

**CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
CLASS LECTURE NOTES  
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*PROLEGOMENA*

*THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION*

*THE DOCTRINE OF GOD*

*THE DOCTRINE OF GOD THE FATHER*

*THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY*

**CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
CLASS LECTURE NOTES  
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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 1: PROLEGOMENA  
OUTLINE

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    - 4. Systematic Theology.
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## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I UNIT 1: PROLEGOMENA

### Introduction

We begin the study of theology with the topic of “Prolegomena,” or what we must say before we really begin. While many issues will call for comment, the goal here is to set the ground rules by giving our definition for theology, specifically systematic theology, and a discussing various aspects of a proper approach and methodology for theology.

#### **I. What is theology?**

A. The nature of theology. It is the study of God, from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (word, thought, reason, etc.). More broadly, we use the word theology to refer to the study of all that involves God. For example, we are a *theological* seminary, in that all we do here pertains to God.

B. The divisions of theology. All that involves God is pretty broad. It encompasses:

1. Philosophical Theology. This includes the basic philosophical assumptions involved in theology--the existence of God and all of reality, the epistemological possibility of knowing something about God, and much more. We touch on these areas in the prolegomena of systematic theology but it is more important in apologetics and the philosophy of religion.

2. Biblical Theology. Systematic theology and biblical theology are closely related disciplines. They both take their content from the Bible, but they differ in how they organize it. Biblical theology organizes either around the overall story line of the Bible (something like creation, fall, redemption, consummation), or around some section of the Bible (Old Testament theology, Pauline theology, etc.). Systematic theology organizes around doctrines. It tries to take the insights of biblical theology together and to systematize the results. As well, systematic theology seeks to incorporate insights from history and to respond more directly to contemporary concerns.

3. Historical Theology. This type of theology looks at the historical development of doctrine, controversies that have shaped the questions we ask and the answers we get, key historical theologians, and how others have viewed the various areas of theology. It assumes that God the Holy Spirit has been active in illuminating his people all through history, and that we are unbelievably arrogant if we ignore what they thought the Bible taught on all the doctrines we study.

4. Systematic Theology. Systematic theology is, in my opinion, the most comprehensive type of theology. We have to engage some areas of philosophical theology to give a basis for theology as a whole, then seek to incorporate biblical and historical theology, and give it a systematic formulation that responds to contemporary issues and gives a basis for

Christian life and ministry (practical theology). Systematic theology is the approach to theology taken in this class. Our subject is usually divided into nine or ten areas.

- a. The Doctrine of Revelation
- b. The Doctrine of God (Theology proper)
- c. The Doctrine of God the Father
- d. The Doctrine of Humanity (Anthropology)
- e. The Doctrine of Sin (Hamartiology)
- f. The Doctrine of Christ (Christology)
- g. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)
- h. The Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)
- i. The Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)
- j. The Doctrine of Final Things (Eschatology)

5. Practical Theology. This refers to theology as it is applied in Christian life and ministry (preaching, counseling, discipling, worshiping, ethics, etc.)

C. The possibility of theology. We do have to face the issue of knowing genuine metaphysical truth, for we are bucking a strong philosophical current running since the time of Kant that denies the possibility of objective metaphysical knowledge. Kant argued that all knowledge comes to us via our senses (empirical data), but that data is so shaped by our mind that we can never know things in themselves, but only how we perceive them. That has been reinforced by postmodern thought and its distrust of reason itself. But Kant's statement denying the possibility of knowing metaphysical truth (all knowledge comes from empirical data) is itself a claim to know a metaphysical truth, and thus contradicts itself.

We affirm the possibility of objective, non-relative knowledge of metaphysical reality based on divinely-given revelation in Scripture. Thus, we start with a presupposition: **the self-revealing God and epistemologically competent human beings, as assisted by the Holy Spirit**. We justify our theology by demonstrating internal consistency and coherence, and showing its ability to explain the observable data of reality. Furthermore, we assert that all attempts to explain reality begin with presuppositions. Our presupposition is at least as credible as any other, and thus unbelievers should not be allowed to hide behind intellectual objections. At the same time, we recognize that no one can be argued into conversion, for it is a moral rather than a mental decision, and the determining factor is the internal working of the Holy Spirit.

D. The necessity of theology. Theology is a practical necessity for anyone embarking on the Christian life. For once you start to try to make sense of God, the Scriptures and life, you have embarked on the road to becoming a theologian. Now the need is to be a good one, for your personal good, your evangelistic effectiveness (I Pet. 3:15) and your edification of others (Eph. 4:11-14).

*You have already received more formal training in theology than the vast majority of people you will meet. You will be someone's theologian; will you be a good one?*

James Leo Garrett, Jr., suggests seven functions that Systematic Theology serves: (1) catechetical (church members need it), (2) exegetical (biblical interpretation requires it), (3) homiletical (theology demands proclamation), (4) polemical (error must be confronted), (5) apologetic (truth must be defended), (6) ethical (the true and the right go together), and (7) cross-cultural (theology helps missionaries rightly relate gospel and culture).

E. The nature of doctrine. As we noted above, theology is divided into various doctrines. But what are doctrines? A simple, standard definition of a doctrine such as, for example, Christology, would be the study of Christ. But are doctrines just subjects for study?

In a landmark 1984 work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck described two typical approaches to doctrine. One he called “cognitive-propositional.” It has been the approach taken by most in the history of theology, and still taken by most evangelical theologians today. Doctrines are seen as propositional statements, seeking to expound the meaning and implications of God’s revelation, which communicates transcendent truth. But Lindbeck sees this approach as premodern, ignoring the effect of Kant’s work which denied access to such metaphysical, transcendent truth.

The second approach, pioneered by Friedrich Schleiermacher and followed by liberal theology, Lindbeck calls “experiential-expressive.” Doctrines are statements expressing how humans have experienced God, reflecting the replacement of Scripture by experience as the normative criterion of theology. But Lindbeck, along with Hans Frei and others in the Yale School or postliberalism have argued that this approach cuts one off from the Christian tradition, makes any type of normative doctrine impossible, and leaves one isolated in her or his own experience. As well, postliberalism has seen both the other two approaches as assuming that truth is universal and the same for all, while this school argues that truth is limited by the mediating factor of language, and understood only within a particular community.

Thus, Lindbeck offers a “cultural-linguistic” view of doctrine, in which doctrine is compared to the rules of grammar which dictate how Christians ought to speak about God. It seeks to be faithful to the Christian tradition, which is mediated primarily through the narrative of Jesus Christ. The major criticism of Lindbeck and postliberalism has been that it seems to make no claim to be universally true for all. Rather, it claims that the validity of Christian theology, like all other thought, can only be judged from within, by its own internal standards.

The reluctance to claim universal truth is understandable. Most today acknowledge that we do see things from a culturally and historically shaped perspective; pure objectivity is impossible. Moreover, such an approach may seem properly humble and a welcome change from what some see as evangelical arrogance and rigidity in doctrine. But if God has spoken in Scripture, he has spoken to all, and our task is to humbly seek understanding. We remain open to learning more, both from Scripture and from others (historically and globally), but an open mind need not be an empty mind, nor a confused mind. For example, when Brian McLaren describes himself as a “Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist,

Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian” I want to say to him kindly but clearly, “my brother, I think you may more succinctly describe yourself as simply ‘confused.’”

Kevin Vanhoozer has proposed a more helpful approach, which takes into account some positive aspects of postliberalism but avoids its problematic aspects. In his 2005 work, *The Drama of Doctrine*, he calls for a “canonical-linguistic” approach to the task of Christian theology. The “canonical” aspect recognizes Scripture as the norm for Christian theology, while the term “linguistic” draws upon recent work by Ludwig Wittgenstein and others in understanding how language works. Vanhoozer argues that doctrine should be thought of primarily as “directive,” relating to “the cognitive, affective, and pragmatic dimensions of theology” (*Drama of Doctrine*, 29).

This “directive” function is intimately related to Vanhoozer’s key metaphor, that of drama. God is the playwright and producer of the greatest drama ever staged, Christ is both the victim and the hero, and the Spirit is the director. By producing Scripture and illuminating our understanding of it, especially in the context of Christian community, the Spirit directs us how we are to play our roles. Doctrine directs us as to how we are to understand ourselves, our relationship to God, and the world, and how we are to live in this world, which Calvin called “the theater of God’s glory.” Doctrine is not just about orthodoxy (right doctrine), or orthopraxy (right practice), but both those two and *orthokrisis* (right judgment). I think this is a helpful approach that calls us to always recognize that, though we may emphasize the cognitive aspects of doctrine in this class, doctrine must always affect how we live out the demands of discipleship, and how we see our role in God’s great drama.

*So with every doctrine we study, ask yourself, what does this mean for how I fulfill my role in God’s drama, for how I think, feel, and act?*

## **II. What is Systematic Theology?**

The term “systematic” used to describe theology has fallen into some disfavor in recent times, perhaps due to the suspicion in postmodern thought that anything systematized is inauthentic or artificial. Thus, this course has come to be called Christian Theology, and some prefer a biblical theology approach. I want to take this critique of systematic theology into account, but believe we can still do systematic theology in a valid and valuable way that makes an important contribution. On the whole, I think systematic thinking is preferable to chaotic. So here is my understanding of systematic theology, a definition that will guide our study.

**Systematic theology is that discipline that seeks to give a systematic, coherent exposition of the Christian faith, based principally on the Scriptures, addressing the concerns and questions of contemporary culture, and leading to personal application in Christian life and ministry.**

Let us unpack this definition, phrase by phrase.

A. It is an academic discipline. It is an exercise in loving God with all our minds. We are here to do the hard work of holy thought, taking every theological thought captive to Christ's lordship. I hope it affects us on a heart level, but it must start on a thought level.

B. It seeks to give a systematic, coherent exposition of the Christian faith. This is what makes systematic theology distinctive from other branches of theology, and also makes systematic theology at times more difficult than other branches of theology, for our attempt to be systematic and comprehensive encounters problems.

1. God is infinite and we are finite. Thus, our language is *analogical*, not *univocal* (or *equivocal*). Thankfully, the language of Scripture accommodates our finite ability to comprehend, and God made us in his image with an ability to know him. Otherwise, our attempt to study God would be more ridiculous than first graders' attempt to study the theory of relativity. This is why our study must be conducted in humility and reverence. We know true truth, but not exhaustive truth. God is always more than we say.

2. The Bible is not a systematic book. It consists mainly of stories. Even Paul's letters were mainly ad hoc, addressed to specific problems. Paul's epistle to the Romans is the closest we have to a systematic exposition. Thus, Scripture does not always answer all the questions we want to ask. There may be speculative questions that naturally arise as we think through issues, but are not addressed by Scripture. There may also be scientific or technical questions, such as how exactly did God create the world, or how did God inspire Scripture, or how does the cross work to accomplish forgiveness of sins. These are questions Scripture does not directly address. In particular, part of the supposed war between science and Scripture is due to a failure to recognize what questions are proper to science and which properly belong to Scripture. Scripture seems most responsive to a third type of question, questions that tell us what something is for, how it is to apply to our lives. We may suggest answers to questions Scripture does not address, but always tentatively. We want to focus on the questions God saw fit to answer for us.

3. A third problem Systematic Theology confronts in the postmodern world is its aversion to anything systematic as forced and fake. But being chaotic or incoherent is not automatically virtuous. In Systematic Theology we do seek to give a systematic response to all our questions, to make a nice, neat system. But my desire is to be biblical more than systematic, and to leave some loose ends, if necessary. Our goal will be clarity where possible, mystery where necessary, and humility in all things. This will, I hope, lead us to unity on essentials, liberty on non-essentials, and charity on all things, and I hope you leave here with a better understanding of what the essentials are.

C. The Christian faith. We expound a body of faith, for the community of faith, with faith as our starting point, and reason as the servant of faith. How do we relate reason and faith?

While modernity has wanted to limit religion to only what reason could accept (see Kant,

“Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone”), and many Baptists want to leave reason totally out of religion, the historic Christian position has been reason as the servant of faith. This is illustrated by Augustine's saying: *I believe that I may understand*. And a similar position is that of Anselm: *faith seeking understanding*. In both these positions, reason is seen as the servant of faith.

D . Based principally on the Scriptures. This raises the issue of theological method. A biblically grounded method must reflect a biblical orientation in many areas.

*Is there such a thing as biblical philosophy, or is there a reason why we offer Christian philosophy, but not biblical philosophy?*

1. There must be a Scripturally compatible philosophical basis. While the Bible is not a book of philosophy, it does reflect commitments in various areas of philosophy.

a. In the area of ontology or metaphysics, the Bible holds that the external world is real (not an illusion), but that there is also an area of unseen reality. Thus, Scripture is incompatible with a pure mysticism or a pure naturalism; it affirms a supernatural metaphysical reality, as well as a natural, physical reality.

b. In the area of epistemology, the Bible bucks the assumption, common since the time of Kant, that human beings cannot have objective knowledge of noumenal or metaphysical reality. While we cannot ignore the effects of Kant's work in shaping the world in which we live, we do affirm that the Creator of all areas of reality has spoken an objective word giving knowledge of all areas of reality, and has so created us that we are able, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to understand that word. This involves philosophical assumptions about God, revelation, humanity, and language.

We accept the postmodern point that all our ideas of truth are perspectival, and that the search for truth needs to be conducted with humility, recognizing our fallibility, especially in seeking to understand the infinite. At the same time, humans have enough of a shared perspective that communication is possible. We all believe it is possible to understand what someone else says, and that not all interpretations are equally close to the truth. The fact that our reading of Scripture gives us a worldview that can be rationally defended grounds us philosophically and allows us to affirm that it is possible to know God, even if that knowledge is not purely mathematical or rationally demonstrable.

c. In the area of anthropology, Scripture affirms humans as creatures worthy of dignity, made in the image of God, made for a relationship with God. But it also affirms the reality of a fall. Therefore, rationalism is suspect philosophically, because human reason is fallen. Experience is suspect as a source of truth, for we cannot say that our present experience reflects God's intention; rather, it reflects our fallen condition. We view all of human life and the created order through the lenses of four key moments: creation (which gives us a basis for seeing good in God's created intention for all of creation), the fall (which causes us to

question the idea that what is now reflects how things must be or reflects God's intention), redemption (which gives us hope for transformation), and the consummation still to come (which explains the already/not yet tension of the Christian life).

d. In the area of history, Scripture affirms a linear (as opposed to cyclical) view of time, and affirms that there is a revealed purpose and goal of human existence. Therefore, nihilism and existentialism conflict with a scriptural commitment in the area of philosophy of history.

In the past, Augustine was able to construct his theology in an era shaped by Platonic or neo-Platonic philosophy, and found that it was basically compatible with Scriptural commitments. Aquinas's great contribution was showing that Christian theology could also be compatible with an Aristotelian philosophy. Since the Reformation, many theologians have operated, consciously or unconsciously, from a philosophical basis of what is called Scottish common sense realism, also compatible with Scripture. But my sense is that most today recognize that common sense realism is a bit naïve about the shaping effect of our own perspectives and have moved to what is called critical realism.

A systematic theology based principally upon the Scriptures must be aware that everyone operates with a conscious or unconscious philosophy, and must consciously evaluate that philosophical basis on the basis of Scriptural affirmations that set some philosophical parameters. Thus, there is no single biblical philosophy, but there have been a variety of ways to do philosophy that have helpfully engaged culture and done so in ways that were compatible with fundamental Christian commitments.

## 2. A Scriptural attitude toward Scripture.

a. Scripture as normative. The reason many have turned to philosophical bases contrary to Scripture has been due to a prior judgment that Scripture was not to be treated as the normative source for theology. One of the major turns in theology came when Friedrich Schleiermacher turned from a theological method based on Scripture to a method based on human experience. He did so, based on the belief that Scripture was demonstrably in error and that theology based on Scripture was no longer credible to the intelligentsia. He is often referred to as the father of liberal theology, and his influence may be seen in how others have followed him methodologically. While we consider experience, reason, and tradition as possible secondary sources for theology, Scripture is the principal and sole normative source.

b. Scripture and hermeneutics. But even among those who agree that Scripture is normative, there are theological differences, because we don't all interpret our normative source in the same way. This is the issue of hermeneutics, which is an ongoing concern in evangelical theology. I mention it here because one's hermeneutics often shapes one's theology in subtle yet important ways (as in covenant versus dispensational theology).

Some think we can dismiss hermeneutical questions by just saying that we should

interpret the Bible literally. But the literal interpretation of a figurative passage of Scripture must be figurative, and the literal interpretation of a symbolic passage must be symbolic. As far as possible, we have to try to get inside the author's mind, and understand the intention he had in writing Scripture. But even then, it may be that the Divine Author had purposes and depths in Scripture that the human author didn't see. I'm not sure that Matt. 2:15 gives us what Hosea had in mind in Hosea 11:1, but Matthew, under the Spirit's inspiration, sees a deeper meaning. Is he interpreting Hosea literally or spiritually? Is he a model for our interpretation of the OT?

I bring these issues up to make you aware of the influence of hermeneutics on theology, to acquaint you with some of the issues, and to emphasize the necessity of always keeping the first rule of hermeneutics in mind: Scripture interprets Scripture. We must continually resist the temptation to build our theology on selected verses we like; our theology must encompass all of Scripture.

3. A Scriptural Perspective on history. We regard history and tradition neither as infallible nor as the error-ridden "Dark Ages." Rather, we study history to understand how we have been shaped by it, to escape being unduly shaped by present history (living in other times gives us a basis for comparison with our time), and to learn from others who read Scripture under the Spirit's illumination.

4. A Scriptural scrutiny of contemporary culture. Evangelical Christianity, especially in America, has always been concerned with reaching the masses, and as such has often unconsciously adopted the culture of the day. American Christianity has been very American, at times to the detriment of being Christian. Many traditional churches have been unconsciously shaped by modernity; many seeker churches have very self-consciously sought to adapt to baby-boomers, and still other churches, in rebellion against the forces of modernity, are in danger of becoming captive to postmodernity. The need in every generation is thoughtful engagement with culture.

*One model: the method and examples in Kevin Vanhoozer, et al., Everyday Theology.*

E. Addressing the concerns and questions of contemporary culture. This requires:

1. Hermeneutical sensitivity to the cultural clothing of some Scriptural truth. For example, "greet one another with a holy kiss," cannot be directly translated into most American churches. How far culture conditions Scripture is one of the hottest issues in contemporary evangelical hermeneutics, with ramifications for many areas of missiology and ministry.

2. Awareness of the concerns of contemporary culture. The theologian must work, as the preacher, with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper (or today a smart phone, tablet, laptop) in the other. There are always new emphases in culture that may be accommodated or opposed, new questions arising from technological advances, new ideas that may become a bridge or a barrier for the message. The theologian must be aware, or his message may not be heard as a relevant word. Understanding is also a part of loving our neighbor.

*Is the greater danger for seminary students too little exposure to secular culture, or excessive conformity to culture? Or we too little in the world, or too much of the world?*

F. Leading to practical application. In the first textbook of systematic theology used at the first Southern Baptist seminary, J. L. Dagg wrote the following words:

The study of religious truth ought to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the heart. When learned, it ought not to be laid on the shelf, as an object of speculation, but it should be deposited deep in the heart, where its sanctifying power ought to be felt. To study theology, for the purpose of gratifying curiosity, or preparing for a profession, is an abuse and profanation of what ought to be regarded as most holy. (*Manual of Theology and Church Order*, 13).

If our study this semester just leads to more knowledge about God, I will be very disappointed. Our goal is to know God himself. I am encouraged by the growing concern of many to link theology and spirituality. They belong together.

**III. How do we do theology?** Finally, I want to say a few words about the methodology we will use in formulating theology this semester. My view is implicit in my definition of systematic theology, but let me make our procedure explicit.

*For a much more thorough study of this whole topic, see David Clark, To Know and Love God: Method for Theology.*

A. The first step and most obvious one is to begin with the Scriptures (presupposing the philosophical commitments required by Scripture, as given above). We gather together all the relevant verses and carefully study them. Usually, this is sufficient, especially for central theological issues. We believe in the clarity of Scripture, especially on central subjects. We can certainly deepen our understanding of any issue by further study, but for all subjects, Scripture is the starting point and the continual touchstone for any interpretation. The difficulty comes when Scripture gives no explicit answer, and the major controversies of Scripture arise around those areas where Scripture can be construed in different ways. But on almost all issues, we can at least lay out biblical parameters. Any legitimate answer must lie within those parameters.

B. Second, use history to help. Others have considered these questions before. Perhaps they can help us. So examine the options history offers, but do so critically. For example, the obvious first question to ask is, Does this view fall within the biblical parameters? In some cases, the answer seems fairly obvious; in others, careful thought and examination is necessary.

To evaluate all the alternatives that are biblically possible, we need to probe deeper, with questions that draw out the implications of the biblical parameters, and check the "fit" of any given interpretation for different contexts and situations. It is this process of questioning that makes theology as much an art as a science, for the point is to ask probing questions that reveal

the adequacy or inadequacy of each view, and the key to asking such questions can be imagination, wide pastoral experience, or simply a thorough thinking through of an issue.

Such questioning usually narrows down the list of possible interpretations. Of course, anywhere in the process an individual may come up with a new interpretation, different from those drawn from church history. Such new light is indeed possible, but we should not easily reject all the options drawn from 2000 years. Sometimes theologians desire novelty for novelty's sake. More often, we will likely accept one of the interpretations suggested by history, but with some revisions, or combine two ideas found in church history.

C. The third step then is to take all the possible alternatives and consider where they lead theologically. Is it a theologically helpful interpretation, not only fitting the biblical parameters but clarifying them? Does a given interpretation fit in with other areas of one's theology, clarifying and illuminating how various parts fit together, or does it conflict with some strongly held positions or even require a whole new paradigm for theology?

We naturally gravitate toward those interpretations that fit with what we already believe (conservatives tend to conserve what they already believe), and that is a generally correct attitude. Interpretations that lead into strange and uncharted theological beliefs are inherently suspect. But there are rare times when a certain interpretation of one issue or a series of issues becomes inescapable, and these new discoveries require wholesale changes in one's theology. The rediscovery of justification by faith alone revolutionized many areas of Luther's theology, and his example, along with a proper humility and robust trust in the power of the Spirit to break forth yet more truth from the Word (to quote John Robinson) should lead us to not raise all of our present convictions to the level of infallibility.

There should be different levels, or orders, of beliefs. There are some convictions that I cannot bring myself to seriously question; they are bedrock, and basic to who I am as a believer. These I call *first order, basic Christian* evangelical convictions. There are other convictions I hold strongly, and it would take a lot to change my mind on them, but they lie under the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture, and I can consider alternative interpretations with a degree of openness. These I call *second order*; they are my *denominational, Baptist* convictions. Still other positions I hold, but would welcome further illumination, and seek to learn from those with whom I disagree on these points. These are *third order, personal convictions*.

*Take a moment and mark the following with a 1, 2, or 3 for what level conviction you see them as (whether you agree with them or not).*

*God created the world approximately fourteen billion years ago.*

*God is three persons in one essence (the Trinity).*

*The Bible is inerrant.*

*Baptism should be for believers only, by immersion.*

*Christ died for the elect only (limited atonement).*

*The evidence of being baptized in the Spirit is speaking in tongues.  
One day Christ will personally, visibly return.*

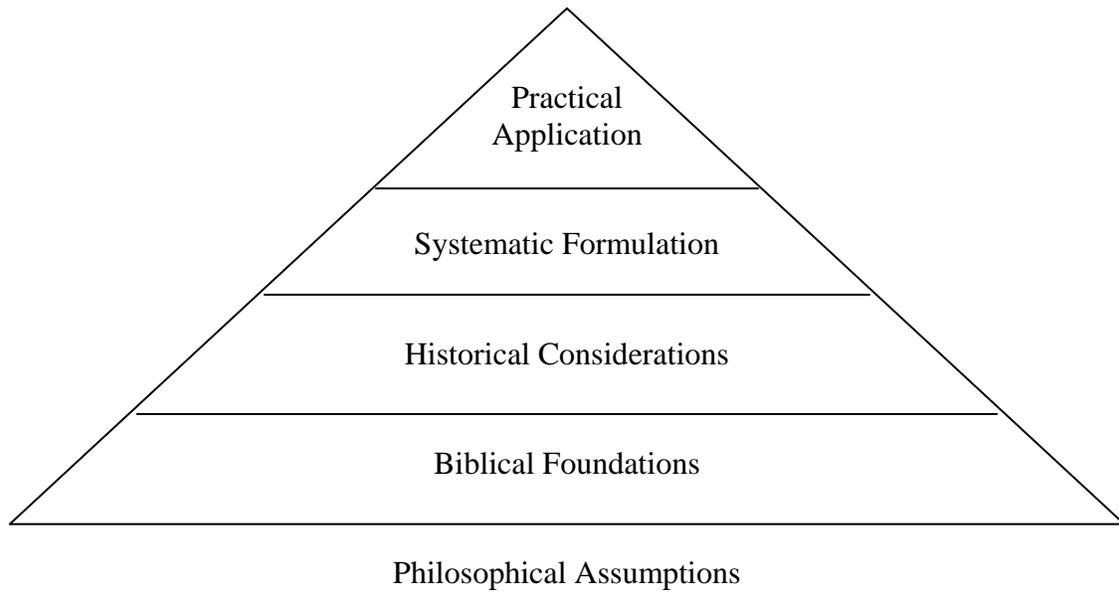
So the key is balancing firm convictions on some basic bedrock issues, with an openness to lifelong learning on many others. It is a difficult balancing act. Openness to change and learning can be scary, and it can open one to charges that he really doesn't have convictions. But the alternative is an unwillingness to learn, the subtle attitude that one already knows all the truth, and the real possibility of placing one's theology above the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture. In general, an interpretation that goes against some of your other theological understandings should be suspect, but keep yourself open to learning and to the possibility that you may be wrong. Scripture is inspired and inerrant; our human interpretations are not.

It is at this point that we may also want to consider secondary sources, such as the sciences. I think science and Scripture usually ask different questions, but if all truth forms a unity (all truth is God's truth), then scriptural exegesis should not conflict with any genuine truth discovered in "God's other book," which is the natural order. There may be difficulties in harmonizing the two, due to the inherent instability in science, or anti-Christian presuppositions prominent in much scientific work today, or attempting to make Scripture, an ancient book, speak more precisely and scientifically than it does. But I do think finding harmony, or at least possible harmonizations, between Scripture and other branches of knowledge is desirable, but not absolutely necessary. Thus we should consider such issues as we formulate our theology, and respond to them, but not be governed by anything other than Scripture in our final formulation.

D. The final part of my methodology is to test the adequacy and effectiveness of our systematic formulation in providing a basis for practical theology. If it conflicts with or undermines ministry, something is wrong. Orthodoxy should lead to orthopraxy, and, to add Kevin Vanhoozer's term, *orthokrisis*, or right judgment, as well. Karl Barth was led away from the liberal theology he was taught by what he called the problem of the sermon. His theology gave him no word to proclaim to those in his congregation. We will seek at times to explicitly draw out some of the implications of theology for ministry, but all that we do should provide a basis for your ministry for years to come. It may challenge some of what you do now, but only to replace it with a better founded practice of ministry.

To summarize my methodology, I begin with Scripture, drawing as much as possible from Scripture to set parameters for possible interpretations. I examine options from the history of theology, probing them for possibilities and weaknesses, and considering how they fit under various scenarios. I draw out the theological implications of various interpretations, looking especially for an interpretation that has the ability to show how other parts of theology fit with it, but considering other possibilities, even if they would require personal theological revision. Where appropriate, I also consider how theological formulations relate to other branches of knowledge. Finally, I consider the impact of this theology in practical ministry, for our primary purpose in studying theology is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but knowledge that

will provide a firm foundation for a lifetime of ministry. The pyramid below illustrates the methodology used in this class and modeled in our textbook.



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 2: THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION  
PART A: UNIVERSAL REVELATION  
OUTLINE

- I. Biblical Foundations. We see universal revelation:
  - A. In the creation.
  - B. In human nature.
  - C. In history?
  
- II. Historical Considerations.
  - A. Thomas Aquinas.
  - B. Karl Barth.
  - C. John Calvin.
  
- III. Theological Formulation.
  - A. In the creation and human nature, God reveals Himself, showing:
    - 1. That God exists.
    - 2. That He is our Creator.
    - 3. That we are sinners.
  - B. The Scriptures teach that because of our fallen nature we do not clearly perceive God's revelation, and that because of the fallen nature of creation, God's revelation there is distorted.
  - C. Thus, while general revelation is sufficient to render us without excuse before God, is it sufficient to save us?
  
- IV. Practical Applications.
  - A. In evangelism.
  - B. In secular studies.
  - C. In our attitude toward the environment.
  - D. In responding to the difficult question, "What about those who never hear the gospel?"

Appendix: What About Those Who Never Hear the Gospel?

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I UNIT 2: THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### Introduction

While the earliest Christian confessions and writings on theology began with the doctrine of God, since the seventeenth century Westminster Confession of Faith, evangelical discussions of theology, either in confessions of faith or in textbooks of theology, have almost always started with the doctrine of revelation. This is partly due to the cultural context of modernity, with its concern for proper epistemology (seen especially in thinkers like Rene Descartes), and partly due to the inherent theological importance of revelation (seen in texts like Heb. 1:1-3, which identifies the true God as the God who speaks).

*If you were writing your own personal statement of faith (a very useful exercise), with what doctrine would you begin? Why?*

The meaning of the term revelation might seem fairly self-evident, but 20<sup>th</sup> century theology saw important developments offering novel definitions. For now, we will offer a preliminary definition, and offer justification for it later. We will define revelation as the manifestation of God himself (personal) and His will for us (propositional). It includes God's mighty acts, but with an accompanying explanation. It is not human discoveries about God but divine self-disclosure.

Discussions of the doctrine of revelation typically involve two sections, reflecting different recipients, sources, and degrees of revelation. The first section is sometimes called *universal* revelation (in that it is addressed to all humans), or *natural* revelation (in that its source is the natural creation), or *general* revelation (in that it gives general knowledge of God). The second division is commonly called *special* (in that it was initially given to specially chosen individuals), given in special ways (visions, inspiration), and less often is called *particular* revelation (in that it gives more specific and particular knowledge of God).

### PART A: UNIVERSAL REVELATION

**I. Biblical Foundations.** Scripture teaches that God is revealed to all people everywhere in at least two ways:

A. In the creation. The stage is set for seeing God revealed in nature by the clear teaching in Genesis 1 that all of creation is the work of one Creator God. There is no room for worship of the sun or moon or stars, for they and all of nature point back to the Creator. This is seen in many places in the Old and New Testament, from God's response to Job (Job 38-41) to Jesus' drawing on nature to teach trust in God (Matt. 6:25-34; 10:29-30). Three texts may be chosen as representative:

1. Psalm 19:1-6 is one of many "nature psalms." The verbs in this psalm give the

idea that revelation is continually gushing forth from the created order. Paul Tillich, while not a very trustworthy theological guide on most issues, observed rightly that the basic philosophical question is why there is something rather than nothing. The creation both provokes that question and supplies the answer: the creation proclaims its Creator. Interestingly, this psalm also turns in its second half to consider the other type of revelation, that found in Scripture (vv. 7-11).

*Johnny Hunt: Creation reveals God gloriously, continuously, universally, silently, and incompletely.*

2. Acts 14:15-17 adds to the fact of creation the fact of providential preservation as a further testimony, not only to God's existence but to his mercy. But seeing God as the ultimate source of life also requires us to reckon with our accountability to God as the one who may justly ask us to give an account of how we used his gift of life.

3. Rom. 1:18-20 specifies further aspects of God knowable from creation. Psalm 19 highlights God's **glory**, Acts 14 God's **goodness**, Rom. 1 God's **Godness** (his "invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature"). The importance of this revelation being universal is that it leaves all humans "without excuse" (also implied in the citation of Ps. 19 in Rom. 10:14-18). No one will be condemned by God for ignorance, but all will be judged for their response to what they did know.

B. In human nature. Though less pervasive in Scripture, there are some texts that see something of God reflected in human nature. Being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27) implies that there is some vestige or reflection of His nature in us. At the very least, we should recognize that God is personal and made us for a personal relationship with him (Acts 17:24-29). One such vestige seems to be the moral law written on our hearts, what we may call conscience (see Rom. 2:14-15). Though cultures may differ in what they consider right and wrong (due to the distorting effect of the fall), the fact that all cultures and all peoples have an idea of right and wrong is a reflection of the fact that all individuals are created in the image of a moral Creator.

C. Some suggest the history of the world reveals the intervention of a Creator, and that we may see God revealed in the ongoing events of history. A biblical basis would be the sovereignty of God (Eph. 1:11). But since we usually see God's purposes in history only in retrospect, it is hazardous to use it as a basis for constructing theology anytime before the *eschaton*.

**II. Historical Considerations.** Universal revelation was widely accepted in the early church, with some going so far as to see God as giving traces of the truth to Greeks through philosophy, as a kind of substitute Old Testament or preparation for the gospel (some saw John 1:9 and Jesus as the *logos* as a basis). However, some later theologians challenged the value of universal revelation, seeing both creation and our ability to understand creation as weakened by the fall. The following positions illustrate the divergence of views.

A. Thomas Aquinas. His name is associated with natural theology, which is based on

reason and universal revelation. Thomas believed reason and the revelation of God in nature were sufficient to prove many key truths of religion, but were not sufficient for salvation. Special revelation was needed for some doctrines (Christ, the Trinity, etc.). Thomas's confidence in reason is based on the Catholic view of the fall, which was that the image of God (reason and free will) was unaffected by the fall, and that only the likeness of God (original righteousness or the *donum\_superadditum*) was lost. Since reason had not been affected, Thomas was able to trust that reason was able to take one a good way toward knowledge of God. Thomas trusted reason fully as much as revelation.

B. Karl Barth. Barth was one of the most Christocentric theologians in the history of the Church and believed the only revelation worth calling revelation was revelation in Christ. He emphasized the infinite qualitative difference between God and man ("By God alone may God be known"), and believed that true revelation must be the revelation of the Triune God, and not some generic philosophical God. Further, the idea of God being revealed in history had led some Germans to see the rise of Hitler as God's ordained way to save Germany. Hitler was even called by some in the Church the new Moses for the German people. Barth was one of the leaders of the Confessing Church in Germany, and the main author of the Barmen Declaration, which opens with the statement: "Jesus Christ, as he is testified to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, which we are to hear, which we are to trust and obey in life and in death." Barth eventually had to leave Germany for Switzerland, and opposed universal revelation throughout his life. He wrote a strong rejection in response to Emil Brunner's defense of universal revelation, entitled simply *Nein!*

C. John Calvin. Calvin's position, and I think the position of Scripture itself, lies between the extremes of Aquinas and Barth. Calvin accepts the Scriptural teaching of revelation in creation and human nature, saying that it would be sufficient for salvation if we had eyes to see it. But due to the fall, our eyes are weak. We now need the "spectacles of Scripture" to see and understand general revelation.

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. (*Institutes*, 1.6.1)

I would add that not only is our ability to perceive universal revelation weakened by the fall, but the fall seems to have distorted the creation itself (see Gen. 3:14-19, Rom. 8:19-22). Are tornadoes, floods, natural disasters part of what God originally desired to reveal in nature or reflections of the fall? I think many aspects of nature can best be explained as the latter, as problems and irritants that have fallen upon humanity because sin entered the world through us, and wounded the creation. Because of the fall, we cannot assume that what is now is what God originally intended. The revelation nature gives of God is distorted.

**III. Theological Formulation.** Drawing together the biblical and historical material, we make

the following affirmations concerning God's universal revelation.

A. In the creation and human nature, God reveals Himself, showing:

1. That one glorious, powerful, eternal, good and moral God exists;
2. That He is our Creator, and thus we are responsible before Him; He has the right to demand an accounting of us, of how we have used the life He gave us;
3. That we are sinners, disobeying the moral law within and rejecting the knowledge of God given in the creation.

B. The Scriptures teach that because of our fallen nature we do not clearly perceive God's revelation, and that because of the fallen nature of creation, God's revelation there is distorted (Gen. 3:14-19, Rom. 8:19-22).

C. Thus, while general revelation is sufficient to render us without excuse before God, (Rom. 1:20) is it sufficient to save us? The answer for most of Christian history has been "no; we need special revelation to be saved. That's why God gave it." But what about those who never hear special revelation? It is a difficult question, and has generated a controversy among contemporary evangelicals, that we will examine shortly.

**IV. Practical Applications.** The doctrine of universal revelation is far from academic, ivory tower theology. It has practical application in several areas of life:

A. In evangelism. The doctrine of universal revelation helps us in three ways in evangelism: (1) it establishes human responsibility before God as His creatures; (2) it reminds us that when we speak of God and sin, we speak what all men know to be true, though they try to suppress it; (3) it enables us to start with some of the truth they can already perceive, to build a bridge for the gospel.

B. In secular studies. We need not fear secular studies, for whatever truth exists has its source in God. Interpreted properly, science and the Bible do not conflict. Rather, science can help us understand God's revelation in nature. We need not fear truth, for all truth is God's truth.

C. In our attitude toward the environment. We should seek to preserve the environment, because we are stewards and because it is part of God's self-revelation. Sadly, Christians have not been at the forefront of the environmental movement historically. Only recently have some reclaimed this emphasis, though Southern Baptists have been more hesitant than most. Yet, in the end, we need to make clear we do not worship nature, but the Creator to whom it points.

*If you began to think of and treat the creation (universal revelation) the way you think of and treat the Bible (special revelation), would it make a big change in your life, attitudes or actions?*

D. In responding to the difficult question, "What about those who never hear the gospel?" The possibility of salvation for those who never hear the gospel through a positive response to universal revelation has generated a considerable amount of discussion recently and calls for a thorough examination of this difficult subject.

#### Appendix: What About Those Who Never Hear the Gospel?

This question is one that is frequently raised as an objection to Christianity by non-believers. How could a just God send people to hell for not believing in a Christ of whom they never heard? Others go further and ask how a just God can send millions of Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists to hell. Surely it is argued, some of them were seeking God as sincerely and honestly as they could. Why would God send them to hell just because by an accident of geography they were born in an area where the gospel was never or rarely heard?

These questions have caused most mainline Christian groups worldwide (and some evangelicals) to adopt some variety of a position generally called inclusivism. They say that since God's salvific will is universal, accessibility to salvation must also be universal. Thus many affirm that God's grace can reach beyond where the gospel has been proclaimed and produce what Karl Rahner has called "anonymous Christians."

Even among evangelicals, a variety of answers have been given to the questions above. While the traditional answer has been that one must hear the gospel and believe, other possibilities have also been suggested: to those who follow the light they have, God will give greater light; middle-knowledge solutions; evangelization via angels or visions; post-mortem evangelization; or salvation via a positive response to universal revelation. We will examine some of these possibilities next semester in more detail; our concern here is with the relevance of universal revelation.

**Positively and most importantly, the doctrine of universal revelation helps us respond to the charge that God is unjust to judge those who never hear the gospel. We respond that all have heard of God (Romans 10:18), and have been offered some knowledge of God (Romans 1:20). They are therefore without excuse. God will not condemn anyone for rejecting the Savior of whom he has never heard. That would be unjust, and God is not unjust (Genesis 18:25). God will judge persons for rejecting the revelation available to them in the creation and in their own heart.**

But what if someone responds positively to the revelation of God in nature and in the moral law? Some say that while the New Testament is clear that salvation is only through Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12), they believe one may be saved by Christ without explicit faith in Christ, but by responding to the knowledge of God they have via universal revelation.

This possibility of salvation through universal revelation has been held by some notable theologians in church history. Justin Martyr believed God used Greek philosophy as a preparation for the gospel among the Greeks, almost as kind of a substitute Old Testament. He saw no reason why God could not have saved some who responded to the revelation they had.

Huldrych Zwingli held a similar position at the time of the Reformation, but his view was based more on God's freedom in election than universal revelation. John Sanders, in a recent book on the subject (John Sanders, ed., *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* Downers Grove, IVP, 1995) claims Chrysostom and John Wesley held this position, though they seem to mention it more tentatively than Justin and Zwingli. Among Baptists, theologian A. H. Strong argued that some who never hear may be saved through response to the light they had, as it seemed to him some in the Old Testament were. Even conservatives as strong as B. H. Carroll, John R. Rice, and G. Campbell Morgan considered salvation via general revelation as an exceptional possibility, but made far less of it than contemporary inclusivists.

More recently, C. S. Lewis raised this possibility in his writings, and illustrated it in the last volume of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the 1960s Karl Rahner's more radical inclusivism became the official policy of Roman Catholics at Vatican II, but the current phase of the debate for evangelicals really began with a publication in 1970 of *Christianity and Comparative Religion* by J.N.D. Anderson, a respected English evangelical. In that book Anderson suggested, somewhat timidly, that perhaps some could be saved by their response to universal revelation. If they see God in creation, recognize their sinfulness, and cry out for mercy to the God they wish they could know intimately, perhaps they may be saved by Christ in the same way as the Old Testament believers. Subsequent books by John Sanders, Clark Pinnock, and a volume of essays by Sigountos and Crockett further fueled the debate, which is continuing today, most recently in an inclusivist approach from an orthodox Calvinist (Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*).

The strongest argument of inclusivists, in my opinion, is that those who never hear the gospel are like the Jews of the Old Testament, who were judged based on their response to the revelation given them, which did not include the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected, at least not in any clear way. To the response that the Jews are a special case because of their place as recipients of special revelation, the suggestion is made that for those outside of the people of Israel (believers like Melchizedek, Jethro and Rahab), universal revelation must have been their path to God. And in any case both Jewish and non-Jewish believers were saved without hearing the gospel. And that is the central point of the debate. They further believe that Scripture teaches that those who seek God with all their hearts will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:7-8). Pious pagans such as Cornelius in Acts 10:34-35, or those postulated by Paul in Romans 2:7-11, show by their actions the work of God's Spirit in their hearts, and He will complete the work He began in them. And if the knowledge mediated by universal revelation is sufficient to render culpable those who reject it (Romans 1:20), does that not imply that acceptance of it would be sufficient to render one acceptable to God?

Indeed, as missiologist Don Richardson has noted, many cultures seem to have within them divinely planted clues that serve to open the people up to the gospel, once missionaries arrive (see *Eternity in Their Hearts*). Richardson himself does not suggest that a positive response to these fragments of universal revelation retained in the culture could lead to salvation, but if not, what was the purpose of such revelation for those who died before the missionaries arrived?

They who hold this position say it doesn't negate the need for special revelation, for God doesn't want His children to live and die wondering about Him; He wants us to know Him intimately. Those saved "in the shadows" still deserve the full light of the gospel.

Nor, they maintain, does it undercut the importance of missions, for the greatest motivation for missions in the NT is the glory of Christ, not the dying millions without Christ. And, in any case, we have Christ's command to share the gospel with all the world, which should be sufficient motivation.

Nor does it undercut the unique saving power of Christ's death. All who are saved are saved by Christ's atoning death; the question is whether one must hear of that death to be saved by it. Those who hold this position believe, on the basis of OT examples, NT hints, and the character of God, that it is possible to be saved by Christ without hearing explicitly of Christ, but by responding positively to God's universal revelation. Though few mention it, they could add that almost everyone allows for the salvation of those who die in infancy apart from hearing and responding to the gospel, but it can be argued that there is an understood exception for those who never reach the age of accountability. They could respond that those who never hear never reach an age of real accountability.

Of course, this conflicts with the majority position held by evangelicals down through the years, that one must hear explicitly the gospel of Christ and respond positively to him for salvation, or at least respond positively to special revelation. This is the position of Ronald Nash in Sander's book and that of most evangelicals historically (Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Carl Henry, and most theologians). They point out that while the children of Israel may not have had explicit knowledge of Christ, they were responding to God's special revelation, not general revelation. They point to statements like John 14:6, and Acts 4:12 as leading obviously to their position. Those on the other side point out that these verses support the uniqueness of Christ as the only Savior, but do not say explicitly that one must hear of Him to be saved by Him, and say this still doesn't explain those outside of Israel who were regarded as OT believers.

The recent book by Millard Erickson (*How Shall They Be Saved?* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) states, very carefully: "There are no unambiguous instances in Scripture of persons who become true believers through responding to general revelation alone." I would say that, while correct, the likeliest explanation for examples like Rahab and Melchizedek would seem to be general revelation. Erickson does not rule out the possibility, but simply states that Scripture is inconclusive at this point: "Scripture does not indicate how many, if any, come to salvation this way." He adds that the evidence from Romans 1 "seems to suggest that ordinarily, general revelation is insufficient to bring persons to salvation" but he does acknowledge that if general revelation is sufficient to render persons without excuse, that does imply that a positive response may render one acceptable to God. He finally comes down to a position not far from that of Anderson, though carefully qualified and guarded. The two key elements are a recognition of sinfulness from the moral law within (and thus the need for grace) and some valid knowledge of the true God from nature. Exactly how much knowledge is required (both for those who never

hear and those who receive the gospel) is a question that Erickson suggests God alone can answer.

I think this is one of the most pressing questions in evangelical theology today and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. If we conclude that inclusivists are wrong, it should not be with glibness and gladness, but with a recognition of the heavy responsibility we are accepting in making that conclusion. Here is where I come down.

### **FIVE REASONS WHY I AM NOT AN INCLUSIVIST**

Inclusivism, the idea that some people may be saved without explicit faith in the gospel message, is a very comforting position that I would like to embrace, and while I find no explicit biblical teaching on how God deals with those who never hear the gospel, I find no biblical warrant for it, and five reasons against it.

**1. A Biblical Reason.** The Bible presents an array of verses that point toward the traditional view (a position we may call evangel-ism; the idea that one must hear the evangel, or gospel message). The religions of other nations in the Old Testament were regarded as idolatrous, not salvific (Ps. 96:5; 97:7); even Jews after the coming of Christ could not be saved within Judaism (Rom. 10:1-3); salvation comes by placing faith in the gospel message (Eph. 1:13); that message centers on Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Christ's coming signaled a change in God's dealings with all (Acts 17:30-31).

**2. A Theological Reason.** I think one idea undergirding inclusivism is that God ought to treat everyone equally. I think we may rightly believe that God will treat everyone fairly, but if God wants to be more than fair with some, and give some much more abundant light than others, I think we have to bow before God's sovereignty (Matt. 20:13-16). In the end, we have to let God be God and reach the same place of trust that Abraham did (Gen. 18:25). Inclusivists assume the problem between God and humanity is a lack of information, but in fact the barrier seems moral rather than mental. Revelational light is universally available, but normally suppressed (Rom. 1:18-23). In the one biblical example where an individual responded to the limited revelation he had, God did not regard that response as sufficient for salvation, but supplied further revelation (Acts 10:4; 11:13-14). God is not obligated to make the gospel message accessible to those who are suppressing the truth they do know (see reason 3).

**3. An Anthropological Reason.** Inclusivism assumes that many individuals are honestly and sincerely seeking God. It would not be just for them to be lost, simply due to the fact that they were born in an area unreached by the gospel (especially when that fact is due to the failure of Christians to get the gospel out). But the teaching of the Bible, though hard for humans to accept, is that "no one seeks . . . seeks God" (Rom. 3:11); that "men loved the darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19), statements which seem supported by fact that quite often missionaries bringing the light are not welcomed. Apart from the Spirit's ministry of conviction and illumination, we do not seek God, and the Spirit's ministry is normally through the preaching of the word (I Thess. 1:4-5; I Cor. 2:1-5). We should not think of these lost people

as helpless victims, but responsible agents—responsible for not loving God, not obeying the moral law within.

**4. A Missiological Reason.** While the New Testament motivation for evangelism is for the glory of God as well as the need of the lost, the command to go and preach the gospel to all does not fit well with the idea that salvation is available apart from the preaching of the gospel. Despite the disclaimers, inclusivism does seem to undercut missions. In fact, I wonder if one reason why God has not spoken more clearly on this issue is that we would take any hint as an excuse to not take Christ's command (Matt. 28:19-20) with full seriousness.

**5. A Practical Reason.** If the inclusivist is right and I am wrong, I will be overjoyed to find heaven much more populated than I think. But if the inclusivist is wrong and I am right, he may have been guilty of encouraging some to trust in a message that did not save, and guilty of encouraging a view that weakened support for the preaching of the gospel, the one message that we know will save those who embrace it.

I believe we may hope that God will save some through their response to general revelation, but we cannot and dare not affirm it or act on the basis of it. In the final analysis, this may be one of those questions for which we do not need a definitive answer. God has told us He will be just (Gen. 18:25), and He has told us to preach the gospel to all nations. What more do we need to know?

J. Robertson McQuilkin gives a good illustration that helps me resolve this issue:

Suppose you and I were the safety officers on the tenth floor of a condominium which cared for elderly patients. Fire broke out. We, having done our job well, knew that the official floor plan posted on the wall identified one fire escape at the end of the corridor. Perhaps it would be legitimate for me to turn over in my mind the idea that surely the architect must have put in another fire escape. Then, too, I remembered reading a newspaper story of someone who fell out of a tenth floor apartment and landed in a bush and survived. It might be all right for me to think of that. I'm not sure. It might be all right for me to think of tying sheets together so that some unusually strong octogenarian could climb down. But I think it would be immoral to propose such ideas in an hour like that. What do you think? (cited in Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne, eds. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 1st ed., pp. 133-134.)

I don't think it's wrong to try to answer serious questions put to us by non-believers and show them that there are possible answers to their questions. But it is curious that inclusivism is gaining ground today when gospel knowledge is more widespread than ever. At any rate, we know God will save those who come to him by faith in Christ, we are commanded and obligated to share Christ with all peoples everywhere for their good and His glory, and we can trust God to do what is right for those who died without hearing, so let's get on with the job.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 2: THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION  
PART B: SPECIAL REVELATION  
OUTLINE

- I. Introductory Matters.
  - A. A preliminary definition of special revelation.
  - B. The assumptions behind special revelation.
  - C. The locus of special revelation.
  - D. The purpose of special revelation.
  
- II. Biblical Foundations.
  - A. Revelation in the Bible.
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    - 2. God reveals information.
    - 3. God's future, full, final revelation.
  
  - B. The means of revelation.
  
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    - 1. Claims for the Old Testament.
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- III. Historical Illumination.
  - A. The issue of the canon.
    - 1. The need for a canon.
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    - 3. The criteria for the canon.
      - a. The objective criterion.
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  - C. Scripture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century
    - 1. Liberalism.
    - 2. Neo-orthodoxy.
    - 3. Orthodoxy.
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#### IV. Theological Formulation.

##### A. Revelation.

1. What is revelation?
2. How does revelation occur?
3. When did revelation occur?
4. To whom is revelation given?
5. Why is revelation given?

##### B. Inspiration.

1. Theories of inspiration.
2. The extent of inspiration.
3. Two implications of inspiration.
  - a. Divine authority.
  - b. Inerrancy.

##### C. Canonization.

##### D. Preservation.

##### E. Illumination.

#### V. Practical Applications.

- A. Show gratitude by diligent study.
- B. Place yourself under its authority.
- C. Trust it to guide your life and empower your ministry.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
 UNIT 2: THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION  
 PART B. SPECIAL REVELATION

Karl Barth was once asked to name the most profound truth he had discovered in all his study and teaching. He responded, “Jesus loves me; this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” While we can learn much of God from universal revelation, knowing God intimately required special revelation. Thank God for it! No effort to understand it can be too much, for here we have knowledge of God offered by God.

I. Introductory Matters.

A. A preliminary definition of special revelation. As mentioned in the previous lecture, revelation may be defined as the manifestation of God and His will for us. It is thus both *personal* and *propositional*, and may be given through revelatory acts (the mighty deeds of God), but requires a divine word of explanation for the revelation given in the act to be understood (no one fell at the foot of the cross in adoration until the divine word of explanation was given).

Special revelation, then, may be defined preliminarily as revelation of God and of information God desired to communicate, given to particular individuals at particular times. This definition excludes ideas such as revelation as personal encounter with God (Karl Barth), revelation as the acts of God (apart from interpretation), revelation as symbol and image (some versions of liberal theology), or revelation as anything that supports liberation (liberation theology and feminist theology). Other views deny any idea of normative revelation, saying all we can have is our own individual perspective and interpretation (supported by postmodern relativism and pluralism, and deconstruction).

For more on different views of revelation, John Baillie's book *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956) is helpful for three major views, though dated. For more contemporary issues, see Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There A Meaning in This Text?* and D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*.

We will try to verify this preliminary definition later when we look at how revelation is described in the Bible.

B. The assumptions behind special revelation. This preliminary definition contains three assumptions about revelation. We mentioned these assumptions earlier, for they are also the assumptions the study of theology, as we defined it, makes. They are:

1. That there exists a God, capable and desirous of revealing Himself. We thus reject Kant's denial of the possibility of metaphysical knowledge.

2. That the human beings to which revelation is addressed are capable, or may be made capable, of receiving and understanding revelation. We thus deny the postmodern idea that Truth is not accessible to us, only individual truths.

3. That human language is capable of transmitting the propositional aspect of revelation, even revelation of an infinite God. It is true that Calvin and others have described Scriptural language as graciously adapted to human limitations (God speaks "baby language" so we can understand things otherwise beyond us), but this does not invalidate revelation, though it does require a proper humility (Ps. 131). We may know God truly, though not exhaustively. We will never completely plumb the depths of God; our feet will never touch bottom; the water will always be too deep. Human language about God is not univocal, but neither is it equivocal; it is analogical and adequate to reveal what we need to know (Deut. 29:29).

To the post-modern criticism that all language is perspectival, we may grant it, but it does not prevent communication. We understand the criticism made by the post-modernist, even though we do not share his perspective. Even deconstructionists like Derrida complain when someone misinterprets their work. Words convey meanings that we can understand and share with others.

C. The locus of special revelation. Neo-orthodoxy believes revelation occurs within an encounter between God and the believer. If that encounter does not occur, revelation has not happened. In this view, the Bible is the record and witness to the fact that some individuals in the past had such an encounter with God, and may serve as the catalyst for a revelatory encounter now, but the Bible itself is not revelation. We will argue otherwise; namely, that the Bible is both the record of past revelations and the channel that brings revelation to believers today.

Whether God also reveals himself to individuals today outside of Scripture is another issue. Some, especially those within charismatic circles, like to speak of receiving revelations, and point to I Cor. 14:26. I cannot deny the possibility that God can give private or special revelation to individuals today, but I would insist on three limitations.

First, any new revelation must not contradict revelation already given in Scripture. One consistent characteristic of cults is new and contra-Scriptural revelation.

The second limitation is that any purported new revelations must not be regarded as normative or binding on others. Even if it seems good, and is compatible with Scripture, the Bible alone is to be regarded as normative revelation, and its canon is definitely closed (Jude 3).

The third caution I would raise is about carelessly using the word "revelation" to make sermons, lessons, etc. stronger, holier, and more authoritative. ("God revealed this to me" as opposed to "I studied the word and this is what I found"). Don't blame God too directly for what you preach or teach. I personally think the ideas of guidance and illumination are more fitting, and more properly humble, and that we should seek God's revelation for us in His living and abiding word.

D. The purpose of special revelation. While special revelation may not be absolutely necessary for salvation (see the discussion of those who never hear), clearly the purpose of

special revelation is relational--God giving information about Himself in order that a relationship of personal knowledge, intimacy and trust may be established.

*I personally have never known a Christian who was growing in her relationship with God who was not consistently reading and applying Scripture to her life. What is your practice in reading and applying Scripture to your life? What have you read this past week that has fed your relationship with God?*

## II. Biblical Foundations.

A. Revelation in the Bible. To check the validity of the definition of revelation offered above, I found it instructive to see what the Bible says God reveals. And the answer is both Himself and propositional information about Himself, His will and His plans. There are too many references to cover them all, but we will note some:

1. Personal Revelation. God reveals himself: I Sam. 3:21 ("through his word"), Is. 40:5 (glory = visible representation of the invisible), Eph. 1:17 (revelation leads to knowing God better), Rom. 1:17-18 (God reveals His attributes in the gospel), Gal. 1:12, 16 (revelation of God the Son), and Matt. 11:27 (revelation of the Father by the Son).

2. Propositional Revelation. God reveals information: "things" (Dt. 29:29), his plans (II Sam. 7:27, Amos 3:7), the future (Dan. 2:28), his word (I Sam. 3:7), the "mysteries" involved in the gospel message (Rom. 16:25-26, Eph. 3:3, 5; I Cor. 2:10, 11:25), and the identity of Jesus (Mt. 16:17); the Holy Spirit reveals truth to the disciples about Jesus (Jn. 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-14--the word revelation is not used, but the idea is clear), and Jesus himself is a "light for revelation" (Lk. 2:32).

3. Eschatological Revelation. There are also a number of uses of revelation (*apokalupsis*) to refer to the return of Jesus Christ (Lk. 17:30, II Thess. 1:7, I Pet. 1:13, 4:13, 5:1, and Rev. 1:1), though we usually associate the words *parousia* and *epiphaneia* with the second coming. This serves to remind us that the full and final self-disclosure of God lies in the future, at the eschaton. Since God has chosen to reveal himself in and through history, the end of revelation will come at the end of history.

However, in the great revelatory act of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures which give the normative interpretation, the future has entered the present. As in virtually all of NT theology, revelation has already been given, but we do not yet have the full and final disclosure of God (this already/not yet tension can be seen in almost every area of the Christian life).

The usage of the Bible seems to confirm the idea that revelation is both personal (of God Himself) and propositional (of various types of information God wants to communicate). Thus we may say that the Bible is the witness and record of God's acts of self-disclosure in the past to chosen prophets and apostles, but it is more. It is the channel that actually brings revelation to us. Revelation may and should be a life changing encounter, but it is not devoid of

communicable information or content, and that content is given in Scripture. God still speaks to us the word he spoke long ago to the prophets and apostles, for his word is living and abiding.

Moreover, in a number of instances, there is already a link being made between revelation and God's word, and even the writing down of that word (I Sam. 3:21 and Rom. 16:25-26, for example). The phrase "the word of God" is used in the Bible for more than just Scripture (the spoken message of the apostles, the message revealed to the prophets, for example), but we may speak of the Bible as being the written form of God's word.

B. The means of revelation. Heb. 1:1 says God spoke in many ways. Some of those means are: dreams and visions (Gen. 37, Dan. 2, 7, Matt. 2:12-13, the whole book of Revelation), audible or inner voices (I Sam. 3, Num. 12:6-8, perhaps Gal. 1:11-12), or miracles (John 10:24-26, the "mighty acts of God"), even research (Luke 1:1-4). The pinnacle of revelation is the Incarnate Word, whose life and words are the most perfect revelation of God (John 14:8-9, John 1:1-3, 14, 18: Jesus is the exegesis [*exegesato*] of God).

*Does God still reveal himself through dreams and visions? There are many reports of such events playing a role in the conversion of Muslims.*

By whatever means, chosen apostles and prophets received revelation from God, and committed it to writing under the supervision of the Spirit, in such a way that it communicates revelation to us today.

C. The Bible as special revelation. The claim that the Bible truly is revelation, and not just the record or witness of past occasions of revelation, rests upon the claim that the Scriptures bear a special divine authority, in such a way that to hear the Bible is to hear God speaking to us. The Spirit who inspired Scripture still speaks through the Scriptures. They are his chosen instrument and servant, and they bear the authority of their Master. We will try to justify that claim by looking at what the Bible says about itself.

#### 1. Claims for the OT.

a. That what the OT writers recorded was revelation from God. See Deut. 18:18, II Sam. 23:2, Is. 59:21, Zech. 7:12. The OT claims to be the "word of God" hundreds of times (Jer. 1:2-4, Hosea 1:1, etc.) and uses the phrase "thus says the Lord" or "declares the Lord" 3808 times, especially in the prophets (see even Obadiah-4 times in 21 verses).

b. That the OT writers wrote at God's direction (Deut. 31:24-26, Jer. 30:1-2), and received such special help in the process that the result is a God-breathed book (II Tim. 3:16-17), in whose words we hear God speak (Matt. 15:4, 22:43; Acts 4:25-26, 13:34-35; II Cor. 6:1-2, Gal. 3:8; Heb. 2:12-13).

c. That readers of the OT thus receive actual revelation from God (Psalm 119, II Tim. 3:15, James 1:18, 21; John 5:39-40).

## 2. Claims for the NT.

a. That the NT is authorized by Jesus, for he appointed apostles to be his official representatives (see the Hebrew concept of a *shaliah*), and the NT is the apostolic teaching in written form (either from an apostle, a companion of an apostle, or containing teaching in agreement with apostolic teaching). The apostles claimed that their message was not their own ideas, but God's word (I Cor. 14:37, Gal. 1:11-12, I Thess. 2:13, I Pet. 1:23-25, Rev. 22:18-19) as was the teaching of Jesus (Luke 5:1, 8:21). And as apostles, what they taught and wrote had the authority of Jesus (John 16:13, Acts 1:1-2, 2:42, Rom. 1:1, I Cor. 14:37, Eph. 2:20, II Pet. 3:2). This is why Paul so often began his letters with his claim to being an apostle; without it, we would have to judge Paul as one of the most arrogant men who ever lived (see II Thess. 3:14; Col. 4:16).

b. That in at least two places, the NT Scriptures are placed on the same level as the OT, and thus would have the same authority (I Tim. 5:18, II Pet. 3:16).

Perhaps one could say that these are simply claims the Bible makes for itself, and is thus a circular argument. Why should we accept the Bible's testimony about its divine origin and authority? John Calvin would say that the final reason must be the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, but John Wenham (*Christ and the Bible*) offers a strong argument as well from the testimony of Jesus (which should be determinative for all who call him Lord).

## 3. The testimony of Jesus.

a. He saw God as the ultimate source of Scripture and the Holy Spirit as the ultimate author (Matt. 15:4, 22:43).

b. He emphasized the importance of every word (Matt. 5:18, Mk. 12:24-27).

c. He believed the Scriptures had to be fulfilled because they were the word of God, who cannot lie (Matt. 26:52-54, Lk. 24:44, John 10:35).

d. He placed himself under the authority of the OT (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Lk. 24:25-26) such that he obeyed it.

e. He named apostles precisely to give his teaching in written form, which is essentially what we have in the NT (see 2a above).

I think the testimony of Jesus is determinative. If we approach the NT, not as inspired Scripture, but simply as a book containing some historical information on Jesus of Nazareth, we can say, based on its testimony, that if we know anything at all that is historically accurate about the one called Jesus, it is that he accepted the OT without question and authorized the NT. Indications of such a position are in every strata of the gospels, and is overwhelming. If the NT has any historical credibility at all, Jesus' attitude toward Scripture is clear.

If he is my Lord, I must follow his attitude toward Scripture. One cannot accept the Incarnate Word as Lord without accepting the Written Word as God's authoritative revelation.

To those who would object that Jesus simply accommodated himself to the prevalent attitude of the day concerning the OT, knowing that it truly was not revelation from God, we would respond that Jesus was not a very accommodating sort of person, and in fact did not accommodate traditional ideas when they were in error, that being the reason why they killed him. To another objection that Jesus held the prevalent idea but as a man was subject to holding erroneous ideas, we would suggest that your Christology and your concept of Jesus' Lordship need closer examination.

I believe the Bible's evidence about itself allows us to claim that it is indeed revelation from God, and not just a witness and record of revelation. It comes to us with divine authority, as the product of God's creative breath, written by men specially assisted by God. When we turn to history and later, to systematic formulation, we will use this key statement of the nature of Scripture as the basis for our views on issues such as inerrancy and inspiration.

*A question that has sometimes appeared on the mid-term exam is, "What is the basis for the claim that Jesus authorized the New Testament?" How would you respond?*

### III. Historical Illumination.

A. The issue of the canon. The basic meaning of the root word for canon in both Hebrew and Greek is that of a straight rod, and, derivatively, a standard or criterion. In theology, it refers to those books that have formed the standard or criterion for, first, Judaism, and later, for Christianity. The canon is the list of books that form the norm for Christian theology. How that list came to be developed, and which books should be included in that list, has been the subject of some controversy in the history of the church.

1. The need for a canon. The 66 books of our Bible were not, of course, the only religious literature produced in the biblical period. There are 14 or so books that were produced from 200 BC to 100 AD called the Apocrypha, a larger group of writings from roughly 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. called the Pseudepigrapha, and many other writings of various types. The need was for a list of books that the people of God viewed as determinative for their life before God.

*For a thumbnail sketch of these books, see "The Protestant's Primer on the Apocrypha," on Moodle.*

That need was accentuated by the appearance of heretics who denied the validity of some of the books commonly used by God's people. The most striking example is Marcion, who denied the whole of the OT, and much of the NT, accepting only 10 letters of Paul and an edited version of Luke. The church needed to say that Marcion was wrong, and to do so they needed a list of the books they accepted.

## 2. The historical development of the canon.

a. The OT. Mainline scholarship has maintained for decades the theory that the OT canon was recognized in three stages, corresponding to the three sections of the Hebrew OT - the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nebiim*), and the Writings (*Ketubim*). The Jewish word for their Bible was the *Tanak*, composed of the first letters of the words for these three sections. The law, or Pentateuch, was accepted as canonical by the fifth century BC, the prophets by the third century BC, and the writings continued in dispute until the supposed synod of Jamnia, held around 90 AD. Thus we arrive at the Hebrew canon of the OT, containing the 39 books we recognize today (though the Jews numbered the books as 22 or 24, by listing the 12 minor prophets as one, and combining various other books).

Moreover, mainline scholarship has also maintained that when the OT was translated into Greek (the Septuagint, around 200 BC), those books called the Apocrypha began to circulate along with the books recognized by the Jews and thus came to be regarded by many as equally canonical. Thus there is the idea of a Palestinian canon, accepted by Hebrew speaking Jews, and a wider Alexandrian canon, which included the Apocrypha, whose books were regarded as equally Scripture by many early church fathers.

But Roger Beckwith challenged these theories of mainline scholarship in a fine, detailed work of historical research (*The OT Canon of the NT Church*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). As to the formation of the canon, he maintains that there is evidence within the OT itself of the Pentateuch being accepted as the authoritative written rule for the life of God's people (see Ex. 24:7, I Kings 23:3, and Neh. 8:9, 14-17, the last probably referring to the entire Pentateuch), and even some references to the writings of the prophets (Dan. 9:1-2 referring to Jeremiah 25:11).

He differs most from the mainline theory, however, on seeing the prophets and writings both recognized as authoritative canonical writings by the second century BC. He cites the prologue to the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus, written about 130 BC, which refers three times to "the Law and the Prophets and the other books," thus giving evidence of a three section recognized canon as early as 130 BC. He suggests Judas Maccabeus and his associates as the likeliest source for this canon, postulating that after the persecution by Antiochus, they collected the scattered Scriptures, subdivided the non-Mosaic Scriptures into the section called the Prophets (though it included books we list as historical books) and the section called the writings (which also included other historical writings). By the first century, both Philo (20 B.C.-50 A.D.) and Josephus (37-100 A.D.) refer to the Jewish Bible as *Tanak*. Beckwith goes into great detail giving evidence for his theory and for why certain books were assigned to the section of the prophets and others to the writings. He acknowledges that at times some rabbis expressed doubts about five books (Ezekiel, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Esther), but argues that these disputes were of limited scale and significance, and did not seriously threaten the general acceptance of these books as canonical Scripture.

For me, the principal importance of Beckwith's work is the evidence that by the time of Christ, there was a recognized three section canon of Hebrew Scripture. Jesus certainly would have been aware of such a canon, and seems to have referred to it on one and perhaps two

occasions. Luke 24:44 refers to the Law, the Prophets and Psalms. It is likely that the Psalms refers to the third section of the canon. It had not received a commonly agreed upon name as the Law and the Prophets. The prologue to Ecclesiasticus refers to it as "the other books," and there is a reference in Philo, another Jewish writer, that uses a word quite similar to Psalms ("hymns"). In any case, Psalms was the largest book in that group and seems to have been used by Jesus as a short way to refer to the whole group of books. A second possibility is in Matt. 23, when Jesus refers to how the Jews have killed the righteous from Abel to Zechariah. This may be a veiled allusion to the canon which began with Genesis (Abel) and ended with II Chronicles (Zechariah).

In any case, I think we have good NT support for accepting the Hebrew canon as valid. Jesus seems to have referred to it, and he certainly knew of it and never questioned it (though he did question many other accepted Jewish beliefs). It is true that this is an argument from silence, but it seems to me to be a significant silence.

As to the question of the Apocrypha, Beckwith notes that the support for the canonicity of these books among the church fathers is in fact much weaker than is commonly thought. Often there are allusions or similarities of thought; there are some direct quotations, but clear claims or even implications of canonicity for these books is scarce. More important, Jesus and the NT authors quote from the books of the Hebrew canon hundreds of times, but never quote any apocryphal book as authoritative Scripture. It is true the NT book of Jude does make use of the pseudepigraphal books of the Assumption of Moses and I Enoch, but not in a way that implies their canonicity. The evidence from Jesus and the NT supports acceptance of the Jewish canon, and rejection of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

The apocryphal books continued to be read and used by many Christians, and were included in the Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate), though the translator, Jerome, clearly accepted only those books accepted by the Hebrews as truly canonical. The issue of their status rose again in the Reformation when some Catholics thought they could use them as a basis for their beliefs in purgatory and justification by works (though even the verses cited--II Maccabees 12:41-45 and Tobit 12:9, 14:10-11--give little basis). The Reformers rightly refused to accept them as canonical, though they did acknowledge them as useful, both for historical knowledge of the intertestamental period and for spiritual encouragement.

b. The NT. Here too the progress was gradual. In the NT itself there is evidence that some parts were already being regarded as Scripture (I Tim. 5:18, II Pet. 3:16), and early church fathers began quoting NT books early, often, and as authoritative. All the NT books except III John were quoted as Scripture in the second century. Early in the second century, there was general acceptance of the 4 gospels, the 13 letters of Paul and the writings of some of the other apostles. By about 170, we have a canon used by the church in Rome that was developed against the heresies of Marcion that recognizes almost all the books of our NT (it omits Hebrews, James and I and II Peter). For a time, some doubts persisted about the inclusion of Revelation, James, Jude, and II and III John and the exclusion of some popular first century books like the Shepherd of Hermas and the *Didache*. Most scholars would say the period from 140 to 200 was determinative for the shape of the NT canon. Our first complete list is from

Athanasius in 367. He is followed by Jerome and Augustine and final approval by the Council of Carthage in 397, which effectively ended discussion.

*Muslims use this fact to argue that over the centuries before the canon was recognized, the text of the New Testament and its teaching was corrupted. How would you respond?*

3. The criteria for the canon. The most perplexing question is trying to reconstruct the reasoning of those who constructed the canon. How did they decide which books to include and which to exclude? The key issue was inspiration. Any book believed to be inspired was included in the canon. There have been a number of proposals as to the criteria used. F. F. Bruce suggests five tests were used: (1) being authored or sanctioned by an apostle or prophet, (2) being widely circulated, (3) being Christologically centered, (4) being orthodox in doctrine, (5) giving internal evidence of being uniquely inspired. These tests seem to fall into one of five types of criteria:

a. The theological criterion: agreement with apostolic teaching and thus orthodox. Part of the reason why gospels like the Gospel of Thomas, or Peter, or Judas were rejected was that they were written later, well into the second century, and thus were not genuinely apostolic, but they were also rejected because they were heretical. Both the oral teaching left by the apostles and the four already accepted gospels contradicted the picture of Jesus in these later gospels. Despite recent claims that our view of Jesus is the result of power struggles at later councils that capriciously chose to ignore some gospels, the reality is that they were never seriously considered, because they were obviously theologically deviant.

b. The objective criterion: prophetic/apostolic authorship. R. Laird Harris claims that the books of the OT were accepted because they were written by people recognized as prophets, and that the NT books either came from an apostle or with apostolic approval. It is true that apostles and prophets were central in the production of the Scriptures (see Eph. 2:20, Acts 2:42), and that apostolicity and agreement with apostolic teaching were used by Irenaeus as criteria in the second century for NT books, but there is a problem with this theory. We have no indication that the authors of Job or Ruth or I and II Kings were prophets or that Hebrews was written by an apostle. This theory claims more than the evidence provides.

c. The subjective criterion: Scripture is self-authenticating. Numerous authors have noted that the canonical books have a discernible qualitative difference from other books. They provide their own criterion. Karl Barth said we accept the canon because it has imposed itself upon the Church. The Church did not create the canon, but simply recognized the self-authenticating quality these books already possessed (see Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 485-492; Metzger, *The Canon of the NT*, and Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, affirm similar ideas). Thus, the canon is not an authoritative collection of books (authorized by the Church), but a collection of authoritative books (authorized by the divine stamp of authorship that authenticates itself).

d. The historic criterion. This criterion trusts the judgment of the Church, which has always accepted the 66 books as canonical and has heard God's voice in those books.

Stanley Grenz and the whole school of canonical criticism seem to take this tack. This could be combined with the second test of Bruce, that of breadth of circulation. Did the early Church as a whole embrace this book? I have a lot of respect for the united historic judgment of the Church, but I would combine this criterion with the fifth one.

e The spiritual criterion: the Holy Spirit. This criterion affirms that the Spirit's role in Scripture did not end with inspiration, but continued in the process of canonization and illumination. The same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures worked providentially to secure acceptance of those Scriptures and gives the final internal testimony that convinces the heart not only of the canonicity of the Scriptures, but of their divine authority and claim on the individual's life. Bruce Metzger, certainly no fundamentalist, states:

There are, in fact, no historical data that prevent one from acquiescing in the conviction held by the Church Universal that, despite the very human factors (the *confusio hominum*) in the production, preservation, and collection of the books of the New Testament, the whole process can also be rightly characterized as the result of divine overruling in the *providentia Dei*. (Metzger, *Canon of NT*, p. 285).

I believe the strongest reason for accepting the canon lies in this final factor. Though there are some indications of the prophetic/apostolic criterion, and an undeniable self-authenticating quality in the documents, and a solid historical testimony to the canon, I simply cannot believe that the Holy Spirit would carefully supervise the writing of the Scriptures (inspiration) and then leave us to ourselves to recognize the authenticity of the writings (canonization). I accept the canon because I trust God the Holy Spirit.

4. The importance of the canon. The canon protects us from two dangers: adding to the Bible or taking something away from the Bible.

a. It is interesting to note that virtually every heretical group has another source of revelation beyond the Bible. The Mormons have The Book of Mormon, among others. Jehovah's Witnesses have the writings of Charles Russell. Christian Scientists follow the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy. But Christians affirm that the faith (the body of orthodox teachings) was given once and for all (Jude 3), and that Jesus is the determinative word of God.

In other words, we believe the canon is closed, in the sense that God is giving no authoritative, normative revelation today. Some may claim personal, private revelations. I do not deny their experience, but I think it is better to call it guidance or illumination, and it must always be judged by Scripture.

b. The second danger is not followed openly, but often subtly. If we believe II Tim. 3:16, we should be reading and preaching all of the books of the Bible. They are all profitable. Obviously, not all parts are equally valuable and applicable. I would not want a pastor to spend months on Leviticus and one week on Ephesians. There are central and peripheral things, but they are all part of the picture. Therefore, the pastor or leader must resist the temptation to develop a personal canon within the canon, and maintain continual exposure to

the whole counsel of God (reading the whole Bible every year, balancing OT and NT preaching and teaching, etc.).

B. Scripture and Tradition. The second major issue in history that illumines the doctrine of revelation for us is the Reformation controversy over the authority of Scripture *vis a vis* the authority of church tradition.

In the early church, Irenaeus opened the door for adding tradition to Scripture by claiming the church was right and the heretics wrong in understanding Scripture because the apostles had given to the bishops the right interpretation of Scripture that had been passed down orally. By the time of the Reformation, there was a debate over how much authority tradition should possess, a debate that was resolved by the Council of Trent, which recognized tradition as a source for doctrine, as authoritative as Scripture.

It is hard for us to imagine how difficult it was for Luther to stand alone, claiming that he alone was right and church councils and popes were wrong. He stood because he believed that Scripture alone was his authority. He knew from studying church history that church councils and popes had contradicted one another and erred, but Scripture did not. Thus, he and all the Reformers stood for *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone.

Baptists agreed with the Reformers. But as Timothy George has said, *sola Scriptura* did not mean *nuda Scriptura*. Church tradition and all other human statements were placed under the authority of Scripture, but that does not mean they are meaningless or unnecessary.

For example, some Baptists are fond of saying "No creed but the Bible," thinking this is a historic Baptist idea and honoring to Scripture. In fact, it was Alexander Campbell who first introduced that cry into Baptist life, after 200 years of Baptist history in which the formulation of confessions of faith had been routine. Such confessions were never placed above Scripture, but were meant to give how Baptists interpreted Scripture, and were necessary to differentiate Baptists from others. For example, in the 19th century, Baptists and the Campbellites equally claimed to follow Scripture alone. But their interpretations of Scripture differed, and a statement of faith was necessary to distinguish between the two. In 1826, the Franklin Association in Kentucky, locked in mortal combat with the Campbellites, rejected the idea that Scripture renders statements of faith unnecessary: "our confessions are human productions, they may all require revision, and be susceptible of amendment, but to erase them from our books, our memory and our practice, is to make. . . a leap into chaos." They denied the idea of "no creed but the Bible," saying "It is vain to say, that the Bible is sufficient for that purpose;" the Campbellites claimed to follow the Bible too. Without a statement of what they believed the Bible taught, "the Church is constrained to receive into her bosom,. . . the enemies of truth. . . reduced to the cruel necessity of harboring under her wings the vilest heresies." (McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, p. 380.)

I include this because some Baptists during the conservative resurgence made claims that the essence of being Baptist is being free, free from any doctrinal parameters. All we need, they say, is the Bible. We are following the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, they say. I

simply want to note that principle never eliminated the proper place of confessions of faith in Baptist life.

C. Scripture in the 20th century. The third major historical development we need to examine is the debate over revelation and the Bible that went on for most of the 20th century. Like no century before, that century questioned the nature of the Bible as normative, special revelation. As Kirsopp Lake has acknowledged, the "fundamentalist" position on the Bible was the almost unanimous view up through the 18th century. The 19th century saw some crucial developments, but the debate became most intense in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Basically, there are three positions I want us to note, with some sub-groupings within the last position. They are liberalism, neo-orthodoxy and orthodoxy.

1. To trace the development of liberalism, we have to go back to the Enlightenment and particularly Immanuel Kant, who is a landmark figure in the history of philosophy. Basically, Kant denied the possibility of objective knowledge of anything metaphysical, or what he called *noumenal*. We can have some knowledge of what he called phenomenal reality, because we have sensory input and we can empirically test and know. But Kant would not accept revelation as a source for knowledge. Rather, he insisted on religion only within the bounds of reason. In Kant and the Enlightenment in general, reason reigns supreme, and reason will not place itself under a supposed revelation from God. Rather, reason examines revelation and sees many ideas and statements it cannot accept--miracles and such. These things are not part of our everyday experience, and so cannot be accepted by reason.

Of course, all this leaves the theologian with an enormous problem. If revelation is discredited, and reason cannot connect with anything beyond the world, how can Christian theology, or Christianity itself survive? Friedrich Schleiermacher's answer was to base Christian faith not on the Bible, or on rationalism, but on experience. The heart of religion is feeling. The experience of absolute dependence is the heart of Christianity.

He went on to try to develop a theology that would appeal to the educated, who had accepted Kant and rejected revelation. He sought to develop a theology based on religious experience, and not revelation. In so doing, he found many doctrines dispensable, since they have no basis in religious experience (the Trinity), and became the father of liberal theology, in which theology is based on something other than biblical revelation, because that approach is assumed to be invalid. Scripture is often used in liberal theology, but it is not as the determining norm, but as something to be added in when it agrees with what the theologian wants to say.

Liberal theology developed in the 19th century and continued into the 20th, cutting back the doctrines that could be accepted. The high point of this may have been Adolf Harnack's formulation of the essence of Christianity as the universal fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the individual soul.

Other representatives of liberalism have been Rudolf Bultmann (miracles are unreasonable and therefore the Bible must be demythologized to be acceptable), Paul Tillich,

most German theologians, and most mainline Protestant theologians (Harvey Cox, Langdon Gilkey and others). The key trait is the assumption from the start that the traditional position on Scripture and revelation cannot be accepted by thinking people today. Theology must be based on something else--most often reason, sometimes experience, sometimes existential philosophy, or the feminist or third-world experience of oppression. Scripture is the record of what certain people thought about God. It is at best fallible human discovery, not authoritative divine disclosure.

Nor is such a revelation necessary. God can be reached through other channels, for the emphasis in liberal theology is on God's immanence, His accessibility, moving at times, into a pantheistic view that sees God as present in everything. Surely reason, or experience, or philosophy can reach Him.

In recent years, some former liberals, discouraged by the results of the liberal project, have returned to Scripture as the authoritative narrative for the Christian community. This school of thought called postliberalism or Yale theology has tried to reclaim core doctrines of historical Christianity but because they do not claim Scripture to be universally valid revelation from God, they have problems with justifying any truth claims.

2. Neo-orthodoxy developed as an almost desperate reaction against liberalism, led primarily by Karl Barth. As a pastor, Barth faced the weekly necessity of preaching to his congregation. He found that liberalism left him with nothing to say, and he turned back to Scripture. He emphasized in a radical way the transcendence of God (By God alone can God be known), and the need for revelation from God. He developed a three-fold view of the Word of God (incarnate, written and preached, with the latter two pointing to the first). He emphasized the importance of the Scriptures, and was a definite improvement from Bultmann and the others dominating the theological scene. But from a conservative point of view, there were two problems.

First, he continued the assumption that the Bible was fallible. As a human book, it had to err. Otherwise, it would be a "docetic" book, appearing human, but not really human. Yet though he affirmed this as a matter of fact, you will search long and hard in the words of the *Church Dogmatics* and find few places where he identifies errors in Scripture. He was very reticent to place his reason over Scripture on specific points.

The second major problem and one that pretty much identifies the neo-orthodox position on revelation is the severing of any direct link between Scripture and revelation. Scripture may be the record of revelation, the witness to the fact that revelation one time occurred, the crater left by an encounter between God and a person, even a catalyst for a revelatory encounter, but Scripture is not itself, objectively the carrier of revelation. It may become revelation, if God chooses to use it to encounter us, but it does not have the characteristic of being revelation in and of itself.

Barth says, "we cannot regard the presence of God's Word in the Bible as an attribute inhering once for all in this book as such," but when the Bible "is taken and used as an

instrument in the hand of God” then “it speaks to us and is heard by us as the authentic witness to divine revelation and is therefore present as the Word of God” (*Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p. 530).

Part and parcel of this view is the idea that revelation is not propositional information, but a personal encounter (“The Word of God is God Himself in Holy Scripture,” CD I, 2, p. 457). What God reveals is not information, but Himself, and the locus of that revelation is not a book, but an individual. That encounter may occur as we read Scripture, if God uses that Scripture to speak to us, but that is left to the free choice of God.

In reality, Barth does derive much propositional information about God from the Scriptures. The six million words of *Church Dogmatics* did not simply come from Barth's own imagination. In fact, one of my main problems with Barth is that his theology is much better than it has a right to be. He is more biblical than his theology of the Scriptures give him a right to be.

Barth has had many followers. Generally, they are characterized by an emphasis on the personal nature of revelation and describe Scripture as a record or witness of revelation. They want to leave some space between Scripture and revelation.

3. The third major position, orthodoxy, is definitely the minority opinion among theologians today, though probably the majority position among believers (the vast majority of believers globally, especially in the southern hemisphere, have an instinctive trust in Scripture). This position places revelation first, trusts the Bible as God's authoritative and inspired word, and seeks to submit to Scripture in theologizing. Yet even within this group, different positions have emerged in the 20th century.

Historically, the word "infallible" has been associated with the orthodox position. Scripture was taken to be authoritative, inspired by God and infallible. But some began to have doubts about some of the details of Scripture, and offered definitions of infallible that included the possibility of minor errors in Scripture. The Bible was said to be infallible in spiritual and moral matters, or infallible in its purpose (to lead people to Christ). It would never lead one astray or deceive one about some issue within its scope, but since it is not a book of science or geography or history, it doesn't matter if there are some minor discrepancies in those areas.

Other who did not agree with the reasoning of the infallibilitists sought another word to distinguish their view. They chose a word that had not been widely used before, inerrancy. By that word, they wanted to affirm that the Bible does not err in any affirmation it makes, about any area. Initially, there was disagreement among those who accepted the term as to exactly what it meant, but the differences have been diminishing since the formulation of the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy, (1978) which has been widely accepted. Today, the chief distinction within the orthodox position is between those who prefer the word "infallible" (sometimes called "limited inerrancy") and those who affirm inerrancy (usually as defined by the Chicago Statement).

The Chicago Statement has been important, not only in giving a standard definition of inerrancy, but also in gaining a wider understanding and acceptance of inerrancy. Many who had previously thought inerrancy required a very rigid posture and a mathematically precise model of revelation have been able to affirm inerrancy in a carefully nuanced definition.

4. I need to add a word about a movement that does not really have a position on Scripture *per se*, but is becoming influential, especially among those under 30. It is the cultural movement called postmodernism. Some within this movement take a liberal approach to Scripture, but not because they exalt reason as the supreme authority. In fact, one of the defining and positive marks of postmodern thought has been the dethronement of reason as the judge of all things. However, many postmodernists reject the Bible's authority because they reject all claims to any absolute, universal truth. Some see an epistemological skepticism as the key difference between modern and postmodern thought. While many evangelicals who work among postmoderns are themselves inerrantists, the distrust of any claim to absolute truth that is pervasive in postmodern thought makes the maintenance of a high view of Scripture difficult for them to accept. This is one element of postmodern thought and culture that needs a gentle but thoughtful critique from evangelicals, especially as we minister in a culture increasingly affected by postmodern thought.

Another area where inerrancy has been challenged has been in OT scholarship, where some think the ancient near eastern context of the writers so shaped them that their statements on creation need to be corrected in the light of modern science. I think it is important to recognize the context of the writers, and that they may not be answering the questions we are asking of them, and that their language can be figurative, but that is different than saying that what they taught was wrong. This seems to me to omit consideration of the divine inspiration of the writers and weaken the meaning of inerrancy.

For responses to the challenges to inerrancy from postmodernism and these recent developments in OT scholarship, see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism*.

IV. Theological Formulation. With this background of biblical teaching and historical illumination, let us seek to lay out a systematic theological formulation of the doctrine of special revelation. I think we may best do so by examining a diagram and five key words (see "The Bible: From God to Us").

A. Revelation. We have already examined the concept of revelation in Scripture. We may summarize and systematize our findings by means of responding to several questions.

1. What is revelation? We affirm that revelation involves both the person of God and propositional information about God.

2. How does revelation occur? We noted that God revealed himself in the past through various means (Heb. 1:1), especially through mighty acts, culminating in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. Yet these acts were always accompanied by divine explanations of the significance of the acts. At times, revelation involved a personal encounter

between God and an individual, but we deny that such encounters lacked informational content. Rather, we saw evidence for the belief that Scripture is the normative written form of special revelation, such that today, when one reads Scripture, one encounters God's revelation written. God instructed the human recipients of revelation to write what had been revealed to them (for the revelation they had received was more than an experience, it was informative), and others who read that written revelation find that it brings them into an encounter with God as well. What Scripture says, God says. What was written is called the word of the Lord thousands of times. The NT letters were delivered with apostolic authority derived from Jesus himself. The evidence of Scripture itself is that Scripture not only gives us a record and witness of how God revealed himself to individuals in the past, it is also the principle and sole normative means of revelation to us today.

Some have recently reasoned that if Scripture is the sole normative means of revelation to us today, and if the Bible is given to thoroughly equip us for every good work (II Tim. 3:17), then we may speak of the Bible's sufficiency in the sense it contains "all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly" (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127). While no evangelical would describe the Bible as insufficient, we should take care that our doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture (special revelation) does not lead us to disregard universal revelation. Scripture is the sole **normative** source of revelation; not the sole source of revelation. The heavens still declare the glory of God, and God may yet have something to say to us through some avenue of universal revelation. Our understanding of universal revelation, however, must be guided, tested and filtered by our understanding of the sure word of written, normative revelation in Scripture.

3. When did revelation occur? The Bible records revelation being given progressively over a long period of time. Christ's first coming has been the high point of revelation thus far, but the return of Christ will be the final and full revelation of God and his purposes.

Moreover, the progressive aspect of revelation may involve the completion or fulfillment of earlier revelation, or the superseding of parts of previous revelation, but not the correction of previous revelation, for that would be inconsistent with the attitude of Jesus (Mt. 5:17) and the attitude of all the NT writers toward the OT.

As noted above, we do not deny that God reveals himself today through universal revelation, but believe the only normative source of revelation today is Scripture. God's principal means of speaking to us is in and through the word He spoke in the past, for it is living and abiding (I Pet. 1:23). The contents of Scripture are not human discoveries, but divine disclosures. Scripture is able to convey revelation to us because it is the chosen instrument of the Spirit.

4. To whom is revelation given? General revelation is by definition given to all, but special revelation has been given to those God chose. Originally, the recipients were especially chosen prophets and apostles, but today God's special revelation is available openly in Scripture, but made effective only when energized or illuminated by divine action (Matt. 11:25-

27, I Cor. 2:10-12). Revelation is always a divine disclosure and gift, never a human discovery or something we have by merit.

5. Why is revelation given? That we may know God and have the type of obedient, intimate relationship that He created us for (Deut. 29:29, II Tim. 3:15-17). Revelation is not given to satisfy our curiosity or to provide material for theologians, but to shape our lives and hearts. It is the stage directions for our participation in God's great drama.

B. Inspiration. There are two key passages that provide the starting point for a definition of inspiration. II Pet. 1:20-21 refers, strictly speaking, to the aid given to prophets in verbalizing the revelation given to them by God, comparing the Spirit's aid to them with that of a river's current aiding a boat. It assumes a link between what the prophet spoke and the written form in the prophecies in Scripture, because of the Spirit's aid in the writing down of the spoken revelation. The result of inspiration is more clearly described in II Tim. 3:16-17. This crucial verse states that Scripture has a quality of being God-breathed, the product of the creative breath of God. As such, we infer that the writers of Scripture must have enjoyed the aid of the Spirit in writing down the revelations they received. Otherwise, the product would have been human, and it is rather described as divine.

So we may say that inspiration refers to the involvement of the Holy Spirit with the human authors of Scripture in the process of writing down the revelations they received in such a way that the final product may be described as the product of the divine out-breathing (the condensation of God's breath).

We may go further and describe the nature of the work of inspiration as more than a mere natural aid, for the human production of a divine piece of work clearly implies supernatural aid. But it was not an aid that eliminated all human traces from Scripture. It is written in human languages, using human conventions and culture (imprecise units of measurement, lack of quotation marks, "holy kiss" as in I Thess. 5:26), reflecting human research (Luke 1:1-4), and human memory (I Cor. 1:15-16) and the individual styles of the human authors. Thus, we may use the word "confluent," "concurrent," or "dynamic" to describe the coming together of divine and human elements in inspiration, and the word "superintend" to describe the nature of the Spirit's activity.

Thus, we give a further definition of inspiration: the work of the Holy Spirit in supernaturally superintending the human authors so that what they wrote may be described as a divine product in fully human clothing. Some have compared this to the nature of Christ. As Christ is fully human and fully divine without sin, Scripture is fully human and fully divine without error. It may be true that "to err is human," but inspiration overcomes that human propensity.

1. Theories of inspiration. Scripture does not describe the how of inspiration. Dictation theories overlook the obvious human marks; the idea of inspiration involving a simple augmentation of human ability (such as intuition or illumination theories) would not justify calling the result "God-breathed." The resulting product bears both human and divine marks,

and thus confluent or dynamic seems more appropriate. Beyond the implications we can gain from the result, Scripture simply does not speak of how God inspired the writers, and thus I conclude that it is not an issue important to Him, and should not be to us.

2. The extent of inspiration. I use the words "verbal" and "plenary" to describe the extent of inspiration, rather than a theory of inspiration. Verbal inspiration does not imply a dictation theory, but simply recognizes that the only thing Scripture contains is words. If inspiration did not affect the words written, what did it affect?

We use the word "plenary" because II Tim. 3:16 says "all Scripture is inspired" (according to the most natural interpretation, though you may find some advocating "all Scripture that is inspired is useful"). Though II Tim. is referring to the OT Scriptures, we find evidence in the NT that it too merited the title of Scripture.

3. Two implications of inspiration:

- a. Scripture, being the product of God's breath, has divine authority.
- b. Scripture, being the product of a God who cannot lie, is inerrant.

Carl Henry, whose six volumes on God, *Revelation and Authority* are the fullest treatment of this subject by any theologian of any time, states that the central affirmation the Bible makes about itself is its divine authority. Inerrancy is not explicitly affirmed but is inescapably implied. The clearest demonstration of this is by a logical syllogism:

1st premise: Scripture comes from God.

2nd premise: God cannot lie, deceive or mislead, or err.

Conclusion: Scripture does not lie, deceive, or mislead, or err. It is inerrant.

Thus inerrancy is based on the central affirmation Scripture makes for itself (its divine authority) and on the nature of God. Yet the claim that the Bible is inerrant has attracted many objections. I will consider six.

(1) Some object that it is not explicitly taught in the Bible, but depends upon a deductive argument. I would respond that it certainly has as much basis as the doctrine of the Trinity, which is also inescapably implied by Scripture.

(2) Some claim that inerrancy overlooks the human aspect of the Bible. Scripture comes from God, but comes through human agents, whose fallibility affects the final product. As we noted above, Scripture does reveal a very human side, but that is exactly the point of inspiration--the biblical writers were not left to their own devices in recording what they received from God, but received such aid that they regarded the final product as God-breathed. Again, as we mentioned, the parallel is Christ--fully human, but without sin.

(3) Some object that inerrancy is a recent invention, not the historic belief of the Church. In one sense, this is true. The word inerrancy has not been the most common word used to

describe the Bible's nature in the history of the Church. The Church fathers did not respond to the exact questions we are asking today, because they weren't questions in their time. That is why it is possible to pull out passages from Augustine and Luther and Calvin and others and claim that they were advocates of infallibility, not inerrancy. But it is a hazardous historical procedure to make a theologian's writings answer questions he was not asking. To a degree, we have to infer how they would have responded to today's questions. Nonetheless, what they did say gives us a firm basis for claiming that we are in line with what they did affirm, and that if they were asked the questions we face today, they would be inerrantists. Augustine wrote of the Scriptures:

of these alone I do most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.  
(*Letters* 82.3)

Luther contrasted many times the erring opinions of councils and popes with the Scriptures, which he stated "has never erred" (WA, 7.315). Calvin likewise based his doctrine of Scripture on the fact that it comes from God: "Its best authentication is the character of the one whose Word it is." Donald Bloesch states: "References to the Scriptures as *inerrabilis* are to be found in Augustine, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. The adjective *infallibilis* was applied to Scripture by John Wycliffe and Jean de Gerson" (cited in text, 140). For Baptist affirmations about Scripture, see Bush and Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*.

Overall, I think the inerrantists have a lot more support from the historical position of the Church than those who oppose inerrancy.

(4) One of the most frequently raised objections is that inerrancy involves an appeal to the original manuscripts of Scripture, which are non-existent. I really do not understand why this qualification is so ridiculed, or how it somehow lessens the authority of the Bible we hold in our hands. We are simply recognizing that God's inspiration applied to what the original authors wrote, and not to all the copyists (or translators) down through the years. We have to accept this, for the fact is that we have thousands of ancient manuscripts of the Bible, and they do not all agree. While there are no doctrinal differences dependent on any textual variants, there are some numerical disagreements, and inerrantists believe that Scripture is true, even in the numbers it reports. So all the manuscripts cannot be correct, and the decisive factor lies in the original manuscripts the biblical authors wrote.

It is true that we don't have those manuscripts, but the Bibles we hold in our hands are more than 99% sure, and the qualification referring to the original manuscripts is made for theological precision. UNC professor Bart Ehrman has made a lot of money arguing that the textual variants somehow weaken the truth claims of Christianity, but he knows better, as do all textual critics. You can take any combination of the texts we have of the New Testament, and you will come out with the same gospel, the same doctrine.

As to why God did not preserve the copies from error, we have no answer from God. The evidence is that the Bible has been preserved as no other document from antiquity, and its text is established beyond any point of serious doctrinal disagreement. Beyond that, we may speculate that God acted to preserve us from idolatry (see the Muslim attitude toward the Qu'ran).

(5) A fifth objection is that inerrancy is too complicated and qualified, and even inerrantists cannot agree on exactly what inerrancy means. It is true that inerrancy has been given a sophisticated formulation to satisfy the objections of other theologians, but the basic idea is very simple: all that Scripture affirms about anything is true. As to the disagreements, there are some, but they have narrowed greatly since the promulgation of the Chicago Statement, which we will examine shortly. It has become a generally accepted statement of what inerrancy involves.

(6) Last, some object that the simple fact is that in reading the Bible, even the casual reader will find inconsistencies, very imprecise quotations, grammatical errors, unscientific language, passages that are very difficult to harmonize with one another. Inerrancy may be a fine logical deduction, but it does not square with the inductive evidence we gather from the Bible itself. Inerrantists have recognized the force of this objection, and have responded as follows. We derive our belief in the doctrine of inerrancy deductively, from the divine authority of Scripture and the character of God, but we describe and define what inerrancy is in a way that takes the realities of Scripture into account. This is the point of Article XIII of the Chicago Statement:

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny 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 or round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Many who in the past did not feel they could identify themselves as inerrantists, after reading this statement have said, "If that is inerrancy, then I am an inerrantist."

I think it would be well worth our time to pause now and simply read through the articles of affirmation and denial given in the Chicago Statement, for they will enable us to review what we have already stated about revelation and inspiration, and perhaps respond to some of your questions, or questions you may be asked by others, about inerrancy.

C. Canonization. As earlier discussed, while there is some evidence of various criteria used by the early church in canonization, my final basis for trusting the canon is my confident belief in the work of the Spirit in guiding the church to recognize the genuinely inspired books.

D. Preservation. As we just discussed, the manuscripts of Scripture have been remarkably well preserved, some going back into the second century. Moreover, the quantity of

manuscripts surpasses that for any other document of antiquity, and allows us to establish the original text with more than 99% certainty. I see this too as the providential work of the Spirit.

E. Illumination. Though this is the last link in our chain, we need to emphasize that it is equally part of the ongoing work of the Spirit. He is active in every step of the revelatory process.

The presupposition of illumination is the willful blindness sin induces in humanity (John 3:19). Revelatory light may be all around us, but we do not see and understand it (Rom. 1:18-23, II Cor. 3:14, 4:4). God must act if we are to understand and receive revelation (Matt. 11:25-27, John 14:26, I Cor. 2:6-16, I John 5:7, 11). Calvin also emphasized the necessity of the Spirit's internal testimony in convicting us of the divine authority of Scripture. Though he knew all the evidence of Scripture's authority, both biblical and extra-biblical evidence, he was convinced that without the internal testimony of the Spirit to our spirits, we will never truly believe that Scripture is the word of God.

How the Spirit acts to illuminate our minds is not spelled out. Clearly it begins with conversion, which begins to remove the blindness of our souls. But illumination must be a continuing process. It may come through diligent study and understanding of principles of biblical interpretation (interpretation being the human activity corresponding to the divine activity of illumination; that is, they are two sides of the same coin). It should come as the result of the ministry of those gifted and called to teach and preach, as the Spirit works through the gifts He Himself gave. And it also often comes in the process of obedience (John 7:17). Whatever the means, when we come to understand and apply God's revelation to our lives (for we don't understand in the biblical sense without application), we are experiencing the work of the Spirit in illumination.

Yet we must admit that even those equally committed to the inerrancy of the Scriptures often differ on specific points of interpretation of Scripture. We must differentiate between the two. Inerrancy refers to what we believe about Scripture; interpretation refers to what we believe Scripture teaches about a particular subject. Some have argued that the lack of an inerrant interpretation renders the inerrancy of Scripture meaningless. The Catholics at the time of the Reformation argued that the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* was useless without an authoritative interpretation, and that was the role of the *magisterium*, or teaching office, of the Church. The Protestants countered with the idea of the perspicuity or the clarity of Scripture, the belief that Scripture is sufficiently clear and the Spirit sufficiently active in illumination that anyone willing to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior will be able to understand everything necessary for salvation. The Church does have a valid teaching ministry, but the Reformers argued that our final trust must be in the Spirit and the sufficient clarity of Scripture to speak to each individual rather than the Church.

Still, some may raise the question: why hasn't God given us an inerrant interpretation? Scripture gives us no explicit answer, but several good reasons are possible.

First, our lack of such an interpretation should teach us a proper humility. Many of us tend to think we do have an inerrant interpretation, mine! We do not need to sink to doctrinal flabbiness, where everything is "that's just your interpretation." In many cases, we can respond with, "No, it's mine and that of the Church down through history, or at least the historic Baptist understanding, and the clear teaching of these passages of Scripture. How do you interpret these passages?" But on issues where there have been differences historically, and where equally committed inerrantists differ, I think it is proper to state, "Yes, it's my interpretation and here is why it's my interpretation," while realizing that I may still be able to learn something, and that my ultimate loyalty is to Christ and His word, and not my interpretation of His word.

Second, our lack of an inerrant interpretation spurs study and searching and that produces spiritual growth.

Finally, I'm not even sure that the idea of an inerrant interpretation makes sense. For one thing, there would still be the problem of interpreting the interpretation. Would the interpretation be clearer than Scripture? Second, how would an interpretation given today respond to questions that haven't yet been raised? For instance, how would an inerrant interpretation given a hundred years ago respond to questions just arising about genetic engineering or the definition of death when medical technology can keep a heart pumping long after the brain has died? I'm not sure that the idea of an inerrant interpretation that would solve all our interpretive difficulties is really coherent. Nor is it necessary. The illumination of the Spirit is sufficient certainly in all matters pertaining to salvation, and in the major issues of the Christian life. The rest can be occasions for study and growth and continuing illumination, as the Spirit illumines all we need to know, if not all we want to know.

V. Practical Applications. All that we have discussed has not just been ivory tower theology, but has obvious applications in Christian life and ministry. How do we reflect our understanding of the precious treasure we have in special revelation?

A. Show gratitude by diligent study. If what we have in Scripture is the very word of God, revelation of the person of God and His commands for our lives, how can any effort to understand it be too much? How can any diligence be too great? How can any gratitude be too deep?

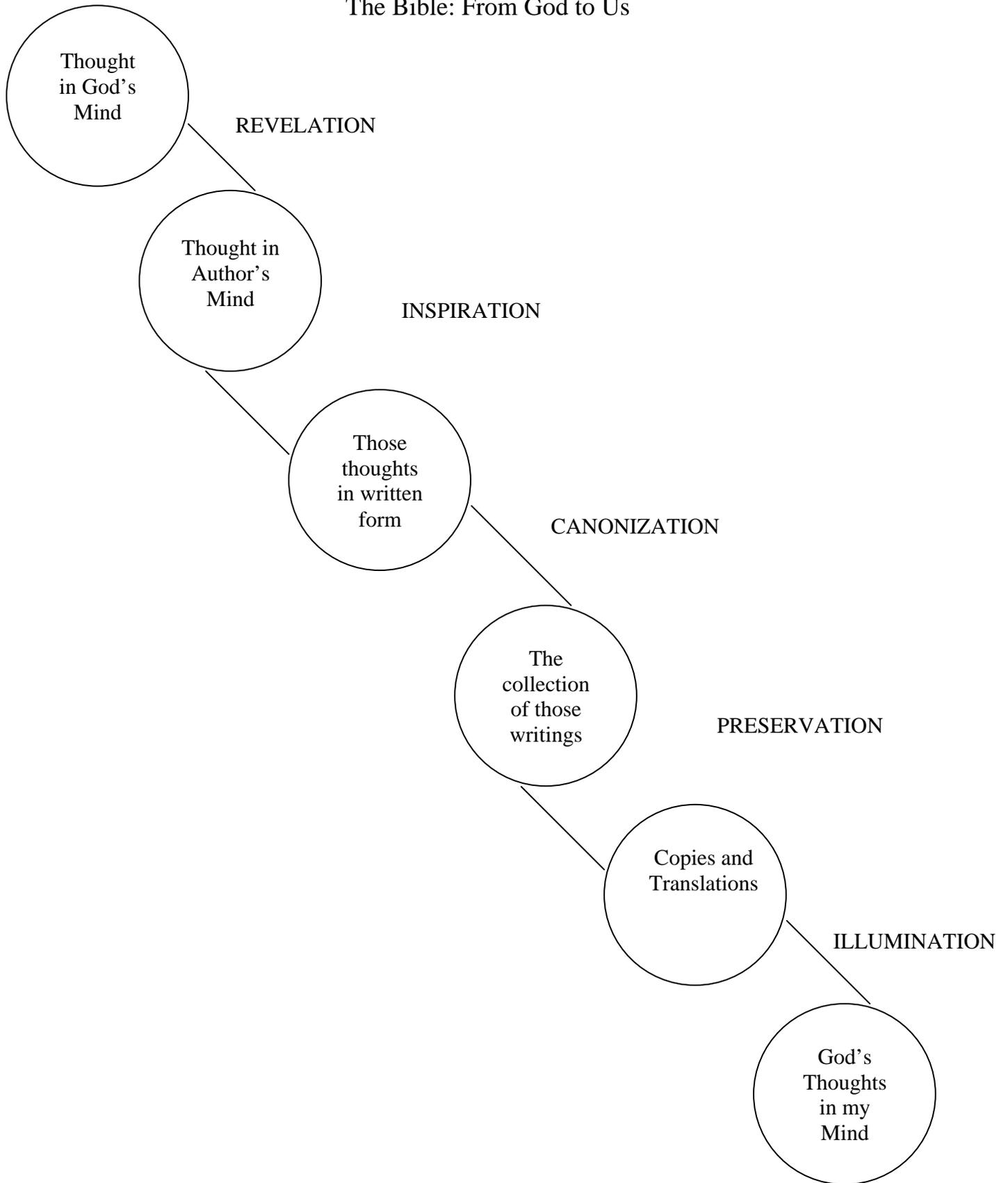
B. Place yourself under its authority, above that of your experience or reason or ideas. Place the Word itself even over your own interpretation of it. Cultivate a submissive spirit to the teaching of Scripture as part of living under the lordship of Jesus.

Those in seminary and ministry face a special difficulty here, that of over familiarity with Scripture. Because we are constantly in contact with Scripture, teaching it, preaching it, using it in counseling, studying it for tests, we can begin to treat it in a casual manner (contrast with Ezra 9:4). We can begin to see it as a tool in ministry. We can assume a position over it, judging which parts are useful for us and which parts are not. Our study of the divine authority of Scripture must lead us to keep our lives and ministries under the authority of Scripture. For this

reason, you need to spend time not just in preparing sermons and lessons, but a separate time feeding and submitting your soul to it, and to always treat it with reverent gratitude.

C. Trust it to guide your life and empower your ministry. If it is God's word--revelation from God, inspired by God, illumined by God--trust it! Obey it, even when it goes against the grain of modern society! Trust in its power to change people and nurture God's people under your charge. Trust it more than your cleverness, more than the latest fads and programs, more than your own ideas. To those who doubt its truthfulness, it is good to give reasons, and to know the evidences we have discussed. But the Bible does not so much need our defense as to be unleashed. As Charles Spurgeon said, "Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion!"

The Bible: From God to Us



## Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

### Preface:

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trust-worthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition\*. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's word we shall be grateful.

*\*The Exposition is not printed here.*

### A Short Statement

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

#### **Article I**

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God. We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

#### **Article II**

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture. We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

#### **Article III**

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

#### **Article IV**

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation. We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

#### **Article V**

We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive. We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

#### **Article VI**

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

#### **Article VII**

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, have us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us. We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

#### **Article VIII**

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

#### **Article IX**

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

#### **Article X**

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

#### **Article XI**

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses. We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

#### **Article XII**

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

#### **Article XIII**

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny 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 and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

#### **Article XIV**

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture. We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

**Article XV**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration. We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

**Article XVI**

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history. We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

**Article XVII**

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word. We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

**Article XVIII**

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

**Article XIX**

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ. We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 3: DOCTRINE OF GOD  
PART A: THE NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD  
OUTLINE

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
 UNIT 3: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD  
 PART A. THE NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

We come now to the topic of theology proper, the doctrine of God. It is perhaps the determinative doctrine for Christian life and ministry, for we cannot lead people beyond our own personal knowledge and experience of God. However, what we study here can only be the beginning. I will offer information about God; it will only become knowledge of God as it becomes part of your heart, shapes your thinking and worship and adoration, and as it is validated in your obedience. For, in matters of God, knowing must lead to doing. So let us study not only with our minds, but also with our hearts and spirits, and with the commitment to live out what we learn in our lives.

We will study the nature, the attributes, and the works of God, but due to length, will divide our study into two parts. First we will look at God's nature and attributes, two topics that naturally fit together. Then we will examine God's works. We will study the individual persons of the Godhead separately later, so remember that we are now studying God, and that all we learn is true equally of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we think that the God we study in the Old Testament is the Father. But that is not true. "Father" is overwhelmingly a NT name for God. What we study in the OT is God: Father, Son, and Spirit equally. They share the same nature and attributes and are all involved in the works of which we shall speak.

*Is there anything taught of the nature and attributes of God in the OT that is not true of the nature and attributes of Jesus in the NT? If so, what would that be?*

Some treatments of God begin with the question of God's existence and look at the various proofs (or better, arguments) for God's existence that have been developed throughout the history of philosophy. Others begin with definitions of God. Though we will consider both, we will begin with neither. We will begin with the Bible and note that the Bible does not define God, but describes Him. It particularly describes His actions, and explains what they mean. Let us begin where the Bible begins: Genesis 1.

#### I. Biblical Foundations.

A. The Nature of God. We need to begin this study with several caveats, or warnings, in mind.

First, it would be very useful, if it were possible, to wipe our minds clean, begin with Genesis 1:1, read all the way through the Bible, with only one question on our minds: what is God like? If we read every passage with that question in mind, and constructed our mental picture of God based on the whole of Scripture, I think we would develop the fullest and most accurate idea of God. We would know what elements stand in the foreground, and what elements are less emphasized, or are in the corners and background.

Of course, we do not have time to walk through all the Bible says about God, but I encourage you to approach your own quiet time in that way from time to time for your own

edification. I hope you would wind up with something similar to what you hear in these class sessions, but I am sure it would be much more clearly nuanced and memorable.

A second problem we encounter at the beginning is one of terminology. We are going to speak of God's nature and then God's attributes. The problem is that it is difficult in many cases to define what is an attribute and what is part of God's nature. That is why virtually every theologian has a slightly different division of the elements of God's nature and the list of God's attributes. My intent is to consider under the area of God's nature the Christian conception of God in relation to other major conceptions. We deny atheism, deism, pantheism, polytheism, and unitarian monotheism. We affirm trinitarian monotheism. Then under God's attributes we will consider further what this trinitarian God is like. But I will admit that there are certainly some of God's attributes that are essential to His nature and parts of His nature that could be considered attributes.

A third caveat has to do with even the possibility of knowing God's nature and essence. Is God not too far above us? Is He not essentially incomprehensible? We revert here to our discussion of the adequacy of language to communicate something of God. We do not have nor can we communicate univocal knowledge of God, but neither is our language equivocal, meaning nothing definite. Rather, we can make meaningful analogical statements about God based on His self-disclosure. We cannot know God exhaustively, but we can know Him truly, for He has taken the initiative to reveal Himself, and has constructed us in such a way that we can know Him. Yet our knowledge will be woefully incomplete at best, and our theological pronouncements in this area, above all, should be given in great humility. We are children, speaking of things far beyond us (see Psalm 131).

Finally, I want to repeat the warning that we cannot proceed with this study in a purely academic, scientific way and hope to know God. This study, above all others in this semester, must be doxological, conducted in a reverent atmosphere of worship.

Let us begin at the beginning, Gen. 1, for it is striking to note how many key aspects of the nature of God are revealed in the first three chapters of Scripture, Gen. 1-3. Let us start with the first verse of Scripture and the first question we all have about God.

1. The first question: Does God exist? The first grand division of opinions about God revolves around the answer to this question. It divides people into theists, atheists, and agnostics.

You may have encountered in other classes some discussion of the traditional arguments for the existence of God, and I do want you to be acquainted with them. The major arguments are:

- the cosmological argument (cause and effect)
- the teleological argument (design implies a Designer)
- the moral argument (moral law implies a Lawgiver)
- the ontological argument (existence is implied in the idea of God; developed by Anselm).

There is some Scriptural support for the cosmological and teleological arguments (Acts 17:24-29, Rom. 1:20), and the moral argument (Rom. 2:14-15), and there is certainly scientific and philosophical evidence that can be cited. The teleological argument has been forcefully advanced by the ID (intelligent design) movement and has recently won the assent of a famous former atheist, Anthony Flew. These arguments can be used to strengthen the faith of believers and respond to the objections of non-believers, but it is neither necessary nor possible to prove the existence of God. It is not necessary because everyone already knows God exists (Rom. 1:20), and it is not possible to give an ironclad proof because God has chosen to make all aspects of our relationship with Him a matter of faith (Heb. 11:6). Evidence; yes. Strong arguments; yes. But ironclad proofs they are not, and have been criticized by philosophers for the last 250 years on a variety of grounds.

I do not think this should greatly concern us, for the proper goal in apologetics is not to force someone to admit that we have proved our position, but simply to remove objections so that a non-believer cannot hide behind intellectual objections. We present good evidence for the existence of God, but admit that it remains a question of faith. But we also insist that the decision to believe in the non-existence of God is also a decision of faith, and we would contend that it is a faith decision with a weaker basis than the decision to believe in the existence of God. The question of God's existence, in the final analysis, is a moral question, not a mental one. Will I accept the fact that there is a God, for if I do, then I must face the question of what He demands of me? I must acknowledge that I am not the master of my fate and the captain of my soul. I must acknowledge someone is over me, and that I am responsible before Him. And all our apologetic arguments must be to get someone to confront the fact that the issue is not mental, but moral.

At any rate, the Bible does not spend much time defending the existence of God. It assumes and affirms it: "In the beginning **God**." So the Bible teaches theism (not atheism), that there is a living and true God. But there are many varieties of theism: deism, pantheism, polytheism, etc. What type of theism does the Bible teach?

## 2. What type of God is God? He is:

a. Transcendent. Gen. 1:1 affirms that God created all things. This is the first and fundamental biblical affirmation about God--that He is the Creator-God. This means that He is not to be identified with the creation, but is separate and distinct from it. In theological terms, this is an affirmation of the transcendence of God. He is not within creation, or part of it, but is above it. Therefore, pantheism (the idea that God = the world) is excluded.

A number of attributes of God are implied in these first words of Scripture. We would expect that the God who could create all things would be greater than them (and thus be an infinite God, or at least extremely great), would be more powerful than any forces He created (and thus be a sovereign God), and would be the source of all life that existed (and thus be a self-existent God, who had the source of life within himself). We will mention these attributes in more detail later, but they are implied in the very nature of a transcendent Creator-God.

b. Immanent. But the affirmation of transcendence is soon balanced with an affirmation of immanence, the idea that God is thoroughly involved with His creation. Gen. 2

and 3 show His very personal involvement with His creation, especially with the creatures created in His image. God is involved with His world, interacts with human beings, acts to intervene in the course of events (including miracles, such as creation itself and other acts of intervention after the fall), and is Himself affected by what happens in His creation (see the divine sadness in Gen. 6:5-6).

Transcendence excludes pantheism, and immanence excludes deism, which pictures God as a watchmaker who winds up the world and then walks away from it, leaving it to run on its own. God is not intrinsically bound to the world as a part of it, but has freely chosen to be immanently involved in the world and in the lives of His creatures. His immanence is not one of essence (that is, that God is by nature part of the created order) but one of personal relationship. This implies another aspect of God's nature that is often considered with the attributes, the personality of God. Personality is used here, not to refer to the elements we normally consider as essential to personality (will, emotions, mind, though each person of the Godhead possesses these), but to refer to the fact that the God we speak of is a type of God with whom human persons can have a personal relationship. He chooses to become involved with His creation. His immanence is not one of essence, but one consonant with His nature as a personal God.

As we shall see, maintaining the balance of transcendence and immanence has been a perennial problem in theology, especially in the 20th century. But both are essential, because they give us a God like no other. Unlike the Roman and Greek gods, the God of the Bible is transcendent, infinite and majestic in both power and goodness. But unlike the gods of the east, of Hinduism and Buddhism, God's transcendence does not lead to a detached, impersonal God. He is immanent, not by being part of the world but by choosing to relate personally to His creatures. There is no other god in history like this personal-infinite, transcendent-immanent God.

*Which side of the balance is emphasized more in Christianity today? Which side is more prominent in your own thinking about God?*

Even his names reflect the balance of transcendence and immanence. The normal word for God in the OT is *Elohim*, which is the plural of the common, generic word for God, *El*. The singular is sometimes used, especially in combination with other designations (*El Shaddai*, *El Elyon*), but much more often *Elohim* is used (2570 times). Why the plural? It is probably not a foreshadowing of the Trinity, though it does allow for that, but is an example of the plural of majesty, or an intensive plural. All that is implied in the idea of a god is true of the God, intensively and majestically. Carl Henry says, “*Elohim* is uniquely the one God who concentrates in himself the being and powers of all the gods, comprehending the totality of deity in himself” (*God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:185).

Likewise the title *Adonai* is the plural of *adon*. The singular form usually refers to human lords and masters, but the plural form is used only to refer to the true God (more than 300 times). It is another plural of majesty and intensity. God is the Master above all Masters, the Lord above all Lords. Both of these titles emphasize the majesty, the loftiness, the authority, the transcendence of God.

But the most personal and characteristic term for God in the OT is *Yahweh* (nearly 7000 times including compound forms, 5321 times alone). There has been much written about the etymology of this title, and its link with the verb "to be" in Hebrew. But J. Barton Payne has pointed out some problems with this linkage, and advocates translating Ex. 3:14 as "I am present is what I am," and understanding *Yahweh* to refer to God's faithful presence (see *Theological Wordbook of the OT*, vol. 1, article on *Yahweh*). And the usage seems to favor Payne's view, for *Yahweh* is especially associated with God's redemptive acts, and His covenant keeping nature. It is not a title ("the Lord") but His personal name, reflecting the fact that He allows Himself to be known by His people, and enters into a personal relationship with them. Thus it very much emphasizes the immanence of God.

Most interestingly, these two most common names, *Yahweh* and *Elohim*, are often combined: the LORD God (Gen. 2:4 and hundreds of other times). Here in the very terminology for God we find the crucial balance of immanence and transcendence.

c. Spirit. Another element we encounter early in the biblical record is the spirituality of God. Gen. 1:2 gives us the first hint, but the rest of the biblical record makes it clear that God not only has a Spirit, but is by nature spirit and not flesh and bones (John 4:24, Luke 24:39). This excludes one of the most dominant philosophies in the world of science, that of materialism or naturalism, the idea that there is nothing beyond the material world. The fact that God is spirit says there is more to the universe than meets the eye. But what exactly does it mean to affirm spirituality as an attribute of God? I think it has two implications, one emphasizing transcendence and one immanence.

To take the latter first, I note the comment of Stanley Grenz that the Hebrew word for spirit (*ruah*) means breath or wind, and by extension it soon became connected with the very principle of life, for without breath there is no life. Grenz thinks Gen. 2:7 is important here, for it gives us a picture of the connection of spirit and life. Grenz concludes: "By declaring 'God is Spirit' we acknowledge that God is the source of all life" (108). As we will find later in our study of the Holy Spirit, one of the main ideas behind Spirit, particularly in the OT, is that of life. The Nicene Creed affirms belief in the Holy Spirit, addressing Him as "the Lord and Giver of life." The spirituality of God thus gives striking evidence of His immanence. He gives life to all that exists (Psalm 104:29-30).

This is close to Paul Tillich's idea of God as the ground of all being (the sap in the tree). Where Tillich goes wrong is in not preserving in a balanced way the transcendent element which gives God a personal and independent existence separate from the world.

The second implication of God's spirituality that does imply His transcendence is in the prohibition of making any physical representation of God (Ex. 20:4). In the incarnation, God the Son accepted a physical body in order to identify with us, and Scripture often uses what we call anthropomorphic language of God, but the divine nature in itself is different. It is Spirit, and thus there is no adequate physical representation for God. Thus any physical representation, even using the most powerful or majestic of animals (a bull, for example) was sinful idolatry, for God is greater than any physical representation can convey. (For a radical application of this principle, see J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, ch. 4)

d. A Unity. The theism of the Bible is monotheism, not polytheism (or even henotheism: one supreme God over all lesser gods). The people of Israel took a long time and severe experiences of judgment and persecution, but they finally learned the lesson taught by Moses in Deut. 6:4: "Hear o Israel, the Lord our God is one God."

In the time of Jesus, that verse was recited by every Jew every morning and night, to remember the hard learned lesson that idols are nothing. There is only one God. The Bible teaches monotheism, and excludes polytheism.

One other attribute of God we may imply from God's unity is what is called His simplicity. This is the idea that there is no division in God's essence, no contradictory elements, no being pulled in two directions. Everything in God is united and in harmony.

The tenacity of Jewish monotheism makes it all the more remarkable that in the time of the NT, there arose among some of these very Jews a new variety of monotheism, trinitarian monotheism. This leads us to the last aspect of God's nature that we will consider.

e. A Trinity. This is the aspect of God's nature that makes the Christian God different than that of any other religion. Not only does the Bible exclude atheism, pantheism, deism, and polytheism, it also excludes unitarian monotheism (such as held by Judaism and Islam). We affirm trinitarian monotheism--one God who exists in a triune being, or, in traditional Christian language, one God in three personal distinctions. To my knowledge there is no other religion in the world that has this conception of God.

How did Christians arrive at this view of God, especially after spending centuries learning that there was but one God? The key factor was reflection on the incarnation and deity of Jesus Christ, and a drawing out of the implications of the NT teaching on Christ, and, secondarily, on the Holy Spirit. We must admit that the Trinity is fundamentally a NT doctrine. But there are some hints in the OT. Reading the OT now as Christians, we may see these hints more clearly in the light of Christ than they did then, but it does not come through clearly until Christ came.

(1) OT Hints. For example, Gen. 1:26 and Is. 6:8 use the first person plural, "our" and "us." Certainly, this could be used simply to add to the majestic nature of the statements, and proves nothing, but it is interesting. More important, in my opinion, is the word used for "one" in the *Shema*, Deut. 6:4. The Hebrew language has two words that could be translated "one." The word *libad* has more the connotation of an isolated unit. The other, *ehad*, may have more the idea of uniqueness than isolation, and may mean a complex unity. It is the word for one used in Gen. 2:24 where the man and woman will become one flesh. And *ehad* is also the word used for one in Deut. 6:4. It affirms monotheism without denying the possibility of a complex or compound unity within God. These hints alone would certainly never lead to the doctrine of the Trinity, but they do fit nicely with it.

(2) NT teaching. The Trinity is essentially an attempt to express three facts affirmed clearly in the NT:

-God is one (Deut. 6:4, Mk. 12:29, Eph. 4:6).

-The Father is God (Rom. 1:7), the Son is God (John 1:1), and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4, Rom. 8:9-10).

-The Father, Son, and Spirit are, in one sense, one (John 10:30, II Cor. 3:17, Mt. 28:19-20), but there exists some distinction between them, for they exist in relationship one to the other (the Father and Son talk, the Spirit fills Jesus, Jesus sends the Spirit, etc.).

These teachings of the NT are the biblical foundations for the doctrine of the Trinity. But it took a while for the early and patristic church to put it all together. How was the early church to relate these three facts? Are they contradictory, or was there a way to combine all three? When we conclude this section on the biblical foundations of the doctrine of God, we will go back and look at some of the historical controversies that have swirled around God, and we will look at the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, not only in the early church, but down through history. For now, we close our discussion of the Trinity and the nature of God with this anonymous couplet on the Trinity: "Try to explain it, and you'll lose your mind; But try to deny it, and you'll lose your soul."

B. The Attributes of God. As we remarked above, there is some difficulty in trying to decide where the nature of God ends and the attributes of God begin. For example, is eternity part of God's nature or an attribute of God? Different theologians treat nature and attributes differently. The distinction offered by one of my theology professors was that the nature of God is like the foundation of a building, and the attributes like the superstructure, but there is no hard and fast rule.

A second introductory remark is that, as we mentioned before, the best way to study these is not to make a list, but to read the Scriptures and see which are central and how they show up in God's dealings with us. However, for the sake of time, we have to give you something of a list. Use it as a starting point and expand on it.

Third, we will follow most theologians in dividing the attributes into communicable and incommunicable attributes (i.e., communicable for those attributes God can communicate, or share with us; incommunicable for those true of God only. Some theologians call them moral and natural, or absolute/immanent and transitive/relational. These formulations all reflect the fact that on the one hand, we are and always will be less than our Creator. He alone is God. On the other hand, we alone are made in His image, and are both called and commanded to be like Him in our limited human way in some of His attributes, most centrally love and holiness.

1. The Incommunicable Attributes. Of the attributes that make God unique and different from all other beings, the first and most important is:

a. His infinity. By definition, there can only be one infinite being, and that being is God. He is infinite in:

(1) Space. This is what we mean by the omnipresence of God (Ps. 139:7-12, Jer. 23:23-24). Some use the terminology the immensity of God. He fills all the universe and more. It is not that he is present **in** every point of space; that could be interpreted pantheistically. Rather, he is present **to** every point of space. This attribute contains both comfort

and challenge. There is nowhere we go alone, but there is also nowhere to hide. As Luther said, we live all our lives before God (*coram Deo*).

The doctrine of the omnipresence of God raises a question as to God's presence in hell. On the one hand, omnipresence would seem to imply that God is present there, but the definition of hell is that of separation from God. The best answer, I think, is to distinguish different senses of God's presence. **Ontologically**, God is present to every point in space, including hell. But **relationally**, God is separated from those in hell. What they experience is separation, or perhaps, they experience only the wrathful presence of God in hell. This is also why we can speak, as Scripture does, of drawing near to God. Ontologically, there is no way to draw near to an omnipresent God, but relationally, we long for a deeper and richer experience of his presence in our lives. (For more on this, see John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, especially pp. 249-252).

(2) Time. God's infinity in relation to time is His eternity. He is the Creator and owner of all time. He existed before the creation of time (Ps. 90:1-2) and dwells in eternity. We receive eternal life in Christ, that will never end, but it did have a beginning.

What it means to say God is eternal has been much discussed in the wake of openness theism. The traditional view has been that God's eternity means he exists outside of and independent of time, seeing all moments of time in one eternal now. More recently, some theologians have wanted to insist that in order to relate to a temporal world, God must have some experience of time. Various theories of omnitemporality (God is present to every moment of time) and relative timelessness have arisen, but in orthodox formulations, time is never seen as a limitation on God. He is both transcendent over time and immanently active within time. In my opinion, openness theism, what we will discuss shortly, goes beyond orthodoxy in their redefinition of eternity. (For more information, see *God and Time: Four Views*, ed. Gregory Ganssle).

Implicit within the idea of this attribute is a distinctly Christian view of history. We do not see history as an endless, meaningless, painful cycle from which we long to escape (as in most Eastern religions), but as His Story, the arena in which God has chosen to accomplish His purposes. Still, it is God's creation, and He will conclude it at His chosen time.

(3) Knowledge. God's infinity in knowledge is omniscience (Ps. 139:1-12, Rom. 11:33-36), including perfect knowledge of us (Heb. 4:13). In contrast to the position of openness theologians, omniscience specifically includes knowledge of future events. Because He knows all, God's decisions show His wisdom (Ps. 104:24), however hidden it may be to us today. As J. I. Packer says in "God's Wisdom and Ours" (*Knowing God*, 102), God's wisdom consists in knowing the whole plan, and how best to accomplish it. For humans, wisdom does not mean sharing in that type of wisdom. The book of Ecclesiastes shows us that things do not make sense under the sun. Rather, human wisdom is knowing, not why things happen, but how we ought to respond to whatever circumstances arise, and knowing that above all we can trust and rest in God's wisdom.

(4) Power. God's infinite power is omnipotence. That means that God can do whatever He pleases (Ps. 115:3). This may be related to one of the names for God in the OT, the Lord of hosts (*Yahweh Sabaoth*). This title is found 285 times in the OT, but

nowhere in the Pentateuch. It emerges as the nation of Israel begins to deal with other nations, and wants to affirm that Yahweh is not only the God of their army, but the Lord of all hosts (all armies). It is an exalted title, one that affirms God's glory and sovereign power (see Psalm 24).

To the nonsensical questions, "Can God make a rock so big He cannot lift it?" or "Can God make a three-sided square?" we reply that this is a misunderstanding of omnipotence. God can do whatever He desires. For example, God can make an infinitely large rock, and God can lift it. God can make squares and three-sided objects and call them whatever He wants to. He cannot lie or be cruel or unjust, for His nature is such that He never desires to do so. Omnipotence means that God has sufficient power to carry out all His intentions. He is sovereign. His plans are not frustrated. Since He is omniscient, He knows what is best, and since He is omnipotent, He can accomplish what is best!

(5) Every perfection. God's infinity extends to every other attribute. All that God possesses, He possesses in perfect and infinite measure: infinite love, holiness, mercy and wrath (Psalm 36:5-6).

b. Self-existence (or aseity). Our life is a derived existence; God has life in himself (John 5:26). The most common name for God in the OT, Yahweh, may hint at the fact that He is and always has been. God calls himself "I am."

He has no need of us or anything else (Acts 17:25); there is a sufficiency of everything within the Trinity. He created not out of need but out of overflowing generosity. And since He has no need of us we can know His love is given freely and graciously.

He is supremely the living God (I Thess. 1:9). And His life alone is an immortal life (I Tim. 6:16). It is possible that he bestows immortality on human beings as part of the image of God (though some would argue that the biblical view of our hope of life beyond the grave is resurrection of the body rather than immortality of the soul), but the clear biblical statement is that God alone possesses immortality as an intrinsic attribute. Any others who possess immortality do so by God's gift.

c. Immutability. I list this word because it is the traditional one, but I prefer words like fidelity or constancy. The point is that God's character is such that we can count on Him to be the same today, tomorrow and forever (Heb. 13:8). His nature, will, mind, and plans never change (Num. 23:19, Ps. 33:11, 102:26-27, Lam. 3:22-23, Mal. 3:6, James 1:17). There is no whimsy, no caprice in God.

A question often raised in connection with immutability is the interpretation of the few verses that speak of God repenting (Gen. 6:6 and Jonah 3:10, for example). The most likely and most usual explanation is that these are examples of anthropomorphic language, in which God's actions are described, not from the perspective of omniscience and omnipotence, but from the human perspective, in human terms. The Bible uses this type of language, because it best communicates the truth God is most concerned to communicate in these stories. For example, in Gen. 6:6, one of the truths God wants to communicate is that our actions affect God. He can be saddened or pleased with the actions of His creatures. Certainly, He is not moved by uncontrolled passions and emotions as we are (that is the grain of truth in the idea of

impassibility), but neither is He a static, stoic, frozen God. The other truth best communicated by anthropomorphic language is that in fact in "repenting" God does show His fidelity to His own character. When He decides not to destroy the repentant citizens of Nineveh, it does not show that God is wishy-washy or capricious; rather, it confirms Jonah's description that He is and always will be a merciful, compassionate, longsuffering God (Jonah 4:2). Jonah knew what would happen if the people repented, because he knew God's immutable character.

All these incommunicable attributes could be equally true of a cruel and unjust God or a good and kind God. It is the communicable (or moral) attributes of God that are often of most concern to the people of God.

2. The Communicable Attributes. These are the attributes that not only tell us more of what God is like, but also give us a pattern for life, for these are the ways in which God wants us to be like Him.

*In groups of three or four, come up with a list of ten words that describe God's character that should be true of us as well.*

There are many lists and ways of describing these attributes. How far one goes depends in part on how finely one wants to distinguish various adjectives (kind, good, gracious, merciful, compassionate). I think the best approach is with an illustration I heard about 20 years ago from a pastor in Suffolk, Virginia.

Imagine these attributes of God like a great tree with two great taproots. One of these taproots is the holiness of God, and the other is the love of God. From these two roots, the tree grows, with one side of the branches representing outgrowths of holiness, and the other outgrowths of love.

I like this because it gives us a memorable picture, and because it accurately, in my opinion, identifies the center of God's moral attributes. If you want to boil all we're going to discuss down to two words, it would be holy love, or loving holiness. I think those two attributes underlie all the rest.

a. Holiness. This word, in both noun and adjective form, is clearly fundamental to the biblical view of God, especially in the OT. Baptist theologian A. H. Strong saw holiness as the most important attribute of God. It has two aspects. The first is the idea of something dedicated to special purposes. The vases and implements in the Temple were holy because they were only used in the service of God, never for ordinary, everyday purposes. God is holy because He is special, unique. He cannot be treated as common. We receive a status of holiness when we are saved because we are no longer to be devoted to the purposes of the world, but to God's purposes.

The second aspect of holiness is that of moral rightness. There is a philosophical question here. Is there a standard of holiness, external to God, which He matches, or is God's nature itself the standard of holiness? While arguments can be made for both positions, I think the latter is much more likely. There is no standard of right and wrong above God. The holiness

of God is the standard and pattern of what is right and wrong. We are holy to the degree we conform to that pattern in all our thoughts, acts, and intents.

I think this is an attribute that needs special emphasis today. Where do people get any glimpse of God's holiness? We have largely lost any sense of reverence; we have no holy objects or places. This is crucial for an understanding of the gospel. Most non-Christians have no problem believing God loves them; their problem is believing that God will judge and condemn them, for they have no sense of how distant their lives are from the holiness of God and thus see no need for a Savior. Perhaps the first step we can take in teaching the world about the holiness of God is to treat him as holy and confess before them our sense of unholiness in his presence and our need for forgiveness and mercy. If they see that we genuinely believe that we are guilty sinners before a holy God, perhaps they will reconsider their own lives.

From this root of holiness, we may derive at least four branches.

(1) Purity. Because God is holy, He is separated from impure things and cannot be contaminated (Hab. 1:13, James 1:13). He cannot be tempted for there is nothing impure within that would be attracted to temptation. There are no hidden motives, no secret agendas. He is pure.

(2) True. Because God is holy, He cannot lie or deceive or fail to keep a promise. It would be a violation of His own nature (Num. 23:19, Heb. 6:18). Involved in his truthfulness are the ideas of faithfulness and being a covenant keeping God. Whatever commitments He makes, He keeps.

(3) Righteous or just. Because God's holiness is the ultimate pattern of what is good and just, and because God always acts self-consistently, He is always righteous and just. Righteousness means to be in the right, to be in accord with the law. Since that law is itself the expression of God's holiness, God's actions are always just (Gen. 18:25, Deut. 32:4, Jer. 9:24).

God's justice includes all He does to create, uphold and maintain justice. God requires others to be just, and when they are not, He acts in judgment and punishment. In the book of Ezekiel, the refrain "Then they will know that I am the Lord" is almost always associated with acts of judgment (the phrase occurs 64 times in Ezekiel; see 28:22-26 for examples). God shows his Lordship by righteously judging sin. To not do so would be unjust and a violation of His character.

This word "justice" is very important in the NT, for it raises the question: How can a just God justly justify sinners? (Note: all the "j" words have the same root, as does righteous). Paul answers that it can only be through the imputed justice (or righteousness) of Christ (Rom. 3:21-26).

(4) Wrath. Because God is holy, He rejects all that is unholy. This opposition to and rejection of what is unholy, the Bible calls the wrath of God. It is not uncontrolled passion, but a firm and unalterable opposition to every form of evil. As light by its nature opposes darkness, holiness by its nature blazes against evil. The wrath of God is seen

against some sins today (Rom. 1:18, 24, 26, 28), but it will be openly revealed one day against all evil in a final consummation (Rom. 2:5, Rev. 6:16-17).

A few decades ago, a British scholar, C. H. Dodd, tried to water down the NT teaching of the wrath of God to make it an impersonal process that sin somehow called down upon itself. His aim was to clear up misconceptions of God as a vengeful, wrathful, angry old man. And that is a misconception, but Dodd was equally wrong, and Leon Morris challenged Dodd's view in scholarly journals and in a number of books (see Morris's *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*). Morris was able to show pretty conclusively that Dodd was not playing fair with the text of the NT, and that wrath was not remotely like sinful human anger, but was a divine attribute inseparable from God's love and holiness, and indeed was the reverse side of the same coin. Because God loved human beings, and had holy purposes for them, His wrath blazed against anything that contradicted that loving purpose. You may still find echoes of Dodd's position in some books, but the great majority of those who take the NT as authoritative acknowledge that Morris won that debate. But in popular culture, the idea of the wrath of God is still almost totally absent, because our idea of the holiness of God is so faint.

*As you contemplate the "holiness" side of God's character, would you say God is nice? Should Christians be nice?*

b. Love. The quality most associated with God is love, and justly so (if not disassociated from holiness). In fact, Alan Torrance affirms that love is of the essence of God, and the ground of any hope alienated humans have for a relationship with God (see Torrance's essay in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer). In the New Testament, the writers overwhelmingly use the word *agape*, relatively unused outside Scripture, to describe the type of love shown in the Incarnation and made real by the Spirit (281 times in noun, verb, and adjective forms, compared to 30 times for *philia*). It is a love that is spontaneous, uncaused by and even indifferent to merit, creating value in the one loved, and opening the way to fellowship with God. Thus it is radically different from what is called love in the modern world. From the root of love, we see 4 branches:

(1) Goodness. Because God is love, He does good for those He loves. There are no evil intentions behind any of His actions. He does good not to manipulate, but to bless. His goodness is the source of all that is good, and it overflows to all His creatures to some extent (Ps. 145:8-9, 16-17, Matt. 5:45, Acts 14:17).

(2) Gracious. Grace emphasizes that God's love is one in which merit is not considered. The fact that all creatures experience the goodness of God to some extent is an evidence of what theologians call "common grace," but more important to Christians is "saving grace," that grace which is the heart and soul of salvation. We need to be careful when we say we are saved by faith. Faith does not save us; Jesus does. Faith grasps Jesus, and He is there to be our Savior because God is gracious. We are saved by grace, through faith, in Jesus.

(3) Merciful. That God is merciful is the hope of every sinner who seeks pardon (Dan. 9:18, Matt. 9:36, Titus 3:5). One of the earliest and most often repeated

descriptions of God in the OT centers on His mercy as our hope (Ex. 34:6-7 and many other places in the OT).

(4) The last attribute I want to highlight is variously translated as "steadfast love," "kindness" and "mercy." The Hebrew word is *hesed*, and it encompasses the ideas of loyalty, patience, and committed love. Psalm 136 repeatedly affirms that this loyal love "endures forever."

All these attributes and more than we can describe are all found marvelously harmonized in the character of God. As God's people, we are called to be like Him, especially in showing His love (John 13:34) and His holiness (I Pet. 1:15). May God plant these two roots deep in our hearts to produce Christlike character in our lives.

II. Historical Developments. Though Scripture is foundational in our understanding of theology, we must also consider history, for three reasons. First, we must not arrogantly presume we have nothing to learn from 2000 years of Christians who have studied the Scriptures and encountered some of the same problems we encounter. Second, we do not approach Scripture or theology with a blank slate or a neutral mind. We come with questions and viewpoints, conditioned by the historical development of doctrine and by our place in history. Understanding how history influences us is our only safeguard against being unduly influenced by history. Third, we must understand the historical development, especially recent historical developments, to understand which areas of doctrine need special attention, defense, or revision in our generation.

A. God as Transcendent and Immanent. We mentioned earlier that maintaining the Scriptural balance of transcendence and immanence has always been a difficult task for theology. For most of church history, we may have erred on the side of transcendence, emphasizing God's separateness and difference from His creation. But beginning with the Enlightenment, and continuing into this century, the pendulum has swung to the side of immanence with a vengeance, provoking some reactions, but maintaining a general tilt to the immanent side.

Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson have tracked how immanence and transcendence have flowed and ebbed in an excellent book, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992). Since the Enlightenment and the work of Immanuel Kant, immanence has been emphasized, since Kant thought we had no access to transcendent metaphysical truth. Friedrich Schleiermacher and liberalism accepted Kant's thesis and sought God in religious experience. For the last 200 years Christian theology has been tilted in a heavily immanent direction, with one important exception. Karl Barth sought to stem the tide, with a strong emphasis on the "infinite qualitative distinction" between the transcendent God and finite humans. He insisted that there is nothing down here (immanent) that allows us to build a ladder to the transcendent. Our only hope is a gracious revelation from God. While Barth was perhaps the single most influential theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he couldn't stem the tide of immanence alone, and to this day theology has not yet regained a proper balance of immanence and transcendence.

For evangelicals, I think a historical perspective should warn us that while our relational age does look for a God who relates to humans, and our God is such a God, there is great danger in limiting our understanding of God to how he relates to us. We need a renewed vision of the greatness of God, His aseity, His intrinsic self-sufficiency, those attributes that make Him worthy of worship, not because of what He has done for us, but because of who He is. These should be prominent in the songs we sing, and they should come through in the way we pray and preach and worship. I fear that one of the casualties of contemporary worship is a sense of reverence.

B. God's Incommunicable Attributes. The need to recover a proper sense of transcendence is also seen in recent battles over some of the incommunicable attributes of God, because they are generally those that emphasize his transcendence, His independence and difference from His creation. And it is those attributes, particularly eternity, omniscience and immutability that have been most challenged.

1. Eternality and Omniscience. We group these two together because they are intrinsically intertwined. For if the eternity of God is not understood in a certain way, omniscience is also affected.

The nature of eternity itself is one aspect of deity that is surely among the most incomprehensible for time-bound creatures like us. All our lives and experiences are defined by time sequences, by "before's" and "after's." But God inhabits eternity. That has often been defined as meaning that he experiences all of time--past, present, and future--in one eternal "now." The comparison is often made to someone sitting on top of a building who can see all the cars of a railroad train, while those on the ground can see only one car at a time as it passes.

This understanding of God's eternity has been challenged recently from two sides. On the one hand, process theologians have denied it because their conception of a growing, changing God demands His full participation in the temporal process. While we would acknowledge that God's immanence requires His awareness of, involvement with and relationship to creatures enmeshed in temporality, we would also maintain that God's transcendence enables us to affirm his essential eternity.

A second related challenge has come from another small group of scholars, led by Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory Boyd, who think traditional theology has overemphasized God's transcendence and argue for "the openness of God" (see the book by that title by Clark Pinnock and others), involving a redefinition of God's eternity and omniscience to safeguard the freedom of human decision in salvation, make God more of a real participant in the temporal process, and, in their view, offer a more biblical vision of God.

A recurring question in theology has been how to reconcile the certainty of future events with the freedom of human decisions. It is especially central in the question of salvation. If God omnisciently knows who will be saved, does that not require God determining that they will in fact be saved? Traditional theology, both Arminian and Calvinist, has said that God may foreknow certain events will happen without being the efficient cause of them.

The idea that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible goes way back in Christian history. I first remember reading it in a little book, *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, written nearly 1500 years ago. Christians have responded that divine foreknowledge and free human choices are not incompatible, because God inhabits eternity in the way described above, seeing past, present, and future in one eternal now. He sees what happens in the future without causing it, because He sees it as present. Thus omniscience, traditionally understood, is both possible, because God is not limited to the historical process, and it is compatible with real, free human choices, for God can simply know what is to come without causing it (see Psalm 139:4).

Others have proposed dual causality (as seen in the life of Joseph; Gen. 50:20) or have brought in the idea of middle knowledge to show that divine foreknowledge and human freedom can fit together. Some more recently see God as more related to the temporal world, but as omni-temporal, or at least possessing knowledge not limited by temporal factors. Traditionally, prophecy has been seen as especially strong support for divine foreknowledge and linked in some way to God's eternity.

But Pinnock and others argue that this understanding of God's eternity insulates God too much from participation in the historical process, and is untrue to the biblical view of God as one who does participate in temporal processes, who does learn as time goes by. God asks questions and seems sometimes surprised by human actions in Scripture (Is. 5:3-4, Jer. 19:5). Further, they argue, the traditional view of foreknowledge assumes that the future is somehow real, but that is a mistaken assumption. The future is not real until our decisions make it real. Until then, there is nothing to know. The idea that God knows what will happen in the future is incompatible with human free choices. He cannot simply see it. If anything is certain to happen, it must be so because God causes it, and that is incompatible with human freedom. So these scholars offer a new definition of God's eternity. God is eternal in that He has always been and will always be, but it does not mean that He knows past, present, and future.

This revised view of eternity means traditional omniscience is impossible. According to these theologians, omniscience is knowing all that can be known. But the future is intrinsically unknowable. It has not happened yet. It is not real yet. The only aspect of the future God can know is what He will do, what He will cause to happen. He cannot know the future actions of free agents. Thus both a traditional understanding of God's eternity and omniscience are surrendered.

In reply, it must be simply stated that this is not the God the Bible portrays. Combining divine omniscience with free human choices may be problematic for some theologians, but the Bible seems to perceive no conflict (see Isaiah 40-48 alone). I see this trend as incompatible with the biblical understanding of a truly transcendent, omniscient, eternal God. Pinnock believes that traditional theology was unduly influenced by Greek philosophy and has overemphasized the transcendence of God, and that a more open God is what Scripture truly teaches. I believe just the opposite. I believe modern theology is being unduly influenced by the cultural currents of contemporary society, and is underemphasizing the transcendence of God. The longing for a more open God is not produced by a careful reading of Scripture, but by an overassimilation of modern culture and its assumptions.

More recently, John Sanders has sought to portray the conflict between openness and traditional views as Arminian vs. Calvinist, but this is not accurate. Arminians have always affirmed a traditional view of foreknowledge, but they have not seen it as entailing foreordination. If openness is to be associated with Arminianism it can at best be called hyper-Arminianism. Since arousing major controversy, especially in the Evangelical Theological Society meetings of 2003 and 2004, open theism seems to be rapidly fading. There are fewer and fewer new books, articles, or discussions on it, but a diminished view of God's transcendence leaves us still vulnerable to attacks on God's incommunicable attributes.

2. God's Immutability. As we mentioned above, process theology has challenged this attribute of God, maintaining that all reality is in process, and that if God is real, He too must be in process. We mentioned the dipolar theism of Alfred North Whitehead, the father of process thought. God is described as possessing two elements, a primordial nature (that is unchanging) but also a consequent nature, a pole or aspect of God that changes, grows, develops as a result of participation in the process of life. God is not finished, but is still open to the future. He will learn more as the future unfolds, and will be impacted by human decisions. Thus, they contend, the traditional understanding of a static, immutable God is incorrect. But the process understanding of God's consequent nature would deny not just immutability, but also omniscience and sovereignty, and ends miles away from the biblical view of God.

Though process theology's influence peaked decades ago, it may have made one positive point. We probably do need to reformulate the idea of immutability. As described in the past, it may have been too static, implying that God is not at all affected by our actions and responses. A truer, more biblical formulation of immutability needs to stress that God always responds, but does so in a manner consistent with His nature, which does not change. The example of Jonah serves as a good model. Jonah hesitated to go to Nineveh, not because he did not want to see their destruction; he did! His fear was that the Ninevites would repent, and that God would respond to their repentance, and that God would respond in a way consistent with His gracious, merciful character (see Jonah 4:2). Changeability of the sort that humans manifest is contrary to God's nature (Num. 23:19, I Sam. 15:29); responding according to His nature is not.

The idea of impassibility, while also safeguarding the idea that God does not experience emotions exactly as humans do, in the past wrongly gave an unbiblical view of God as unfeeling. A number of evangelical scholars, including J. I. Packer, have concluded that impassibility may be largely jettisoned, as more of a liability than an asset, and more influenced by Greek philosophy than Scripture. Immutability is more important but should be reformulated and described in terms of fidelity or constancy. I think this would allow us to retain what is important in the biblical understanding of immutability without the negative connotations of that word.

C. The Trinity in church history. Because the Trinity is one of the most difficult, but also one of the most distinctive Christian doctrines, I think we need to survey how this doctrine has developed and been treated down through the years.

1. The patristic period. From the first generation of Christians on, the struggle was to maintain the monotheistic heritage of Judaism with the Christian confession of Jesus as

Lord (Yahweh more than 6000 times in the Septuagint) and the power they experienced from the Holy Spirit.

a. Tertullian. It was the Latin theologian Tertullian (c. 200 AD) who first coined the term Trinity (*trinitas*) and the formula one substance (*substantia*) in three persons (*personae*), and even suggested some of the analogies we use to explain the Trinity (a tree composed of root, trunk and branch; the sun, its warmth and its light). But his formulation did not catch on immediately, due in large part to the fact that the issue of Christ's deity had not been resolved, and in part due to the fact that his formulation tended toward a modalism rather than a true trinitarianism.

Students of theology are usually familiar with the controversies that went on during the first centuries of the church concerning the deity of Christ. Against those who claimed that Jesus was the highest of God's creatures, or the greatest of the prophets, or a man specially indwelt by God, Christian orthodoxy eventually affirmed the full equality of the Son with the Father. This opened the way for the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

b. The Cappadocians. There is a trinity of theologians associated with the first careful formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. They are the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus). Their task was to steer a way between the dual heresies of tritheism (three gods) and modalism (the idea of one God in three successive modes) or subordinationism (where Christ and the Spirit are a lower level of being than the Father).

Their solution, adopted at the Council of Constantinople in 381, was one *ousia* (essence) in three *hypostaseis* (center of consciousness), in which all three share in the same *ousia*. The distinction which separates the three *hypostaseis* is their manner of origin. Though all three are co-eternal, the Father "is ungenerated", the Son "is generated", and the Spirit "proceeds." This is no distinction of attributes or nature, but a difference that allows for real personal distinctions. There may be a subordination of order or dignity, but there is full equality of essence.

Although this formulation was adopted officially in 381, there was continuing discussion and different trajectories taken by East and West. In the East, where Greek was spoken, where the Cappadocians had lived, and where Platonic philosophy was especially strong, the emphasis was on the threeness of God, and the manner of origin differences between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Moreover, there were overtones of subordinationism as the Father was seen as the single source of divinity from which the Son is generated and the Spirit proceeds.

In the West, most theologians were not fully cognizant of the distinctions between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, and tended to base their work more on Tertullian's formulation of *substantia* and *personae*. But *substantia* was the usual Latin translation of *hypostasis*, not *ousia*, and the Latin term *personae* did not have our modern idea of a distinct psychological being, but was a theatrical term used to refer to a mask worn by a character. Thus, where the East saw threeness, the West saw oneness. Threeness was still present, but the West emphasized the oneness of God. The distinction between the three members was not usually seen as manner of origin, but relational. This is especially seen in the influential work of Augustine.

c. Augustine. The work which Augustine himself saw as his most important was *De trinitate*, at which he labored, on and off, for nearly 20 years. In it he advocated a relational distinction between the three members of the Trinity. The Father is different from the Son, because he is eternally the Father, and always relates to the Son as a Father. That is part of his person. Similarly, the Son is always the Son, and it is part of his person to always submit to and obey the Father, though he is in no way inferior to the Father. And the Spirit, in Augustine's formulation, is the *vinculum caritatis*, the link of love, uniting the Father and Son.

Another important part of Augustine's work was an exhaustive search for analogies of the Trinity, or vestiges of the Trinity in the world. After examining all the usual analogies and finding them to lead toward tritheism or modalism, Augustine looks within human personality. He suggests the triad of the mind, its knowledge of itself, and its love of itself, or memory, understanding and will, or, most importantly, the mind remembering God, knowing God, and loving God. Though no analogy is fully adequate, since the Trinity truly is unique, Augustine felt the last was the closest and yielded the best understanding of the Trinity.

But Augustine made one further change that led to controversy and was eventually part of the reason for the division between East and West. He taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque* in Latin), whereas the Nicene Creed had mentioned only the Father. Augustine's idea was adopted by the Council of Toledo in 589, and by the ninth century was well established in the West. But the East objected to the addition of the *filioque* clause. They felt that adding a clause to an ancient creed without their consent was not only arrogant, but it threatened the unity of the Godhead, for the Father was the sole source of divinity. The West thought the *filioque* clause was fitting to uphold the full equality of the Son with the Father (against Arianism).

It is arguable which of the two positions is more biblical. The East has John 15:26, while the West has the clear teaching that the Son sent the Spirit (Acts 2:33). More important than the wording is the interpretation. The two sides persisted in their different interpretations, and the *filioque* clause was one factor among many in the formal separation of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches in the 11th century.

2. The modern period. Throughout the rest of the Middle Ages and afterwards, the doctrine of the Trinity attracted little attention. There was a denial by the Socinians in the time of the Reformation, but the real attack on the Trinity began afterwards, as Europe embraced "rational religion" that did not need to rely on special revelation. In the 19th century, Schleiermacher saw the Trinity as a dispensable doctrine, since it could not be derived from Christian self-consciousness. Schleiermacher's attitude has been fairly characteristic of liberal Protestant theology since. Where denial of the deity of Christ and dismissal of the Spirit has been typical, the Trinity has hardly been emphasized. When it has been mentioned, it has been seen as symbolic (P. Tillich) or reinterpreted in process terms, which ends up unitarian more than Trinitarian.

It has been Karl Barth who has been most responsible for elevating the Trinity to a place of importance in modern theology. In Barth's theology, the three members of the Trinity are necessary to explain the self-disclosure of God. Revelation requires God the Father/Revealer,

Christ the Son/Revelation, and the Spirit/Revealedness. Following Barth, Karl Rahner, Jurgen Moltmann, and Wolfhart Pannenberg have all given the Trinity serious consideration. Rahner coined a phrase that has become known as Rahner's axiom: "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity," manifesting his belief that we can't get behind the works of the members of the Trinity (the economic Trinity, works *ad extra*) to the being of the members of the Trinity (the immanent Trinity, works *ad intra*).

Barth has been accused by some of modalism, but I am not sure that is entirely accurate. He is uncomfortable with the formulation of "three persons," because he feels that the way we use the word "person" today implies tritheism. He wants to affirm threeness as well, but is unsure how to best communicate that, and has used phrases like "modes of existing," but I do not think he would deny that there is some type of personal distinction within the divine nature. The formulations of Moltmann, Pannenberg and Hans Kung are more problematic, in that they affirm an "economic" trinity (referring to distinctions in the work of salvation) but not necessarily an "immanent" trinity (distinctions within the nature of God). But at any rate, these theologians have insisted upon the importance of the Trinity for systematic theology, and have helped stimulate new discussion about the ancient doctrine. For a helpful evaluation of current philosophical and theological discussion of the Trinity, see Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* and Michael Chiavone, *The One God: A Critically Developed Evangelical Doctrine of Trinitarian Unity*.

III. A Contemporary Theological Formulation. As evangelical systematic theologians, Scripture is determinative for our theology, and we have already considered the biblical foundations for our beliefs, and do not need to cover that ground again. We also exist in a historical context, and have considered questions and challenges that have developed historically and especially in contemporary life. Our task now is to focus the biblical teaching on contemporary challenges and point out those issues that need special attention in our contemporary formulation and exposition of the doctrine of God.

A. First, let us consider some issues relative to the nature of God.

1. As I have already indicated, theology today needs to recapture the transcendence of God, without losing a proper perspective on the immanence of God. New Age thought, many varieties of eastern thought, and some parts of the environmental movement tilt toward a pantheistic or panentheistic view, in which the line between the Creator and his creation is blurred.

In response to this, we need to state clearly that God's immanence to the world lies not in his essence, but in his loving gracious decision to enter into personal relationship with His creatures. This focus on the relational God presupposes a distinction between the two who are in relationship, while emphasizing properly the presence of God in and for His creation.

To uphold the transcendence of God, we need to emphasize in our preaching, teaching and worship the greatness of God. Perhaps the greatest impact on the average Christian can be made through worship. Cultivation of the awesomeness and the majesty of God must be pursued through prayer that is humble and holy, that urges us to bow before One who is greater than we can imagine. It must be cultivated through continuing the present emphasis on praise in worship,

but strengthening significantly the theological content and depth of our praise choruses, so that we praise God not only for who he is for us, but we worship God for the glory and beauty He is in Himself. And in our praise, let us not neglect some older, substantive hymns (note the transcendent theology in hymns like "Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise" and "O Worship the King").

2. We must continue to defend a Trinitarian view of God, for it is one doctrine that clearly distinguishes Christianity from other world religions. This is one reason why the Trinity is challenged by many today; it is an obstacle to pluralism. In particular, Islam challenges that the Trinity is irrational, and that it ends in polytheism.

We may acknowledge that there must remain an element of mystery in the Trinity, for we are exploring here perhaps as deep as we can go in the nature of God. But that doesn't mean the doctrine is irrational or unimportant.

The key elements are all present in a diagram that has been found in some stained glass windows in Europe. It affirms in a visual way the three facts that we have said form the biblical basis of the Trinity: God is one; Father, Son, and Spirit are equally divine; but the three are distinct one from another. Beyond that, when we try to explain how they are different, we are entering areas of speculation. I prefer Augustine's idea of a relational distinction, rather than the unbegotten/begotten/procession distinction characteristic of much Trinitarian history, or the functional distinction suggested by Erickson in his recent work.

Erickson suggests that we may have made the doctrine more difficult than necessary. He advocates emphasizing the distinctness and threeness of the Trinity, and seeing the oneness as union rather than unity:

The Trinity is a communion of three persons, three centers of consciousness, who exist and always have existed in union with one another and in dependence on one another. . . . Each is essential to the life of each of the other, and to the life of the Trinity. They are bound to one another in love, agape love, which therefore unites them in the closest and most intimate of relationships. (331).

He guards against tritheism by emphasizing the *perichoresis* of the three persons, the depth of their union in love, and the dependence of each on the other. He advises describing each of the persons as divine, rather than each of the persons as God, reserving that title for the Trinity rather than any one person of the Trinity. An analogy that he thinks is helpful, if less than perfect, is that of Siamese twins. They are two, but unable to live separately.

I fear Erickson may be overemphasizing threeness in an attempt to reduce the paradox or difficulty in understanding how God can be three and one. The Bible does use "God" to refer to each of the individual members of the Trinity, so Erickson's implication that each member of the Trinity is only a "part" of God is misleading. I prefer the traditional view, emphasizing equally threeness and oneness, even with its paradoxical difficulty.

To those who say that the Trinity is irrational, for it asks us to believe that  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ , we respond with two counters. Rather, we are saying that  $x + y + z = a$ , or better still,  $1 \times 1 \times 1 =$

1. In the case of deity, perhaps the relationship is multiplicative, not additive. At any rate, we must be prepared to show that it is not inherently irrational or incapable of a sophisticated, coherent formulation. Beyond that, we may allow that perhaps a full comprehension of the triune nature of an infinite God is beyond us. He is unique.

3. The Trinitarian nature of God can also help us resolve a question that our culture stumbles over: Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad? The strong push toward pluralism in our culture makes the answer seem obvious. All religions are simply different paths up the same mountain, and Muslims themselves would say they worship the same God as the Christians and the Jews, only without the misinterpretations or corruptions of the Torah (Old Testament) and Injil (New Testament). But the question is more complex than it might appear at first. It needs to be separated into three distinct questions.

a. Are the terms Allah and God interchangeable? The answer should be clear, yes. Allah is not an inherently Muslim term, but an Arabic term that was used for the Christian God long before Muhammad appeared on the scene. Early Arabic translators of the Bible used Allah to translate *elohim* and *theos*.

b. A second form of the question would be, Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Here the answer is both yes and no. Since as monotheists, we believe there is only one God, Muslims cannot be worshipping some other God. But to worship a unitarian god is to worship the one true God in a false way, and is not acceptable to him. So no, their conceptions of God are so different that it cannot be said that they are worshipping the same God.

c. That difference is clarified by focusing on the nature of God in a third form of the question: Is the one called Allah in Arabic versions of the Bible and worshiped by Christians the same as the one called Allah in the Qur'an and worshiped by Muslims? Here a Christian well aware of God's nature would say no. While there is a good deal of overlap in the Muslim and Christian conceptions of the nature and attributes of God (omniscience, omnipotence, immutability), there are also crucial differences (very little on communicable attributes, and most of all, a stark difference on the Trinitarian nature of God). The God Christians worship is the God who is Father, and Son, and Spirit. In fact, an informed Muslim should reject even the question with which we began (Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?) because in referring to God as the Father of Jesus we are making a claim they reject.

As pastors, missionaries and Christian leaders today, it is more important than ever for us to be informed about the Muslim conception of God. We need to be familiar enough with their literature to know where we share some common ideas concerning God's nature and attributes, and to show love for them by becoming informed before we speak. But even if we have no contact with Muslims we still need to know enough to refute the common assumption in our culture that we all worship the same God.

For more on this question, see Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 25-51; Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* and a series

of five articles, “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?” *Christian Century* 121, nos. 8-12 (April-August 2004).

## B. The Attributes of God.

1. Giving a Relational Definition to the Incommunicable Attributes. In keeping with the need to emphasize the transcendence of God is the need to emphasize his incommunicable attributes, those ways in which God is different from all other beings. But we may do so in a way that does not portray God as either static (the complaint of process theology) or as a threat to human freedom (as some Arminians believe). Rather, we may define these attributes, not metaphysically, but relationally.

For example, God's aseity means that His relationship with us is free and gracious, for He is not dependent (or co-dependent) on us. His omnipotence does not cower us, but encourages us to trust that He can perform all He promises to do. His omniscience does not violate our freedom; rather, it means he knows what we will freely choose to do because he knows us, intimately and completely. His immutability does not imply a frozen God, but a God whose responses will always be consistent with and faithful to His own unchanging character.

Really, this approach is as old as the Puritans. Richard Brooks wrote that when God promises to be our God,

that is as if he said, You shall have as true an interest in all my attributes for your good, as they are mine for my own glory. . . My grace, saith God, shall be yours to pardon you, and my power shall be yours to protect you, and my wisdom shall be yours to direct you, and my goodness shall be yours to relieve you, and my mercy shall be yours to supply you, and my glory shall be yours to crown you.

Though Brooks mixes communicable and incommunicable attributes, all can be stated in similar terms. We need to emphasize God's incommunicable attributes in precisely these two ways: they glorify God as a great God, and they meet the needs we have as His beloved creatures. As John Piper is fond of saying, “God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in him.”

2. Holding Love and Holiness Together. With regard to the communicable attributes, I will say only that we need to keep holiness and love firmly tied together in our contemporary situation. There is a tendency to define love in terms of tolerance in our society, when in reality tolerance is far too weak for biblical love. Biblical love, because it is a holy love, cares too much to tolerate unholy, self-destructive acts and attitudes in the lives of those who are loved. Tolerance accepts others as they are and leaves them as they are, for tolerance is not love. Love accepts others as they are, but yearns for others to be all they can be, and seeks by all possible means to motivate, spur on, and encourage others to be the best they can be. Tolerance is easy; holy love is much more costly. We must not let our love degenerate to a mushy sentimentality, nor allow our holiness to become a harsh, legalistic set of rules. Hold the two together.

I hope and believe we have been offering some practical applications throughout our discussion thus far, but we will mention some specific applications of the doctrine of God for life and ministry after we complete the second section of our study concerning the works of God.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
 UNIT 3: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD  
 PART B: THE WORKS OF GOD  
 OUTLINE

I. Biblical Foundations for the Works of God.

A. Creation.

1. God created everything.
2. Creation was affected by the fall.
3. Creation still reveals something of its Creator.
4. God's final, new creation still lies ahead.
5. God's creation includes the creation of spiritual beings.
6. The purpose of creation.

Appendix: Angels and Demons

B. Providence.

1. Preservation.
2. Governing.
3. Three issues.
  - a. The possibility of miracles.
  - b. The power of prayer.
  - c. The problem of evil (theodicy).

II. Historical Developments.

A. The Creation/Evolution Debate.

1. Did God create the universe?
2. How did God create the universe?
3. When did God create the earth?

B. Providence.

III. A Contemporary Theological Formulation.

A. Center on the issue of the Creator.

B. See providence in relational and eschatological terms.

IV. Practical Applications.

- A. Evangelism.
- B. Comfort.
- C. Ethics.
- D. Personal Growth.
- E. Worship and Prayer.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 3: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD  
PART B. THE WORKS OF GOD

We turn now to consider explicitly what in a sense we have already been discussing, for we know God's nature and attributes primarily through his actions. Here, however, we turn to a more thorough consideration of the major works of the Godhead (not including the special works of the individual members).

Some theologians, especially very traditional Calvinists, begin the discussion of God's works with a discussion of the decrees of God. A typical Calvinist definition of God's decree would be something like this: "that just, wise, and holy purpose or plan, through which God has, in Himself and from eternity, determined everything that happens." Such a discussion might include how God ordained the fall, and the plan of salvation, and the order of the various decrees, and how all that relates to theodicy, or the problem of evil.

In particular, there has been discussion of the relationship of the decree of election to the decree to permit the fall. Supralapsarians say that the decree to elect is prior to the decree to allow the fall, for election's purpose is to manifest God's glory. Infralapsarians (or sublapsarians) say God's decree to elect was after the decree to allow the fall, for it was the fall that necessitated election. God would have been sufficiently glorified by an obedient creation, even apart from election, had there been no fall.

My problem is that I find nothing explicit in Scripture about such decrees, much less their logical order. Thus, I am going to omit discussion of the decrees. I am generally Calvinist in my views, and certainly believe that God is sovereign, that he has a plan that he will bring to his ordained conclusion, and that all that happens does so within His will. If forced to choose, I would take an infra- or sublapsarian position, but I find most discussions of God's plan or decrees more speculative than biblical (for Scripture does not say much about God's plan nor decrees) and not particularly profitable. We will move on to consideration of God's works of creation and providence.

#### I. Biblical Foundations for the Works of God.

A. Creation. For most conservatives, it is difficult to broach the topic of creation without thinking of the creation/evolution debate. We will have to investigate that question when we look at historical controversies that have shaped the formulation of systematic theology on this point, but right now we want to lay the biblical foundations and the emphasis in Scripture is on the fact of creation, not the time or manner. Out of more than 100 passages on creation:

- 90 affirm God as Creator,
- 58 note God's power over nature,
- 38 specify God as Creator of all,
- 32 speak of God's purposefulness in creating the earth for man, and man for God's glory,
- 20 relate to God's continuing preservation of creation,
- 10 remind us that God is everlasting and prior to his creation,

9 declare that creation shows God's wisdom, and  
2 discuss the time of creation.

That topic which has occupied center stage for many of our discussions of creation is not central in the Bible's portrayal of creation. What does the Bible emphasize? Six statements summarize scriptural teaching.

1. God created the entire universe, including human beings, who alone have the special status of being made in God's image, and God pronounced it "very good" (Gen. 1-2). We need to note several important implications of this statement.

Note that the first fact we are told of God is that He is the Creator, and most early creeds reflected that in their statements about God (the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"). It excludes pantheism, as we mentioned earlier. It also excludes dualism, for nothing exists on the same level with God. He is the Creator, all else is His creation (see John 1:3, Eph. 3:9, Col. 1:16, Rev. 4:11 for emphasis on the all-inclusive nature of God's creation). This is the central point of Genesis 1. The traditional understanding of creation as out of nothing rather than pre-existing matter (*creatio ex nihilo*) was very important in the early church in distinguishing the Christian view of creation from some Jewish versions. It continued to be widely affirmed because it emphasized the special nature of God's creative work (*bara* [Gen. 1:1] as opposed to *asah*), and clearly distinguished God from his creation. Our "creations" involve shaping and fashioning already existing material, but God created all that exists, not out of pre-existing material, but out of nothing more than His own power (see Heb. 11:3). This is also the Achilles' heel of naturalistic evolutionists, who have to explain why there was something existing to evolve.

His creation of human beings is the ultimate basis for human dignity and worth, as we shall discuss later. On the one hand, we share the status of being creatures with the rest of creation, and so cannot disregard that link. Indeed, we are given special responsibility for creation. But we are different from all other creatures in one respect. We are made in God's image, and that gives us a special dignity.

His pronouncement of creation as very good means that which is material is not essentially evil. Nothing God created is essentially or necessarily evil. Thus our major problem is not our environment; evil originates within human beings. The world is not inherently evil, even after the fall (see I Tim. 4:4).

2. Creation was affected by the fall (Gen. 3:17-19, Rom. 8:19-21). Somehow the fate and destiny of creation are intertwined with ours. Now it no longer cooperates with us, but rather, is subjected to corruption and decay.

3. Though injured, creation still gives testimony to the glory, power and goodness of its Creator (Ps. 19:1-6, Job 38-41, Is. 40:12-26). Fifty-eight passages on creation see God's omnipotence revealed in His creation; another 20 affirm God's continuing providential activity in creation. Creation is also associated with God's eternity (10 times) and omniscience (9 times). Clearly, the creation does give some revelation of its Creator.

4. Though God completed His initial creative work and rested, there still remains to be seen the new creation of God, the new heavens and the new earth, the home of all God's redeemed (II Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:4-5). Some have suggested that the fire at the end of history will be to cleanse and purge this creation and ready it to be recreated as God's new creation; others have said the new creation will be just that, new. But in either case we are not destined to live on clouds, but in a new (or renewed) universe.

5. God's creation is purposeful. That purpose relates especially to humans. Thirty-two passages deal with this theme. There is no hint of randomness in creation. Scientists have noted the anthropic nature of creation, that many aspects of creation seem especially and essentially suited to human existence. But there is also a higher purpose for the creation of humans. The ultimate purpose of all creation is to worship and glorify God.

6. God's creation includes the creation of spiritual beings, angels, some of whom fell and became demons (Col. 1:15-16). In a moment, we will take this opportunity to consider briefly angelology and demonology. They are relatively minor doctrines of theology and do not require a separate section, so we will treat them as an appendix to the doctrine of God and His creation.

#### Appendix: Angels and Demons

Despite the general disdain of mainline liberal theology toward angelic (and demonic) beings, they have enjoyed some prominence in contemporary culture, though it is now subsiding (see the recent TV series "Touched By An Angel," a number of movies, many bestseller books, etc.). Much of it may be prompted by reports of "near-death" experiences, New Age interest in "spiritual" contacts, and in the case of demons, interest in the occult. In *Angels and the New Spirituality*, Duane Garrett notes some of the strange ideas circulating in some current books on angels, such as angels as "inter-galactic social workers," and exercises designed to help you grow your own angel wings! Whatever the source, the interest in spirits presents both a challenge and an opportunity for us to offer what Scripture has to say about these beings.

#### I. Angels.

A. What are they? A central clue lies in the fact that in both the OT and NT, the chief word for angel (*malak, angelos*) means "messenger." The closest to a definition we find in Scripture is Heb. 1:14: they are "ministering spirits." From these clues, we may draw several implications.

1. They are spiritual beings. They neither marry nor procreate (Matt. 22:29-30), and are not subject to physical death (Luke 20:36). It seems their normal environment is heaven, the place of God's presence (Matt. 18:10, Mk. 13:32, Job 1-2), but they are often sent to earth, and are able (or are specially enabled by God) on those occasions to take on a physical appearance (Gen. 18:1-8, Luke 1:11-13, 26-29, Acts 1:10-11), so that they can be seen by us.

When seen in Scripture, almost invariably their first words to humans are "Fear not" (see Luke 2:9; Matt. 28:5). Apparently, they are an awe inspiring sight.

2. They are beings, not forces. Though different from us, they are represented as personal, rather than impersonal. They experience joy (over a sinner's repentance, Lk. 15:10), they feel curiosity and a desire to understand God's workings (I Pet. 1:12), and they act as God's messengers and servants. So they have the elements of personality of emotion, mind, and will. They are described as worshipping (Is. 6:1-3, Rev. 4:6-11), protecting God's people (Ps. 35:4-5, II Kings 6:13-17, Daniel 3:24-28, 6:20-23, Matt. 2:13-15, Acts 12:1-17), communicating messages from God (Matt. 1:20-21, Luke 2:8-15, Acts 10:1-8), and strengthening and encouraging (Matt. 4:11, Lk. 22:43, Acts 5:19-20, 27:25).

3. They are created beings. We infer this from the fact that God created all that exists (John 1:3, Col. 1:16), and from the fact that though they are spiritual beings, they have numerous creaturely limitations. As Pete Schemm notes, they are "wise but not omniscient . . . strong, but not omnipotent" and in "many places, but not omnipresent" (*A Theology for the Church*, 296-97). They are specifically said to be subordinate to Christ (see all of Hebrews 1). They are God's servants, not His equals (Ps. 103:20). Their creation by God is also implied by the fact that they are called "the sons of God" (see Gen. 6 and Job 1-2).

4. Are they created in God's image? There is no verse that explicitly addresses this question, but the way that phrase is uniquely applied to humans in Genesis 1 suggests that they are not. While they share many of our attributes, they are not embodied, and being creatures with bodies allows us to be the representatives of God on earth, a function many associate with our being made in God's image. We will discuss the meaning of our creation in God's image at length in a later section of these notes.

B. When were they created? Job 38:4-7 and Ps. 148:2-5 imply that it was before the creation of the physical universe, and Mark 8:38 implies that their original state was good and holy, but we are told little about their origin. They are not mentioned in the six days of Genesis 1. Certainly Satan was created and fell before he came to tempt Eve, but why God created angels before humans (if he in fact did), or why there is no account of the creation (and fall) of angels, we are not told. B. H. Carroll wondered if jealousy of God's creation of humanity in the image of God was a factor in Satan's fall and decision to tempt humans. Perhaps the creation of angels is not mentioned because some did fall and introduced something "not good" into the creation. While interesting, Scripture leaves most of our speculative, metaphysical questions unanswered.

C. Why do they exist? We have really already answered this question: they exist to worship and serve God. They were active at many points in the OT: the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-1), the Exodus (Ex. 14:19), the period of the Judges (Judges 6 [Gideon] and 13 [Samson]), and in the period of the exile (Dan. 3, 6). In the NT, angelic activity centers around the birth of Christ (19 times) and the end of the age (68 times in Revelation alone, many more times in parables of the end in the gospels: Matt. 13:39-43, 25:31, II Thess. 1:7-10). Thus, daily contact with angels was not the norm for believers in Scripture, and every believer today may not experience angelic activity, but part of their service to God is serving his people (Ps. 34:7; Heb. 1:14), service which is sometimes not recognized (Heb. 13:2).

#### D. Specific Issues.

1. Guardian angels? Matt. 18:10 and Acts 12:15 are probably the basis for this belief, but we cannot say that Scripture clearly affirms an individual guardian angel for each believer. However, guarding and protecting believers is part of their overall assignment.

2. Wings? The seraphim (Is. 6:2, 6) and cherubim (Ezek. 1:5-8) are described as having wings, but there is little basis for the traditional artistic rendering of angels. As non-material beings, wings seem particularly needless. When they do appear physically in Scripture, it is most often in a human-like form.

3. Ranks? Though Michael is called an archangel (Dan. 10:13, I Thess. 4:16), and medieval theologians drew up elaborate organizational schemes, there is little basis for affirming much more than there is some idea of order among the angels.

4. The angel of the Lord. Several passages in the OT mention what appears to be a special angel, called "the angel of the Lord." What calls for special attention is the fact that this angel is, at points, identified with God (see Gen. 16:7-14; Ex. 3:2-4; Judges 6:11-24, and others). Some see this angel as simply a special angel, but I think that does not do justice to the association with God. Most evangelical theologians see it as a theophany or Christophany: an appearance of God, particularly God the Son, in a humanlike form. Before his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth, the Eternal Word or Logos at times served as the Father's messenger (which is what angel means; see also the usage of messenger for Jesus in Mal. 3:1, "the messenger of the covenant"). The factor that tips the scales in favor of this interpretation in my opinion is the fact that when "the angel of the Lord" appears in the New Testament, the strong association with deity is missing.

5. How was it possible for some angels to fall? Is there any danger of some falling today? Though angels are represented as having a will, and those who fell are held responsible to God for their actions, we are told very little about how or why or when this happened. Some affirm that the number of angels who fell was one-third, based on Rev. 12:4, but the verse cited is not at all clear. However it happened, angels are clearly represented in two black and white groups: the holy angels (Mk. 8:36) and the fallen angels (the devil's angels; Matt. 25:41). Both groups seem to be fixed in their positions. If the holy angels have any temptation or possibility of sin, we are not told of it. And the evil angels seem to be completely evil and fixed in their position. We are told that Christ did not die to redeem fallen angels but sinful humans (Heb. 2:16), reminding us that the provision of salvation is totally gratuitous. God did not provide it for fallen angels, and did not have to provide it for us. All this leads us to the second half of this appendix.

#### II. Demons.

Demons are one of the doctrines Bultmann and liberals in general see as simply unacceptable to modern people. Others, like Tillich, have resymbolized demons as the biblical term for the powerful forces of evil at work in the structures of society ("demonic forces" rather than "demons"). But what does Scripture say about demons?

Overall, the OT says very little. We think of Gen. 3, but we don't learn the identity of the serpent until Rev. 12:9. There is a possible involvement in Gen. 6 that we will examine later, a few passing references in Deut. 32:17 and Ps. 106:37, a single reference in I Chron. 21:1 to Satan inciting David to sin, and another single reference to spiritual warfare in Dan. 10:12-13. Other than those, the clearest and most sustained mention is in Job 1-2. Even of these, most deal with Satan and not demons in general.

The NT situation is much different. Some argue that this reveals Persian influences and historical developments during the intertestamental period, with a growing interest in angels and demons. That is possible, but it seems that it was the appearance of Christ that really brought demonic activity into the open, and by far, the great majority of references to demons in the New Testament are found in the gospels (94 times in the gospels; 21 times in the rest of the NT).

*Have you encountered something you thought was openly and obviously demonic? Why does demonic activity seem more open in some cultures than others?*

A. Their nature. We normally think of the demons as Satan's angels. But substantiating that Scripturally is a bit involved. Here's the argument:

The NT teaches that Satan is the prince of demons (Mt. 12:26); the NT also teaches that Satan has his angels (Mt. 25:41, who are his servants (II Cor. 11:14-15), so we are justified in thinking that the demons are, in fact, Satan's angels, or that the angels who have fallen and become evil serve him.

The problem with this argument is that II Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6 teach that at least some angels who fell are already condemned and chained. So we are left with 3 options: (1) either the demons are a different group of beings than the imprisoned fallen angels, perhaps not deserving the status of angels at all (K. Barth says to give them any positive attribute, even existence, is to flatter them too much; they are only part of the nothingness that threatens the cosmos with chaos); or (2) only part of the evil, fallen angels are under chains; those still left free to roam are Satan's demons; or (3) the description of the fallen angels in II Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6 does not preclude the possibility of their continued demonic activity (God has them on a very long leash!).

There are problems with all three, though the problems seem much more pronounced with options 1 and 3. The first leaves us wondering if demons are not angelic beings who have been perverted, then what are they? The description of demons reads an awful lot like angels, except that they are perverted and bent to evil (spirit beings, Mt. 8:16, intelligent, Mk. 1:23-24; having power but using it to destroy, Mk. 5:2-5). The third option has the obvious problem that the demons associated with Satan do not act chained.

The second view has to deal with the implication of II Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6 that the judgment applied to all the angels who sinned, and would also have to account for why some have already been judged and others left free to roam. But in fact II Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6 do not specifically say that they refer to all the angels that sinned. Some have suggested that the angels imprisoned are the ones involved in the sin mentioned in Gen. 6:1-4; other angels fell but were not involved in that particular sin and thus are still free to roam. This assumes an interpretation of Gen. 6 that involves angels (which we will discuss in a moment), but does fit with the context

of II Pet. 2, which mentions Noah immediately after the sin of the angels, just as Gen. 6 mentions Noah immediately after the sin of "the sons of God." And it was a common interpretation of Gen. 6 in first century Judaism.

As to when these angels fell from their original position (for all were originally created good--as A. H. Strong said when asked who created Satan: "God created a good angel; Satan by his evil choice created Satan"), we are not told. There is a description in Rev. 12:7-9 of warfare in heaven and Satan and his angels being cast down, but it is stated as something that happened in history in association with the incarnation, not as a prehistoric event. By inference, we place the fall of angels after the creation of angels and before Gen. 3, but we can go no further.

B. Their activities. We may gain a general idea of the activities of demons by contrasting them with the general idea of the activities of the good angels. Whereas the good angels seek to help God's people, demons aim to destroy all people, and especially God's people (Heb. 2:14 vs. Eph. 6:12). They produce counterfeit or twisted teaching (II Cor. 11:14-15, I Tim. 4:1, I John 4:1-4), and can physically attack God's people (II Cor. 12:7: "messenger of Satan" = "angel of Satan").

C. Demonic possession. Of course, the most characteristic activity of demons in the gospels was possession, or, it could be translated, "demonization" (the usual verb: *daimonizomai*). This apparently was a state in which a person was dominated by demons who had effective control over the person. The result was behavior that was destructive of a person's humanity (Mk. 5:2-5) and even his life (Matt. 17:15).

It is interesting, however, that there are only a couple of instances of demon possession and exorcism in the book of Acts and no others than those anywhere in the NT outside of the gospels. It seems that Christ's presence brought the battle activity to a peak. There is certainly demonic activity reflected in the rest of the NT (Eph. 6:12, I Tim. 4:1, etc.), but I do not think we need to buy into some of the current fads in demonology: you have to name the demon (why? Jesus only did it once), casting out demons needs to be a regular activity (that was not reflected in Acts). I do believe that there are times when demonic activity is involved, but we do not need special rituals for exorcism. The tools we are given in Eph. 6 are prayer and Scripture. We do not have to win a battle, but stand in the position of victory we already have, the position reflected in Scripture. "Resist" and "stand" are the key words (see James 4:7; I Pet. 5:9; Eph. 6:11, 13, 14). We need no further advance. We have already won. Satan may at times win a battle (I Thess. 2:18), but the war is lost.

So demon possession is real, though not as common as some in the body of Christ think. Can it happen to a Christian? I think not in the sense we have spoken of, as effective control of one's personality. I think the indwelling Spirit would prevent it, and I John 5:18 seems to deny it. However, demons may certainly harass and oppress a believer to such an extent that the fact that it is oppression and not possession may not seem very comforting to the oppressed individual (see Paul's anguish in II Cor. 12:7).

To those who would say, "but we know now that what they called demon possession is really mental illness," I would say beware of reductionism on either side. To believers, we must say yes, mental illness is a reality, and can be caused by physical, chemical imbalances or by

emotional disturbances (do not too sharply separate persons; we are a physical, psychological, emotional, social, spiritual unity). To skeptics, we reply, who is to say that demonic activity is not a component in the onset and continuation of mental illness? Could this denial of a spiritual component be one reason why success rates are so much lower for treatment of mental illness than physical illness?

Demonic possession may also give us a possible interpretation of one of the trickiest passages in Scripture, Gen. 6:1-4. Some have interpreted the sons of God here as angels, but since they are non-material beings, the production of offspring would seem problematic. The other major interpretation is that the phrase "sons of God" refers to the godly line, the line of Seth (Gen. 4:25-26), and that their sin was intermarrying with beautiful but godless women and thus polluting their line. But if that was the author's intention, he chose a most obscure way to communicate it. "Sons of God" is nowhere else used to refer to anyone's line; when it is used, which is rare in the OT, it refers to angelic beings. If, however, we see the "sons of God" as human beings, perhaps renowned warriors, but human beings possessed by demons driven by lust, we may have an interpretation that fits the data better than any other. This would also support the interpretation of II Pet. 2:4 given above, that the angelic beings involved in this sin are even now imprisoned, while other fallen angels are active in the world. But the passage in Gen. 6 is so brief and unexplained that it is hard to be definite about any interpretation of it.

D. But by far the greatest emphasis in Scripture (mainly the NT) is not on the demons in general, but on their "prince," Satan. Since he is one and not capable of omnipresence, the beings we actually struggle with most of the time must be demons, Satan's helpers, but the dominant emphasis in Scripture is on Satan himself, rather than his helpers. In the final analysis, this probably makes little difference, since the demons are seen as His servants and defeating them is defeating Satan (Luke 10:17-18). Most of what Scripture tells us of Satan, then, we should see as true of both him and his minions.

Here, too, we deal with a biblical belief largely abandoned by mainline liberal scholarship. I've heard this bit of dialogue attributed both to Karl Barth and a former professor at this institution: "Do you believe in the devil? No, I believe in Jesus Christ." Clever, but such an answer evades the real issue: Is there a being, such as that described in Scripture, that we call Satan? Unfortunately, the biblical evidence, not to mention personal experience, is all too clear in giving an affirmative answer.

1. Satan's origin. Satan suddenly appears in Gen. 3 without explanation, and without being named until long after (Rev. 12:9). There is only one verse that speaks of what happened to transform Satan from an angel to the prince of the demons, I Tim. 3:6, where it is hinted that his sin was pride, or conceit.

John 8:44 may also contain a hint, saying that the devil was a murderer from the beginning, "not holding to the truth," but this is not as clear as the reference in I Timothy. The idea is that he was created in the truth, but did not hold to it. The result was that he became a murderer from the beginning (see I John 3:8, 12: the devil was sinning "from the beginning," and was the operative power behind Cain's murder of Abel).

Some OT scholars think that Is. 14 and Ezek. 28 are veiled references to the fall of Satan, but in context these passages seem to refer clearly to the fall of human kings. Some have seen the language suggestive of a deeper meaning, but in the absence of clearer statements elsewhere in Scripture concerning the fall of Satan, I am hesitant to go beyond the stated reference, which is to the king of Babylon (Is. 14:4) and the king of Tyre (Ezek. 28:1). There is a record of the fall of Satan in Rev. 12, but as I've said, it is placed in the context of human history long after the fall, so there is no biblical account of the origin of Satan. My suspicion is that most of what we have in our minds and popular ideas come more from John Milton's portrayal in *Paradise Lost*, where he tried to fill in the gaps, than Scripture. His work has been very influential in shaping the view of millions who never read it, because it gave us a plausible account.

But there is a deeper theological question here. Where does evil come from? If God is the Creator of all, and all He created was good, what is the source of evil? Who tempted Satan? How are we to explain this? Why are we not given an account of how and why it happened?

One of my professors at Trinity gave me what I think is the best answer I have encountered. There is no answer to the origin of Satan, of evil, of sin, because it is fundamentally inexplicable. No reason is given because it is fundamentally irrational. Isaiah is equally amazed by the people in his day (Is. 1:3-5). Animals know to obey their masters, so why is it that humans, those created in the very image of their Creator, why and how is it that they rebel against goodness and holy love? It is irrational and inexplicable, the mystery of iniquity.

At any rate, the point is that Satan appears, without explanation. We infer that he is a creature of God, learn later that he is among the sons of God (Job 1), learn later still that he fell because of pride or conceit (I Tim. 3:6), but why he should have committed that sin is a mystery.

2. Satan's titles. We know that Satan is a fallen angel, for Job 1-2 includes him among the "sons of God" and his actions reveal his fallenness. Thus, his nature is much the same as that of other angels--he is a being, not a force. He has intelligence and power, and for some reason has assumed a position of leadership among the evil angels, being acknowledged as their prince. Thus we can assume certain truths about his nature in common with the other angels. We get a clearer picture of his character through the titles used for him.

a. Satan (Job 1:6). This is the most common title (about 50 times) and the only one used in the OT, unless we add the title used in Is. 14:12 (Lucifer is the KJV translation of a word that means "shining one"). The Hebrew word *satan* means adversary. In relation to God and those who love God, Satan is against them in every way.

b. Devil (*diabolos*). This is the second most common title for Satan, found about 35 times, only in the NT, beginning with Matt. 4:1. It refers to one who accuses and slanders. He does so with no regard for the truth, since lying is his native language (John 8:44).

c. The Evil One (I Jn. 2:13 and probably Matt. 6:13). Evil describes his heart, his desire, his twisted character.

d. Destroyer (Rev. 9:11). Revelation gives this title in both Hebrew and Greek. God is the Creator; Satan is the Destroyer.

e. There are a number of titles that indicate his power and influence in this present world: the prince of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Eph. 2:2), the god of this age (II Cor. 4:4). These titles imply what is stated in I Jn. 5:19: "the whole world is under the control of the evil one." "World" in these Johannine passages is not so much a geographic sphere as humanity organized in opposition to God. Still, these titles indicate the power and sway of Satan over those outside of Christ. We should expect opposition.

3. Satan's activities. What exactly can Satan do? We need to have a clear view on this, so that we do not blame him for our own sinfulness, nor ignore his influence in areas we may think are ours. Here is a list I derived from the NT.

a. Satan can tempt us (Matt. 4, I Thess. 3:5). We need to remember that temptation is not sin, and that God does not allow it to become more than we can bear, if we are willing to take His way out (I Cor. 10:13). The idea of Satan whispering in our ears, or speaking to our minds, is valid, but does not imply omniscience. He does have a lot of experience in tempting, and the Scripture speaks of various ways we give him access to us. And, of course, he does present sin's pleasures in enticing color, while lying about or ignoring the consequences.

b. He can blind the eyes of non-believers (II Cor. 4:4). This doesn't mean unbelievers are not responsible for their rejection of the gospel, but it does remind us that conversion is not a human possibility, but a divine work. Satan works at shaping world systems, world ideas, as well as individual minds and hearts, to block or distort the light of the gospel. That is why cults and heretical groups so often spring up. It is Satan's blinding, distorting work.

c. He can deceive (Rev. 12:9). He leads people astray, he lies, he twists the truth, even Scripture (Matt. 4:6), and can even do "miracles" to deceive the world (II Thess. 2:9-10, Rev. 13:13-14). I think his major tactic in the West is to deceive people into not believing in his existence, while in the Majority world he deceives them about his power and intimidates them.

d. He can inflict physical suffering, even on a believer. We have the examples of Job (Job 2:1-10) and Paul (II Cor. 12:7), and it may be implied in I Cor. 5:5 and I Tim. 1:20, two cases dealing with discipline. Even so, the result of Satanically caused physical suffering can be, for the wise believer, a closer communion with the Lord.

e. He can plan strategies. II Cor. 2:11 and II Tim. 2:26 indicate that Satan is not acting sporadically, but systematically and strategically, with a definite plan. So we need to be equally strategic, in recognizing our vulnerabilities and taking precautions.

f. He can hinder (I Thess. 2:18). One problem of the Christian life is determining when God has closed a door, and when Satan is opposing. Heb. 5:14 seems to say that spiritual maturity and practice is the only sure way. In I Thess. 2, Paul acknowledges that the devil won a temporary victory.

g. He can use persons as his instruments. I John 3:12 states that Cain belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. I think there are a lot of cases where persons

are used by Satan for his purposes without them having the least idea, even believers (Mark 8:33).

h. He can enslave. John 8:34, Acts 26:18 and I John 5:19 say that all persons without Christ are slaves of Satan. They may think they are free, and he is happy to let them enjoy their illusion, as long as they continue in his way. Heb. 2:14-15 implies that one of Satan's tools in enslaving us is our fear of death. I do not think this passage teaches that Satan has the authority to decide who lives and dies. Rather, the power of death that he has is the power of threatening us with death and condemnation, and enslaving us because of fear. Christ frees us from that.

We could include more, how he counterfeits (II Cor. 11:14-15), slanders God's character and purposes (Gen. 3:4-5), seeks to devour God's people (I Pet. 5:8), lies and is the father of lies (John 8:44), and even incites persecution against God's people (Rev. 2:10), but I think we have a pretty good picture.

4. Satan's limitations. But in all of this, we need to remember that he can do none of this without the permission of God. He is not omnipresent, omniscient, nor omnipotent (Job 1:6-12). He may be successfully resisted by believers (James 4:7), and will be judged and condemned one day by God (Matt. 25:41). He is, as Luther said, God's devil, even if for now on a long chain. His greatest limitation is that he is already definitively defeated. It was determined at the cross (John 12:31, Rev. 12:10-11).

5. Our response. If you try to summarize all Satan's activities and strategies, I think you can narrow it down to intimidation and deception (it even seems that he works primarily through the first in areas where his reality is assumed, and the second in contexts where he is ignored). Our response, then, must be to stand fast against his intimidation and hold to the truth against his deception.

a. Stand on the truth that Satan is a defeated foe. That is why the repeated emphasis in Eph. 6:10-20 is to stand (4 times, "stand"). You have no need to advance, just stand and face him down. Tell him he's a loser when he comes to tempt. His power lies only in deception, illusion, and fear. Speak Scripture to him, use the word as your sword.

b. Give the devil no foothold, no place of entrance in your life (Eph. 4:26-27, II Cor. 2:11). This means resolving anger before it becomes a root of bitterness (Heb. 12:15), being aware of Satan's traps, and being watchful (I Pet. 5:8). Today there are many practices with links to the occult world that Christians should be very wary of.

At the same time, I do not think we can be too rigid or legalistic. For example, while Halloween can certainly be celebrated in a way that glamorizes or trivializes demons and evil, I do not think I have biblical warrant to criticize a fellow believer if he carves a jack-o-lantern or participates in Halloween activities in an appropriate manner. Some may feel convicted to avoid it totally; others may not. We need to think through the implications of our actions in this and other areas, to avoid opening ourselves to evil influences, but to accept that some believers may arrive at a position different from ours.

c. Against his attempts to intimidate, the biblical injunction is simply to resist him (James 4:7, I Pet. 5:9). We have the promise that when we resist him, he eventually has to flee, for "greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world" (I Jn. 4:4).

d. Finally, I think we need to live with confidence. Yes, Satan is real and dangerous, but the NT does not breathe of fear of Satan, but of joyful confidence. Verses like Rom. 8:38-39, 16:20 and II Thess. 3:3 give the dominant attitude of the NT toward Satan. Don't let him squeeze the joy and peace out of your life. He is defeated!

For more on this, I can recommend highly the brief but very good book by Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman, *Sense and Nonsense About Angels and Demons*. For a book with some positions stronger than others, see James Beilby and Paul Eddy, ed., *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views*. For some specific, recent issues, see Clinton Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare*.

Now let us return to our original subject. We were talking about the works of God, specifically the work of creation. We will move now to the work of providence.

B. Providence. We use the word providence to refer to God's ongoing activity in the world. God is not a deist clockmaker who wound up the world and left it to run by itself. He is still immanently active in the world. We may speak of at least two aspects of his providential care: sustaining or preserving all of life, and governing or ruling and directing all things unto His ultimate purposes for them. Some add a third category, that of concurrence, in which God uses natural processes and/or human cooperation to accomplish his purposes (*Theology for the Church*, 280). I see concurrence, not as something distinct from preservation or government, but one of the ways of preserving or governing.

1. Preservation. Scripture speaks at least twenty times of God's oversight of creation in the sense of providing for the needs of animals, humans, and even the land itself (Ps. 36:6-9, 65:9-13). Col. 1:17 and Heb. 1:3 are perhaps the most inclusive statements of this aspect of providence. Preservation can take very concurrent or natural forms (common grace forms), such as providing the rain (Matt. 5:45), the growing of crops (Acts 14:17), even the establishment of civil authority (Rom. 13:1-7). It can take what we regard as miraculous intervention (sparing Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace, Dan. 3:17, 28-29), or it can take the form of timely coincidences (Esther 4:14; "coincidence- a small miracle in which God prefers to remain anonymous").

Preservation does not mean of course that people do not die, or even that God's people are not afflicted. The evidence is obvious that this is not the case. We do suffer, and at those times we often find that God's greatest provision to us in those times of trial is His own presence (Rom. 8:35-39, Ps. 23:4).

God's providential sustenance of this world also means that the creation never becomes independent of its creator, never becomes self-sufficient. On a more positive note, it means that God never leaves or abandons us. He is always at work, holding all things, including our lives, together (Col. 1:17).

2. Governing. Scripture also affirms that God providentially works in history, guiding all events to his intended ends. His attribute of sovereignty is reflected in the influence His government extends over all areas of life, and all persons, though he has a special care for His own people. He controls the forces of nature (Ps. 135:5-7), directs human history (Dan. 2:21, 4:35), and even uses bad acts for good purposes (Gen. 50:20, Acts 2:23, Rom. 8:28). Proverbs says humans may plan and scheme, but it is the Lord that controls the final outcome (Prov. 16:1, 19:21). He can shape hearts and implant thoughts, guiding individuals unknowingly to His purpose for their lives.

Psalms 104 illustrates both aspects of God's providential care. God preserves the life of humans and animals (vv. 11-15; 21; 27-28); he governs what we call the natural order (vv. 9, 19). From one perspective all these things could be explained as the result of natural processes. But Scripture sees God's providence as not contrary to but as the deeper cause of natural processes. To explain how something happens is not to explain why it happens. Thus, the growing of grass can be explained in terms of the process of photosynthesis and God's providential preservation.

*Can you identify an example of God's providential activity in your life? (You could begin with providing air for you to breathe this morning).*

3. Three issues. This doctrine of providence raises three issues that are important both for theology and for practical life and ministry.

a. The first concerns the challenges raised since the Enlightenment concerning the possibility of the miraculous. A God who works quietly, immanently, through natural processes, may be acceptable (for He does nothing that cannot be explained by natural forces), but the possibility of a radically supernatural God, who does miracles, has been strenuously attacked as a violation of the laws of nature and reason.

Basically, the arguments against miracles are based on the presupposition that a sovereign supernatural God does not exist. There are a few extra twists to some of the arguments, but basically the difference lies in what type of God, if any, exists. If a sovereign, genuinely supernatural Creator God does in fact exist, there is nothing odd or unexpected about the fact that He may work miraculously in the world. In fact, given the depth of His interest, shown in the Incarnation, it would be strange if He did not from time to time intervene.

Still, we must admit that miracles are by definition rare, and we shouldn't "expect a miracle." They are by definition unexpected. Further, Jesus spoke some strong words against those who seek for a sign. I do not think God wants to make His existence and power more obvious than it is. If He overwhelms us with proof, how are we going to learn to trust Him? As Phillip Yancey notes, the periods of the greatest concentrations of miracles in Scripture (Moses, Judges, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus) did not produce the type of widespread love and trust among God's people that we would have expected (see Yancey's *Disappointed With God*). Miracles can be used by God to glorify Himself, to guide and confirm revelation, and to meet needs, but they are strictly in the hands of God, and never dependent on human agents, or the fervency of our

prayers. Apparently, miracles do not produce the intimate relationship of love and trust that God desires.

b. The second issue raised by the doctrine of providence is confusion over prayer. We love to say: "Prayer changes things." Does it? If God has a plan, and is already committed to guiding all things to accomplish His purpose, how does prayer change things? Why are we commanded to pray?

And if I pray longer, am I more likely to get the answer I want? Does God answer prayer prayed by 100 more than prayers prayed by 10? Do I get through more quickly if I am more fervent or if I fast, or if I really believe? Some of those in the health and wealth theology seem to think we can force God to act as we want if we believe something strongly enough. I think all these seem to suppose God is unwilling to bless or unaware of our needs and must be coerced into acting. God is willing, aware, able and desirous of blessing us. So, why pray?

There are a couple of answers to these questions. The first is that God's plan includes the means by which He chooses to accomplish His ends. For example, suppose God has sovereignly decided that He is going to heal John Smith of cancer. But He has also decided to enlist certain of His people as His partners in the process, and is guiding them to pray for John Smith. Certainly He could heal John Smith without their prayers, but He has given some of His people the privilege of participating with Him in His work, and He makes their prayers the means of calling down God's blessing on John Smith's life. Certainly God can work apart from our prayers, but He has given us the dignity of meaningful participation in His work. He takes our prayers seriously, and so should we. If we don't pray, He knows that too and can work despite us, allowing others to be a blessing and disciplining us for our disobedience.

The second answer is that prayer does indeed change things; it changes our ideas, understanding, willingness, etc. It changes us. This is why we persist in prayer, why we fast and ask others to join us in prayer. In prayer we are not seeking to change God's plan, but to understand it and adapt ourselves to it ("Thy will be done" Mt. 6:10). As we persist, we have the chance to hear God's voice more clearly. We fast, not to impress God, but to make more time to devote to prayer, and we ask others to join us, for as more pray, we have a better chance of understanding God's plan. We learn persistence, discernment, submission, and faith, all of which are spiritually healthy. Prayer is intrinsically good, good for us, apart from the answers we get. Quite often we see the part we need to do in being the answer to our prayer, or we see that the prayer itself is wrong, or that we are asking for the wrong thing.

Petitionary prayer recognizes that God's perfect will is not always done on earth as in heaven (Mt. 6:10). Thus we reject the status quo and fatalism, and all arguments that things can't be changed. We rebel, not against God, but against the evil that God too hates. We recognize that God alone can change things and thus cry out to him. This is another distinctive of Christianity--neither the fatalistic resignation to the will of Allah characteristic of Islam, nor the attempt to extinguish all desire common in Buddhism, but asking God to intervene in a fallen world to accomplish his purposes. Thus, while prayer is not attempting to coerce God, it can and should be forceful and persistent, for it expresses our love and concern for those for whom we are praying and it expresses our fervent desire to see God's will done on earth and his name

glorified. This is also why we want others to pray with us. It's not to increase our power, but to increase our openness to God's will and work in and through us.

To the charge that prayer "doesn't work," (i.e., isn't answered), I think we may affirm that God always answers in one or more ways. Paul Eschlemann gave me a helpful way to remember the different ways God answers:

When my request is wrong, God says no.  
 When my life is wrong, God says grow.  
 When the timing is wrong, God says slow.  
 When everything is right, God says go.

It is not always obvious which of these is God's answer to a particular petition, but I think God does always answer in one of these ways.

Finally, we should note that asking is not all that should be going on in prayer. There should be thanksgiving, praise, and simply unburdening our hearts before God. We pray because we need to pray and want to talk to God; not just to get something. Still, in those areas of prayer where we are asking, it is meaningful. No, we do not seek to change God's will, nor inform Him of developments He had not foreseen. We seek to fulfill our role as His partners, and to pray with sensitive spirits to allow Him to change us as we spend time before Him.

For more on prayer in relationship to providence, see the very fine work by Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*.

c. But certainly, the biggest problem in the doctrine of providence is what is called the problem of evil, or theodicy (*theos*: God, and *dike*: justice).

It may be considered in two aspects. The first and easier question is sin. If God is the author of all, and all is done according to His sovereign plan, is God the author of sin?

Some stricter Calvinists maintain that God somehow ordains the evil acts that sinners do, yet because they do it willingly, God is not the author of it. This is called God working through secondary causes, or working concurrently. They point to numerous verses, mainly in the OT, that say God indirectly brought about some kind of evil:

Gen. 50:20, the sin of Joseph's brothers;  
 Ex. 9:12, hardening Pharaoh's heart;  
 Josh. 11:20, hardening the hearts of the Canaanites;  
 II Sam. 24:1, inciting David to sin by numbering the people (through the agency of Satan, I Chron. 21:1);  
 Acts 2:23 and 4:27, the action of God and wicked men in the death of Jesus.

But in all these cases, God is not morally culpable, for he never does morally evil acts. Many of these verses speak of God's judicial action, in sending chastisement or punishment for previously committed sin. Others speak of how God marvelously uses sinful acts for righteous purposes (Joseph, the death of Christ). Still, even when God is said to incite David's sin, David

sees himself as responsible (II Sam. 24:10), and Paul, in his strongest statement of God's sovereignty (Rom. 9:19-21, see also Rom. 3:5-6), refuses to allow God's sovereignty to cancel human moral culpability. As the Abstract of Principles puts it, "God from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not in any wise to be author or approver of sin nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures." A. H. Strong sees a fourfold way in which God relates to evil: (1) preventative (God prevents evil from happening), (2) permissive (God lets evil happen), (3) directive (God directs evil acts to accomplish good ends), and (4) determinative (God sets boundaries for evil).

Of these, it seems that God's relationship to sinful acts is usually that he **permits** them (Acts 14:16, Psalm 81:12-13). What God **ordains** is that morally responsible agents be permitted to act. God certainly can prevent sin, limit sin, and use sin for his purposes, but the general teaching of the Bible seems to me to be that God doesn't like sin, it isn't what He wants us to do, but He permits us the freedom to choose to do it. Strict Calvinists do not like to weaken God's causality to mere permission, but I think it is biblical.

We must make some type of a distinction between what God directs and what God permits. Eph. 1:11 says that God does everything according to the counsel of His will. Thus, everything happens within the circle of His will. But Matt. 6:10 commands us to pray that God's will be done, which assumes it isn't always done. Overlapping the circle of God's **permissive** will (which some call his **decretive** will), there is also a smaller circle of God's **directive** will (which some call his **perfect** will or **moral** will), which is not always done, for it excludes sin and sin does happen. Sin also has effects. We do lose something; some possibilities for good and blessing are gone. Sin does hurt, both the sinner and the one sinned against. But because God is omnipotent in grace and incredibly creative, He can even use our sin for good in our lives. It will not be the good that could have been (not the perfect will of God), but it is the good God works for despite our failings (Rom. 8:28).

The second and more difficult form of the problem is the broader problem of evil in all its forms. Even if we grant that God is not the author of evil, why does He permit evil? The core of the problem may be seen in the questions put to Christians by David Hume: "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing: whence then is evil?" Or to put it in a logical syllogism:

An all-good God would destroy evil.  
 An all-powerful God could destroy evil.  
 But evil is not destroyed.  
 Hence, an all-good, all-powerful God does not exist.

There are two preliminary responses to this syllogism. The first is that even if the problem of evil cannot be explained, it doesn't necessarily follow that God doesn't exist, for there are other factors. On atheistic grounds, it is equally difficult to explain the problem of pleasure and the existence of moral good in the world. Also, evil itself can be an argument for the existence of God. For if God does not exist, then moral values don't exist, including evil. But it is very hard to deny the reality of evil in a post 9-11 world with terrorist activity all around. But if evil exists, then moral values exist, which implies a Moral Law-Giver, God.

While this problem is more central to courses on the philosophy of religion, it is also part of systematic theology. You need to be prepared, for you will encounter this issue on two levels in your ministry. One will be with some who truly have an intellectual problem with this issue and need some intellectual answers. For those, we are giving you some starting points and a number of books to take you further. Far more common will be those who encounter evil in their own lives and are asking "Why? Why did God let this happen?" These people do not need a course in philosophy of religion, they need pastoral ministry. You can help them in advance by dealing with some of the themes that help us understand God's purposes in suffering, but in the moment of crisis, much of what I am about to say does not need to be said.

Nevertheless, there are some biblical themes, which, while not giving a complete answer to every specific case, do give some insights into this issue, as well as some helpful books, which I will cite along the way.

(1) First and most important, human freedom is by far the largest factor in the problem of evil. The whole biblical narrative makes little sense without the understanding that God created human beings with a freedom that included the possibility of evil. Otherwise, why the prohibition in Gen. 2:16? Why did God create the tree of the knowledge of good and evil if he didn't want them to eat of it? The answer is because He created humanity to choose to obey, to choose to love, and that involved also the possibility of choosing to disobey and hate.

This position, called the free-will defense, has been a large part of most Christian responses, dating from Augustine to C. S. Lewis (*The Problem of Pain*) and others. It responds to the logical syllogism above by denying that a good God would destroy evil. If destroying evil required destroying freedom, and freedom is necessary for love and faith and all the good things that God desires for humanity, then a good God would not destroy evil. Besides, if destroying evil meant destroying all of us who are the carriers of evil, do we really want God to destroy evil? If God destroyed all evil at midnight tonight, which of us would be around at 12:01 a.m.?

Thus, while the problem of evil is often seen as a challenge to the idea of a loving God, it can also be seen as revealing the depth of the love of God. He created us for the blessing of communion with Him, and that requires freedom. Therefore, knowing that many will misuse their freedom, and that His creatures, His Son, and even He himself will suffer because of that misuse of freedom, still He chose to create us with that freedom, for without it we could not enjoy the greatest blessing, genuine communion with Him. God chose to suffer the pain of knowing intimately every evil inflicted on everyone anywhere in the world; chose it, foreknowing all that it would involve, so he could make you more than a robot. I think that is profound.

You will find in philosophers of religion debates on the possibility of whether or not God could have created truly free beings who would not choose evil. While philosophers debate it, I think most of us would reply instinctively no. Freedom carries with it a great danger. God has given us a terrible burden in granting us real freedom, real choice. And the great majority of evil in the world can be traced to the misuse of freedom by human beings. In fact, Alvin Plantinga, the foremost philosopher of religion in the U.S. today, believes that it is possible to explain all

evil as the result of the misuse of freedom by either fallen angels or humans (*God, Freedom, and Evil*).

(2) Some evil is necessary to develop certain moral virtues. Who develops patience without the temptation to be impatient? Who learns to forgive without being sinned against? Who would learn the meaning of sacrifice if there was no pain involved? Who would learn courage if there was nothing scary in the world?

Among philosophers, this is sometimes known as the "best way" theodicy, or, in John Hick's terminology, the Irenaean theodicy. This world is not the best of all worlds, but the best way to the best of all worlds (which will be heaven). According to Hick (*Evil and the God of Love*), the explanation stemming from Irenaeus is that this world is a "vale of soul-making," and therefore "designed as an environment in which finite persons may develop the more valuable qualities of moral personality." As a biblical basis, Heb. 2:10, 5:8-9, Rom. 5:3-5, James 1:2-4 and numerous other verses can be cited.

This world is the best way to the best of all possible worlds for in this world, creatures with freedom may develop virtues that only develop in an environment in which evil exists, may make a decisive choice for fellowship with God, and may arrive at the best of all possible worlds much richer because of the path traveled to arrive at that world.

God can even use evil in one life for good in another's life. For example, caring for an elderly Alzheimer's patient can develop genuine unconditional love in the caregiver, and may be part of God's purpose in allowing them to linger.

As Hick notes, this solution requires an eschatological perspective, in which we look toward and value the end of the process. It reformulates the syllogism we looked at earlier as follows:

A good God would destroy evil.  
 An all powerful God could destroy evil.  
 Evil is not destroyed...yet.  
 Therefore, an all good and all powerful God will destroy evil after He has used it to accomplish His good purposes.

(3) Some of what is called natural evil (hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.) may also be traced indirectly to sin. Gen. 3:17-19 and Rom. 8:19-21 suggest such a link with the fall of humanity, and there may also be a link with fallen angels, who are also a cause of some of the evil in this world (II Cor. 12:7, for example). Even natural evil would not cause much of the suffering it does if it were not for human evil. For example, droughts wouldn't bring starvation if those with plenty shared with those in need. Even fallen as it is, the world produces enough food for all; the problem is distribution.

(4) We should note that we bring some suffering and evil upon ourselves by our own sin (Gal. 6:7: the law of sowing and reaping). But we should also be quick to say that this is not true of all suffering (Job 1-2, John 9:1-3).

(5) We should emphasize, in our pastoral ministry especially, that God himself has suffered and knows what it is like (Heb. 2:17-18, 4:15-16). His presence and comfort and empathy mean much more in the moment of sadness and suffering than all the intellectual answers we can suggest (see Philip Yancey, *Where is God When It Hurts?*).

(6) We must also insist upon an eschatological perspective, with a time of judgment to right all the injustices of life, and a life beyond the tomb which rewards the development of moral virtues, takes the sting out of death, and makes the sufferings of this world appear light and momentary (II Cor. 4:17, Rom. 8:18, Psalm 73). I think we must say forthrightly that without heaven and life beyond the tomb, Christianity has no answer to the injustices of this world. Eternal life is not an optional extra, but a necessary part of resolving the enigma of evil. Jesus said, "Great is your reward in heaven;" there is no guarantee that following Christ will produce overall profit in this life.

These suggestions will not cover all the cases of evil you see. Some evil is horrific and none of these purposes seem to fit. I acknowledge that we see very much in part now, but I believe Scripture teaches that God has a purpose in all that happens, even if it is incomprehensible to me now. For now, we live by faith in the face of what often appears to be gratuitous and pointless evil.

*What from our discussion on prayer or the problem of evil, have you found helpful, either in resolving questions you have heard or have heard from others? What is one thing you might want to share with a friend who has not had the opportunity to take a class like this? (Remember, you are somebody's theologian).*

This concludes the first portion of our treatment of the works of God, biblical foundations. Now we want to add to our understanding by examining some of the important historical controversies and developments surrounding creation and providence.

## II. Historical Developments.

A. The Creation/Evolution Debate. When we turn from God's nature and attributes to God's work, we immediately think of the controversy over God's creative work, or the debate over creation and evolution. It is worth observing that initially, Darwin's theory of evolution was not seen as an insuperable problem for Christian theology, and a number of evangelical scholars simply saw evolution as the method God used in creation. But in the twentieth century, evolution was increasingly used seen in naturalistic terms, and used as an argument against divine creation. The famous Scopes trial of 1925 hardened the opposition of evolution to creation, and the growing dominance of evolution as the accepted scientific explanation of the world has caused Christians to look again at Gen. 1-2 and their interpretations of these chapters. Understanding and responding to the current situation requires attention to three separate questions.

1. **Did** God create the universe? On this all Christians should be able to agree, and must. Divine creation is an essential aspect of Christian theology. The alternative to the Creator-God is the eternal existence of matter (itself a sizable item of faith), which, when combined with sufficient time and chance, produced this universe. Without creation, the universe has no purpose, human beings have no dignity, and all the beauty and meaning we sense is an

illusion. Evolutionists do not always point out the consequences of their theories, but we should be aware that creation is no inconsequential doctrine, but absolutely fundamental.

Further, it is the fact of God as Creator that is the focus of Scripture. Of approximately 110 passages on creation in Scripture, 90 name God as Creator, and 38 specifically affirm God as creator of all. By contrast, the time involved in creation, the most controversial issue among us today, is discussed only twice in Scripture.

2. **How** did God create the universe? I believe that a failure to fully think through this question has led to a lot of problems for believers.

First, though it has been often stated, we still need to remember that the question of the Bible is most often "why?" or "to what purpose?" or "who?" while the question of science is "how?" I affirm without hesitation that anything the Bible teaches in the realm of science is true, but I do not believe the Bible is terribly concerned about the "how" question. Leon Morris makes this point with the following analogy:

In answering the question, why is the kettle boiling, one can speak of the striking of a match, the kindling of the gas flame, the increase of the temperature of the water and so on. The chain of cause and effect can be complete. But it is also possible to answer the question by saying, "because I want to make a cup of coffee." The second answer is just as true as the first. It would be foolish to deny the truth of the second on the grounds that the first can be demonstrated scientifically. The scientific explanation while true is not the only one. And it may be argued that it is not the most significant one. (*Christianity Today*, (Aug. 11, 1972), 42).

The same point is made by the following story:

Imagine a family of mice who lived all their lives in a large piano. To them in the piano-world came the music of the instrument, filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was Someone who made the music--though invisible to them--above, yet close to them. They loved to think of the Great Player whom they could not see.

Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano and returned very thoughtful. He had found out how the music was made. Wires were the secret; tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths which trembled and vibrated. They must revise all their old beliefs: none but the most conservative could any longer believe in the Unseen Player.

Later, another explorer carried the explanation further. Hammers were now the secret, numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The Unseen Player came to be thought of as a myth.

But the pianist continued to play. (Reprinted from "The London Observer" in *Leadership* 4, no. 3 [Summer 1983]; 95.)

I have quoted this story at length because I think it gives as effective an answer to the evolutionist as any I have heard. Which mice understood the world better: the modern or the medieval? I think we may ask the same question as to which generation of human beings better understands the meaning of this world. Our century may know the mechanics better, but I think past generations better understood the meaning.

My point is that when we try to give an answer to the question of how God created, we must beware, for we are entering somewhat alien territory. It is much more a question of science. It is certainly not central to the Scripture's message.

Also, when we enter the scientific area, most of us are bound to be at a disadvantage. I am an expert in theology and Scripture. I have read the literature, I have studied the source materials, I know it. But I am a novice in science. Among Christians who are scientists, there are conflicting views, so who is a non-scientist to believe?

My approach is to evaluate the differing approaches, not in terms of their dealing with the scientific evidence, but their biblical and theological viability. On the question of how God I think three views can make a case for biblical-theological viability.

a. Direct creation of every species. This is usually associated with what is called young earth creationism, in which the apparent age of the earth is explained as a result of the Noahic flood. For arguments for this view, see Kurt Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms About Creation and the Age of the Universe*, and the Answers in Genesis website ([www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org)).

b. Progressive creation (God created the first of every "kind" then allowed micro-evolution to develop all our present species over a long period of time. This view allows for an old earth and a variety of views on exactly when and how God's creative activity occurred, but does affirm God's specific involvement in all areas of creation. One of the most prominent defenders of this view is Hugh Ross (see his numerous books and the Reasons to Believe website, [www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org)).

c. Theistic evolution, or as its contemporary advocates prefer, evolutionary creationism. Those in this camp argue that evolution is not inherently naturalistic, despite the fact that many evolutionists claim that it is so. According to this view, God can be the ultimate cause of creation (the why of creation), with evolution as the instrumental cause (the how of creation). They would point out that this is how Scripture often speak of God's work. For example, in Psalm 104:14, God making grass to grow does not preclude the use of photosynthesis, and God feeding the birds (Matt. 6:26) does not preclude a complex cycle of life involving numerous instrumental causes. Just as Scripture does not spell out all the steps in the growing of grass and the feeding of birds, so it does not spell out all the steps in the creation of the universe. And just as further study of God's world has discovered the mechanisms of photosynthesis and ecosystems, so it has found the mechanism of evolution. This view is supported by Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* and the BioLogos Foundation website ([www.biologos.org](http://www.biologos.org)).

This view has remained controversial in evangelical circles for a number of reasons. Some think for God to use evolution as the mechanism for creation would be immoral. A system in which animals struggle for survival, and whole species die out and only the fittest survive, seems contrary to the picture of creation in which everything is good, and contrary to the teaching that death entered the world only after sin (this is one of the main criticisms of young earth creationists against all other views).

Others think such criticisms push beyond the clear teaching of Scripture. There is no indication in Genesis 3 that a curse was placed on the animal kingdom as the result of sin, such that death entered it then. Human death is the result of sin (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:12); animal death is not discussed. Moreover, William Dembski (*The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World*) has argued that Adam's sin may have introduced death into the animal kingdom retroactively, just as Christ's death provided forgiveness for the righteous who lived before him. J. I. Packer sees nothing in Scripture that decides the question of evolution one way or the other.

I think the most that theology and Scripture can say to the question of how God created is to say that all three of the views surveyed here are possible, and thus I think we must allow some room for diversity here. There is simply not much in the way of specifics given on the how of creation, and I want to be cautious to not claim more than Scripture affirms. On the issue of the creation of humans, I think the image of God, by its very nature, could only be produced by special, direct creation. Beyond that, I see nothing in Scripture that endorses, or rejects, some possible use of evolution in creation.

3. **When** did God create the earth? Many contend that a common-sense, straightforward reading of Genesis 1 leads naturally to a six 24 hour day theory of creation and that any other theories fudge with Scripture in the desire to satisfy science. They overlook one very notable example in history when scientific findings caused a universal modification of the interpretation of Scripture. Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and others all thought Scripture taught that the earth was stationary and the sun moved; no one today affirms that. We see biblical language of the sun rising and setting as giving how things look from our perspective (phenomenological language).

While the young-earth, six day creation view has been the overwhelmingly majority opinion in Christian history, there have been from the beginning some alternative suggestions, and in recent years others receiving significant support. The three most prominent views among evangelicals are given in the interestingly titled book, *The G3n3s1s Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*.

a. The six 24 hour day theory stands for a very young earth. The days of Genesis 1 are seen as literal days, and the genealogies in the book of Genesis and elsewhere are seen as allowing us to roughly calculate the when of creation. The apparent age of the earth that geologists see is explained either by the catastrophe of the Noahic flood, or as the result of God creating things with the appearance of age. The problem with "flood geology" is that it has not been widely accepted by professional geologists, either Christian or non-Christian. The criticism of God creating things with the appearance of age has been that it makes God seem deceptive.

Biblically, the affirmation of the days of Genesis as literal days has been questioned hermeneutically as imposing modern categories on an Ancient Near Eastern document, and exegetically as overlooking numerous hints in Gen. 1 and 2 that these days may not be literal days. Advocates defend their view as supported by the normal meaning of day (*yom*) elsewhere in Scripture, especially when coupled with ordinal numbers (first, second, etc.) and the formula “evening and morning,” and the appeal to creation in the establishment of the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11).

b. The age-day theory encompasses a variety of non-literal views of the six days. They give two types of reasons for rejecting the traditional view. The first are heremeneutical/exegetical. Many OT commentators believe the literal view does not account sufficiently for the original audience and purpose of Genesis, and is asking Genesis to answer questions it is not asking (I surveyed eleven evangelical commentaries on Genesis 1, and found one affirming literal 24 hour days). Others see internal features in Gen. 1 (the creation of the sun on the fourth day, the lack of the refrain after the seventh day) and Gen. 2 (the passage of many days between the development of plants and the creation of man in Gen. 2:5-7, the lengthy list of events that happened on the sixth day in Gen. 2:8-23, Adam’s exclamation of “at last” upon seeing Eve in Gen. 2:23) as indicating something other than literal days. John Collins sees the days as analogical language, referring to “God’s workdays,” and thinks the length is neither specified nor important (C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4*).

Others want to correlate Scripture and science, and hold for some type of correspondence between the six days of creation and the generally accepted scientific account of creation. Hugh Ross has written several books commenting on the numerous significant areas of correspondence he sees, and presents this view in the three views book referenced above.

c. The literary framework view was presented initially by Meredith Kline in 1958, and has gained increasing acceptance since then, especially among OT scholars. It relies on internal evidence from the text of Genesis, and argues that the six days are non-literal and non-sequential. Days 1, 2, and 3 give the creation kingdoms of light, sky/seas, and dry land/vegetation; days 4, 5, and 6 give those who exercise dominion in these spheres (luminaries, sea/winged creatures, land animals/humans). Day 7 is reserved for the King over all. Others see the first three days as days of forming, and the latter three as days of filling. But in either case, they see Moses’ intent in Genesis 1-2, not as giving a modern, scientific account of creation, but as countering the creation myths of Ancient Near Eastern culture. The features he presents are intended to do just that.

Bruce Waltke argues very strongly (“The Literary Genre of Genesis, Chapter 1,” *Crux* 27/4 (December, 1991), 2-10) that the six days of creation are a construct to affirm monotheistic creation against the polytheistic, syncretistic creation myths of Near Eastern culture. Waltke cites Conrad Hyer’s words:

on the first day the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. On the second day the gods of sky and sea. On the third day, earth gods and gods of vegetation. On the fourth day, sun, moon and star gods. The fifth and sixth days take away any associations of divinity from the animal kingdom. And finally, human existence, too, is emptied of any intrinsic

divinity - while the same time all human beings, from the greatest to the least, and not just pharaohs, kings, and heroes, are granted a divine likeness and mediation (3).

No one questions that God could create everything in 6 days, or 6 hours for that matter. The issue is what is the most natural reading of the text. What was the point of the original author? Waltke says: “A sequential reading of the text lacks cogency. How can there be three days characterized by day and night before the creation of the luminaries to separate the day from the night and to mark off the days? Are we clueless?” (7).

To the counter argument that the establishment of the Sabbath day (Exodus 20) requires six 24 hour days, it may be noted that the eight day Feast of Tabernacles was given to commemorate a forty year event, the journey to the promised land, and that the idea of a Sabbath was also extended to giving the land a sabbath year. Further, the seventh day, which the Sabbath commemorates, is nowhere indicated to be a 24 hour day. It is not limited by the phrase “evening and morning” and seems to be symbolic for a much longer time in Heb. 3-4. Thus, the importance of the establishment of the seventh day may be more a commemoration of God's creation and the pattern of one day in seven, without requiring a 24 hour day interpretation of Genesis 1.

In fact, the longer I study Genesis 1, the more I come to agree that it is simply not a scientific account. Had it been so, it would have been virtually useless until the past century. Insisting that it is a scientific account may cause unnecessary conflicts with science and obscures the more important theological message these chapters were written to convey. But in terms of our question, when did God create, I think all three of these views can claim biblical-theological viability. I will not venture to pronounce on whether or not the young-earth position is scientifically viable. As I have said, I lack the expertise to do so. But I would be less than honest if I did not report that it is not well respected outside of the most conservative evangelical circles.

*I realize I am presenting options that some of you may have not considered as viable before. What questions do you still have? Do you find this helpful, disturbing, or both?*

B. God's Providence. The other work of God which needs a historical perspective is the work of providence, especially as it relates to the problem of evil. We noted earlier that this issue has attracted considerable attention in the history of theology. Augustine was in his earlier years attracted to the dualistic philosophy of Manichaeism, which affirmed the eternal existence of evil and thus limited the omnipotence and sovereignty of God. In his solution to the problem of evil, then, he reaffirmed God as the Creator of all and denied the positive existence of evil. Evil is not a thing, said Augustine, but a lack or privation in a thing. Thus blindness is not a positive thing, but a lack of the ability to see. This may not be particularly satisfying to a suffering individual, but it solved his philosophical problem, when combined with the idea of the misuse of freedom.

Of more interest to me is the sense that began with the Enlightenment and has reached epic proportions in recent years that the problem of evil has made the Christian concept of God untenable. Especially since World War II, the challenge to God's providence raised by the problem of evil has become more pronounced and more discussed than ever before.

One particularly poignant voice that has raised the problem of evil is Elie Wiesel, a German Jew who suffered through the Nazi concentration camps, and saw suffering and inhumanity that killed his belief in God. When he saw a young boy hanged at a concentration camp, he says it was as if God had died in his heart (among Wiesel's many books, see *Night*).

Certainly we have seen much evil this century, with two world wars, the holocaust, and the dropping of atomic bombs. But my reading of history suggests that while our century may have seen destruction on a larger scale, evil of this type has been common in the history of humanity. Genocide of whole races, mass slaughter in times of warfare, inhuman forms of torture--this is the material of the history of the human race. Such things should arouse our indignation and we should long for criminals to be brought to justice, but this type of hatred and evil has been going on for centuries. Why should it all of a sudden be so much more of a theological problem than it had been in earlier centuries?

The sense of outrage that many have at the problem of evil is especially surprising when one realizes that we live in a time when there are more creature comforts, more ways to alleviate pain and suffering than ever before. Try to imagine a world without anesthetic or aspirin or antibiotics. Why do we feel this problem so much more severely than previous generations? They recognized it, and spoke to it, but felt satisfied that their explanations were sufficient. They experienced more suffering and pain, yet saw less of a theological problem with it. Why?

Perhaps part of it can be attributed to the rise of technology, which has given us, on the one hand, much greater efficiency and power in unleashing our hatred on one another, and on the other hand, has given us media which enable us to see in living color evil and suffering around the world. In previous times, people saw their own suffering; we see the suffering of the world.

I think a larger part of our problem with evil has been the fact that it shattered the illusion we wanted to maintain that humanity was getting better, evolving to a higher level, and that with a little more technology and education, all would be well. That was the reigning view in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The First World War jarred that idea, but there was still hope, for that was the war fought to end all wars, and the League of Nations would protect the peace. But the Depression, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb shattered whatever optimism remained among most of the intelligentsia (some of the hope in evolution and technology remains on a popular level, as seen in *Star Trek*, for example). The evolutionary process does not seem to be improving humanity, and technological improvement has only improved our efficiency at destroying one another.

But I think by far the greatest factor in the growing sense that the problem of evil is an insuperable problem for Christian theism is a different view of what this world is for. For example, in the medieval era, this world was largely viewed as a vale of tears, a place of sadness and pain, where we prepared for eternity. Eternity loomed much larger then than it does now, and the desire for heaven and the sense of the wonder of heaven was much greater. In the theodicy stemming from Irenaeus, as we saw earlier, this world is a place of soul-making.

But from the Renaissance forward, a great shift began. Emphasis was placed on here and now, rather than eternity. At first it was a healthy balance, but soon the present began to crowd out eternity. With that change, the idea of the purpose of this world began to change. David

Hume, in the Enlightenment, assumed that this world should be viewed like a house. God, as the presumed architect, surely would have wanted to make his house large and comfortable. But the presence of evil indicated to Hume that God was a very inept architect. For later utilitarian philosophers like John Stuart Mill, the goal of life is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. But the world does not seem constructed with that goal in mind. Thus, they concluded, God must not be good, or must not be in charge.

In our century, our technological advances have produced such physical comforts and such spiritual dimness that there are few, even among evangelical Christians, who long for heaven. Few of us can imagine a world better than this (as the commercial says, "It just doesn't get any better than this"). Having dropped our expectation and hope for heaven, we expect more from this world, and we are disappointed. If this world is all there is, it better be good. If something bad happens to me, it is intolerable. Someone ought to pay. Bad things ought not to happen. But this is earth, not heaven. The problem is not with the evil in the world; it is with our expectation of this world. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation" (Jn. 16:33); he said, "Great is your reward in heaven" (Mt. 5:12). The theological answer to the problem of pain lies in a renewed understanding of this world as the preparation for real and larger life, which lies ahead.

C. S. Lewis put it this way. If we think of this world as a hotel, we shall be very disappointed. The service is poor, the rooms aren't always comfortable, etc. But if we think of it as a prison, it's not all that bad. Actually, he says, we ought to see it as a school. We are here to learn, but it's not home. We need surrender neither the power of God nor the goodness of God; rather, we need to remember the purpose of God.

*What do you expect of heaven that you do not expect of earth? Yet do you find yourself complaining that earth does not provide what you expect properly only of heaven? What should you expect of earth?*

III. A Contemporary Theological Formulation. As with the nature and attributes of God, so there are aspects both of creation and providence that require careful theological formulation and defense in our contemporary situation.

A. Creation. Important as the creation/evolution debate has been and still is, I believe it is time for us to shift the way we carry on the debate. Instead of asking ordinary Christians to debate with trained scientists, let us get down to the fundamental issue. We may say, "Suppose we grant you the mechanics of evolution. You still haven't answered why matter existed in the first place, or why there should have been any impulse toward life, or how evolution produced self-conscious beings with a moral nature, an impulse to worship, and a longing for beauty and meaning." Remember the illustration of the family of mice in the piano. I think we can make our best arguments for a Creator along these lines, while continuing in academic circles to challenge the unproven assumptions of evolutionary science. And maintaining the Creator is imperative for at least two contemporary issues.

First, we will never get a right perspective on the environment without recognizing its Creator. Right now, many environmentalists teach quite candidly that Christianity and its teaching that humans are to subdue the earth is the basis for our ecological and environmental

problems. Sadly, there is enough truth in that statement in terms of how Christians have misinterpreted Gen. 1 to give some credence to it. But a better interpretation of Gen. 1 and a recognition of creation as part of God's revelation and our role as stewards can lead us to a better perspective. We must neither neglect our environmental stewardship (as many Christians have in the past), nor idolize the creation (as some environmentalists do), but use it wisely and preserve its beauty so that it may continue to proclaim the glories of the Creator.

The second issue where the Creator is imperative is in anthropology. Increasingly today, humans are being regarded as either animals that can be conditioned or machines that can be programmed. In either way, there is little human dignity (see B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*). Developments in neurobiology and genetic research imply that all we are is “a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules” (see Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis*). The only way we can preserve a basis for human dignity is to ground it in our creation in the image of a Creator who has made us with freedom, responsibility and dignity.

B. Providence. We divided the work of providence into the areas of preservation and government, the first being God's work of sustaining life. As we have moved from an agrarian to an industrial society, we may well have lost our sense of God's provision for us. We do not see as clearly that our food is dependent on God's gifts of rain and sun, for we get our food from the grocery store, not from God.

Moreover, preservation was also linked with the idea that God continually upheld the world, an idea largely denied by modern science that regards the natural world as a closed system of causes and effects that has no need for a Divine Sustainer. We disagree with this view, but preservation may make more sense to modern people if we can explain it in terms more relevant to their perceived needs. Stanley Grenz suggests we view God's preservation as preservation from meaninglessness. That is a threat much more felt by the average person today than starvation or dissolution of the universe. We may affirm that God not only holds the universe together, but holds our lives together and provides meaning.

In the area of God's governance of the world, we have already discussed the need to view this world and life from an eschatological perspective, as a place of soul-making. This means in our theological formulation of other doctrines, such as salvation, we recognize the importance of salvation for our present condition, but state clearly that the dominant biblical theme in regards to salvation is not "abundant life now," wonderful as that may be, but "the blessed hope" that lies ahead. In other words, when we preach about salvation, preach about how it will transform present life, but emphasize even more heaven and hell, and the greater issue of our eternal destiny. If we are accused of scaring people by preaching about hell, we may respond that fear is a proper response to the real existence of something fearful, which hell is.

IV. Practical Applications. We have made mention throughout of several ways in which this doctrine should shape our lives and ministries, but I do not want to conclude our study without noting a few more practical applications.

A. Evangelism. Study of the doctrine of God should lead every Christian to the conclusion that the pluralistic idea that all religions are different roads to the same destination is utterly false. The Christian idea of God is distinctive and glorious, and should motivate our

evangelism, not only because of the needs of lost people, but because of the glory of God. He is worthy of the worship and adoration of every heart that beats on this planet.

B. Comfort. Meditation on God should bring joy and assurance and comfort to the Christian's heart. For example, when we think of the Trinity, what comfort we should derive from knowing that our salvation is secured by a fully divine Savior, and that we are indwelt and sanctified and kept by the power of a fully divine Holy Spirit. This is not abstract theology, but the basis for joy and assurance.

C. Ethics. Here the model of the Trinity has special relevance. It teaches us that before anything else existed, there was eternal love, expressed in the Trinity. God did not create out of need, but out of overflowing love. The Trinity teaches that at the basis of all reality, there is not only unity, but community, and that the pattern of the Godhead is the pattern for humanity, and will be present at the consummation of God's plan. We are made to live in community.

Moreover, the Trinity also speaks to roles and relationships among humans. The Trinity teaches that submission and obedience do not imply inferiority, but are written into the fabric of existence. The Son submits to the Father; the Spirit serves to glorify the Father and Son, all within perfect equality. We need to grasp the truth that submission is not just for wives, but is integral to the Christian lifestyle. Yes, it applies to wives toward husbands, but also to all of us to the Lord, church members to their leaders, and in person to person relations, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). It is part of the Christian lifestyle.

D. Personal Growth. No one can lead others beyond the level of his or her own personal growth, and the basis for all growth is growth in the knowledge of God. And genuine knowledge of the one true God does expand, elevate and transform a life. In fact, it is so powerful that we often shrink from a true encounter with the Infinite-Personal God we have studied. One of the greatest temptations we all face is to cut God down to manageable proportions. A man named Wilbur Rees put it this way:

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please; not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. (*Leadership* 4, no. 1 [Winter, 1983], 107).

Resist the temptation to shrink God; let all you have learned and all that is in Scripture shape your mental picture of God, and grow in the powerful, transforming knowledge of that God.

E. Worship and Prayer. We worship and pray out of our vision of God. Continually dwell on God's nature, attributes and works and our hearts will be brought down low to bow in awe and reverence, and lifted high in grateful joy. But weakness in prayer and deadness in worship cannot be corrected by mere mechanics; we must see and know God. Only then will our worship be acceptable.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 4: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD THE FATHER  
OUTLINE

- I. Biblical Foundations.
  - A. God as Father in the Old Testament.
  - B. God as Father in the New Testament.
    - 1. The dominant name for God in the NT is "Father."
    - 2. God is principally the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
    - 3. Believers are children of God by adoption.
    - 4. God is the model for all fathers.
- II. Historical Illumination.
  - A. Feminist objections to calling God "Father."
  - B. Our response to the objections.
    - 1. Yes, there has been oppression of females.
    - 2. Yes, our language for God is analogical.
    - 3. No, we should not cease calling God "Father."
      - a. It is thoroughly Scriptural.
      - b. It was contrary to the culture in which the Bible was written.
      - c. It is needed to maintain God's transcendence and distinctness from creation.
      - d. God is not male, but relates to us in a masculine way.
      - e. The feminist solution will not accomplish their goal.
- III. Theological Formulation.
  - A. God is not the Father of all, but the Father of all He adopts.
  - B. God is Father.
  - C. The fatherhood of God is "the normative category for the Christian life."
- IV. Practical Applications.
  - A. The greatness of God's love.
  - B. The glory of the Christian hope.
  - C. The ministry of the Holy Spirit.
  - D. The meaning of "gospel holiness."
  - E. The problem of assurance.

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I

### UNIT 4: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD THE FATHER

It is a strange fact that the fatherhood of God is an almost totally ignored aspect of theology. We study God the Son and God the Spirit, but we seem to assume that God the Father is covered in the general study of God. No major systematic theology text that I know of treats the fatherhood of God in any substantive way, and there are few books on the topic.

Yet, as Packer insists in his classic book, *Knowing God* (chapter 19), the fatherhood of God should be central to the Christian's life and theology of God. Let me quote extensively from his chapter on this topic:

You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God. (201).

Packer's position stands in opposition to a couple of widely held assumptions--that the God of the OT is the Father, and that all persons are children of God--but I believe a careful study of Scripture sustains his claims. Let us turn to Scripture and see.

I. Biblical Foundations. I searched the OT for verses that speak of God as Father, or of either Israel or humanity as being God's children. The results were sparse.

#### A. God as Father in the OT.

1. God calls Israel "my son" on a few occasions (Ex. 4:22, Jer. 3:19, 31:9, Hosea 11:1).
2. God is compared to a father (Psalm 103:13).
3. Isaiah refers to God as "our Father" three times within a few verses (Is. 63:16, 64:8).
4. God speaks of Himself as a father, or as Israel's Father on a couple of occasions (Jer. 3:19, 31:9, Mal. 1:6).

But, in truth, the evidence is sparse. If one stretches to include all the verses that have any link whatsoever with the idea of God as Father in the whole OT, we may reach as many as 14 verses. But that is less than the references to God as Father in the three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7, 17 times), and the verses in the Sermon on the Mount are much clearer and more emphatic.

This means that when we read of God in the OT, we should not think of God only as Father, but as Triune God--Father, Son, and Spirit. Even the verses that do speak of God as Father refer to Him as the Father of Israel. The idea of God as the Father of all persons has a grain of truth if the idea is that He created all, that all are created in His image, and that all are precious in His sight. Paul mentions once that we are his offspring (Acts 17:28-29), but even that lacks the warmth of calling God Father. The dominant teaching of the OT (and NT, too) is that all persons are creatures of God, but all are not children of God.

Of course, the obvious question is why the OT does not teach this truth. I believe it is because the central lesson of the OT is on the holiness of God. The emphasis is that God is holy, and that we are not, and thus we are not worthy to be called His children. In the OT, it was difficult and at times even dangerous to approach God. God was teaching us that being a child of God is not a matter of a universal human right. If it happens at all, it must be a gift of grace.

While both the OT and NT teach that God is holy and loving, the OT accents the holiness of God. The Jews learned that lesson well. In the time of Jesus, no one would dare to address God as Father. Joachim Jeremias, one of the foremost students of first century Palestine, says that in all the vast prayer literature of Judaism in the century before Jesus, one never finds God addressed as Father. The coming of Jesus signaled a major change of emphasis. God is still holy, but now the emphasis is on His love and grace, and the boldness with which His people may come to Him, because of the living way Jesus has opened. It is Jesus alone who graciously gives believers the right to become children of God (John 1:12). The emphasis on the Fatherhood of God is indeed one of the greatest differences between the OT and NT.

## B. God as Father in the NT.

1. The dominant name for God in the NT is "Father." It appears 17 times in the Sermon on the Mount, and is the title we are taught by Christ to use when we address God in prayer. It is found more than 250 times in the NT as a whole, and is used for God in every book of the NT except III John. This emphasis is distinctively Christian. I know of no other religion that calls God "Father." It is too intimate for Islam and too personal for Buddhism. It is the Christian name for God.

2. God is principally the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus refers to God as his Father about 50 times in the gospels, and the idea of Father and Son dominates the gospel of John. Paul typically joins Father and Son in the opening salutation of his letters (the formula "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," appears near the beginning of nine of Paul's letters, and almost identical words appear in his other four letters).

This emphasis raises the question: in what sense is God the Father of Jesus? We think first of God's involvement in the conception of Jesus. Luke 1:35 describes that involvement in very delicate terms, and gives it as the basis for calling the child the Son of God. But I think we would be wrong to base God's Fatherhood exclusively on that basis. For that explains God's Fatherhood of the human Jesus, but not his Fatherhood of the human-divine Lord Jesus Christ.

The Second Person of the Trinity existed long before his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth, and, as we discussed in our study of the Trinity, many have seen Sonship as part of the eternal nature of the Second Person of the Trinity, just as Fatherhood is part of the nature of the First Person of the Trinity. The Father is and always has been the Father and the Son is and always has been the Son. They have always related as Father and Son. The difference between them lies in that relationship, because they share the same, nature, attributes, and powers.

Thus, God's involvement in the conception of the human Jesus was an illustration of an eternal truth in the relationship of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. The Second Person did not become the Son of God at his incarnation. Rather, he was the Son of God during his life on earth because that had always been his relationship to God.

While there is no explicit Scriptural teaching on the Second Person of the Trinity as the Eternal Son, such a view does seem to accord better with the explanation Jesus gives of his Sonship in passages such as John 5:16-23. Jesus here identifies some of the elements involved in his relationship with the Father.

a. Equality (v. 18). Claiming to be God's Son was recognized by the Jews as involving a claim to be equal with God, a claim he never corrected. He even habitually healed on the Sabbath (v. 18 uses the imperfect tense, indicating a habitual action) to provoke them to ponder his claim as Lord even of the Sabbath. He was and is equal to God, because both belong to the same family, the family of deity, the family of the Trinity. They share the same nature and essence, and Sonship portrays that fact.

b. The authority of the Father and the submission of the Son (v. 19; see also John 6:38 and 15:10). Some people today think that two persons cannot be equal if one has authority over the other, or if one submits to the other. But the relationship of the Father and Son denies this idea. Jesus accepted the Father's authority, without resentment or any sense of inferiority. The submission of Jesus is not a forced, cowed submission, but a freely given submission that results in authority being given to the Son (v. 22). There is no competition, but joyful cooperation, with each gladly filling different but complementary roles.

The application to the issue of equality of men and women is obvious. Free submission and complementary roles are not opposed to freedom, equality, and self-realization, but are God's means to a full and real experience of freedom, equality, and self-realization.

c. Love (v. 20). Some human fathers are cruel or cold, but not God the Father. He loves the Son and shares intimately with the Son. Yet we must note that paternal love does not mean the Father removes all difficulties from the life of the Son. Jesus went to the cross, by the will of his Father, to perfect, not just us, but Jesus himself as well (Heb. 2:10). Fatherly love can allow children to experience difficulties to strengthen and develop them.

d. Communion (v. 22-23). Virtually all the passages on the Father and Son breathe the spirit of mutuality. They love one another, honor one another, give glory to one another, they share all things in common (see John 17:10). One cannot honor the Father or Son

separately. They are in all things linked.

These four ideas illustrate some aspects of the relationship of Jesus with the Father. In some ways, our relationship with the Father is similar (love, authority/submission, and, to a lesser degree, communion), but in one crucial respect, our relationship with the Father is different.

3. Believers are children of God by adoption. Jesus is Son of God by nature; thus, his Sonship involves equality of nature. Ours is an adoptive relationship, and thus involves a gift of grace. That gift is given to those who trust in the name of the one and only Son (unique or one of a kind is a better translation than "only begotten" of the Greek word *monogenes*). This adoptive relationship carries with it several implications.

a. The reason for adoption: God's love (Eph. 1:5, I John 3:1). The apostle John is virtually overcome with awe and wonder that God's love should be so great as to actually make us His children. Packer notes that while justification is the most fundamental blessing of the gospel, adoption is a higher privilege. Justification relieves us of guilt, but it leaves us as simply pardoned criminals before a forgiving Judge. Adoption takes us off the street, brings us into a family, and places us before a loving Father. It is almost too much to be believed. John's phrase "what manner of love" implies a love that goes far beyond what could be reasonably expected, a love that is beyond what any earthly love would give.

b. The role of the Spirit in adoption (Rom. 8:15-17). It is the Spirit who testifies with our spirits to assure us of the reality of our adoption. And, as the Spirit of adoption, it is the Spirit who helps us live like adopted children. Again, Packer suggests that these verses can help us understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is not basically a ministry of signs and wonders, but a ministry of testifying to us that we are God's children, and enabling us to live in the freedom, joy and power of that knowledge.

c. The result of adoption: holy living (I John 2:29, 3:9). In I John, assurance of salvation is largely inferred from the quality of one's life. If one is living an obedient life, and loving other believers, it is evidence that she is in fact an adopted child of God. It may be that part of the Spirit's testimony to us, mentioned in Rom. 8:15-17, is enabling us to see and recognize these signs of adoption in our lives.

4. God is the model for all fathers (Heb. 12:7-9, Eph. 3:15: "whole family" may be translated "all fatherhood"). Though care must be taken to not imply too much on this point, I think it is valid to say that human fathers can see the Fatherhood of God as a model for their own parenting. Certainly the book of Hebrews sees a parallel in the area of discipline, and the role of being head in the family seems to place some responsibility on the father for leadership and guidance of the family (see Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

*Has your earthly father shaped how you think of God the Father? If so, in what ways has that been positive and in what ways negative?*

II. Historical Illumination. Though the title of this section is illumination, confusion would be more appropriate for the historical development we must discuss. I refer to the more radical elements of the feminist movement that want to do away with the idea of God as Father as intrinsically patriarchal, sexist, and oppressive of women.

Already there are some non-sexist versions of the Bible and liturgies that refer to the Trinity as Creator, Liberator, and Comforter, or to God the Parent and Christ the Child or even to God/dess, and She. Some question whether a male Savior can really save women; other want to withdraw from males altogether and form what they call "women-church." Some of the leaders in this movement are Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Sallie McFague, Elaine Pagels, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Mary Daly and there are numerous others. Their ideas go far beyond inclusive language for people and even women's ordination; it is a radical restructuring of all of Christianity.

A. Their argument for non-sexist or inclusive language for God goes as follows.

1. Women in the church have been oppressed since the first century, and language has been part of the problem. Use of the words "man" and "mankind" for all persons has meant the definition of what it means to be human has been to be male. Further, using masculine titles and pronouns for God has elevated men over women, creating a hierarchical mind set that sees men somehow more like God and closer to God than women.

2. All language about God is analogical and metaphorical anyway, and there are places in the Bible where God is described with feminine imagery, so why should there be a problem with describing God as God/dess our Mother. No one is claiming that God is male, anyway. It's just a metaphor.

3. So in order to promote women's liberation and overcome the evils of patriarchalism, we should either eliminate masculine terminology for God, use masculine and feminine terminology equally, or use neutral terms.

B. What should our response be to such arguments?

1. First, I think we must acknowledge the reality of past oppression. As recently as 200 years ago, Baptists in the South debated whether women in the church could vote or speak in church meetings. There has been past discrimination. And sexual harassment and discrimination of various forms is still a problem today, especially in those parts of the world least affected by Christianity. We should be clear that when we say we believe that all persons, male and female, equally bear the image of God, we mean it.

Thus, I have no problem with using inclusive language for persons. I try to use "humanity," rather than "man", and at times I will use "she" for the generic third person. I do so, not because I believe using "man" or "he" has actually been part of the problem, but as a matter of Christian love and courtesy (not causing some sisters or brothers to stumble). Even evangelical publishers ask writers to use such language for persons.

Moreover, wherever Scripture uses words that mean all persons (*adam* in Hebrew, *anthropos* in Greek), I think that should be reflected in the translation (humanity for man, etc.). How to handle the third person singular pronoun (the generic "he") is more difficult, as is the question of translating Paul's use of "brothers" for believers in general by "brothers and sisters" (note Paul's expansion of II Sam. 7:14 in II Cor. 6:18). Does Paul include females when he refers to fellow Christians as *adelphoi* ("brothers")? I think so, in most cases. Do women see themselves as included when they read "brothers" in Scripture? In the past, I think so. Today, I think some would not. So is "brothers" the best translation? It's a tough question.

I have read one of the recent versions that tried to be gender neutral in its language for people and found it created some minor problems, but the issue here is translation philosophy with regard to language for persons, and I can see arguments on both sides. Inclusive language for God is another matter, with far more important ramifications.

2. Second, we may agree that our language for God is analogical, as we have said all along, and that God is Spirit, and thus transcends sex. God is not male, and males are not somehow more like God than females.

3. Nevertheless, we are left with several reasons why we must reject feminist conclusions about the need to change our language for God.

a. First of all, we believe Scripture is the revelation of God, not the ideas of chauvinistic men controlled by their patriarchal culture. Certainly, the titles for God in Scripture are metaphorical to a degree (God is not a male), but these are divinely chosen metaphors, and the principal ones are all masculine: King, Judge, Husband, Master, and Father.

Further, it was the Lord Jesus who taught us to pray, "Our Father." If there is some authority above Christ in a person's life, how can that person be called a follower of Christ?

b. Second, this choice of masculine imagery was hardly accidental. All around the nation of Israel, female deities abounded. In fact, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are unique among the world's religions in the lack of feminine symbolism for God. The instances where female imagery is used for God (Is. 42:14, 45:10, 49:15, 66:13) are few and are limited comparisons, with nothing resembling addressing God as Mother.

For these two reasons, and others, see Simon Chan, "Father Knows Best," *Christianity Today* (July/August, 2013): 49-51, which is available to you on the Moodle page for this course.

c. Third, the reason for this absence of female symbolism is the danger such symbolism runs of blurring the transcendence of God and merging the Creator with the creation. In an article remarkable in that it gives a cogent rebuttal to radical feminism by a main-line, moderate, female theologian, Elizabeth Achtemeier writes these insightful words:

It is precisely the introduction of female language for God that opens the door to such

identification of God with the world, however. If God is portrayed in feminine language, the figures of carrying in the womb, of giving birth, and of suckling immediately come into play. (Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Why God Is Not Mother," *Christianity Today* [Aug. 16, 1993]: 16-23).

Achtemeier gives numerous illustrations from present day feminists and religions of the past that show the dangerous tendencies that enter automatically with the adoption of female language for God. If God and creation are united, humans can claim to be divine, and to embody divinity within themselves. She cites feminists who claim they have found God in themselves and no longer need any external God. They submit to no authority; they are strong and free. In addition to the tendency to merge God with the creation, there is the tendency to adopt a view of time that is geared to nature's cyclical rhythm rather than the linear view that sees us moving toward the consummation of history.

d. While God is not male, it may well be that He is masculine in relationship to us. C. S. Lewis argues that principles like leader/follower, authority/submission, initiator/receptor are built into the fabric of existence. This is reflected in the fact that most languages assign a gender to every object, even objects that have no sexual identity. Thus, the masculine is much larger than the male, and the feminine much larger than the female. Lewis argues that in relationship to humans, God is the masculine, the initiator, the leader and all humans are the receptors, the followers, the submitters. Masculine language for God is appropriate because it accords with the nature of how God relates to us. Lewis goes on to argue on this same basis that there should be role distinctions in marriage and the church, but that is a subject for later discussion.

The same point is made by Eric Johnson in an article in the June, 1997 *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)*, noting the importance of the incarnation. Here, too, God revealed himself, not as female, or twins (a boy and a girl), but as a male, laying the foundation for comparisons of the relationship of a husband and wife to that of Christ and the church. In relationship to Christ, all believers, male and female, are the bride.

e. A final reason for rejecting the feminist argument for inclusive God language is that their solution will not, in fact, accomplish their goal. It will not foster true liberation or remove oppression. Societies that worshiped female goddesses in the past were far more oppressive and patriarchal than that of the OT ("Why God Is Not Mother," 21). By contrast, wherever Christianity has been planted by missionaries, one universal result has been a dramatic rise in the status of women.

The basic problem of many of the feminists is that they think liberation can be found by removing all elements of authority, all requirements of submission. But true freedom is not found along those lines. We cannot escape the fact that we are created for submission--for free and voluntary submission to God. As a train may seek freedom by escaping from those limiting railroad tracks only to find itself enslaved off the tracks and most truly free only on the tracks, so human beings may seek freedom by rejecting all authority, all calls to submission, only to find that true freedom is only found in submission to one's rightful Lord.

III. Theological Formulation. With this background of biblical teaching and our contemporary situation, we may suggest the following points for emphasis in our theological formulation of the doctrine of God the Father.

A. We should insist that God is not the Father of all persons, but that sonship comes through an adoptive relationship. This is necessary as an antidote to incipient universalism, and as a reminder of the holiness of God. The reason why God is not Father of all is not a lack of love on God's part, but a lack of holiness on the part of humans. The holiness required for the intimacy of knowing God as Father is not inherent in humans, and is indeed, not a human possibility. Those who want a heavenly Father must come through His Son.

B. We should insist that God is Father to uphold his transcendence, against radical feminism and all the forces we mentioned earlier that are pushing theology toward an overemphasis on immanence.

C. We should see the Fatherhood of God as, in Packer's words, "the normative category for the Christian life." From the Sermon on the Mount alone, Packer shows how God's Fatherhood is the basis for Christian conduct (glorifying the Father, Matt 5:16; imitating the Father, 5:44-48; and pleasing the Father, 6:4, 6. 18), the basis for Christian prayer (Matt. 6:7, 8, 7:7-11), and the basis for the life of faith (Matt. 6:25-34). Clearly, this is not a part of the doctrine of God that should continue to be ignored.

IV. Practical Applications. Packer's chapter is full of them. I will briefly note five that he highlights, and add two more. He states that God's fatherhood is the key to understanding:

A. The greatness of God's love (I John 3:1), which we have already noted.

B. The glory of the Christian hope (Rom. 8:16-17, 8:23). We look forward to a family gathering, with our Father and our Savior-Brother. There we will be heirs of greatness we cannot imagine, and will be in redeemed, resurrected bodies, appropriate to our status as inhabitants of heaven and children of the king.

C. The ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15). As the Spirit of adoption, his ministry is to give us the full assurance of that adoption, and to enable us to live accordingly.

D. The meaning of what Packer calls "gospel holiness." By this, he means that it is the truth of being God's child that motivates us to live, not in a legalism of rules, but with a heartfelt desire simply to please the Father.

E. The problem of assurance (Rom. 8:16). Packer begins by assuming that God, as a perfect Father, would not desire his children to live unsure of their status before Him. Moreover, His Spirit is specifically said to give a witness of assurance to God's children. Why then do so many still suffer from anxiety and a lack of assurance? It is because they have grieved the Spirit with sin in their lives, and thus cannot hear His voice of assurance. He says of assurance, "Some

gifts are too precious for careless and naughty children" and God will hold it back if giving it would encourage us to live lazy and disobedient lives.

F. The calling of earthly fathers. It is almost inevitable that children growing up who hear of God the Father will draw some of their understanding of what that means from their relationship with their earthly father. This should drive every dad to his knees to ask God to work powerfully in him to portray his own fatherly nature and should be one of the motivations for stepping up and leading his family in a godly way.

G. The contemporary adoption movement. One of the most interesting developments in the contemporary evangelical church is the adoption movement. It has gone from being a "second-best" solution for infertility to being seen as it should be seen, a way that Christian families can care for orphans in a godly way. I would not want to understate the difficulties adoptive parents can face, but I commend it as following how God has treated us.

Packer concludes his study of God as Father by giving a long list of questions for meditation and examination. They are worth citing at length, and a fitting way to conclude our study of this often overlooked doctrine.

To help us realize more adequately who and what, as children of God, we are and are called to be, here are some questions by which we do well to examine ourselves again and again.

Do I understand my adoption? Do I value it? Do I daily remind myself of my privilege as a child of God?

Have I sought full assurance of my adoption? Do I daily dwell on the love of God to me?

Do I treat God as my Father in heaven, loving, honoring and obeying him, seeking and welcoming his fellowship, and trying in everything to please him, as a human parent would want his child to do?

Do I think of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord, as my brother too, bearing to me not only a divine authority but also a divine-human sympathy? Do I think daily how close he is to me, how completely he understands me, and how much, as my kinsman-redeemer, he cares for me?

Have I learned to hate the things that displease my Father? Am I sensitive to the evil things to which he is sensitive? Do I make a point of avoiding them, lest I grieve him?

Do I look forward daily to that great family occasion when the children of God will finally gather in heaven before the throne of God, their Father, and of the Lamb, their brother and their Lord? Have I felt the thrill of this hope?

Do I love my Christian brothers and sisters with whom I live day by day, in a way that I shall not be ashamed of when in heaven I think back over it?

Am I proud of my Father, and of his family, to which by his grace I belong?

Does the family likeness appear in me? If not, why not?

God humble us; God instruct us; God make us his own true children. (229).

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
 UNIT 5: THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY  
 PART A. THE CREATION OF HUMANITY

- I. Biblical Foundations.
  - A. We are created by God.
  - B. We are created in the image and likeness of God.
  - C. We are created male and female.
    - 1. What is sexuality?
    - 2. Are the sources of sexual differences nature or nurture?
    - 3. What are God's purposes in creating us male and female?
    - 4. What about singles?

*Appendix: Men and Women in the Home and Church*

- I. The Cultural Background.
- II. The Biblical Battlegrounds.

- D. We are created to work.
  - 1. The goodness of work in creation.
  - 2. The effects of the fall.
  - 3. Work under the Lordship of Christ.
  - 4. The consummation of work.
- E. We are created with a complex constitution.
- F. We are created for community .
- G. We are not today as we were originally created.
- H. We are not today as we will one day be.

- II. Historical Illumination.
  - A. Adam and Eve.
    - 1. What does Gen. 2-3 intend to teach us about Adam and Eve?
    - 2. When did God create Adam and Eve?
    - 3. How did God create Adam and Eve?
  - B. The importance of genetics.
- III. Theological Formulation.
  - A. Clarify the alternatives: creation or cosmic accident.
  - B. Emphasize the givenness of creation.
  - C. Maintain real, though limited, freedom and responsibility.
- IV. Practical Applications.
  - A. Racism.
  - B. Family life and church life.
  - C. Self-esteem.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 5: THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY  
PART A: THE CREATION OF HUMANITY

The question of the psalmist, "what is man?" (Ps. 8:4) is one that has echoed down through human history. It is especially prominent today, as we are awash in a plethora of competing ideas of who we are, which basically divide into two types.

One type of view we may call free views. They emphasize human autonomy, and deny that there is any human essence to which we should conform. Rather, we are cast adrift into existence, and left to create our own essence by the choices we make.

One version of this view is optimistic, believing that humans, freed from the restrictions of religion and tradition, will be able to construct noble and free societies, using technology, reason, and cooperation to make a better world for all. In essence, we can be our own gods. Such is the vision of the Humanist Manifesto (see versions I and II, and 2000), and secular humanism as a philosophy. More recently, some have believed we can use technology to improve on human nature, even to the point of overcoming human mortality (transhumanism).

Other existentialists, perhaps thinking things through a bit more clearly, affirm the existentialist view but see that it leads to a meaningless world and life. Where will we derive what is good? What basis will we have for even claiming that freedom is good and should be upheld? Many existentialists, like Sartre, see the world as a senseless, cruel joke. We live with the illusion of significance and freedom, but in reality there is no meaning, and no exit.

The opposite of these free views are determinist views in which humans have no liberty but are the products of other forces. Either we are simply the result of where the evolutionary process has arrived thus far (determined by our genes and a larger, more complex brain), or the product of our environment (determined by our environment, opening the possibility of behavioral conditioning, which, in the view of B. F. Skinner, would lead us to a new world beyond freedom and dignity), or the product of psychological forces (Freud and the role of sexuality and family background), or the product of economic forces (Marx and the class struggle). In each of these, humans are determined by forces outside of them.

How is a Christian to respond to these views? We may acknowledge that there are elements of truth in all of them. We are influenced, but not determined, by a variety of forces (genetic, environmental, psychological and economic). For example, God created families to shape us, and they do, for better or worse. We enter life with assets and liabilities. They shape but do not determine us. Indeed, if the determinist views are correct, they are self-stultifying, for advocacy of any view would be already determined by the forces that control us.

On the other hand, we do have a degree of freedom (and with it, moral responsibility and accountability), but not total autonomy. Our freedom is limited by our nature. For example, I am

not free to fly; my nature does not allow it. We are created beings, made to function according to certain divinely given norms. We ignore them to our detriment.

All these views miss the most important fact about humans: we are created beings, and cannot be understood apart from the Creator. John Calvin opened his famous work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (the first and most influential systematic theology text) with these words:

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern.

We cannot know ourselves apart from our relationship with our Creator. So we begin our study of humanity, not as we exist now, as fallen creatures, but as we were originally created by God.

I. Biblical Foundations: Humanity as Created by God. We may lay a foundation for understanding humanity by noting eight biblical affirmations about our nature as created beings.

A. The first is simply to emphasize that we are created beings. This fact has three implications.

1. First, it excludes pride and vanity. There are no self-made men or women. We owe our existence to God. "It is He that has made us and not we ourselves" (Ps. 100:3).

2. Second, it gives us dignity. We are not a cosmic accident, or the chance product of evolution, or simply an animal that somehow gained rational powers ("the rational animal" is Aristotle's definition of humans). God deliberately chose to create us. Every other view of humanity lacks any transcendent basis for human dignity. The Humanist Manifestos (I, II, and III) loudly advocate human dignity and freedom, but at the same time affirm that humans are the product of evolutionary development. How can evolutionary accidents be beings of intrinsic dignity?

3. Third, it provides both comfort and responsibility. On the one hand, we are not thrown into existence and told to create our own essence. We are created for a purpose. But on the other hand, we are created with the freedom and accompanying responsibility to choose to accept who we are and what we are created for.

The history of humanity is filled with illustrations of our striving to find meaning and purpose in life. This endless striving reflects the ancient truth discovered by Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." Or as stated in the Westminster Catechism: "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." We are not only created **by** God; we are created **for** God.

B. Second and most importantly, humans alone are created in the image and likeness of God. This is so central to a biblical understanding of humanity, and so crucial to giving a basis for human dignity, that we will treat it separately (see Unit 5, Part B).

C. We are created male and female. This is one of the first facts mentioned about humanity in the Bible, that we are created in two varieties. Everyone is either male or female. But exactly what does it mean to be either male or female? In view of the contemporary confusion, I think we need to examine three questions concerning our sexuality.

1. What is sexuality? What does it mean to be male or female? Some say sexuality just involves the obvious, biological differences, and even use a different word (gender) for what they believe are learned, culturally varying differences between the sexes. But in fact, sexuality involves far more than just physical differences. I like the phrase of Stanley Grenz, that being male or female involves living with differing "modes of orientation." A male relates to himself, others, and the world out of one orientation; a female, out of another orientation.

In saying this, we do not want to overemphasize the differences between men and women. We are far more alike than different, and Scripture addresses us far more often as humans, than as male or female. There are relatively few verses that are gender specific. Still, there are certain differences that should be recognized.

a. Physical differences (such as size, strength, and brain differences). These are obvious, and for that reason are sometimes downplayed as just biological. I would argue that they serve as a basis for other differences. Indeed, the male hormone testosterone has been correlated with a number of other sex differences, especially aggressive behavior. The differences in brains seem to correlate well with other differences. For example, does it surprise anyone that the limbic system, which is linked to bonding, nesting, and being in touch with one's emotions, is larger and deeper in women? A leading genetics researcher at Duke University, who has spent years studying the XX chromosome in women and the XY chromosome in men has said, "In essence, there is not one human genome but two—male and female" (*Duke Magazine*, July-August, 2005, 44). Interestingly, he notes that while the X chromosome has about 1000 genes, the Y chromosome is "a genetic runt, with only about 100." Those 100 genes are the physical basis for a variety of other differences.

b. Aggressive vs. nurturing. This is seen consistently in studies of males and females. It is not absolutely universal; there are some very nurturing males and some very aggressive females, and there is nothing wrong in people being who they are. Paul compared himself to a mother and a father (I Thess. 2:7, 11). But there are strong tendencies toward aggression in males and nurturance in females. I think the greater strength of men and the fact that women carry and bear and nurse children may contribute to these differing orientations. Also, the more well developed limbic system in women supports their nurturing abilities.

It can be seen in the differing ways children play with the same toys, or tend to choose different toys, or in the fact that certain vocations tend to be primarily male or female. For

example, one distinction that seems to be universal among all cultures that anthropologists have encountered is that males have the primary responsibility for governance and leadership, while women have the primary responsibility for home and children. Even in countries where there have been conscious efforts toward sharing of responsibilities equally, these patterns have endured.

In terms of spiritual leadership of a family, a man's influence is clear. If a teenage child is saved, 16% of the time, the family follows. If the mother is reached, 31% of the time, the family follows. If the father is converted, 93% of the time, the family follows. Every church I know has many wives who are there without their husbands, but few husbands without their wives. Some think one reason why men are more resistant to church involvement than women is that women see the church as a warm, nurturing place and appreciate it, while men want something with a challenge, adventure, and even danger. Or it may be simply male pride, stubbornness and unwillingness to admit their need. There have always been more females than males in US churches, and the difference crosses denominations, and even religions. (See David Morrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*).

c. Goal-oriented vs. person-oriented. Again, a universal finding of anthropologists is that males feel more driven to achieve and accomplish goals, while females tend to be more team-oriented, valuing achievements and relationships. Males tend to be separate mind, will and emotions, while females integrate mind, will, and emotions more easily.

d. There are also numerous studies showing a tendency toward different aptitudes in the sexes. Women surpass men in verbal abilities; men do better in math and spatial relations (check how men and women differ in giving directions). Men do well in analytical focused studies; women are better able to take in a wide range of stimuli. Females seem to be better able to use their brains holistically and multi-task, while men do better in specialized use of one center or area. These differences again correlate well with brain differences. Women have larger frontal lobes, which deal with language; men are larger in the area related to math, spatial relations, and perception of time and speed. Women have a larger *corpus callosum*, which helps the two sides of the brain communicate to each other. (Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Men, Women, and the Extreme Male Brain*: "The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems" [5]).

This responsiveness to a wider range of stimuli is seen in the greater concern women have for beautifying their surroundings. They simply notice it more, and thus are far more likely to hang pictures, put up curtains, redecorate, etc. Even what we call women's intuition may be simply the unconscious reception and processing of subtle forms of information missed by males.

*How would you explain what it means for you to be a male (or female) to an angel, who as far as we know, are not created male and female? How would you explain to a member of the opposite sex?*

It should be underlined that these are differences, not superiorities or inferiorities. Males and females can be different and still equal. Unfortunately, that fact is not accepted by many, and has led many to deny the reality of these differences by posing a second question.

2. Are the sources of sexual differences nature or nurture? In asking this question, many today want to suggest that the differences we see are not inborn and innate, but created and learned from our cultures, by what we expect of little boys and girls. The expectation is that if we can recognize the subtle ways we signal boys and girls to be different, and treat them all the same, all these differences (except the undeniable biological ones, which they feel are not really all that important) will disappear.

Christian theology does not stand or fall with either position. Even if the differences are inborn, they are inborn in fallen humans and thus we cannot go from how we are today to God's created intention. And if the differences are learned, we cannot conclude that they should be eliminated. They may represent some good common sense, learned over a period of generations.

But in point of fact, there is a growing body of evidence that while nurture does have a role in the shaping of one's perception of what it means to be male or female, there are more deeply rooted bases of differences, inborn genetic, physiological, neurological, and hormonal differences that predispose males toward one orientation, and females toward another orientation. Both seem to play a role. (For a full presentation and evaluation, see Richard A. Lippa, *Gender, Nature, and Nurture*).

Again, the nurture vs. nature argument is secondary for Christian theology. We look to Scripture, not the social sciences, for God's intention for sexuality. If Scripture taught that God intended for men and women to be identical, we would be bound to seek to follow that, however difficult it might be. But in fact, Scripture seems to indicate that the differences between men and women, though doubtless distorted by the fall, are consistent with God's purposes for our sexuality. This leads us to our third question.

### 3. What are God's purposes in creating us male and female?

a. First of all, there is the obvious purpose, that sexuality is God's chosen way for the propagation and continuation of humanity. The statement of creation in two sexes is immediately followed up with the command to "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:27, 28). God has constructed us such that it takes both male and female to produce another human being, and this explains the biological differentiation of male and female (and constitutes an implicit argument against homosexual activity; it is sterile).

The fact that humans have a strong sexual drive is God's way of indicating that He wants humanity to continue. Propagation of the species is not the only, or even the most important reason why God created us male and female, but it is one reason. Sex is not just intended for pleasure. It is linked to what may be called "the office of parenthood."

b. Creation of two sexes is part of God's plan to push us toward relationships. The dilemma of Adam in Gen. 2:18-20 is really quite striking. Why did God create Adam with a need for someone else, with a need for a "suitable helper"? Wasn't God enough? And, if there was a need for companionship, why didn't God create another man?

I think the implication behind Gen. 2:18-25 is that God created men and women incomplete without one another (see also I Cor. 11:11). Each sex has understandings, insights, feelings, sensitivities, abilities that the other needs to be fully human. Why do we call the other sex the opposite sex? Because they are different and those differences are complementary.

Our culture wants to insist that the equality of men and women (which the Bible teaches) requires that there be no differences between men and women, apart from the undeniable biological ones (which the Bible does not teach). But "equal" need not mean "identical," experience teaches that men and women are different, empirical evidence for these differences is mounting, and while Scripture does not explicitly enumerate the differences, I think the clear implication is that there are differences. If not, what was the point of creating two sexes? Surely God could have taken care of propagation of the species in another way.

For most people, marriage will be the context for developing that type of relationship with a person of the opposite sex. There is abundant empirical evidence for the benefit of such a committed relationship. Married men earn more money, have better health and a longer life expectancy than single or divorced men, and are more likely to say they are happy with their lives than single men. Married women have lower rates of poverty and depression and are less likely to suffer domestic violence or be a victim of any violent crime than single, divorced or cohabiting women. Children who grow up with a mom and dad have better health and lower chances of becoming involved in crime, dropping out of school and becoming divorced themselves (see Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*).

These benefits come from committed, marital relationships between men and women. They constitute a strong support for traditional, as opposed to same-sex, marriage, for the latter lacks the dynamic and enrichment possible in opposite sex relationships. The value of such relationships is also seen in the fact that sexual expression is intended for marriage alone. It constitutes a third purpose why we are created male and female.

c. Within marriage, God created sexual expression as a way of symbolizing and strengthening that union (Gen. 2:24). It thus serves a unitive and procreative function.

This needs to be clearly affirmed, for it is the basis of our sexual ethics. The reason why we believe homosexual relations or extra-marital sexual relations are wrong is that they fall outside God's purpose for sexual relations. The fear of AIDS or of an unwanted pregnancy is an insufficient basis for our sexual ethics, for both are in theory preventable. In fact, some say that the reason for sexual prohibitions in the Bible was the fear of illegitimate pregnancies, and now that we can prevent that, we should be free to enjoy sex without any restrictions. "Face it," secularists may say, "sex is enjoyable. Why limit yourself to one partner?"

Our answer is that casual, promiscuous sex takes a precious gift and uses it for a trivial purpose. One can take a Stradivarius violin and burn it and it will warm the body. But it is a monstrous misuse of a treasure. One can use sex and enjoy a time of pleasure, for God graciously created sex to be pleasurable. But to use it for selfish pleasure alone is, in the truest sense, a prostitution of the gift of sex. It was given to symbolize the unity of husband and wife and to strengthen their commitment to one another and their intimacy with one another. And it is within the context of a loving, unified marriage that the reproductive purpose of sex should take place, so that children are raised in a home where two parents are committed to each other.

Because of the fall, our bodies not work properly and thus some couples suffer infertility. This does not invalidate their marriage, for sex also serves a unitive function. These two factors--the fall and the unitive function of sex--also justify birth control (contra Catholic teaching and evangelical groups like Quiver Full). What happens naturally is not necessarily God's will. Thus limiting the number or timing of kids is not wrong, though an outright refusal to take up the office of parenthood is questionable, if the motive is fear or selfishness. In fact, while the need among evangelicals twenty-five years ago was to emphasize that the pleasure of married sex was a good and pure thing (see books like *Intended for Pleasure*), I think the need today is to emphasize that sex is not just intended for pleasure; it is intended to produce children and unite a couple in a powerful bonding way.

It is clear in the contemporary world that something has gone seriously wrong in our obsession with sex. We magnify the importance of sexual activity for a healthy life, and yet trivialize it by making it a common thing. And one of the results has been the weakening of marriages, for one of the elements God designed as cement has been dissolved.

d. I will mention a fourth purpose as a possibility. It is at least possible that God created two sexes because both are required to reflect the glory of the Trinity. I mention this somewhat tentatively, because it is not taught explicitly, though the ability of husbands and wives to portray the relationship of Christ and the church is (Eph. 5:22-33). But I think it does make sense.

As we said before, the distinction between the members of the Trinity lies in the relationship to one another. The Father is the initiator and leader; the Son gladly obeys and responds, and the Spirit binds the two together in self-giving love. I believe that God's design is for the relationship between the sexes to reflect something of that pattern. Within a complete and full equality, males are to model the principle of authority, leadership and initiative, and females are to model responsiveness, nurture and submission, with self-giving love governing actions on both sides.

As we mentioned in our discussion of God the Father, the principles of masculinity and femininity are larger than merely male and female. We are all on the feminine side as the bride of Christ in relationship to our Bridegroom. Perhaps we are all on the masculine side in our stewardship responsibility over Mother Earth. But normally, men and women reflect these two

principles of leadership and submission, creation and nurture in their personalities and relationships.

4. What about singles? Singles are not neuter, and God is glorified as they use their sexuality in appropriate ways in relating to others and reflecting the Trinity. Jesus mentioned three reasons for singleness in Matt. 19:12. Some are born with physical deformities that prevent marital sexual relations; some suffer accidents with similar results; some choose singleness for the sake of the kingdom. Paul regards this as an honorable gift (I Cor. 7:7) but since the Reformation, marriage has been more honored among Protestants.

Today, singles are one of the largest and fastest growing segments of American population, and one that few churches attract, in part because churches deliberately attract and are structured for families (see *Christianity Today*, June 11, 2001). The rise in divorce has resulted in many single-agains, but most of the growth is among those not yet married. People are waiting longer than ever to marry. Either they have not found the right person, or they are fearful of commitment, or, especially for many men, they see no need to marry since sexual needs can be met outside of marriage with little social stigma (here is another way the sexual revolution has backfired on women).

For those desiring marriage, committed to godly purity as a single, but with no prospects for a spouse, singleness can be difficult. Churches can do a better job of welcoming singles and utilizing them in places of service, and fellowship is necessary (Gen. 2:18 applies to singles too). Pastors can be more aware of their presence, and not assume in their sermon illustrations and applications that everyone is married. I also think it is appropriate for pastors and churches to challenge men to step up, make themselves worthy of a woman's trust, and take the initiative to seek a wife. If you ask women out and they say no, you will not die, but you may learn areas in which you need to grow. There are also ways that women can take the initiative to create contexts to help relationships develop, but the ultimate source of strength and contentment in singleness must be Christ himself (Phil. 4:11-13).

#### Appendix: Men and Women in the Home and Church

We are entering into a complex, broad, and hotly disputed area, that of the issue of different roles for men and women in the home and church. We do not have the time to deal with the issues involved in this question fully, but I do want to mention the basic issues, and the crucial Scriptural passages. For those who want to go further, I suggest the books by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, and James Beck, ed., *Two Views on Women in Ministry*.

I. The Contemporary Cultural Background. There are two basic positions within evangelicalism today: complementarianism and egalitarianism. Mainline and liberal theology have long ago adopted an egalitarian view, but many modern evangelicals think egalitarianism can be squared with a conservative view of Scripture, and indeed, fits overall Scriptural teaching better.

The egalitarian view argues that the overall teaching of Scripture is equality between men and women, and that limiting the roles a woman can fill, just because she is a woman, inevitably violates equality. The few verses that seem to suggest otherwise, they believe, can be explained as limited by cultural factors and were never meant to be taken as timeless principles.

The complementarian view agrees that men and women are equal, but believes equality can be maintained along with a differentiation of roles, because the roles do not involve being higher and lower, but being complementary. They see this as being taught in a number of places in Scripture. Exactly how the principles apply in specific situations can be difficult to determine, for we have positions and roles today that did not exist in biblical times (Sunday School teacher, associate pastor, minister of music, etc.), but the key passages do require some differentiation of roles between men and women.

Perhaps more than any other issue, it is the conviction of evangelical feminists (or egalitarians) that subordination of females to males inevitably involves the inferiority of females that separates the egalitarian and complementarian positions.

I think Stephen Clark, in his book, *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980) has the best analysis of why egalitarians and complementarians can't seem to connect on this issue. He contrasts traditional societies with technological societies. In the former, the organizing principle of society was relational. Your status was ascribed to you; that is, you were a son or a daughter, a member of this tribe or this family. It was relationally based, a status based on your relationships rather than your accomplishments. In technological society, the organizing principle is functional and your status is achieved. Thus, you describe yourself in terms of what you do, and you earn respect and position based on your abilities and accomplishments.

The transition from traditional to technological society has had serious consequences in many areas. For example, formerly the home was the economic, educational, health and spiritual center of life. But now we work outside the home, go to school for education, go to the doctor or hospital for health care, and go to church for spiritual training. In such a situation, a feminist revolution should have been expected. Staying at home has little to attract women. The current movement to home schooling is the result of a variety of factors, but at least one of these factors is the recognition that well educated women, committed to being stay at home moms, can make their homes more of a real center of life for their families.

But the most important difference between traditional and technological society for our discussion is a different definition of equality. A traditional society's idea of equality allows for relational distinctions; equality of worth is not negated by different roles or relationships. A parent and child are certainly equally human beings, but the parent has authority over the child, not just because the parent is older and wiser, but because the parent is the parent.

A technological society's idea of equality is functional; that is, the only reason why one person should be treated differently than another is on the basis of ability. On this view, the only basis for the parent's authority is superior wisdom and greater experience. To base roles,

especially headship/helper roles, on gender implies that females are inferior in some functional way to males, for that would be the only valid reason for assigning that role to males only. Rather, the husband should lead in the areas of his expertise and the wife should lead if she has the abilities and expertise. And, in the church, if a woman is gifted in preaching and leadership, she should not be barred from serving in pastoral leadership roles. This seems to be the point egalitarians see as the crux of the whole matter. But giftedness is not the issue. God gives gifts as he chooses; the issue is the context in which they are used.

There is very little in Scripture about equality. Unity is present, and sacrifice and submission, but there is little use of equality, either the term or the idea. Even the text most often seen as the charter of equality, Gal. 3:28, emphasizes oneness in Christ, not equality. What idea of equality there is seems to me far more relational than functional. The husband is the head, not because he is male or better in any way, but because that is the way the relationship is established. Arguments that try to justify the husband's role on functional, ability-based differences will ultimately fail. Though they may fit for many people, you will find some couples in which the wife seems more capable, more aggressive, more of a leader in every way, than her husband. Why should she not be the head of her family? Because that is not the way the relationship is created. Submission does not mean she should not express her views when she disagrees with him; she should give him the benefit of a genuine other point of view, rather than an echo of his. Certainly her husband should call on her gifts and abilities, and may delegate decisions to her in her areas of greater expertise, but the responsibility is his, and cannot be delegated.

Similarly, men are to be in the authoritative teaching roles in the church, not because women are unable to teach or not gifted in such areas. The Spirit gives gifts as He wills. Women who have gifts of teaching, preaching, or leadership must use their gifts, or be disobedient to God. It is the context in which the gifts are exercised that is limited by Scripture.

II. Key Biblical Battlegrounds. Scripture is, of course, our sole normative authority. The preceding section is necessary because we read Scripture with eyes often influenced by our culture. While not exhaustive, the following passages are central in the debate:

A. Gen. 2:18: In making Eve a helper (*ezer kenegdo*) for Adam, is there an implication of differentiation, since Adam is never said to be a helper of Eve? Egalitarians say no, that the word helper is often used for God (*eben ezer*, I Sam. 7:12) and thus cannot imply subordination, and that the long historical record of male domination of females stems from the fall (Gen. 3:16) rather than creation (Gen. 2:18).

Complementarians respond that while being a helper does not imply inferiority, a helper does take a subordinate position, as a parent does when helping a child. The child's needs and plans take priority. Furthermore, Gen. 2 is used in the NT as a basis for differentiation of roles (see I Cor. 11:1-11, I Tim. 2:13-15). Thus, complementary roles is a pre-fall institution. Gen. 3:16 is a sinful distortion of what God intended, turning what was intended to be loving headship into harsh domination.

I am not willing to push this differentiation of role too far. It is not, I think, valid to conclude that women have no areas in which they can and should exercise leadership, and take independent initiatives. Rather, the context of Gen. 2 is very specifically the marriage context, the role that a wife plays in relationship to her husband. The worlds of business, education, politics, or elsewhere are not in view. Gen. 2 deals with a husband and wife, not men and women generically. I think the generic idea is treated in Gen. 1, where men and women are equally given the "cultural imperative." This may be reflected as well in the activities of the Prov. 31 woman.

B. Next we turn to the NT and the teaching of Jesus. It is not so much individual verses here as the tenor of his entire teaching. There are two major points to draw from Jesus.

The first is to note the thorough involvement of women with Jesus and his ministry. He taught them, used women as positive examples in many of his parables, accepted their help and support, and honored them by appearing to them first on resurrection day, as they had honored him by being last at the cross and first at the tomb. He treated them with respect and dignity, as human beings (see the article by Borland in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* for the texts embodying these attitudes).

And yet any summary of Jesus' teaching about women would be incomplete if it did not also note that nothing he said or did can be construed as a denial or repudiation of a proper understanding of male headship or the complementarian view we are advocating, and one very important action seems to uphold it. That action is the very deliberate naming of twelve males as his apostles, his personal representatives, those to whom he entrusted the care and teaching of his Church.

Now I do not think this action of Jesus alone justifies the complementary roles of men and women in home and church. First, one may argue that the apostles are a special case, and not directly relevant to church leaders today, and certainly not relevant to marriage relationships. Second, one may argue that Jesus was simply avoiding the problems and suspicions that would have been inevitable if he had a woman among the twelve ("avoiding the appearance of evil"). Third, many egalitarians have argued against the significance of male apostles by noting that they were also all Jews, too. Should we interpret that action as implying that Jews have a different role than non-Jews? I think all these objections are answerable when seen in the context of all of Scripture (to the first objection: Jesus' action fits remarkably with the later statements in Paul's writings which seem to limit leadership positions to males; to the second: Jesus was not averse to scandalizing people when theological truth demanded it; and to the third: if other verses gave doubts about the propriety of non-Jews serving in leadership positions, then Jesus' example may be relevant, but when the issue raised by the rest of the NT is gender, then Jesus' words must count on that side, for whatever weight they count).

My point here is that we cannot legitimately appeal to Jesus' teachings to escape the "harshness" of Paul or relativize other areas of Scriptural teaching. Yes, Jesus treated women with uncommon respect and dignity, and thus gave men a challenge to follow his example in dealing with women. But Jesus never spoke directly to our question of male and female roles,

though he knew that his society was thoroughly patriarchal. And the action most directly relevant, while not definitive, fits far better within an overall complementarian view than the egalitarian position.

C. Eph. 5:22-33, I Pet. 3:1-7. These two passages seem to be the clearest teaching on the differentiation of roles in the home. Egalitarians believe the idea of mutual submission in Eph. 5:21 qualifies vv. 22-33, and seek to make a parallel with slavery, which follows the instructions about husbands and wives in Ephesians and precedes it in I Peter. They say, just as the overall teaching of Scripture eventually led us to reject slavery in spite of these verses, so the overall teaching of Scripture should lead us to egalitarian marriage in spite of these verses.

Complementarians accept mutual submission within the body, but see a special case of submission within marriage that reflects the relationship of the church to Christ. In fact, husbands are not commanded to be submissive; wives are. Husbands are commanded to love their wives (not to make them submit), and to love them as Christ loved the church. So their headship is not domination, but servanthood. They are given the authority to make decisions, but are charged to do so not to gratify themselves, but to give of themselves to serve and bless their wives. Still, it is headship. There is differentiation of roles. The parallel with slavery is a false one, for slavery is a condition created by humans, while marriage is instituted by God. Slavery is involuntary, while marriage is freely entered into. And if the parallel with slavery applies to husbands and wives, would it also apply to parents and children? Should we seek not only egalitarian marriage but egalitarian parent-child relationships? No, the slavery issue is different and not an appropriate parallel.

Beyond the basic pattern of headship and submission, it is remarkable how much of the marriage relationship is left undefined. While most complementarians see primary bread-winner as part of a husband's role in marriage, my own conclusion is that this is more a cultural assumption, with a weak exegetical base; perhaps it is implied in Eph. 5:28-29. The reference to the cursing of the ground in relationship to the man in Gen. 3 is suggestive, but by no means conclusive. I would be willing to say that headship implies a responsibility to see to it that the family is provided for (I Tim. 5:8) but not that the husband must necessarily be the one that provides.

Likewise, while most complementarians see a wife's role as centering on home and children, those issues are not clearly central in Scripture. Again, Gen. 3 may be simply reporting the painful consequences of sin, and not thereby defining a wife's role. Titus 2:5 says a young wife should be "busy at home" (literally a home worker), but it does not say she should only be busy at home. And the example of Prov. 31 is that of a wife who carried household responsibilities but also found time for outside interests. I see no Scriptural bar to a Christlike husband accepting more than a usual share of household responsibilities in cases where a wife wanted to complete her education or pursue a career, though both would want to consider the impact of this decision on family life, especially in cases where young children are involved. But Scripture, in my opinion, leaves a lot of room for individual decisions and arrangements in carrying out these broad assignments. And, in any case, for every believer, male and female,

married or single, the most important role is as a child of God and servant of God, called upon to use one's gifts and life to bless and serve others.

Some complementarians think that the order established by God in marriage should also be an argument for a similar order within the church. Thus, just as women cannot be husbands or fathers in the family, so they cannot (or at least should not) be elders or authority figures within the larger family, the church. While I personally think this view has a good deal of merit, we are not left to such an inferential argument. There are a number of texts that bear directly on the question of male-female roles within the church, and we will turn to them shortly.

D. Gal. 3:28. For egalitarians, this is the key verse of Scripture, giving the key by which all other teaching on men and women should be evaluated. But the roles of men and women is not even in view in the passage. Egalitarians seize on this verse, not for exegetical reasons, but because it supports what they want to say. I think complementarians are able to interpret this verse much more naturally. It is simply an affirmation of the *unity* (it doesn't even use the word "equality") all believers have in Christ that transcends the barriers of society, but in no way outlaws complementary roles.

E. I Tim. 2:12-15. While I Cor. 11:1-16, I Cor. 14:34-35, and the qualifications for elders in I Tim. 3 and Titus 1 have some relevance, by common consent I Tim. 2:12-15 is the key battleground for differentiation of roles in the church. While egalitarians try to find some reason for limiting application of these verses to a specific situation, or some reason for seeing cultural conditioning of the prohibition, complementarians point out that the stated reason for the prohibition is an eternal reality, the order of creation and the actions of Adam and Eve at the fall.

F. But I think the question that still disturbs egalitarians is "Why? Why would God set up the relationships in this way?" It seems too arbitrary. I Tim. 2 and I Cor. 11 point to the order of creation, but it is difficult for us to see the point. Why should being made first make males the leaders? John Stackhouse, in his book *Finally Feminist*, acknowledges that complementarians have a more obvious case from Scripture, one that can be avoided only by what he calls "exegetical heavy-lifting," yet he feels compelled to make a theological argument for the egalitarian side, in part because of this very question. He challenges complementarians to finish the statement, "It is better for men to always be leaders and never women because . . ." with some phrase other than "because the Bible says so." He believes God's commands normally make sense, but he sees none in the commands for differing roles for men and women.

First, I would question his assumption that God's commands make sense. Personally, I have no problem with obeying even when I don't understand. In fact, I think that is when obedience is most pure; when we see good reasons for obeying, obedience is merely prudence. And there is a precedent: there was no reason for not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fruit was not wormy or obviously poison. It looked desirable. The command of God appeared arbitrary. So I am willing to accept male headship and female submission without understanding all God's reasons.

But I think there may be some ways to complete Stackhouse's statement without just saying, "because the Bible says so." While not taught explicitly, I can see at least three possible reasons why God may have designed male and female as fulfilling complementary roles in the home and church.

Clearly, one purpose of marriage is to mirror the relationship of Christ and the church, and that relationship is not egalitarian. Husbands are assigned to model the role of Christ, and wives the role of the church (Eph. 5:22-25).

Second, I believe there may be a corporate as well as an individual meaning to being made in God's image. Since the God in whose image we are made is a Trinity, perhaps one way we image God is in relationships. I believe God desires to see the Trinity reflected in the home and church, with males modeling the Father, females the Son, bound together by self-giving love, which reflects the Holy Spirit.

A third possibility I offer somewhat tentatively, but offer nonetheless. It may be that part of God's reason for complementary relationships is as a teaching tool. God knew from creation that the greatest need of any human is to submit to God in repentance and faith. Therefore, God established all types of human relationships where we learn the lessons of submission - children to parents (Lk. 2:51), citizens to government (Rom. 13:1, I Pet. 2:13), church members (male and female) to church leaders (I Cor. 16:16), younger men to older men (I Pet. 5:5), believers to one another (Eph. 5:21, I Pet. 5:5), and all of us to God (James 4:7, Heb. 12:9). Seen in this context, female submission is not unusual or demeaning, but another context in which we may learn the lesson of submission. Could it even be an advantage, and explain why, for example, 60% of American church members are female?

Finally, if there really is genuine equality on the level of worth, value and being, why do complementary roles even need to be justified? I can see only one possible reason - - the conviction that equality and complementary roles are incompatible. In the end, this seems to me to be the key issue. But if they are compatible, we should not feel that we have to justify complementary roles. It should not be a problem that threatens anyone.

G. Conclusion. Without going into all the arguments and counter-arguments, which are outlined in dozens of books and articles, the basic difference is that the complementarian view sees the verses I cited as still in full effect, because they are based on unchanging realities (the relationship of Christ and the church, the order of creation), while the egalitarian view sees cultural conditioning, time-specific directives, the fall and misinterpretation limiting the application of the verses appealed to by the complementarists. In other words, one side believes a certain, admittedly small group of verses means something, though the exact applications are problematic, while the other side believes these verses, properly interpreted, require no role differentiation today.

I have yet to encounter an explanation of the verses involved that would allow me to disregard them, and thus I am a complementarian. I acknowledge that I Tim. 2 is difficult, and that I do not fully understand why Adam being created first was so important, nor do I fully

understand what "Law" Paul is referring to in I Cor. 14:34, but the arguments for cultural conditioning and limited applicability I find unconvincing. Moreover, the issue of different roles in the home seems much clearer, and the differences in the church are built, to some extent, on the differences in the home (see I Tim. 3:5). That difference is firmly based on the relationship of Christ and the church.

Trying to put these verses into practice raises a number of difficult questions: Does submission involve accepting abuse? I think not; it is submission "in the Lord," not in any form of ungodliness. What positions are women excluded from based on I Tim. 2:12-15? Positions, even of those on this faculty, vary from not allowing a woman to teach a mixed Sunday School class, to allowing a woman to serve in any position other than that of elder or senior pastor. The fact that these verses in I Tim. 2 are followed by the qualifications for an elder lead me to believe that the teaching and exercising authority that Paul had in mind were those associated with the office of elder (or pastor). That office is limited to males; other positions are debatable.

This is an issue that merits thoughtful consideration by all believers. It has as much potential to split evangelicals as any other issue on the horizon, and has immediate ramifications, both for one's home and one's ministry. My personal conviction is that it is being driven by the inability of egalitarians to see that complementary roles need not deny complete personal equality. In every defense of egalitarianism I have read, there is the insistence that only their view really upholds equality. But biblical equality need not entail functional identity. Being equal does not mean being able to do anything another person does. No man will ever be able to carry or bear a child. Does that create inequality? No, it requires acceptance of complementary roles. There is certainly room for repentance among men for not treating women as genuinely equal in the past, but the proper corrective is not trying to regard men and women as interchangeable, but as equal and complementary, as Scripture indicates.

*What about women serving in the following roles: Director of Children's Ministry, Youth Minister, Music Minister, Associate Pastor, Church Planter, Seminary Teacher, Sunday School Teacher (adult couples class)?*

-End of Appendix-

D. A fourth affirmation the Bible makes about our creation is that we were created to work (Gen. 1:28 and 2:15).

1. The goodness of work in creation. Some theologians refer to these verses, Gen.1:28 and 2:15, as the cultural imperative. The evangelistic imperative stems from the fall and the resulting need to share the message of salvation, but the cultural imperative dates from creation. Work is given to us before the fall, as one of God's good gifts. This view of work affirms that any profession, vocation, or job that has a part in filling and subduing the earth, in blessing the lives of others and thus glorifying God is part of God's call on one's life. In this sense, everyone should have a vocation from God, a way of using talents and abilities to make the world a little better place. And, in fact, if you can find no positive purpose being served in your job, you may need to question whether God would have you continue in it.

Despite what seems clear in Scripture, this view of the good, God-ordained nature of work was quickly lost in the history of the church. The ideal of the Greeks and Romans was to be free from work, to devote oneself to art and the responsibilities of citizenship. Slaves were those who had to work. The Catholics believed that a monastic vocation was the only vocation truly pleasing to God, and saw work more as a disagreeable necessity. The Protestants countered with the idea of the priesthood of all believers and the idea that the cook, the carpenter, and the farmer also are called by God to their jobs, and affirmed that any honest work that bettered human life could be seen as a Christian vocation and a means of serving God.

I think this raises questions about our idea of higher and lower callings, and even our terminology “full-time Christian vocational service.” All Christians should do whatever they do because they see it as God’s will and thus service to God, and all Christians should do that 24 hours a day. Paul was no less a servant and apostle when he made tents than he was when he preached (see Acts 18:3-5).

This attitude toward vocations led to a more serious attitude toward the conduct of one's business and the Protestant work ethic. It was not fueled, as Max Weber suggested, by the hope of assuring oneself of being one of God's elect by seeing success in one's business, but by the realization that God is concerned about how his people conduct their business affairs and by the conviction that doing one's work to the best of one's abilities glorifies God.

The Enlightenment secularized the Protestant work ethic. The ideal of working hard was maintained, but the motivation was not to glorify God and serve others, but to get ahead, to get wealthy. The problem, observed by Christians as far back as Wesley, is that conversion does make one a more diligent worker, leading to a gradual rise in socio-economic status and, in many cases, a corresponding decline in spirituality. It is a historical fact that churches and denominations grow fastest when they reach poor people; as a denomination rises socio-economically, it usually declines in evangelistic effectiveness. The reason is not hard to see. Jesus himself taught that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom. I believe it is this secularized work ethic that motivates most Christians today, especially in this country. And our prosperity may lead to our downfall, unless we do a much better job teaching generosity and godly stewardship. (For more information and ideas, see the classic work by Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* and Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*.)

2. The effects of the fall. Though created by God to be a blessing, work has by the fall been distorted to be toil and a source of temptation (Gen. 3:19). The environment in which we work; those with whom work; and we ourselves are fallen. As a result, every job I have ever had has had an element of toil, and much of the non-paying work in my life in less than enjoyable (yard work). Work has also become an arena of temptation.

a. Idolatry. As noted in a book a few years ago, Americans tend to worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship. Some feel a sense of competence and success in their work and thus overemphasize it, allowing it to be the number one priority in their lives (Lk. 14:18-19). Others are drawn to worship work by the lure of

materialism (Prov. 23:4-5, 30:7-9). Yet in the end, even if one does reach material success, it does not provide what was sought (Eccles. 2:10-11).

The Puritan antidote to this temptation was the practice of the Sabbath. However, based on Rom. 14:5 and Col. 2:16-17, many would argue that the Sabbath command is no longer binding on Christians; we have experienced true rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28-30, Heb. 3-4). Perhaps this is behind the change in the statement on The Lord's Day in the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, in which activities on that day are left up to "the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

But even if not a binding command, observing something of a Sabbath rest can be an important spiritual discipline. In choosing not to work, we confess that we live by God's grace, not by our efforts. We confess that Christ is more important than work, that our identity is not tied up with our jobs, and recognize that we are not indispensable to our work or the world. I think if we understood better these purposes of the Sabbath, we would have less need for legalistic debate over what should and should not be done on Sunday. Moreover, bodies still do need physical rest, and families need time to reconnect with each other and neighbors and friends, and we all need some unhurried time with God. All these are proper forms of recreation (re-creation) and leisure is as much a part of our humanity as work.

b. The opposite temptation is that of laziness. We are warned of this danger in Prov. 6:6-11, II Thess. 3:6, 11-12 and Titus 3:14. Not only is it financially dangerous, it is an affront to God, whom we serve in our work, and involves opting out of our responsibility to rule and care for the world and others.

This is a word many in Christian ministry need to take to heart. In reaction to those who have been devoured by their ministries and lost their families, we are producing some pastors who think they should work no more than 40 hours a week. They need to realize we ask our laypeople for 10-15 hours a week beyond what they work on their jobs (and few of them can get by with just 40 hours a week). I think pastors need to set the example by spending at least 40 hours more in ministry than they ask from their most committed lay people. If they can't do that and still maintain a healthy family life, maybe they're asking too much of their people. More likely, they can do both, if they are diligent.

c. A third temptation is to injustice and oppression. James 5:4, Amos 2:7, 5:11-12, and Is. 58:3-7 all mention the need to preserve integrity, honesty, and fairness in our business dealings. Thus, while work can be a place of temptation, it can also be an arena for moral development.

This leads to a third topic in connection with work:

3. Work under the Lordship of Christ. Just as work was created good by God, and distorted by the fall, it is redeemed by Christ.

a. Our work can be a means of serving and honoring Christ (Col. 3:24, Eph. 6:6-7). Our work is an expression of our love for our neighbor, which pleases Christ.

b. We work as a testimony, showing the effect of Christ in our lives. This will be the only place many see a display of Christian character (Titus 2:3-5, 6, 9-10, I Tim. 5:13-16). Our witness our work should first of all be in doing our job the very best we can. Second, it should be in acts of love and service to our co-workers. Then, it should be words when appropriate, but not in a way that prevents either you or your co-worker from doing your jobs.

c. We work, not only to provide for our own needs, but to have something to share with others (Titus 3:14, I Tim. 5:8, Eph. 4:28).

4. The consummation of work. Finally, the proof of the basic goodness and importance of work is that even in heaven, God's servants will serve him (Rev. 22:3). There is no indication that the cultural mandate will end, so it may well be that carpenters will build, cooks will cook, and all the gifts that bless human life here will be present in heaven, only in their purest and best forms. Heaven, in Anthony Hoekema's words, is more than an eternal day off.

E. We are created with a complex constitution. Gen. 2:7 gives us the first clue of our complexity. In addition to a material, physical body, humans receive something called here "the breath of life," and become, literally, "living souls." In addition to body and soul, we find that humans are also endowed with something called spirit, mind, heart, and conscience. The complex created constitution of humans explains their complex interaction with the world, each other, and God, an interaction that involves a degree of freedom for real, morally responsible choices, and a degree of influence from factors that shape our body, mind, spirit, and soul. In fact, our constitution is so complex that we will devote a separate section to it (see Unit 5, Part C of these notes).

F. We are created for community (Gen. 2:18). This is another area where Americans and Baptists can learn from other cultures. We are an intensely individualistic culture, and Baptist theologians have promoted the individual to a position of overimportance in our theology. The biblical vision is that humans are created to live in community. It is still not good for anyone, man or woman, to live alone.

One of the first effects of the fall was to break communion, not only between humans and God, but among humans (Gen. 3:7, 12). Throughout the OT God's constant emphasis was not just or even primarily the salvation of individuals, but the creation of a people (see Gen. 17:7-8; trace the development of the phrase "I will be your God and you shall be my people" through the OT and into the NT [Jer. 31:33]). In Christ God's work of creating a people takes a giant step, with Christ uniting Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, breaking down the walls that inhibit the growth of real community (Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:14-15). And in the end, God's purpose is completed when His initial purpose is realized (Rev. 21:3).

We are created for community; we are destined for community; and it is uniquely the purpose of the church to provide community (note the argument of Robert Wuthnow that local churches must do so to survive against megachurches and electronic churches that can provide better preaching and music). Right now, one of the inhibiting factors among Baptists in America is our overinflated idea of personal freedom and autonomy. In fact, many who join churches today are not even looking for community. They are governed by a consumer mentality, a view that sees churches as suppliers of religious goods and services. Their primary commitment is to getting their needs met, not to being in community with other believers. Therefore, if they find a better supplier, they retain the freedom to leave and go to the better deal. We have even coined terms like "church-shopping" to reflect our practice. But you can't shop for community. It only comes in committing to others. In our theology and practice, we must see ourselves and live, not as isolated, autonomous individuals, but as people in community, part of a body, with responsibilities to others that limit and direct our freedom (see the title and emphasis of Stanley Grenz's theology, *Theology for the Community of God*).

G. Also crucial to our understanding of humanity is the fact that we are not today as we were originally created. The fall has made a dramatic change in humanity. For that reason, we cannot draw conclusions as to God's intentions from the way we are today. Doing what comes naturally will not necessarily lead us to God's will, for our natures today are not exactly as God created. Empirical study of humans today will not necessarily reveal theological truth about human nature as created by God. We will examine this whole area later when we examine the doctrine of sin, but it deserves mention here as a warning.

H. Finally, we are not today as we will be one day. Our very nature is undergoing restoration and renewal as part of the process of sanctification, and will one day be perfected at the consummation, but we must defer these topics to Theology II (doctrine of salvation) and Theology III (eschatology).

II. Historical Illumination. Recent developments in anthropology and genetic study have raised questions relevant to our study of the creation of humanity. To some degree this discussion of the creation of humanity will overlap with that of the creation of the universe, especially on the questions of when and how, but they are properly separate topics and deserve separate consideration.

A. Adam and Eve. The first and most controversial area has to do with the creation of Adam and Eve, and the interpretation of Gen. 1-3. There are three separate questions that require investigation.

1. What does Gen. 2-3 intend to teach us about Adam and Eve? This is the hermeneutical issue. Are we to understand Adam and Eve as historical persons, or in some other way? There are basically two major views in theological circles.

a. Adam and Eve are somehow symbolic, either symbols for what happens in every individual's life, or symbols for humanity as a whole. We all experience a fall from innocence into sin, with its ravaging effects. This is the view held by Emil Brunner, who sees

Gen. 2-3 as similar, in terms of type of literature, to the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The value of the parable is not dependent on those events happening to a particular individual. It is told to illustrate truths about God and his relationship to all of us. The same is true of Gen. 2-3. It is saga, myth, parable. To interpret it as a historical narrative is to misinterpret the type of literature it is.

Brunner and others like him argue that there are features in Gen. 2-3 that support their position. Certainly, the account in Gen. 2-3 is not like a modern newspaper account. Adam's height and weight are not given, and even his name (*adam* in Hebrew means "man") is symbolic. Moreover, can we find the garden of Eden and see the angel who is guarding the Tree of life? Though he points to these elements, the real impetus for Brunner's view is his belief that the traditional position that Adam and Eve are a historical pair is untenable in the light of modern science. Thus, it must be jettisoned if Christianity is to remain credible and not be liable to ridicule.

A more recent variant of this view sees Adam and Eve as literary figures, characters in God's creation story that is given to teach theological and not historical truths. To try to see them as historical figures is to misunderstand the purpose of Gen. 1-2. This view is common among evolutionary creationists, and, according to Daniel Harlow, professor at Calvin College, is held by the majority of contemporary biblical scholars, theologians, and Christians working in the sciences, outside of evangelical circles. Denis Lamoureux professes belief in inerrancy, and says "I love Jesus, and I don't believe Adam ever existed" (*Evolutionary Creationism*, 386). Adam is part of the "incidental ancient vessel" God used to reveal theological (and not historical) truth. Peter Enns, formerly of Westminster Theological Seminary, has tried to give a more thorough defense of it (*The Evolution of Adam*) but the impetus for it has been the claims of science and genetics, the latter arguing that modern humans originated in a group, not an individual couple.

b. While not denying that there may be figurative or symbolic elements in Gen. 2-3, the traditional view is that Adam and Eve do refer to real, historical individuals. Perhaps if all we had were Genesis 2-3, a literary or symbolic view could be argued, but when Adam appears in genealogies (1 Chron. 1:1, Lk. 3:38), what theological purpose can be served if Adam is not historical? More important, key theological truths are rooted in the actual existence of the first Adam in Rom. 5:12-21 and I Cor. 15:21-22, 44. All the theological importance of the first Adam/last Adam theology in Paul seems to demand the equal historicity of both. Moreover, in 1 Tim. 2:11-15, Paul's theological point depends not just on the historicity of Adam and Eve, but the order in which they were created.

As to the argument from genetics that humanity originated in a large group rather than a single couple, scientists are far from unanimous on that point. But even if there was a large group with the qualifications for beings humans according to anthropology, some are willing to affirm that God could have chosen one from among them into whom he would breathe the breath of life, and make him the first human according to theology; that is, the first human made in the image of God, from whom he would then make Eve and the rest of humanity. I am willing to allow that as a possibility, but I would insist on a historical Adam and Eve, who are the heads of humanity, and who were endowed with the image of God via a special creative act of God as

essential beliefs (see C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care*).

2. The second question is, When did God create Adam and Eve? This is one of the most difficult questions to resolve for science and Scripture. Scientists have found the bones of man-like creatures going back hundreds of thousands of years, and Neanderthal man and Cro-Magnon man date from around 30,000 years ago, and possessed language and sophisticated behavior, indicating that they deserve to be called *homo sapiens* by anthropological standards.

But the validity of the fossil evidence and the idea that the earth is 30,000 or hundreds of thousands of years old is disputed by some. Here too, rather than debate the scientific evidence, I will present what I see as biblically and theologically viable models. There are basically three approaches.

a. The young-earth approach sees the creation of Adam and Eve on the sixth day of the week of creation, and thus they were created around 6000 years ago, certainly within the last 10,000 years. This view is based on an interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 as literal days, and the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 as being fairly complete. While the six literal day interpretation of Genesis 1 has fallen out of favor with OT commentators, and while some have argued that Jews allowed for gaps in genealogies (compare the genealogy in Matt. 1:1-17 with the generations recorded in the OT), this view is biblically and theologically viable. However, it faces the need to explain away the evidence claimed to support an old earth and an earlier creation of humans. Whether it can do so convincingly or not is debated.

b. The old-earth position is open to dating Adam and Eve at a variety of dates. Some have seen the descriptions of practices in Gen. 4 (agriculture and domestication of animals) as indicating a date of around 10,000 years ago. Their understanding of Genesis 1 and the genealogies can certainly accommodate such a date. What do they say about the supposed claims that human-like fossils date to much earlier?

John Collins argues that the language describing Cain as a farmer and Abel as a herdsman could have meant those terms in very rudimentary forms, and the genealogies in Genesis could have been very selective (*Genesis 1-4*). Thus he sees no biblical reason why the creation of Adam could not stretch back well before 10,000 years ago.

One recent book, written by Reason to Believe vice-president Fazale Rana, with Hugh Ross (*Who Was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man*) sees gaps in the genealogies and ambiguities in the biblical text that make it impossible to do more than estimate the creation of Adam to somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 years ago. He sees any date within that time frame as biblically acceptable.

Still others allow for a distinction between what anthropologists call *homo sapiens*, distinguished by language or some other sign, and *homo divinus*, humans made in God's image, distinguished by the reception of that image (Derek Kidner, *Genesis*). The former may be dated

back to 100,000 years ago or earlier. It was only with the special act of God (around 8,000-10,000 years ago) to bestow the image of God that humanity in the biblical sense began.

All those in this camp affirm the importance of a historical Adam and Eve, as the heads of biblical humanity; but they believe the data of Gen. 1-3 allow for a good deal of openness as to the time of their creation.

c. The evolutionary creationist approach is in truth a variety of approaches, but one major variety of approach is to offer no date for the creation of Adam, for they deny the creation of a historical Adam. We have already judged that interpretation beyond the bounds of biblical and theological viability in answering the previous question. A historical Adam and Eve seems to me an essential element in a biblical doctrine of humanity.

However, some in the evolutionary creation camp want to retain Adam's historicity. Denis Alexander and Darrell Falk recognize the biblical support for such a view, and suggest some ways they think a historical Adam can fit with the data of science. The model they seem to favor is creation of Adam and Eve around 10,000 years ago, as the couple chosen by God from a community of anatomically modern humans, to receive God's image and be the federal head of humanity (Falk, *Coming to Peace with Science*, 226; Alexander, *Creation or Evolution*, 234-43; "Were Adam and Eve Historical Figures," on the biologos.org website).

As said above, I think any view, to be theologically viable, must hold to the historicity of Adam and Eve as the head of humanity, endowed with the image of God by his special creative act. At least some representatives of the three approaches described above meet those criteria. As to the specific date when that happened, I do not think we are given the data in Scripture to determine that.

3. The third question is, How did God create Adam and Eve? Before venturing to answer this question, I think it is important to note that Scripture usually speaks in terms of ultimate causality, and omits intermediate steps. Psalm 139:13 says that God knit us together in our mother's womb, but that does not mean we cannot also explain our origin in terms of the union of egg and sperm and all the stages of embryonic development. In the same way, the data in Genesis may not be a complete step by step description of how God created us. There are at least three views that seem consistent with what Scripture does say.

a. Direct creation. Young-earth creationists (Answers in Genesis, Institute for Creation Research and others) affirm God's direct act in creating Adam and Eve and deny any role for evolution in shaping them. What they affirm is certainly consistent with Scripture; what they deny is possible, but not seen by others as required.

b. Among old-earth creationists, there are some who affirm direct creation of Adam and Eve (Reasons to Believe, Wayne Grudem), but others who think the language of Genesis 2 allows for additional steps in the process we are not told about, and affirm what some call progressive creation. John Collins notes that the same word used for creation of Adam in Gen. 2:7 is used for the natural process of child development in the womb in Psalm 119:73

(*Science and Faith*, 268-69). He, Derek Kidner, and even Carl Henry allow that God could use evolution to shape the physical form of humanity, but see special creation as necessary to make humans the image bearers of God: “man may be dependent physically on intermediate manlike forms but in distinction from the primates he is specially made in God’s image” (Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6: 205).

c. Evolutionary creationists, by definition, see evolution as the process God used to create, and affirm the use of evolution in the creation of humans as well. But most recognize the difficulty of explaining how the image of God and the spiritual nature of humanity could have evolved, and so there are a variety of approaches by those in this camp. Some affirm the special miraculous intervention of God in the creation of humans in a manner close to progressive creationists, but most are more tentative (see the variety of explanations on the biologos website, under the question, “how could humans have evolved and still be created in the image of God?”).

Of course, as discussed earlier, many see evolution in totally naturalistic terms. When seen in that way, it is totally incompatible with a Christian view of creation. But there are three reasons why I am cautious but open to allowing a role for evolution, when it is seen, not naturalistically, but under the sovereignty of God.

First, I do not think it is inherently naturalistic, or too immoral a way for God to have used; still, I recognize that the case for seeing evolution in ways that are compatible with a Christian view of creation needs to be made better and more clearly, especially in evangelical circles. Second, I think the fact that Scripture most often describes God’s acts in terms of ultimate causality and leaves instrumental causes unmentioned leaves the door open for evolution to be one of the unmentioned instrumental causes, at least to some degree. I do not think humans made in the image of God could be produced by any instrumental cause other than God.

Finally, I want to be careful that we not cut off any viable interpretations of Scripture with the charge that we are forcing Scripture to fit science, because I am reminded of a previous occasion when similar questions arose concerning the theory of Copernicus that the earth revolved around the sun. For years, many of our best interpreters of Scripture (Luther, Calvin, John Owen, John Wesley) thought Copernicus couldn’t be right, because Scripture taught so clearly that the sun rises and sets, and the earth is firmly established and cannot be moved. On biblical grounds alone, I think they had a strong case. But today, we all see Scripture’s language on the sun rising and the earth being immovable as the language of appearance and accommodated to human perception. I agree with that assessment, but I submit that it is not the most obvious interpretation, and that it arose when scientific evidence forced us to reexamine our previous interpretation. It may be that some of the interpretations I have presented have been sparked by what some see as good scientific evidence. Whether it is or not, I have no ability to judge. But the fact that an interpretation may have been sparked by supposed scientific evidence does not mean it is automatically wrong. Thus, my attempt has been to assess all interpretations on the basis of what I have called biblical and theological viability; that is, is a given interpretation consistent with what I see to be the essential teaching of Scripture on our creation?

I think any view that maintains a historic Adam and Eve, as the heads of humanity, created in God's image by special creation, who subsequently fell and whose sin brought death upon humanity, fit my criteria for a viable interpretation.

*What would you see as essential beliefs about the creation of humanity? Would you add or subtract any from those suggested by the professor? Why or why not?*

B. The second area of controversy arises from the extensive study of genetics and the influence genetics has on many areas of an individual's life. Not only do we inherit hair color and complexion, we are today identifying genes that influence personality traits ("she got that temper from her mother"), genetic tendencies toward addiction (alcoholism runs in families), and some suspect we will someday find genes that predispose one to criminal or violent behavior. Others postulate that our survival has depended on passing on our genes; only those successful in doing so survived, and so today our behavior is profoundly shaped by what all those previous generations passed down to us genetically. Such ideas are prevalent in the fields of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology.

The challenge this raises to the doctrine of humanity is the implicit idea that genetic predisposition releases one from personal responsibility. "I couldn't help it; my genes made me do it," is the idea. Some go beyond genetic predispositions to genetic determinism. What is to be our response to this development?

First, we must recognize that we all start life with a different set of assets and liabilities. Some are raised in a Christian family, by a set of loving and stable parents, with a positive genetic inheritance, while others grow up in countries where Christ's name is rarely heard, in a family where poverty was all that had been known, and both parents and all grandparents had been addicted to drugs or alcohol. Only God is wise enough to judge individuals based on how they deal with what they received, and Scripture does say he will judge us on this basis ("to whom much has been given, much will be required," Luke 12:48).

But, secondly, we must still affirm that humans have a degree of freedom and responsibility. The fact that God still judges indicates that humans still have an area where choice is possible, and for which they are responsible. Our genes, families, and background may limit our choices or make them more difficult, and God takes that into account, but we are still responsible creatures. In fact, there seems to be some evidence arising today that our choices can begin to reprogram our genes.

For example, if in the future there should be proof that there is a "homosexual" gene, that would not be a theological problem. We could acknowledge that because of the fallenness of this world, all kinds of defects from God's design have crept into all areas of life, including our genetic makeup, but someone born with a homosexual orientation still has a choice, whether or not to engage in homosexual behavior. What Scripture condemns is not temptation (either homosexual or heterosexual) but sexual relations outside of marriage (either homosexual or heterosexual).

In point of fact, homosexual orientation seems largely to be the product of a variety of factors, and in our ministry to homosexuals we need not condemn or blame someone for their orientation. Rather, they especially need our love and understanding, for their orientation places them under a difficulty. They must either remain celibate or seek a change of orientation and marriage. But in matter of fact, their difficulty is not all that different from that faced by a young heterosexual person who is single, who very much wants to be married, is troubled by strong sexual desires and temptations, but has not yet found a mate. That person, too, must choose by God's grace to remain chaste until God grants a mate.

Whatever our tendencies or orientations or struggles, whether produced by family background or genetic inheritance or any other factor, we need to emphasize that humans retain a degree of freedom and choice and thus are morally responsible creatures before God.

III. Theological Formulation. By way of summary and review, let me emphasize some of the most important elements we must highlight in our contemporary formulation of the doctrine of humanity as created by God.

A. We must make clear the alternatives: creation or cosmic accident. While we can and should address the scientific questions regarding the creation of man, I think our focus should be on the fact of divine creation and on simply clarifying the alternative if that is denied. If we are not created by God and endowed with dignity and meaning, the alternative is that we are simply a cosmic accident, a chance production of the universe, devoid of meaning, lacking a basis for claiming dignity and purpose. All our longings for beauty and significance are simply illusions, sophisticated chemical reactions in our brains. Most people recoil instinctively against such an alternative. Thus some have begun to almost personify evolution as a friendly "substitute Creator," viewing it as purposive and guiding humanity in an ever upward direction. But evolution has no being, no friendly orientation toward us. It reduces us to cosmic trash. Our first important theological task in the present climate is to clarify the alternatives.

B. We must emphasize the givenness of creation, against the yearning for absolute autonomy in our culture today. We simply must accept that as created beings we are structured in certain ways that we cannot change. We may strive against them, but it will be in vain. We are finite, mortal beings, and we will die, however much medical science may improve. We are moral beings, and we extinguish that spark of conscience only with great peril and at the risk of becoming virtually non-human. We are sexual beings, with differences so deep and profound on every level of our being that no sex-change operation can alter them.

C. We must emphasize the real, though limited, freedom that humans have, against all forms of determinism in our culture. While we are not autonomous creatures, we are responsible for the choices we make. Circumstances may limit the options, and God understands that, but our moral responsibility remains basic to our humanity.

IV. Practical Applications. While I hope that much of what we have discussed will find a practical expression in our lives and ministries, there are some practical applications so important that I want to make sure you see them.

A. One of the timeliest is the strong way the doctrine of our common creation undermines racism. In this country and around the world, and even in some churches, racial and ethnic conflicts continue. In such a context, our common source in God needs to be proclaimed.

B. Let us be unafraid to shape our lives, families and churches by the truths of our created nature. If Scripture says we need input from the opposite sex, let us seek settings that encourage that. Some same-sex relationships are crucial, too, but husbands and wives need to listen and learn from each other, and churches need some settings where we discuss things together.

Likewise, if Scripture indicates men and women are equal but with complementary differences, let us affirm that gladly, and show in our lives that when lived in self-giving love, this does not produce oppressed women and tyrannical men, but beauty in human relationships. Let us not be afraid to accept those differences as real and good. I had a friend who, upon urging his son to get GI Joe rather than a doll, was challenged with the question, "Are you trying to sexually stereotype your son?" He thought for a moment of all the confused, mixed up kids he knew, and replied, "Yes."

If Scripture says we are created for community, what are we doing to develop that in our churches and families? If it is a real need (and it is), and folks don't find it at church, they will go elsewhere (a club, a group, a team, a bar).

C. Let us use the doctrine of our creation by a perfect Creator as the first line of defense against enemy attacks on a proper sense of self-esteem and the guiding principle in relating to others, especially others different from us. Everyone is worthy of being treated with respect, yourself included.

Others practical points of application in a variety of areas can and should be added, but these should suffice to stimulate your thinking.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 5: THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY  
PART B: THE IMAGE OF GOD  
OUTLINE

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 5: THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY  
PART B: THE IMAGE OF GOD

Of all God's creatures, we alone are made in God's image and likeness. Many elements of our created nature we share with animals, but only humanity was created with special deliberation and with this special feature. Moreover, as we will see, for many the image of God indicates that humans are created for special purposes and special relationships.

The image of God is important in a variety of ways. Historically, it has been an important and much discussed issue, with major directions in the history of theology being affected by different interpretations of it. It could be argued that it was central in the Reformation and remains crucial today as the indispensable background for the doctrine of salvation. Theologically, it is not only important in itself, but also leads us into discussions of the effects of the fall and regeneration, and must be related to Christology, for Christ is the perfect image of God. Practically, the image of God is the basis for human dignity and the sanctity of all human life. A correct understanding of it is the basis for truly Christian and truly human relationships.

#### I. Biblical Parameters.

In view of the theological importance of human creation in the image of God, it is surprising to note the relatively small number of texts this doctrine is built upon. And in the verses where our creation in the image of God is affirmed, there is nothing resembling an explicit definition. However, biblical teaching does establish some boundaries or parameters. Whatever the image of God is, it must fit within these parameters. We will survey biblical teaching and try to draw out these clues or parameters. Then we will evaluate major historical interpretations and test them by how well they fit these parameters. The relevant texts fall into three categories.

A. Foundational Texts. There are, first, four texts that affirm God's creation of all humans in his image: Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1-2, 9:6, and James 3:9. They may be called foundational because, in the case of the Genesis references, they are first and form the background for many of the later references, and for all the references, they give image-bearing as the defining characteristic of all humans.

The initial text, Gen. 1:26-27, is emphatic, using the term "image" three times, and using "likeness" once as well. Specifically, the text says we are made "in" God's image and "according to" his likeness. The prepositions used (the Hebrew letters *beth* and *kaph*) serve to distinguish between humans and God's image itself; humans are not the image or likeness but made in some sense like God's image. The other two verses in this category, Gen. 9:6 and James 3:9, see our creation in God's image and likeness as bestowing on all humans a special dignity. In the former, to kill a human is such a heinous and serious crime that the offender forfeits her own life; in the latter, even to curse one made in God's likeness is improper. Perhaps here James is remembering the teaching of Jesus that put cursing a brother on the same level as murder (Matt. 5:21-22). The

fact that Noah is given permission in Genesis 9 to kill and eat animals (v. 3) implies that as image bearers humans have a unique status not shared by any other animal.

Some hear echoes of Genesis 1 in the description of humans in Psalm 8:4-8, and Paul's address to the Athenians in Acts 17:24-29 sees some reflection of the divine nature in humans since they are "God's offspring," but neither text is clear or explicit in affirming our creation in the image of God. So the three texts from Genesis comprise all the explicit Old Testament teaching on our creation in the image of God, and James 3:9 is a companion New Testament text. While none give anything resembling a definition of what it means to be created in the image of God, they do allow us to draw some parameters.

First, whatever the image of God is, it is something true of all humans. It seems to constitute humans as humans. It is specifically affirmed of males and females, and is nowhere limited by age, race, social class or any abilities.

Second, whatever the image of God is, it is something that sets humans apart. It is hard to read the account in Genesis 1 and not note the special treatment of the creation of humans. It is positioned last in the account, is given more space, is introduced with a distinctive formula ("Let us make" versus "Let there be"), includes the distinctive terms "image" and "likeness," and, of all God's creatures, it is only humans to whom God speaks. In Genesis 9, the killing of a human is viewed in a more serious light than the killing of an animal, further implying a unique status for humans. James 3:9 underscores human dignity by prohibiting even the cursing of them.

Third, all the texts discussed here, with the exception of Genesis 1, describe humans after the fall. Thus, whatever the image of God in humans is, it is not something destroyed by our fall into sin. Whether the image is in some sense damaged by our fall into sin is a question not answered in these texts.

*What is something that is true of all humans but only of humans? What makes us different from all other animals?*

B. Christological Texts. At least two texts (II Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15) speak explicitly of Christ as the image (*eikōn*) of God; Hebrews 1:3 has the same idea in slightly different terms (Christ is the "exact representation" [*charaktēr*] of God's being). John 14:9 describes it in visual terms: "Anyone who has seen me (Jesus) has seen the Father." These verses, at first sight, would seem to distance Christ, as *the* image, from humans, who are only made *in* or *according* to the image. The context in Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 suggest that calling Christ the "image of God" and "exact representation of his being" are ontological claims, claims of deity. This is also obvious in John 14:9. What ordinary man says "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"? But for a number of theologians, the incarnation changes everything. As man, Christ becomes the Second Adam, the true image of what humans are to be, the archetypal human, and the proper starting point for understanding humans as created in the image of God.

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, in his study *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ*, gives as his starting point “the understanding of *the Image of God* as itself designating, ontologically, the eternal Son, and the understanding of man as by creation constituted in or after that image, by sin fallen away from that image, and by redemption reconstituted in that image.” He recognizes that Christ, in his deity, is distinct from humans, but in his incarnation, identifies with us in our humanity.

Thus, we have a further parameter for understanding what the image of God means. Whatever the image of God is, it must be something of which in some sense Christ is the original or pattern and of which we are the image and likeness.

C. Pauline Texts. The final category of texts builds on the idea of Christ as the image of God, the true Man, the Second Adam. These verses presuppose that sin has in some way damaged the image of God in humans and that in Christ the image is something being renewed, restored, or somehow formed in Christians as part of their salvation. These texts are all found in Pauline letters: Rom. 8:29, I Cor. 15:49, II Cor. 3:18, Col. 3:10, and probably Eph. 4:24.

Romans 8:29 sees being “conformed to the likeness of his Son” as the ultimate goal of God’s saving work. There seem to be two assumptions undergirding Paul’s statement here. As mentioned above, it is assumed that something happened to the image of God in humans as a result of the fall. Adam’s disobedience has left the image scarred and it is that image he has passed on to his descendants. The second assumption is that conformity to the image of Christ is essentially the same as having the image of God in us fully restored.

First Corinthians 15:49 uses the image language in reference to the body. The argument is that just as we have borne the image of the first Adam in a natural body, subject to death due to sin, so we will also bear the image of the Second Adam, “the man from heaven,” in a spiritual body. This verse gives some support to those who think the image of God includes our physical aspect or bodily nature, an idea which has not been widely followed in Christian thought as a whole, but is one feature that distinguishes us from angels.

The third Pauline text, II Cor. 3:18, speaks of a process of believers being “transformed into his likeness” as they “reflect the Lord’s glory.” Paul’s reference to the “likeness” and “glory” here anticipates II Cor. 4:4, where Christ is specifically described in terms of “glory” and “image of God.” Here again we see the persistent Pauline connection between Christ as the image of God, and the restoration of the image of God in the lives of believers.

Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 are virtually parallel texts. Only Colossians has the specific language of the renewal of the image of the Creator, but the reference to our creation *kata theon* (“according to God”) in Eph. 4:24 has an unmistakable allusion to Gen. 1:26. Both texts reflect the idea that the image of God has been defaced and that it is now being restored as part of the union of Christ with believers. Here again it is because Christ is supremely the image of God that union with him produces restoration of the image of God.

These verses allow us to draw a final biblical parameter for our understanding of the image of God. Whatever the image of God in humans is, it must be something that is somehow damaged, but not totally eliminated by our fall into sin; something that can be restored, renewed, or transformed in union with Christ; and something that will be completed in final glorification, including the reception of a glorified, spiritual body.

D. A Word About Words. Before we gather together the parameters we have drawn from the biblical texts and use them to help evaluate suggestions for how we are to understand the image of God, we need to briefly comment on the key words used in these texts. While one major option in the history of Christian thought sharply distinguished “image” as that which makes humans different from all other animals (usually reason and free will) from “likeness” as an added gift of righteousness, scholars today are in general agreement that “image” and “likeness” are used interchangeably in Scripture.

The pattern of usage is the clearest clue to the essentially synonymous nature of the terms. Only Gen. 1:26 has both in reference to humanity. The other texts, Old Testament and New Testament, seem to use them interchangeably, which strongly suggests that the usage in Gen. 1:26 is what most see as Hebrew synonymous parallelism. After Gen. 1, Gen. 5:1 uses only “likeness,” and Gen. 9:6 only “image.” In the New Testament, I Cor. 11:7 uses “image” and James 3:9 “likeness.” Though “image” has been more used in Christian theology, in Scripture there is no clear distinction between “image” and “likeness.”

#### E. Summary of Biblical Parameters

As we have already noted, most theologians have not seen either the relevant verses or the terms used as giving a clear or explicit definition of the meaning of the image of God. However, we have drawn from biblical teaching a number of parameters that can give us help in evaluating the various options in interpretation offered by history. Before we embark on that task, it may be helpful to summarize the parameters. Whatever the image of God is, biblical teaching places it within these boundaries.

1. Creation in the image of God is affirmed for all persons; it constitutes humans as humans (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1-2, 9:6, James 3:9).
2. Creation in the image of God sets humans apart, implying that humans are unique among God’s creatures and worthy of dignity, simply because they are image-bearers (Gen. 9:6, James 3:9).
3. Even after the fall, humans are spoken of as being in the image of God (Gen. 9:6, James 3:9), so the image isn't completely lost in the fall.
4. Since Christ is the perfect image of God, and we are those made “in” or “according to” that image, the image of God in us must be something that allows for some correspondence between Christ and humans.
5. Since Paul speaks of the renewal of the image of God in those who belong to Christ (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24), we must assume that something has happened to damage the image of God in us. The fall seems the likeliest explanation of what caused the damage (especially in light of the first Adam, Second Adam teaching of Rom. 5:12-21).

6. Since the end goal of salvation is conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), which is the culmination of a progressive transformation that Christ is accomplishing in believers now ( II Cor. 3:18), the image of God must be something that is dynamic and related to the process of growth in the Christian life. First Corinthians 15:49 implies that it will include a bodily aspect, at least in its eschatological manifestation.

But these parameters are all that Scripture clearly affirms. Thus, in interpreting what the image of God is, we will follow these biblical clues, and seek to stay within the biblical parameters, and assess what ideas seem to make the best sense of all the data we have, or what approach best ties all of Scripture together. In view of this situation, it is not surprising to find that theologians have interpreted the image of God in a variety of ways, and we are fortunate to have twenty centuries of the reflections of our forebears to draw upon in understanding Scripture's teaching on this issue.

## II. Historical Options.

While there is some variety among scholars as to the number of options considered from the history of Christian thought, most affirm three major approaches, with differing combinations of the three forming a fourth approach. John Collins alliteratively calls them resemblance, representational, and relational; Millard Erickson uses substantive, functional, and relational; Marc Cortez prefers structural, functional, and relational, and terms the fourth "multifaceted." Despite the differences in nomenclature, they are all referring to the same approaches.

A. Resemblance/Substantive/Structural Approaches. The first group of approaches (resemblance/substantive/structural) sees the image of God in humans as some capacity, property, or characteristic (or set of such) that makes humans in some way like God. This has been the most common approach in Christian history, perhaps because many think that such an approach is implied by the most basic meaning of "likeness" or "image." In some way, we are like God, or reflect something about him.

The quality, capacity or property most often associated historically with the image of God is reason. In the early church, rationality was widely seen as that which most clearly distinguished humans from other animals, and so they focused upon reason as central to the image of God. Others broaden the set of characteristics to include more than just reason. Among the Reformers, Calvin set the Protestant paradigm for viewing the image of God. In the *Institutes* he says:

the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man's nature towers over all kinds of living creatures . . . And although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind or heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow. (1.15.3)

Some aspects of that "whole excellence" that Calvin specifically mentions are reason, true knowledge of God (Col. 3:10), and original righteousness (Eccles. 7:29). Some aspects of the image were completely lost at the fall, but human beings are still different from other animals.

Many other evangelical theologians have built on Calvin's general approach, and have specified various elements or characteristics as involved in the image. Suggestions include qualities like rationality, creativity, righteousness, moral discernment, will, language, conscience, and the ability to form relationships.

By way of evaluation, this approach has some strengths. In terms of the parameters above, it does seek to highlight those capacities that set humans apart from all other animals. Those capacities endure after the fall, and Christ, both as eternal Son and incarnate Second Adam, would seem to share these capacities in common with us. The capacities, or at least the proper functioning of them, could be understood as having been damaged by the fall and restored in Christ, progressively in sanctification and finally in glorification. These strengths help explain the widespread support of this approach in the history of theology. But there seems to be a weakness in fitting this with the idea that all humans possess the image. This is especially the case when there is an emphasis on reason. For example, would this mean that babies, who do not fully exercise reason at birth, are only potentially created in God's image? Would it mean that the more intelligent are more *imago dei*, or that those who suffer mental retardation or from a disease like Alzheimer's or those in a coma are not bearers of God's image?<sup>1</sup> The fact that all humans seem to bear God's image equally while possessing reason unequally raises questions as to how central reason should be in our understanding of the image.

Moreover, others might raise questions as to whether these characteristics really set humans apart. A number of animals possess at least some intelligence, will, and emotions. Finally, it may be asked whether the various sets of characteristics fit the fourth and fifth parameters well. There is some evidence in Scripture that reason is darkened by the fall, and in Christ there is a renewal of the mind, but does the same apply to other characteristics listed, such as emotions, creativity, or language? They may certainly be used for different purposes or with different motivations pre- versus post-conversion, but are the capacities themselves renewed or restored in salvation and sanctification, and will they be perfected in glorification? Perhaps, but the fit is not immediately evident and obvious.

B. Functional/Representational Approaches. Noting such weaknesses in the substantive approaches, other scholars have adopted a second approach, called functional or representational. Functional views see the image as something humans do. The most common function associated with the *imago dei* is that of dominion, or ruling over the created order. Those who hold this view note the close association of the commands to rule in Gen. 1:26 and 28 with the creation of humans in God's image in Gen. 1:26-27. The idea is that in exercising the function of dominion, humans represent or reflect or image God.

While this view has long enjoyed some support among Reformed theologians, it has

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<sup>1</sup>See Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics*, vol. II, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1952), 57. He upholds a structural or substantive aspect of the image of God, which he says "cannot be lost," and "only ceases when true human living ceases—on the borderline of imbecility or madness." One wonders if Brunner would judge the severely retarded or Alzheimer's victims as no longer possessing the image of God.

gained stronger support among Old Testament scholars in the latter half of the twentieth century, and recently received a full length defense by J. R. Middleton in *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*.

One strength of this view, noted by most Old Testament scholars, is the close connection of the statement of creation in God's image in Genesis 1:26 with the command to exercise dominion, a command given once in v. 26 and repeated in v. 28. The implication to them seems obvious: to image God is to exercise dominion. That this exercise of dominion is representative of God's exercise of dominion is drawn from the numerous Ancient Near Eastern parallels. But does it fit the parameters drawn from other relevant texts beyond Gen. 1?

We are tipped off that perhaps it doesn't by the fact that after Genesis 1, none of the other relevant texts mention the issue of dominion in connection with the image of God. Even Genesis 9, which reiterates the command to be fruitful and multiply, omits the language of ruling and subduing. Another weakness of this view is noted by several Old Testament scholars who make the observation that the grammar of Gen. 1:26 is in the form "that typically expresses the result," and thus affirms that dominion is a consequence, but not the content of the image. A final and less serious objection is that at least to this author it simply seems strange to define a noun (image) as a verb (exercise dominion). Even if the function of representation is central to the *imago Dei*, it seems more likely that the image is some capacity or quality that enables humans to perform some function, and not the function itself.

C. Relational Approaches. A final approach has been what is called a relational interpretation of the *imago dei*. Perhaps the initial version of this approach was that of Karl Barth. Barth was strongly opposed to substantive views that attempt to find in the nature of humans some type of point of contact with God, and to functional views. He writes of the image of God, "It is not a quality of man. . . . It does not consist in anything that man is or does." Rather, "the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation. This is first constitutive for God [referring to God's triune existence] and then for man created by God." He thinks earlier interpreters overlooked the obvious clues in the immediate context of Gen. 1. He notes that God says "Let us make." The "us," while not explicitly teaching the Trinity, does hint at the fact of relationship within the nature of God. In a corresponding manner, God does not create a single, isolated creature, but man and woman. Barth sees this point as crucial.

Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female? (*Church Dogmatics*, 3/1, 195).

Male and female are created in relationship with one another, and it is that relationship which reflects the relationship within the Godhead and the relationship of the human with God that is the image of God. There is no thing within either man or woman that is the image of God; it is the fact of their existence in relationship that mirrors something of God, and is thus God's image, a reflection of something of the divine nature.

By way of evaluation, we observe that many discussions of the image of God mention the idea of relationship prominently, and so it may be that Barth is on to something. In terms of fitting the parameters derived from the biblical texts, it would seem that seeing the image of God as the capacity for relationship with God would be a promising approach, one that we will suggest shortly. But Barth specifically denies that the image of God is any capacity that humans possess. His particular relational approach as existence in confrontation is difficult to grasp, difficult to evaluate, and difficult to see in the relevant texts beyond Gen. 1. The idea of relationship suggested by the relational approaches is a helpful and promising idea. Those who develop it in different ways along the lines of a *capacity* for relationship may have a very viable interpretation, but the language of capacity puts such an interpretation, strictly speaking, within the substantive/resemblance/structural approach, which Barth opposes.

D. Composite/Blended/Multifaceted Approaches. In addition to the three major approaches described above, there are others who combine aspects of different approaches into a blended or composite approach. I appreciate that developed by Anthony Hoekema (*Created in God's Image*). He believes that a biblical view of the image of God must have a twofold sense corresponding to the twofold way the Bible speaks of the image, as both something inhering in humans postfall, and something profoundly affected by the fall. Some have used broader and narrower, some formal and material; Hoekema uses structural and functional. By structural, he follows close to Calvin's ideas and sees the image as referring to "the entire endowment of gifts and capacities that enable man to function as he should," things like moral sensitivity, conscience, will, and the ability to respond to God and others. These qualities show something of God's greatness, power and glory. But it is the functional aspect that Hoekema sees as more important. We are created to function in a certain way in relationship to God, the world and others. The gifts included in the structural aspect of the image enable us to carry out our assigned function, but it is the actual carrying out of the function that is more important.

Since all such composite approaches build on the previous approaches, they all share the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches they utilize. Some do a better job than others in accenting the strengths of the views they utilize and minimizing the weaknesses, but the fact that they vary so widely with one another shows that we have yet to discover a view that commands wide adherence.

III. Theological Formulation. The lack of an explicit biblical definition and the lack of any consensus makes the task of a theological formulation a daunting one, yet the importance of the image of God for a proper understanding of humans renders it a necessary task for believers. I will thus offer my own formulation, evaluate it by the parameters drawn from Scripture earlier and attempt to defend it against objections.

First, let me offer my formulation and then the rationale: I believe the image of God in humans is the gift of **a capacity for a particular type of personal relationship; primarily a relationship with God.** A right relationship with God should lead to right relationships with others, unless conditions like dementia, severe autism, retardation, or other extraordinary situations hinder or prevent developing relationships with others. In such cases, such individuals are still humans, made in the image of God, but the consequences that should flow from being

*imago Dei* are being hindered by some of the conditions of fallen life. This capacity for relationship with God is centered in the human **spirit**, but may utilize other human capacities such as reason, conscience, and emotion, without necessarily requiring the use of them. I think the image may also have a representational aspect, which I associate especially with our bodily nature, but I see it as secondary. We represent God, but in an embodied form, and thus in a different way than angels, who may represent him, but if so, they do it in a different form.

The exegetical support for such a formulation is found not so much in specific terms (the word “relationship” is not even a biblical term), or a specific verse or phrase, but in the way this formulation fits the parameters we saw in our survey of the whole of biblical teaching on the image of God. We will examine the fit of this interpretation with the parameters, one by one.

A. The Image as Universal and Constitutive. Take, first, the idea that all persons are created in the image of God, and that the image of God constitutes humans as humans. Is capacity for a relationship with God something true of all humans? If that capacity is defined in terms of qualities such as reason, will, and conscience, it raises the question of the status of very young children, the mentally retarded, those with dementia or Alzheimer’s, and others who may not be able to exercise the qualities of reason, will, and conscience. But if that capacity centers on the possession of spirit, we deal with something that all humans possess, as a unique aspect of human constitution. Moreover, in some circumstances God may choose to bypass reason and establish a direct Spirit to spirit relationship with a person.

In addition, it seems to be something constitutive of humans, as departure of the spirit is a biblical description of death (see Eccles. 12:7; Luke 23:46). Care should be taken here, for we are not arguing that spirit is one “part” of human nature. Humans are made in God’s image in their entirety, and spirit is a capacity that interacts with the whole of a person’s being. Normally one’s relationship with God involves the use of reason, will, emotions and other capacities, as the spirit energizes, directs, and stimulates them. But these other aspects of personality may not be absolutely necessary in every case. Seeing our capacity for relationship with God as dependent on spirit leaves open the possibility that God can establish relationships with humans in exceptional ways in exceptional circumstances, such as when reason is impaired, or no longer functioning, or not yet functioning.

B. The Image as Grounds for Unique Dignity. From Gen. 9:6 and James 3:9, we drew the idea that humans have a unique status that demands they be treated with a special dignity because they have been created in the image of God. Does the capacity for personal relationship with God fit with this parameter? It would certainly seem to. Humans are the only creatures to whom God speaks in Genesis 1 and 2, pronouncing words of blessing and command. He assigns them tasks, and holds them accountable. They alone may experience the eternal life that knowing God is (John 17:3). And perhaps it is because they alone will face divine judgment, that it is unfitting for humans to curse or kill them.

One question that is seldom discussed in the literature on the image of God is the status of angels. They are by nature spirit, and certainly seem to have some type of relationship with God. Some are already under divine judgment. So are they also created in the image of God? If

so, then are humans no longer set apart as unique? If not, is capacity for personal relationship with God a sufficient understanding of the image of God, seeing that angels seem also to experience a personal relationship with God?

Here we must enter an area that is somewhat speculative. We are not told in Scripture that angels bear God's image, nor are we told they do not. We are also not told much about the nature of their relationship with God. Here is where our embodied nature has a proper place in our understanding of the image of God. Even if angels have the capacity for a personal relationship with God, they do not have it as embodied beings as all humans do. Being embodied sets us apart from angels, and allows us to serve another role supportive of human dignity, that of God's representatives on earth. We can be *eikōns* or image bearers of God on earth because we do have a visible, embodied nature. An embodied nature sets us apart from angels; a capacity for personal relationship with God sets us apart from the rest of creation, other than the angels.

C. The Image as Enduring After the Fall. Seeing the image as the capacity for personal relationship with God, and centering that capacity on the spirit, gives us a way of understanding the damage that the image sustained in the fall, without the image being totally destroyed. God's warning in Gen. 2:17 was that the man would die literally "the day" he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Adam lived for many years after he ate of the tree. He may have become physically mortal the day he ate; and many would argue that physical mortality is one of the effects of the fall. The death he died that very day would seem to be spiritual death.

Thus, the fall gave a mortal wound to the human spirit in Adam. He remained human, with the spirit within him, but in a deadened condition. The proof that the spirit endures after the fall is what happens in salvation; the spirit must be present to be given new life by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5). God can breathe new life into those spiritually dead; he can reactivate the spirit left dead by the ravages of sin. This underscores the serious impact of sin, but does not render us unable to be restored to our relationship with God. The image is still present in us, but requires restoration to life.

D. Christ as the Perfect Image of God. The twofold nature of Christ demands a twofold answer to the question this parameter raises: how does seeing the image as the capacity for a personal relationship with God correspond to the idea of Christ as the perfect image of God? As the eternal Son, Christ is the image of God in a way that we never will be. He is the "image of the invisible God," in whom "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 1:15; 2:9). However, as the incarnate Son, made *in* the image of God, he exercised the capacity for personal relationship with God in a perfect, unfallen way, such that he was like us in all ways, except without sin (Heb. 4:15). Instead, he always did what pleased the Father, and enjoyed unbroken communion with the Father (John 8:29). As the exalted Son now, he gives life to our spirits and thus renews the image of God in all those who are joined to him by faith.

It would also seem that the image of God in Christ involved his physical body. This would explain one reason why he had to become incarnate; humans bear God's image both in the spirit's capacity for relationship with God and also in the body's representational function. Since death was a matter of obedience but not necessity for Christ (Phil. 2:8), we may infer that his

body was not affected by the fall; that is, he was not born physically mortal. This is another way that he is the perfect image of God.

E. The Image as Renewed in Christ. The image of God as capacity for relationship with God, fits very well with this parameter. In our natural state, we are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1); in Christ, we are given spiritual life (Eph. 1:5). In Colossians 3:10, Paul compares it to putting on a new self, for the newly alive spirit is active in renovating all aspects of the believer's life. II Cor. 3:18 reminds us that the renewal of the image is a transformative process, in which our relationship with God yields "ever-increasing glory," which is not empowered by human effort, but by "the Lord, who is the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:18).

It must be acknowledged that the bodily aspect of the image does not seem to experience renewal in Christ as the spirit does in this light. Certainly, the body of a Christian should be an instrument of righteousness, not wickedness (Rom. 6:13), but the physical mortality that came upon the body by the fall, is not removed in this life. Our bodies still enable us to represent God before his creation, but in a perishable, mortal form. It will one day be renewed, but it is still part of the not-yet. Perhaps physical mortality is left to us as a reminder of the seriousness of sin; or perhaps it is left to us as a severe mercy, a reminder that this is not the place or state in which God has ordained that we live forever. It will be different one day.

F. The Image as Conformity to the Image of Christ. Being conformed to the image of Christ is the goal of God's saving and renewing work. How does it relate to the image of God as capacity for relationship with God? Hebrews 12:23 describes the spirits of the righteous in heaven "made perfect." This would seem to correspond with complete conformity to the image of Christ, as the spirit itself is central to our capacity for relationship with God. Spirits "made perfect" thus means a relationship with God no longer marred even by the remnants of sin.

But glorification also involves the body, and in the final consummation the bodily aspect of the image of God is also perfected. It would be neither fitting nor possible to represent God in the new creation in a perishable, corruptible, mortal body. Thus, complete conformity to the image of Christ involves a transformation of our bodies, as physical mortality is transcended and our bodies come to bear "the likeness of the man from heaven" (I Cor. 15:49).

Thus, by the criteria we gathered from Scripture, the idea of the image of God as the capacity for personal relationship with God, with a secondary idea of the image as our embodied nature, allowing us to serve a representational function, seems to be well supported. It is interesting to note that similar emphases on relationship are surfacing in numerous contemporary formulations of the image of God (see Kevin Vanhoozer, *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, 158-88; Douglas Moo, "Nature in the New Creation," *JETS* 49, no. 3 [Sept. 2006]: 449-88; Christoph Schwöbel, "Human Being as Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology," in *Persons, Human and Divine*, 141-65). Such formulations spark hopes that perhaps one day we will arrive at something of a consensus on the meaning of our creation in the image of God. Traditional substantive interpretations are often critiqued as being overly rationalistic and individualistic, for not giving proper place to human embodiedness, and for the lack of agreement on exactly what capacities are shared by humans and only humans. Marc

Cortez says “most contemporary thinkers have rejected the structural approach as an adequate way of understanding the image” (*Theological Anthropology*, 19). While my interpretation does fall in the substantive camp, I do not think it is subject to most of the criticisms he mentions. It does seem biblically faithful, theologically coherent, and practically helpful.

IV. Practical Applications. The precious gift of being created in God’s image should make a practical difference in how Christians think of themselves and others in a number of ways.

A. First, it should give us a proper balance of humility and dignity. On the one hand, we dare not flatter ourselves that we are in any sense divine. We were formed from the dust of the ground. There is one Transcendent Creator, and everything else is of a different order of being, created rather than Creator. But there is one and only one created being that is said to be made like God, and that is humans. We are not just like all the other creatures; we are made with a special responsibility and a special privilege. We alone are the image-bearers of God in this world. Any other created image of God is an idolatrous abomination, but we are authorized to bear His image. We reflect his likeness in a way that nothing else in creation does; we are responsible for our use of this gift in a way that nothing else in creation is.

B. This truth should also profoundly impact the way we see every other human. Recognizing every human as an image bearer of God means there are no insignificant people, no life that is less than worthy of full respect and dignity. Human life is special in creation, and eternal in destination. All human relationships should be conducted in this light. C. S. Lewis profoundly comments on this point:

It is a serious thing . . . to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. . . . It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit--immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. (*The Weight of Glory*, 14-15)

All humans are headed toward one of these two destinations because we are created *imago dei*, with all the privileges and responsibilities involved.

C. A third practical application of being created in God’s image is a different view of what life is all about. Being created in the image of God means not only that we are created *by God* and in some way *like God*, but that we are created *for God*, for relationship with him. Therefore one cannot experience full humanity apart from a vital relationship with God. We do affirm that the fall did not destroy our humanity. The image in some sense remains in humans. But the heart of living as image bearers of God is living in right relationship with God. The image of God is rooted in the doctrine of creation, but fully realized only under the doctrine of redemption. The image of God we bear apart from a right relationship with him, is largely that

of responsibility, with the expectation of judgment. It is only when we turn to him that we fully experience our created purpose, fully experience what it means to be human.

This leads to the conclusion that the fullest and most proper expressions of the image of God in humanity are those actions that flow from a proper relationship with God. Unbelievers may at some times and in some ways image or reflect God. But they do so unwittingly, often unwillingly, and at best, partially. Various aspects of human culture may reflect some human creativity and ingenuity, but in so doing they reflect the image of God only in a very limited and partial way. It is actions flowing out of a right relationship with God that reflect full humanity and the full image of God.

Christ is our model in his perfect humanity, not so much in doing what he did (miracles and such) but in living in the same type of relationship with the Father as he did. Jesus was a perfect man and the perfect image of God in living in moment by moment communion with God. We follow him, not by doing the same things he did, but in following the same Father he followed, and seeking to live in the same type of communion with God in our lives.

*Has your answer to the question, what makes humans different than all other creatures, changed from the beginning to the end of this lecture? If so, how? How will you apply your understanding of our creation in the image of God to your own life and ministry to others?*

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 5: THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY  
PART C. THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION  
OUTLINE

- I. Biblical Anthropology.
  - A. Body, flesh.
    - 1. The holistic view of human nature in Scripture.
    - 2. The promise of the resurrection of the body.
    - 3. The association of bodily organs with "spiritual" functions.
  - B. Soul.
  - C. Spirit.
  - D. The Heart.
  - E. Importance for life and ministry.
- II. Are Humans a Dichotomy or Trichotomy?
  - A. The arguments for trichotomy are few and weak.
  - B. The arguments for dichotomy are stronger.
  - C. My formulation: complex functional unity.
- III. The Origin of the Soul.
  - A. How is the soul transmitted from parents to children?
    - 1. Eternally pre-existent souls.
    - 2. The creationist position.
    - 3. The traducian or generation position.
  - B. When does the soul originate? (When does life begin?)
  - C. When does life end?

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY I  
UNIT 5: THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY  
PART C. THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION

We turn now to one of the most troublesome aspects of the doctrine of humanity, the topic of the human constitution. We will seek to analyze the human being, and identify its constituent elements, such as soul, body and spirit.

It is a troublesome task because the Bible does not use the central terms (soul and spirit, especially) in any consistent way. Further, this question leads us into another difficult issue, that of the intermediate state, or the nature of human existence in the period between death, which is the end of our earthly human existence, and the resurrection of the body, which is the inauguration of our normal heavenly existence. Some say that the idea of existing as a disembodied soul or spirit is non-biblical, and thus propose the idea of soul-sleep, that the non-material aspect of a person sleeps until the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body. We will have to touch on this issue, though it belongs more properly to eschatology.

A final difficulty is the fact that we live in a time when reductionistic views of humanity abound. For most secularists, we are just bodies; our minds and thoughts are just electro-chemical reactions, and even love is reduced to a chemical equation (see Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis*). Research narrowing the gap between the mind and the brain have led even some Christian thinkers to doubt the idea that there is a non-material aspect of human nature. They are non-reductive physicalists, who see no immaterial soul, but affirm soulish functions that arise from the complexity of the brain. They think the traditional Christian view of substance dualism (the soul and body are regarded as separate entities) overlooks the unity of the human person (see Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*). But if we affirm that the death of the body is not the end of the person, some type of ontological dualism in human nature seems necessary and is receiving strong defense, on philosophical (J. P. Moreland, *Body and Soul*) and biblical (John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and the Life Everlasting*) grounds.

Despite the difficulties, we must embark upon this venture, for several reasons. First and foremost, Scripture does use these terms (body, soul, spirit, etc.) and does affirm our continued existence after death, so we do need to try to understand what the words mean and how to describe our existence after death.

Second, we must confront this topic because history has bequeathed to us two traditional debates on which systematic theologians are expected to take a position. The first is the dichotomist vs. the trichotomist view of human nature, and the second is the origin of the soul (created directly by God, or transmitted in the process of reproduction).

Finally, we must enter this arena for practical reasons. We use terms like "soul-winner"; we must know what we mean. Anyone preaching a funeral or ministering to grieving persons must have a theology of the intermediate state, and that rests upon an understanding of the human constitution. And there is our natural desire to understand how we are put together, what soul and spirit and heart are and how they all fit together.

I. Biblical Anthropology. We want to begin, as always, with Scripture and seek to state the central meaning of the various terms involved in the debate over the human constitution: body, flesh, soul, spirit, and heart.

I will try to give you what I see as the central meaning, but any single definition is artificial, for, as we will see, the Bible uses these and other terms somewhat interchangeably, and with a variety of meanings. Moreover, as more and more theologians are concluding, the Bible uses most of these words to refer to humans in their totality, but from different points of view. Nevertheless, these definitions do give us what I see as central or a distinctive aspect of meaning, and provide us a basis for responding to the questions of dichotomy or trichotomy, the intermediate state, and the origin of the soul.

<b>English</b>	<b>Hebrew</b>	<b>Greek</b>	<b>Theological Significance</b>
body, flesh	<i>basar</i>	<i>soma</i> <i>sarx</i>	the physical form the capacity for weakness, sin, and rebellion
soul	<i>nephesh</i>	<i>psuche</i>	the seat of life or being; the person
spirit	<i>ruach</i>	<i>pneuma</i>	the capacity of the human being for relationship with God
heart	<i>leb</i>	<i>kardia</i>	the whole person at the deepest level of existence

This diagram outlines my understanding. Now let us turn to the Scriptures and see how these ideas are derived and how they are related to one another.

A. Body, Flesh. Perhaps no other term needs more biblical clarification, for one result of the birth of Christianity in a Greek context has been an unwitting adoption of a Greek, rather than a biblical, view of the body. The ideal of many Greek philosophers was to flee the body, and they saw the body as the prison of the soul. What was non-material was good and pure; what was material was inherently corrupt and impure. But this is emphatically not the Bible's view of the body. Three lines of evidence show the Bible's high view of the body.

1. The holistic view of human nature in Scripture. The dominant view of the body in Scripture is not that it is evil, but a normal and necessary aspect of a human being. Several scholars have noted that there isn't even a Hebrew word for body as something separate from the soul or spirit. The closest equivalent we find is *basar*, but it is almost always translated flesh, either human flesh or the flesh of animals. When used to refer to humans, it most often has in view the whole person, though looking at that person's external aspect. But a word for the body as something separated from the non-material aspect of human nature is missing, for the

normal Hebrew conception of a person assumed the physical form as necessary and inseparable from the whole person. God made us embodied, and it wasn't a mistake.

Even in the NT, while body (*soma*) and spirit are at times distinguished (Matt. 10:28), they are not opposed. As in the OT, the body can even be used to refer to the whole human person (Rom. 12:1), for human existence is a bodily existence and human nature is an embodied nature.

The culprit for the negative view of the body in Christian thought is mostly Greek philosophy, but also be traced to a misunderstanding of the second NT word that refers to body or flesh, *sarx*, especially as Paul sometimes uses it. Most of the time in the NT, *sarx* is roughly equivalent to *basar*, referring to human flesh (Lk. 24:39), or to humans in their external, physical aspect. In this sense, John 1:14 teaches that Jesus shared this essential aspect of human existence. Both the OT and Jesus recognized that human flesh was weak and could not be trusted (Jer. 17:5, Is. 40:6, Matt. 26:41), but there is no idea that human flesh is inherently sinful. Sometimes Paul uses *sarx* in a fairly neutral way to refer to human ancestry (Rom. 1:3, 9:3, 5) or to physical human flesh (I Cor. 6:16) or as another way to speak of a person (I Cor. 1:29; NIV: "person"). But one important usage of *sarx* in Paul goes further. About 35 times, Paul uses *sarx* in a distinctive way to refer to the human capacity for sin, weakness, and rebellion (see Rom. 7:18, 8:5-13, Gal. 5:17). It is the opposing capacity to human spirit, and is in conflict with the work of God's Spirit in His people. As the human spirit is the capacity to open one's life to the influence of God, so the flesh is the capacity to hear and respond to temptation. The spirit leads life in one direction; the flesh, in the opposite direction.

We should note that Paul's use of *sarx* in this sense does not mean sin is especially associated with the body. Many of the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21 are sins of the mind or heart, and sometimes the translation of *sarx* as "flesh" has caused us to think of the body as the source of sin or think of sin primarily in physical terms. For this reason, I prefer the NIV translation of "sinful nature," but not in the sense of a separate entity, but as a capacity that can invade all aspects of human nature.

In theory, the sinful nature has already been crucified in those who belong to Christ (Gal. 5:24). In practice, we find that the struggle continues. But the struggle in the Christian life is not between the body and the soul, or the flesh and the spirit, but between the spirit and the sinful nature. The body itself is most often seen in the OT and NT as a necessary aspect of humanity, and is often used to refer to the human person as a whole.

2. A second way to see the high view of the body in Scripture is to note that the hope of the believer is not the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the body. The body is not a temporary inconvenience, a disagreeable necessity for life here that will be discarded later. It is part of God's plan for heavenly existence, too. To be sure, it will be a different body, what Paul calls a spiritual body (I Cor. 15:42-44), but our heavenly existence will be a bodily, not a ghostly, existence. This belief in the continuing importance of the body is another distinctive belief of Christianity.

The idea of the immortality of the soul has a long history in Christian thought, and has been an unquestioned assumption for most of church history. But immortality in Scripture is predicated of God alone (I Tim. 6:16). It may be given to humans as part of the image of God, but that is nowhere stated in Scripture. Rather, the dominant view of our life beyond the grave is that of a resurrected, bodily existence; that life is described as being clothed with “immortality” (I Cor. 15:53-54). The culmination and consummation of our salvation do not come with death, but with the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:23, Phil. 3:21).

It is true that the NT affirms the continuation of human existence in a fashion in the time between death and the resurrection of the body when Christ returns (I Cor. 15:51-52). Verses such as Phil. 1:23, Luke 23:43, and II Cor. 5:8 require some type of an intermediate state, and our relationship with Christ is such that not even death can end it (Rom. 8:38), but Paul's longing in II Cor. 5 is not escaping from the prison of this body, but being clothed with his heavenly body and being present with the Lord (II Cor. 5:1-8). He seems to regard a disembodied existence as abnormal, a form of nakedness that is not desirable.

I think one aspect of our problem here is that we don't take seriously enough the fact that God's plan has not yet reached its culmination. We usually think that when a person dies, he or she has reached their final state. But the Bible sees all of creation, including humans, as awaiting God's final act of culmination (Rom. 8:22-23). Our continued existence after death, and even our dwelling place during that time--it is all intermediate, awaiting the consummation when we will receive the fullness of redemption, which includes the resurrection of the body, and we will receive our final dwelling place, the new heavens and earth, which Jesus has gone to prepare (John 14:2), but which will not be finished until God completes his plan with this present creation (II Pet. 3:11-13). Death does not end our participation in God's plan. We await, with all creation, the last act, with Christ's return, which will mean for us the resurrection of the body, as part of God's original good creation and inseparable from full human existence.

3. A final line of evidence for the high view Scripture places on the body is the way Scripture associates various organs of the body with functions we normally associate with the soul or spirit.

a. For example, we think of stubbornness as a spiritual problem, but the OT describes it as a neck problem. Stubborn people are a stiff-necked people (Ex. 32:9). I don't think the writers thought of a literal connection between the neck and stubbornness, but the point is that they thought in corporeal terms, for all of life is related to the body, for our whole existence is a bodily existence.

b. A second example is the kidneys or intestines, often seen as the seat of emotions or thought. For instance, you might not gather from reading Ps. 7:9, 16:7 or 26:2 that God searches kidneys and that the psalmist's kidneys instruct him, but that is the literal translation. The translators use "heart" or "mind" or even "inmost being" (Prov. 23:16) because we don't associate such functions with the kidneys, but the OT does. It takes the unity of human personality much more seriously than we do. There is even a NT reflection of this practice in

Phil. 1:8, where "affection" is literally "intestines." (Compare Matt. 9:36 with Acts 1:18 for both spiritual and physical uses of this term.)

c. The eyes are another physical term used in the OT as an element of personality. Eyes can be unsatisfied (Prov. 27:20) or expectant (Ps. 145:15). We think of these examples as just figurative language, but they show that biblical thought does not sharply separate body from the non-material aspects of human life and personality.

d. Of course, the most important and prominent example is the heart. We know, as did the Hebrews, that the heart is a crucial physical organ. But of the more than 950 times the word "heart" is found in the Bible, it almost never refers to that physical organ. Rather, it is such an important term for the center of human life, personality, and existence that it demands separate consideration.

The importance of all these examples for anthropology is that the Bible does not separate the body from these functions, which we normally associate with the non-material aspect of humanity. The Bible sees the whole person as involved in thinking, feeling, deciding. Today we have more evidence than the biblical writers did that our physical condition affects our mental, emotional and spiritual condition, but we are arriving at the same conclusions. Human beings are not neatly segmented into compartments. We think, feel, and act as one being. For example, your marital life can affect your prayer life (I Pet. 3:7). Your physical health has a profound impact on your spiritual life (I Kings 19:1-9).

B. Soul. Some evangelicals like to talk of soul-winning and saving souls, and the Bible does sometimes use the word soul in the sense of the form in which humans exist after death, that aspect of our nature whose fellowship with Christ continues even after the death of the body (Matt. 10:28, I Pet. 1:9, Rev. 6:9). But that view of the soul is not the dominant idea behind the biblical words *nephesh* and *psuche*.

H. Wheeler Robinson, in his helpful study, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, gives three central meanings for the word *nephesh* in the OT. The most frequent sense is the soul as the seat of life (according to Robinson, 282 times out of a total of 754 occurrences of *nephesh*). Thus, when Adam received the breath of life from God, he became a living soul. But likewise, in Gen. 1:20, the animals in the water are called living souls. This does not mean we need to evangelize fish, but that the normal meaning of soul is the seat of life, that which makes a body, animal or human, a living being. Taking the life (or "lifeblood") of a man or animal in Gen. 9:4-5 is taking its *nephesh*, for, as Lev. 17:11 says, the *nephesh* of an animal is in its blood. To shed blood is to pour out life. In I Kings 19:10, Elijah was hiding from those who were seeking his life (*nephesh*). In all, *nephesh* is translated as "life" 102 times in the KJV translation of the OT, and means the seat of life many other times when it is translated as soul.

A second and closely related major usage (223 times, according to Robinson), is *nephesh* as subject or agent of life. In such cases, the best translation is often a personal pronoun (such as I for *nephesh* in Ezek. 4:14; this seems to be the usage as well in the more well known verse, Ezek. 18:4). The third sense of *nephesh* Robinson calls a psychical sense, involving an

emotional manifestation of life, often similar to the ideas associated with spirit or heart (see Ps. 19:7 or Prov. 2:10).

The corresponding NT word, *psuche*, also often means simply life, and is translated as "life" 41 times in the KJV (compared to 57 times as "soul"), and even more often in more modern versions (see the NIV footnote on Mk. 8:35-36). Occasionally, the NIV even translates *psuche* as simply a general reference to a person or persons ("you" in James 1:21; "themselves" in I Pet. 4:19), and often that is the clear meaning (Acts 27:37, probably Acts 2:41, I Pet. 3:20). In the same sense, Ezek. 18:4 does not teach the annihilation of the soul, but the responsibility and accountability of each person. Edmond Jacob's article on soul says "*Nephesh* is the usual term for a man's total nature. . . . Hence, the best translation in many instances is 'person.'" (Kittel, *TDNT*, vol. 9, p. 620).

*Nephesh* and *psuche* are also used a few times in slightly different ways, some of which can be derived from the central sense of life. For example, in Ps. 107:9, it is "souls" that are hungry and thirsty, desiring that which is necessary for life. Other desires are also referred to as being in the soul, both evil desires (Gen. 34:3; his "heart") and godly desires (Ps. 42:1, 63:1). In these last cases, the meaning of soul is virtually equal to "heart," and is often so translated (Ps. 10:3, Eph. 6:6, Col. 3:23), referring to the center of life, and especially the seat of emotions, even the emotions of God. It is God's soul that hates (Ps. 11:5, and Is. 1:14) and loves (Jer. 12:7; "the one I love" is "the beloved of my soul"), and Jesus' soul that is sorrowful in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38). Infrequently, *psuche* is spoken of as the object of God's saving work (James 1:21, Heb. 10:39, I Pet. 1:9) or the locus of the spiritual life (Matt. 11:29, Acts 14:22, Heb. 13:17, I Pet. 2:11, 2:25), so there is a slim basis for speaking of "lost" and "saved" souls, though there would be little change of meaning in these verses if *psuche* was translated as "life" or as a general reference to persons.

Finally, there is some overlap with "spirit." A couple of clear examples are Luke 1:46-47, where the two are used in parallel, and Rev. 6:9, Heb. 12:23, where both are used to refer to those who have died. But *nephesh* and *psuche* more often overlap with the concept of heart, and the dominant and distinctive meaning overall is that of life.

C. Spirit. The words *ruach* and *pneuma* are used in five senses in Scripture. In the physical sense, these words can denote wind or breath (Ex. 14:21, John 3:8). In a psychological sense, these words can refer to an attitude or disposition (Ps. 51:10, Is. 61:3). The divine sense of spirit is the Holy Spirit. The angelic sense is used for good spirits and unclean spirits (demons). Our major concern is with the anthropological sense, the human spirit. Actually, this anthropological sense is not the most frequent usage of *ruach* or *pneuma*. The most common usage in the NT, by a large margin, is the Holy Spirit. Most common in the OT is the physical sense of wind, closely followed by the Spirit of God. But where these words are used in an anthropological sense, there are some important nuances of meaning.

As we mentioned above, spirit can sometimes be used almost interchangeably with soul (Ps. 31:5, Eccles. 12:7, Heb. 12:23, and especially Lk. 1:46-47), and at times overlaps with the idea of heart (the psychological sense above, and especially Is. 57:15, where spirit and heart are

used in parallel), but the dominant use is slightly different from either soul or heart. W. D. Stacey states the difference in these terms:

When reference is made to man in his relation to God *ruach* is the term most likely to be used . . . , but when reference is made to man in relation to other men, or man living the common life of men, then *nephesh* is most likely, if a psychical term is required. In both cases, the whole man was involved. (*The Pauline View of Man*, 90).

What is true of *ruach* in the OT is even more true of *pneuma* in the NT. James Dunn says *pneuma* denotes

man in so far as he belongs to the spiritual realm and interacts with the spiritual realm. . . . Thus, the spirit of man is that aspect of man through which God most immediately encounters him . . . that dimension of the whole man wherein and whereby he is most immediately open and responsive to God . . . that area of human awareness most sensitive to matters of the spiritual realm. (*NIDNTT*, v. 3, pp. 693-694).

It refers to the capacity of humans for a relationship with God, and the means by which that relationship is established. Usage is especially noteworthy in Paul, particularly Romans 8:10, 16, but is found as well in the gospels (Matt. 5:3, Lk. 1:47, Mk. 2:8, 8:12, 14:38, Jn. 11:33, 13:21) and less frequently, in other parts of the NT (Heb. 4:12, I Pet. 3:4).

This does not mean that spirit is a separated compartment of the human being. Rather, it is a capacity that indwells the total person, and only human persons. Soul may be used of the life principle or vitality in both animals and people; certainly both have bodies. But only human beings have the capacity for relationship with God (which reinforces my interpretation of this capacity as central to the image of God in humanity).

D. The Heart. The heart in Scripture is the seat of personality, the central focus of one's life, who one really is (see I Sam. 16:7, Prov. 4:23, Matt. 12:34, I Pet. 3:4, where heart is translated "inner self").

At various times, the heart is spoken of as the center of thinking (I Kings 3:9, 12; Luke 2:19), feeling (Is. 35:4, John 14:1), and especially willing. In Deut. 6:5, we are commanded to love God with our hearts, the heart being responsible to obey. It is with the heart that we choose to trust Christ (Rom. 10:10). It is the heart that purposes to give (II Cor. 9:7). Josiah is praised because his heart was responsive to God's word (II Chron. 34:27), but the heart of the wicked is perverse and proud (Ps. 101:4-5). Robinson says heart is used 166 times for emotional states, 204 times for intellectual activities, and 195 times for volition. Even more frequent is heart as the personality or character as a whole (257 times, including I Sam. 16:7).

Obviously, there is a lot of overlap between heart and mind, soul, will, spirit, and even conscience (Rom. 2:15), but the central idea is that the heart is that which directs the course of one's life. Thus, it is crucial for the heart to be sensitive to the voice of the Lord, and not become

hardened (Ps. 95:8-10), for obedience begins in the heart. The heart can be the seat of sin (Gen. 6:5, Jer. 17:9) as well as the seat of faith (Prov. 3:5). At the same time, we may note a slight difference of emphasis between Paul and the OT. Paul at times uses mind (*nous*) or conscience (*suneidesis*) where the OT uses heart, and Paul uses *pneuma* as central to one's relationship to God almost as often as he uses heart (and in a much more uniformly positive sense). Still, the statement of Hoekema is a good summary of the importance of heart in Scripture: "*Kardia* stands for the whole person in his or her inner essence. In the heart man's basic attitude toward God is determined, whether of faith or unbelief, obedience or rebellion" (215).

This means that one question every teacher, preacher, mentor and disciple must ask is, how do I teach in such a way that I not only impart information to the head, but impart transformation to the heart? The Puritans thought the path to the heart runs through the mind; we first teach the truth; then it is applied to the heart through searching self-examination and genuine meditation. In my own experience, I know that I have been influenced on the deepest level by those who have modeled knowing God on the level of the heart as well as mind, who are passionate about the truth they believe, and whose knowledge leads to active ministry.

*Who has had the most influence on your spiritual development on the level of heart transformation (not merely emotions, but your inner essence)? How did they do it? What was it about their ministry that caused their words to go deeper than just your mind?*

E. Importance for life and ministry. Why go through all these aspects of the human constitution. Because your own life will involve all these aspects and ministry must address the whole person. And, in our spiritual lives, we must develop not only spiritual disciplines, but also be good stewards of our bodies. We should not fall into the present day cult of worshipping the body and physical fitness (I Tim. 4:8--it is of some value, but keep the priorities straight), nor follow the American obsession with bodily comforts and pleasures (see I Cor. 9:27), but we cannot ignore the body's needs (I Kings 19:1-9), for God has created human beings as a physical-social-emotional-spiritual unity.

Now with this biblical basis, let us turn to the traditional theological questions associated with the human constitution.

II. Are Humans a Dichotomy or Trichotomy? By now, you may guess that my answer is neither.

A. The arguments for trichotomy are few and weak. Heb. 4:12 is cited to prove a distinction between soul and spirit, but there can be a difference without the two being separate elements in humans. Most often cited is I Thess. 5:23, but it either proves too much or not enough. If each word listed denotes a different element in humanity, trichotomy is not enough, for Mark 12:30 gives four elements, and spirit is not among them, so that would make five elements. On the other hand, if the three words are used just to emphasize the totality of a person, and not necessarily separate elements, then it proves too little.

Anthony Hoekema gives six areas in which soul and spirit are used as close to synonyms, and I find it difficult to refute his examples (see *Created in God's Image*, 206-207). Few today

hold to trichotomy, though it is affirmed by Watchman Nee, some dispensationalists, and is taught in the Scofield Reference Bible.

B. The arguments for dichotomy are stronger. While soul and spirit are used sometimes almost synonymously, there is a difference between either of them and the body. Humans are sometimes described as body and soul (Matt. 10:28) and sometimes body and spirit (Eccles. 12:7, I Cor. 5:3). Strongest of all, if humans continue to exist after the death of the body, and Scripture teaches they do, there must be some non-material aspect of human nature that can exist in separation from the body. Thus, we are more than just a body; there is another element, whether one calls it soul or spirit. The reality of human existence in the intermediate state is for me the strongest reason for resisting monist or non-reductive physicalist arguments regarding human nature and the existence of a non-material aspect of human nature.

C. My formulation. While recognizing the strength of the dichotomists' arguments, I believe the dominant view of humanity is as a unity, a complex functional unity, with a variety of aspects and capacities, but a unity. This view fits much better with the biblical ideas associated with the various terms we examined. Most of them are used, at least at times, for the whole person. Under normal circumstances, humans think, feel, and act as a unity. But the world now is not normal. Thus, under the especially abnormal condition of death, the unity may be dissolved temporarily into the material and non-material aspects, but the two will be reunited at the resurrection.

The non-material aspect we may call for convenience the soul, recognizing, however, that is not the normal meaning of that term in Scripture. The material aspect we call the body.

There are also various capacities that are not parts or elements of the human being, but simply capacities she has. One we call spirit, and the other flesh, though recognizing that the biblical words are not always used with these meanings. The spirit is the human capacity for relationship with God (and others) and, once energized by the Spirit of God, leads all of life in that direction. The other capacity, called the flesh, or more accurately the sinful nature, is the capacity for sin, weakness, and rebellion, and, if the controlling influence of life, leads all of life in that direction.

### III. The Origin of the Soul.

A. The first question here is really, How is the non-material aspect of humanity transmitted from the parents to the children? Nothing of tremendous value hangs on this question, though it was historically important to Catholics because of its implications for the sinlessness of Jesus and Mary, and has some importance for us in keeping a consistent anthropology.

1. The first and least held view is that souls eternally pre-exist and join with the bodies at birth. This was held by Origen and is held by Mormons, but has no biblical basis.

2. The creationist position. Each soul is directly created by God and joined to the body, either at conception or some point during gestation. This view is favored by most Catholics, in large part because it seems to safeguard the purity of the souls of Jesus and Mary from the taint of original sin. Others maintain that this view follows the model of Gen. 2:7 and affirms the continuing creative involvement of God with every person (see also Eccles. 12:7). Historically, this has been the majority position, with Calvin among its supporters.

Against this view may be offered three criticisms. First, the creationist position is not needed to safeguard Jesus from the taint of original sin. There are other, more cogent ways to explain how Jesus escapes that taint. Second, if God creates every soul, how and why does every soul become corrupt? This position has no answer. Third, this view separates the bodies and souls of human beings, and we have already affirmed the unity of the human constitution (at least functional unity) as a more biblical view.

3. The traducianist theory (or generation) states that souls and bodies (or material and non-material aspects) are passed together from parents to children. This allows for the type of functional, psychosomatic unity we see in Scripture, and accounts for the possibility of non-material aspects of personality to be passed from parents to children (the corrupt spiritual nature passed down from Adam). Finally, I believe it gives a stronger basis for affirming the full personhood of babies from the moment of conception, for at that moment, children have already received all that is involved in being human (though most creationists would affirm this as well). At the very least, they are potential humans, and thus deserving of protection. For these reasons, the traducian position is, in my opinion, the preferable view.

B. The second question is when does the soul originate? Since the soul is the seat of life this amounts to asking when does human life begin.

In this section, I will draw significantly from the recent book by J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae, *Body and Soul*. Biblically, the key passage, in my opinion, is Gen. 2:7. Upon the action of God, what had been an inert body became a living being. How may we understand and describe that action theologically?

We may say that what defines a living human being is the possession of *nephesh*. *Nephesh* may be regarded specifically as the soul (a non-material substance) or more generally as the seat of life. Either way, it is an enduring reality in a human's life, giving personal continuity and stability despite the ever changing physical make-up of a human. Still, humans do not live and act in this world apart from a body.

We may go further then and say that the origin of the soul occurs when certain cells develop the potential to become new organisms through which the soul can act. We define living persons thus in terms of potential and capacity rather than the necessary actualization of that potential and capacity for a number of reasons. Scripturally, pre-born humans are regarded as fully human, even before they actualize their potential for activity (Gen. 25:22). Philosophically, to assign life to any point after conception seems arbitrary. Medically, potential makes much more sense. Otherwise, unconscious people, people in reversible comas, and those with

Alzheimer's or other mentally debilitating diseases could be seen as no longer living beings because they are not actualizing higher brain activities. But as long as there is any brain capacity (through which the soul directs the activities of the body), we should view people as living beings. Finally, on a personal level, it is very difficult to feel a pre-born baby kick inside its mother's womb and not regard it as a living being.

We can explain the origin of the soul along these lines under either a creationist or traducian view. On a creationist view, God faithfully creates a soul on every occasion when the potential for full organic development arises. On a traducian view, God has placed soulish potential within certain cells, such that, when the conditions for full organic development are met, the soulish potential becomes actual.

In either case, it does not matter how the conditions for full organic development arise. It may be through normal sexual intercourse, in vitro fertilization, twinning (the development of normal human twins), or even cloning. There is thus no more theological a problem with cloning than with twinning (though much more of an ethical problem). In the case of frozen embryos, we may see them as possessing souls from the moment when the potential for full organic development began (at conception), but the conditions for the further development of that potential have been frozen. How God deals with the souls of such embryos, if they are destroyed before having the chance to experience life in this world, is the same question as how God deals with the souls of those embryos that miscarry, are stillborn, are aborted, or die in early infancy. While we may trust in the mercy of God, and hope that He will take them to himself, and grieve more for ourselves than them (see Is. 57:1-2), that does not of course justify taking their lives, so that we can insure they go straight to heaven. In any case, God has not given us explicit assurance that all who die in such situations will be saved. Some postulate God will save those He knows would have responded to Christ had they lived. Perhaps God has not revealed His will on this issue explicitly in order to prevent such mercy killings. In any case, God forbids us to do evil in the hope of accomplishing good. How God himself deals with the fall-out from human evil is another question.

In any case, we do not see the soul as derived from the DNA; it is, after all, a non-material reality. DNA may be necessary for life, but it is not sufficient alone to constitute life. Furthermore, life is not directed by one's DNA, but by the decisions of the soul acting through the body. DNA, like family background and other influences, is part of the "hand" one is dealt in the world. But it is the soul that determines how one plays that hand.

This view enables us to affirm that life begins at conception, and continues even when we are unconscious, or enter a reversible coma, or suffer diseases which reduce our capacity to act. The soul is still present and thus we are still living beings.

C. When does life end? If the origin of the soul marks the beginning of life, when does life end? Biblically, it seems to be when the soul (or spirit) departs (see Gen. 35:18; Luke 8:55). How do we discern the departure of the soul/ spirit? The older medical definition of death as the cessation of heartbeat or breathing has been revised, since it is now possible to keep the lungs breathing and the heart beating artificially for an indefinite period of time.

Today, the most widely accepted definition of death is brain death, when there has been an irreversible cessation of any functioning of the brain. Is that a theologically sound definition of death? I think so, for the only way we know for the soul/spirit to act in this world is through the impulses of the brain. This gives us a basis for advising families in the situation where a loved one has suffered some accident or illness that has rendered the brain irreversibly damaged, but the heart and lungs are being artificially sustained. Is it theologically okay to turn the machine off, or is that taking life into our hands? I think turning the machine off is recognizing that death has already occurred. The soul leaves the body when it is no longer able to act in this world. What happens after that is properly a topic for eschatology, which is covered in Theology III.