community Concerning Jesus

The New Testament community witnessed Jesus of Nazareth. They came to the conviction expressed in the previous section. Belief and faith are not synonymous; belief moves toward faith, giving it a formal structure. Faith as used here is the experience of working out the ramifications of what one believes. From the experience of Christ the New Testament community formulated their faith.

In a sense, what is to follow is secondary. That that does not mean that it is unimportant—I mean by secondary that it is not first, but follows after. The faith of the New Testament community is secondary, coming *after* the experience of Christ, but it is also secondary in another sense. This is reflective Christology.

The faith of the New Testament community concerning Jesus is expressed in four affirmations, each of which are reflective theologies. That is, having experienced his life, words, and actions, the community wrote down their understanding of the Christ event.

1. Christ the Pre-existent One

Pre-existence is a metaphor used for time reference purposes. Pre-existence means that Jesus lived before he was born. It was not intended to jeopardized the teaching that Jesus was really born and that he was really Mary's son. Rather, it was intended to affirm that *even though Jesus was born, he was nevertheless to be identified with God who is eternal*. It says that the one who saves us is God.

See John 1:1.

2. Christ the Eternal Creator

In Hebrews 1:1–2, the writer tells us that Jesus was superior to the prophets, the Law, the sacrifices and other aspects of Old Testament religion. But more, the writer identifies Jesus with the creative activity of God. Creation is used as a way of expressing the writer's association of Jesus with the eternal creator of the universe. This is not intended to jeopardize the teaching that Jesus was made of a woman. It is rather affirming that though Jesus lay in a crib he is nevertheless to be identified with the God who creates and orders the universe. This is again reflective theology.

3. Christ the Virginally Conceived One

Matt. 1:18 and Luke 1:26ff. The intention of the writers is to say that Jesus is identified with God as his unique son. Here I do not want to hurry and shall perhaps spend a disproportionate amount of time. I do so because this is such a pressure point in theological understanding.

a. Possible Interpretation of the Virgin Birth

- 1) In classical literature, virgin births are rather common. They are, however, rather gross and have the various gods copulating with selected women.
- 2) The scientific world agrees that virgins births can and do happen in the animal world. The process is called parthenogenesis. They say among insects this is somewhat common, and therefore the possibility of this happening among humans, though highly unlikely, yet remains as a possibility.¹⁰
- 3) Theologically, a pre-existent Christ enters into a world of nature and history despite the fact that he eternally transcends the world of nature and history.¹¹

b. Why a Virginal Conception?

It is best, from my perception, to call this a virginal *conception*, not a virgin *birth*. There are a number of reasons for this:

- 1) Because the Bible says a virgin conceived (Matt. 1:23, Luke 1:31).
- 2) Because of the teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary. Later theology will say that Jesus passed through Mary like light through a window pane. Mary remained a virgin, the hymen was unbroken. This

¹⁰ Parthenogenesis in a mammal would be expected to produce female offspring since the Y chromosome necessary to produce a male is not present in the mother. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1965, s.v., "Parthenogenesis," by J. Herbert Taylor, 21:352.

¹¹ Helverson, s.v. "The Virgin Birth" by J. V. Longmead Casserley, 369-371,

implies that Joseph and Mary never had sexual intercourse. So the birth of Jesus was without pain and all Mary's sexual organs were yet intact.

- 3) Because of the teaching of Mary as co-redemptrix, and therefore the need for an *immaculate* conception. To be the mother of Jesus, Mary must be preserved from original sin. Mary suffered the temporal penalties of Adam's sin, such a bodily limitation, sorrow and death. But the active essence of original sin was excluded from the moment of conception. Mary's debt of sin was paid in order that the debt might not be incurred in her. Mary was free from all the stains of original sin.

4. Christ the Divine Word

John 1:1–14—this passage describes Jesus as the divine Word who has become flesh. This does not mean that the word ceased to be divine and became human. What is being expressed here is that Jesus is God in the flesh living with us and among us.

5. Conclusion

I have presented four different ways of saying the same thing. When they say that Jesus was pre-existent, that he exercises cosmic functions, that his mother was a virgin, and that he was the Word become flesh, the writers are consciously affirming that he was divine. Since these four passages represent five different writers—Paul, Matthew, Luke, John and the author of Hebrews, I think it is reasonable to say that the early church identified Jesus with God.

This is the witness of the New Testament community in reflection.¹²

D. Sharing of the Messianic Secret

Luke 2:52 reads, "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." What did Jesus learn? cf., Heb. 5:7. The early community selected events from the life of Jesus to weave together the story. Jesus learned from His baptism and temptations.

The instruction of Jesus to the New Testament community can be clearly seen in what is called the "Messianic Secret" of Mark, Mark 1:25; 1:34; 1:43f; 3:12; (5:19¹³); 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9). Cf. Acts 3:13, 3:26; 4:27. The disciples were not to tell that Jesus is the messiah until they properly understood Jesus' messianic role.

¹² Buttrick, *IDB*, s.v. "Christ" by S. E. Johnson, 1:565.

¹³ There is only one exception to the "don't tell" prohibition in Mark. In 5:19, the Gerasenes were not.

The concept of Messiah had to be restructured to that of being the servant King. That was the interpretation God wanted. Jesus does not let his messiahship go “on the record” until Mark 14:62, after his arrest, and after he has been bloodied, chained, and before a kangaroo court.

E. Conclusions

1. Philosophy vs. History (Creed vs. Faith)

The Creed is framed in philosophy, but New Testament faith is framed in history.

In theology, Israel and her culture must be the point of departure. But if we attempt to understand faith abstracted from Jewish culture, we shall have a meaningless faith. Writing an Asian, African, or American theology can only be done by going from Jesus and the culture of Israel. One must deal with the culture of Israel and then clothe the truth with garments of the target culture. This is the missionary task of today. This burden fell upon the council at Nicea—was Nicea true to the task?

- Nicea affirmed that Jesus was God. “From the Substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made.”
- Nicea affirmed that Jesus was man. “Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man.”

But Nicea presented a Christology from above, which tends to deny Jesus’ humanity—God pretending to be man. The Christology from the witness of the New Testament community gives a balanced approach.

2. The Witness of Other Cultures

While the Hebrew religion provided the church with the substance of its faith and of its knowledge of God, *the Hebrew religion did not supply the intellectual concepts and categories for a systematic articulation of this knowledge*. These were to come from Greek philosophical traditions that would be used to bless the world. This process of transfer to other cultures is *necessary*; it not only serves a new culture, but it adds to the richness of theology as a whole.

If Christ conquered the ancient world in the sphere of religious faith, it was Greek philosophy which had prepared minds for the theological task of understanding. Greek philosophy provided the instrument with which Christian theology set about its task, particularly the adoption of elements of the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle into Christian doctrine.

- No interpretation is free from cultural presuppositions. There is no culture-free interpretation of Scripture.
- No culture is the perfect correlation to scripture, but Hebrew culture is the original culture of expression and the point of beginning.
- Every culture may potentially illumine Scripture. Greek culture brings out aspects not seen in Hebrew culture.

II. The Nature of God

Introduction

We must begin with an understanding of the differences between Greek and Hebrew culture and see what happens to this doctrine in the Patristic period.

1. A Contrast in the Ways to Know

The theologies influenced by Patristic thought begin their study of God with the attributes (or perhaps proofs for the existence) of God. This approach assumes that God is an object in space and time whose existence can be demonstrated by logical propositions.

The biblical witness is that God is unique and incomparable (Isa. 40:25). How can you prove something which has no comparison? Instead of gods like the Greeks, the Hebrew God is described in terms of relationship.

Let me attempt to illustrate. If I had the privilege to introduce my wife to you I might do it one of several ways. For instance I might say, “this is my wife Norma. She is characterized by moral qualities like industriousness, fortitude, patience and tolerance. Her physical attributes are petiteness, cleanliness and vigor.” That is one way of letting you know her. A second way might be, “this is my wife Norma. She is a social worker, the Assistant Administrator of the Community Service Division of the San Andreas Regional Center in San Jose, and she is also a musician and directs choirs. We have been married for nearly 40 years with two adult children—Lisa and Jim.”

One approach speaks of *attributes* which are essential in philosophical deductions based on reasoned concepts. This is the Greek approach. The other is based on what one *does*, and that is the Hebrew approach. The Patristic approach moved from noting what God does, to the understanding how God could be deduced. This Greek approach has made a great difference in our understanding of God.

People do not perceive truth in the same way. That is not saying that truth differs, but the way one seeks to know truth does differ.

The Greek way is that of *speculation*.

- Greeks will speak of God as *immense*, so large that he can't be measured.
- Greeks will speak of God's *aseity*. That God is self-contained and therefore that He needs nothing.
- Greeks will speak of God as *simple*, as opposed to compound; that is, He is of only one substance. This was the basis of Arius' belief that Jesus could not be God.

This may be illustrated in a work of A.H. Strong entitled *Systematic Theology*. In his doctrine of God he deduces two concepts—absolute and relative. From the “absolute,” he deduces spirituality, infinity and perfection. Under “relative,” Strong discusses time and space, relation to creation, and relation to moral beings.

The Hebrew way is *functional*.

This way prefers to explore an historical event and to ask “What did the event mean?”, and “What is the function or the purpose of what happened?” G. Ernest Wright argued in his book, *The God who Acts*, that Israel's theology was not a product of abstract reasoning, but rather a faithful remembering and reciting of the mighty acts of God in her history. Psalm 105 illustrates Wright's thesis. Vv. 1–2 make known God's deeds; vv. 8–11 recite the covenants; vv. 26–27 recall the rescue from Egypt; and vv. 42–45, remember the inheriting of the land. This is the substance and bases for Israel's faith. The God of the patriarchs is known in concrete and historical ways, that is in relation to particular persons and clans.

But there are also other ways to know as well. These ways also affect our understanding and ways of knowing. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Western way is *scientific*.

This is the scientific or the Enlightenment way. We ask how it works, how it can be tested, and how can it be demonstrated or validated.

The African way is *familial*.

The African way is that of the extended family. This is the way of the developing nations in general. What helps my family (tribe) is right and what hurts them is wrong.

Every culture has an approach to apprehending truth. The gospel must be adapted and worked through that culture but the missionary must be aware of what has happened to the nature of the gospel when this is done. The process must continually be refereed to, and squared with, Scripture.

There must be a continual attempt to square cultural expression and meanings with the Hebraic experience of Scripture.

2. Hebrew and Greek Views of God

There are several ways to contrast the Hebrew and Greek views of God.

a. Dynamic against Static

Israel's names for God show a dynamic God interacting with the people of faith:

- *El Shaddai*: God revealing himself in might. *Shaddi* means “almighty,” cf. Ex. 6:3; Gen. 17:1; 28:3. The root meaning of *El* is power, cf. Ex. 15:2.
- *Adonai* means Lord, to whom people can turn for help. cf. Ps. 12:1.
- *Yahweh*, stresses God as creator, but also as redeemer. Isa. 49:6, 26; Ex. 17:15; Ezekiel 6:13; 7:27
- Other terms include “my strength,” Ps. 18:2; “God who fulfills his purpose for me,” Ps. 57:2; “a strong tower,” Ps. 61:3; “Teachers” Isa. 30:20; “My maker,” Job 36:3.

These views differ sharply from the Greek view of divinity, such as the gods on Mt. Olympus—narcissistic, aloof, non-involved, cf. Zeus.

b. Cyclical against Event

The Hebrews saw history with continuity. That is, the world began and the world will end, Acts. 1:21–22. Time was seen not as being merely linear, but as linear, *eventful* time. A harvest, for example, is an event, but one that can only take place as the result of a succession of earlier events (planting, watering) in the continuity of the growth of the crop.

The Greeks, on the other hand, saw history as cyclical. That is, no one period of time is any more important than any other period of time. This leads to the doctrine of re-incarnation, which contrasts with the Cross and resurrection, which are more important any other events, having a sense of once-and-for-allness.

c. Non-Feeling against Passion

Hebrews will see and speak of God as caring and repenting, cf. Gen. 6:6. God is jealous and yearns, Ex. 32:14.

To the Greek, passion is from the lower nature and a god must not have these feelings. A god cannot suffer, nor can a god have feelings.

3. Understanding the Biblical View of God

So how do we construct a doctrine of the nature of God from the Hebrew approach?

a. We Will Address God

This approach is the only way we are able to study God biblically. God cannot be expressed, but only addressed.¹⁴ We can't use inductive or deductive logic or reason in addressing God. We will use the illustration I presented in introducing my wife the Hebrew way—as a social worker and musician—rather than the Greek manner approach of describing her attributes.

b We Will Ask “What is God Doing?”

The Bible asks, “what is God doing?” and from his actions we can then perceive who he is. This is a non-speculative and functional way to know God. It is God who manifest himself. We are to study the manifestations and perceive God and hear what the inspired writers have interpreted and seek illumination of the Spirit. We are to go from the known to the unknown—a non-speculative approach.

So the approach to the study of God is to ask, “What is God doing and what does it mean?” From that approach we will come to know (experience) God.

What is God doing?

- He is *making a covenant*—a study of name.
- He is being *other*—a study of holiness.
- He is being *just*—a study of righteousness.
- He is *affirming the good*—a study of love.
- He is *resisting evil*—a study of wrath.
- He is *knowing his creation*—a study of knowing.

This method can be easily extended to other areas of study. Again, what is God doing?

- He is *securing his purposes*—a study of power.
- He is *being present*—a study of presence.
- He is *receiving glory*—a study of glory.
- He is *reigning*—a study of Lordship.

¹⁴ Buber, 127.

- He is *being Father*—a study in Father.
- He is *being*—a study of the Trinity (but this will be treated as the last unit of study for the semester).

c. A Warning to Remember

There is a tendency to make God in our image.

- Ps. 50:21, “You thought I was altogether like you.”
- Ps. 115:8, “Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.”

Without awareness we will tend to create God in our image and in our understanding. We are in God’s image, God is not to be made in our image. Taking the attribute approach to God is a theological cul-de-sac.

A. A Study of “Name”

What is God Doing? He is *making a Covenant*.

1. God Has a Name

Judges 13:18, “Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding”, where “beyond understanding” is understood as being full of wonder.

a. Biblical References

Ex. 3:13–14, “I am who I am.” God is saying that He is the mysterious one, and will remain so. God is unknown until he makes himself known.

Ex. 33:19, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name.”

Matt. 6:9, “Hallowed be your name.”

John 17:6, 12, 25–26, declaring God’s name.

Others: Gen. 12:8, “called on the name of the LORD.” Ex. 20:7, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD ...” Acts 4:7, “by ... what name did you do this?” Rom. 10:13, “calls upon the name ...” Rev. 22:4, “his name will be on their foreheads.”

b. Nature of God

The name stands in the center of the biblical witness. The biblical conception of name contains the whole biblical doctrine of God.¹⁵ God’s *Name* means God’s *nature*, and his *nature* can *only be known by revelation*.

¹⁵ Brunner, 1:119.

2. Theological Significance

a. Name Denotes Personhood

The fact that God has a name means he is a person. To be a person is to have a desire for relationship. God is seen as a covenant-establishing God.

b. Name Must be Revealed

God reveals his name; otherwise it would remain unknown. His name cannot be discovered. Ex. 3:14. Revelation is different from discovery. God is unknown till he makes his name known.

Even in our relationships, telling someone your name gives them some power over you.

c. Name Implies Relationship

God is said to know us by name. We are other than God, but we are a Thou to God. We are more than an "it." That the hairs of our head are numbered means that God knows us; He knows our nature, Matt. 10:30, Luke 12:7.

Cf., the naming of the animals in Gen. 2:20 defines a new relationship between animals and humankind. Adam recognizes their nature. The cattle, birds, and beasts do not match Adam's nature so he remains lonely. A domestic nature, a wild nature, and a human nature are evident.

When God gives his name, a covenant relationship is established.

d. A New Name Implies a Changed Nature or Relationship

Relationship with God alters if our nature changes. A new nature means that a new name is needed. This is illustrated when Jacob's name becomes Israel (Gen. 32:22ff), Levi becomes Matthew; Simon becomes Peter. It denotes a character change and a new relationship with God.

A New name means a redeemed character.

God giving a name means a new relationship.

Conclusion

The relationship of God and humanity is to be that of a covenant. The desire of a personal God is to enter into covenant with persons. This speaks of a historical manifestation of God out of which our theology comes.

Because that relationship is unique there are to be no graven images (Ex. 20:4), that is, no right to compare God with anything known to us. *The gods of traditional religion are not really mysterious because they can be known.*

Prayer in the name of Jesus, for example, is an altogether different concept when heard from biblical culture. It is to pray in nature of Jesus, cf. John 14:13–15.

B. A Study of Holiness

What is God Doing? He is *being other*.

This is being different from all else and thereby holding forth fresh possibilities to His creation.

1. Etymology of Holy

“Holy” comes from “cut off,” “separate,” or “set apart.”

Qodesh, which means separation, is the paramount meaning; *hagios* is the LXX translation of *qodesh*. The Old and New Testaments are close in their meaning here.

2. Biblical Materials

Holy is used in three basic ways.

a. Absolute or Unique Sense

To say God is holy is to say that God only is God, there is no other. Holiness applies only to God, Ex. 15:11, “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?”

- 1) Holiness is related to name.

Isa. 57:15, “For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy ...”

Ex. 3:1–6, The revealed name “Yahweh” is holy, and there is holy ground. Also, cf. Amos 2:7.

- 2) Holiness relates to God; God is the Holy One.

Isa. 40:25, Hab. 3:3, “Holy One from Mount Paran,” Ps. 71:22; Isa. 5:24, 47:4; Matt. 6:9 and Luke 11:2, the Lord’s Prayer.

For God to swear by his holiness is for God to swear by himself. Compare Amos 4:2 with 6:8.

“Holy One” of Israel, Hosea 11:9, Ezek. 39:7.

The Holy One is the only one that is near and who can help, Isa. 31:1.

John 17:11, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.”

Holiness is a synonym for deity, Hos. 11:9. Holiness means “separation”—so holiness is that which separates God from us. We can never be God.

b. Derived Sense

Holiness is sometimes applied in the sense of being dedicated to God.

- 1) A materialization, a residue of power that results from separation.
 - a. The Ark was a symbol of God’s presence. See 1 Sam. 4:19–22; 2 Sam. 6:6–9 (Uzzah).
 - b. The temple is holy because of its relationship with God—see Ps. 93:5, “Holiness adorns your house.”
 - c. *Holy* and *very holy*, Ex. 26:33 (*a ka sha*; 29:37 Ex. , 30:10; Lev. 2:3, 1 Kings 6:16; 7:50; 8:6; Ezek. 41:4; 42:13; 43:12; 44:13. “The glory of the LORD departed,” Ezek. 10:18. In the absolute sense, God’s holiness is not a matter of degrees. In the derived sense, however, there can be degrees of holiness.
- 2) An association. Something that applies to what belongs to God because of relationship.

God is alone holy. Person or things are holy only as they are set apart for God. Isa. 6:3, Rev. 4:8.

- Ex. 3:5, holy ground. The ground is holy because it is associated with a manifestation of God.
- Ex. 19:6 and Deut. 7:6, holy nation. The nation was holy because it was called by God.
- Ex. 20:8–11, holy day. This is associated with what God had done.
- Ex. 28:2, holy garments, plates (Ex. 38:36), the tabernacle (Ex. 40:9), holy water (Num. 5:17)—these are all associated with the worship of God.
- Deut. 14:2, holy peoples. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 1 Pet. 1:14–16, and 2:9–10, the corporate people (church).
- Ps. 29:2, holy attire.
- Ps. 110:3, holy mountain.

The derived usage does not connote anything moral or ethical about the person associated with the “holy” object.

- 1) The term “holy” applies to non-personal things.
- 2) It is also applied to pagan deities and,

3) it denotes temple prostitutes and sodomites.

“Sanctify,” “saint,” and “sanctification” all mean the same thing. They are all from the same word. A saint is one dedicated, or set aside. Sanctification means being set apart to God, not to become God.

c. Religious Sense

The term came to involve morality and ethics, (cf., the holiness code).

Lev. 19:2, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”

Giving commandments, cf. Lev. 20:7, 21:8; 22:9; 31–31; 1 Cor. 6:12, 1 Cor. 19–20.

2 Cor. 7:1, “Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” 1 Thess. 4:3, 2 Tim. 2:21, 1 Pet. 1:13–16.

3. Theological Implications

a. Holiness Emphasized Transcendence

Holiness means otherness. The creation is *other* than its creator, and no part of the creation can be “holy” except in the derived sense. See Isa 31:1–3; Isa 45:11–12; Hosea 11:9, “I am God and not man.”

Transcendence is frequently expressed in terms of time and space, Ps. 90:2; 1 Kings 8:27. It is God’s separateness from all creation, Ps. 99:2–3.

Holiness is that aspect of God which separates him from us. The only position we can take before God is on our face. Job 42:6, “despise myself and repent,” cf. Isa. 8:13; 29:23.

b. Holiness Evokes Worship

The manifestation of holiness upon us can only be fear. See Ps. 99:1–5, one of the most beautiful psalms concerning worship

More than any other term, holy gives expression to what is essential for God. The third stanza of a familiar hymn sets forth the idea well.

Holy, holy, holy, tho’ the darkness hide thee
Tho’ the eye of sinful man they glory may not see
Only thou art holy, there is none beside thee
Perfect in power in love, and purity.¹⁶

¹⁶ Reginald Heber, *Holy, Holy, Holy* (1826).

C. A Study of Righteousness

What is God Doing? He is *being just*.

1. Etymology of Just

Just, justice, justification, right, righteousness—all these are from same root.

- Old Testament *tsedek*—to be straight, a relational term.
- New Testament *dikaio*—same meaning as *tsedek*.

Definition: One is righteous when he or she fulfills the responsibilities of a relationship. Righteousness contains the idea of a abiding to a standard—a plum line—corresponding to a norm.

Righteousness is primarily a relational activity, a matter of putting or keeping relationships right.

2. Theological Significance

a. Old Testament

When God or his people fulfill the conditions imposed by a relationship that one is said to be righteous.

1) *In social relations.*

Each one has many relationships, e.g. kings relate to the people, the priest relates to the worshipper, the husband relates to the family. Each relationship brings demands, and the fulfillment of those demands constitutes righteousness. There is even a relationship between pastor and church.

1 Samuel 24 describes Saul's visit to a cave to relieve himself, unaware of the presence of David and his men who were using the cave for a hiding place. Resisting a consummate opportunity to slay his persecutor, David merely cuts off a corner of Saul's cloak. That David was righteous in refusing to slay Saul was due to the covenant relationship, and is later acknowledged by Saul in 1 Sam 24:17, "'You are more righteous than I,' Saul said. 'you have treated me well, but I have treated you badly.'"

One should treat the poor according to the covenant. "Return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God," Deut. 24:13ff. "The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern," Prov. 29:7.

2) *In legal relations.*

Those who judge correctly are righteous. Ex. 23:7–8, Deut. 25:1.

The fulfillment of communal demands is righteousness, Deut. 1:16; 16:18, Ps. 82:2–4; Prov. 17:15, 26.

Righteousness is the restoring the foundations of commercial life, Amos 5:12, Ps. 72:2, Jer. 22:3, 15, Isa. 5:23, 29:21.

3) *Yahweh is righteous.*

2 Chron. 12:5–6, Neh. 9:8. Keeping a promise is righteous, Ps. 7:9, 103:17f, 116:5; Jer. 9:24, Dan. 9:14, Zech. 8:8, cf. Matt 6:33. God's nature as righteous, Isa. 60:21.

Righteousness consists of the fulfillment of the demands of the relationship which exist between Yahweh and his people, Ps. 9:4; 50:6, 96:13 Ps. ; 99:4; Isa. 5:16; 58:2, Jer. 11:20.

Righteousness can be synonymous with saving acts. Isa. 46:13, "I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel." 51:5–6, God's fulfilled his word, 55:11.

God's covenant stands despite Israel's unrighteousness. Isa. 46:12–13; Isa. 49:15, 54:5–6, 55:11.

4) *Covenant relations.*

To be righteous, Israel had to fulfill the demands of the covenant. Ps. 1:6 "The LORD watches over the way of the righteous."

Law is a guide to fulfill the covenant.

Love the Law, Ps. 40:8–10.

Meditate on the law. Ps. 1:3.

The Law is a gift. Ps. 19:9–10 cf. Ps. 119:137–138, 142, 144.

5) *Righteousness has consequences.*

God fulfilling promises made to one may hurt another. That is due to the kind of a world that we live in. There are two sides to righteousness—salvation and condemnation, vs. deliverance and punishment. See Isa. 11:4; Ps. 58:10–11; Isa. 61:1–2; Heb. 3:12–13; Mal. 4, cf. Acts 12:19.

Note that salvation for Israel sometimes meant the destruction of her foes. Righteousness is never, however, solely an act of condemnation.

Righteousness leads to the New Testament.

b. New Testament

The covenant perspective applies in the New Testament as well.

God desires fellowship, so he chose the people of Israel with whom to covenant, Ex. 24 and Deut. 7:7ff. God promised to be their God and Israel promised to obey, Ex. 24:7. Though rebellion and sin, however, the covenant was broken. Through Christ, God has re-established the covenant relationship, making it possible for us to have fellowship with him. The restored fellowship laid a twofold demand: The believer is to admit his or her failure to uphold the covenant with God (repentance), and he or she is to accept the restored covenant relationship as an act based on God's grace (faith). In addition a believer must accept and uphold the community God's covenant calls into being (fellowship). So repentance, faith, and fellowship are called for.

- 1) Righteousness as humanity having a relationship with God.
 - a) Simon, in Acts 8:20f, attempts to purchase the gift of God. Cf., 1 Pet. 3:18 "righteous for the unrighteous," Luke 18:9ff, John 16:8, 10.
 - b) Cornelius is righteous (Acts 10:22) because he "does what is right" (Acts 10: 35). He had been a proselyte, and had done what proselytes were supposed to do.
 - c) Elymus, in Acts 13:10, obscured the requirements for a right relationship with God.
- 2) Righteousness as God's having a relationship to humanity.
 - a) Righteous is being faithful with what God has given. See the parable of the unrighteous steward, Luke 16:1ff.
 - b) The reward for an unrighteousness act of betrayal is a broken relationship of trust. Consider the consequences Judas' money in Acts 1:18.
- 3) God as the source of righteousness.

Rom 3:9f, all have a broken relationship to God and are sinners and devoid of righteousness.

Rom. 3:26, Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the supreme act of obedience and fulfills the demands of the covenant: obedience to God. By participating in this relationship one can be righteous, cf., John 17:25.

Rom. 5:9, Christ's act of obedience in his death nullifies the disobedience which broke the covenant relationship with God. Christ's act of obedience restores the relationship of humanity with God.

Christ's righteousness is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). His blood is a symbol of Christ's act of obedience, Rom. 5:9, 1 Cor. 6:11, Rom 3:24, cf. Titus 3:5, 1 Pet. 3:18.

Righteousness is a matter of one's relationship to God; it is not an ethical state. Because God's covenant with us is restored, we are expected to glorify God. Rom. 4:2f, 1 Cor. 1:30f, Gal. 6:14f.

Jesus is still righteous one because is our advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1).

c. Conclusions

- 1) Jesus is righteous because of his obedient and sacrificial death (1 Pet 3:18), "For Christ died for our sins," Luke 19:10.
- 2) Humanity is righteous by accepting and maintaining the covenant. Matt. 25:34ff, esp. 37; Luke 14:14.
- 3) A.H. Strong made this observation: "God *must* be just, he *may* be merciful." God is "just" because he does what God ought to do. Better said, "Because God is just, he is merciful."

1 John 1:9 is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. It is heresy to say that the enumerating of one's sins brings forgiveness. It is not the confession of sins *per se* that brings forgiveness, but it is the faithfulness of God. Since God is faithful and just, one can be forgiven. To attribute that forgiveness to the human act of confession is pelagianism. Forgiveness can be had because God does what God ought to do—because God is God.

D. A Study of Love

What is God Doing? He is *Affirming the good*.

1. Etymology of love

a. Old Testament

The Old Testament has many words for love. I will call attention to only two:

- *Aheb* (pronounced "ahêv") is used over 200 times. It means to pant, to desire intensely, to long for. Examples: Gen. 27:9 and 14, the food used by Jacob to steal Esau's blessing, and Prov. 20:13, not loving sleep.
- *Hesed* is covenant love. Translations: NAS, "loving kindness," RSV, "steadfast love." *Hesed* means loyalty and conduct cf. Ps. 136, Deut. 7:12, "If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with

you, as he swore to your forefathers. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers...”

Hesed is preferred in the Old Testament over *ahab*.

b. New Testament

The New Testament uses two words for love, but three are often referred to.

- *phileo*: Social love, affection of friends. It means “to be kindly disposed to,” cf. James 4:4 regarding friendship with the *world*.
- *eros* (not used in the New Testament): Physical love; also spiritualized as upward striving “lust for life.” Is a self-seeking, discriminating, human kind of love, and is not found in the New Testament at all. Such love is called forth by the inherent worth of the object and the desire to possess and enjoy the object. Such love asks the question, “what is in it for me?”
- *agape*: Originally, *agape* was a neutral word that Jesus apparently chose as a vessel into which he would pour content. Before Jesus extended it, *agape* was the “ordinary” *ahab* love of the Old Testament, and the way that word is usually translated in the LXX.¹⁷ In its new form, it is love that is not conditioned by the one who receives it. It is indiscriminating and irrational by erotic standards. It flows downward regardless of the worth of the object. It is unselfish and unmerited. Rom 5:8 is its ultimate defining verse.

To say that “God is love” does not mean that love is God. We do not discover what God is by analyzing and defining our ideas and experiences of love. Love does not define God, in other words—it is God that defines love by what he has done.

2. Biblical Materials

a. Old Testament

A key verse, Jer. 31:3, defines love in the Old Testament: “The Lord appeared unto me saying ‘I have loved you...’” Also, Isa. 65:1–3, Deut. 4:37, 7:7, Hosea 11:1.

- 1) The five points of Yahwehism, an early confession. Ex. 34:6:¹⁸ “The LORD, The LORD, a God
 - merciful and
 - gracious,

¹⁷ The LXX generally translates *Hesed* into the Greek *elios*, “mercy.”

¹⁸ Moody, 104ff.

- slow to anger (Cf. Num. 14:18; Joel 4:2c; Nahum 1:3a),
- abounding in steadfast love,
- and faithfulness.” (*NB*: The fifth point was never firmly concretized, cf. Ps. 89:5; Ps. 40:10b; 92:2b; 119:90a; 143:1b; Hosea 2:20; Lam. 3:23).

This formula is found elsewhere: Ex. 20:5–6; Deut. 5:9–10; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; 31; Nahum 1:3; Joel 2:13; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Jonah 4:2. This formula appears twelve times in all.

2) Trilogy of Love.

- *God’s manifested love.* Ex. 15:13; Deut. 4:37; 7:7–8; 33:3, Ps. 136.
- *Humanity’s answering love.* Ps. 31:23.; Deut. 6:4–5; “walk in all his ways,” Deut. 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16; “keep my commandments,” Ex. 20:6; Deut. 5:10.
- *Human love:* “Love your neighbor as yourself,” Lev. 19:18; “you are to love those who are aliens,” Deut. 10:19; “Jacob was in love with Rachel,” Gen. 29:18–20. This category also includes family love, “son, ... whom you love,” Gen. 22:2; “He who loves him is careful to discipline him,” Prov. 13:24.

3) Overview of *Hesed*

- *Hesed* is the basic way that God relates. See Hosea 11:1 and 9, and the Five Points of Yahwehism, above.
- It is voluntary love. In traditional religions, gods did not choose to love—the relationship was natural and inescapable, usually connected with the land. There is no coercion to love. God *chooses* to love.
- It is spontaneous, not caused by a consideration of the worth of its object, cf. *agape*. Deut. 7:6–8.
- It is exclusive, demanding undivided allegiance. “... with all your heart,” Deut. 6:5. “... a Jealous God,” Ex. 20:3–5. (If one spurns God’s love, that love becomes wounded—it becomes *jealous*. God is jealous because he wants us to return his love.

b. New Testament

Key verses for *agape* love are John 3:16, Rom. 5:8, and 1 John 4:8.

- 1) The New Testament affirms the Old: Mark 12:30–31, cf. Deut. 6:4.

- 2) There is also a Trilogy of love like New Testament, but enhanced in content because of Christ. The love of God the Father is said to be for the Son, John 3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:24, 26.
 - God's manifest love—giving His Son, Rom. 5:8, 1 John 4:10, and 1 Cor 13, a portrait for which Christ sat.
 - Humanity's answering love, 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us."
 - Human love—
 - for *neighbor*, Rom. 13:8 (*agape*), Gal. 5:22 (*agape*), Col. 3:14 (*agape*), James 2:8 (*agape*).
 - for *believers*, John 13:34f; 5:12, 17; Eph. 5:2.
 - for *family*, Col. 3:19.
 - for *enemies*, Matt. 5:43–48; Luke 6:27–35. If you treat your enemy the way he treats you, you become like your enemy.
- 3) Characteristics of *agape*
 - *Agape* is God's basic way of relating. 1 John 4:7–9, "let us love one another, for love comes from God... This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son..."
 - *Agape* is understood most clearly in Christ, 2 Cor. 8:8–9.
 - The hymn of *agape* (Rom 8:31–39) has two stages:
 1. vv. 31–34, no condemnation, and
 2. vv. 35–39, no separation.
- 4) Implications of *agape*
 - God opened himself to his creation. He became vulnerable to the pain of rejection.
 - God's openness is occasion for his sufferings.
 - God's love casts a shadow—wrath.

E. A Study of Wrath

What is God Doing? He is *resisting evil*.

Wrath has a place throughout the Bible, along with other manifestations of God. It cannot be ignored without misunderstanding the Biblical message.

1. Etymology of Wrath

The most common Old testament word for wrath is *aph*, Isa 12:1, “I will praise you O LORD. Although you were angry with me...” It probably once meant “to snort.” Hebrews had the seat of anger in the nose, Amos 4:10, Ps. 18:7–8.

Definition: “to snort, to swell, to be full.” *Aph*—“to breathe though the nostrils.” An onomatopoeic word. The LXX used *orga* and *thumos*.

Thumos suggests the inner affect of anger, Rev. 15:1, 7, “God’s wrath.”

Orga suggests the outer effect of anger. Rom. 1:18, “wrath of God is being revealed from heaven...”

In places they have become interchangeable, as in Rev. 16:19, “fury of his wrath.” *thumos* of *orga*.

The basic idea is to swell, be full—blood rushing to the face, swelling up like a toad, and the nostrils flaring.

2. Biblical Materials

Expression of God’s holiness in relation to sin. While love is spontaneous to his own being, his wrath is called forth.

a. Old Testament

- 1) Wrath against Israel as a nation, Ex. 32:11, Deut. 9:8, Ps. 74:1; Isa. 47:6. Amos 3:2, “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.”
- 2) Wrath against individuals and groups within Israel, Deut. 1:34, 37, Jer. 21:5.
- 3) Wrath against other nations and their rulers, Isa. 10:12–19 (esp. v. 17).
- 4) Wrath against social injustice, Isa. 1:23–24, Amos 8:4–10, Micah 6:6–8.
- 5) Wrath against those who presume on Yahweh, Hosea 13:6–8.
- 6) The Day of Wrath, Isa. 2, Amos 5:18–20, cf. Day of the Lord, Ps. 22:1–21; 30:8–10.

Day of wrath—the day of God’s final and irrevocable judgment against sin. Spoken of in the gospels, epistles, and Revelation.

b. New Testament

- 1) Manifested in Jesus (Mark’s gospel)
 - against hardness of heart, Mark 3:5,

- against the proud, Mark 9:42,
 - against arrogance toward children, Mark 10:14,
 - against misuse of the temple, Mark. 11:15.
- 2) Witnessed in the epistles, Rom. 1; Jude, 2 Pet.
- 3) Theological interpretation.

Wrath is not to be thought of as an irrational, irresponsible action on the part of God, but rather as the manifestation of his aversion to sin which is part of his character.

a) Wrath has a kinship to holiness.

In biblical portrayal, the wrath of God is not so much an emotion or an angry frame of mind as it is the settled opposition of his holiness to evil. God is holy, and God resists sin. God's wrath is his resisting sin. Wrath is the action of God against all that is opposed to God.

b) Wrath is not basic to God's nature.

"Slow to anger." Repentance can alter God's action. Cf., the Five Points of Yahwehism, Ex. 34:6, in light of changes in the human situation.

Hab. 3:2, "In wrath remember mercy." *It is never possible to say God is wrath as it is to say that God is love*, Jer. 18:7–10, Amos 7:1–6.

Wrath is modified by mercy.

There is a twin attitude on the part of God—an intense anger against sin, and the forbearance toward the sinner. *How?* In my own case, I can hate my sin, but can love myself. In the same way, God loves us even though he can be angry at what we have done.

Isa. 54:7–8, wrath is passing, love is basic.

Ps. 30:5, wrath is not basic to God's nature.

Hosea 11, fierce anger and ardent love are together.

Luther on wrath vs. love

- "*opus alienum*," (foreign work), God's wrath on the sinner—his left hand.
- "*opus proprium*" (proper work). God's love for the Christian—his right hand, cf. Isa. 28:21.

c. Interpretation guidelines

- 1) Don't be quick to suggest that an act of God is punishment.
- 2) Don't hesitate to change such an evaluation if it has been made.
- 3) Sin does bring punishment—but *how* is left up to God. God opposes all that is degrading to persons. God cares (loves) enough to take our sins seriously.

Wrath implies that we must take sin seriously. Sin is anti-God; it crucifies Christ; it destroys the sinner. That is why God resists sin—that is why God “hates” sin.

F. A Study of Knowing

What is God Doing? He is *knowing his creation*.

The Greek idea is that God can be known apart from what he does. Biblically, however, we must go from the known to the unknown. Metaphysical speculation is the wrong trail for us to follow. What is God doing? He is knowing his creation.

1. Etymology

Yados means to experience, illustrated in a twofold usage:

- to know from experience, like affliction, 1 Kings 8:38, and Isa. 47:8, the loss of children.
- to know also means to know essence of another. Gen. 4:1. In biblical thought, the sexual relationship between two people is understood from the basic metaphor of knowing another.

Gnosis in the LXX and New Testament has the same two Old Testament meanings. Note that cognitive “knowing” is *not* primary—see “Hebrew vs. Greek Views of Knowledge,” below.

2. Examples of Knowing

- a. Gen. 2:17—The tree of the knowledge, good and evil, is not theoretical knowledge of moral values. Partaking of the forbidden tree will disclose the difference between good and evil. It is through trespassing God's prohibition that one will “know” what good is like and what evil is like. To partake of the tree's fruit is to have *experiential* knowledge of evil—that is, to have experienced evil.
- b. Isa. 1:3—“Israel does not know...” Israel's lack of knowledge is not theoretical ignorance, but rather failure to practice the filial relationship in which they stand with God.

- c. Ps. 49:3, Prov. 2:2, 10:8, Isa. 6:10. The heart is sometimes mentioned as an organ of knowledge because “heart knowledge” is accompanied by an emotional reaction and therefore involves the whole person.

3. Hebrew vs. Greek Views of Knowledge

- a. *Greek*—knowledge is intellectual, cognitive, noetic (intellectual speculation, so Omniscience means an awareness of all that is and all that goes on in the world. God is the great computer in the sky, with foreknowledge).
- b. *Hebrew*—Knowing is an activity in which the whole individual is engaged, not his mind only. Knowing the essence of being or things. So for the Hebrew knowledge is to have an intimate relationship, it is experiential or relational knowing.

4. Biblical Passages

- a. Ps. 139 asserts that God knows me. Knowledge, vv. 1–6; presence, vv. 7–12; power, vv. 13–18. Nothing is hidden from God, who is intimate with his creation.
- b. Knowing God is salvation, Jer. 31:34.
John 17:3, Knowledge has a redemptive purpose. Cf. Ps. 138:6, “The proud he knows from afar.”

Knowledge of God means redemption. Deut. 11:2ff; Isa. 41:20. To know truth is nearly a synonym for becoming a believer in the New Testament sense. John 17:3, “This is eternal life: that they may know you...”

To know God is the chief duty of man, Deut. 4:39; 29:2–6; Isa. 43:10; Hosea. 6:6; Ps. 46:10, “be still, and know that I am God.”

God knowing means accomplishing his purposes, Jer. 1:5; 1 Cor. 8:2f; Gal. 4:8–9.
- c. An unique knowing—Matt. 11:27. The uniqueness of God and Christ knowing.

5. The Way God Knows

- Mediate—through means.
- Immediate—without means.

God’s knowledge is immediate but, through the incarnation, God also knows through means.

If God knows experientially and not just intellectually, I want to ask a theological question of you. Did God learn something by what he experienced

in the incarnation? The Greeks would say no, what would the Hebrews say? See Heb. 5:7–8.

In a secondary sense, does God learn through you? No one has quite experienced life as you are experiencing it. If God is knowing you, are their new experiences that you provide God?

6. Conclusion

Knowledge for the Hebrews is not abstract, but concrete. Reality is what happens, and knowledge means the apprehension of reality. In the fullest sense, to know God means salvation.

- To the Greek: Knowing is abstract. God is said to have omniscience—he is all knowing.
- To the Hebrew: Knowing is experiential, God knows *me*.

A Greek understanding of knowing began to invade correct biblical understanding, leading to a number of doctrinal distortions.

- 1) The doctrine of God and the doctrine of human nature had become distorted because of the use of philosophical categories.
- 2) Philosophical methods attempted to appropriate the unknown by starting with the unknown. We always need to begin with the known (that is, what God has done) and then move toward the unknown.
- 3) The use of attributes as a way of knowing the nature of God. The attribute approach is a theological cul-de-sac. It plays into the hands of Greek speculative thinking.

III. The Holy Spirit

Introduction

There was never a serious tendency in Patristic thought to be binitarian. Having affirmed the deity of Christ, it was natural for them to seek an understanding of the person and work of the Spirit.

1. Witness of the Patristic Period

Constantinople 381:

We believe...in the Holy Spirit., the Lord and the Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father. Who is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and Son, who spoke through the prophets.

The emphasis on the person of the Holy Spirit began in the Patristic Period. They acknowledged the work of the Spirit, but it was the person which they emphasized. The great creeds and confessions said little about the work of the

Spirit. On the other hand, the biblical writers focus more frequently on the Spirit's work than on His person.

The emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit began in the Reformation. In the eighteenth-century revivals and awakenings, theological interest in the work of the Holy Spirit received impetus through the ministry of John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and others. Beginning in 1792, the modern mission movement emphasized the Spirit's activity in world missions.

2. Presuppositions

a. The Reticence of the Spirit

The purpose and the function the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus. "He will testify about me," John 15:26. Cf., the *paraclete* sayings in John 14:16–18; 25–26; 15:26–27; 16:13–15. In Gal. 4:6, the Spirit cries, "*Abba*, Father."

The chief function of the Spirit is to point to and magnify Jesus Christ, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells. So it is counteractive to the Spirit's role and function to point to or magnify the presence or the work of the Spirit. Anytime that you magnify the Holy Spirit, you go contrary to Scripture and distort the gospel message.

One of the amazing events in the New Testament was Pentecost—the Spirit of God was poured out. Yet note the preaching of Simon Peter on that day! He did not magnify the coming of the Spirit, but magnified Christ who had lived among them, had been crucified, and whom God raised from the dead. *The spotlight was on Jesus, and not on the coming of the Spirit.* Had Pentecost occurred in our day, I feel certain that it would have been called "A Holy Ghost Revival." Yet such an emphasis was not in that of the biblical writers; They kept the spotlight on Jesus.

Here are some historical illustrations to document the thesis that attention on the Spirit is counterproductive.

1) The Montanists, c 200.

Montanus of Phrygia was a pagan priest who converted. The major problems of the early church was its different cultures and rapid growth, which brought untrained leadership to the front. This was the reason for the New Testament injunction "to lay hands suddenly on no one," 1 Tim. 5:22.

Montanus claimed to possess the Spirit of prophecy. He was joined by two women, Maximilla and Priscilla, who deserted their pagan husbands with Montanus' sanction. He declared himself to be the manifestation of the *Paraclete* of John 14:26. Where Jesus said "I will send the Paraclete," Montanus said, "Here I am."

He taught that the period of revelation was ending and the world would soon come to an end. He claimed to be the *Paraclete* in the sphere of morals, not allowing any second marriages—even marriage itself was questioned. He insisted on strict fasting, which he felt was not done stringently enough in the church, and on preparation for martyrdom. He forbade flight in persecution and insisted on separation from the world. Only Christians doing these things would have the Spirit.

Montanus called members of the church “animal men,” and his own followers, “spiritual men.” He proclaimed that the heavenly Jerusalem would descend near Pepuza in Phrygia, his home town. (It is strange that people generally see the return of the Lord to their home town.)

One of the early Christian writers and theologians, Tertullian, joined ranks with him. Some have suggested that it was the movement’s puritanical emphasis that drew him, and not its theology.

2) Casper Schwenckfel (1490–1561).

His first name was Casper, and he was a spiritualist. I have often wondered if the cartoon *Casper the Ghost* was written by some good Lutheran who had some knowledge about Schwenckfel.

Schwenckfel was a contemporary of Luther, and admitted that it was through Luther that he found the gospel. He had a spiritualistic theology—it is not the Word which brings the Spirit as with Luther, but the person who is filled with the Spirit who brings light with him to the Word. “The divine light must be brought to the Scripture.”

He found that he could not give unreserved assent to many of the Protestant doctrines. For example, he felt that the doctrine of justification by faith created serious moral dangers. The believer needed *strict rules of discipline*.

Working this out theologically, Schwenckfel’s view would give sacraments little or no value. This was because of the “immediacy of the Spirit.” If the Spirit is always available, there is no need for such material things.

Again—if you move the spotlight to the Holy Spirit, everything else goes out of focus.

3) Conclusions

- Spiritualist experiences have been ubiquitously reported. There are many in our day. I will bet my ordination papers that some such movements will be reported sometime during coming year.

- Spiritualist views have some common elements: Strict discipline, anti-materialism, an imminent view of the return of Christ and the ending of the world, and the superiority of sect followers over other Christians.
- Without affirming the reticence of the Spirit, theological distortion often transpires. It is essential to match the role and function of the Spirit with the biblical witness.

b. Oneness of God

There is no more fundamental tenant for Judaism or for Christianity than the *Shema* (the Hebrew imperative for “hear!”), the first word of Deut. 6:4. Cf. Mark 12:29; Luke 10:27; 1 Tim. 2:5. The oneness of God is explicitly taught. Also, cf., 1 Cor. 8:6, “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we live...”; John 17:3, “only true God”; Rom. 3:30, “only one God”; Gal. 3:20, “but God is one”; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25; Eph. 4:5; James 2:19. The oneness of God is a non-negotiable concept.

The Spirit does not come with separate programs of His own. The Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, creates and redeems. His redemptive work is to effect the presence and power of God’s kingdom in history, primarily through the church and Christian living. Sometimes the two testaments are interpreted as though God did not become triune until the events of the New Testament. Although God’s triune nature is clearly revealed only in the incarnation and resurrection, God is essentially and eternally triune.

We must not conclude this study with a belief in tritheism. Tritheism is the average church-goers theological understanding. A theologian finds himself opposing the non-verbalized heresies of the church as well as the advocated heresies.

c. The Phenomenon of the Last Days

The coming Day of the LORD was an essential belief of Israel, and the prophets proclaimed this hope in a variety of ways.

- The last days will dawn in which “the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful,” Isa. 4:1–5.
- God will make the dry bones live again, Ezek. 37:1–14.
- Joel was particularly elegant in his proclamation, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy ... I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth”, Joel 2:28–32.

It was to be Joel’s proclamation that Simon Peter would quote on the day of Pentecost. Simon Peter stated, “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men

are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel," Acts 2:14-16. The meaning of Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit was that the last days had begun. They last days began with the Spirit's coming. The last days are not ahead of us, but they are behind us, cf. Heb. 1:2.

With the coming of Jesus and his death and resurrection, and now with the descent of the Spirit, God's program has been completed. The last days have arrived, and there is nothing remaining but the eschaton. And the time of the consummation no human knows or can know.

d. Hermeneutical Principle for Interpreting the Holy Spirit

The historical Jesus is the hermeneutical principal for interpreting the Holy Spirit.

Compare John 14:26, with 1 John 2:1. In the former, the Holy Spirit is the *paraclete*, "But the *counselor*, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things...", and in the latter it is Jesus who is called the *paraclete*, "we have *one who speaks*¹⁹ to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ." The basic tenant is this: "if there is something that I can't imagine the historical Jesus doing, I will look askance if it is said that the Spirit does it."

Do not separate the work of the Christ from the work of the Spirit. Cf., Rom. 8, the Spirit did not come to take Christ's place but to make Christ's presence in the world real. Scripture speaks more of the *work* of the Holy Spirit than of the *person* of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will be seen effecting God's purposes.

Since the Spirit is sovereign, believers never "possesses" him, in the sense of taming or controlling him. They can never domesticate the Spirit, cf. Acts 8:20, "never buy the gift of God with money."

A. The Continuation of the Work of the Holy Spirit

In one sense the Holy Spirit is a new dynamic power and presence in our world. The Spirit's arrival ushered in the new age, and the Spirit makes all things new. This newness is associated with the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ. The content with which the Holy Spirit works now is new.

On the other hand, God is God and God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). So I want to trace the theme of the Spirit to give us an overview of the Spirit's work and then turn to the newness in the New Testament. One of the ways to view the Spirit's work is in the light of *continuity*. Continuity is a key which can unlock the meaning of the Spirit's work.

¹⁹ "an advocate," in the NRSV.

1. Order in Created Life

“The Spirit of God moves across the face of the waters.” What the Spirit did was to seek to bring order out of chaos. This implies that order and design in creation are the work of the Spirit (Gen. 2:1–2).

The Old Testament word *ruach* and the New Testament *pneuma* share four levels of meaning:

- wind (Gen. 8:1; John 3:8),
- breath (Gen. 6:17; 2 Thess. 2:8),
- the human spirit (Deut. 2:30; Rom. 8:16), and
- the Spirit of the Lord or the Holy Spirit (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18).

You need to see *ruach*, not just as wind or breeze, but as one who energizes, cf. Ps. 33:6; Ps. 104:29–30, Job 33:4.

2. Order in Believer's Life

Just as the Spirit's work was to create order in the cosmic arena, there is a continuity to the Spirit's work in the believer's life. Job 26:13, says that by God's breath “the skies become fair,” so Jesus will affirm that the wind will bring order to a believer's life.

In the Nicodemus encounter, Jesus spoke of the Spirit saying “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). The born again experience is the bringing to life of God's intention for the individual. It is God's desire that the chaos within the believer shall end and the reign of God begin. The order that God had brought to the original cosmic chaos he brings to the believer. God exerts mastery over the life; that is, God exerts his Lordship.

3. Order in Congregational Life

“Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way,” 1 Cor. 14:40. Paul indicates that when a worship service degenerates into confusion by babblings it is an indication not of the *presence* of the Spirit, but of the *absence* of the Spirit.

Order and the Holy Spirit are in a continuous theme. Where there is disorder in the church, the Spirit is not there. I'm comfortable in saying that the nature of God is such that chaos is contrary to God's being and God's Spirit strives to bring order.

The Spirit who worked in the Old Covenant is the same Spirit who is poured out at Pentecost. That means that what the Spirit was doing before Pentecost will continue. The Spirit will seek to bring order to God's creation. But the

New Testament has a radical newness to it that must be affirmed. The newness with which the Spirit works is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That content of the Jesus story brings a newness that is integrated into the continuity of the Spirit's work.

4. Disorder as Demonic

With the work of the Spirit being continuous and creating order, disorder is an indication of another kind of spirit. The Scriptures speak of alien spirits, cf. 1 Sam. 16:14–15; 1 Kings 22:21–23; Hosea 4:12, and 5:4; The work of these spirits are cacophonous in nature.

In 1 John 4:1–6, the believers were asked to test the Spirit, and the criteria of the testing deals with a consistency concerning the witness to Jesus Christ. It is the spirit of the antichrist who will not affirm to the Christian community the presence of God in Jesus. This is disruptive to the community and is therefore to be rejected.

B. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

1. Introduction

During the inter-testamental period it was believed that the Spirit of prophecy was dormant but that the Spirit would return to activity with the coming of the Messiah. Ps. 74:9, “we are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be,” was the verse used to interpret the Maccabean age.

a. The Baptism of Jesus

The baptism of Jesus broke the Maccabean dormancy of the Holy Spirit. While that even was treated in *The Anabaptist Story*, the descent of the Spirit as a dove needs to be treated here as well. In alighting upon Jesus, the dove symbolized his receiving into his own person the promised outpouring of the Spirit. The Spirit was not merely for prophetic inspiration; its descending and resting upon Jesus indicated the full endowment of divine power. Cf. John 3:34, Luke 3:22.

The anointing of Jesus by the Spirit was an understanding that the Messianic age had dawned.

b. The Ministry of Jesus

The Spirit came to Jesus at his baptism. The empowering of the Spirit enabled him to invade the demon infested dominion of Satan and to deliver those that were in bondage. Note how the events of Jesus life set out this conflict:

- 1) *Jesus driven by the Spirit into the wilderness.*

The result of the wilderness temptation was a concretizing of the baptismal theophany. He was to be God's messiah and do God's work; he was to be God's messiah and do God's work *in God's way*. His ministry would reflect the character of God.

Jesus leaves the wilderness to go to Nazareth and preach his first sermon. In that message he proclaims "The Spirit of the Lord is on me," Luke 4:18. This is a proclamation that the "age of the Spirit" had arrived; it will be lived out in Jesus' ministry.

2) *Jesus calling and commissioning the disciples.*

The disciples were called to be with him and then to be sent out, according to Mark 3:13–15 and Mark 6:7–13. I think the order is important—*being with* Jesus precedes *going for* Jesus. The authority to go and the authority to exorcise demons comes from Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the source of authority to Jesus and Jesus transferred to the disciples that same authority in this sending. This may be compared to the desirability of attending seminary before pastoring.

See also the sending in Luke 10:17–24, where the disciples joyfully discover that the very name of Jesus was sufficient to command the demons, and that Jesus then sees a vision in which he says, "I saw Satan fall like lightening," Luke 10:19–20. Jesus had invaded Satan's empire; this was an invasion that began with Jesus baptism, but which was consummated by the cross and resurrection.

It is to be noted in the account of Luke 10 that Jesus indicated authority over demons was not to be compared with having citizenship in heaven. To experience the reign of God within the life was the greatest gift.

Jesus' disciples do the ministry of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the source of authority in the ministry of the Eleven.

3) *Jesus and the blasphemy of the Spirit.*

In Mark 3:20–30, there are three parables which give the context for Jesus warning about the "blasphemy of the Spirit." The first of these (vv. 25–26) speaks of the absurdity of saying that Satan is casting out Satan—that would be civil war. Another answer for what is transpiring must be sought.

The second parable (v. 27) speaks of the Stronger One. The stronger one invades the demonic realm of a strong one. The stronger one binds and plunders Satan's Kingdom. Jesus is the stronger one, and plunders Satan's house.

The third parable (vv. 28–30) indicates that the source of Jesus' power was the Holy Spirit. Anyone who attributes the exorcisms to Satan has committed blasphemy. Blasphemy against the Spirit is a sin

which can never be forgiven—the sin representing a spiritual blindness for which there is no cure. This is because there is no remedy for failing to sense the Spirit’s work, for only from the Spirit can an understanding of the work of God come. The unforgivable sin is to attribute the work of Jesus to evil powers.

2. The Coming of the Spirit

The Coming of the Spirit is not only an Old Testament prophecy, but also a prophecy from John the baptizer. John had said before the baptism of Jesus that the one coming after him would baptize with the Spirit and with fire (John 1:33, Luke 3:16, cf. Acts 1:5). Those upon whom the Spirit will come will be participating in the same Spirit which operated in Jesus.

At the celebration of the Festival of the First Fruits of the barley harvest, some 50 days after the Passover, the Spirit came in fulfillment of the promises of God. Pentecost marks the baptism of the Spirit spoken by John and Jesus. Therefore, there is only one “baptism of the Spirit,” and that is Pentecost. Likewise, baptism of the individual is a once-in-a-lifetime event.

A theological understanding of Pentecost must be framed against the background of Babel in Genesis 11: 1–9. Pentecost is best understood as a reversal of Babel.²⁰ Babel means “the gate of God,” and in Genesis 11, humanity storms God’s gates in an effort to unseat God and assume Lordship over creation. Therefore, two aspects of the Babel judgment are addressed by the events of Pentecost. First, the Babel judgment had confused language, and, secondly, the people had been scattered across the face of the earth. As a result of this twin judgment, humanity’s plan was frustrated.

God had told Abraham in Genesis 12 that the judgment of Genesis 11 would be reversed: through him, “all peoples of the earth will be blessed,” Gen. 12:3. It would not be until Pentecost that his promise would be fulfilled; That work of human pride in Genesis 11 was counteracted by a work of grace in Acts 2.

- Where the language had been confused, now all hear in their own language: “When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language,” Acts 2:6. So understanding between the peoples was achieved.
- Where at Babel the people were scattered, here at Pentecost the people were gathered. “Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven,” Acts 2:5. In this gathering of Jews and Gentile proselytes there are representatives of all the known nations of the earth.

²⁰ Metzger, 162NT—footnote on Acts 2:4-11.

What sin had done in the beginning, God undoes through Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was the long awaited reversal of Babel.

a. The Symbols of Pentecost

- Rushing wind (the *ruach* of God), v. 2, is symbolic of the presence of the Spirit and his power. This is the spiritual dynamic of missionary enterprise, which was to begin in this event (cf. 1:8). The purpose of the bestowing of spiritual gifts is to empower that missionary effort, as well as to show the presence of the Spirit.
- The sheets of fire of v. 3 is symbolic of cleansing (see Isaiah 6:6–7).
- “Other tongues,” v. 4, is a sign of the breaking down of barriers and of including all peoples by the power of the Spirit.

Chapter 2:9–12—The twelve Gentile nations, the Romans, the desert dwellers, and the Island dwellers, represents everybody in the known world. I am not the only one that sees Matt. 24:14 as being fulfilled here, cf. Rom. 10:18.

Luke shows the New Testament theology of the Spirit as manifested in the baptism of Jesus and becoming the possession of the Christian community as a consequence of his saving work. Then he superimposes peculiar insistence on the Spirit as a guide and dynamic power of the world-wide mission manifested in prophetic charismata, “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” Acts 1:8.

b. The Message of Pentecost

The *Kerygma*, Acts 2:14–39 is important for us. It is the message that is intended for those outside of the fellowship.

- The “age to come” has begun, vv. 14–21. The coming of Jesus was something new, something that did not exist before. Yet the coming related to the past—that which was promised—a new kind of life.
- Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, Acts 2:22–32 and 36. God was acting in the world, as seen in the words “mighty works,” “crucified,” “rose again,” “exalted to right hand” (cf. Ps. 16), and “will come again.”
- The church as the new Israel received the outpouring of the Spirit, vv. 33–36, Cf. Ps. 110.
- One can now share in the life of the new age vv. 37–39:
 - believe in Christ,
 - repent, and

- accept.

There are seven sermons in the book of Acts and they all follow this general outline.²¹

The crowd listening to Peter's address was a mixed group of Jews, proselytes, and Gentile "God-fearers," (Acts 2:5). Since the Spirit was given by the exalted Christ (2:3) and baptism expressed repentance and attachment to Him. The people were exhorted to repent and be baptized. To share the same gift as the disciples of Christ, Acts 2:38.

The age of fulfillment has dawned and the characteristic mark is the outpouring of the Spirit in accordance with the ancient prophetic hope.

c. The Inclusiveness of Pentecost

The theme of the book of Acts is in v. 1:8. The risen Jesus had said to the disciples, "you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." As the book unfolds, Luke traces how this spread of the witness will transpire. I will refer to four "pentecosts" in Acts, but what I really mean is that there was one actual Pentecost (occurring on the day of the Jewish festival), and three reenactments. The reenactments are important because they act as *inclusive* narratives, expanding the focus on greater numbers of people and breaking through cultural and language barriers.

- *Jewish Pentecost*, Acts 2. This is the story of the coming of the Spirit, but the reference is primarily to Jews and proselytes. What of Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth? Does this outpouring of the Spirit include only the Jewish believers? Will the new people of God, now being formed, be Jewish?
- *Gentile Pentecost*, Acts 10:43ff. While there is only one Pentecost, that Pentecost will be re-enacted to include all the peoples. Simon Peter preached in the home of Cornelius and a most unusual event transpired. He told of God anointing Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power, and how Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil. As the message began to climax in the cross and resurrection, and while Peter was preaching, the "Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message," v. 44. Peter and his Jewish compatriots were astonished that "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles," v. 45. Baptism was administered because they had received the Holy Spirit just as the Jews and God Fearers had at Pentecost, v. 47.

Later, when Simon Peter reports his experience in Jerusalem, he interprets this experience: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came

²¹ C. H. Dodd.

on them as he *had come on us* at the beginning,” Acts 11:15. What had happened at Jerusalem had also happened in Cornelius’ home. Just as there had been a Jewish Pentecost, there had been a Gentile Pentecost.

- *Samaritan Pentecost*, Acts 8. Although Acts 8 precedes the Gentile experience, the record of Peter’s interpretation of the event in the home of Cornelius helps in the understanding of what had transpired with the Samaritans.

Acts 8 relates the ministry of Philip and how his preaching was honored in Samaria. The crowds heard and miraculous signs occurred (vv. 6–7). Many were baptized (v. 12). When this story came to the apostles in Jerusalem and they heard about the Samaritans receiving the gospel, many questions emerged. What did the experience in Samaria mean? Peter and John were sent to evaluate the situation.

“When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit,” vv. 15–17).

With the people already believers, what was needed for the Apostles in Jerusalem to have their answers resolved? Are the Samaritans included in the new people of God? The laying on of hands and the receiving of the Holy Spirit resolved all questions. The same Spirit that came upon the Jews at Pentecost, and who will later come upon the Gentiles in Cornelius’ home, falls upon the Samaritans. Again—there is only one Pentecost, but that Pentecost reaches out and includes the Samaritans among the new people of God.

- *From Jerusalem to the Ends of the Earth*, Acts 28:31. The Gospel was to go to Jerusalem, and it did in Acts 2. The Gospel was to go to all of Judea, and Judeans were present in Acts 2. The Gospel was to go to Samaria, and it did. The Gospel was to go to the Gentiles, and it did.

It is significant that Acts ends with *akolutos*, “without hindrance.” The verse reads, “Boldly and *without hindrance* he preached the kingdom of God, and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” The inclusiveness of Pentecost means that the Gospel is now unhindered. It goes to all the ends of the earth through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. All barriers—Jewish, Samaritan, Gentile—have been removed, and nothing hinders the gospel’s spread.

- *A Baptist Pentecost*, Acts 19:6. There is one other story in Acts that relates to the Pentecost experience. A close reading of the Scripture will show some rivalry between the disciples of John and the

disciples of Jesus (John 3:22–23, 4:1). In Acts 19, Paul encounters some of the disciples of John the Baptist. Simon Peter and several of the disciples of Jesus had once been the disciples of John, they had been baptized by John, and there is no record of their being re-baptized. Why will Paul baptize these disciples of John?

I believe that the query of Paul, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2) might be paraphrased, “Do you understand John’s message?” They replied that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Why was that? The coming of the Spirit was paramount in John’s preaching! The most likely answer was that these were distant disciples who had not received the message of John fully. When that fact was realized, Paul baptized them and the Spirit was given. John the Baptist’s disciples became included in the church.

As you review these experiences in Acts, note that occurrences of glossalalia coincides with crucial junctures in narrative as the gospel spreads. Where the gospel makes breakthroughs to the Jews (Acts 2), to the God-fearing Gentiles (Acts 10), and where John’s and Jesus’ disciples were united (Acts 19)—those are the places where there were tongues. In each of the three chapters, a new group is included; to each, Babel is reversed, just as it was on the day of Pentecost. Glossalalia was the symbol of God’s reversal. These people are all one and can understand each other by the grace of God.

The baptism of the Spirit was an historical event—an *inclusive* event that brought all peoples groups into the church. The baptism of the Spirit meant Pentecost, and was never to happen again. In Acts 1:5, Jesus says, “In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit,” and the “few days” was to be the celebration of the coming barley feast, the day of Pentecost. The baptism of the Spirit was an historical happening—the Spirit had come once into our world to dwell with the believing community and the believer’s life. There can never be another baptism of the Spirit anymore than there can be another birth of Christ at Bethlehem, or a death of Christ at Calvary.

C. Living in the Spirit

“Living in the Spirit” was an emphasis primarily centered in the works of Paul.

Having been delivered from the kingdom of darkness, the believer has a responsibility within the community of faith. The life delivered by the Spirit is now to be lived in the Spirit.

1. Spirit and spirit

a. Definitions

These are the definitions we will use for “spirit”:

Spirit of God	God's everywhere-ness.
Holy Spirit	God's specialized presence. ²²
Human spirit	Inner human essence of existence. The point of the human capacity to cooperate with God.

The Christian experience is that the Holy Spirit interpenetrates the human spirit. This understanding differs from the emphasis some make that the Spirit eradicates sin. If the Spirit interpenetrates the human spirit, the struggle to live a life worthy of God is continuing. This understanding of the Spirit also rejects the Keswick understanding that the Spirit counteracts the human spirit. The interpenetration calls for the believer to live in cooperation with the Spirit. This is the essence of Christian living. God's coming into our lives does not always make us whole, but it does make us more real.

Since the Spirit's characteristic way of working is to interpenetrate the human spirit, then neither the idea of the believer's sufficiency without the Spirit, nor the notion of the Spirit's sufficiency apart from responding human efforts, is adequate. The Bible gives no support to the view that, since God works, there is therefore nothing for persons to do! Rather, the Bible says that God's work *enables* the believer's work (Phil. 2:12–13).

God's grace is never intended as a substitute for human responsibility.

b. The Walk of a Believer

Galatians 5 is an important passage for understanding a believer's walk of faith. All the references to Christian living are essentially synonymous. There is no distinguishing between

- Gal. 5:16, *peripateo*, "walk, live,"
- Gal. 5:18, *ago*, "led", and
- Gal. 5:25, *zao*, "live."

Walking, being led, and living in the Spirit means a conflicted life; Conflict is going on within the world and within the believer.

The goals of the walk in the Spirit are graces or fruits, Gal. 5:22. The nine graces are no less important than the gifts of the Spirit, but in our culture do not have comparable emphasis. The reason, sadly, seems to be that the gifts are "flashier."

²² Do you see the difference. The Greeks will speak of God's "everywhere-ness," "omniscience," "omnipotence." To the Hebrew, there was no place you could where God was not also there, nothing you could know that God didn't know, and no power possible that could not be outmatched by God.

The gifts are manifestations of the Spirit for the edification of the whole church. Graces and fruits are ethical behaviors that give evidence that the Spirit has become present in the life.

This is an over simplification, but has some validity:

Inward graces	Love, joy, peace, these relate primary to one's inner being—a state of being.
Outward graces	Patience, kindness, goodness—these relate primary to the community of faith and those relationships.
Upward graces	Faithfulness that mirrors God's action, gentleness that mirrors God's nature, self-control that mirrors God's relationship—these relate primary to God and the mirroring of God.

To be filled with the Spirit means to walk in the Spirit, not merely to have a special experience in spiritual renewal. Luther once said 'If I were God I would have kicked the world into a thousand pieces.' That is the reason that Luther was not God! We must be careful not to promise too much victory—a life of unbroken fellowship. That understanding does not recognize the complexity of human nature or the intensification of the struggle with evil, e.g. Jesus' experience in the wilderness and Gethsemane or crucifixion.

We also must be careful not to offer the promise of permanent victory. Victory may be gained—but there are no permanent victories in Christian living, and there is no such thing as a permanent spiritual victory. I have had to re-fight many temptations. The battle field may change, but the battle continues.

2. Sanctification by the Spirit

In Christian living, the Spirit sets the believer apart. The meaning of the setting apart has often been debated. The following discussion will in no way resolve the issue, but the following will reflect a believers' church response.

a. Definition

Sanctification means "set apart by God for God." The Scriptures speak of holy plates, holy mountains, etc. See the study on Holiness beginning on page 32.

b. Tenses in Sanctification

As with many biblical concepts, the terms related to sanctification remain fluid and are not concretized. Sanctification is biblically applied in a threefold manner:

- *Past sense*—a fact accomplished. Eph. 5:26, 2 Thess. 2:13, cf., Heb. 10:10.

- *Gradual sense*—something being realized, an ongoing activity. 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23, Heb. 12:14; 2 Cor. 3:18.

Growing in grace is under this caption. Can sinlessness be achieved? This depends on the definition of sin. If by “sin” one means breaking known rules such as the Ten Commandments, then there is a possible “yes” answer to the question. However, Paul’s response to the Tenth Commandment was that it caused him to know that he was a sinner (Rom. 7:7–9). The better answer is “no.” We live in need of forgiveness and our “being sanctified” is our growth in overcoming sins in our life.

- *Completed sense*—the eschaton. Holiness is a gift of God, finally, in the world to come (1 John 3:2). God’s Spirit interpenetrates human spirit; God seeks a willing response. This is the key to Christian living.

3. *Worshipping in the Spirit*

a. Introduction

- 1) There is a distinction between tongues (glossalalia) in Acts and in 1 Cor. 14. In Acts, tongues serve to break down barriers. Every time tongues are mentioned in Acts there is the inclusiveness of a new group, and the phenomenon brings understanding of an unknown language. This is the reversal of Babel. The people of God are not to be divided.

It is different in 1 Cor. 14, in which there is inarticulate, unintelligible speech from a Christian in a state of ecstasy. Tongues in Corinthians differs from tongues in Acts because the Corinthians used tongues as a mark of:

- intimacy with God, and
- an aid to devotion.

- 2) Tongues are not a unique Christian experience. The experience of speaking in tongues is not limited to Christian faith. These experience may be found in many of the religions of the ancient world. The spirit of the gods worshipped took possession of the devotee, spoke through them, and often produced bodily movements of abnormal character.

Compare this with the channeling today and other such experiences.

b. Interpreting the Tongues Experience

Any discussion of the tongues experience in 1 Cor. 14, must include its proper and improper use.

- 1) Tongues are a spiritual gift.

- They are a genuine gift and one that Paul shared, 14:14, 18, (“speak more than all of you,” is a rabbinical expression that means, “it has been my experience as well”).
- They are an expression of thoughts and feeling not available in other channels, 14:2.
- They are a sign of God’s presence to unbelievers, 14:22. The ancient world understood glossolalia to be a sign of God’s presence, a view that can be expected to have carried over into the believing community.

In Isa. 28:11–12, speaking in tongues by foreigners did not effect *belief* in Israel, it led to their *judgment*. So tongues are not a sign to believers. In fact, since tongues did not lead the people to obedience in Isa. 28, speaking in tongues is not for *believers* but for *unbelievers*.

However, Paul asserts that prophecy, because of its intelligibility and revelatory character, functions as a sign of God’s approval or God’s presence in their midst. The evidence of this is to be found in the way it affects unbelievers—“God is really among you.”

Signs are positive and negative. Tongues are a sign for judgment. Prophecy is a sign for believers and is a blessing. Signs function as an expression of God’s attitude—they signify either approval or disapproval. Tongues are a sign that God is present, but Paul’s is more concerned with clear communication.

Tongues function in either of these two ways on unbelievers:

- They receive no revelation from God.
- They judge the Spirit’s work as madness.

2) The Utilization of tongues.

- Tongues are not to be used indiscriminately, 14:18f, 28.
- They are almost last in the list and least in value, 12:10, 14:19.
- They tend towards self-centeredness, 14:4.
- They can create disorder in worship, 14:27f, 33, 40.
- Tongue usage can be controlled, 14:28, 32.

3) Comparisons

- *Prophecy* and *tongues*. Prophecies are Holy Spirit inspired utterances that are intelligible, 14:3f, while tongues are Holy Spirit inspired utterances which are unintelligible 14:14f.

- *Childishness and maturity.* Childishness is to place ecstatic utterance above intelligent utterance, v. 20. A small child coming across a tray of colored beads and a tray of diamonds, will be attracted to the former because he or she does not have the maturity to know the true values.

4. Conclusions

- a. *There are not many long practicing Christian tongue speakers.* This is not say that tongue speaking is wrong, but it does tend to put experience above the mind and to keep the believer at a level of growth without development.

An the illustration of the nun's dream is applies here. She has a vision of three nuns whose prayers are interrupted by the arrival of the Savior. Jesus sits first with the first nun, caresses her hair, and enters into a quiet conversation with her. After a long time, he moves to the second nun, spends a moment with her, and gives her a brief hug. When he gets to the third nun, they exchange a quick smile and he vanishes. The nun having the dream begins to project herself into the scene, earnestly praying that she might be like that first nun! But then she hears Jesus' voice; she has it all wrong! The first nun was the most immature, and needed extra time for instruction and encouragement. The second nun was much more mature, and needed only a few brief words. The third nun, being a mature Christian, was satisfied with the acknowledgment of a smile and to resume her walk in faith.

- b. *The problem of counterfeiting.* Satan continues successfully to counterfeit the gift and this implies that it is genuine. No counterfeiter counterfeits a three dollar bill—a counterfeiter copies the genuine article.
- c. *Two positions to avoid:*
 - charismania
 - charisphobia
- d. *Elements of worship should be*
 - Theocentricly focused,
 - Congregationally centered, and
 - Orderly.

Kierkegaard made a helpful observation concerning differing views of the worship experience:

- The general view—the congregation is the audience, the pastor is the performer, and the Spirit is the promoter.

- The biblical view—the congregation is the performer, the pastor is the prompter, and God is the audience.

Within these parameters, there remains a great deal of freedom in the believer's practice of worship.

D. The Gifting of the Spirit

God has richly gifted His people, empowering them for Kingdom service and enabling them in attitude and action to minister in Jesus' name.

Introduction

- 1 Peter 4:7–11. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully, administering God's grace in its various forms," v. 10.
- 1 Cor. 12:4–7. "To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good," v. 7.

Two things stand forth from these passages.

- Believers have a responsibility to understanding the giftedness and be stewards in servanthood.
- Believers receive the gifts for the common good of the church. The gifts are to serve others.

The Holy Spirit bestows on the community of faith diverse yet complementary gifts to enable a believer to serve. What is said here is true throughout the word of God.

1. Gifting in the OT

In Exodus 31:2–3 the LORD says regarding Bezalel, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts." Bezalel was to design the things which were in the tabernacle—the ark of Testimony, the atonement cover, all the other furnishings of the tent, the lampstands, accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering, and all its utensils. There was a task. Its doing and accomplishing was the will of God. The person was equipped and gifted by the Spirit to accomplish the task. What God has done God will be doing in our day.

In Judges 11:29, "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah." He went forth to battle the Ammonites.

Over and over again God equipped his people, gifted his people to do the task to which he called.

The immediate purpose of the gifts is to shape up the believers so they can do their work of ministry. What was true of the people of God in the Old Testament is true of the people of God in the New Testament and it is true of the people of God today. Cf. Num. 11:16–29 (the Seventy); 1 Sam. 10:6–13 (Saul); 1 Sam. 11:6 (Saul); 1 Sam. 19:20–23 (Saul); 1 Sam. 16:13 (David); Judges 3:10 (Othniel) Dan. 5:13–16 (the dream interpretation) Isa. 32:15 (government).

2. Gifting in the New Testament²³

1 Cor. 14:1 tells us to “make love your aim and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts.”

Why are we to earnestly desire these gifts? 1 Cor. 14 tells how the people of God meet together to worship God. This is what we mean by congregationalism.

- Where is the authority of God? In the congregation.
- Is it in bishops, in priest, in pastors? No—it’s in the congregation.

When the people of God are open and sensitive to the Spirit, it is with them that God’s intentions are made known. Now, when one knows what God wants, then God will endue that community to do the task that God wants done.

In 1 Cor. 12:8–10, nine gifts are listed. Look at them—utterance of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healings, working of miracles, prophecy, distinguishing utterances, interpretation of utterances, Now in vv. 28–30, eight additional gifts are mentioned—apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrations, speakers. So altogether in chapter 12, there are 17 different gifts listed. Faced with excessive individualism at Corinth, Paul’s teaching on gifts stressed their corporate dimension. If you go to Rom. 12:6–8, seven gifts are listed; they are prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, contributing, giving aid, doing acts of mercy. In Eph. 4:11–12 there are four gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers. In 1 Pet. 4:9, there is the gift of hospitality, and two normative ways of expressing of gifts are indicated, and they are speaking and serving.

The corporate nature of the gifts means that members of the body need one another. There is no room left for rivalry, contention, jealousy, or envy to divide Christians. Since no member has every gift, the eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you,” for members of the body are interdependent (1 Cor. 12:21).

So the New Testament itemizes a total listing of 29 gifts.

²³ Birkey, 104ff. Also Moody, 452-455.

But, oh! Here I think people miss the point of the word of God. Students place gifts on a sheet of paper and pass it around and ask believers to check off items in the list, asking “what is your gift?” The idea is that the gifts are permanent and individual assets. But the Roman letter did not say they needed all of the Corinthian church’s gifts. *Why?*

Here is the key. The church at Corinth had many problems—they needed seventeen gifts for them to be the people of God. Rome, to accomplish what God wanted, needed but seven gifts. Peter address a scattered and frightened people of God and said that—hospitality, speaking and serving were the gifts needed for them to be the people of God. Paul writes the church of Ephesus, that they needed four gifts to do the work God would have them to do. Ephesians may be a cover letter, so the gifts are more germane.

Nothing indicates that the New Testament gift lists were meant to be exhaustive or final.

- Gifts are for the church, not for individuals.
- They are not given to individuals to keep; their ownership remains with God.

3. Gifting for Today

Now what does this mean for us today?

The church has a first and primary task—to discern what God wants to do. What does God want done? This is not an easy task—people have their own ideas, and they project what they think. One’s needs to study and know the facts. Is your need to serve? What are the needs? Are they to grow? Are there people about with which you need to interact and to which you need to witness? Do you need to comfort the homeless or abused? Come together, two or three in Jesus name, and then ask what you will and it will be done. *The coming together is essential*, cf. Matt. 18:20.

When you have determined what God wants you to do, then and only then you have the assurance of the word of God, and only then will you will be gifted to do what God wants you to do. Like with Jephthah—are there Ammorites in the land? Then the Spirit will come upon you to drive them out. Or like Bezalel, is there a place of God to beautify for worship? Then the Spirit of God will descend and you will be enabled to do the work. Are there problems in your church that need to be dealt with, then like the Corinthian church? The Spirit will come and give you the gifts needed to do what God wants.

The gifts of God today include things not enumerated in the Bible—radio and television broadcasting, pastoral counseling. Also, we are a lonely people—so counseling is needed and we are being gifted by people who can do that task. What is your need? Some will say one thing, and some will say another. Together you must decide. “Where two or three are gathered together in my

name, there am I in the midst.” Hard work normally precedes the gifts of the Spirit.

4. Ordinary and Extraordinary Gifts

Let me go further. Gifts in the New Testament are both ordinary and extraordinary. When the rebel Saul of Tarsus was converted and became the apostle Paul, did he lose all he had gained in the years of development and study at the feet of Gamaliel? On the contrary, Paul recognized that God had called him even before his birth (Gal. 1:15–16). When Saul became Paul, the Spirit enhanced his natural abilities and redirected them. Matthew was at a seat of customs and making tax records; when he followed Jesus, the pen that once had written out receipts for payments was enhanced to write the story of the Life of Christ.

The Spirit of God will enhance what is there and make it larger. The key to the transformation of a talent into a gift is in recognizing the enhancement of that talent as having its source from God. A natural talent, if recognized as from God and dedicated to the Lord in ministry in some special way, may become a gift of the Spirit. But also the Spirit of God will grant new gifts to accomplish his will, such as miracles, healings, and discernment. If this is what the body of Christ needs, then the Spirit will give it. You can look at the gifts that come to a church and understand the church’s prior weakness or its present ministry.

This perhaps can be understood in the differences between *discover* and *develop*. To discover a gift is to receive it from grace provided. To develop a gift is to enhance a gift by disciplined faith. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of creation as well as the Spirit of re-creation.

5. Exhortation

Listen to the exhortation of Paul: “fan into flame the gift of God,” (2 Tim. 1:6). Dormant gifts are frustrating to the work of God. Every member can be gifted but not all are engaged in Christ’s work. Burying the talent is the way Jesus spoke of it in one of his parables (Matt. 25:14ff). Again “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” (1 Thess. 5:19). When God is at work, cooperate with God’s activity. The flame is to be fanned. We need the encouragement of each other in this work. We are dependent on each other to do God’s work in the world. Gifted but unconcerned is a tragedy and why we are limping rather than running in our ministry.

But listen to one more exhortation: “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you ...” (1 Tim. 4:14–16). Every believer is capable of being God-gifted. We are to be servants in some way. Do not neglect that gift, but use it.

6. Summary

As a believer in the body of Christ, every member is to have a function. There are no second-class Christians. All have unique and important gifts for

building up the body. The church, or the people see who they are and what is needed. They work together, or covenant together concerning what they believe God would have them to do. They come to possess clarity on what the mission of God is for them as the church.

With a task understood, then faith believes what God has caused us to discern, and God will enable us to do it. So, some natural talents may be enhanced and some extraordinary equipping may transpire. But the gifts are to be able to enable us to do the work of ministry.

Now I need to add one further note. When that task is done, the gift does not become the property of the believer, but remains the property of God who gave it.

For the next task, a different gift may be given. God will provide the Spiritual gifts for the task we are to do. So the seventeen gifts to the Corinthian Church, the seven gifts to Rome, the gifts to Ephesus, the one gift to the scattered people that Peter addresses—the gifts are not for our enhancement but for the building up the people of God to the task they have been called. Gifts function in the body.

In Eph. 4:12ff, gifts are for the building up of the body of Christ and to equip saints for the work of ministry. It is not the presence of spiritual gifts but the proper use of spiritual gifts that validates servanthood. Our gifts from God are on loan. Let us use them well.²⁴

E. Summary and Conclusions

1. The recognition of the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

This came quickly after the affirmation of the deity of Christ. Binitarianism was never really a possibility. Worshipers in the early church knew and appreciated the Spirit before the theologians did. Early Christians were deeply conscious of the Church as the living, healing, reconciling community where the risen Christ was to be found in the Holy Spirit. The church was the contemporary proof of the resurrection as it was the proof of the presence of the Spirit.

2. The *filioque* clause.

In 1012, a German-born Pope, Benedict VIII, added this clause to the creed of Constantinople: “We believe...in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*...Who is worshipped and gloried together with the Father and Son, who spoke through the prophets...” This *filioque* clause, that the Holy Spirit

²⁴ See *Spiritual Gift Inventory* by Gordon McMinn, used at Western Baptist Seminary, and “Nexus,” a table game for discovering gifts produced by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, for an alternative view.

proceeds from the Father *and the Son*, contributed to the schism in 1054 in the division of East and West.

John 15:26 speaks only of the Spirit proceeding from the Father, but is sent by the Son. It does not say “proceeding from the Son,” but since the Son is the same essence as the father the *filioque* is theologically correct.

The *Filioque* clause has consequently been a bone of contention between East and West ever since, with the further complication of the more recent argument regarding whether the Pope has a right to alter the creed without calling or consulting a General Council.

3. In the Reformation period, Luther and Calvin spoke of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. This was to combat Rome and give authority to the believer reading Scripture and knowing the mind of the Lord.
4. In the Modern era since the Enlightenment reason has tended to replace the doctrine of the Spirit. The world is judged by the observable and that which can be measured and quantified.
5. The difficulty for Christians to speak about the Holy Spirit is because He is God and we directly experience Him.
6. Theologizing. The Spirit may be interpreted by the tasks set forth in these three traditional phrases:
 - “The communion of the saints,” *solidarity*,
 - “The Lord” (from the Constantinople creed), *authority*, and
 - “The giver of life” (from the Constantinople creed), *vitality*.

Christians who emphasize *vitality* tend to have a religion primarily of the heart.

Christian who emphasize *authority* tend to have religion primarily of the head.

Christians who emphasize *solidarity* tend to have a religion primarily of unity.

Likewise, the Spirit may be interpreted by enumerating the works of the trinity:

We speak of God as *Father* by emphasizing what he is doing (holiness, love, etc.),

We speak of God as *Son* by enumerating events in his life (born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, baptized in the Jordan, ministered in Galilee, crucified in Jerusalem, risen the third day, etc.).

We speak of the *Spirit* by listing his activities (inspired the writers of the Bible, regenerates believers, gives gifts, guides and empowers believers in the church for mission, etc.).

Either approach is satisfactory. Frankly, I use both. The key biblical idea to distinguish the Spirit's role from those of the Father and the Son is the idea of effecting. The Spirit is the effector of God's purposes, whether in creation or redemption.

Instead of the Spirit taking the place of an absent Father or Son, as is sometimes said, the Spirit *effects* their presence and activity. We are to remember that the giver is more important than the gifts. As the Effector of God's creative and redemptive purposes in history and experience, the Spirit actualizes God's purposes in a manner that promotes the long-range growth of persons. The Spirit is the effective actualizer of God's intentions. This view

- includes the Spirit's role in creation as well as in redemption, and
- points to patience and endurance, rather than spectacular signs and wonders, as the biblical characteristic of the Holy Spirit's primary work.

This brings us to the last unit of study.

IV. The Trinity

If I could have had my preference, this is the first lecture I would have given at the beginning of the year. Theology is basically trinitarian and the underpinning for all that has been said theologically is trinitarian. But because we have to walk together and gain comfort with one another and because we must learn to talk theologically and gain a proficiency in theological understanding this lecture comes at the end of the year. Even though this lecture is last, it is yet first. Christian theological reflection ought to begin with the consideration of God's triune nature precisely because "in the light of the theology of the Trinity, everything looks different."

Presuppositions

The doctrine of the Trinity was developed during the Patristic period. In this introduction I want to set out my presuppositions.

1. Doctrinal Development

In order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity it is necessary to understand the concept of doctrinal development.

The doctrine of the Trinity is an interpretation and development of the witness of the New Testament. The doctrine is unique in that it was not completed in the New Testament period, but was completed in the Patristic period. In the Patristic period we are dealing with an essentially a united church. This united church is our root, even of those of us in the believers' church tradition. The term Old Catholic is used with dealing with this period of time, which is to be distinguished from the Roman Catholic period which begins in the 600s, centuries into the Constantinian period.

In this Old Catholic period our identity is linked with those who were formulating the doctrines concerning Christ, selecting the books which make up our canon, affirming the deity of Christ and the Spirit, and developing a trinitarian understanding of God. These people in the Old Catholic period were our predecessors. Men like Irenaeus, the Gregories, Origen, Athanasius and others who have blessed us and to whom we owe such a great debt in the faith. They as with all others, had weaknesses, but their heroic journey to put belief in Christ into a context for those who followed has been an enduring legacy. It is to our shame that we have left this period of study to the Roman Catholics, to the Anglicans, and, to a lesser degree, to the Church of Christ.

Because the doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit reached a somewhat specific formation in this period of time, the doctrine of the Trinity did as well. Of these three doctrines, Christ and the Holy Spirit are deeply related to the doctrine of the Trinity. The concept of the Trinity will be a logical conclusion following the understanding of the divinity of the Son and the divinity of the Spirit.

It is important to attempt an understanding of the concept of doctrinal development. This concept is at this time somewhat controversial. I do not mean by doctrinal development that all doctrines evolve, but I do mean that some doctrines have a history and in that history there is development of meaning. However, let me say this is not a straight line kind of development—perhaps it is best understood as a zigzag, rather than evolution. The path to truth must often have correctives. This idea of doctrinal development is evident within the Patristic period. Let me attempt to illustrate the concept of doctrinal development with two Old Testament illustrations before we look at the concept of doctrinal development in the Patristic period. This may help us have some understanding of what the concept means.

- Monotheism. In Ex 20:3 we are told to have “no other gods before me.” The term used for that concept is monolatry. That is, God is higher than all the other gods; God is above them, he is the most high God. Later in the Old Testament, in Isa. 45:5, there is the statement “I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.” How do you account for this different witness within the Old Testament? This change indicates doctrinal development. The answer to the change between Ex. 20 and Isaiah 45, or at least a possible answer, is that God began with his people on an incarnational level.

God has always been who he is. God has not changed, but the understanding of God has changed. In the incarnational concept, the people around Israel believed that there were many gods, as did Israel at the time; in time God would guide them to a fuller truth. This is what is meant by doctrinal development. This is not true of all doctrines, but it is true of some. In fact, Jesus' witness, "You have heard it said of old but I say to you..." (e.g., Matt 5:21) underscores that He came to bring a fuller understanding to doctrine. These statements of Jesus would too be doctrinal development.

- Universalism. This also is a doctrine that developed. I do not mean by universalism that all are going to be saved, but rather that God is a God of all peoples. This witness, that God is a God of all, may be old, but yet even in Acts there is the need for the breaking down of barriers so all peoples could be included in the church. This doctrine was been difficult for understanding. How could there be a special people and God be the God of all people? There is a witness in the Old Testament to the God of all, and the witness of Simon Peter at Cornelius' home that God showed no favoritism. But the understanding of universalism may not fully be understood even yet.
- The Trinity, like monotheism and universalism, is also a developing doctrine. It will be a doctrine somewhat different from the two above, in that its development and flowering in human understanding takes place *beyond* the New Testament period of time. It is for that reason that the Trinity is perceived by some as the most difficult of all doctrines to understand. The *seeds* of Trinitarianism will be found deeply within the New Testament but the *flowering* of the doctrine was within the patristic period.

2. Monotheists Gave Us Trinitarian Thinking

There is not a single writer in the New Testament that would not quote the *Shema* with conviction "Hear O Israel ... the LORD is one." The writers of the NT have Jewish or Hebrew convictions about God. Nothing they say or teach, will they see as conflicting with that historical theological view rooted in the *Shema*. Trinitarianism must not be viewed as an opposite, but rather as an extension of monotheism. This is a highly significant point if the doctrine of the Trinity is to be understood.

Some have suggest that there was monotheist development within the Old testament itself as seen in the hypothesizing of the "Wisdom" as seen in Proverbs. Time will not allow us to pursue this possibility. Trinitarianism must be seen as a flowering of monotheism.

3. The Trinity Is a Missionary Doctrine

The trinity is the interpretation of God made by believers on non-Jewish soil. The doctrine was developed with biblical terms, and concepts that were blended with the thought-forms of contemporary Greek philosophy. This helps explain why the doctrine is so distinctive—it is the result of a marriage between Hebrew and Greek thought. It was a Hebrew conviction expressed in another language and on foreign soil.

This task is the missionary task—the witnessing of God in terms of other cultures. The maintaining of the witness of the gospel and yet the expressing this witness in the language and understanding of a different people is what the missionary task is about.

Because of this influence of Greek philosophy on the doctrine, some theologians have accused the doctrine of becoming subverted by Greek philosophy. But I would want you to remember that those who gave us the doctrine of the Trinity *opposed* Greek philosophy's interpretation of creation, insisting on *creatio ex nihilo*; and they also *opposed* the Greek understanding of incarnation (i.e., that the flesh is evil), and further they opposed the Greek understanding of time, saying that time is non-cyclical but linear and eventful (that is, has movement toward a goal, with *kairos* events). Why, then, do these Patristic theologians support so ardently the view of God as Trinity? Answer: *they saw in this doctrine a correct witness to the New Testament.*

The Patristic theologians were not always correct. We are yet attempting to correct their view of human nature, that of body and soul, and their understanding of the nature of God—these were developed from Greek philosophy. But with the Trinity we, or at least I, bear witness to a great contribution made by the believers in the Patristic period.

So we have an unique doctrine in the trinity, a doctrine that blends Greek culture and philosophy with Hebraic thought and New Testament witness in a way far different from any other doctrine we have studied this semester.

4. Trinitarianism is the Christian Doctrine of God

The doctrine of the Trinity is an essential part of the Christian witness. It is the only doctrine formulated (completed) outside the New Testament of which this statement is true. It is an essential part of the gospel. It is to be remembered, however, that the doctrine is a logical development of the biblical monotheism.

Trinity is the Christian doctrine of God. It has as its purpose the answering of the questions, “What difference did Jesus make to the understanding of God?”, and “how is Jesus related to God?” Sooner or later these questions had to be answered. The attempt to answer these questions was first made in the Patristic period.

From Tertullian (160–220) to Schleiermacher (1830) the doctrine of the Trinity is viewed as *distinctively Christian*. But something happened with the development of liberal theology in the 1800's until the time of Karl Barth. Karl Barth brought the doctrine back to the forefront in theological discussion. The point at which Christianity differs from the monotheism of both Judaism and Islam is hardly mentioned in most Protestant theologies yet to this day. This doctrine is, however, of the utmost significance. Let me say again. Trinitarianism is the Christian doctrine of God.

Col. 1, Heb. 1, and John 1 are the New Testament statements that are seminal for an understanding of the Trinity. The full implication of Jesus and his relationship to God were not perceived and stated at that time, even as the doctrines of monotheism and universalism were not fully perceived and stated early in the Old Testament era.

5. Description of the Trinity

I would like you to know the following “description” as if it were a definition, although it cannot be a definition. How can one “define” God?

The Trinity avers that God exists as three in one Godhead, having eternal ontological distinctions within his being. Those distinctions correspond to what was manifested in the history of salvation and as recorded in Scripture. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three in one.

6. Delineations to Aid Our Understanding

a. Two Heresies to Avoid

- Unitarianism. This makes Jesus only a man. Maybe a special man, but this does not square with the New Testament teachings.
- Tritheism. This is the belief in three Gods— the view that in heaven there are or will be three thrones. On the central throne is God, and on his right hand is the Son, and on the left hand is the Holy Spirit. (The third throne may not be firm in most peoples minds.) Tritheism speaks of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit as three separate individuals. This, I think, is the general Baptist church members view and maybe the average pastor as well.

Neither of these views is acceptable.

b. Two Technical Terms to Know

1) Economic Trinity

Economic has the meaning of management or dispensation. The Economic Trinity is the historical manifestation of God.

- To Abraham, God was Father,
- In Bethlehem, God was Son, and
- At Pentecost, God was Holy Spirit.

Such a view tends to emphasize oneness. It tends toward modalism—that God became the Son and then became the Holy Spirit.

The Economic Trinity is valid, but be careful of its emphasis on oneness and God expressing being in different modes. Sometimes this view is called functional instead of economic. It is also called the social theory.²⁵

The Cappodicians formulated the Trinity starting with the understanding of the Father; from Him they derived the Son by generation and the Spirit by procession.

2) Ontological Trinity

Ontology means being and reality. God's essence corresponds with historical manifestation. God has always been Trinity. The ontological approach refers to God's inner life. The view emphasizes the threeness, and thus tends toward tritheism. Ontological is sometimes called "immanent" or "inherent." The Ontological Trinity is also sometimes called *essential Trinity*.

Augustine started with *ousia*, or the *being* of God. The doctrine had already been formulated, but he interpreted Trinity so the three ways of existing had a common relationship.

c. Two Inherent Problems to Transcend

- The word "person" has greater meaning than the word "individual." *Propospon*, *hypostasis*, and *persona*—all are used interchangeably for "person." "Person" in the biblical world infers a recognizable, separately existing entity. The Patristic period generally used "person" in the way that matches with the Old Testament doctrine of corporate personality. In corporate personality the "I" can sometimes be the whole nation or a separate individual.

In the Greek world the word "person" meant someone who sounded through a mask. The stress was on the different roles of the actor. It was just to mark a differences in the characters. The person could be an individual or the citizens of a city.

Our concept of individualism is a relatively new concept. Modern individualism began in the 1600s and the concept matured in psychology in the 1700s and 1800s. From that time on the term

²⁵ Cf. .Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*.

person began to express ideas different from the biblical insights or patristic understanding. So, today, “person” is understood to mean an individual with separate and unique personality and possessing a center of the self. Center of consciousness is personality with all the psychological depth and complexity attached to these terms in modern thought. We now hear what the Biblical witnesses and the Patristic theologians say from our current understanding of the word “person.” I oppose the understanding of person that implies three centers of divine self-consciousness as applied to God. That would be a heresy, because the word “person” in the modern sense, when applied to God, gives a tritheistic understanding of God.

How do we deal with this problem regarding the understanding of “person”? Instead of “person,” Karl Rahner uses the term “the way of existing.” This is closer to what the Patristics meant because they were dealing ontologically and not psychologically. They were not speaking of mind or consciousness or feelings when they spoke of the three *hypostasis* of God. So Rahner would have us say that God has three ways of existing as God. God is only one personality as we think today, cf. 2 Cor. 5:18. God is only one personality and used in the modern sense of person, God has only one center of consciousness. He expresses his personality and his consciousness in three different ways of being who he is.

To be *personal* is not to be individual or private, but to *live in relationships*. God’s being is communion.

- *The experience of the incarnation as permanent.* When the incarnation is conceived as a permanent expression rather than what the Bible calls a *kenosis* (emptied himself) and *plerosis* (returned), a difficulty emerges in our thinking of God. It is best to think of Jesus today from the resurrection experiences rather than to think of him as continuing in his incarnate state. But I don’t find that this is the way we conceive him, unless we are being reflective. I struggle in this area in my own thinking.

If the incarnation is viewed as permanent, then much difficulty is inherent in that thought process that leads to an understanding of the Trinity.

d. Two Contributing Understandings

- The deity of Christ passages are set forth in a trinitarian setting,²⁶ cf. Matt. 11:26–27; Luke 10:22; and John 20:28.

²⁶ J.S. Whale, *Christian Doc.*, 112-120.

- The divinity of the Holy Spirit passages are set forth in a Christological context, “I will send the Spirit to you,” cf. John 14:26.

In fairness, the Apologists (Justin Martyr, *et al.*) in the Patristic period would probably be happier with binitarianism than trinitarianism. But when the church thought on the matter of binitarianism it was never seriously considered.

The Spirit is understood in the New Testament both as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity inevitably arises with the attempt to preserve monotheism in a way that incorporates the threefold experience of God. Once the truth has been recognized that the doctrine of the self-communication of God in Christ demands a belief in the eternal distinction between the Father and the Son in the Godhead, and then a similar distinction is applied to the Holy Spirit and trinitarianism must follow.

The Constantinople Council in 381 virtually completed the trinitarian concept. The finishing touches were added by Augustine. The doctrine of the trinity is the work of theological reflection based on the Biblical witness to God as Creator, Incarnate Word, and Indwelling Spirit.

The problem is to affirm the deity of Christ and the deity of the Spirit without compromising monotheism. This is what the Patristic theologians attempted to do.

I. Biblical Materials

Reading forward, the Old Testament has no direct expression of the Trinity. There are expressions about the diversity of God’s action—the angels of Yahweh, wisdom, and the theophanies, for example. But, reading back from a New Testament and Patristic understanding of trinity, much more can be seen and understood about the diversities in God.

The New Testament does not use the term Trinity. Trinity has a Latin root that was used intermittently in the Patristic period and then established in the fourth century at Constantinople to describe God.

A. The Scriptural Witness to Distinctive Presences

By “distinct,” I mean a distinctive, conscious presence.

1. In Jesus is the presence of God.
Rom. 5:6–8, God’s love is in the activity of Jesus.
John 1:18, The Son is in the bosom of the Father.
Matt 11:27, The Father and Son are reciprocal, cf. Luke 10:22, 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5.
2. In the Holy Spirit is the presence of God, John 7:37–39.

The Holy Spirit is the presence of God as the character of Jesus within and among the believers. John 14:16–17; 15:26f; 16:7–11.

The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in and among his people. This is seen in the stories of Acts, Acts 2:33.

3. Wisdom is a *hypostesization* of God—a taking on of personhood.

Old Testament passages that have influenced the formulation of the Trinitarian doctrine, including the wisdom books, include Prov. 8:12–31, esp. 22–31; Job 28:12ff, esp. 20–28, cf. John 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:18–31, esp. v. 30, and Heb. 1:2.

There is a growing tendency to personify wisdom and to assign it a creative function. New Testament writers avail themselves of this idea in order to explain Christ.

B. Trinitarian Correlations

There are several correlations between “persons” in the New Testament. Note, however, that the order of this section is not rigid.

1. 1 Cor. 12:4–6 correlates Spirit, Lord, and God. The primacy of the Spirit (the Spirit is listed first) is with gift giving—an *equipping* approach. Cf., Eph. 4:4–6 (the Spirit is in v. 4, Lord is in v. 5, and God is in v. 6).
2. 2 Thess 2:13–14 correlates God, Spirit, and Lord. Cf., 1 Pet 1:1–2. God, Spirit, and Jesus Christ—a *revealing* approach. God by Spirit magnified (read “revealed”) Jesus.
3. Heb. 9:14 correlates Christ, Spirit, and God: “... Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God,” a *redemptive* approach. Cf., Heb. 10:29. Reflects the redemptive process as is experienced by most believers.
4. Acts 2: 32–33. Jesus, Father, and Spirit. The theocentric process is seen theologically—a *theocentric* approach. When Peter and Paul are doing their theological thinking they speak about God, but when their thoughts take wings and turns into praise and doxology, it is then that they address the Father. Cf., 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3. Jesus begins his prayers (except on the cross) with “Father.”

C. Trinitarian Blessings

Blessings that are couched in Trinitarian formulae are present in the New Testament

1. at believers’ baptism, Matt. 28:19, and
2. in benedictions:
 - 2 Cor. 13:14, “The Grace...”,

- Jude 20–21, “... and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ ...”

D. A Trinitarian Event

The baptism of Jesus is an event that is recorded in all four Gospels. It is an account of how God the Father acknowledges Jesus of Nazareth to be in an unique sense his Son and sends down His Spirit upon him to anoint him for his work. Even though the gospel writers do not explicitly say that the God who is involved in the baptism of Jesus must be thought of as Father, Son, and Spirit in the closest possible unity with one another, what they do say provides the material on which such a conclusion can be validly based.

E. A Testimony of a Monotheist

In writing 1 Cor. 15:25–28, Paul could yet say the *Shema*.

The work of Jesus is theocentric. What Jesus does is the work of God.

F. Conclusion

Belief in God as Trinity develops primarily out of the *worship* of the Christian community. Let me illustrate by some New Testament prayers:

- Eph. 2:18, “For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”
- The Spirit (Rom. 8:26–27) and the Son (Rom. 8:34) enable us to approach the Father.

II. Historical By-paths, Through Heresy to Truth

Truth has about it an aura of struggle and this can be sensed in the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The initial issue is to affirm the deity of Christ without compromising monotheism.

Mixed into the process were political motives, personal rivalries along with theological concerns.

A. Monarchianism

This group wanted to preserve the unity of God. They emphasized oneness. There are two types of monarchianism that developed.

1. Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism)

Theologians in this group saved the unity of God by denying the full deity of Christ. Christ, they said, was a man who was endowed with a special gift of power which set him apart from other human beings.

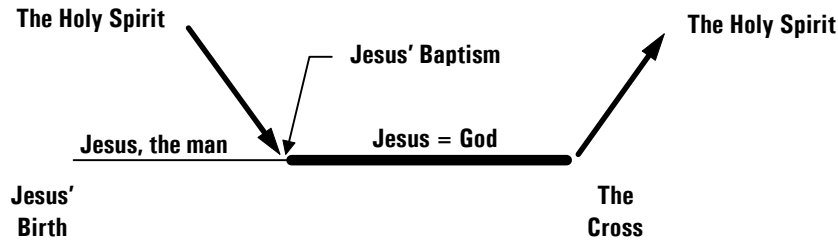


Figure 1. Dynamic Monarchianism.

God adopted Jesus as Son and filled him with a divine quality. Usually this is associated with the experience of baptism. The power left him at his crucifixion. Figure 1 illustrates this approach.

God and Christ are viewed as one in will, purpose, and disposition, but they are not equal in being or essence. Christ is not God, but inspired by God and endowed with special divine power.

Paul of Samosata was condemned by the Synod at Antioch in 268 for holding such a view.

2. Modalistic Monarchianism

Theologians of this stripe took seriously the *full deity of Christ as equal with God*. God is one being who is manifested in *three successive modes or manifestations*—Father, Son, and Spirit. These three ways were one and the same God in different and sequential appearances.

Sabellius is the name most frequently associated with this view.

This is patripassionism, for it says that the Father was born, suffered and died. See Figure 2.



Figure 2. Modalistic Monarchianism understood God as a series of manifestations.

B. Apollinarism

Apollinarius was the Bishop of Laodica, c. 380. A very good man—I hate to call him a heretic.

Apollinarius said that in the person of Jesus the divine *Logos* took the place of the human spirit. Jesus therefore possessed a *human body, a human life, but not a human spirit*. The divine *Logos* was the spirit or mind in Jesus.

What is at stake here is the full humanity of Christ.

It was the great Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Ancyra, and Gregory of Nyssa, who perceived the fault in this theology. Gregory of Nazianzus formed the quote, “*what is unassumed is unredeemed*.” If any area of Jesus Christ not like humankind, that area can not be touched by the redemptive hand of God.

In 381, the Council of Constantinople rejected Apollinarius and the ingredients of the Trinity were in place. Jesus was understood to be fully God and fully man. The Holy Spirit is also understood and affirmed to be divine from the 362 Council of Alexandria onward.

C. Conclusion

At the beginning, nobody knew the right, most satisfactory answer to the problem of the relationship of God, Christ, and Spirit. This is one reason the controversy lasted in some degree until 381. Gradually the controversy involved every conceivable authority—general councils, emperors, bishops, parties of the bishops, and even the faithful at large who made their contribution, usually through riots. If ever there was a controversy decided by the method of trial and error, it was this one. Gradually a consensus emerged—Jesus was God and Jesus was man—he is the God-man. He is fully God and fully man. In some ways the Holy Spirit barely made it as a follow up to the discussion about Christ, but that may be what the Holy Spirit was most pleased with. The Spirit wants to keep the spotlight on Jesus. It is, however, right to say that the divinity of the Spirit had to be understood for the trinitarian understanding of God to be completed. So I think the Spirit even guided believers into truth about the Spirit.

1. Safeguarding the Divinity of Christ and the Spirit

The doctrine of the Trinity was the early Father’s attempt to guarantee, establish and safeguard the understanding that, in Christ, God was moving, acting, and decisively committing himself on our behalf in the Son and the Spirit. Only a Trinitarian shape of the doctrine can give that safeguard. The authenticity of God’s self-revelation and self-communication necessitates a trinitarian understanding. A Trinitarian account of God is essential to the Christian faith.

2. Affirming the Salvific Work of God

The doctrine of the trinity pertains above all to the mystery of salvation because the doctrine presents the fullness of God in Jesus Christ both in his

life and work and in our understanding of the Christ event by the illumination of the Spirit. Without these understandings, salvation would be impaired.

- Christians, in their *practical lives*, can be mere monotheists. They need not connect events of salvation history (creation: Spirit's and Son's work; incarnation: Father's and Spirit's work; sending of the Spirit: Father's and Son's work) with God's own reality. This is why I would say Trinitarian theology is not obviously relevant for the life of most believers. I deeply regret this for it causes an impoverishment of faith.
- Christians, in their *devotional lives*, can be tritheists. They can and do call on all the names of the Trinity without ever needing to see or understand the connection of the names and God's interrelatedness.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not an *explanation*, but a *description* of the being of God and the work of God. In New Testament there are discussions of various doctrines. For example, sin is discussed in Rom. 1–2; the person of Christ in John 1:1–14, the work of the Spirit in John 14:16. But one will not find a corresponding discussion of the Trinity.

3. The Baptist Faith and Message

The Baptist Faith and Message deals with the three but never unites them—a very serious weakness in the document. It states in the introduction under section II on God:

The eternal God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

There is no clear ontological trinity in this statement.

Remember that this is a confession and a confession differs from a creed. A confession need not touch all bases, but makes confessions in areas upon which the writers wish to speak. However, the confession does shape thought, and this confession does not help one shape a trinitarian understanding.

III. Theological Reconstruction²⁷

A Trinitarian pattern seems to arise inevitably out of Christian experience and reflection. We cannot say all we need to say about God without referring in some way to the Creator, the Incarnate *Logos*, and the presence of the Spirit. This way of thinking about God is intrinsic and not arbitrary.

Using language available to them, the Patristic theologians were trying to steer between modalism on one side and Arianism on the other side in the attempt to enrich monotheism without falling into tritheism.

²⁷ British Council of Churches, *passim*.

A. The Economic/Ontological Trinity

The economic trinity *is* the ontological trinity and the ontological trinity *is* the economic trinity. What God has revealed himself to be, God is.

This means that who and how God is in the economy of salvation is who and how God is eternally. The historical activity is true, and the historical activity reveals to us God's inner history.

- The work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each the work of God.
- The work of each is inclusive of the others. All three participated at the burning bush, the feeding of the 5000, and at the tongues of fire at Pentecost.
- The threefoldness is eternal. Modes, or God's way of existing are not temporary phases. They are eternal, and they *are internal to the being of God*.

B. The Work of God Is Particularized

- The Son dying on the cross is not the Father.
- The Spirit coming at Pentecost is not the Son.

C. Analogies of the Trinity

Analogies of the trinity are usually not helpful. An analogy must do justice to unity and threefoldness. I personally know of no adequate analogy.

Beside doing justice to unity, an analogy must be in personal terms. Impersonal terms takes away from the being of God. Illustrations:

- Clover has three leaves, but what of the stem? What of the soil, could it have four leaves? This is modalism.
- Water, ice, and steam. Again, modalism—there is no simultaneous unity.
- Father, son, and person. This has some strengths. I am the father of Lisa and Jim, I am son of James H. and Opal Zink Nelson, and I am an individual person. The weakness: was there ever a time I was not father? Being a son precedes being a Father. This is also modalism.
- Sun, light, and fire. Modalism, again.

If you need an analogy, worship is better. Worship is the best analogy, but remains imperfect. "I pray in Jesus name, by the power of the Spirit, to the Father." Worship and prayer give us a trinitarian experience. We pray "To the

Father through the Son and in the Spirit.” The fellowship within the church can mirror the inner life of God, the *koinonia*. This will be developed later.

D. God as Community

God is not a solitary monad; God is sovereign, but not solitary. He is differentiated within himself with one center of consciousness. God as community consisting in unbroken personal relationship.

1. Perichoresis

Perichoresis is a word that helps us understand the relationships within the trinity.

Perichoresis is the mutual giving and receiving that makes the divine persons what they are only in their relations to each other. The consciousness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct but exist in *perichoresis*.

2. God’s Trinitarian Life

God’s life is trinitarian (Figure 3). God does not simply act on our behalf, but invites us to be partners in his life and work. In that way I think it proper to speak of an *openness* in the Trinity—the believer can participate in the relationship that “flows” between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit moves out from the Father through the Son to the believer. The believer moves in the Spirit through the Son to the Father.

- God has never been without a Son—The Son is the begotten.
- The Son never been without the Father—The Father begets.
- The Spirit proceeds from the Father—but also from the Son (*filioquay*).

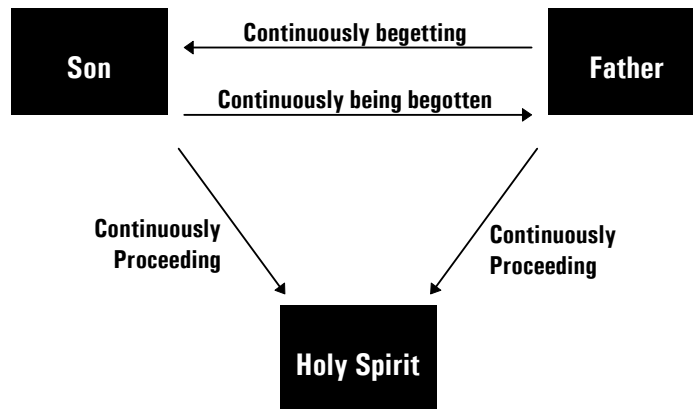


Figure 3. Viewing the life of God as an eternal event.

God is essentially relational and all may share in that relationship.

3. Emphasizing the Persons of the Trinity

Our relationship with God goes wrong when we over stress one of the persons of the Godhead.

- Emphasizing the Father.* We associate power and dominion with the Father. We sing praises to an “awesome God,” ignoring the Son and the Holy Spirit and distorting the trinity by ignoring its unity.

We think of the Father apart from Christ and the Spirit then as a first cause, a designer. This is a distortion. A right relationship with Jesus will lead us through Jesus both to the Father that he comes from and to the Spirit that he sends.
- Emphasizing the Son.* We associate moralistic activism or individual or inverted pietism. The New Testament never views Jesus in isolation. Jesus is not, himself, our destination, but the true and living way to the Father. Being a Christian means Jesus relates us to the Father.
- Emphasizing the Spirit.* We associate introspective escapism or charismatic excess with the Spirit. Religious experiences in and for themselves is the danger. The Spirit is known because he enables us to know God as our Father (Gal. 4:6) and Jesus as our Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). The Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us.

4. Trinitarian Worship

Worship is a celebration of and a sharing in the relationships between Father, Son and Spirit.

- a. Worship which is less than fully trinitarian is not untrue, but is *inadequate* worship. This is an area where experience and doctrine actually shape each other. In “inadequate” worship one may approach God as Father, with the Son merely as our pattern.

Approach God as Father, pleading the past work of Christ as our warrant, but forgetting the communion between them here and now. Remember that the work of the Son was God the Father reaching out to us.

One may use the names of Father, Son and Spirit without awareness of relationship between them. Common difficulties include:

- Worshipping only Christ as king, neglecting the kingship of the Father and forgetting the obedience of the Son. Much of the idea of subjection today rest in this false understanding.
 - Worship as something we do and feel, rather than something God invites us to enter.
- b. A more adequate model for worship begins with God inviting us into his life. The worshipper should celebrate and be drawn into the life and relationship of the triune God. This is the “openness” of the trinity, and applies only in the worship experience. The Spirit moves out from the Father through the Son to us; we move in the Spirit through the Son to the Father.

Some components of this worship approach include:

- *Silence.* To listen to the dialogue between Father and Son into which we are summoned. This is waiting on the Lord.
- *Thanksgiving.* Saying Yes to our creation and creation about us.
- *Peace.* Sharing in God’s own sending forth of love and peace. God’s benediction to us is the peace of Christ and we are to share that peace.
- *Prayers of intercession.* Sharing in God’s mission. Our love and concern goes on journey with His.

The Father and Son commune. They invite us by the Spirit to enter into that communion. The Trinity is an open Trinity and we are invited to enter into the life of God. Again, it is God that initiates, and it is upon God’s invitation that worship begins; it

does not start with the first stroke of the baton of the “music minister” or “worship leader.”

Our prayers ride on the prayers of Christ—the Son is in communion with the Father. Worship and prayer are an invitation to participate in the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit, graciously caught up into a divine conversation. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groan that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will,” Rom. 8:26-27.

The Spirit prays in us. The biblical images of wind, breath, fire, oil, water, beating wings affirms that we can share in the moving of God through the world. They also suggest depths of personal relationship in God that cannot be fully expressed in terms of Father and Son alone. Our leaning upon the relationship between Father and Son is the movement of the Spirit. He holds a place open for us within God. God eternally chooses to be an “open Trinity,” including us in his own fellowship.

Our mission rides on the mission of the Son—as the Son was sent so we are sent. Our leaning on Father and Son is the movement of the Spirit. The Spirit holds a place open for us within God.

The open trinity includes us in the fellowship.

c. Worship as a communion of faith.

Don’t see the church as an institution; it is a community for the worship of God. The Father and the son are in communion and the Spirit invites us to share in that communion.

- 1) *The church is a way of being.* Because God is community consisting in unbroken personal relationships, this asserts the theological priority of community over institution or anything impersonal. The church must cease to be looked on primarily as an institution and be treated as a way of being. We are to think of Christianity not only in terms of forgiveness only but of acceptance, healing, and restoration. Our thought needs to move from being strictly western to more of an Eastern way of thinking which includes these understandings.

Members need to be redeemed from isolation. Gifts are not individual self-expression, but contribute to making the whole body of Christ manifest—the place of the

integration—God and others. We pray “our” Father—this is no human dream of community, but an invitation to enter the communion of God’s own life.

- 2) *The church is an open communion.* Because the Trinity is open, we are invited to the dialogue of God. The action of the Spirit is of equal importance to that of the Son. The Spirit makes possible God’s presence now as well as his past action in the constitution the church. The church is to be a trinitarian witness. Trinity breaks a hierarchy of domination and submission—there is no divine right of spiritual leaders—authority can only be based on trust. God became weak to win our hearts. God’s kingship is not earthly power magnified to infinity. Relationship between God and human beings not a chain of command.

E. Conclusion and Summary

1. *The Trinity is the Christian doctrine of God.*
 - Because the trinity corrects deism—that God created and then left the creation to the capriciousness of natural laws. God is not remote and distant from his creation. Deism depicts God as absolute, static and impassable. Jesus as God incarnate counteracts that concept.
 - Because the trinity corrects subordinationism—that is, that Jesus is less than God. There is a subordination during the earthly ministry of Jesus that I accept. But there can be no eternal subordination.
 - Because the trinity corrects polytheism—several gods of whom Jesus is one. Trinitarian is monotheism. God is one. Trinitarianism is a flowering of monotheism.
2. *The trinity is a summary of Christian theology.* It tells of one God and Father who invades our world as Jesus Christ the Son to provide salvation and fellowship and who is now present in the ongoing life of his people by the Spirit.
3. *The trinity is the inner life of God.* God is eternally in himself what he reveals himself to be in Jesus Christ. Working back from revelation or the economic trinity to the inner being of God, must say that whatever is true about God’s triune way towards us must also be true of what God is in himself eternally. If Jesus acts as true Son on earth there must always have been a Son in the being of God.
4. *The trinity demonstrates doctrinal development.* It took time to learn how to speak about God in the light of the Christ event, but the earliest writings of New Testament Scripture have implicit

trinitarianism—see Phil. 2:6–11 and 1 Cor. 1:2. Trinitarian thinking is in the earliest parts of the New Testament.

5. *The trinity invites Participation.* The trinity is best experienced as an invitation to participate in God. God's life is trinitarian.

There is a sixteenth century Russian painting that is titled “Old Testament Trinity,” and I want to share a little bit about that picture. It reflects a long tradition of understanding of the trinity. The picture is based on the Old Testament story of the three angels that appeared to Abraham and Sarah, recorded in Gen. 18. Three persons sit around a table on which rests a common cup. The cup signifies fellowship and communion. The three are sitting in such a way, and gazing toward each other in such a manner, that they really cannot be said to be separate at all. This is called the common mind.

The persons in the picture, however, have more in common than just the mind. They are totally given to or are lost in the other persons. There is no trace of self-consciousness on their faces. They are living for and through each other as one communal expression of love. These beings are in appearance sexless, for God is above gender. And what is most important for me is that there is an opening to the communion cup. The trinity is an open trinity. The cup of communion is there for me. I sense that I am being invited to enter into the life of God and participate in that life.

This is what theology is all about—learning to participate in the life of God. May our study have brought that about.

Stan Nelson is Professor of Theology at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, California, a post he has occupied since 1984. He received his training at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Union Seminary, the University of Nigeria-Ibadan, and Oxford University.

While Dr. Nelson originally taught Systematic Theology in the classical manner, in 1989 he began a new approach that he calls "embedded theology." Rather than introducing the student to theological concepts as if they were philosophical ideas, Dr. Nelson helps the student "feel" the development of each doctrine as it emerged from the historical conflict that is the heritage of Baptists and others of the believer's church persuasion.

Before joining the faculty at Golden Gate, Dr. Nelson had labored over thirty years in Christian service, split about evenly between foreign missions and the pastorate. These experiences have equipped him to present his subject more as a humble witness to the Christian walk than as a synthesis of theological concepts, and the reader will find many illustrations taken from his years of service. The notes are truly humble, and sometimes very personal, as Dr. Nelson strives to help the student understand the historical and inductive mind-set of the biblical authors.

While intended primarily as a study aid for the new theology student, this work goes beyond mere "study notes." Pastors and teachers who have learned their theology within the traditional model will find a fresh and exciting perspective in Dr. Nelson's presentation.



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