Articles from 1950–1959

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Prof. Vollenhoven’s Significance For Reformed Apologetics

In this brief article it is our purpose to make a few general remarks about the significance of *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, and therefore of the work of Dr. D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, for Reformed Apologetics. Dr. Vollenhoven has been primarily engaged in the formulation of the principles of a Calvinistic philosophy. Yet his work has indirectly stimulated the thinking of those whose business it is to concern themselves with questions of Apologetics.¹

Challenge Versus Appeasement

The great value of Vollenhoven’s work for Apologetics may perhaps be summed up in a word. It is to the effect that he has helped apologists for the Reformed Faith to see with increasing clarity that they must follow a fearless policy of challenge rather than a fearful policy of appeasement with respect to the wisdom of this world. They must not approach the “natural” man, the would-be autonomous judge of all systems, including the Christian “system,” by humbly submitting to him for his calm consideration the idea that Christianity is probably “in accord with logic” and probably “in accord with fact.” They must on the contrary require the would-be judge to be judged or interpreted in terms of Christianity. But to require this, is by implication to require also that “logic” and “fact” be seen to be separately intelligible and mutually fruitful in relation to one another only when regarded in the light of Christianity. Reformed apologetes need a fully self-conscious philosophy of man, a fully self-conscious philosophy of method and a fully self-conscious philosophy of fact. They cannot have any one of these unless they have all three of them. And unless they have all three of them they cannot say with any real significance: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:19–20).

To challenge the wisdom of this world means first and above all to challenge its uncritically assumed position with respect to man himself. For all its vaunted neutrality or open-mindedness, for all its claim to go back to the presuppositions of its approach, non-Christian thought always assumes the ultimacy and normalcy of man himself. Quite uncritically the natural man makes himself the final reference point in all his predication.

Now the traditional or Romanist-Arminian method of apologetics does not basically challenge this assumption of the non-Christian thinker with respect to himself. The Romanist, and even the Protestant evangelical, that is, non-Calvinist forms of theology, are themselves too much infested with the virus of “freedom” or autonomy, to be desirous of really challenging it in those whom they would win to an acceptance of the Christian Faith. And all too often Reformed apologists have failed to apply the doctrine of total depravity, which they so vigorously defend against the Romanist or the Arminian, to the question of the point of contact with the “natural man.” They know that this “natural man” always seeks to suppress the truth. They know that the “systems” of philosophy constructed by the “natural man” are by virtue of their basic assumption of man’s ultimacy, unable logically to recognize as valid the truth of God. Why then have they so often failed to challenge this basic assumption? Was it because they still, in spite of themselves, feared to assert the full significance of their own position? Was it that they feared lest the “natural man” would forthwith reject their presentation of the gospel? Did they secretly hold that the only way to make contact with the natural man is to agree in part, at some point or to some extent, with the systems of thought constructed by this natural man?

Whatever may have been the reason, Vollenhoven has helped the Reformed apologist to follow Paul in challenging the wisdom of this world. He has done so by showing that every form of non-Christian philosophy, in the nature of the case, uses exclusively immanentistic categories. For Christian theology to seek for a point of contact by the process of overlapping at some point with one of these immanentistic philosophies, is to compromise with those who deny the truth. It is in accord with the genius of a scholastic theology, itself constructed in part from Aristotle and in part from Scripture, to seek such overlapping with immanentistic philosophies. It is utterly out of accord with a true Protestantism, that is with a truly Biblical theology, to follow a policy of appeasement with the natural man. And if Reformed theology shall maintain itself firmly in its policy of interpreting man exclusively in terms of Scripture, it is imperative that there be a Calvinistic philosophy that does likewise. A Reformed Apologetics needs both a Reformed theology and a Reformed philosophy for its background. How else can it challenge the wisdom of this world at every sector of the front?

Moreover Vollenhoven has helped the Reformed apologist to be unafraid and fearless. Romanism is basically afraid of the wisdom of the world. It has failed to see the utterly self-frustrative character of every form of non-Christian life and world view. Romanism has therefore claimed no more than greater probability of truthfulness for Christianity than for its rivals. In its “theistic proofs” it has claimed to be able to show merely that a God exists. In so doing it has secretly admitted some measure of validity to the non-Christian assumption about man’s autonomy and to the non-Christian methodology in general. It has admitted that the natural man by his assumption (a) of man’s autonomy, (b) of abstract logic apart from and above God, and (c) of the existence of brute fact, has correctly interpreted some dimension of life and has probably done justice to the evidence for God’s existence that daily confronts him. But Vollenhoven’s analysis (a) of man himself, (b) of a truly Christian methodology, and (c) of the structure of factual existence in the created universe, has helped the Reformed apologist to see that any form of immanentistic philosophy is wholly unable to give meaning to any aspect of human experience. On the basis of any immanentistic philosophy, pure abstract logic and
pure brute factuality are the two and the only two ingredients out of which the would-be autonomous man must construct coherence for himself. But on an immanentistic basis pure factuality will lose its character of fact and become nothing but an instance of an abstract universal so soon as it is brought into any contact with law at all. The universal and the particular, law and fact, can never be brought into contact with one another without destroying one another on the basis of an immanentistic philosophy. Thus every form of non-Christian philosophy is wholly self-frustrative and totally destructive of the meaning of human experience.

If then it remains true—as undoubtedly it does—that non-Christian scientists and philosophers have discovered truth about many of the facts and laws of the universe, this is adventitious with respect to their own systems. If science depended for its existence and progress on the truth of immanentistic philosophy, there would be no science. It is this that the traditional Romanist-Arminian apologetics has failed to point out. It has failed to point out that every aspect of human experience is meaningless on a non-Christian basis. It has not insisted that the whole house of immanentism must be broken down before a solid structure of science, philosophy, and theology can be put in its place.

No doubt the traditional apologetics was afraid to make this negative claim with respect to immanentistic philosophy because it cannot offer a positive foundation for human experience in terms of its own position. Unwilling to accept without qualification the Biblical doctrine that God by his counsel controls “whatsoever comes to pass,” traditional apologists cannot furnish a positive foundation for science, philosophy and theology. They fear that if a Christian challenges the “rational” foundation of an immanentistic philosophy, then he at the same time undermines the foundation on which he himself must stand. They fear that the inevitable result of challenging the immanentistic “support” for “faith” is to fall into irrationalism. Not willing to presuppose God in their own theology, they cannot consistently require others to presuppose Him in philosophy and in science.

But here precisely Vollenhoven has been of great service to the Reformed apologete. With the help of the *Wijsbegeerte der Westidee*, the Reformed apologete is gradually beginning to see more of the resources that are at his disposal. As the God of Scripture is the presupposition of his theology, so the God of Scripture must also be the presupposition of the intelligibility of human experience in general. The God of Scripture, accepted exclusively upon the authority of Scripture, is the foundation of the meaning of any aspect of human experience. Without the presupposition of this God, human experience operates in a void.

The Reformed apologete is therefore better able than ever before to cut himself loose from every form of Scholasticism and Arminianism. As he cannot follow a policy of appeasement with the “wisdom of the world,” he cannot cooperate with Christians who follow such a policy. On the contrary he will plead with those, who with him name the name of Christ, to brand as aggressors every system built on “reason” as being destructive of reason in every one of its legitimate functions. He will seek for a head-on collision with all those who interpret reality with man himself as a final point of reference. Thus only can they make a real point of contact. He knows that every man is in contact with truth. Every man knows that he is a creature of God. Rom 1 But every man also seeks to suppress this truth about himself. He does so by making plausible systems of interpretation. These systems serve the sinner as masks which are cemented to his face.
He therefore never sees himself, his own face, till these masks are torn away from him. This precisely the Reformed apologete seeks to do. The natural man must not be told that his systems are probably untrue, that they need redecorating of modification and addition. He must rather be told that his systems are certainly false and certainly false in their every basic element. The natural man must not be told that Christianity is probably true. He must rather be told that it is certainly true and certainly true in its every basic aspect. Then, and then only, is apologetics itself really subject to the sovereign disposition of the Spirit of truth.

Those whose business it is to concern themselves with Reformed apologetics, with Christian apologetics, are grateful for the help they have received through the work of Vollenhoven.
Wanted—A Reformed Testimony

A Common Witness of Reformed and Evangelicals Inadequate for our Time

*The Presbyterian Guardian*

1951

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Floating across the Pacific on a raft they named Kon-Tiki was a thrilling experience for the six brave men who recently took that trip. Says Thor Heyerdahl, who tells us about the adventure, “Experts who looked at the raft gave us little encouragement. The biggest balsa exporter in Peru said the porous balsa logs would become water-logged and sink before we had covered a quarter of the distance across the sea. A Norwegian boatswain said the raft would not hold together for a fortnight before every single rope was worn through by the movement of the big logs rubbing against each other. If we totted up all that the different experts, each in turn, pointed out as the vital flaw, there was not a length of rope, not a knot, not a measurement, not a piece of wood in the whole raft which would not cause us to founder at sea.”

After they were out on the ocean, it seemed as though the predictions of the experts would come true. “It was easy to see that the balsa logs absorbed water. The aft cross beam was worse than the others; we could press a fingertip into the soaked wood till the water squelched. Without saying anything I broke off a piece of the sodden wood and threw it overboard. It slowly vanished down into the depths. Later I saw two or three of the other fellows surreptitiously do the same—and watch somberly as the waterlogged piece of wood slowly sank.”

The Prophets of Doom

Some of the “experts” who write large books today with such titles as *The Decline of the West, The Destiny of Western Man, The Crisis of our Age*, are solemnly predicting that every rope that helps to tie the beams of civilization together will soon be worn through. And as we lie in our cabins at night it is alarming to hear these ropes creaking and groaning, “each rope having its own note according to its thickness and tautness.” The whole thing seems to be like “one complaining chorus round us in the dark.”

The Prophets of Bliss

But then why not reach for *The Ladies Home Journal*. Looking into the current issue (July, 1951) we at once see Joseph Stalin’s military figure. But turn quickly to the
opposite page and there you meet the benign countenance of Albert Schweitzer. A small kitten sits quietly on his hand. It seems to know that Schweitzer’s life principle is a “reverence for life.” “His entire personal life is a reflection of his own deep ‘reverence for life!’” says Harold Stassen. If only we would follow the example of Schweitzer and not that of Stalin, he argues, then all would be well. He quotes Schweitzer himself as saying, “I look to the future with hope.” ¹ And as for himself, Stassen adds in conclusion, “I believe man was meant to be free. I believe man was meant to respect other men. I believe there is a God. I believe that in the half century ahead the philosophy of Albert Schweitzer will be victorious and that of Joseph Stalin will fade.” ²

Here then is an expert predicting, as it were, that the balsa logs of history will not become waterlogged, and that the ropes which tie them together will easily hold till the end of the journey.

What Choice?

Which expert shall the hapless public believe? Neither the prophets of doom nor the prophets of bliss have actually crossed the Pacific of life in a raft. They speak with greatunction, but only on the basis of the “long experience of the human race.” The pessimists see that the balsa logs are absorbing water. With “infallible logic” they calculate that before the end of the journey the whole raft must sink. The optimists argue that the balsa logs consist of wood and that they must float. Both use the word must very freely. They can do nothing else. What they are talking about lies beyond the experience of any of them. Yet both pretend to speak in terms of experience only.

Our Task

Such is the wisdom of the world. It has been made foolishness with God. Our task as Christians is to tell men so. But it has pleased God to save men through the “foolishness of preaching.” Our task as Christians is again to tell men so. A simple all comprehensive alternative must be placed before men. Half-way measures contain no challenge. Men must turn away from the pessimists; they are not nearly pessimistic enough. The human race is not merely adrift, facing a possible extinction. Men are subject to the wrath of God and are headed for the final judgment day. They will one day cry to the mountains to fall on them, wishing that the prophets of doom might be right. For then they would escape the wrath to come.

And by then they would long since have known that the prophets of bliss are wrong. These are not nearly optimistic enough. For those that believe in Christ there will be eternal joy in the presence of God, not merely some sunny days as the Kon-Tiki continues its way surrounded by the monsters of the deep.

¹ p. 131.
² p. 132.
Experience And The Bible

Yet, by and large, Fundamentalists do not thus challenge the wisdom of the world. Their theology does not permit them to do so. The theology of Fundamentalism is largely Arminian in character. And an essentially Arminian theology is vitiated by the fact that it is, in part, at least, based on that very “experience” on which the non-Christian prophets of doom and of bliss depend for their predictions. Fundamentalists start from the experience of freedom, even as Stassen, the humanitarian, starts with the “experience” of freedom. While waving high the Bible, the Fundamentalist yet, at critical junctures, appeals to experience as the final guide. Fundamentalism, in short, is inadequately Protestant. It does not do full justice to the Bible as the only authoritative guide for human experience.

This is sad indeed. Fundamentalists mean to be true to the Bible. They are most sincere. They are, many of them, self-sacrificing and wholly devoted to the Christ who bought them with His precious blood. But their witness to the world is vitiated by their principle of experience as standing next to rather than subject to Scripture.

Fundamentalism, let us say, speaks on a radio station called Back to the Bible and Experience. It sounds like two broadcasters on the same wavelength, each trying to drown the other out.

A God or God

On a Sunday afternoon you listened to Harold Stassen. He says he believes there is a God. Now ‘a’ God is a ‘finite’ god, is ‘no’ god. But the “experience” of sinful man teaches us to believe at best in a god. Such teaching leaves men without the true God and without hope in the world. Yet this is the best that the prophets of bliss can offer. They are no better than the prophets of doom.

Now turn on the “Back to the Bible and Experience” program. It speaks vigorously of God, of the true God, the God of the Bible. At the same time it speaks, even if less vigorously, of a god, the god of experience. It assumes that the two are identical. It assumes the god of Stassen and the God of Luther to be the same God. The result is that you are not clearly challenged to forsake your trust in the false prophets of bliss.

God Probably Exists

These prophets of bliss are very “scientific.” They speak with moderation. They say they believe man was made to have “reverence for life,” to respect his fellow man. When they say that they believe this, they imply that they do not know it. How can any one know? The universe is full of unknowables. They believe in the incomprehensibility of God, that is, of Reality. They assume that God is incomprehensible even to Himself.

Of course the god, the finite god they believe in, is incomprehensible to himself. He cannot, then, help man to know himself. He leaves the prophets of bliss to speak as from themselves.
Now again turn on the “Back to the Bible and Experience” message. It speaks vigorously of the God of the Bible, as certainly existing, as clearly revealing Himself both in the world and in the Word. It speaks of knowing, though not fully understanding, this God. At the same time it speaks even if less vigorously of God as probably existing, because experience, and reason based on experience, it says, cannot reach to certainty. And it assumes that the God of the Bible as clearly revealed and the god of “experience” as dimly discernible are the same God. It assumes that the God of Calvin and the god of Stassen are identical. The result is again that you are not clearly challenged to forsake the prophets of doom. They may probably be right, by the admission of the Fundamentalist himself. Worse than that, if God probably exists He is not God at all. In fact, if God only probably exists, then He surely does not exist at all and the prophets of doom are certainly right.

The Growing Christ

On another Sunday afternoon you perhaps listen to a program called “The Growing Christ.” The speaker for the day is Karl Barth, of Basel, Switzerland. With great power and enthusiasm he urges men to return to the God of the Word and the Christ of the Word. This God, he says, is first “wholly other” than man. But in Christ He becomes wholly identical with man. And then in Christ man comes to participate in the very attributes of God. The whole thing is one process, first God coming down to man and then man growing up into God. And all that because God is God for man in Christ and man is man for God in Christ. It is Christ in whom and through whom man grows into divinity.

Surely, you say, “Back to the Bible and Experience” will speak out against this basic denial of the Christian faith. And, to be sure, you will hear some criticism by the Fundamentalist to the effect that Barth is not fully true to the Bible. But after that you will hear much of agreement with Barth on the part of the Fundamentalist. The theology of Barth is based upon human experience, not on the Bible. And the theology of Fundamentalism is based partly also upon experience. Hence the sad fact that one does not find any basic criticism of the current heresy of dialectical theology on the part of the Fundamentalists. And what is true of this heresy is true of all modern heresies. Fundamentalism is not in a position to guard itself against them with any degree of thoroughness. It is like a helpless hen that sees the hawk carry off its chicks and does little more than make a noise about it.

True, in practice Fundamentalism is much better than it is here presented as being. But that is because Fundamentalists are at heart the best of Christian believers. They therefore often give a better testimony than their system would lead us to expect.

The Dependent Spirit

Growing tired of the Sunday broadcasts you give the modern religionist one final chance. This time the speaker is an expert on the psychology of religion. His name is Leuba. Of course, he says, we who apply the scientific method to the phenomena of religion, believe in regeneration. If you Fundamentalists tell us that you have had the
experience of regeneration, we shall not deny it. A fact is a fact and we would be the last to tamper with the facts.

But now if you wish to tell us what this fact of regeneration means you will, of course, have to talk in language that we can all understand. You will have to explain the meaning of regeneration in naturalist terms. For those are the only terms that all men understand. Are you ready to do that? If not we shall be compelled, however, much against our will, to call your experience meaningless.

You have now reached the point of desperation. Your own experience of regeneration is said to be meaningless unless you can explain it away in naturalistic terms. Does not Leuba see that this is to prejudge the case? Does he not see that, to all intents, it is impossible? Yet he had proclaimed his readiness to accept any fact from any source.

What will be the response of “Back to the Bible and Experience”? This time the voice that speaks is even weaker than on earlier occasions. It speaks of regeneration as the gift of the Spirit. But then it speaks also of faith as preceding regeneration. For how can God save men, if man does not want to be saved? You are free to resist the work of Christ. It is you who must let Christ into your hearts or He cannot come in at all.

Here the Fundamentalist is virtually admitting that Leuba is right in separating the fact of regeneration from the system of Christian religion of which it is a part. Fundamentalism itself will not admit that the regeneration is the work of the sovereign and free Spirit. If the Fundamentalist is said to be born again he wants himself to be present at the operation and see what it is that the Spirit does. He wants to help the Spirit of God by an act of self-conscious acceptance that is, in part, independent of the Spirit. Thus the Spirit of God is no longer free to go and do in sovereign pleasure what he wishes to do. The Spirit of God and the spirit of man, the sinner, make a common testimony on sin and on salvation.

To reveal the compromising character of Fundamentalism fully it would be necessary to discuss every major Christian doctrine. Fundamentalists compromise the Gospel not merely at some but at every point. At every point the Voice of Experience creates so much static that the Voice of Scripture cannot be clearly heard.

### A Common Witness?

A highly important as well as highly practical question now faces the adherents of the Reformed Faith in the modern world. It is that of cooperation with Fundamentalists or Evangelicals in a common witness for the Christian Faith. There are two opinions on the subject of cooperation with Evangelicals among Reformed Christians. According to the one opinion, it is, and according to the other opinion, it is not, possible for Reformed Christians to engage in a common witness with Evangelicals or Fundamentalists, without compromise.

The two groups holding these opposite opinions agree that the Reformed Faith is not merely a matter of the five points of Calvinism, but that it is the Christian faith. It therefore includes all the doctrines of the Christian faith.

The difference between the two groups centers on the question of the nature of the witness to the Christian faith as this is given by Fundamentalists or Evangelicals. The nature of that witness we have found to be one of compromise with unbelief at every
point. A common witness is, therefore, we believe, the same in effect as a compromising witness.

A common witness is of necessity the lowest common denominator witness. This would be true even if, in any given organization, the representatives of the Reformed Faith were in the majority. Any witness to the Christian faith must be positive as well as negative. It is always both at the same time. It cannot be otherwise. There is no intelligible witness against the wisdom of the world except in the name of the wisdom of God. And a common witness involves, therefore, a common responsibility for the positive affirmations of the faith as well as the negations against unbelief. Now the positive affirmations of Evangelicals are, without exception, confused and compromising in character. It is for the confused and compromising witness of Fundamentalism that Reformed Christians become co-responsible in any effort at giving common witness to the world.

**A Reformed Witness**

Do Reformed Christians want their own witness to be identified before the world with those who cannot speak otherwise than words of compromise? Of course they do not. Then let them not either as churches or as individuals be joined to the councils or associations where such compromise necessarily occurs, either through organizational or doctrinal relationships.

Do Reformed Christians want their own witness, the only consistent witness to the Christian faith, to be heard in the world? Then let them band together with all Reformed men and groups of Reformed men everywhere for a common testimony to that which alone can really challenge the wisdom of the world.

The end of time approaches. Unbelief is more consistent in the expressions of its principles than it has ever been. The modern prophets of doom, and of bliss, the modern naturalistic theologians such as Barth and Brunner, make man and his own experience the standard and the test of truth. The Reformed Faith consistently expressed is the only thing that can challenge the God-defying humanism of this latter day. Will Reformed churches and individual Christians then squelch their own voice? Will they create static for themselves as they try to make themselves heard? We trust they will not. We trust on the contrary, that they will make themselves heard without compromise.
In this series of articles our concern will be to discover some of the main features of the Reformed approach in Christian Apologetics.

While seeking light on this question, let us turn first to the inaugural address of the late Dr. Valentine Hepp of the Free University of Amsterdam. The title of this address is Reformed Apologetic.¹ Hepp says that a Reformed Christian must naturally be Reformed in his approach to the problem of Apologetics. Men and women do not walk about first as human beings and afterward as men and women. No more can a Reformed Christian first appear as a Christian and later as a Reformed Christian. A Reformed Christian is a Reformed Christian from the outset. If Hepp is right, then the Reformed Christian will have a distinctively Reformed approach when he is trying to win “Mr. Black” to become at once a Reformed Christian, not first a Christian and then a Reformed Christian. “Mr. Black” must become a Reformed Christian not in two but in one transaction.

The late Dr. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield once said that Calvinism or the Reformed Faith is Christianity come to its own. Warfield did not like to identify Calvinism with the so-called “five points of Calvinism”: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Historically at least, Warfield asserts, these five points were but the “theological obverse” of the “five points of Arminianism.” The “five points of Calvinism” are but so many branches of the tree of Calvinism.

Looked at as a unit, Calvinism represents the “vision of God in his majesty.” Regarded a little more particular, Calvinism implies three things. “In it, objectively speaking, theism comes to its rights; subjectively speaking, the religious relation attains to its purity; soteriologically speaking, evangelical religion finds at length its full expression and its secure stability.”² Amplifying this statement Warfield says: “I think it is important to insist that Calvinism is not a specific variety of theistic thought, religious experience, evangelical faith, but just the perfect manifestation of these things… There is but one kind of theism, religion, evangelicalism; and if there are several constructions laying claim to these names they differ from one another not as correlative species of a more inclusive genus, but only as more or less good or bad specimens of the same thing differ from one another.”³

If Warfield is right, then our conclusion must be the same as that based on Hepp’s remarks. The Reformed Faith is theism come to its own. If there be other theisms they are not true theisms. How could they be? Are there several true Gods? There is but one true

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¹ Gereformeerde Apologetiek, Kampen, 1922.
² Calvin as Theologian and Calvinism Today, p 23.
God; there is therefore but one true theism, namely, Christian theism, the theism of the Bible. There is but one God, the God triune of the Scriptures. And it is the vision of this God “in his majesty” that constitutes the essence of the Reformed Faith. It is to the recognition of this God as wholly sovereign that the Reformed Christian would win “Mr. Black.”

Two Negative Conclusions

Two general conclusions of a negative nature may now be drawn. First, the Reformed apologist cannot cooperate with the Romanist in the establishment of the existence of God. The theism of the Roman Catholic theology is not “theism come to its own”; it is a vague, general sort of theism. It is a theism in which the God of Christianity and the God of Greek philosophy, particularly the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, are ground together into a common mixture. The theism of Romanist theology is a theism heavily freighted with pagan elements of thought. If such a theism were proved to be true, then the Christian theism of the Reformed Christian would be proved to be untrue. If with the Romanist we “prove” the existence of a god, then we have disproved the existence of the God of Christianity. It is only a perverted type of Christianity, such as constitutes Romanism, that fits onto the perverted type of theism which is “proved” by Romanist theologians.

The second major negative conclusion to be drawn from the remarks of Hepp and Warfield is that the Reformed apologist cannot co-operate with the “evangelical” in providing the truth of evangelicalism. By evangelicalism we mean what Warfield meant when he spoke of it as identical with the general non-Reformed Protestantism.  

This second negative conclusion follows directly from the first. The evangelical does want to co-operate with the Romanist in proving the truth of theism. He argues that Protestants have many doctrines in common with Romanists, and that the existence of God is the most basic of them. Why then he asks in amazement, cannot Protestants co-operate with Romanists in proving the truth of theism? Why not have the Romanist help us build the first story of the house of Christian theism? After they have helped us build the first story of our house we can dismiss them with thanks for their services and proceed to build the second story, the story of Protestantism, ourselves.

The answer to this is that if Romanists have helped us in building the first story of our house, then the whole house will tumble into ruins. It has already been noted that when they build the first story of their house the Romanists mix a great deal of the clay of paganism with the iron of Christianity. The concrete blocks may be those of Christianity, but the cement is nothing other than the sand of paganism. Woe to the Protestant who seeks to build his Protestantism as a second story upon a supposedly theistic foundation, and a first story built by Romanism or by Protestants in conjunction with Romanists. Only a defective Protestantism can be built upon the perverted theism of the Romanist type. For, as Warfield puts it, the precise characterization of evangelicalism is that which describes it as a defective Protestantism. Warfield’s point is that evangelicalism is inconsistent Protestantism. It has carried into its system certain foreign elements—elements ultimately derived by way of Romanism from paganism.

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Are We Extremists?

“But,” some one will exclaim, “look where you have brought us! To what extremes you have gone! Not to speak of Romanists, are we not even to co-operate with evangelicals? I know many evangelicals who are much better Christians than are many Calvinists.” But this is not the issue. The question is not as to who are Christians and who are going to heaven. We are not judging men’s hearts. Many evangelicals are no doubt better Calvinists in practice than other men who are officially known as Calvinists.

The point is that we are now speaking of theological systems. When Warfield makes the high claim that Calvinism is “nothing more or less than the hope of the world,” he is speaking of the Reformed system of theology and of the Reformed point of view in general. Other types of theology are super-naturalistic in patches. To some extent they yield to the idea of autosoterism, to the idea that man to some degree is saved by his own effort. Therefore, argues Warfield, “Calvinism is just Christianity.” But then, by precisely the same reasoning, Reformed apologetics is the hope of the world. A further objection may be met here: Have not certain Reformed theologians been willing in some measure to co-operate with Romanists in defending theism and with evangelicals in defending evangelicalism, in order, after that, to defend the specific doctrines of Calvinism? Are they all wrong and are you alone right?

The answer to this objection is not easy. It would require separate and extensive discussion to do it justice. There is, no doubt, some measure of truth in the contention that at least some Reformed theologians have been willing to follow the method of co-operation first and distinctiveness afterward. Over against this stands the fact that other Reformed theologians, seeing, as they thought, the compromising result of such a method, have argued that the very idea of apologetics as a positive theological discipline is out of accord with the principles of the Reformed Faith. Or again, some have argued that apologetics must at most be given a very small task in the way of warding off the attacks of the enemy. The difference between Warfield and Kuyper on the question of apologetics is well known. Are we to be reprimanded in advance for not agreeing with Kuyper? Or for not agreeing with Warfield? Let us rather seek to listen to both Warfield and Kuyper and also to Calvin, and then do the best we can as we ask just what the genius of the Reformed Faith requires of us. Is there anything else that any one today can do?

A third party is anxious to ask a question here. Are all the efforts of evangelical apologists then to no avail? Are we to make no use whatsoever of the research done by them in such fields as biblical history and archaeology, to mention nothing more?

Let us reply to these questions with other questions. Reformed theologians do not co-operate with Arminian theologians in the preaching of the gospel. Do they therefore conclude that all Arminian preaching is to no avail? God uses even defective preaching to accomplish his purposes; so God also uses defective reasoning to bring men to himself. And as for the results of evangelical scholarship, the Reformed apologist should gratefully employ all that is true and good in it. What is true and good in it derives from the measure of Calvinism any form of Christianity contains. But when it comes to the

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1 The original text indicates the presence of a footnote here, but none is listed.—ed.
master plan of procedure, the Reformed apologist must go his own way; and it is only of
the master plan that we speak when we deal with the question of apologetics in general.
Solomon made use even of the Sidonians when building the temple of the Lord, but he
did not give them membership on his building committee.

The Basic Difference

A fourth party now asks: “Granting all this for the sake of argument, can you tell us in
a few words wherein you think the main difference consists between a Reformed and a
Romanist or evangelical apologetics?”

Here, indeed, is the heart of the matter. It is not easy to answer this question. But let
us try to deal with it as best we can in a general way before going on to further specific
points.

The basic difference between the two types of apologetics is to be found, we believe,
in the primary assumption that each party makes. The Romanist-evangelical type of
apologetics assumes that man can first know much about himself and the universe and
afterward ask whether God exists and Christianity is true. The Reformed apologist
assumes that nothing can be known by man about himself or the universe unless God
exists and Christianity is true.

It will be observed that it is this very difference that exists between the two types of
theology, the Romanist-evangelical and the Reformed. The former type of theology
assumes that it first knows what human freedom is from “experience.” It then adjusts the
doctrines of Scripture concerning God and Christianity to its notion of freedom derived
from experience. The Reformed type of theology begins with Scriptures and defines
human freedom in terms of its principles alone.

It is natural that this difference which is basic in the two types of theology should also
be basic in the two types of apologetics. Thomas Aquinas, the Roman Catholic, and
Bishop Butler, the Arminian, both talk a great deal about the nature of man and of reality
as a whole before they approach the question of the existence of God or of the truth of
Christianity. At least, they assume much about the nature of man and of reality as a whole
while they are speaking about the possibility of the existence of God or of the truth of
Christianity. Over against them stands Calvin. He will not say one word about man or
about the universe except in the light of the revelation of God as given in Scripture. The
very first page of The Institutes is eloquent testimony to this fact.

Otherwise expressed, it may be said that the Reformed apologist does while the
Romanist-evangelical apologist does not make the Creator-creature distinction basic in all
that he says about anything. His argument is that unless this distinction is made basic to
all that man says about anything, then whatever man says is fundamentally untrue. The
natural man, who assumes that he himself and the facts about him are not created,
therefore assumes what is basically false. Everything he says about himself and the
universe will be colored by this assumption. It is therefore impossible to grant that he is
right, basically right, in what he says about any fact. If he says what is right in detail
about any fact, this is in spite of, not because of his basically false assumption.

Since the Romanist-evangelical apologist does not make the Creator-creature
distinction basic to the very first thing that he says about man or the universe, he is
willing to join hands with the natural man, and together with him “discover” many
“truths” about man and the universe. He will make common ground with the unbeliever as in science or in philosophy they investigate together the nature of Reality as a whole. He will agree with the natural man as he speaks about “being in general,” and only afterward argue against the unbeliever for the necessity of introducing the Creator-creature distinction. So Butler agrees with the deists on their view of the “course and constitution” of nature, and afterward tries to persuade them that they ought also to believe in Christ.

Of course, the reason why the one type of apologetics does and the other does not wish to make the Creator-creature distinction basic at the outset of all predication is to be found in the differing conceptions of sin. The natural man does not want to make the Creator-Creature distinction basic in his thought. The sinner does not want to recognize the fact that he is a creature of God, as such responsible to God, and because of his sin under the judgment of God. This is to be expected. But why should Christians who have confessed their sins to God, who have therefore recognized him as Creator and Lord, and especially why should evangelicals who confess that they hold to the Bible as their only infallible rule of authority, not wish to bring their every thought captive to the obedience of Christ? In other words, how do you account for the fact that evangelicals carry into their theology and into their apologetics so much foreign material? It is, of course, because of their defective view of sin. In fact, their defective view of sin is itself of foreign origin. More must be said about this subject later.

For the moment: let us be keenly aware of the fact that we who seek to escape the defective views of sin and of creation involved in evangelical theology and apologetics are always defective in practise. Precisely the same tendency toward the acceptance of a low view of sin and of creation that we deprecate in our brethren is found in ourselves. We should therefore seek to win ourselves in practise as well as our brethren in theory to an acceptance of the implications of a fully biblical view of sin and creation in the field of apologetics. Of these implications it will be our concern to speak in what follows.
In the first article of this series the contention was made that one who holds to the Reformed Faith in theology should, to be consistent, also hold to a Reformed method in Apologetics. In practice this means that we should try to win Mr. Black, the non-Christian, to an acceptance of Christianity as it is to be identified with the Reformed Faith, which is Christianity come to its own. We should not try to win men to acceptance first of Christianity in general and afterwards to “the five points of Calvinism.” The transition from non-Christianity or paganism to the Reformed Faith as full-fledged Christianity must be made in one transaction.

To see clearly what is meant think of a dentist. You go to him with a “bad tooth.” Does he take care of your tooth in two operations? To be sure, you may have to come back to have him finish the job. But it is one job he is doing. He takes all the decayed matter out before he fills the cavity. Well, Mr. Black is the man with the toothache, and you, as a Reformed Christian, are the dentist. Would you first convert him to Evangelicalism and then to the Reformed Faith? Then you would be like a dentist who would today take half the decayed matter out and fill the cavity, and tomorrow or next week take out the rest of the decayed matter and fill the cavity again. Or, rather, you would be like the dentist who takes part of the decayed matter out, fills the cavity, and then lets the patient go until a long time later he returns complaining again of a toothache.

Indeed, it is no fun to have the dentist drill deep into your tooth. And it is the last and deepest drilling that hurts most. So Mr. Black is likely to feel more at home in the office of the “evangelical” dentist than in the office of the “Reformed” dentist. Will the latter have any customers? He is likely to fear that he will not. He is ever tempted, therefore, to advertise that he is cooperating with all good “conserv-atives” in all good dentistry, but that he has a specialty which it would be very nice for people to see him about.

The X-ray Machine

Let us now ask by what means we may diagnose Mr. Black. For that purpose we use the X-ray machine. Whence do you know your misery? Out of the law, the revealed will of God, answers the Reformed Christian. Let us call him Mr. White. It is by means of the Bible, not by personal experience, that he turns the light on himself, as well as on Mr. Black. He does not appeal to “experience” or to “reason” or to “history” or to anything else as his source of information in the way that he appeals to the Bible. He may appeal
to experience, but his appeal will be to experience as seen in the light of the Bible. So he may appeal to reason or to history, but, again, only as they are to be seen in the light of the Bible. He does not even look for corroboration for the teachings of Scripture from experience, reason or history except insofar as these are themselves first seen in the light of the Bible. For him the Bible, and therefore the God of the Bible, is like the sun from which the light that is given by oil lamps, gas lamps and electrical light is derived.

Quite different is the attitude of the “evangelical” or “conservative.” Let us call him Mr. Grey. Mr. Grey uses the Bible, experience, reason or logic as equally independent sources of information about his own and therefore about Mr. Black’s predicament. I do not say that for Mr. Grey the Bible, experience and reason are equally important. Indeed they are not. He knows that the Bible is by far the most important. But he none the less constantly appeals to “the facts of experience” and to “logic” without first dealing with the very idea of fact and with the idea of logic in terms of the Scripture.

The difference is basic. When Mr. White diagnoses Mr. Black’s case he takes as his X-ray machine the Bible. When Mr. Grey diagnoses Mr. Black’s case he first takes the X-ray machine of experience, then the X-ray machine of logic, and finally his biggest X-ray machine, the Bible. In fact, he may take these in any order. Each of them is an independent source of information for him.

**Mr. Grey Analyzes Mr. Black**

Let us first look briefly at a typical sample of procedure generally followed in conservative or evangelical circles today. Let us, in other words, note how Mr. Grey proceeds with an analysis of Mr. Black. And let us at the same time see how Mr. Grey would win Mr. Black to an acceptance of Christianity. We take for this purpose a series of articles which appeared in the January, February and March, 1950, issues of *Moody Monthly*, published by the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Edward John Carnell, Ph.D, author of *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* and professor of Apologetics at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, wrote this series. Carnell’s writings are among the best that appear in evangelical circles. In fact, in his book Carnell frequently argues as we would expect a Reformed apologist to argue. By and large, however, he represents the evangelical rather than the Reformed method in Apologetics.

When Mr. Carnell instructs his readers “How Every Christian Can Defend His Faith,” he first appeals to facts and to logic as independent sources of information about the truth of Christianity. Of course, he must bring in the Bible even at this point. But the Bible is brought in only as a book of information about the fact of what has historically been called Christianity. It is not from the beginning brought in as God’s Word. It must be shown to Mr. Black to be the Word of God by means of “facts” and “logic.” Carnell would thus avoid at all costs the charge of reasoning in a circle. He does not want Mr. Black to point the finger at him and say: “You prove that the Bible is true by an appeal to the Bible itself. That is circular reasoning. How can any person with any respect for logic accept such a method of proof?”

Carnell would escape such a charge by showing that the facts of experience, such as all men recognize, and logic, such as all men must use, point to the truth of Scripture. This is what he says: “If you are of a philosophic turn, you can point to the remarkable way in which Christianity fits in with the moral sense inherent in every human being, or
the influence of Christ on our ethics, customs, literature, art and music. Finally, you can draw upon your own experience in speaking of the reality of answered prayer and the witness of the Spirit in your own heart…. If the person is impressed with this evidence, turn at once to the gospel. Read crucial passages and permit the Spirit to work on the inner recesses of the heart. Remember that apologetics is merely a preparation. After the ground has been broken, proceed immediately with sowing and watering.”¹

It is assumed in this argument that Mr. Black agrees with the “evangelical,” Mr. Grey, on the character of the “moral sense” of man. This may be true, but then it is true because Mr. Grey has himself not taken his information about the moral sense of man exclusively from Scripture. If with Mr. White he had taken his conception of the moral nature of man from the Bible, then he would hold that Mr. Black, as totally depraved will, of course, misinterpret his own moral nature. True, Christianity is in accord with the moral nature of man. But this is so only because the moral nature of man is first in accord with what the Bible says it is, that is, originally created perfect, but now wholly corrupted in its desires through the fall of man.

The Boy Or The Rock

If you are reasoning with a naturalist, Carnell advises his readers, ask him why when a child throws a rock through his window, he chases the child and not the rock. Presumably even a naturalist knows that the child, not the rock, is free and therefore responsible. “A bottle of water cannot ought; it must. When once the free spirit of man is proved, the moral argument—the existence of a God who imposes moral obligations—can form the bridge from man to God.”²

Here the fundamental difference between Mr. Grey’s and Mr. White’s approach to Mr. Black appears. The difference lies in the different notions of the free will of man. Or, it may be said, the difference is with respect to the nature of man as such. Mr. White would define man, and therefore his freedom, in terms of Scripture alone. He would therefore begin with the fact that man is the creature of God. And this implies that man’s freedom is adervative freedom. It is a freedom that is not and can not be wholly ultimate, that is, self-dependent. Mr. White knows that Mr. Black would not agree with him in this analysis of man and of his freedom. He knows that Mr. Black would not agree with him on this any more than he would agree on the biblical idea of total depravity.

Mr. Grey, on the other hand, must at all costs have “a point of contact” in the system of thought of Mr. Black, who is typical of the natural man. Just as Mr. Grey is afraid of being charged with circular reasoning, so he is also afraid of being charged with talking about something that is “outside of experience.” And so he is driven to talk in general about the “free spirit of man.” Of course, Mr. Black need have no objections from his point of view in allowing for the “free spirit of man.” That is at bottom what he holds even when he is a naturalist. His whole position is based upon the idea of man as a free spirit, that is, a spirit that is not subject to the law of his Creator God. And Carnell does not distinguish between the biblical doctrine of freedom, as based upon and involved in

² Idem., p. 343.
the fact of man’s creation, and the doctrine of freedom, in the sense of autonomy, which makes man a law unto himself.

Of course, Mr. Black will be greatly impressed with such an argument as Mr. Grey has presented to him for the truth of Christianity. In fact, if Christianity is thus shown to be in accord with the moral nature of man, as Mr. Black himself sees that moral nature, then Mr. Black does not need to be converted at all to accept Christianity. He only needs to accept something additional to what he has always believed. He has been shown how nice it would be to have a second story built on top of the house which he has already built according to his own plans.

To be sure, the evangelical intends no such thing. Least of all does Carnell intend such a thing. But why then does not the “Evangelical” see that by presenting the non-Christian with Evangelicalism rather than with the Reformed Faith he must compromise the Christian religion? And why does he not also see that in doing what he does the non-Christian is not really challenged either by fact or by logic? For facts and logic which are not themselves first seen in the light of Christianity have, in the nature of the case, no power in them to change the unbeliever to change his position. Facts and logic, not based upon the creation doctrine and not placed in the context of the doctrine of God’s all-embracing Providence, are without relation to one another and therefore wholly meaningless.

It is this fact which must be shown to Mr. Black. The folly of holding to any view of life except that which is frankly based upon the Bible as the absolute authority for man must be pointed out to him. Only then are we doing what Paul did when he said: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world” (1 Cor 1:20)?

Mr. White Analyzes Mr. Black

As a Reformed Christian Mr. White therefore cannot cooperate with Mr. Grey in his analysis of Mr. Black. This fact may appear more clearly if we turn to see how Mr. Black appears when he is analyzed by Mr. White in terms of the Bible alone.

Now, according to Mr. White’s analysis, Mr. Black is not a murderer. He is not necessarily a drunkard or a dope addict. He lives in one of the suburbs. He is every whit a gentleman. He gives to the Red Cross and to the Red Feather campaigns. He was a boy scout; he is a member of a lodge; he is very much civic minded; now and then his name is mentioned in the papers as an asset to the community. But we know that he is spiritually dead. He is filled with the spirit of error. Perhaps he is a member of a “fine church” in the community, but nevertheless he is one of a “people that do err in their heart” (Ps 95:10). He lives in a stupor (Rom 11:8). To him the wisdom of God is foolishness. The truth about God, and about himself in relation to God, is obnoxious to him. He does not want to hear of it. He seeks to close eyes and ears to those who give witness of the truth. He is, in short, utterly self-deceived.

Actually, Mr. Black is certain that he looks at life in the only proper way. Even if he has doubts as to the truth of what he believes, he does not see how any sensible or rational man could believe or do otherwise. If he has doubts it is because no one can be fully sure of himself. If he has fears it is because fear is to be expected in the hazardous situation in which modern man lives. If he sees men’s minds break down he thinks this is
to be expected under current conditions of stress and strain. If he sees grown men act like children he says that they, after all, were once children; if he sees them act like beasts he says that they were once beasts. Everything, including the “abnormal” is to him “normal.”

In all this Mr. Black has obviously taken for granted that what the Bible says about the world and himself is not true. He has taken this for granted. He may never have argued the point. He has cemented yellow spectacles to his own eyes. He cannot remove them because he will not remove them. He is blind and loves to be blind.

Do not think that Mr. Black has an easy time of it. He is the man who always “kicks against the pricks.” His conscience troubles him all the time. Deep down in his heart he knows that what the Bible says about him and about the world is true. Even if he has never heard of the Bible he knows that he is a creature of God and that he has broken the law of God (Rom 1.19–20; Rom 2:14–15). When the prodigal son left his father’s house he could not immediately efface from his memory the look and the voice of his father. How that look and that voice came back to him when he was at the swine trough! How hard he had tried to live as though the money with which he so freely entertained his “friends” had not come from his father! When asked where he came from he would answer that he came “from the other side.” He did not want to be reminded of his past. Yet he could not forget it. It required a constant act of suppression to forget the past. But that very act of suppression itself keeps alive the memory of the past.

So also with Mr. Black. He daily changes the truth of God into a lie. He daily worships and serves the creature more than the Creator. He daily holds the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). But what a time he has with himself! He may try to sear his conscience as with a hot iron. He may seek to escape the influence of all those who witness to the truth. But he can never escape himself as witnessbearer to the truth.

His conscience keeps telling him: “Mr. Black, you are a fugitive from justice. You have run away from home, from your father’s bountiful love. You are an ingrate, a sneak, a rascal! You shall not escape meeting justice at last. The father still feeds you. Yet you despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not recognizing that the goodness of God is calculated to lead you to repentance (Rom 2:4). Why do you kick against the pricks? Why do you stifle the voice of your conscience? Why do you use the wonderful intellect that God has given you as a tool for the suppression of the voice of God which speaks to you through yourself and through your environment? Why do you build your house on sand instead of on rock? Can you be sure that no storm is ever coming? Are you omniscient? Are you omnipotent? You say that nobody knows whether God exists or whether Christianity is true. You say that nobody knows this because man is finite. Yet you assume that God cannot exist and that Christianity cannot be true. You assume that no judgment will ever come. You must be omniscient to know that. And yet you have just said that all man declares about ‘the beyond’ must be based upon his brief span of existence in this world of time and chance. How, then, if you have taken for granted that chance is one of the basic ingredients of all human experience, can you at the same time say what can or cannot be in all time to come? You certainly have made a fool of yourself, Mr. Black,” says Mr. Black to himself. “You reject the claims of truth which you know to be the truth, and you do that in terms of the lie which really you know to be the lie.”
It is not always that Mr. Black is thus aware of the fact that he lives like the prodigal who would eat of the things the swine did eat, but who knows he cannot because he is a human being. He is not always thus aware of his folly—in part at least, because of the failure of evangelicals, and particularly because of the failure of Reformed Christians to stir him up to a realization of his folly. The evangelical does not want to stir him up thus. It is in the nature of his own theology not to stir him up to a realization of this basic depth of folly. But the Reformed Christian should, on his basis, want to stir up Mr. Black to an appreciation of the folly of his ways.

However, when the Reformed Christian, Mr. White, is to any extent aware of the richness of his own position and actually has the courage to challenge Mr. Black by presenting to him the picture of himself as taken through the X-ray machine called the Bible, he faces the charge of “circular reasoning” and of finding no “point of contact” with experience. And he will also be subject to the criticism of the evangelical for speaking as if Christianity were irrational and for failing to reach the man in the street.

Thus we seem to be in a bad predicament. There is a basic difference of policy between Mr. White and Mr. Grey as to how to deal with Mr. Black. Mr. Grey thinks that Mr. Black is not really such a bad fellow. It is possible, he thinks, to live with Mr. Black in the same world. And he is pretty strong. So it is best to make a compromise peace with him. That seems to be the way of the wise and practical politician. On the other hand, Mr. White thinks that it is impossible permanently to live in the same world with Mr. Black. Mr. Black, he says, must therefore be placed before the requirement of absolute and unconditional surrender. And surely it would be out of the question for Mr. White first to make a compromise peace with Mr. Black and then, after all, to require unconditional surrender. But what then about this charge of circular reasoning and about this charge of having no point of contact with the unbeliever?
The one main question to which we are addressing ourselves in this series of articles is whether Christians holding to the Reformed faith should also hold to a specifically Reformed method when they are engaged in the defense of the faith. This broad question does not pertain merely to the “five points of Calvinism.” When Lutherans or Arminians attack these great doctrines (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints) we, as Calvinists, are quick to defend them. We believe that these five points are directly based upon Scripture. But the question now under discussion is whether, in the defense of any Christian doctrine, Reformed Christians should use a method all their own.

The Negative Answer

People easily give a negative reply to this question. Do we not have many doctrines in common with all evangelicals? Don’t all orthodox Protestants hold to the substitutionary atonement of Christ? More particularly, what about the simple statements of fact recorded in Scripture? How could anyone, if he believes such statements at all, take them otherwise than as simple statements of fact? How could anyone have a specifically Reformed doctrine of such a fact as the resurrection of Christ? If together with evangelicals we accept certain simple truths and facts of Scripture at face value, how then can we be said to have a separate method of defense of such doctrines?

The Positive Answer

Yet it can readily be shown that this negative answer cannot be maintained. Take, for example, the doctrine of the atonement. The Arminian doctrine of the atonement is not the same as the Reformed doctrine of the atonement. Both the Arminian and the Calvinist assert that they believe in the substitutionary atonement. But the Arminian conception of the substitutionary atonement is colored, and as Calvinists we believe discolored, by his view of “free will.” According to the Arminian view, man has absolute or ultimate power to accept or to reject the salvation offered him. This implies that the salvation offered to man is merely the possibility of salvation.
To illustrate: suppose I deposit one million dollars to your account in your bank. It is still altogether up to you to believe that such wealth is yours, and to use it to cover the floor of your house with Persian rugs in place of the old threadbare rugs now there. Thus, in the Arminian scheme, the very possibility of things no longer depends exclusively upon God, but, in some areas at least, upon man. What Christ did for us is made to depend for its effectiveness upon what is done by us. It is no longer right to say that with God all things are possible.

It is obvious, therefore, that Arminians have taken into their Protestantism a good bit of the leaven of Roman Catholicism. Arminianism is less radical, less consistent in its Protestantism than it should be. And what is true of Arminianism is true also, though in a lesser degree, of orthodox Lutheranism.

**Mr. Grey On The Atonement**

Now Mr. Grey, the evangelical, seems to have a relatively easy time of it when he seeks to win Mr. Black, the unbeliever, to an acceptance of “the substitutionary atonement.” He can stand on “common ground” with Mr. Black on this matter of what is possible and what is impossible. Listen to Mr. Grey as he talks with Mr. Black.

“Mr. Black, have you accepted Christ as your personal Savior? Do you believe that he died on the cross your substitute? If you do not, you will surely be lost forever.”

“Well now,” replies Mr. Black, “I’ve just had a visit from Mr. White on the same subject. You two seem to have a ‘common witness’ on this matter. Both of you believe that God exists, that he has created the world, that the first man, Adam, sinned, and that we are all to be sent to hell because of what that first man did, and so forth. All this is too fatalistic for me. If I am a creature, as you say I am, then I have no ultimate power of my own and therefore am not free. And if I am not free, then I am not responsible. So, if I am going to hell, it will be simply because your ‘god’ has determined that I should. You orthodox Christians kill morality and all humanitarian progress. I will have none of it. Good-by!”

“But wait a second,” says, Mr. Grey, in great haste. “I do not have a common witness with the Calvinist. I have a common witness with you against the Calvinist when it comes to all that determinism that you mention. Of course, you are free. You are absolutely free to accept or to reject the atonement that is offered to you. I offer the atonement through Christ only as a possibility. You yourself must make it an actuality for yourself. I agree with you over against the Calvinist in saying that ‘possibility’ is wider than the will of God. I would not for a moment say with the Calvinist that God’s counsel determines ‘whatsoever comes to pass.’ ”

“Besides, even extreme Calvinists like J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., virtually agree with both of us. Listen to what Buswell says: ‘Nevertheless, my moral choices, are choices in which we are ourselves ultimate causes.’ Buswell himself wants to go beyond the ‘merely arbitrary answer’ in Romans 9:20–21, which speaks of the potter and the clay, to the ‘much more profound analysis of God’s plan of redemption’ in Romans 9:22–24, in which Paul pictures Pharaoh as ‘one who, according to the foreknowledge of God, would rebel against God.’ ”

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Mr. Black On The Atonement

“Do I understand then,” replies Mr. Black, “that you evangelicals and even the more moderate Calvinists are opposed to the determinism of the regular, old-style Calvinists of the historic Reformed Confessions? I am glad to hear that. To say that all things have been fixed from all eternity by God is terrible! It makes me shudder! What would happen to all morality and decency if all men believed such a teaching? But now you evangelicals have joined us in holding that ‘possibility’ is independent of the will of God. You have thus with all good people and with all modern and neo-modern theologians, like Barth, made possible the salvation of all men.”

“That means, of course, that salvation is possible too for those who have never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Salvation is therefore possible without an acceptance of your substitutionary atonement through this Jesus, of whom you speak. You certainly would not want to say with the Calvinists that God has determined the bounds of all nations and individuals and has thus, after all, determined that some men, millions of them, in fact, should never hear this gospel.”

“Besides, if possibility is independent of God as you evangelicals and moderate Calvinists teach, then I need not be afraid of hell. It is then quite possible that there is no hell. Hell, you will then agree, is that torture of a man’s conscience which he experiences when he fails to live up to his own moral ideals. So I do not think that I shall bother just yet about accepting Christ as my personal Savior. There is plenty of time.”

Mr. Grey’s First Failure

Poor Mr. Grey. He really wanted to say something about having a common testimony with the Calvinists after all. At the bottom of his heart he knew that Mr. White, the Calvinist, and not Mr. Black, the unbeliever, was his real friend. But he had made a common witness with Mr. Black against the supposed determinism of the Calvinist. Still it was difficult for him to turn about face and also make a common testimony with Mr. White against Mr. Black. He had nothing intelligible to say. His method of defending his faith had forced him to admit that Mr. Black was basically right. He had given Mr. Black an opportunity of knowing what he was supposed to accept, but his testimony had confirmed Mr. Black in his belief that there was no need of his accepting Christ at all.

It is true, of course, that in practice Mr. Grey is much better in his theology and in his method of representing the gospel than he is here said to be. But that is because in practice every evangelical who really loves his Lord is a Calvinist at heart. How could he really pray to God for help if he believed that there was a possibility that God could not help? In their hearts all true Christians believe that God controls “whatsoever comes to pass.” But the Calvinist cannot have a common witness for the substitutionary atonement with “evangelicals” who first make a common witness with the unbeliever against him on the all-determining question whether God controls all things that happen.
Requirements For Effective Witness

It must always be remembered that the first requirement for effective witnessing is that the position to which witness is given be intelligible. Evangelicalism, when consistently carried out, destroys this intelligibility. The second requirement for effective witnessing is that he to whom the witness is given must be shown why he should forsake his own position and accept that which is offered him. Evangelicalism, when consistently carried out, also destroys the reason why the unbeliever should accept the gospel. Why should the unbeliever change his position if he is not shown that it is wrong? And, in particular, why should he change if the one who asks him to change is actually encouraging him in thinking that he is right? The Calvinist will need to have a better method of defending the doctrine of the atonement, for example, than that of the evangelical.

The Resurrection Of Christ

We have dealt with the doctrine of the atonement. That led us into the involved question whether God is the source of possibility, or whether possibility is the source of God. It has been shown that the “evangelical” or Arminian fundamentalist holds to a position which requires him to make both of these contradictory assertions at once. But how about the realm of fact? Do you also hold, I am asked, that we need to seek for a specifically Reformed method of defending the facts of Christianity? Take the resurrection of Christ as an example why can there be no common witness on the part of the evangelical and the Calvinist to such a fact as that?

Mr. Grey On The Resurrection

Once more Mr. Grey, the evangelical punches the doorbell at Mr. Black’s home. Mr. Black answers and admits him. “I am here again, Mr. Black,” begins Grey, “because I am still anxious to have you accept Christ as your personal Savior. When I spoke to you the other time about the atonement you got me into deep water. We got all tangled up on the question of ‘possibility.’ ”

“But now I have something far simpler. I want to deal with simple facts. I want to show you that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is as truly a fact as any that you can mention. To use the words of Wilbur Smith, himself a Calvinist but opposed to the idea of a distinctively Reformed method for the defense of the faith: ‘The meaning of the resurrection is a theological matter, but the fact of the resurrection is a historical matter; the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus may be a mystery, but the fact that the body disappeared from the tomb is a matter to be decided upon by historical evidence.’ And the historical evidence for the resurrection is the kind of evidence that you as a scientist would desire.”

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1 *Therefore Stand*, Boston. 1945, p. 386.
“Smith writes in the same book: ‘About a year ago, after studying over a long period of time this entire problem of our Lord’s resurrection, and having written some hundreds of pages upon it at different times, I was suddenly arrested by the thought that the very kind of evidence which modern science, and even psychologists, are so insistent upon for determining the reality of any object under consideration is the kind of evidence that we have presented to us in the Gospels regarding the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, namely, the things that are seen with the human eye, touched with the human hand, and heard by the human ear. This is what we call empirical evidence. It would almost seem as if parts of the Gospel records of the resurrection were actually written for such a day as ours when empiricism so dominates men’s thinking.’”

“Now I think that Smith is quite right in thus distinguishing sharply between the fact and the meaning of the resurrection. And I am now only asking you to accept the fact of the resurrection. There is the clearest possible empirical evidence for this fact. The living Jesus was touched with human hands and seen with human eyes of sensible men after he had been crucified and put into the tomb. Surely you ought to believe in the resurrection of Christ as a historical fact. And to believe in the resurrected Christ is to be saved.”

“But hold on a second,” says Mr. Black. “Your friend the Calvinist, Mr. White, has been ahead of you again. He was here last night and spoke of the same thing. However, he did not thus distinguish between the fact and the meaning of the resurrection. At least, he did not for a moment want to separate the fact of the resurrection from the system of Christianity in terms of which it gets its meaning. He spoke of Jesus Christ the Son of God, as rising from the dead. He spoke of the Son of God through whom the world was made and through whom the world is sustained as having risen from the dead. And when I asked him how this God could die and rise from the dead, he said that God did not die and rise from the dead but that the second person of the trinity had taken to himself a human nature, and that it was in this human nature that he died and rose again. In short, in accepting the fact of the resurrection he wanted me also to take all this abracadabra into the bargain. And I have a suspicion that you are secretly trying to have me do something similar.”

“No, no,” replies Mr. Grey. “I am in complete agreement with you over against the Calvinist. I have a common witness with you against him. I, too, would separate fact and system. Did I not agree with you against the Calvinist, in holding that possibility is independent of God? Well then, by the same token I hold that all kinds of facts happen apart from the plan of God. So we evangelicals are in a position, as the Calvinists are not, of speaking with you on neutral ground. With you, we would simply talk about the facts of Christianity without bringing into the picture anything about the meaning or the significance of those facts.”

“It makes me smile,” continues Mr. Grey, “when I think of Mr. White coming over here trying to convert you. That poor fellow is always reasoning in circles. I suppose that such reasoning in circles goes with his determinism. He is always talking about his self-contained God. He says that all facts are what they are because of the plan of this God. Then each fact would of necessity, to be a fact at all, prove the truth of the Christian system of things and, in turn, would be proved as existing by virtue of this self-same

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Christian system of things. I realize full well that you, as a modern scientist and
philosopher, can have no truck with such horrible, circular reasoning as that.”
“It is for this reason that, as evangelicals, we have now separated sharply between the
resurrection as a historical fact and the meaning of the resurrection. I’m merely asking
you to accept the fact of the resurrection. I am not asking you to do anything that you
cannot do in full consistency with your freedom and with the ‘scientific method.’”

**Mr. Black Replies On The Resurrection**

“Well, that is delightful,” replies Mr. Black. “I always felt that the Calvinists were our
real foes. But I read something in the paper the other day to the effect that some Calvinist
churches or individuals were proposing to make a common witness with evangelicals for
the gospel. Now I was under the impression that the gospel had something to do with
being saved from hell and going to heaven. I knew that the modernists and the ‘new
modernists,’ like Barth, do not believe in tying up the facts of history with such wild
speculations. It was my opinion that ‘fundamentalists’ did tie up belief in historical facts,
such as the death and the resurrection of Jesus, with going to heaven or to hell. So I am
delighted that you, though a fundamentalist, are willing to join with the modernist and the
neo-modernist in separating historical facts from such a rationalistic system as I knew
Christianity was.”

“Now as for accepting the resurrection of Jesus,” continued Mr. Black, “as thus
properly separated from the traditional system of theology. I do not in the least mind
doing that. To tell you the truth, I have accepted the resurrection as a fact now for some
time. The evidence for it is overwhelming. This is a strange universe. All kinds of
‘miracles’ happen in it. The universe is ‘open.’ So why should there not be some
resurrections here and there? The resurrection of Jesus would be a fine item for Ripley’s
*Believe It or Not*. Why not send it in?”

Mr. Grey wanted to continue at this point. He wanted to speak of the common witness
that he had, after all, with the Calvinist for the gospel. But it was too late. He had no
“common” witness left of any sort. He had again tried to gallop off in opposite directions
at the same time. He had again taken away all intelligibility from the witness that he
meant to bring. He had again established Mr. Black in thinking that his own unbelieving
reason was right. For it was as clear as crystal to Mr. Black, as it should have been to Mr.
Grey, that belief in the fact of the resurrection, apart from the system of Christianity,
amounts to belief that the Christian system is not true, is belief in the universe as run by
Chance, is belief that it was not Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who rose from the dead.

To be sure, in practice the “evangelical” is much better in his witness for the
resurrection of Christ than he has been presented here. But that is because every
evangelical, as a sincere Christian, is at heart a Calvinist. But witnessing is a matter of the
head as well as of the heart. If the world is to hear a consistent testimony for the Christian
faith, it is the Calvinist who must give it. If there is not a distinctively Reformed method
for the defense of every article of the Christian faith, then there is no way of clearly
telling an unbeliever just how Christianity differs from his own position and why he
should accept the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. We are happy and thankful, of
course, for the work of witnessing done by evangelicals. We are happy because of the
fact that, in spite of their inconsistency in presenting the Christian testimony, something, often much, of the truth of the gospel shines through unto men, and they are saved.
The difference between a Reformed and an Evangelical method of approach to unbelievers is our main concern in these articles. Our contention has been that the very nature of Reformed theology requires a distinct approach in the matter of its defense. Let us again discuss this question, this time in relation to the central problem of biblical authority.

How will the Evangelical or Conservative urge upon the unbeliever the idea of accepting the Bible as the Word of God? He will, of course, tell the unbeliever that his eternal weal or woe is involved. “Christ died for your sins, and you must accept him as your Savior or you will be eternally lost,” says Mr. Grey, the Conservative, to Mr. Black, the unbeliever.

Rational Probability

“But how can anyone know anything about the ‘Beyond’?” asks Mr. Black.

“Well, of course,” replies Mr. Grey, “if you want absolute certainty such as one gets in geometry, Christianity does not offer it. We offer you only ‘rational probability.’ Christianity, as I said in effect a moment ago when I spoke of the death of Christ, is founded on historical facts, which, by their very nature, cannot be demonstrated with geometric certainty. All judgments of historical particulars are at the mercy of the complexity of the time-space universe…. If the scientist cannot rise above rational probability in his empirical investigation, why should the Christian claim more?”¹ “And what is true of the death of Christ,” adds Mr. Grey, “is, of course, also true of his resurrection. But this only shows that ‘the Christian is in possession of a world-view which is making a sincere effort to come to grips with actual history.’”²

Gobble-de-Gook

By speaking thus, Mr. Grey seeks for a point of contact with Mr. Black. For Mr. Black, history is something that floats on an infinitely extended and bottomless ocean of Chance. Therefore he can say that anything may happen. Who knows but the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Son of God might issue from this womb of Chance? Such

events would have an equal chance of happening with “snarks, boojums, splinths, and
gobble-de-gook.” God himself may live in this realm of Chance. He is then “wholly
other” than ourselves. And his revelation in history would then be wholly unique.

Now the Evangelical does not challenge this underlying philosophy of Chance as it
controls the unbeliever’s conception of history. He is so anxious to have the unbeliever
accept the possibility of God’s existence and the fact of the resurrection of Christ that, if
necessary, he will exchange his own philosophy of fact for that of the unbeliever.
Anxious to be genuinely “empirical” like the unbeliever, he will throw all the facts of
Christianity into the bottomless pit of Chance. Or, rather, he will throw all these facts at
the unbeliever, and the unbeliever throws them over his back into the bottomless pit of
Chance.

Of course, this is the last thing that such men as Wilbur Smith, Edward J. Carnell, and
L Oliver Buswell, Jr., want to do. But in failing to challenge the philosophy of Chance
that underlies the unbeliever’s notion of “fact,” they are in effect accepting it.

This approach of Mr. Grey is unavoidable if one holds to an Arminian theology. The
Arminian view of man’s free will implies that “possibility” is above God. But a
“possibility” that is above God is the same thing as Chance. A God surrounded by
Chance cannot speak with authority. He would be speaking into a vacuum. His voice
could not be heard. And if God were surrounded by Chance, then human beings would be
too. They would live in a vacuum, unable to hear either their own voices or those of
others. Thus the whole of history, including all of its facts, would be without meaning.

It is this that the Reformed Christian, Mr. White, would tell Mr. Black. In the very act
of presenting the resurrection of Christ, or in the very act of presenting any other fact of
historic Christianity, Mr. White would be presenting it as authoritatively interpreted in
the Bible. He would argue that unless Mr. Black is willing to set the facts of history in the
framework of the meaning authoritatively ascribed to them in the Bible, he will make
gobble-de-gook of history.

Nobody Knows

If history were what Mr. Black assumes that it is, then anything might happen and
then nobody would know what may happen. No one thing would then be more likely to
happen than any other thing. David Hume, the great skeptic, has effectively argued that if
you allow any room for Chance in your thought, then you no longer have the right to
speak of probabilities. Whirl would be king. No one hypothesis would have any more
relevance to facts than any other hypothesis. Did God raise Christ from the dead?
Such would be the picture of the universe if Mr. Black were right.

No comfort can be taken from the assurance of the Conservative that, since
Christianity makes no higher claim than that of rational probability, “the system of
Christianity can be refuted only by probability. Perhaps our loss is gain.” How could
one ever argue that there is a greater probability for the truth of Christianity than for the
truth of its opposite if the very meaning of the word probability rests upon the idea of

3 Idem., p. 115, note.
Chance? On this basis nature and history would be no more than a series of pointer readings pointing into the blank.

**But You Are Wrong**

In assuming his philosophy of Chance and thus virtually saying that nobody knows what is back of the common objects of daily observation, Mr. Black also virtually says that the Christian view of things is wrong.

If I assert that there is a black cat in the closet, and you assert that nobody knows what is in the closet, you have virtually told me that I am wrong in my hypothesis. So when I tell Mr. Black that God exists, and he responds very graciously by saying that perhaps I am right since nobody knows what is in the “Beyond,” he is virtually saying that I am wrong in my “hypothesis.” He is obviously thinking of such a God as could comfortably live in the realm of Chance. But the God of Scripture cannot live in the realm of Chance.

Mr. Black’s response when confronted with the claims of God and his Christ, is essentially this: Nobody knows, but nevertheless your hypothesis is certainly wrong and mine is certainly right. Nobody knows whether God exists, but God certainly does not exist and Chance certainly does exist.

When Mr. Black thus virtually makes his universal negative assertion, saying in effect that God cannot possibly exist and that Christianity cannot possibly be true, he must surely be standing on something very solid. Is it on solid rock that he stands? No, he stands on water! He stands on his own “experience.” But this experience, by his own assumption, rests again on Chance. Thus, standing on Chance, he swings the “logician’s postulate” and modestly asserts what cannot be in the “Beyond,” of which he said before that nothing can be said.

**The Law Of Noncontradiction**

Of course, what Mr. Black is doing appears very reasonable to himself. “Surely,” he says, if questioned at all on the subject, “a rational man must have systematic coherence in his experience. Therefore he cannot accept as true anything that is not in accord with the law of noncontradiction. So long as you leave your God in the realm of the ‘Beyond,’ in the realm of the indeterminate, you may worship him by yourself alone. But so soon as you claim that your God has revealed himself in creation, in providence, or in your Scripture, so soon I shall put that revelation to a test by the principle of rational coherence.”

“And by that test none of your doctrines are acceptable. All of them are contradictory. No rational man can accept any of them. If your God is eternal, then he falls outside of my experience and lives in the realm of the ‘Beyond,’ of the unknowable. But if he is to have anything to do with the world, then he must himself be wholly within the world. I must un-derstand your God throughout if I am to speak intelligently of any relationship that he sustains to my world and to myself. Your idea that God is both eternal and unchangeable and yet sustains such relationships to the world as are involved in your doctrine of creation and providence, is flatly contradictory.”
“For me to accept your God,” continues Mr. Black, “you must do to him what Karl Barth has done to him, namely, strip him of all the attributes that orthodox theology has assigned to him, and thus enable him to turn into the opposite of himself. With that sort of God I have a principle of unity that brings all my experience into harmony. And that God is wholly within the universe. If you offer me such a God and offer him as the simplest hypothesis with which I may, as a goal, seek to order my experience as it comes to me from the womb of Chance, then the law of noncontradiction will be satisfied. As a rational man I can settle for nothing less.”

**Rationalism And Determinism**

All this amounts to saying that Mr. Black, the lover of a Chance philosophy, the indeterminist, is at the same time an out-and-out determinist or fatalist. It is to say that Mr. Black, the irrationalist, who said that nobody knows what is in the “Beyond,” is at the same time a flaming rationalist. For him only that can be which—so he thinks—he can exhaustively determine by logic must be. He may at first grant that anything may exist, but when he says this he at the same time says in effect that nothing can exist and have meaning for man but that which man himself can exhaustively know. Therefore, for Mr. Black, the God of Christianity cannot exist. For him the doctrine of creation cannot be true. There could be no revelation of God to man through nature and history. There can be no such thing as the resurrection of Christ.

Strangely enough, when Mr. Black thus says that God cannot exist and that the resurrection of Christ cannot be a fact, and when he also says that God may very well exist and that the resurrection of Christ may very well be a fact, he is not inconsistent with himself. For he must, to be true to his method, contradict himself in every statement that he makes about any fact whatsoever. If he does not, then he would deny either his philosophy of Chance or his philosophy of Fate. According to him, every fact that he meets has in it the two ingredients: that of Chance and that of Fate, that of the wholly unknown and that of the wholly known. Thus man makes the tools of thought, which the Creator has given him in order therewith to think God’s thoughts after him on a created level, into the means by which he makes sure that God cannot exist, and therefore certainly cannot reveal himself.

When Mr. White meets Mr. Black he will make this issue plain. He will tell Mr. Black that his methodology cannot make any fact or any group of facts intelligible to himself. Hear him as he speaks to the unbeliever:

“On your basis, Mr. Black, no fact can be identified by distinguishing it from any other fact. For all facts would be changing into their opposites all the time. All would be gobble-de-gook. At the same time, nothing could change at all; all would be one block of ice. Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? He clearly has. I know you cannot see this even though it is perfectly clear. I know you have taken out your own eyes. Hence your inability to see is at the same time unwillingness to see. Pray God for forgiveness and repent.”
Mr. Grey On Logic

But what will be the approach of the Conservative, Mr. Grey, on this question of logic? He will do the same sort of thing that we saw him do with respect to the question of facts. Mr. Grey will again try to please Mr. Black by saying that, of course, he will justify his appeal to the authority of the Bible by showing that the very idea of such an appeal, as well as the content of the Bible, are fully in accord with the demands of logic.

“You are quite right in holding that nothing meaningful can be said without presupposing the validity of the law of noncontradiction,” says Mr. Grey.1 “The conservative ardently defends a system of authority.”2 But “without reason to canvass the evidence of a given authority, how can one segregate a right authority from a wrong one? … Without systematic consistency to aid us, it appears that all we can do is to draw straws, count noses, flip coins to choose an authority. Once we do apply the law of contradiction, we are no longer appealing to ipse dixit authority, but to coherent truth.”3 “The Scriptures tell us to test the spirits (1 Jn 4:1). This can be done by applying the canons of truth. God cannot lie. His authority, therefore, and coherent truth are coincident at every point. Truth, not blind authority, saves us from being blind followers of the blind.”4

“Bring on your revelations,” continues Mr. Grey. “Let them make peace with the law of contradiction and the facts of history, and they will deserve a rational man’s assent.5 Any theology which rejects Aristotle’s fourth book of the Metaphysics is big with the elements of its own destruction.”6 “If Paul were teaching that the crucified Christ were objectively foolish, in the sense that he cannot be rationally categorized, then he would have pointed to the insane and the demented as incarnations of truth.”7

Mr. Black’s Reaction

“Well,” says Mr. Black, “this is great news indeed. I knew that the modernists were willing with us to start from human experience as the final reference point in all research. I knew that they were willing with us to start with Chance as the source of facts, in order then to manufacture such facts of nature and of history as the law of noncontradiction, based on Chance, will allow. I also knew that the new modernist, Karl Barth, is willing to make over his God so that he can change into the opposite of himself, in order that thus he may satisfy both our irrationalist philosophy of Chance and our rationalist philosophy of logic. But I did not know that there were any orthodox people who were willing to do such a thing. But you have surprised me before. You were willing to throw your resurrection into the realm of Chance in order to have me accept it. So I really should

2 Idem., p. 71.
3 Idem., p. 72.
4 Idem. p. 73.
5 Idem., p. 178.
6 Idem., p. 78.
7 Idem., p. 85.
have expected that you would also be willing to make the law of noncontradiction rest upon man himself instead of God.” “And I am extremely happy that not only the Arminian Fundamentalists but also you less extreme or moderate Calvinists, like Buswell and Carnell, are now willing to test your own revelation by a principle that is wholly independent of that revelation. It is now only a matter of time and you will see that you have to come over on our side altogether.”

“I do not like the regular Calvinists. But they are certainly quite right from their own point of view. Mr. White claims that I am a creature of God. He says that all facts are made by God and controlled by the providence of God. He says that all men have sinned against God in Adam their representative. He adds that therefore I am spiritually blind and morally perverse. He says all this and more on the basis of the absolute authority of Scripture. He would interpret me, my facts, and my logic in terms of the authority of that Scripture. He says I need this authority. He says I need nothing but this authority. His Scripture, he claims, is sufficient and final. And the whole thing, he claims, is clear.”

“Now all this looks like plain historic Protestantism to me. I can intellectually understand the Calvinist on this matter of authority. I cannot understand you. You seem to me to want to have your cake and eat it. If you believe in scriptural authority, then why not explain all things, man, fact, and logic in terms of it? If you want with us to live by your own authority, by the experience of the human race, then why not have done with the Bible as absolute authority? It then, at best, gives you the authority of the expert.”

“In your idea of the rational man who tests all things by the facts of history and by the law of noncontradiction, you have certainly made a point of contact with us. If you carry this through, you will indeed succeed in achieving complete coincidence between your ideas and ours. And, with us, you will have achieved complete coincidence between the ideas of man and the ideas of God. But the reason for this coincidence of your ideas with ours, and for the coincidence of man’s ideas with God’s, is that you then have a God and a Christ who are identical with man.”

“Do you not think, Mr. Grey, that this is too great a price for you to pay? I am sure that you do not thus mean to drag down your God into the universe. I am sure that you do not thus mean to crucify your Christ afresh. But why then halt between two opinions? I do not believe Christianity, but, if I did, I think I would stand with Mr. White.”
We are concerned in this series of articles with the problem of Reformed apologetics. In the first three articles we discussed the general nature of Reformed apologetics. Its method, we saw, is radically different from that of Romanist-evangelical apologetics. The latter starts from the presupposition that man has a measure of ultimacy or autonomy. This method assumes therefore that man can correctly interpret an area of life without referring to the God of the Bible. Over against this Reformed apologetics contends that man himself must first be interpreted in terms of the Bible before he can, without falsification, interpret any area of life.

The Bible

In the fourth and fifth articles we dealt with the Bible itself. Reformed theology holds that Scripture speaks for itself. The sort of God of which the Bible speaks cannot speak otherwise than with absolute authority. The biblical notion of God as self-contained or self-sufficient and the notion that the Bible is self-authenticating are involved in one another.

This simple foundation truth of Protestantism is virtually rejected by evangelical Protestants. Evangelicals make a two-fold charge against the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. On the one hand they say that it is irrationalistic. We saw how Carnell sets up the autonomous or “rational man” as a judge before whom the Bible must prove its right to speak with authority. This is as though a child were sitting in judgment on its parents, graciously permitting these parents to speak to it with authority.

On the other hand evangelicals say that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is rationalistic. We saw how Pieper, the Lutheran, sets up the autonomous man as judge over the contents of the Bible. He insists that inasmuch as the Bible teaches the “freedom” of man it can and must also teach the doctrine of a changing God who adjusts himself to the ultimate decisions of man.

The Autonomous Man

On the surface it seems strange that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture should be charged both with irrationalism and with rationalism. And on the surface it also seems
strange that the two seemingly exclusive charges spring from the same source, namely, from evangelicalism. Yet there is really nothing else that we could expect from evangelicalism. The root error of evangelicalism, as noted earlier, is its ascription of a measure of ultimacy to man. This partly ultimate man only claims its “rights” when it charges the idea of the absolute, self-authenticating authority of Scripture with irrationalism, and when it charges the idea of the absolute, self-consistent God with rationalism.

Evangelical Compromise

Of course the evangelical, Mr. Grey, has the best of intentions in all this. He wants to win Mr. Black, the non-believer, to an acceptance of the Bible as God’s Word and to an acceptance of the God of the Bible as his God. But Mr. Black has his conditions. Hard-pressed though he is, he none the less is not ready, he says, to consider the idea of an unconditional surrender, such as Mr. White, the Reformed apologist, has placed before him. Accordingly Mr. Grey offers Mr. Black a compromise proposal. The principle of human autonomy and ultimacy is to be combined with that of biblical authority. Yet Mr. Black does not readily accept this compromise proposal.

Why not? Because he cannot clearly see, from Mr. Grey’s reasoning, why he should exchange his position for that of Christianity at all. He is not shown by Mr. Grey how utterly desperate his own situation is. Nor is he shown how completely the Christian position solves the problems that are wholly baffling on his own position. Mr. Black is left in confusion. The witness of the gospel has not really been placed before him as a challenge!

Unconditional Surrender!

Meanwhile the Reformed apologist, Mr. White, has pressed upon Mr. Black the ultimatum of unconditional surrender to the authority of Scripture. He has shown that unless one presupposes this authority as absolute and not merely as that of an expert, then man’s experience operates in a vacuum. He has made plain to Mr. Black that all discussion about Christianity as being “in accord with the law of contradiction” is worse than pointless unless it first be asked on what fulcrum the law of contradiction itself rests. What sort of answer does Mr. Black give to this question? He prefers not to discuss this problem. He assumes that it rests on man thought of as ultimate or autonomous. But on what does man then rest? Man rests on a vacuum. And so Mr. Black presents the picture of man resting on “nothing,” using the law of contradiction as a revolving door in order by means of it to move “nothing” into “nothing.” His whole procedure is that of an “encounter with nothing.”

Mr. White has also made plain to Mr. Black that all discussion about Christianity being “in accord with the facts of experience” is worse than pointless unless one first has shown that he has a philosophy of fact that enables him at least to distinguish one fact from another. Can Mr. Black, on his assumed principle, distinguish one fact from another fact? No, his philosophy of fact is the philosophy of chance. His “principle of individuation,” that is, the principle by which any fact is supposed to be different from
any other fact, is that of chance. On this basis one cannot even count! No fact has any identity of its own. The procedure at the “tower of Babel” would be as orderly as the strictest military discipline in comparison with a scientific methodology based on such a philosophy of fact.

“So then,” says Mr. White to Mr. Black, “you see that unless you are willing to presuppose the Bible as absolutely authoritative, your ‘law of contradiction’ could not get into gear with ‘facts’ and your ‘facts’ would not be amenable to the operation of the law of contradiction. Only on the presupposition of the absolute authority of Scripture as the Word of that God who controls ‘whatsoever comes to pass’ do you have a philosophy of ‘reason,’ a philosophy of ‘the law of contradiction’ and a philosophy of ‘facts’ that enables you to make sense out of life. Unconditional surrender to the absolute authority of Scripture is your only hope. It is your only hope for eternity. It is also the only hope for your scientific and philosophic endeavor in this life.”

It appears then that the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is the only truly Protestant doctrine of Scripture. It also appears that unless we are willing to begin from this fully Protestant doctrine of Scripture we cannot with Paul challenge the wisdom of this world, showing that it has been made foolishness with God.

**General Revelation**

It is to be expected that with a specifically Reformed concept of Scripture there goes a specifically Reformed concept of revelation through nature and history. And it is also to be expected that this specifically Reformed doctrine of revelation in nature and history will be charged with being both irrationalistic and rationalistic by Romanists and non-Reformed Protestants or evangelicals.

**Calvinistic Rationalism**

Let us look first at that aspect of the Reformed teaching on revelation in nature and history that is frequently charged with being rationalistic. The Reformed faith stresses the fact that it is God’s plan that is being realized in and through what man does as well as in and through man’s environment. Whatever comes to pass comes to pass in accordance with the one all comprehensive plan or counsel of God.

All the facts that confront man as he looks about himself and as he looks within himself are therefore revelational of God. The human mind as knowing no less than the trees that are known is revelational of God. For what happens according to the plan of God happens in accordance with the nature of God’s being. Nothing could exist, either as directly made by God or as made by man, the creature of God. The subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge alike are revelational of God.

The apostle Paul says in the first chapter of Romans that all men know God. They cannot help but know God. Therefore they cannot help but know that they themselves are creatures of God. Human self-consciousness involves God-consciousness. Human self-consciousness would be self-consciousness in a vacuum unless it implied consciousness of God. Calvin speaks of this when he says that man has the sense of deity ineradicably impressed upon him. Therefore his freedom is the freedom of God’s creature. It is
freedom to do that which is in accord with or to do that which is against the revealed will of God, but in either case that which is in accord with the plan of God.

Evil

Special emphasis should be placed upon the fact that even the evil that man does by virtue of his sinful will is still in accord with the plan of God and as such is revelatory of God. Man, not God, is the responsible author of sin. But man could not sin if his sinning were not, in spite of himself, revelatory of God. Man does not sin in a vacuum. He could not sin in a vacuum. The possibility of sin presupposes the all-comprehensive plan of God. God reveals his holiness in his wrath upon the sinner. God is angry with the wicked every day. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). Paul tells us that the sinner’s conscience excuses or accuses him according as he obeys or disobeys the revealed will of God (Rom 2:14–15). Man’s self-consciousness is moral self-consciousness. And as self-consciousness in general involves consciousness of God, so man’s moral self-consciousness involves consciousness of covenant relationship to God. To know himself at all man must know himself to be a covenant being. He knows he is either keeping or breaking the covenant.

Calvin greatly stresses the fact that all things that happen in history are revelational of God. Men ought to see God everywhere, he says. God is clearly to be seen by men whether they look round about them or within them, whether they look to the past or look to the future. The whole scene of history in all of its aspects reveals God to man. Men ought to see God as their Creator. They ought to see him as their bountiful benefactor. They ought to see him as their judge. He is everywhere clearly to be seen. Men cannot look in any direction without seeing the face and therewith the claims of God. Every man walks under the brilliant spotlight of the revelational claims of God.

The Foundation Of Science

When modern Calvinists present their views on the foundation and unity of human knowledge in the fields of science, philosophy, and theology they constantly refer to this basic, inescapable revelational character of all created reality. ¹ The essence of false science, false philosophy and false theology consists therefore in the suppression and rejection of this revelational foundation of human effort and enterprise. And the very purpose of squarely opposing those who reject this revelational foundation of man’s work is to the intent that this work might be placed upon its proper foundation again. The antithetical effect of the Christian’s effort is not an end in itself. The idea of the antithesis is based upon and is correlative to the positive idea of the all comprehensive revelational character of the universe.

¹ Cf. V. Hepp, De basis van de eenheid der wetenschap. Assen, 1937.
The Point Of Contact

It is the basically revelational character of all created being that constitutes the foundation of truth for man. Man is inherently enveloped in and by truth. But truth is not an abstraction. Truth is truth about God and the universe. Thus man is naturally confronted by truth. When he speaks untruth he speaks that which, at bottom, he knows to be untruth. When philosophers think out systems of philosophy that are not based upon the Creator-creature distinction they know, in the depth of their hearts, that they are doing this in order to suppress the truth about themselves. Knowing God to be their Creator they glorify him not as such.

When Mr. White, the Reformed apologist, approaches Mr. Black, the unbeliever, with the claims of God and of Christ, he knows in advance that the victory is his. He knows that no man can successfully seek for truth if first he has cut himself off from truth. And he knows that those who try to cut themselves off from truth cannot really succeed in doing so. Accordingly Mr. Black, the man who starts from himself without owning his own creatureliness is like the man who, standing in the light of the sun, takes out his eyes and then wonders whether the sun exists.

In talking to Mr. Black, Mr. White will be courteous and kind. But he will not fail to point out that on his assumptions, Mr. Black cannot find the truth because he cannot even seek for it. He cannot on his basis ask a single intelligent question. When Mr. Black hears of this he turns to Mr. Grey for sympathy. He knows that Mr. White is right but, unless the Holy Spirit quickens him, he will continue to suppress the truth.

Negotiated Peace

Mr. Grey, the evangelical, hastens to assure Mr. Black that Mr. White is an extremist. “As for myself,” says he, “I do not hold to the determinism and rationalism of Mr. White.” He would rather say that God limited himself when he created man. To give man true freedom, true personality, God was willing to forego his absolute control over him. God gave man a bit of the same sort of being that he himself possesses. Man’s freedom is, like God’s freedom, ability to initiate something wholly new in the world. And so man is not exclusively revelatory of God, the controller of all things. Rather God and man are together participant of the same sort of being. Suppose, says Mr. Grey, that you and I need a dollar for a bit of breakfast. You, as the man of means, contribute ninety-eight cents. I, representing the poorer class, contribute two cents. I feel rather dependent on you. Even so, my two cents are worth exactly as much as any two cents that you have contributed. I can, if I wish, buy two cents worth of pretzels and make them do for breakfast. Even if you had given me the two cents that I possess, now that I have them, I have a measure of absolute independence over against you.

In thus asserting his idea of “freedom” Mr. Grey has compromised the revelational character of the constitution of man. He has approved of Mr. Black’s basic assumption to the effect that man must begin by thinking of himself as knowing himself apart from God. Mr. Grey has sided with the Romanist idea of the analogy of being as over against the Protestant principle of the exhaustively revelational character of all created being.
Having thus taken over—in part at least—Mr. Black’s conception of man, Mr. Grey, naturally also takes over—in part at least—Mr. Black’s conception of man’s environment.

For Mr. Grey history is partly revelational of God and partly revelational of man. God as the father, carries ninety pounds and man, as the child, carries only ten pounds. But the ten pounds carried by man is in no wise carried by God. Mr. Grey feels that if one says with Mr. White, the “whatsoever come to pass” comes to pass by virtue of the ultimate plan of God, that then one must make God to be the author of sin, and kill all human responsibility. He therefore joins Mr. Black in rejecting the “rationalism” of Mr. White.

**Mr. Grey And Non-Christian Irrationalism**

The foundation on which Mr. Grey stands when he rejects the “rationalism” of Mr. White is the foundation on which Mr. Black also stands. It is that of non-Christian irrationalism. It is the assumption that man is not created but is ultimate and therefore autonomous.

From this point forward Mr. Grey is at the mercy of Mr. Black. Mr. Grey has now to accept all the false problematics of Mr. Black as though they were genuine. In particular Mr. Grey must assume with Mr. Black that the facts of man’s environment are not exclusively revelational of God. When he argues with Mr. Black about the existence of God he can only claim that a limited God probably exists. And he must prove his point by first cutting both himself and Mr. Black loose from the truth of the revelational character of all created being.

It should be noted that Mr. Grey’s attitude toward general revelation is the same as that of Mr. Pieper, the Lutheran, toward Scriptural revelation. Mr. Pieper also argued in effect that the God of the Bible must be limited in order to make room for the freedom of man. In both cases the attitude toward the revelation of God is determined by the assumption of human freedom as a measure of independence from God. In both cases there is no real ground for saying that the revelation of God is really ultimately the revelation of God, the self-contained and self-sufficient God of which the Bible speaks.

**Calvinistic “Irrationalism”**

So far we have dealt with the Reformed conception of general revelation from the point of view of its supposed rationalism. To this we must now add a few words about the Reformed conception of general revelation from the point of view of its supposed “irrationalism.”

Here too the point is very simple and taken directly from Scripture. It is to the effect that from the beginning of history, even before the entrance of sin, supernatural thought-communication on the part of God to man was added to God’s revelation to man in his own constitution and in the universe about him. The two forms of revelation, revelation in the facts of the created universe whether within or about man, and revelation by way of God’s directly speaking to man, are mutually involved in one another. Just as two rafters of a house need to support one another, so these two forms of revelation need to support one another.
Mr. Grey’s Rationalism

The significance of this basically simple point cannot well be overestimated. The entire Reformed philosophy of history is colored by it. Think for a moment of some one living where the gospel call has not penetrated. What are the responsibilities of such a person? Is he responsible only for the revelation that speaks to him through his own constitution and through his environment? Mr. Grey would answer yes but Mr. White would answer no. Mr. Grey has no eye for the supplemental character of the two forms of revelation. And that too was the fault of Adam and Eve when they sinned against God. Adam and Eve thought that they could interpret themselves and nature about them independently of the supernatural thought-communication of God. And Mr. Grey does not see that this was a grievous sin. He still thinks that Mr. Black, the non-believer, is not wrong when he interprets at least some areas of life without reference to the supernatural though-communication of God to man in Scripture. When Paul says that “from the creation of the world” God has clearly manifested himself to man (Rom 1:20) and that at the beginning of the history of the world every man in Adam sinned against God, (Rom 5:12) Mr. Grey rejects all this as so much irrationalism. How could men in far off Africa be held responsible for what happened in paradise thousands of years ago? When Mr. Black ridicules this simple biblical teaching Mr. Grey joins in with him in saying that surely Mr. White is being an extremist again. This time Mr. White is said to be an irrationalist as before he was said to be a rationalist!

In doing so Mr. Grey again does not realize that he has accepted the basic assumption of Mr. Black about man’s independence of God. Little does he realize that he has again accepted the basically false problematics of Mr. Black as though they were sound. And little does he realize that after this he can, if consistent, only ask Mr. Black to accept a God who is a supplement to nature and to man, a finite god who probably exists—and probably does not exist!

In particular it should be noted that this form of argument which fails to see the interdependence of supernatural and natural revelation springs from the non-Christian rationalism of Mr. Black. It is the sort of position maintained by Carnell when he says that Mr. Black must not be asked to accept any sort of authority which he as a “rational man” is not able to approve by a standard that he used prior to his meeting of the demands of the revelation in question.

The Sum Of The Matter

In conclusion we may sum up the matter as follows: there is a distinctly Reformed doctrine of Scripture. This is for Mr. White always “the first book.” This distinctly Reformed doctrine of Scripture is rejected by Mr. Grey, the evangelical, because he thinks that it is both rationalistic and irrationalistic. It is rationalistic he says, because it insists that whatsoever happens, happens in accord with the plan of God. It is irrationalistic, he says, because it holds that human reason itself in all its cultural effort must be made subservient to the self-authenticating authority of God.

Similarly there is a distinctly Reformed doctrine of general revelation. This is the “second book” of Mr. White. This distinctly Reformed doctrine of general revelation is
implied in the distinctively Reformed doctrine of Scripture. One must, to be consistent, either take both or neither. One cannot read the book of nature aright without the book of Scripture. This Reformed doctrine of general revelation is again rejected by Mr. Grey, the evangelical, because he thinks it is both rationalistic and irrationalistic. He says this doctrine is rationalistic in that it holds that all the facts of the universe, including those done by the will of man, whether good or bad, are revelational of the plan and therefore of the nature of God. He says this doctrine is irrationalistic because it asserts that all men everywhere are responsible for what happened at the beginning of history when Adam disobeyed the supernatural revelation of God.

Yet in making the double charge of rationalism and irrationalism against the only consistently Reformed doctrine of revelation, inclusive of the two “books” of Scripture and nature, the evangelical is basing himself upon the assumption of Mr. Black. It is to be expected that Mr. Black would call the biblical position rationalistic. It goes against his idea of “freedom” to say that whatever he does is within the plan of God.

It is also to be expected that he will call the biblical position irrationalistic. It goes against his idea of the ultimacy of his reason to say that reason itself, from the beginning of history, was meant to function in self-conscious subordination to the authoritative thought-communication of God.

But what shall we say of Mr. Grey? Is not he supposed to be winning Mr. Black over to the truly biblical position? Why then does he join Mr. Black in charging the simple teaching of Scripture with respect to itself and with respect to general revelation with being both rationalistic and irrationalistic? And when will he realize that by his method he cannot show Mr. Black just how Christianity differs from its opposite and just why Mr. Black should become a Christian? Only Mr. White can really challenge Mr. Black to forsake his idols and serve the living God. His witness must be heard throughout the world. Let him then not be high-minded but rather strengthen his heart in the Lord his God.
1. Authority in Scripture

When Mr. Black objects against Mr. White that unconditional surrender to the authority of Scripture is irrational, then Mr. Grey nods approval and says that, of course, the “rational man” has a perfect right to test the credibility of Scripture by logic. When the Bible speaks of God’s sovereign election of some men to salvation this must mean something that fits in with his “rational nature.” When Mr. Black objects to Mr. White that unconditional surrender to Scripture is rationalistic, then Mr. Grey again nods approval and says that, of course, genuine human personality has a perfect right to test the content of Scripture by experience. When the Bible speaks of God by his counsel controlling whatsoever comes to pass, this must mean something that fits in with man’s freedom. God created man and gave man a share in his own freedom; men therefore participate in his being.
2. Authority In “General Revelation”

But what of natural or general revelation? Here surely there can be no difference, you say, between the requirements of Mr. White and Mr. Grey. Here there is no law and no promise; here there is only fact. How then can you speak of requirement at all? Here surely Mr. White can forge his “five points of Calvinism” and join Mr. Grey in taking Mr. Black through the picture gallery of this world, pointing out its beauties to him so that with them he will spontaneously exclaim, “The whole chorus of nature raises one hymn to the praises of its Creator.”

3. Mr. White’s Silence

Let us think of Mr. White as trying hard to forget his “five points.” “Sure-ly,” he says to himself, “there can be nothing wrong with joining Mr. Grey in showing Mr. Black the wonders of God’s creation. We believe in the same God, do we not? Both of us want to show Mr. Black the facts of Creation so that he will believe in God. When Mr. Black says: ‘I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and I pass on, quite as I came, confused and dismayed’ Mr. Grey and I can together take him by plane to the Mt. Wilson observatory so he may see the starry heavens above. Surely the source of knowledge for the natural sciences is the Book of Nature, which is given to everyone. Do not the Scriptures themselves teach that there is a light in nature, per se, which cannot be, and is not, transmitted through the spectacles of the Word? If this were not so, how could the Scriptures say of those who have only the light of nature that they are without excuse?”

4. Mr. Grey’s Eloquence

So the three men, Mr. White, Mr. Grey and Mr. Black, go here and there and everywhere. Mr. White and Mr. Grey agree to pay each half of the expense. Mr. Black is their guest.

They go first to the Mt. Wilson observatory to see the starry skies above. “How wonderful, how grand!” exclaims Mr. Grey. To the marvels of the telescope they add those of the microscope. They circle the globe to see “the wonders of the world.” There is no end to the “exhibits” and Mr. Black shows signs of weariness. So they sit down on the beach. Will not Mr. Black now sign on the dotted line?

As they wait for the answer, Mr. Grey spies a watch someone has lost. Holding it in his hand he says to Mr. Black: “Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: you will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond that which human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human designs, thought, wisdom and intelligence. Since, therefore, the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy,
that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the
mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of
the work, which he has executed.”

“Now, Mr. Black, I don’t want to put undue pressure on you. You know your own
needs in your own business. But I think that as a rational being, you owe it to yourself to
join the theistic party. Isn’t it highly probable that there is a God?”

“I’m not now asking you to become a Christian. We take things one step at a time.
I’m only speaking of the Book of Nature. Of course, if there is a God and if this God
should have a Son and if this Son should also reveal himself, it is not likely to be more
difficult for you to believe in him than it is now to believe in the Father. But just now I
am only asking you to admit that there is a great accumulation of evidence of the sort that
any scientists or philosopher must admit to be valid for the existence of a God back of
and above this world. You see this watch. Isn’t it highly probable that a power higher
than itself has made it? You know the purpose of a watch. Isn’t it highly probable that the
wonderful contrivances of nature serve the purpose of a God? Looking back we are
naturally led to a God who is the cause of this world; looking forward we think of a God
who has a purpose with this world. So far as we can observe the course and constitution
of the universe there is, I think, no difficulty on your own adopted principles, against
belief in a God. Why not become a theist? You do want to be on the winning side, don’t
you? Well, the Gallup poll of the universe indicates a tendency toward the final victory of
theism.”

5. Mr. Black Politely Declines

When Mr. Grey had finished his obviously serious and eloquent plea, Mr. Black
looked very thoughtful. He was clearly a gentleman. He disliked disappointing his two
friends after all the generosity they had shown him. But he could not honestly see any
basic difference between his own position and theirs. So he declined politely but
resolutely to sign on the dotted line. He refused to be “converted” to theism. In substance
he spoke as follows: “You speak of evidence of rationality and purpose in the universe.
You would trace this rationality or purpose back to a rational being back of the universe
who, you think, is likely to have a purpose with the universe. But who is back of your
God to explain him in turn? By your own definition your God is not absolute or self-
sufficient. You say that he probably exists; which means that you admit that probably he
does not exist. But probability rests upon possibility. Now I think that any scientific
person should come with an open mind to the observation of the facts of the universe. He
ought to begin by assuming that any sort of fact may exist. And I was glad to observe that
on this all important point you agree with me. Hence the only kind of God that either of
us can believe in is one who may not exist. In other words, neither of us do or can believe
in a God who cannot not exist. And it was just this sort of God, a God who is self-
sufficient, and as such necessarily existent, that I thought you Christian theists believed
in.”

By this time Mr. White was beginning to squirm. He was beginning to realize that he
had sold out the God of his theology, the sovereign God of Scripture by his silent consent
to the argument of Mr. Grey. Mr. Black was right, he felt at once. Either one presupposes
God back of the ideas of possibility or one pre-supposes that the idea of possibility is
back of God. Either one says with historic Reformed theology on the basis of Scripture that what God determines and only what God determines is possible, or one says with all non-Christian forms of thought that possibility surrounds God. But for the moment Mr. White was stupefied. He could say nothing. So Mr. Black simply drew the conclusion from what he had said in the following words:

“Since you in your effort to please me have accepted my basic assumption with respect to possibility and probability it follows that your God, granted that he exists, is of no use whatsoever in explaining the universe. He himself needs in turn to be explained. Let us remember the story of the Indian philosopher and his elephant. It was never more applicable than to the present subject. If the material world rests upon a similar ideal world, this ideal world must rest upon some other; and so on, without end. It were better, therefore, never to look beyond the present material world. In short, gentlemen, much as I dislike not to please you, what you offer is nothing better than what I already possess. Your God is himself surrounded by pure possibility or Chance; in what way can he help me? And how could I be responsible to him? For you, as for me, all things ultimately end in the irrational.”

6. Mr. Grey Appeals To Logic

At this point Mr. Grey grew pale. In his desperation he searched his arsenal for another argument that might convince Mr. Black. There was one that he had not used for some time. The arguments for God that he had so far used he labeled a posteriori arguments. They ought, he had thought, to appeal to the “empirical” temper of the times. They started from human experience with causation and purpose and by analogy argued to the idea of a cause of and a purpose with the world as a whole. But Mr. Black had pointed out that if you start with the ideas of cause and purpose as intelligible to man without God when these concepts apply to relations within the universe, then you cannot consistently say that you need God for the idea of cause or purpose when these concepts apply to the universe as a whole. So now Mr. Grey drew out the drawer marked a priori argument. In public he called this the argument from finite to absolute being. “As finite creatures,” he said to Mr. Black, “we have the idea of absolute being. The idea of a finite being involves of necessity the idea of an absolute being. We have the notion of an absolute being; surely there must be a reality corresponding to our idea of such a being; if not all our ideas may be false. Surely we must hold that reality is ultimately rational and coherent and that our ideas participate in this rationality. If not how would science be possible?”

7. Mr. Black Again Declines

When Mr. Grey had thus delivered himself of this appeal to logic rather than to fact then Mr. White for a moment seemed to take courage. Was not this at least to get away from the idea of a God who probably exists? Surely the “incommunicable attributes of God,” of which he had been taught in his catechism classes, were all based upon and expressive of the idea of God as necessarily existing. But Mr. Black soon disillusioned him for the second time. Said he in answer to the argument from Mr. Grey, “Again I
cannot see any basic difference between your position and mine. Of course, we must believe that reality is ultimately rational. And of course, we must hold that our minds participate in this rationality. But when you thus speak you thereby virtually assert that we must not believe in a God whose existence is independent of our human existence. A God whom we are to know must with us be a part of a rational system that is mutually accessible to and expressive of both. If God is necessary to you then you are also necessary to God. That is the only sort of God that is involved in your argument.”

8. Mr. Grey Testifies

“But Mr. Black, this is terrible, this is unbearable! We do want you to believe in God. I bear witness to his existence. I will give you a Bible. Please read it! It tells you of Jesus Christ and how you may be saved by his blood. I am born again and you can be born again too if you will only believe. Please do believe in God and be saved.”

9. Mr. White Hopes For The Best!

Meanwhile Mr. White took new courage. He realized that he had so far made a great mistake in keeping silent during the time that Mr. Grey had presented his arguments. The arguments for the existence of God taken from the ideas of cause and purpose as set forth by Mr. Grey had led to pure irrationalism and Chance. The argument about an absolute being as set forth by Mr. Grey had led to pure rationalism and determinism. In both cases, Mr. Black had been quite right in saying that a God whose existence is problematic or a God who exists by the same necessity as does the universe is still an aspect of or simply the whole of the universe. But now he felt that perhaps Mr. Grey was right in simply witnessing to the existence of God. He thought that if the arguments used are not logically coercive they may at least be used as means with which to witness to unbelievers. And surely witnessing to God’s existence was always in order. But poor Mr. White was to be disillusioned again. For the witness bearing done by Mr. Grey was based on the assumption that the belief in God is a purely non-rational or even irrational matter.

10. Mr. Black Asks Some Pertinent Questions

Mr. Black’s reply to the words of Mr. Grey indicated this fact all too clearly. Said Mr. Black to Mr. Grey: “I greatly appreciate your evident concern for my eternal welfare. But there are two or three questions that I would like to have you answer. In the first place I would ask whether in thus witnessing to me you thereby admit that the arguments for the existence of God have no validity? Or rather do you not thereby admit that these arguments, if they prove anything, prove that God is finite and correlative to man and therefore that your position is not basically different from mine?”

Mr. Grey did not answer because he could not answer this question otherwise than by agreeing with Mr. Black.

“In the second place,” asked Mr. Black, “you are now witnessing to Christ as well as to God, to Christianity as well as to theism. I suppose your argument for Christianity
would be similar in nature to your argument for theism would it not? You would argue that the Jesus of the New Testament is probably the Son of God and the he quite probably died for the sins of men. But now you witness to me about your Christ. And by witnessing instead of reasoning you seem to admit that there is no objective claim for the truth of what you hold with respect to Christ. Am I right in all this?"

Again Mr. Grey made no answer. The only answer he could consistently have given would be to agree with Mr. Black.

“In the third place,” asked Mr. Black, “you are now witnessing not only to God the Father, to Jesus Christ the Son, but also to the Holy Spirit. You say you are born again, that you know you are saved and that at present I am lost. Now if you have had an experience of some sort it would be unscientific for me to deny it. But if you want to witness to me about your experience you must make plain to me the nature of that experience. And to do that you must do so in terms of principles that I understand. Such principles must needs be accessible to all. Now if you make plain your experience to me in terms of principles that are plain to me as unregenerate then wherein is your regeneration unique? On the other hand, if you still maintain that your experience of regeneration is unique then can you say anything about it to me so that I may understand? And does not then your witness bearing appear to be wholly unintelligible and devoid of meaning? Thus again you cannot make any claim to the objective truth of your position.”

“Summing up the whole matter, I would say in the first place that your arguments for the existence of God have rightfully established me in my unbelief. They have shown that nothing can be said for the existence of a God who is actually the Creator and controller of the world. I would say in the second place that using such arguments as you have used for the existence of God commits you to using similar arguments for the truth of Christianity with similar fatal results for your position. In both cases you first use intellectual argument upon principles that presuppose the justice of my unbelieving position. Then when it is pointed out to you that such is the case you turn to witnessing. But then your witnessing is in the nature of the case an activity that you yourself have virtually admitted to be wholly irrational and unintelligible.”

11. Mr. White Sees The Richness Of His Faith

When Mr. Black had finished Mr. White was in a great distress. But it was this very distress that at last he saw the richness of his own faith. He made no pretense to having greater intellectual power than Mr. Grey. He greatly admired the real faith and courage of Mr. Grey. But he dared keep silence no longer. His silence had been sin, he knew. Mr. Black had completely discomfited Mr. Grey so that he had not another word to say. Mr. Black was about to leave them established rather than challenged in his unbelief. And all of that in spite of the best intentions and efforts of Mr. Grey, speaking for both of them. A sense of urgent responsibility to make known the claims of the sovereign God pressed upon him. He now saw clearly first that the arguments for the existence of God as conducted by Mr. Grey, are based on the assumption that the unbeliever is right with respect to the principles in terms of which he explains all things. These principles are: (a) that man is not a creature of God but rather is ultimate and as such must properly consider himself instead of God the final reference point in explaining all things; (b) that all other things beside himself are non-created but controlled by Chance; and (c) that the
power of logic that he possesses is the means by which he must determine what is possible or impossible in the universe of Chance.

At last it dawned upon Mr. White that first to admit that the principles of Mr. Black, the unbeliever, are right and then to seek to win him to the acceptance of the existence of God the Creator and judge of all men is like first admitting that the United States had historically been a province of the Soviet Union but ought at the same time be recognized as an independent and all-controlling political power.

In the second place, Mr. White now saw clearly that a false type of reasoning for the truth of God’s existence and for the truth of Christianity involves a false kind of witnessing for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity. If one reasons for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity on the assumption that Mr. Black’s principles of explanation are valid, then one must witness on the same assumption. One must then make plain to Mr. Black, in terms of principles which Mr. Black accepts, what it means to be born again. Mr. Black will then apply the principles of modern psychology of religion to Mr. Grey’s “testimony” with respect to his regeneration and show that it is something that naturally comes in the period of adolescence.

In the third place Mr. White now saw clearly that it was quite “proper” for Mr. Grey to use a method of reasoning and a method of witness bearing that is based upon the truth of the anti-Christian and anti-theistic assumptions. Mr. Grey’s theology is Arminian or Lutheran. It is therefore based upon the idea that God is not wholly sovereign over man. It assumes that man’s responsibility implies a measure of autonomy of the sort that is the essence and foundation of the whole of Mr. Black’s thinking. It is therefore to be expected that Mr. Grey will assume that Mr. Black needs not to be challenged on his basic assumption with respect to his own assumed ultimacy or autonomy.

From now on Mr. White decided that, much as he enjoyed the company of Mr. Grey and much as he trusted his evident sincerity and basic devotion to the truth of God, yet he must go his own way in apologetics as he had, since the Reformation, gone his own way in theology. He made an appointment with Mr. Black to see him soon. He expressed to Mr. Grey his great love for him as a fellow believer, his great admiration for his fearless and persistent efforts to win men to an acceptance of truth as it is in Jesus. Then he confessed to Mr. Grey that his conscience had troubled him during the entire time of their troubles with Mr. Black. He had started in good faith thinking that Mr. Grey’s efforts at argument and witnessing might win Mr. Black. He had therefore been quite willing, especially since Mr. Grey was through his constant efforts much more conversant with such things than he was, to be represented by Mr. Grey. But now he had at last come to realize that not only had the effort been utterly fruitless and self-frustrating but more than that it had been terribly dishonoring to God. How could the eternal I Am be pleased with being presented as being a god and as probably existing, as necessary for the explanation of some things but not of all things, as one who will be glad to recognize the ultimacy of his own creatures. Would the God who had in Paradise required of men implicit obedience now be satisfied with a claims and counter claims arrangement with his creatures?
Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was, however, a very difficult matter, especially in Corinth. The Corinthians were Greeks and lived among Greeks. Would they not be laughed to scorn if they spoke of such a thing as the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?

Paul himself had feared to face the Greeks with this witness. But a heavenly vision had been received by him, in which he had heard the heartening words: “Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace … for I have much people in this city.” In obedience to this Word of God Paul would instill into his fellow believers the same courage that this vision had instilled into him.

1. “My Beloved Brethren”

In connection with this first part of the text allow us to make a series of brief observations:

(a) The expression: “beloved brethren” with which he addresses his fellow believers is not first of all a term of personal endearment. It is above all a recognition of the fact that they are fellow witness-bearers. With Paul they are anointed unto the task of bearing witness to the Christ and his resurrection from the dead.

(b) My beloved brethren, Paul means to say, I want to encourage you, to admonish you, to command you to be zealous in the work of the Lord. To so encourage you I offer the assurance that you will have success upon your labor. I do not so speak to you merely as an expert. I am not one who merely observes tendencies in history. I speak in the Name of the Lord of history. “Am I not free? am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?” I speak for the glorified Christ, whom I have seen; I speak by his commission. I speak with Christ’s authority to encourage you.

(c) My beloved brethren, ye are my work in the Lord. Hard pressed was I in the spirit when first I came to Corinth. How bitterly the Jews, who require a sign, opposed me! How many of your fellow Greeks, who seek after wisdom, ridiculed me when I spoke of the resurrection of the dead! But you believed. You are the result of my work; you are my work in the Lord.

(d) When first I came it was to tell a simple story. It is the story of God who made the world and placed man to rule over it. It is the story of God’s gracious covenant with man offering him eternal life on the condition of unreserved faith in his Word. It is the story of how man broke this covenant that God had made with him, thus worshipping himself, the creature, more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. So I explained to you—not on
my own authority, but Christ’s—both the origin of the world and the evil that is in it. And therewith I told you how much worse the situation is with respect to man and his world than any of your wise men had ever dreamed.

(e) But then I also told you how much better the situation is than any of your wise men had ever imagined. Did they speak vaguely of an underworld and of a probable immortality of the soul? Did they build ideal, imaginary commonwealths and dream of future, wonderful utopias? They had no ground for giving you any hope that any such things would ever come to pass. You have seen the effects of unrighteousness. You have seen despair written on the faces of those compelled to lay aside loved ones in a tomb. What remedy do your wise men offer for this? Actually your wise men cannot even draw a picture of the perfect man, the man who is entitled to live on the isles of the blest. How then could they make provision for the realization of a perfect world in which a perfect man should dwell?

(f) But I challenged the wisdom of this world, both with respect to the future and with respect to the past. I gave you a totally new and different philosophy of history. I preached Christ to you, not only as wisdom but also as righteousness and sanctification and redemption. I commanded all men everywhere to repent because God has “appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

All this, my beloved brethren, you believed. You believed it by the power of the Spirit. And in believing it you rejected the whole scheme of the wisdom of this world. You are therefore the result of my work in the Lord; you are my work in the Lord.

(g) Since you are now my work in the Lord you are also committed to the same work to which the Lord first committed me. You are my “brethren” by virtue of a common commitment to a common task. You are my fellow soldiers. We receive orders from the same commander-in-chief.

We are now engaged in a common task. It is the cultural task of keeping the covenant which God first made with man. That task is all-comprehensive. It means that in Christ’s Name we must subdue the earth.

But there are enemies. There are those who have refused to listen as you by God’s Spirit have listened. They seek to oppose the work that we are in Christ’s Name called to do. They are still, even as we were, inspired by Christ’s chief enemy. Satan, their commander-in-chief, knows that his time is short and that his defeat is certain. Therefore he now fights with increasing desperation.

I rejoice to pin on you the badge of brotherhood, you who wear the uniform of the soldiers of the risen Savior. With me you would now worship and serve the Creator more than the creature. You would uphold the constitution of the universe and seek its development according to the divine plan. You are the instruments that God will use for the fulfillment of his plan in which righteousness shall triumph in all the world!

2. “Be Ye Stedfast … ”

What is the content of the command that the apostle gives to his beloved brethren? Very simply, it is that they shall do what he has done.
(a) They must witness to Jesus and his resurrection. They must do so in the same way that he has witnessed. They must do it by challenging the wisdom of this world. So they are to set the resurrection in the same broad frame-work in which he has set it. They must tell men that they are creatures made in the image of God. They must add that men are now sinners subject to the wrath of God. Man are not just unfortunates cast in a world of chance. They are guilty before their Maker—and in the depths of their hearts they know that this is the case!

(b) Then they must go on to tell men of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man. They must proclaim his Name, telling men that through this blessed Name—if they only believe—they may be saved from the wrath to come. They must plead with men to repent as Jesus himself pleaded with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Through the foolishness of preaching they must present the wisdom of God. They must preach the remission of sins and the joy of being righteous in Christ through his death and resurrection. Thus they, like Paul, must tell the story, the story of man and his sin, the story of Christ, the Savior of men. They must speak of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness will dwell, urging men to believe lest they be cast into outer darkness, losing themselves and their labors as well.

(c) In this work of telling the story of Christ and his resurrection set in the framework given by the prophets and apostles they must be steadfast and unmoveable. To be steadfast and unmoveable does not mean inactivity, stone-like immobility. They are workers, are they not? They are what they must do for the Lord! How then could they be anything but active in the Lord’s service? It would be a contradiction in terms to think of themselves as doing nothing or very little for the Lord. They are not indifferent spectators of the drama that is the history of the human race. They are not in the balcony; they are on the road with its dust and dirt. They are in the arena fighting the good fight of faith.

(d) They must assign themselves to a definite course of action. From this course of action they must not deviate, looking neither to the right nor to the left. To illustrate: look at that great locomotive all set to make its run from Chicago to New York city. It is as it were most anxious to get on its way. Its railed route is often rugged. It leads through the wilderness. It passes through the Slough of Despond. It goes through “the valley of the shadow of death.” It leads past Doubting Castle and Giant Despair. Yet onward the locomotive presses and forward, without deviation, till it reaches its final destination.

(e) Thus steadfastness of purpose must characterize the beloved brethren. They must keep their principal goal clearly in mind. Their glorified Lord with whom they will reign forever is also the Way. He, too, is the work the Father gave him to do. The vision of meeting him at the end of the road will keep the brethren from going aside. Looking up to him, they will persevere.

(f) But they are not only to be steadfast and unmoveable. They must also abound in the work of the Lord. They must be steadfast and unmoveable in order thus to abound in the work of the Lord. Look at that locomotive once again. If the engineer will only but give it opportunity, it will go forward eagerly and swiftly. It has confidence and strength. It does not worry for fear that it will not be able to reach New York’s Grand Central Station. Actually it must be restrained by its engineer. Now, the entire locomotive is what it is as the instrument of the engineer whose desire it is to take it to its destined goal. So the “beloved brethren” are, they are exclusively what they are, as the work of the Lord. Their
entire out-put of energy must be spent in his work. They must abound in the work of the Lord.

3. “Forasmuch As Ye Know … ”

What is the reward of such service?

(a) Since it is their very nature to work for the Lord these “beloved brethren” do not first of all ask for a reward. But a reward there will be. They have their reward in the fact that their work gives them joy. But yet another reward, a great reward awaits them at the end of the journey. They have worked for the joy of working, for the love of the Lord. Now a crown of righteousness awaits them.

(b) The reward that awaits them is the result of their labors. They will be tempted to fear. They will be scorned for their faith. After all, even Socrates couldn’t speak with certainty of an immortality of the soul. And as for the resurrection of the body, didn’t all the facts of nature show that such an idea is absurd? Will they then continue to believe in the resurrection of Christ and in their own final resurrection to meet him in spite of the wisdom of the world? Surely all their labors and struggles will be for naught!

(c) But you know, writes Paul, that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. The whole outlook of the world’s wisdom has been exposed to be confusion and worse than confusion. If the world were what the wise men have said it is, then there would be no reward for any man’s labor. Then all labor, all culture, would be lost. But Paul has shown that the world is created and controlled by God. God through Christ and his resurrection has redeemed the world. God through Christ will therefore take his redeemed people to himself. He will certainly raise them up at the last day. No power on earth can stop him from doing so. Are not all the powers of nature servants of his will? Christ, resurrection’s first fruit, will take to himself those who witness to his resurrection. Of this there can be no doubt. Those who are truly absorbed in the work of the Lord have a full assurance that they will be raised into the presence of their Lord.

(d) Don’t, counsels Paul, look any longer to the wisdom of the world. Don’t look in part at the wisdom of God and in part at the wisdom of the world. Look always and only to the wisdom of God. For doubt is sin. God’s existence is not probable. His promises are not probably true. The question is not whether there will be immortality. In his conscience every man knows that he has been made by God and that one day he will be called to give an account of his life to God. The issue is therefore this: Will you be resurrected unto life or unto death? Those who are witness-bearers to the resurrection of Christ are righteous before God. Only such believing witnesses shall receive the crown of righteousness. But they shall surely receive it. Don’t waste your energy doubting. My beloved brethren, you are what you are as those that know whom they have believed and are fully persuaded that he is able to keep that which they have committed unto him against that day.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain with the Lord.”
But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Cor 3.18

This passage of Scripture is the climax of a chapter that the Apostle Paul devotes to the privileges of those who have the task assigned them by the Lord of the Church to preach the gospel.

It is formed in the pattern of a contrast, a contrast between the Old Testament situation and the New Testament situation. The Old Testament period was signalized by the fact that God’s people must stay at a distance. A portion of Exodus 19 was read to you. The stress of that chapter is on this, that God’s people, though they are not like others who know not God or His ways or covenant, nonetheless must stay at the foot of the mountain while Moses alone, the servant of God, might come into the presence of God to the top of the mountain. So there is contrast between the servants of God in the New Testament period who are called to build up the church of Jesus Christ, and the servant Moses who in the Old Testament period had to lead the people of God closer to God, but also had to keep them at a distance.

But back of this contrast between the Old Testament and the New Testament preaching of the gospel is a deeper contrast—the contrast between those who know not God, and those who know Him through the Saviour Jesus Christ. For the Old Testament believers as well as those of the New Testament ate of that same spiritual food, Paul tells us, and drank of that same spiritual rock, which was Christ. Thus there is one company of people, Old and New Testament believers together, constituting the church of Jesus Christ, the body of the redeemed, those for whom Christ gave His life, and for whose justification He rose from the dead. And on the other hand are those not his people, who will not hear the gospel call, who have been disobedient in Adam, have not obeyed the gospel, and are not now God’s people.

Those that are not God’s people are portrayed to us as being in darkness, and those that are God’s people are portrayed to us as living in the light of the Son of God.

Those in darkness have had their own prophets to speak to them. Plato, for instance, the great Greek philosopher, in that matchless allegory of the cave, spoke of men as being chained by their necks, their heads turned into the cave, away from the sunlight back of them. They can see only shadows on the wall. They hear only echoes. It seems that these shadows are speaking with one another. And these echoes and shadows typify mankind. And when one of these men, for some reason Plato cannot explain, has His chains removed and comes to the sunlight and sees things as they really are, and then goes back to his fellows who are still bound, they will not believe him. They say he is seeing visions and has been dreaming dreams. They think they are the ones that see the truth,
and that he is a visionary who has imagined things for himself, so that he talks wildly about seeing the sun and the colors of the rainbow. He is a dreamer.

Yet he has seen the sun, and he it is who does see things as they are. And he proclaims the truth of God to men. So the Apostle says that it is we, God’s people, who have been given this task, to bring the light of the gospel to those in darkness, that they too may be translated out of the darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son.

And as ministers of the gospel we of the New Testament dispensation are not only taken out of darkness into light, but also in distinction from Old Testament believers we have a greater fulness of light. It is of that greater fulness of the light of the gospel which New Testament ministers preach and teach that this text speaks.

Notice these three points. We New Testament believers and preachers see better than Old Testament believers and preachers did. Secondly we see more. We see something they did not see. We see the glory of the Lord. And in the third place, we are changed more thoroughly than they were. As a result of what we have seen, we are changed as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Better Vision

The Apostle begins by saying—But we all, with open face... In contrast to the fact that Moses went to the mountain top alone, he says we all go up. Moses prayed that famous prayer, Oh, that all God’s people might be prophets—that they might have spiritual understanding, that I might be able to take them to the mountain top and display to them the glories to be seen there. But they are of poor vision.

They see not the end, the meaning, of those sacrifices they bring daily. They understand not that the blood of bulls and goats points to the blood of Him who is the Son of God and Son of Man, who alone through His shedding of His blood can bring remission of man’s sins.

So they wander in the valley. They do not perceive clearly and persistently the purpose of these things. But we all go to the mountain top. None must stay behind. No aged or sick, no mothers with infants need remain at home. In the New Testament all God’s people without exception may take this trip to the mountain top, to glory, to see what is there to be seen.

And we see with open face. This again is in contrast with the Old Testament. They saw with veiled face. When Moses had been to the mountain, in the presence of God, he came down with glory shining in his face. He adjusted the glory of the revelation of God to the poor eyesight of the believers.

But we all, with open face, with good eyes, with telescopes, good telescopes that bring distant things near so that we can see them clearly and exhaustively in their relationships one to another, behold the glory of the Lord. This is our privilege as New Testament believers.

On the old Route 30 through Pennsylvania, there is a place at the top of one mountain where you can stop and look through a telescope at various sections of the country, even at several states of the union. And when a family stops there, and each one looks, then each one individually says, O, how wonderful! But that in which Paul speaks, each as it were has his own telescope. He has it in his eyes. And all say simultaneously, O, how
wonderful! That is the communion of the saints, to give expression simultaneously to the wonder of the glory of the Lord.

Further, Paul says, *beholding*. He uses the present participle. In the Old Testament even Moses only went to the top once—or twice because of the disobedience of the people. But after that he had to live on the memory of that one great event in the past. If you have been to Europe or somewhere, and you’ve seen strange things, you come back and tell your friends and relatives about them. At first they stand out clear in your mind. But after fifteen or twenty years memory dims, and you speak in more vague terms.

But in this of which Paul speaks, you live there every day. Yo don’t make one vacation trip to the mountain top, or have one mountain top experience of an emotional lift sort, bt each morning yo rise in the panoramic vision of the glory of God. Every day you see the glorious scenery.

So Paul describes the privilege of New Testament believers. They all may see, instead of Moses going alone. They all may see with open face and clear vision, and they all may see constantly, not dependent, as was Moses, on one distant event.

But supposing this most excellent vision all existed, and there wasn’t much to be seen. It has happened on occasion, when a family planned a picnic visit to some mountain to see beautiful scenery, and all the preparations were made, that the day turns out to be misty. In spite of good eyes, and telescopes, and all, you find a fog, and you can’t see anything.

**The Better Object Seen**

But in the things of which Paul speaks, this does not happen. It was to some extent true to the Old Testament believers. They saw vaguely, in the distance, things yet to come. Those things were delineated to them more specifically through God’s prophets as time went on. But even the greatest of them did not see what we in the New Testament have seen and can see—the glory of the Lord.

What does he mean by this? It seems to me he means, the glorified Lord, the Lord of glory, who Humbled himself though He was God and thought it not robbery to be called equal with God, humbled himself to death, even the death of the cross. In that humiliation He was glorious. We have seen Him, says the apostle John, and He was altogether lovely and beautiful. But especially in His resurrection He was glorious. By the glory of the Lord He was raised from the tomb, He could not be holden of it. Then He ascended into glory. Open wide the gates of the temple! Let the Lord of glory return with His spoils, the Victor over Satan and all his host.

That Lord of glory it is that the minister of the gospel may display before his people, before the congregation of Jesus Christ, and offer as a challenge to the darkness of this world, that they too may see and be glorified.

Now we all, he says, may see that, in this book. He says, beholding as in a glass. We behold through the glass of Scripture. That is the instrument, the window through which we see this. And the minister of the gospel has the task and privilege of taking that glass, ”?”
Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?

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The Theology of Crisis continues to be of great interest to orthodox Christians. By orthodox Christians we mean those who believe in historic Christianity. In particular we are thinking of all Protestants, whether Lutheran, Arminian or Reformed in their theology, who subscribe to the infallibility of Scripture and therefore to the idea of temporal creation, the historicity of the Genesis account, the substitutionary atonement through Jesus Christ the son of man and son of God and his bodily return on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead.

All of these orthodox Christians hoped and some of them believed that in Karl Barth and Emil Brunner there had arisen in the Christian church of the modern day two great expositors and defenders of the historic Christian Faith. In more recent times many of these Christians have been disappointed in Brunner. Has he not openly and constantly denied the virgin birth of Christ? Does he not profess to be an adherent of a radical school of negative biblical criticism? Does he not frankly espouse the teachings of modern evolutionary theory? But these same Christians are now pinning their hopes and expectations on Barth. Granted that he has in the past held to some views that were out of accord with the historic Christian Faith, is he not now working in the right direction? Does he now at least assert that the Bible is and not merely contains the word of God? Does he not, over against Brunner, strongly affirm the virgin birth of Christ? Granted that in the past Barth did not stress sufficiently the historic character of Christianity does he not now at least maintain, against modern subjectivism, the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is very God and very man? Does he not maintain that the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are real historical events? And does he not vigorously oppose Rudolf Bultmann’s theory to the effect that the Genesis account gives us religious myth alone and that the resurrection of Christ is based merely on the belief of the disciples? Surely, these Christians say, whatever he may have been, Barth is now altogether or largely orthodox. At least he must be ranked among the believers in and the defenders of the historic Christian Faith. He is our friend not our foe. Even if we do not agree with him on some individual point of doctrine we should welcome him into our ranks as helping us to propagate in modern language the old Christian Faith among those who oppose it but who may be won to a belief in it. We must learn to appreciate those who hold the like precious Faith with us even though they give a different emphasis when they express it. Here is a great defender of the theology of the Word and of the Christ of that Word against modern subjectivism, the subjectivism of Schleiermacher and of Ritschl. At any rate Barth may not fairly any longer be called a heretic; he is at least a prophet as much as a heretic.
It is the purpose of this article to examine whether this hope and expectation with respect to Barth is justified. The primary source of our information will be Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*.  

Barth is currently engaged in writing this monumental work. The first volume, in two parts, deals with the doctrine of the Word of God. The second volume, also in two parts, deals with the doctrine of God. The third volume, in four parts, deals with the doctrine of creation. The last part of volume three appeared in 1951. The fourth volume deals with the doctrine of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*). The first part of it appeared in the course of 1953.

It is not our purpose to follow Barth’s argument in his *Church Dogmatics* step by step. Otto Weber has written what he calls “An Introductory Report on Volumes 1:1 to 3:4” under the title *Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*.  

English readers desiring some insight into the course of thought developed step by step in the *Church Dogmatics* may be referred to Weber’s book. In the foreword of Weber’s book Barth complains of the “theological journalism” of which up till now he has “largely been a victim.” We may well sympathize with Barth in this respect. But one need not be unfair to Barth if one measures his theology by the standard of historic Christianity. We shall not, however, find it possible to make a point-by-point comparison between the teachings of Barth and those of historic Christianity. For the sake of brevity we shall limit ourselves to a discussion of Barth’s views of Scripture, of God, of man and of Christ.

In so doing the main points of Barth’s theology will come before us. In dealing with the views of Barth on these subjects one point must constantly be remembered. It is a point on which Barth lays the greatest possible stress. All the doctrines of the Christian Faith, he insists, must be treated christologically. It is Barth’s contention that orthodox theology has all too frequently failed to do this. For any fair comparison of Barth’s views with those of orthodox theology it is, therefore, imperative that one discover what Barth means when Barth speaks of dealing with Christian teachings christologically. What this means will appear, step by step, in the discussion in this article.

### The Bible

Basic to all the doctrines of historic Christianity is its view of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being in the original manuscripts the infallible Word of God. Barth rejects this doctrine as vigorously in the *Church Dogmatics* as he did in any of his earlier writings. He does so in view of his conception of the “freedom” of God. The sovereign God must not be bound by a finished revelation identified in Scripture. He would then be revealed without being hidden in his revelation. His revelation would then be at the mercy of man. Man could then deal with God’s revelation in the Bible as he deals with the contents of any other book. We should therefore be doing poor honor to Scripture if we should identify it with revelation.  

The Bible as a book claims no authority for itself; it wants only to be a witness to revelation. Barth speaks of the orthodox view of Scripture as being that of direct revelation. For it he would substitute

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1. *Kirchliche Dogmatik* to be referred to as *K. D.*
the idea of the Bible as indirect revelation. He even speaks of the “double indirectness” of the witness of Scripture. 2 He does so in order to stress his idea that God is hidden in his revelation. 3 God’s revelation as witnessed to in Scripture would not be the revelation of the sovereign God if it were not hidden. 4 As witnessing to revelation Scripture points beyond itself to revelation. It cannot point to itself as being the revelation itself. For revelation always takes place in the present. In the act of God’s revelation nothing is simply past or simply future. Nor is anything simply present. The idea of the present does not refer to a date on the calendar. If it did there would, after all, be direct revelation. If it did then the witness to revelation would, after all, be identical with revelation. For any past or present or future point in the ordinary historical sense 5 we must substitute the notion of the divine present. 6

The whole doctrine of revelation, says Barth, must be regarded from the point of view of this divine present. 7 Revelation is the act of God’s incarnation, his act of reconciliation. In revelation God is present to us. And this revelation has its own time. 8 It does not take place in our ordinary time. The incarnation cannot be identified with what took place in the life of Jesus of Nazareth in our historical past. We would not understand the event of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God if we should say unconditionally that it took place in our time. 9 We must, to be sure, say that the Son of God or the Word is the man Jesus of Nazareth. We must also say that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God or the Word. But if we are asked whether there is a synthesis of these two New Testament christological theses we must reply with a resounding No! 10

Here then we are face to face with the heart of the matter. The question between Barth and historic Christianity is that of the reality of the identification of God’s revelation in history. When Barth answers his question with a resounding No, orthodox

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2 K. D., 1.1, pp. 174–175.
3 Idem.
4 “Ein-Zeugnis ist ja nicht einfach identisch mit dem von ihm trod in ihm Bezeugten.... Wir haben es also, wenn wir es mit der Bibel zu tun haben, zunächst mit diesem Medium, mit diesen Worten zu tun, mit dem Zeugnis, das als solches nicht selbst die Offenbarung, sondern eben, und darin liegt die Einschrankung, nur ihr Zeugnis ist.” (K. D., 1.2, p. 512.)
5 bloss historisch, K. D., 1.2, p. 558.
6 göttliche Präsens, Idem.
7 K. D., 1.2, p. 558.
8 K. D., 1.2, p. 50.
theology answers it with a resounding Yes. Orthodox theology says that the revelation of God in Christ is directly identifiable with the man Jesus of Nazareth. But it says this because it believes that this identification has been indicated by the direct revelation of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.\footnote{Cf. G. C. Berkouwer’s discussion of this dialectical view of the christological incognito (De Persoon van Christus, Kampen, 1952).} Barth believes that the revelation of God in history cannot be directly identified with Jesus of Nazareth. And involved in his rejection of the identification of God’s revelation with any point in history, be that point the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, is the idea that neither the Old nor the New Testament must be regarded as a direct medium of communication of God’s revelation to man.

If the incarnation, the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are not, as such, the revelation of God to man, then the Bible as the Word of God cannot be, as such, the revelation of God. What Jesus of Nazareth was, and did, or said is then, as such, not revelational. Revelation is then historical, but the historical, whether in the form of words or deeds, is not, as such, revelational. Our ordinary history lies “in the neighborhood” of the real time of Jesus Christ; it is not itself that time. Our time stands in the light of that “wholly other time” of the revelation of Jesus Christ.\footnote{K. D., 1.2, p. 72.} Our real time is not here, in history, but is there, in Christ.\footnote{K. D., 1.2, p. 73.} There, and only there, in our contemporaneity with Christ, mediated through the apostles and prophets do we really have time.\footnote{Idem.} This, argues Barth, is the whole message of the Bible.

It will now be clear what Barth means when he says that the Bible is the word of God and that we are not to distinguish in it between the words of man and the words of God.\footnote{K. D., 1.2, p. 590.} The Bible is the Word of God, so far as God allows it to be such, so far as God speaks through it.\footnote{“Die Bibel ist Gottes Wort, sofern Gott sie sein Wort sein lässt, sofern Gott durch sie redet.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 112.)} When we say that the Bible is the Word of God we express our faith in an act of God’s redemption of man in the present. The Bible becomes the Word of God in this event and it is with respect to its being in this becoming that the little word is, in the sentence that the Bible is the Word of God, refers.\footnote{“Die Bibel wird also Gottes Wort in diesem Ereignis und auf ihr Sein in diesem Werden bezieht sich das Wörtlein ‘ist’ in dem Satz, dass die Bibel Gottes Wort ist.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 113.)}

To be sure, we are bound to this text as being the Word of God.\footnote{K. D., 1.2, p. 591.} But it is through this text with all its humanity and all the fallibility involved in this humanity that God speaks. This text has the “form of the world.” It consists of fallible words written by fallible men. But God was not ashamed of the fallibility of the human words of Scripture, nor of its historical and scientific errors, its theological contradictions, the uncertainty of its transmission and above all of its Jewish character. Why then should we be ashamed of it? It would betoken self-will and disobedience if we should seek for infallible elements.
in Scripture. It is therefore not because he considers all the words of Scripture to be infallible that we are not to distinguish in it between the words of God and the words of men.  

19 It is on the contrary because the Bible as an historical and human book is through and through fallible and God speaks through this obviously fallible text that we are forbidden to look for the infallible in Scripture. To look for the infallible in Scripture is to look for clear and direct revelation in history. To look for the infallible in Scripture virtually constitutes an attack on the very center of the message of Christianity, namely, the sovereign character and with it the hidden nature of the revelation of God.

Verbal inspiration therefore means that the fallible and erring human word is here and now taken into his service by God and is to be received and heard as such regardless of its human fallibility.  

20 The orthodox doctrine of verbal inspiration is, by contrast, a typical instance of rationalistic thought. For it seeks to control the revelation of God by reducing it to that which is directly available in the Bible as such.  

21 Thus the very idea of faith is rejected in favor of rationalistic conceptualization. The form of the Word of God as it lies before us in the Bible, says Barth, is as such not suitable to be the means of the conveyance of God’s revelation. Its form is rather that of the cosmos, which stands in opposition to God.

In concluding this section something further must be said of Barth’s view of man’s hearing and receiving or accepting the revelation of God in Christ. This hearing and receiving of the revelation of God takes place in the same divine present in which the revelation itself takes place. This divine present is not to be identified with the present of a calendar day. Hearing and receiving the word of God is no directly identifiable experience of any human being. Whatever experience any human being may have is at most a pointer to the faith that he possesses in his contemporaneity with Christ. It is only by participation in the time of Christ that men have faith. And this participation in the time of Christ involves the sublation, though not the destruction, of ordinary time into the time of Christ.

19 “Hat Gott sich der Fehlbarkeit all der menschlichen Worte der Bibel, ihrer geschichtlichen und naturwissenschaftlichen Irrtümer, ihrer theologischen Widersprüche, der Unsicherheit ihrer Überlieferung und vor allem ihres Judentums nicht geschämt, sondern hat er sich dieser Worte in ihrer ganzen Fehlbarkeit angenommen und bedient, dann brauchen wir uns dessen auch nicht zu schämen, wenn er sie in ihrer ganzen Fehlbarkeit als Zeugnis an uns erneuern will, dann wäre es Eigenwilligkeit und Ungehorsam, in der Bibel auf die Suche nach irgendwelchen unfehlbaren Elementen ausgehen zu wollen.” (K. D., 1.2, p. 590.)


21 K. D., 4.1, p. 407.

22 “Seine Gestalt ist nicht ein geeignetes, sondern ein ungeeignetes Mittel der Selbstdarbietung Gottes. Sie entspricht der Sache nicht, sondern sie widerspricht ihr. Sie enthüllt sie nicht, sondern sie verhüllt sie…. Die Gestalt des Wortes Gottes ist also wirklich die des Kosmos, der im Widerspruch gegen Gott steht.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 172.)

23 “Das von Ewigkeit gesprochene Wort hebt die Zeit, in die es hineingesprochen ist (ohne sie als Zeit auszulöschen), als nunmehr seine Zeit hinauf in seine eigene Ewigkeit,
Moreover, participation in the time of Christ is participation in Christ himself. For Christ is the event of his revelation. In the event of revelation, which is Christ, God is free for man. In the event of man’s faith in Christ, which is participation in Christ, man is free for God. This freedom of man for God can only be a gift of God in the act of his revelation to man. In the last analysis it can be nothing but God’s own freedom.

Thus the nature of the recognition of the Word of God corresponds with the nature of the Word of God itself. Thus “man acts by believing, but the fact that he believes by acting is God’s act.” Thus man is “assimilated to the object” of his faith. “As a believer he cannot regard himself as the active subject of the work which there takes place.”

The main point of Barth’s discussion on the subject of faith is that it takes place by virtue of participation in the act of revelation itself. The faith by which men believe is said not to be a quality or an attitude. It is an event. It is an event in ordinary human experience as the revelation of God in the Bible and in preaching is an event in ordinary experience. But yet it is not any form of human experience as such that constitutes faith any more than it is any event, however miraculous, that, as such, constitutes revelation. There is no directly identifiable fact in the subjective realm of faith any more than there is any directly identifiable fact in the objective realm of revelation. Revelation is always hidden; so faith is always hidden. Revelation is indirectly identical with the words of Scripture. In some such way faith is indirectly identical with human experience. Both the revelation of God to man and the acknowledgment of it by man are real by participation in the one Event of the Christ, who is God with us.

By being taken up into the Event of revelation we are children of God through the Holy Spirit. But the work of the Holy Spirit is a work for all eternity. Thus by the Holy Spirit, the subjective reality of revelation, men are children of God from all eternity. They have heard the Word of God from all eternity in the Event of Jesus Christ.

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24 K. D., 1.1, p. 119.
25 “Diese Freiheit des Menschen kann nur eine von Gott im Akt seiner Offenbarung geschaffene und den Menschen gegebene, sie kann letztlich auch nur Gottes eigene Freiheit sein.” (K. D., 1.2, p. 224.)
27 Ibid., p. 258 (Engl. tr., p. 281).
Enough has now been said to indicate the fact that Barth’s christological principle requires him to reject the orthodox doctrine of Scripture in its entirety. It is not a question of his rejecting the doctrine of plenary inspiration while holding on to the idea of the general trustworthiness of God’s revelation in Scripture. It is not a question of his making minor or even major concessions to negative biblical criticism. It is not a question of his being unable to believe in some of the recorded miracles of Scripture. On Barth’s view the orthodox doctrine of Scripture is inherently destructive of the gospel of the saving grace of God to man. Orthodoxy seeks for the saving grace of God in history as such. Hence it also seeks for a revelation of the meaning of the saving grace of God in an historical document as such. In so doing orthodox theology restricts the freedom of the grace of God. The grace of God is made subject to the conceptual manipulation of man and thus it is at the mercy of some men who possess it to the exclusion of other men who do not possess it. There are those who will never possess it because they have never heard and believed it. They are lost because of an historical accident. They are moreover condemned to everlasting death because of their rejection of a revelation of God not mediated through Christ, but through an historical Adam and through direct revelation in nature.

It is to relieve the church of the encumbrance of this “system” of doctrine and its concomitant idea of direct revelation of God to man in Scripture and nature that Barth offers us his christological concept of revelation. By means of it, he reasons, the grace of God can be seen as streaming forth freely to all men everywhere. The Bible then becomes a pliable instrument for the transmission of the grace of God. It is no longer a cistern containing so much of the grace of God and holding it for so many as the arbitrary will of God may see fit to elect to eternal life. In “possessing” the Bible the church that “hears” it and “believes” it, hears it and believes it for all men everywhere, for those who have “never heard” of it, for those too who “disbelieve” and “reject” it. For the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the subjective actuality of faith in men is the participation of all men in the one all-enveloping Christ-Event.

It is therefore contrary to his frequently reiterated assertions as well as contrary to the whole spirit of his christological principle to maintain that his view of Scripture is basically similar to that of historic Protestantism. For Barth the gospel of the saving grace of God in Christ requires the rejection of the orthodox view of the direct revelation of God in history and therefore the rejection of the orthodox view of the direct revelation of God in Scripture. Any form of direct revelation constitutes, according to Barth, a virtual attack on the hiddenness of revelation and therewith on the “freedom” of God. The deus revelatus is the deus absconditus. Orthodoxy destroys this correlativity of the hiddenness and the “revealedness” of the revelation of God.

God

Turning now from Barth’s view of Scripture to his view of the content of Scripture we deal first with his doctrine of God. This too must be, says Barth, interpreted christologically. We know nothing of God but through his revelation in Christ.
And what we know of God through Christ is above all that God is what he is in his revelation in Christ. We are not to think of a God who exists prior to and apart from his revelation in Christ. God is identical with his revelation.¹

God gives himself wholly to man in his revelation.² For herein consists the grace of God, that he is “free for us” in Christ. We must, to be sure, distinguish between the essence and the works of God. But this distinction must be made only in the interest of stressing the fact that when God’s essence is wholly revealed it is also wholly hidden. The incomprehensibility of God does not rest upon some internally self-complete essence of God to be thought of as existing back of the revelation of God. The incomprehensibility of God rests rather upon the fact that when God’s essence is wholly revealed to man it is at the same time still wholly hidden to man.³

Similarly God’s transcendence above man does not rest upon some incommunicable attributes such as aseity, unity and eternity which God possesses in himself prior to his revelation to man in Christ. His transcendence consists rather in the fact of his freedom to become wholly or partly other than himself and in the fact that he can take this “otherness” back into himself again.⁴

¹ “Wollen wir die Offenbarung wirklich von ihrem Subjekt, von Gott her verstehen, dann müssen wir vor allem verstehen, dass dieses ihr Subjekt, Gott, der Offenbarer, identisch ist mit seinem Tun in der Offenbarung, identisch auch mit dessen Wirkung.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 312) “Er selbst ist nicht nur er selbst, sondern auch das, was er bei den Menschen schafft und ausrichtet.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 315.)
² “Gott gibt sich dem Menschen ganz in seiner Offenbarung.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 391.)
³ Idem.
⁴ “Also: Gott kann wohl (und das ist seine Transzendenz) allem Anderen jenseitig genug sein, um sein Schöpfer aus dem Nichts zu werden und zugleich frei genug, sein Sein teilweise oder ganz und gar zu ändern oder auch es ihm wieder zu nehmen, wie er es ihm gegeben hat. Aber Gott kann, wenn man so sagen darf, noch mehr als dies: Er kann (und das ist seine Immanenz) allem Anderen so inseitig sein, dass er, indem er sein Schöpfer und also der Geber seines Seins ist und indem er ihm dieses sein Sein nicht wieder nimmt, diesem seinem Sein in der ganzen Verschiedenheit seiner eigenen, des göttlichen Seins sich nun nicht etwa entzieht, ihm (nachdem es durch seinen Willen entstanden ist, indem es durch seinen Willen Bestand hat) nicht etwa als Fremder unbeteiligt gegenübersteht, sondern als das Sein seines Seins gegenwärtig ist in eben jener ewigen Treue, deren kein Geschöpf dem anderen gegenüber fähig ist. Gott kann dieses Andere, von ihm gänzlich Verschiedene, nun doch und als solches leben, weben und sein lassen in ihm selber. Er kann ihm sein besonderes, von seinem eigenen verschiedenes Sein ganz und gar gönnen, gewähren und lassen und es nun dennoch und gerade so und also in seiner geschöpflichen Freiheit ganz und gar durch sein eigenes Sein erhalten, tragen, regieren, ganz und gar sein Anfang, seine Mitte und sein Ende sein. Ihm tatsächlich näher sein als es sich selber ist, es besser verstehen als es sich selbst versteht, es intimer bewegen als es sich selbst bewegt: unendlich viel näher, besser; intimer sogar und dies Alles nun doch nicht in Auflösung sondern in Bestattigung seiner göttlichen Eigenheit und wiederum nicht in Auflösung sondern in Bestattigung der Eigenheitauch des Anderen! Dass Gott das kann, das ist seine Freiheit in seiner Immanenz.” (K. D., 2.1, pp. 352 f.)
Thus it is because God’s essence is identical with his revelation that he can be both *totus intra el totus extra*. The ideas of transcendence and of immanence pertain to this essence of God as act of revelation in Jesus Christ.

When then God is said to be unchangeable this refers not to an essence back of his revelation, but to the continuity of his freedom for us in Christ. God is changeless in his Lordship over all ages as “participating in their change.” All that—and only all that—is real in which God repeats and maintains himself. Again when God is said to be eternal this refers not to God as he is in himself, but it refers to him as he is free for us in Jesus Christ. In Christ God becomes eternal. He makes created time the form of his eternity.

Correlative to Barth’s view of God’s nature as free to become wholly or partly other than itself is the idea of human nature as free to participate in the very being of God. This point will engage us more particularly when we deal with Barth’s view of man. At this juncture it is mentioned only in order to indicate that God’s essence includes that of man. For Barth God’s essence is a pure abstraction unless it be thought of as identical with his revelation in the incarnation and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In his revelation, which is the incarnation, God takes on a secondary absoluteness. Thus he creates time for us. God reveals himself fully for us and we become contemporaneous with God. As he makes created time the form of his eternity, so this same created time receives in Christ and receives in each act of faith in him the character and stamp of eternity and life in it, the very essence of eternal life. Thus God has life within and without. That constitutes his glory. In Christ God extends his existence to coexistence with man. He identifies his being with that of man and transforms human being into divine being.

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5 K. D., 2.1, p. 354.
6 Idem.
7 K. D., 2.1, p. 557.
8 K. D., 2.1, p. 598.
9 K. D., 2.1, p. 694.
10 “Denn der Sohn Gottes, der in Jesus Christus Fleisch geworden ist, ist als ewige Seinsweise Gottes selbst nicht mehr und nicht weniger als das Prinzip aller Weltimmanenz Gottes und also das Prinzip dessen, was wir die sekundäre Absolutheit Gottes genannt haben.” (K. D., 2.1, p. 356.)
11 K. D., 2.1, pp. 695 f.
12 “Kann man aber die Einheit mit sich selbst: die höchste Betätigung und Bestätigung dieser Einheit, in der Gott gerade in Jesus Christus handelt, nicht genug hervorheben, so ebensowenig die Tiefe, in der er sich hier von sich selbst unterscheidet, einem ganz Andern, als er selbst ist, sich öffnet, erschliesst, hingibt, einem Anderen höchste Gemeinschaft mit sich selber verleiht, seine eigene Existenz gewissermassen erweitert zur Koexistenz mit diesem Anderen, indem er, wahrer Gott bleibend, ja gerade darin als der wahre Gott lebend, wahrer Mensch wird. Man bedenke: Mensch wird—also nicht nur den Menschen schafft, erhält und regiert; das ist das Werk der Schöpfung, das in jenem grösseren Werk freilich vorausgesetzt ist, das aber jenem, so unbegreiflich es selber schon ist, doch nur vorangeht, das in jenem noch einmal in unerhörter Weise überboten wird. Denn dass Gott in Jesus Christus selbst Mensch wird und ist, das ist mehr als Schöpfung. Erhaltung und Regierung, das ist die Herablassung Gottes selbst. Das heisst, dass Gott selbst sich das Sein dieses Anderen, des Menschen, zu eigen macht, sein
Thus we have come full circle with the doctrine of God as we had to come full circle with the doctrine of revelation. God is known by God and alone by God. It is man who believes in God, but he does and can believe only by virtue of the fact that his faith participates in and is therefore a part of God’s act of revelation. Similarly man as the creature is in all his limitations of time and space distinct from God, but his whole existence under these limitations is what it is only as participant in the very aseity of God. Only God knows God; man knows God because he participates in the revelation of God. So also only God participant in the being of God.

Thus Barth’s christological principle requires the rejection of the orthodox doctrine of God as it requires the rejection of the orthodox doctrine of revelation in Scripture. In Barth’s idea of the Christ-Event the distinctions made in orthodox theology between God as the self-contained being, the giver of revelation, and man the creature, the receiver of revelation, are correlative. Barth’s Christ-Event seeks to be a principle of unity that includes the orthodox doctrines of God and man and therefore of revelation and faith. God is said to be wholly known to man as man is said to be wholly known to God. So also God’s being is wholly present to man as man’s being is wholly present to God. At the same time Barth’s Christ-Event seeks to be a principle of diversity that cuts much deeper than the orthodox distinction between the Creator and creature. God is contingently contemporaneous with man.

Barth’s christological principle leads him to the denial of the orthodox doctrine of Scripture as directly revelational of God. This same principle leads him to the denial of the orthodox doctrine of God. For Barth there is no God who exists independently of his revelation. Such a God would be an unknowable God. He would be an arbitrary God. His righteousness would not be subject to his grace. He would not be inherently gracious and redemptive of all men.

Over against this God of orthodoxy Barth places the God of grace in Christ. It is God’s essence to be gracious to all men. In fact his giving of grace to men, to all men, whether they believe or disbelieve is of the essence of God.

Man

Barth’s doctrine of man is found in the third volume of his Church Dogmatics. As might be expected, it too is developed in accordance with his christological principle. All that is found in the four parts of this third volume centers around the idea that God participates in the creature and the creature participates in God. In Christ God and man become wholly identical. But this identification of God with man and man with God in

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13 “Gott wird durch Gott und zwar allein durch Gott erkannt.” (K. D., 2.1, p. 47.)

1 In Jesus Christ, says Barth, we have both the Realgrund and the Erkenntnisgrund of the doctrine of creation in general and therefore of man in particular.

2 K. D., 3.3, p. 324.
Christ is no direct identification. God comes down to man in self-estrangement. The subject who wholly reveals himself by identifying himself with his creature wholly hides himself in the object of his creation. The subject of revelation becomes the object to himself as subject. And in becoming the object to himself in Christ he becomes the real man. Christ is therefore the real man, the only real man. Christ is Adam.

As Adam Christ is he in whom sin originates. On becoming the object of his own revelation in his self-estrangement God becomes the object of his own wrath. As the only real man, as the one in whom alone therefore sin did and could originate, Christ alone is the object of God’s wrath. What Judas wanted to do to Christ God did to himself; he delivered himself over to his own wrath.

But God’s wrath is never ultimate. It is penultimate. God’s grace is ultimate. Hence Jesus Christ is the elected man. To be sure, the wrath of God is real. God’s wrath upon himself in Christ involves utter dereliction and death. Even so Christ is the elected man

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3 “Unsere Teilnahme an seiner Selbsterkenntnis is wahr und wirklich, sie ist aber diese indirekte Teilnahme.” (K. D., 2.1, p. 64.)
4 “Indem er uns bekannt wird, wird er sich selber—in dem Mittel und Zeichen, dessen er sich bedient, um uns bekannt zu werden—fremd und uneigentlich.” (K. D., 2.1, p. 59.)
5 “Dieser Mensch ist der Mensch—erstlich und eigentlich er ganz allein: so gewiss Gottes Verhalten zum sündigen Menschen erstlich und eigentlich ganz allein sein Verhalten zu ihm und erst und nur in ihm und durch ihn dann auch sein Verhalten zu uns Anderen ist.” (K. D., 3.2, p. 49.)
6 “So war also schon Adam Jesus Christus und so war Jesus Christus schon Adam.” (K. D., 3.1, p. 229.)
8 K. D., 3.1, p. 440.
9 “Nicht eine unbewegte Vollkommenheit Gottes hinter und über der geschöpflichen Unvollkommenheit also, sondern die durch Gottes eigenen Einsatz für das Geschöpf vollzogene Bestreitung und überwindung von dessen Unvollkommenheit. Um dieser göttlichen Bestreitung und überwindung willen darf es unvollkommen sein, nimmt es auch in seiner Unvollkommenheit schon teil an Gottes eigener Vollkommenheit.” (K. D., 3.1, p. 441.)
from all eternity. God’s grace outreaches his wrath. God’s self-estrangement is in order to higher unity and love.

Now the doctrine of man must be viewed in the light of his participation in the divine self-estrangement and the more ultimate removal of this self-estrangement of God by God in God. Thus there is indirectness in God’s revelation. When wholly revealed to himself God is also wholly hidden to himself. And man participates in God’s being as wholly hidden and wholly revealed to himself. Thus there is double indirectness as between man and God: indirectness by virtue of the fact that man only participates in God’s revelation and being and indirectness by virtue of the fact that this participation implies involvement in the indirectness of the nature of God.

Who then is man? Man is a creature of God and estranged from God. He is under the wrath of God. But even so he is in Christ elected of God. His sin is sin against the grace of God. Man could not know his sin as sin except in the fact that he knows his sin to be forgiven. Revelation is reconciliation and redemption. It is reconciliation and redemption from all eternity. And it is all this for all men; for men, to be men, must be men in Christ. And Christ’s work is his work from all eternity. This universalistic motif will engage us later.

When orthodox theology speaks of man’s being a creature and a sinner before God it thinks in terms of direct revelation in ordinary history. It thinks of an Adam prior to and apart from Christ who was the first man of history. It thinks therefore of a human nature as existing as an entity apart from God. It thinks of this human nature as being created perfect at the beginning of history. It thinks further of this quality of perfection as having been lost when this historical Adam sinned against God. It was this human nature, as already existing with qualities of its own, that the second person of the trinity took to himself in permanent union yet without participation. Basing its soteriology on such a view of human nature, orthodox theology thinks of some men as continuing their existence in their sinful human nature forever. It thinks of eternal punishment upon such as were and are and ever will be separate from Christ. It thinks of other men as continuing their existence in this human nature in eternal joy with God.

But the christological principle requires us, argues Barth, to replace this orthodox notion of an independent human nature operating in ordinary history with the idea of man’s participation in Christ in real history, in Geschichtte rather than Historie.

Now Christ is Geschichtte and Geschichtte is Christ. There are not two entities, God and man, each of which is first determined by his nature or condition and which afterward come into certain not previously obtaining contacts with one another.  

10 “Er ist menschliche Person. Er ist menschliche Seele eines menschlichen Leibes. Er ist Mensch unter Menschen und Mensch in der Menschheit. Er hat Zeit: seine Zeit. Nicht er muss teilnehmen am menschlichen Wesen, sondern das menschliche Wesen darf teilnehmen an ihm. Nicht er steht hier also unter den Bestimmungen und Merkmalen dieses Wesens, nicht er ist durch sie bedingt und begrenzt, sondern indem es sein Wesen ist, ist er es, der diese Bestimmungen und Merkmale bedingt und begrenzt als der, der über ihnen ist. Menschliches Wesen mit allen seinen Möglichkeiten ist als das menschliche Wesen Jesu gerade keine auch für ihn gültige, auch ihn beherrschende und also auch ihn erklärende Voraussetzung, sondern sein Sein als Mensch ist als solches die Setzung und darum auch die Offenbarung, die Erklärung des menschlichen Wesens in
creature does not have a history, it is history. And the nature of man is history because it is, from the outset, what it is in Christ.

Moreover, Christ’s being as a Person is identical with his work as Saviour. Thus man’s essence consists in participation in the work of Christ.

When the Bible speaks of the creation of man it does not refer to history as such. The relationship between object and subject that obtains in ordinary history does not obtain in the Genesis account. So we have to speak of unhistorical history.

This *Geschichte* can only be related in terms of pure *Saga*. But *Saga* is not to be equated with myth or tale. Myth is a mere historical presentation of non-historical speculation. *Saga*, on the contrary, enables us to penetrate into the radical time of primal history.

Regarding the creation account as pure *Saga* enables us to see it in its true relation to Christ. For Christ is Adam. We must not think of Adam as the first historical man. We must think of Adam, i.e., Christ, as the only fully real man. God’s relation to men is

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12 "Nur von diesem, dem Heilandswerk kann das gesagt werden, was von Jesus zu sagen ist: dass sein Werk selbst seine wirkende Person und also er der Täter und seine Tat, seine Tat unter der Tater, eines sind." (K. D., 3.2, p. 71.)


14 "Geschichte, die wir nicht zu sehen und zu begreifen vermögen, ist aber jedenfalls keine historische Geschichte.” (K. D., 3.1, p. 84; cf. also 3.1, p. 239.)

15 "Eben darum ist sie keine Historie und kann es von ihr auch keine Historie geben. Eben darum kann sie nur unhistorische Geschichte sein, und kann es von ihr nur unhistorische Geschichteeschreibung geben.” (Idem)

16 "Die biblische Schöpfungsgeschichte aber ist, entsprechend dem singulären Charakter ihres Gegenstandes, reine Saga.” (K. D., 3.1, p. 89.)

17 K. D., 3.1, p. 91.

18 "Sie blickt im wörtlichsten Sinn auf die ‘radikale’ Geschichtszeit.” (K. D., 3.1, p. 90.)
really and strictly his relation to this man Jesus. Thus creation appears to be the external ground of the covenant of God with man.

Now Jesus Christ as the only true man is the elected man. But being the elected man he is, at the same time the electing God. In him the subject and the object of election are wholly identical. Moreover God’s act of election is God, the triune God himself.

Thus to be man, to be created by God, means to be a fellow-creature with Christ, fellow-reprobate and fellow-elect with Christ, and thus participant in God. And as being thus participant in God through Christ, man’s being consists in fellow-participation in the *Geschichte* of redemption. It consists in his freedom for God even as God’s being consists in his freedom for man.

Moreover man’s creation for the covenant with Christ is a finished work. It has been accomplished from all eternity.

It is, still further, of the nature of man to believe that he is thus participant with and in Christ of the grace of God from all eternity. Through the Holy Spirit, as the subjective of actuality and possibility of God’s revelation, man’s faith is man himself in Christ. Man does not know himself for what he is by being free for God in faith, unless he sees himself as the fellow-creature and fellow-elect with Jesus Christ.

Finally it belongs to man as created for the covenant that he be not merely fellow-elect with Christ, but that he be also fellow-elector with Christ. Man as man is not merely the passive recipient with Jesus Christ of the grace of God. To be truly participant with Christ, he must be fellow-subject as well as fellow-object.

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19 “*Dieser Mensch ist der Mensch—erstlich und eigentlich er ganz allein: so gewiss Gottes Verhalten zum sündigen Menschen erstlich und eigentlich ganz allein rein Verhalten zu ihm und erst und nur in ihm und durch ihn dann auch sein Verhalten zu uns Anderen ist.*” (K. D., 3.2, p. 49.)


21 “*Sein Tun nicht nur, sondern auch sein Sein in seiner Teilnahme an dem, was Gott für ihn tut und ist, seine Freiheit besteht dann in seiner Freiheit, sich für Gott zu entscheiden.*” (K. D., 3.2, pp. 85 f.)

22 “*Es muss diese unsere Anteilhabe zu Jesu Christi Sein und Werk nicht erst hinzukommen als ein Zweites, sondern es ist als das Eine was vollbracht werden muss, ganz und gar in ihm vollbracht. Es ist als das Goschehen in Gott—das Goschehen, an dem wir ja kraft des Wesens des Seins und Werks Jesu Christi beteiligt sind—in sich und von Hause aus auch ein Geschehen an und in uns.... Das Leben der Kirche und das Leben der Kinder Gottes ist als das Werk des Heiligen Geistes nichts Anderes als die Einheit des Vaters und des Sohnes in der Gestalt der Zeit, unter und in uns Menschen, die wir unsere Existenz als solche noch nicht daheim bei dem Herrn, noch in der Fremde, in Jesus Christus aber nicht mehr in der Fremde, sondern schon daheim bei dem Herrn haben.*” (K. D., 2.1, pp. 176 f.)

23 K. D., 2.1, p. 177.

24 “*Wie wäre sie Teilnahme an seinem Leben, Vollstreckung der von ihm dem Menschen gewährten Bundeseinheit, wenn sie nicht aktive Teilnahme an seiner Liebe,*
The act of creation by God must, according to Barth, be regarded as the act of God’s self-estrangement, his becoming an object to himself as subject, his incarnation. Thus the nature of man inherently participates in the nature of God. And since God is what he is in his act or work of revelation, and since this work of revelation is the eternal election of all men to salvation, it is the nature of man to be participant in God’s act of saving all men.

It is thus that the orthodox view with respect to the nature of man is repudiated at every point. The orthodox conception of the incommunicability of the attributes of divine and of human nature is replaced by the idea of Anteilgabe and Anteilnahme. For Barth the unity of the work of God requires the envelopment into the idea of the Christ-Event, of both what God does in creating and redeeming mankind and of what man receives and does in being created and redeemed. And since God is the act of his revelation and reconciliation of mankind, man as man is participant in this act of saving all mankind.

Immediately involved in the idea of man’s creation is that of his sin. This too must be christologically viewed. So the orthodox doctrine of the fall of man in Adam, the first historical man, must be rejected. Christ is Adam. Only through Christ can God be known by man. Only in Christ is man what he is. Therefore only as being in Christ is man able to sin and able to know that he has sinned and is sinning. Man sins against his own nature as co-saviour with Christ. To be man is to be with God. Whatever else he may be presupposes this. 25

Sin therefore can never mean permanent or eternal separation from God. To be sure, says Barth, we must believe in reprobation as well as election. The reprobate is rejected of God. His place is in the kingdom of Satan. He is subject to the destructive hostility of God. He is given over to being lost forever. 26

But all this must not be taken to mean that there is for some men an eternal punishment. This cannot be since it is Christ who is the true and really the only man. He is therefore the reprobate man as well as the elect man. 27 Thus other men are reprobate in Christ. And Christ is primarily the elected man. Other men are therefore men, as elected men, co-elected with Christ. Their reprobation is not final. Men cannot attain to final

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25 K. D., 2.2, p. 381.
27 K. D., 2.2, p. 382.
separation from God. 28 Men can only be potentially reprobate. 29 Men can be conditionally but not unconditionally reprobate. The wrath of God has fallen once for all upon Jesus Christ. So other men cannot, for a second time, bring upon themselves unconditional destruction. 30 The figure of the reprobate is therefore a departing one. It is the figure of a shadow. This figure belongs to the past. The destiny of the reprobate is to be sublated as reprobate by his inclusion in Christ. 31 To be reprobate is to oppose one’s actual election in Christ. 32 God has taken upon himself the reprobation of man with all its consequences and has ordained him to participation in his own glory. 33 In so doing he rejected himself. 34 This rejection, therefore, cannot strike man. 35 According to Barth, the true doctrine of reprobation teaches the reverse of what classical Reformed theology has meant by it. This classical doctrine thought of reprobation as pertaining to some men and of election as pertaining to others. 36 Calvin’s electing God was a Deus nudus absconditus, not a Deus revelatus, which as such is also Deus absconditus. 37 Accordingly he, and other traditional theologians, dealt with two classes of men, the reprobate and the elect. Dealing

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28 “Sie können es nicht erreichen, dass Gott nun gerade sie anders ansehe als so, wie er den sündigen Menschen in seinem eigenen Sohn von Ewigkeit her ansehen wollte und angesehen hat.” (K. D., 2.2, p. 385.)
29 “Sie können nur potentiell Verworfene sein.” (Idem.)
30 “Ihnen ist damit eine Grenze gesteckt, dass der Verworfene, der den Zorn Gottes eigentlich und wirklich Tragende, Ertragende und Hinwegtragende Jesus Christus heisst.” (Idem.)
32 K. D., 2.2, p. 498.
34 K. D., 2.2, p. 179.
35 “Es ist also die Praedestination, sofern in ihr auch ein Nein ausgesprochen ist, auf alle Fälle kein den Menschen treffendes Nein.” (K. D., 2.2, p. 181.)
36 K. D., 2.2, p. 187.
37 K. D., 2.2, p. 119.
with two classes of men, they made the one class the object of God’s final wrath and the
other class the objects of his final favor. Interpreting the doctrines of election and
reprobation christologically requires us to reject both of these positions of orthodox
Reformed theology. There is no final separation into two classes. Election to eternal life
includes all men. The only difference between the elect and the reprobate, so far as we
may use this distinction, is that the former do and the latter do not yet own themselves to
be what they really are in Christ. Whether your name be Moses, a friend of God, or
Pharaoh, an enemy of God, whether it be Isaac or Ishmael, Jacob or Esau, you are in any
case included among those for whose sins Christ died and rose again. \(^{38}\) Judas too is in
the Church of Jesus Christ. \(^{39}\) In Jesus Christ we can think of sin and evil only as already
defeated. \(^{40}\) Man in himself and as such always does that which, according to the Genesis
account, Adam did. Therefore he is under the wrath of God. He is guilty of death. But
this man in himself and as such God has from all eternity loved in Christ. \(^{41}\) In Jesus
Christ God loves man in himself and as such. It is Jesus who bears God’s wrath, his
judgment and his punishment. It is God’s own son and therefore himself who receives all
this. Therefore it does not come upon man. \(^{42}\) We know nothing of hell; we know only of
victory over hell.

We have now come full circle for the third time. In the doctrine of revelation God
reveals himself and in his revelation is fully hidden. Man by faith participates in God’s
revelation and thus in God wholly knows God as the wholly revealed and as the wholly
hidden God. In Barth’s doctrine of God, it is shown that the revelation of God is God
himself. So it is God himself, in his whole being, whose nature it is to be other to himself,
to be free for man in Christ. God is wholly present to man in Christ. At the same time
man by faith participates in the very attributes of God. Man is free for God as God is free
for man. And this means that man is through Jesus Christ taken into the circle of the
being which is the revelation of God through Christ.

In his doctrine of man it is God in Christ who becomes man and is the only fully real
man. All other men are men by participation in God and his revelation, which is also his
election and reconciliation in Christ. Man’s sin is sin against himself as participant in the
saving work of God for mankind. Sin has thus become an impossible possibility for man.

\(^{38}\) “Du bist auf alle Fälle, ob du nun wie Mose ein Freund oder wie der Pharao ein Feind
Gottes seist, ob du nun Isaak oder Ismael, Jakob oder Esau heisest, der Mensch, um
dessen Sünde willen und für dessen sünde Jesus Christus zur Rechtfertigung Gottes am
Kreuz gestorben und zu dessen Heil und Seligkeit, zu dessen eigener Rechtfertigung er
von den Toten erweckt worden ist.” (K. D., 2.2, p. 245.)

\(^{39}\) K. D., 2.2, p. 250.

\(^{40}\) K. D., 2.2, p. 189.

\(^{41}\) K. D., 2.2, p. 131.

\(^{42}\) K. D., 2.2, p. 132.

\(^{1}\) “Gottlosigkeit ist infolgedessen keine Möglichkeit, sondern die ontologische
Unmöglichkeit des Menschseins. Der Mensch ist nicht ohne, sondern rnit Gott. Wir sagen
damit selbstverständlich nicht, dass es kein gottloses Menschsein gibt. Es geschieht, es
gibt ja zweifellos die Sünde. Aber eben die Sünde ist keine Möglichkeit, sondern die
ontologische Unmöglichkeit des Menschseins. Wir dnd mir Jesus, wir sind also mit Gott
The three circles described above, it must be noted with final emphasis, are the same circle. That circle is the Christ-Event.

Little can be said about this Christ-Event that has not already been said. Since the doctrines of revelation, of God and of man all centered about Jesus Christ we have had to speak of the Christ-Event repeatedly in dealing with these doctrines. On the other hand the Christ-Event includes all that relates to God and to man. So nothing can be said about this Christ-Event unless we speak of God and of man. Yet we can concentrate our thought upon the hub of the wheel, upon Jesus Christ, as the point at which God and man do meet.

Since we are concerned to ask whether Barth has become orthodox in the central doctrines of his theology, it is of special interest to note whether he believes in the Christ of the Scriptures, the Christ of historic Christianity.

Barth keeps coming back to the statement that Jesus Christ is very God and very man. In Jesus Christ God is free for man and man is free for God.

But if this is to be maintained then we must, according to Barth, by all means reject the orthodox doctrine of a “God in himself” and a “man in himself” and as such. Not as though the ideas of God in himself and of man in himself must not be used. But they must not be taken to mean what orthodox theology has meant by them. When orthodox theology speaks of God “in himself” it thinks of an immanent or ontological trinity that is self-contained, that is self-sufficient. And when orthodoxy speaks of man in himself and as such it thinks of human nature as created by this self-sufficient God, apart from and prior to Jesus Christ. The relation between this God in himself and this man in himself of orthodoxy is a systematic one. God is said to have a plan or counsel for man. He is said to have expressed his commandment to man originally in direct fashion to the historical Adam. And the sin of man is sin against the will of this God who has revealed himself to man prior to Jesus Christ. According to classical Reformed theology this God in himself elects or reprobates individual men in themselves apart from Christ. Even when some Reformed theologians connect Christ with their doctrine of election, their Christ is himself subjected to the ideas of a God in himself and a man in himself. For according to the classical Reformed doctrine of election there are three centers of self-consciousness in God as he exists in himself. And it is only one of these “persons,” namely, the second person of this God in himself, who becomes incarnate. Thus it is not the whole God who is free for man. And even the second person of the trinity is, on this orthodox basis, not wholly free for man. He does not give himself wholly. He retains his aloofness from man. His divine nature keeps itself in self-contained isolation from his human nature. It retains its own incommunicable attributes in splendid isolation from man even in the incarnation. Thus Jesus Christ cannot as God be said to be very man. Similarly on the orthodox view the second person of the trinity took to himself a pre-existent human nature that was derived from the historical Adam. This human nature also had attributes or qualities of its

zusammen. Das bedeutet, dass unser Sein die Sünde nicht ein-, sondern ausschliesst. Sein in der Sünde, Sein in der Gottlosigkeit ist ein Sein wider unser Menschsein.” (K. D., 3.2, p. 162.)
own nature apart from Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ took to himself this human nature, this human nature could not participate truly in his divine nature.

On this orthodox scheme of systematic and direct relation of a God in himself and a man in himself Jesus Christ could not be seen for what he really is, namely, both the ontological and epistemological ground of the relationship that obtains between God and man.

For this orthodox scheme Barth substitutes his idea of Jesus Christ as very God and very man in dialectical relation. It is of paramount importance to observe that on Barth’s view all of orthodoxy must be discarded or none of it need be. Particularly when orthodox theologians speak as though Barth does retain the historic Christian doctrine of the ontological trinity even though he is very unsound on other doctrines, such as the Scriptures in relation to God’s revelation in nature, they are not speaking according to the spirit of Barth. One who holds the orthodox doctrine of the trinity, holds in principle, according to Barth, to the whole scheme of systematic relationships between God and man. And therefore he cannot, except with a happy inconsistency, hold to Jesus Christ as very God and very man. Either take Jesus Christ as very God and very man or take the notion of a God in himself and a man in himself. Either make men look into the Götzenseinbild of a God in himself with an independent attribute of righteousness that casts men in themselves, apart from Christ, forever into perdition or make them look into the face of Jesus Christ, very God and very man, through whom God is seen to be inherently gratiosus to men, since to be men, they are men in Christ. All or none; that is Barth’s challenge.

In our section on Barth’s doctrine of God it was pointed out that Barth rejects the orthodox doctrine of the incommunicable attributes of God. God, he says, is free to turn wholly or partly into the opposite of himself. He does this in terms of the second Person of the trinity. In him the triune God appears as Lord. But this implies that the idea of the trinity must be taken as including the act of incarnation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The persons of the Godhead are not three centers of self consciousness. They are modes of being of the one God. Only thus, argues Barth, can

3 “Gott ist, der er ist in der Tat seiner Offenbarung.” (K. D., 2.1, p. 288.)
4 “Aber wie dern auch sei: die Herrschaft, die in der biblischen Offenbarung sichtbar wird, besteht eben in der Freiheit Gottes, sich von selbst sich zu unterscheiden, sich selber ungleich zu werden und doch der gleiche zu bleiben, ja noch mehr: gerade darin der eine sich selbst gleiche Gott zu sein, gerade darin als der eine einzige Gott zu existieren, dass er sich so, so unbegreiflich tief von sich selbst unterscheidet, dass er nicht nur Gott der Vater, sondern auch—das ist in die Verbindung der zusammenfassende Sinn des ganzen biblischen Zeugnisses—Gott der Sohn ist.” (K. D., 1.1, pp. 337 f.)
5 K. D., 1.1, p. 401.
6 “Die Trinitätselehre lautet also nicht etwa dahin, dass in Gott drei Personlichkeiten seien.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 370.)
we find true unity in the trinity. For this unity consists in the fact that God can become wholly other than himself in his works ad extra while yet remain identical with himself. It is then also possible to see how the whole God is wholly revealed to man. Man must know God wholly or he does not know him at all.

On the other hand when the “second person of the trinity” is conceived of as a mode of divine being rather than as a center of self-consciousness it is possible to maintain the complete hiddenness and therewith the freedom of the revelation of God. Thus the orthodox doctrine of three persons in the ontological trinity would, according to Barth, lead to tritheism. And it would lead to a “systematic” or speculative and static conception of the relation of the triune God to man. This orthodox doctrine is therefore to be replaced by the idea of the unity, or essence, of God which includes the opera ad extra of God as equal with the opera ad intra of God. Thus all is brought under one principle of being which is at the same time one principle of revelation. It provides for the exhaustive revelation of God in the Geschichte of the Christ-Event.⁷

At the same time the ascription of equal ontological status to the opera ad extra and the opera ad intra produces a principle of diversity or differentiation that provides for the true hiddenness or freedom of God. Thus all differentiation can be sublated into unity and all unity made correlative to ultimate differentiation. Thus God is wholly revealed and wholly hidden in Jesus Christ, true God and true man.⁸

⁷“Der Christus von Nicaea und Chalcedon an sich und als solcher wäre und ist natürlich ein Wesen, das, selbst wenn es gelingen sollte, seine eigentümliche Struktur begrifflich einigermassen konsistent und einleuchtend zu erklären, wegen der notwendigen Zeitlosigkeit und Geschichtsferne der Begriffe (Person, Natur, Gottheit, Menschheit usw.) als solcher unmöglich also der geschichtlich Handelnde verkündigt und geglaubt werden kann, den die christliche Kirche unter den Namen Jesus Christus faktisch überall und zu allen Zeiten verkündigt und geglaubt hat.” (K. D., 4.1, p. 139) Barth clearly rejects the Chalcedon creed, with its notion of the second person of the ontological trinity taking to himself in permanent union, without confusion, an already existent human nature. For Barth human nature for the first time comes into existence in the incarnation. “Nicht er muss teilnehmen am menschlichen Wesen, sondern das menschliche Wesen darf teilnehmen an ihm.... Sein Sein als Mensch ist sein Werk.” (K. D., 3.2, p. 69.)

⁸“... die Wirklichkeit, die die Absicht des Offenbarers und darum zugleich der Sinn, das Wohin der Offenbarung ist. Kürzer gesagt: nur weil es eine Verhüllung Gottes gibt, kann es eine Enthüllung, und nur indem es Verhüllung und Enthüllung Gottes gibt, kann es eine Selbstmitteilung Gottes geben.” (K. D., 1.1, p. 383)

“Dieser eine Gott ist aber dreimal anders Gott, so anders, dass er eben nur in dieser dreimaligen Andersheit Gott ist, so anders, dass diese Andersheit, sein Sein in diesen drei Seinsweisen ihm schlechterdings wesentlich, von seiner Gottheit unabtrennbar ist, so anders also, dass diese Andersheit unaufhebbar ist” (K. D., 1.1, p. 380).

“Der Einigkeit des Vaters, des Sohnes und des Geistes unter sich entspricht ihre Einigkeit nach aussen. Wesen und Wirken Gottes sind ja nicht zweierlei sondern eins. Das Wirken Gottes ist das Wesen Gottes in seinem Verhältnis zu der von ihm unterschiedenen, zu schaffenden oder geschaffenen Wirklichkeit. Das Wirken Gottes ist das Wesen Gottes als das Wesen dessen, der (NB. in freier Entscheidung, begründet in
With this dialectical conception of the trinity as inclusive of Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost goes the conception of Jesus Christ as having time for us. The pre-existence of the second person of the trinity is then no longer shut up to an eternity that has no history and can absorb no history. On the truly dialectical principle the idea of the pre-existence of the Christ as the second person of the trinity includes man and his existence within itself. 9

Geschichte includes then the fact of the life and death of Jesus Christ as true man. That is to say this Geschichte includes these facts so far as he is really the only real or true man. Still further this Geschichte involves and includes the lives of all men. It involves the lives of all men because they all participate in Jesus Christ and his work. But this participation indicates that Jesus Christ, as the only real man, is both wholly different and wholly like other men. A few considerations with respect to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must now be advanced.

The first question pertaining to Jesus Christ is that of his virgin birth. Some orthodox Christians are distressed over the fact that Brunner frankly denies the virgin birth of Christ and then they rejoice in the fact that in opposition to Brunner Barth affirms it. But it is not the second person of the holy trinity who is, for Barth, the subject of the virgin birth. We have seen that Barth’s christological principle requires the rejection of the idea of three centers of self-consciousness in God. Nor is his view that of Monarchianism or Patrapiassianism. His departure from the historic doctrine of the immanent or ontological trinity is much deeper than any found in the history of the ancient church. Barth’s conception of the incarnation involves the complete immersion of divinity into pure contingency. And this amounts to saying that for Barth there is no transcendent or antecedent God at all. But he continues to use the word God as modern theology in general continues to use it. And so he speaks of the virgin birth of Jesus

Christ as standing for the principle of the pure hiddenness or pure contingency of the revelation of God.

Barth’s criticism of Brunner’s rejection of the virgin birth is therefore far from being undertaken in the interest of a return to orthodoxy. Quite the contrary. His criticism of Brunner is to the effect that in denying the virgin birth Brunner has done less than justice to the hiddenness of the revelation of God. According to Barth, Brunner has begun to be interested in biological questions. And this is in line with his general tendency to return to a natural theology, a return directly contrary to the core and center of the true christological principle. As if either the affirmation or the denial of a virgin birth as a biological fact could have anything directly to do with the Geschichte of the incarnation.

What happens in the field of biology is at most a sign of what happens in the Geschichte in which the reality of Jesus Christ as very God and very man confronts us. When we say that Jesus Christ was born of the virgin we deal not with portenta stupenda but with a true miracle that is neither founded in or to be understood in terms of the continuity of this world. When we say that Jesus Christ as true man was conceived by the Holy Ghost we mean that the Holy Ghost is the possibility of human nature’s being taken up into unity with the Son of God. Through the fact and act of the Holy Ghost man comes to be free for God. Through the Holy Ghost, the flesh, human nature, is taken into unity with the Son of God. Thus all men partake of the virgin birth; on becoming free for God through the Spirit they participate in the being and work of Jesus Christ.

As Barth rejects the orthodox view of the virgin birth so he also rejects the orthodox view of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Not as though he does not speak much of Jesus of Nazareth as being very God and very man. The gospel, he says, does not deal with myths. It deals with Geschichte, with real datable happenings. Just as Barth says that the Bible is God’s word, so he also says that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. But in both cases he qualifies this statement. As noted above the Bible is said to be indirectly the Word of God. It is not directly such because anything historical cannot as such be revelational. Anything directly revelational entails a systematic rather than a dialectical relationship of

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10 “Man darf das Verhältnis dieser beiden Grenzen untereinander vielleicht so bestimmen: die Jungfraugeburt bezeichnet im besonderen das Geheimnis der Offenbarung. Sie bezeichnet dies: dass Gott am Anfang steht, wo wirkliche Offenbarung stattfinde, Gott und nicht die willkürliche Klugheit, Tüchtigkeit oder Frömmigkeit eines Menschen. Dass Gott in Jesus Christus hervortritt aus der tiefen Verborgenheit seiner Gottheit, um als Gott unter uns und an uns zu handeln, wie es in dem Zeichen der Auferstehung Jesu von den Toten wirklich und sichtbar wird, das ist begründet in dem, was durch die Jungfraugeburt bezeichnet ist: hier in diesem Jesus hat sich wirklich Gott selbst in die Menschheit herabgelassen und verborgen.” (K. D., 1.2, pp. 199 f.)

11 “Aber dazu ist zunächst allgemein zu sagen: was hier auf dem Feld der Biologie geschieht, ist an sich, wie schon Irenaus (s.o.) gesagt hat, nut das signum, das Zeichen der unaussprechlichen, alle menschlichen Betrachtungsfelder begrenzenden Wirklichkeit der Offenbarung, des vere Deus vere homo.” (K. D., 1.2, p. 200.)

12 K. D., 1.2, p. 204.


man to God. And this implies that the all-important relationship between the Deus absconditus and the Deus revelatus as interdependent would be broken. We would once more have a God like the God of Calvin who simply and plainly reveals himself without being wholly hidden in his revelation. And even so, on this basis God would not be wholly revealed as he is not wholly hidden.

Accordingly, as Barth asserts over and over that God is wholly revealed in Jesus of Nazareth he also at the same time asserts that in this revelation God is wholly hidden. There was therefore no voice in ordinary history that could say of a certain man walking on the shore of Galilee: This is the Son of God. Jesus himself in testifying of himself as being such could not do so. John the Baptist could not do so. The Old Testament prophets could not delineate a picture of a man to whom Jesus of Nazareth would answer with certainty. For all these would be direct revelations about a supposedly directly revelational fact. Ordinary historical phenomena are inherently ambiguous. To maintain that Jesus of Nazareth can be directly identified is to hold to a natural theology based on a direct revelation.

Barth’s insistence that Jesus of Nazareth cannot be identified in ordinary history is a thoroughly consistent application of his dialectical or christological principle. It is sometimes said by orthodox Christians that Barth is one-sided in that he emphasizes God’s revelation in Scripture at the expense of his revelation in nature. But to say this is to misapprehend the main principle of Barth’s theology. Barth’s principle is as much opposed to the orthodox doctrine of revelation in Scripture as it is to the orthodox doctrine of revelation in nature. He is opposed to all direct revelation in history. He is opposed to the idea of a God who exists from all eternity apart from and above history, who, in revealing himself is not himself exhaustively expressed in his revelation. He is opposed to the idea that this Deus nudus absconditus has a plan according to which things come to pass in history. And because he is opposed to all this, he is opposed also to the idea of any direct identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God.

One must therefore not look for sinlessness in Jesus of Nazareth as a quality or character that made him noticeably distinct from other men or other religious teachers. We should not look for a distinctive quality of perfection in Scripture. God was not ashamed to reveal himself in the Bible as being his word, though this Bible as a book contains much of error and contradiction. So God is wholly revealed in Jesus of Nazareth though as a man and as a Jewish rabbi he might not compare favorably with other men or other religious teachers.”

Fragen wir aber, worin denn nun konkret die Sündlosigkeit oder positiv der Gehorsam Christi zu erblicken ist? so wird man schwerlich gut tun, sich nach diesen oder jenen Charaktervorsätzen, Tugenden oder guten Werken dieses Menschen umzusehen. Denn wir können nur wiederholen: als moralischen Idealmenschen hat das Neue Testament Jesus Christus nun gerade nicht dargestellt, und bei Anwendung der Massstäbe, die man bei der Konstruktion eines moralischen Idealmenschen anzuwenden pflegt, könnten wir sowohl bei dem Jesus der Synoptiker wie bei dem des Johannes leicht in gewisse nicht einfach aufzulösende Schwierigkeiten geraten. Sondern das ist der Gehorsam Jesu Christi, dass er nichts Anderes, sondern reit allen Konsequenzen nur dies Eine sein wollte und war: Gott im Fleische, göttlicher Träger der Last, die der Mensch als Sünder zu tragen hat.” (K. D., 1.2, p. 171)

15 “Denn die Phänomene als solche sind neutral, relativ, zweideutig.” (K. D., 3.2, p. 88)
The sinlessness of Jesus consists, therefore, not in his recognizable possession of a perfect character but in his desire to do what no other human being desires, namely, to live wholly and exclusively by the grace of God. It is his desire to live as man wholly by the grace of God that makes him wholly different from other men. But the difference cannot be recognized as such in history.

What has been said about Barth’s view of the sinlessness of Jesus leads on to the idea of Jesus as the criterion by which other men must be identified as men. What is humanity? What is human nature? In how far does human nature correspond to its destiny of becoming a covenant-partner with God? Our criterion for the answering of this question must be the humanity of the man Jesus. It is this sinless one, the one who desires to live wholly by the grace of God, who is truly God’s covenant-partner. He is the one in whom God is wholly revealed. Thus he can be the criterion or standard for manhood. But he is also the one in whom God as wholly revealed is also wholly hidden. Can he then still serve as the standard for men? Yes, he can, for he is the only real man. Men do not know him as the ideal or perfect man because he wholly reveals God. As such he is wholly different from them; as such they could not recognize him. Men do not know him as the standard man because in him as wholly revealed God is wholly hidden. As such he is again wholly different from them. Nor do men know him because they have of themselves determined the nature of the ideal man to be the one who wholly reveals and wholly hides God. For then they would already have available a criterion of the Christ.

16 “Anders Jesus: er hat gut gemacht, was Adam verkehrt machte, er hat die Sünde im Fleisch gerichtet, indem er die Ordnung der Versöhnung anerkannte, d.h. indem er sich, an die Stelle eines Sünders gestellt, unter das göttliche Urteil beugte und sich allein der Gnade Gottes anbefahl. Und das ist seine Heiligung, sein Gehorsam, seine Sündlosigkeit. Sie besteht also nicht in einem ethischen Heldentum, sondern gerade in einem Verzicht auf jedes, auch auf das ethische Heldentum. Er ist sündlos, nicht trotzdem, sondern gerade weil er der Zöllner und Sündner Geselle ist und zwischen den Schäfern stirbt. In dieser Sündlosigkeit ist er nach Paulus der ‘zweite Adam’ (1. Kor. 15, 45 f.), der Eine, der durch seinen Gehorsam die Vielen als Gerechte vor Gott hinstellt, dessen Rechttat den †vertretungen der Vielen, in der Gefolgschaft Adams rettungslos dem Tode Verfallenen versohnend gegenübersteht: die Rechttat, in der es zu einer Rechtfertigung, und zwar zu einer Leben bringenden Rechtfertigung (δικαίωσις ζωης) für alle kommt (Rom. 5, 12 f.; 1. Kor. 15, 22). Indem das Wort Gottes Adam wird, wird die Kontinuität dieses Adamseins gebrochen, die Kontinuität eines neuen Adamseins eröffnet. Die Kontinuität des alten Adamseins wird aber gerade damit gebrochen, dass seine Wahrheit, durch keine Illusionen verschönert, durch keine Kunst umgangen, einfach anerkannt, seine Not oft und willig ertragen wird.”

“Das ist die Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus. Denn wo der Mensch sich zu seiner Verlorenheit bekenn und ganz von Gottes Barmherzigkeit lebt—das tat kein Mensch; das hat allein der Gottmensch Jesus Christus getan—da ist Gott Selbst oftbar. Und damit versöhnte Gott die Welt reit sich selber. Denn wo der Mensch kein Recht für sich beansprucht, sondern Gott allein ganz recht gibt—das tat kein Mensch, das hat allein der Gottmensch Jesus Christus getan—da ist die Welt aus ihrer Feindschaft gegen Gott herausgeholt und reit Gott versöhnt.” (K. D., 1.2, p. 172.)
apart from the Christ. But coming to consciousness as men, by participation in Jesus Christ they after that see him as the true man and themselves as fellow-men. Thus they can identify Jesus of Nazareth only if, as, and when they recognize themselves as fellow-men, as fellow-livers by the grace of God. And they recognize Jesus of Nazareth as true man, only when they see him as the elect man. And again, seeing him as the elect man is seeing him as the one in whom mankind is elect of God. To identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God is to identify him as living for men, for all men, by the grace of God. Jesus of Nazareth is recognized for what he is in his uniqueness, in his function as the criterion of true manhood only if he is at the same time seen as the electing God, as the one who elects men, all men, to be such as receive the grace of God. Finally Jesus of Nazareth can be recognized for what he is in his uniqueness only if he is seen as the one in whom his fellow-men, all men, participate as fellow-Saviours. Jesus as true God and true man is God’s essence, in otherness to itself, taking all men into its own essence of being gracious toward all men.

It will be seen then how far, according to Barth, orthodoxy has been from recognizing Jesus of Nazareth for what he is. Taking the Old Testament as a direct revelation of God, they looked for a directly identifiable Son of God. They looked for a character that should be recognizably distinct from other men. They looked for sinlessness in terms of a standard that they already possessed apart from him. When they identified Jesus of Nazareth with a certain Jewish rabbi as the Son of God they therewith disowned him as being the Saviour of all men. They made men’s salvation to depend upon the accident of their becoming acquainted through direct revelation with a Jewish rabbi who in any case was not true God and true man as Saviour of all men. The sluice gates of the grace of God can be opened unto all men everywhere only if this orthodox view of Jesus of Nazareth be replaced with the dialectical view.

The substitutionary atonement may now be seen to be involved in the sinlessness of Jesus. For Barth the sinlessness of Jesus is as such the substitutionary atonement for all men. For the work of Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ himself. He is what he is as the sinless one, the one living exclusively by the grace of God. As such he is substitutionary for all men. But as the sinless man he is the electing God. He is the subject who elects himself in his otherness to participation in his glory. And in electing himself, the true man, he elects himself for all other men. In distinction from the “first Adam” Jesus Christ as the second Adam bowed himself under the judgment of God. In so doing he recommended himself to the grace of God. Thus he became the reprobate man, the only reprobate man. He was the one by whom, and upon whom the wrath of God upon mankind expended itself. Thus sin was made to be an impossible possibility for men. The choice for the Nihil (das Nichtige) against God is an impossible choice. To be sure men make this choice. They sin “by nature” against God. Judas represents the “open situation” in preaching. Men can always do the impossible. In fact, so far as they may be considered “in themselves and as such” they cannot but do the impossible. But the only final or ultimate possibility is man’s choice to live by grace of Christ. 17 This is their only final possibility because as men they

are what they are by virtue of living with Christ, by participating with him in living by
the grace of God, by participating with him finally in his work as Saviour
(Heilandswerk). As Jesus Christ cannot sin, even though we should look in vain for an
exceptionally moral man in the rabbi of Nazareth known by that name, so no man can sin
even though all men are sinners in “the first Adam.” What truly is and can be does not lie
in ordinary history.

It is plain then that Barth does not hold to the orthodox doctrine of the substitutionary
atonement. It would be worse than a wasting of words to debate whether Barth holds to a
Calvinist or an Arminian view of the limit of the atonement. Of course Barth thinks of
himself as being Reformed. He holds “the” supralapsarian view of election. He holds to
unconditional election. But he holds to a supralapsarian view of election, he tells us, on
different presuppositions from those of Calvin, the Leiden Synopsis and classical
Reformed theology in general. As earlier noted these different presuppositions are such
as require the complete rejection of the whole idea of a systematic relation between God
and man. His presuppositions require not merely the idea that Jesus Christ died for all
men in the way that Arminianism or Lutheranism holds. For Arminianism and
Lutheranism still hold to the idea of a systematic relation between God and man. They
still have a God in himself with a plan for the world. They still hold with the Chalcedon
creed that there were two distinct natures, a divine and a human, that were, in history,
brought together directly, without change or confusion.

Barth’s view of the substitutionary atonement requires the rejection of all this. Not
one stone of this orthodox structure can be left unturned, lest we look into the face of a
demonic God and unless we think of men as having the power of an ultimate choice
against God. An evil orthodoxy (üble Orthodoxie) continues to hold to the systematic
rather than to the christological or dialectical principle. In so doing it takes away Jesus
Christ from men. It claims to know and to ground man’s being and his sin in terms of a
“first Adam” not himself interpreted as a shadow of the true Adam. It speaks of a Deus
nudus absconditus, as though there were a God in himself, knowing himself and known
by man apart from Christ. Thus it makes it impossible to identify Jesus of Nazareth as
true God and true man, as the only real and true man. It takes away the sinless man, the
substitute for men, for all men. It keeps the grace of God away not merely from some
men but from all men. For no man has the grace of God unless all men have it in the one
true man. The church has the grace of God only as it carries the grace of God to the
world. Individual men have the grace of God only as they bear it to all men. And those
who have never heard of Jesus of Nazareth as the Jewish rabbi, as well as those who
reject him, are yet the recipients and potential distributors of the same grace of God. If
this is not so, then no one has the grace of God and Jesus Christ is not truly God and truly
man.

Barth’s views of the resurrection of Jesus Christ are naturally of special interest and
significance. It is of interest to note that in the foreword to the first part of volume four of
his Church Dogmatics he informs us that he has, as it were, had a silent conversation with
Rudolf Bultmann throughout his book. He sets his own position squarely over against the
demythologising process of Bultmann. He wants, he repeats, no parthenogenesis of the
Christian’s faith. There must be for it a genuine basis in fact. The resurrection of Jesus
Christ was experienced by his disciples as a genuine confrontation with fact. Although
the resurrection accounts be marked by obscurity and contradiction, by saga or legend,
though they come to us in unhistorical and pre-historical form, they clearly convey to us the fact that there the disciples had a confrontation with God, a confrontation in which the person of Jesus Christ stood before them and spoke to them. They saw the glory of the Word become flesh (Jn 1:14); they heard and touched him.  

It is this strong opposition to Bultmann’s views and his strenuous insistence that there was an actual confrontation of the disciples with Jesus Christ as a reality, that might make orthodox Christians hope that at least on the resurrection of Jesus Christ Barth is in essential agreement with them.

But then there is the warning that at every other point in the life of Jesus of Nazareth he is also seemingly at one with them but in reality always rejects their views as really destructive of the gospel. He believes the reality of the virgin birth. He says that Jesus of Nazareth is true God and true man. He vigorously affirms the substitutionary atonement. But in each instance he applies his general assertion that though God reveals himself in history, yet history as such is never revelational of God. Accordingly there must be no biological virgin birth, no direct identification of Jesus of Nazareth and no direct substitutionary atonement through the death of this Jewish rabbi for men who existed as sinners apart from Jesus Christ.

The case is similar with the resurrection. The last hope of orthodox believers is taken from them by Barth’s flat denial of the resurrection as being anything historical. The very text of Scripture which, as Barth affirms, assures us of a genuine confrontation with Jesus Christ himself on the part of the disciples gives no coherent story of what happened when Jesus Christ rose from the dead.  

To be sure the resurrection “happened.” It happened in human time and space. But it happened, for all that, not in our time. It happened in the time of Jesus Christ. And this time of Jesus Christ is that of the pure present. It is not limited by the passage of days, as marked by a calendar. The text of the resurrection narratives does not even have such a resurrection in view. The “historic witnesses” do not refer to ordinary history. Why should we regret this fact? After all that we know about the essence, the character and function of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the foundation and center of the New Testament message, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that we cannot do justice to it by means of the historical conception of

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19 “Da steht man vielmehr vor den bekannten Dunkelheiten und nicht auszugleichenden Widersprüchen und kann sich wohl wundern, dass bei der Entstehung des Kanons niemand daran Anstoß genommen zu haben scheint, niemand den Versuch gemacht hat, die verschiedenen Relationen von diesern für die neutestamentliche Botschaft so grundlegend wichtigen Geschehen einander anzulegen.” (K. D., 4.1, p. 369.)
Geschichte. 

We must therefore again, as in the creation story, employ the idea of saga and legend.

Thus while Barth sets his view of the resurrection as really having happened in time and space sharply over against Bultman’s idea of Mythus, he no less sharply sets his view over against the orthodox view. And he does this not because he is a bit concessive to the negative critics of the gospel narratives. He does it rather because the orthodox doctrine would be, he thinks, destructive of the free grace of God. It would keep men from confronting the real Jesus Christ and therefore the real resurrection. Not all men could then be confronted with him. And unless all men are confronted with him there has been no real resurrection. For Jesus Christ, as before noted, is God in the act of saving all men. Moreover, those who would have seen Jesus of Nazareth as a Jewish rabbi risen from the dead in ordinary history would not have seen the true Jesus Christ. They would not have been lifted into the pure present with him; he would have been reduced to an appearance in their time which is only shadow time. And this time would have turned into the dead past.

There is one point in Barth’s discussion of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that requires separate mention. He speaks of the events of ordinary history as permitting of schematization by all men everywhere. But Jesus Christ, he says, appeared after his resurrection only to his disciples, to the eyes of faith. And he urges this fact of the limitation of the post-resurrection appearances to the disciples as evidence that the real resurrection took place in Geschicht instead of ordinary history. The validity of this argument depends upon the assumption that there can be no direct revelation in history. On the orthodox view man was directly confronted by God’s revelation in paradise. When Adam refused to obey God’s command, then in him the minds of men were darkened and their wills set in opposition to God. But this ethical opposition to God did not reduce either the fact of God’s direct revelation or its clarity to men. So when Jesus Christ lived and died and rose from the dead there were those who disbelieved the direct oracles of God with respect to him. Others had learned to believe in him from himself directly and from the Old Testament as being a direct revelation about him. To them, as believers, and in the case of some of them as about to become official witness-bearers of his resurrection, Jesus appeared. They were believers because they did believe in such revelation, and in particular because they were meant to be those through whose witness to God’s revelation in history other men were also to believe in it. Barth’s assumption is that none of this can be true. Without this assumption his argument based on the fact that Jesus appeared to his disciples only would have no validity.

Barth’s negation of the orthodox Christian view, however, is based upon his own positive view. And his own positive view of the resurrection in Christ is that it marks the crown of God’s essence as the act of the saving of all men.

Thus the question whether Barth teaches universal salvation is connected directly with his view of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The heart of the matter lies in the fact

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20 “Es hätte keinen Sinn das zu bedauern: nach Allem, was wir von dem Wesen, dem Charakter, der Funktion der Auferstehung Jesu Christi als Begrundung und im Zusammenhang der neutestamentlichen Botschaft gehört haben, kann es gar nicht anders sein, als dass wir mit dem ‘historischen’ Begriff von Geschichte hier nicht durchkommen.” (K. D., 4.1, p. 370.)
that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is itself the salvation of all men. If we say that Barth
denies universalism we must also say that he denies the resurrection of Christ. 21 To him
these two ideas are not merely involved in one another; they are identical. For Jesus
Christ is what he is in the work that he does. This work, his \textit{opus proprium}, is the work of
grace. And grace is not grace unless it is grace for all men. 22

To be sure there remains the \textit{opus alienum} of God. His wrath is upon men as they are
in themselves and as such. But, as noted, sin has become an impossible possibility. 23 The
last word of God to all men is an absolute Yes. The Scriptures know nothing of hell; they
tell us only of victory over hell. Their central message is of the “Victor over Chaos.” And
men, so far as they are men, are in Christ. They are what they are as fellow-conquerors of
the \textit{Nihil}.” 24 If the shadow remains, it is only as a shadow that it remains. If Judas stands

\footnotetext{21}{Speaking of the time of Easter Barth says: “\textit{Es ist die Zeit, die er sich genommen und
die er eben damit den Menschen aller Zeiten geschenkt hat, die Zeit, die er für uns haben
wollte zu Begründung und Aufrichtung, zur Durchführung und Vollendung seines
Bundes—die Zeit, die darum die Zeit aller Zeiten ist, weil das, was Gott in ihr tut, das
Ziel der ganzen Schöpfung und eben damit auch aller geschaffenen Zeit ist.” (K. D., 3.2,
p. 546.)}

\footnotetext{22}{“Dass er ihnen—mit Allem, was das implizierte—erschienen, dass diese Geschichte
geschehen ist, das ist der Inhalt des apostolischen Kerygmas, der Gegenstand des durch
dieses erweckten Glaubens der Gemeinde (1. Kor. 15, 14). Dass die göttliche Validierung
und Proklamation dessen, was zuvor, in Jesus Christus für uns, zur Errettung zu unserem
Heil, zur Veränderung der ganzen menschlichen Situation, wie sie endlich und zuletzt
direkt und allgemein offenbar werden soll, geschehen ist, das besagt das Kerygma, davon
lebt der Glaube. Das Geschehen dieser Geschichte krönt und offenbart den zuvor
geleisteten Gehorsam des Sohnes mit der ihm und in ihm allen Menschen zugewendeten
Gnade und Barmherzigkeit des Vaters. Ihr Geschehen ist unsere aus dem dort
aufgerichteten und behaupteten Gottesrecht und Menschenrecht folgende Rechtfertigung,
ist selbst das die menschliche Situation von Grund aus verändernde Urteil Gottes. Ihr
Geschehen ist das Anzeichen und das tatsächliche Anheben der unnützlichen und
endgültigen Offenbarung dieser Rechtfertigung und Veränderung, die sich in Jesu Christi
Wiederkunft vollenden wird. Von diesem Geschehen her versteht die Gemeinde sich
selbst in der Welt und ihre, die Zwischenzeit, und blickt sie deren Ende und Ziel eben in
Jesu Christi Wiederkunft entgegen.” (K. D., 4.1, pp. 368 f.) “Ist es nun so, dass wir eben,
indem wir an Gottes Selbshingabe in Jesus Christus glauben, auch an Gottes
Praedestination glauben dürfen und sollen, dam können wir nur an unsere und an aller
Menschen Nicht-Verwerfung glauben, dam können wir die Verwerfung des Menschen nur
noch als den finsteren Gegenstand des Unglaubens, als das objektive Korrelat alles
falschen Glaubens verstehen.” (K. D., 2.2, p. 184.)}

\footnotetext{23}{“Das Ziel seines \textit{opus proprium} ist das Ende seines \textit{opus alienum}, eben damit aber
auch das Ende von dessen Gegenstand.” (K. D., 3.3, p. 419) “Gottlosigkeit ist
infolgedingess keine Möglichkeit, sondern die ontologische Unmöglichkeit des
Menschseins.” (K. D., 3.2, p. 162.)}

\footnotetext{24}{\textit{Ein Mensch ist von Jesus her ein Bewahrter und nun doch selbst ein Bewahrer: denn
indem er behütet ist, ist es ihm aufgegeben, selber ein Hüt er zu sein.” (K. D., 3.2, p. 194.)}
for the “open situation in preaching,” even he cannot be understood except as still standing among the children of God.

This teaching is, of course, not that of universal salvation as this would be taken by an orthodox Christian. For Barth does not think in terms of heaven and hell in the orthodox sense of the term. Barth does not affirm in so many words that no men are to be forever lost and all men are to be forever with God and Christ in glory. In this sense it is in accord with fact to say that Barth does not teach universalism. But, as indicated, it is also true that Barth has replaced all the distinctions of orthodox Christianity with those that follow from his dialectical principle. He has done away with a self-contained God, with a plan by such a God, with a temporal creation and fall, with an historical substitutionary atonement, with an historical resurrection. So too the second coming of Christ is not the climax of history. There is no room for the grand assize, settling the eternal destiny of men, of those at his left and of those at his right.

All this Barth rejects in the interest of a principle of unity that speaks of the essence of God as inclusive of all that takes place in the history of the human race. The history of the human race is seen as participant in true history, the Geschichte of God. In this Geschichte there is the fact of Chaos, the Nihil. And men in themselves and as such are participant in Chaos. But this Chaos has its existence only by virtue of its negation to God. Its existence is therefore a vanishing, an ever vanishing, existence.

So then, though it be true that Barth nowhere directly teaches universal salvation, we may agree with Berkouwer when he says that it is difficult to understand why he should have any difficulty with the teaching of apokatastasis. 25 Is the preacher of the gospel to call men to conversion lest they fall into the hands of an angry God? Nay, rather, he is to tell them that they cannot successfully separate themselves from the love of God in Jesus Christ. 26 He is to tell them that the Bible knows nothing of eternal punishment. Inasmuch as Jesus has taken God’s condemnation upon himself, this cannot again become the portion of men. 27 Man cannot frustrate the eternal decision of God. 28 Jesus Christ is the only reprobate. Accordingly besides him there are none. 29 Those opposed to God are also elect. They are such though not aware of it. 30 They stand in the light of the election of God in Christ. 31

Now Jesus Christ is the eternal elected man. 32 He is the pre-existent God-man who as such is the eternal ground of the election of all men.

Citing such passages as these from Barth’s discussion of election Brunner says that this is not a mere repetition of universalism such as was taught by Origen and others. He

26 “Die Stellung und das Los des Verworfenen, nach welchem sie in ihrer Torheit die Hände ausstrecken, indem sie Gott verwerfen, werden sie bestimmt nicht erlangen.” (K. D., 2.2, p. 351.)
27 K. D., 2.2, p. 182.
28 K. D., 2.2, p. 348.
29 “... gibt es ausser ihm (Jesus Christus) keinen Verworfenen.” (K. D., 2.2, p. 389.)
30 K. D., 2.2, p. 353.
31 Ibid., p. 552.
32 Ibid., p. 111.
says that Barth goes much further than all others. He calls it a speculation and a natural theology. He adds that on Barth’s basis there is scarcely any room for the biblical idea of faith. Does not Scripture teach that those who believe, and only they, shall be saved? Yet on Barth’s basis there is no real significance in faith. All is already settled in Christ apart from it.

Moreover, says Brunner, if there is no real significance to faith then there is no real significance to the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ in history. All has been pre-existent and finished in eternity.

Thus as Barth charged Brunner with returning to natural theology in his rejection of the virgin birth, so now, in turn, Brunner charges Barth with returning to natural theology in his view of the election of all men from all eternity in Jesus Christ.

The temptation for orthodox Christians is to side one moment with Barth and the next with Brunner. Is not Barth right over against Brunner in affirming the virgin birth? Is not Brunner right over against Barth in affirming the importance of faith and in his insistence that there must be real significance attributed to that which Christ did in history?

The assumption of such an evaluation is that the dialectical and the historical principles of theology are not basically at variance with one another. But both Barth and Brunner are anxious to point up the differences between these two principles. Differences between Barth and Brunner are differences within the dialectical principle. When one of them charges the other with holding to natural theology, the charge is that of not being fully true to the dialectical principle as over against the principle of orthodox Christianity. So when Barth affirms the virgin birth he is specific in making plain that by so doing he is not returning to an acceptance of the categories of orthodox theology. On the contrary he fears that in denying the virgin birth Brunner betray a nostalgia for the orthodox doctrine of direct revelation. Again when Brunner maintains the importance of faith as over against Barth’s teaching that from all eternity all men are elected in Christ, he is not returning to the orthodox view of faith, faith in direct revelation through Jesus Christ, the rabbi of Nazareth. On the contrary Brunner fears that in his view of election from eternity it is Barth who is, in spite of himself, returning to the idea of a systematic rather than a dialectical relationship between God and man.

Both Barth and Brunner want the idea of the Deus revelatus as being the Deus absconditus to be set squarely over against the orthodox view of God, existing first in himself, according to his eternal plan creating and controlling the world and its history. Barth’s doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the elect man, in whom all men are elect from eternity, in whom God is therefore wholly revealed, has for its correlative his doctrine of the virgin birth of this same Jesus Christ, again involving all men. In this virgin birth this same Jesus Christ is wholly hidden.

Barth would therefore not seem to be at all inconsistent with his own principle. His dialectical principle requires the very notion he so greatly stresses, that all men are in Christ, and that all are in him from eternity. God’s essence as including his work of revelation, that is of the reconciliation and redemption of all men, requires that Easter and Pentecost be eternally present and as such be thought of as once for all events. If they were taken in the orthodox sense of marking points on the calendar they would be, by

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34 Ibid., p. 378.
definition, not exhaustively revelatory of the essence of God. On the other hand the virgin birth must be taken as indicating that this same Jesus Christ is wholly hidden. If the virgin birth were affirmed in the orthodox sense of the term, God’s revelation, his work of reconciliation and redemption, would not be wholly hidden.

But finally, the virgin birth and the resurrection must be true of the same Jesus Christ at the same time. If the virgin birth and the resurrection had taken place on distinguishable dates on the calendar, then the correlativity between the Deus revelatus and the Deus absconditus in Jesus Christ would again be broken. And it is this very correlativity that constitutes Geschichte rather than history. In the pure present, all men are present to God in Christ. As present they are the objects of his favor. But this Jesus Christ is the Deus absconditus too. So there remains the vanishing shadow of separation from God in Christ.

Thus the three circles: (a) of God’s revelation to man, including man’s faith in this revelation, (b) of God himself becoming other to himself and taking mankind into himself, (c) of man as inherently participant in God appear to be the one circle of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is the essence of God, fully hidden, fully revealed, with the emphasis on the latter, which includes the salvation of all men at least essentially if not fully.

It is, we believe, to do Barth injustice, and to do the church irreparable harm, when orthodox theologians, for whatever reasons, fail to make plain that dialectical theology is basically subversive of the gospel of saving grace through the blood of Christ.

No judgment about Barth’s own faith is implied in this. It is only to say that what appears in his writings, his latest and most mature writings, is calculated to lead men to think that they are not sinners, that they are not subject to the wrath of God, that their sins need not be washed away through the blood of the Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of the virgin Mary, died and rose again with the same body with which he was laid in the tomb. For men to depend upon the Jesus Christ of Barth is to depend upon themselves as inherently righteous. Shall not preachers of the gospel call men away from this other gospel which is not the gospel? Is the church now any less responsible for setting off the truth against error than it was at Nicaea, at Chalcedon, not to speak of Dort or the assembly of the Westminster divines? No heresy that appeared at any of these was so deeply and ultimately destructive of the gospel as is the theology of Barth. Never in the history of the church has the triune God been so completely and inextricably intertwined with his own creature as he has been in modern dialectical thought.
Dimensionalism Or The Word

Comments on the Theology of Dr. John A. Mackay, President, of Princeton Theological Seminary

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It was Dr. Clarence Edward Macartney who spoke at the first Commencement of Westminster Seminary on May 6, 1930. Said Dr. Macartney at that time, “A decent respect to the opinions of Presbyterians, and evangelical Christians in the United States and throughout the world, requires that we should declare the causes which impelled us to separate from Princeton Theological Seminary. A statement of these cases must, of necessity, embrace a brief survey of the present condition of the Protestant Church.”

Then he spoke of how on an August day one summer he was seated in the park in Geneva, Switzerland, looking at the International Monument of the Reformation. “Over all, cut in great letters was the familiar motto of the Reformation, ‘Post Tenebras Lux’...

As I gazed earnestly and reminiscently upon the memorial to our spiritual forefathers, the vagrant August wind was blowing the yellow leaves about the gardens, telling me that the end of the summer was at hand. Has the Protestant Church, which we and our fathers took to be a Tree of Life, whose leaf could never wither, come to its sere and yellow leaf? Is its grandeur and glory only in the past …? … Has the inexorable hand which has spelled the passing of so many of the kingdoms and societies of mankind now appeared to write upon the wall of Protestant Christianity, ‘Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting’?”

Then in looking over the field of Protestantism, Dr. Macartney spoke of a “deleted Bible” and a “diluted gospel,” another gospel ‘which is not another’ that is widely proclaimed in Protestant churches.

He spoke with amazement of the fact that the substitution of this “other gospel” for the true gospel had largely come about in one generation. He reminded his audience that some thirty years earlier Union Theological Seminary in New York “broke from its connection with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church because it found that that connection hampered the seminary in its liberty to teach Liberalism and

1 Dr. C. Van Til, Professor of Apologetics in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, is one of the four professors who left Princeton Seminary in 1929 to join in the founding of Westminster. Dr. Van Til has continued on the faculty of Westminster and is at present its senior member. He was one of the speakers at the annual dinner of the Westminster Alumni Association on May 11, and we present here the address which he delivered on that occasion.


3 Ibid.
Modernism.” 4 But today, he added in substance, we have established a new seminary free from all control of the General Assembly “because it was discovered, to our sorrow and amazement, that such connection was a menace to our liberty to be loyal as we understood loyalty, to the doctrines of evangelical Christianity.” 5 We can no longer hope as Dr. Francis L. Patton hoped, when “he delivered the funeral sermon over his colleague … Dr. Wistar Hodge,” that Princeton would “‘lead the van in the great fight for fundamental Christianity’… We bear no grudge against Princeton, the seminary which nurtured us and whose grand traditions are precious unto us. If God shall still use Princeton as a witness to the truth, we shall rejoice in it.” 6

Then, as he addressed the graduating class, he said in closing, As ye go, preach! As ye go, preach! As ye go, preach! And may the blessing of the Triune God be upon you.

‘God of the Prophets! bless the prophets’ sons!
Elijah’s mantle o’er Elisha cast’. 7

**Reality Is Hierarchical**

And now, after nearly a quarter century, what may we expect? Does it look as though the shadows that had fallen on Princeton will lift? What are men now taught and told to preach in that ancient institution, once the citadel of the Reformed Faith in this land?

Listen to Dr. John A. Mackay, President of Princeton Seminary, as he addresses the opening exercises of the seminary in September, 1949, and tells the students what to preach. They must of course preach the truth as Jesus tells us to preach it. And what does Jesus Christ tell us? “Jesus Christ said, not in so many words, but by implication, that reality is hierarchical. That means that you have in the universe a graded scale of being. You have God, you have man, you have animals, you have matter; you have also spirits, angelic and satanic. There is an hierarchical nature of things in which true order is achieved when the lower gives obedience to the higher.” 8 It is this that Jesus Christ tell us as the “Lord of thought.”

But Christ also speaks to us as the “Lord of life.” As the Lord of life he tells us that as for him, so for his followers, crucifixion is inevitable. “Deity in all its fullness was in the Crucified Jesus making manifest the self-giving and forgiving love of God. Jesus in his death wrestled with and overcame all the cosmic forces that stood in the way of man’s salvation. Rising again from the dead, the Crucified conquered death and made the great Enemy a spiritual mother.” Hence, “when man sets out to serve God in truth the end is crucifixion.” But “Jesus Christ saved death for spiritual ends. In her dread womb new life was engendered and a new law of spiritual advance revealed.” 9

Here, then, is the gospel that Princeton Seminary proclaims. Her students are not to say that God created and controls the universe. They are not to preach that the eternal Son

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5 *Ibid*.
6 *Idem.*, p. 9f.
9 *Idem.*, pp. 11–12.
of God took to himself a human nature and in it bore the wrath of God for sinners. They are not to preach the grand particularities of the gospel. They are rather to preach about the nature of Reality. In Reality, they must tell men, there are gradations. God occupies the highest place. But by love he comes down with the whole of his being to share the state and fate of man, in suffering. This is the way downward. There follows a way upward. “For the Lord of life is the crucified conqueror of death.” 10 “Redemption, the participation of man in the life of God, is thus found by the seeker to be the meaning and the goal of Biblical truth.” 1

The Cross

It is this way downward and this way upward that constitute the divine drama. The central point of this drama is the cross. “In the Cross of Jesus Christ the inmost nature of evil and the inmost nature of divine redemptive love were both revealed. It was there that the supreme crisis in both the life of God and man took place.” Man’s “Everlasting Nay” hurled against God was defeated by God’s “Everlasting Yea.” Thus an end was made of “sin and its power over man.” Thus all that stood between man and his true destiny was removed. It is now the destiny of man to participate in the new divine order—the order of the Resurrection. 2

The Bible As Perspective

Where then must men learn about this divine drama, this “Eternal Yea” of God? Of course, from the Bible. But not from the Bible as an “objective criterion” of truth. “There is no such criterion where the human realm is dealt with, or any realm which is directly related to our ultimate sense of values.” 3 It is only if we first reject the idea of an objective criterion and commit ourselves to participation in the drama of God that we can write “a lyrical interlude on Biblical authority.” “When men are willing to adopt a Biblical point of view, to put themselves in the perspective from which the Bible looks at all things and to identify themselves with the spiritual order of life which the Bible unveils, they understand the Bible, they see those spiritual realities about which the Bible speaks.” 4

10 Idem., p. 12.
1 John A. Mackay, A Preface to Christian Theology, 1941, p. 66. Used by permission of Macmillan Co.
2 Idem., p. 95.
4 John A. Mackay, God’s Order, 1953, pp. 4–5. Used by permission of Macmillan Co.
The Great Commission

When men thus “learn Christ,” when they thus leave the balcony and walk the dusty road, they will understand “The Great Commission.” For on the road they will meet Jesus Christ as “a luminous category for thinking and a compelling personality for living.” This “compelling personality” … “or-dains us to a mission.” And then we “move from Golgotha and the empty tomb to a mountain and a trail. There we confront an imperious Person with a pointing finger, and not merely a luminous personality.” We then note that “this same Jesus Christ commands His Church to summon men everywhere to become His disciples.” “He of the yoke and of the towel says:…With my yoke upon you, girded each of you with a towel … get ready for the Road.”

Preaching To The Horizontally Minded

As you thus walk along with your inseparable Road-Companion, you will meet those who are “the horizontally minded.” “Horizontal-mindedness is interested only in a world of two dimensions, a world which is all surface with infinite breadth and infinite length…. Their characteristic gaze is parallel with the surface of the ground…. Their representative philosophy is a philosophy of history from which certainties and ultimates are excluded…. For such a type of mind the dimension of the eternal and the absolute means nothing.”

What shall we say to these horizontal minded ones? “To a horizontally minded generation which has lost its way, our message is: Look up, sheer along the line of the vertical. Let the eternal in. We shall discover thereby the significance of life in the light of God. So shall our efforts at this organization of life on the terrestrial plane, be inspired by the eternal Wisdom and undertaken through the eternal Strength.”

These that have learned to participate in the divine drama minister to a generation which has become aware of subterranean forces that “have torn great fissures in the placid surface of life,” a generation which has “rediscovered hell, deep down in the human heart and in the social order.” Having fearlessly explored with Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky “the nether world of human nature, human society and human institutions,” they cry out: “Life is our need, life, life! Life that shall show Nietzsche and all neo-Nietzschians that Christianity is overwhelming abundance of life. Life that shall introduce new meaning and thrill into our deadness, and make possible a totally new ‘reverence for life’ such as Schweitzer pleads for, with a consequent reconstruction of

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6 Idem., p. 130.
7 Idem., p. 131.
8 Idem., p. 132f.
10 Idem., p. 123.
life—life that shall produce Christians who literally throb and pulsate with life as did Temple Gairdner of Cairo, as does Kegawe of Japan.”

**Pioneers At The Frontier**

By thus asking the horizontally minded to look upward, and by proclaiming the “Eternal Yea” of God as victor over the “Eternal Nay” of the nether world, these horizontally minded ones will be brought to join the “brotherhood of enthusiasm” and to stand as pioneers at the frontiers of life. They will in turn find the “dimension of depth” in life. They will help men to change from individuals into persons by being “in Christ” … “who proved to be the Man, history’s center because history’s Lord.”

Having seen the “vision splendid,” having heard the “music of eternity,” they will help those who are still in rebellion against the hierarchical structure of the universe, who are out of step with reality, to find their true destiny in Christ. Thus those who live in a vacuum of Anonymity and Banality may find their true spiritual dimension of life.

These in turn will speak with reverence of “God’s adventurous concern for the human kind.” They will tell those that live without the vertical perspective that “The ultimate spiritual pattern is that of a paternal Kingdom. Therefore might is not right. Souls are not for sale. Fatherhood among men, and all that it signifies, is grounded upon the reality of a Divine universal Fatherhood.”

For “God’s will to unity is … the most central thing in cosmic human history. This Divine drive none dare ignore, for whatever man attempts that runs counter to it will ultimately be frustrated and shattered by it.”

**Hierarchical Simplicities**

These “hierarchical simplicities” derive from “the famous Theologica Germanica, which played such a decisive part in the spiritual history of Martin Luther.”

They derive more specifically from Kierkegaard, from Karl Barth, from Emil Brunner, from Paul Tillich, from Bergson, and from the Spanish mystic Miguel de Unamuno.

Here then is “truth with a lilt.” The “great rift” in the universe has been closed. Such truth has the answer to the nihilistic mood of our time. As “the spectre of Nothingness” haunts the world, the universal church may call upon men to have the upward look. The church may tell all men everywhere that this is a “sacramental universe.”

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3 *God’s Order*, p. 17.
4 *Idem.*., p. 55.
5 *Idem.*., p. 56.
6 *Idem.*., p. 62.
7 *Preface to Christian Theology*, p. 113.
8 *Idem.*., p. 17.
At the meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, Germany, in 1952 Dr. Mackay said, “We are happily agreed as to who Jesus Christ is; we start from an acceptance of His Deity and Saviourhood.”

No one needs then to be excluded from partaking in the preaching mission of the church. One need not, to be a preacher in the Christian church, believe the Bible as the objective revelation of God. One need not believe that God revealed himself to mankind at the beginning of history, making known his will to mankind. One need not believe in the virgin birth and the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. One need not believe in the hope of eternal life in heaven or in eternal punishment for unbelief and disobedience to the revelation of God.

Did I say that one need not believe these points? True, one need not believe all or any of these doctrines.

Many of those with whom Dr. Mackay is seeking to establish the universal church do not believe these doctrines. And the idea of modern dimensional philosophy which Dr. Mackay is, with all possible force, impressing upon the church, does not require belief in such doctrines.

But this is putting it too mildly. For the truth of the matter is that Mackay’s “hierarchical” scheme, his dimensionalism, does not allow for belief in such doctrines. Therefore those, and only those who believe what the older Princeton men, like the Hodges, Warfield, Vos, Armstrong and others believed, would not be welcome in the new universal church.

To be sure, when Vos, when Armstrong, when Casper Wistar Hodge were called to glory to reap their reward of grace for faithfully preaching these doctrines, eulogies were spoken and written of them at Princeton. But eulogies they were such as those that were written for scientists of an earlier day who believed that the earth was flat.

When the seminary at Princeton was reorganized in 1929, a statement was issued about its position, in The Princeton Seminary Bulletin. The constituency of the church was assured that, despite false charges of apostasy made against the seminary, all was well. “Under the provisions of the amended Charter and Plan”; they were told, “all the members, elders as well as ministers, of the one governing Board … are required recurrently to sign the following formula:

Believing the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; sincerely receiving and adopting the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, approving the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America; promising to study the peace, unity, and purity of the Church; and approving the Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, I solemnly declare and promise, in the presence of God and this Board, that I will faithfully endeavor to carry into effect all the articles and provisions of said Plan, and to promote the great design of the Seminary.”

But instead of an infallible Bible Mackay offers human experience as the starting point for theology. Instead of the Confession of Faith as containing “the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures” Mackay offers the idea of a dimension in depth, the idea of perspective, the idea of a lower or impersonal and a higher or personal dimension of being, in short, a modern dimensional philosophy alien to Christianity.

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9 “The Great Commission … ” p. 130.
10 Nov. 1929.
The development of apostasy at Princeton did not recapitulate the slow stages traversed in the course of American church history. There was no half-way covenant. There was no insidious transformation of the “grand particularities” of Calvinism for the universal atonement of Arminianism. With the speed of a strato-cruiser all these “minor” stopping-points were passed over in order to realize “the great design of the Seminary,” that of submerging the church into a vague mysticism in which God is not God, man is not man, and Christ is not Christ.

Some years ago Union Seminary in New York was organized in independence of the church in order to be able to teach Liberalism freely. Now, what was then the center of orthodox Reformed theology teaches, and that within the church with the approval of the church, a deeper-dyed heresy than the old Liberalism had the capacity to be.

Let us then again, after a quarter century, thank God for the foresight of Dr. Machen, Dr. Frank H. Stevenson and others who organized Westminster Seminary when and as they did. But let us not depend upon aught that is in man, least of all upon aught that is in ourselves, but only upon the grace of God so that this seminary may continue to train men to teach and preach the doctrines of Warfield, of Vos, of the Hodges, the system of doctrine of the Confession of Faith as the system of doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. Sunk in the quicksands of dimensionalism and mysticism Princeton is not likely to “lead the van in the great fight for fundamental Christianity.”

May God grant us grace to honor him in all the dimensions of life. May we pray to him who giveth the former … and the latter rain as well as the regeneration of the heart. May we not teach and preach modern Dimensionalism but the Word of God that liveth and abideth forever.
Common Grace And Witness-Bearing

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“Ye are my witnesses,” said Jehovah God to Israel through the mouth of His prophet Isaiah. “This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise” (Is 43:21). In those words is summed up the whole task of the people of God in this world.

The New Testament through Peter tells us the same: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pt 2:9).

We Witness To The Unbeliever

But if God’s people must bear witness of God, how did they come to be equipped for this task? The answer is that they have been “formed” by God for this purpose. They have not chosen this task. They have been chosen for it. They were not of themselves ready to obey when called to this task. Their hearts too were “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked … ” They were of a piece with those who walk “in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Eph 4:17–19).

From this vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers, they have been redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ.” And this Christ was Himself “foreordained before the foundation of the world” for this task of redeeming His people (1 Pt 1:20). So they are “chosen in him before the foundation of the world.”

The Unbeliever Challenges Our Witness

The Christ chosen to redeem them and they chosen to be redeemed by Christ! “What a neat little circle,” someone will say. Your Christ came only to save you, your own little group of Calvinists, or at best your own group of Fundamentalists. Is that to the praise of the glory of His grace? Your Christ died only for the elect; is your witnessing for God limited to telling the world this fact? Why should the world be interested in such news as that? Have you no message of salvation for the world? Will you simply tell men that they are reprobate? Will you tell them that God intends to send them to perdition regardless of
what they do? A “peculiar people”! Indeed you are. You have a God who “appoints” men to eternal death or “elects” them to eternal life irrespective of their good or evil deeds. I dare you to preach on John 3.16. You are morally a Pharisee if you say that “whosoever will” may come. You have no love for men in your hearts. Or if you have, then you flatly contradict yourself. You say that whosoever will may come but you know that they cannot will to come. You ought to try preaching in a cemetery and see what results you have.

Seeking to satisfy this objector you assure him that God does not deal with men as with sticks and stones. According to our doctrine, you tell him: Man has lost, through Adam the first man, true knowledge, righteousness and holiness which he originally had. He has lost what we call the image of God in the narrower sense. But he has not lost his rationality, his sense of moral responsibility and ability to will freely according to his nature. Man’s freedom and the contingency of second causes, you tell him, are not taken away by the idea of election.

But the objector is not satisfied. He asks: “Do you not hold that even Adam, though created with this true knowledge, righteousness and holiness had to sin? Was not the idea of his fall a part of the plan of God? Was not the Christ who should redeem your sinners chosen for that very purpose before the foundation of the world? And yet your Christ came only because of sin did He riot? So in order that you might be redeemed in Him from sin unto good works your God must have planned that you should be sinners. Is that not true?”

...Perhaps you will hesitate for a moment here. You know that sinners are dead and unable to come to life. You know that according to Scripture man is ethically bound to sin. He has no ethical free will by which, of himself, to accept the gospel offered him. So you say that the case of Adam was different? Adam was free not to sin and free to sin? Is it not because of his abusing this freedom that the slavery of sin has come upon all men? Yet you know that it was in accord with God’s counsel that Adam should sin.

Try as you may, you soon discover that you cannot present your position without seeming to the man to whom you are speaking to be contradicting yourself. And try as you may to avoid it, you find that in answering the seemingly limited objection of your inquirer with respect to the matter of salvation in Christ, you must bring into the picture the whole idea of the plan of God controlling all things of history and the place of man as a moral and rational creature in this plan. If you do not see this yourself, your questioner will soon force you to see it. He will push you back, from the question of Christ dying for the elect only and yet being preached to all men, to the idea of this Christ as the Son of God, and the Logos, the Creator of the world, and the sustainer of it. He will say that if Christ is Himself God and if with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He has from all eternity determined whatsoever comes to pass (thus determining that only some men shall be saved) then His weeping over Jerusalem, and His bidding all that are weary and heavy laden to come to Him, is but a farce and a sham. It is ethically reprehensible for Jesus to call man to Himself, if from all eternity He has determined that they shall reject Him. He may perform miracles before them in order to prove His divinity and in order to have them believe His message and yet He is also responsible for the words: “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not
believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (Jn 12:37–40). Christ performs miracles before their eyes so that they might believe, and yet He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts so that they cannot believe. Is not that the plainest contradiction? the objector will say.

And then there is the point of the cosmic significance of Christ. Christ died only to save the elect and yet Christ died “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth” (Eph 1:10). “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:19–20). So your Christ came to save the “world” yet not to save us. Do we not count for anything? Are we not part of the world? Or are you better than we?

Such then is the nature of the objection to the message of Christianity that, as Christians, holding to the Reformed Faith, we are bound to meet. Your Christianity, the objector says, insults the intrinsic value and right of human personality. Your Christianity reduces man to the level of the machine. The God of Christianity is an arbitrary being, electing or rejecting men as He pleases apart from the actual merits of men. Even the Christ you offer, men say, contradicts Himself when He offers Himself to all sinners, since He as God intends to save only some of them.

Humility In Our Reply

Now what shall we say by way of response to this charge? In the first place we shall, of course, remember that all that we have received has been by grace. And if those who hold the Reformed Faith do greater justice to the idea of God’s grace in the salvation of sinners, then they ought to be the humblest of all men. They ought to enter most sympathetically into the mind and heart of him who makes this objection. Did he not himself kick against the pricks and rebel against the overtures of God’s grace?

And this attitude of humility holds over against those who with him name the name of Christ, as well as over against the unbeliever. With Bavinck let us say that all true Christians are at heart Augustinian and with Warfield let us say that every Christian who calls out unto God in anguish of heart is really a Calvinist.

Nay But—O Man

But if we must follow the examples of Augustine and Calvin on the point of humility, shall we not also follow them when, in answer to the objector, they quoted Paul saying: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus” (Rom 9:20)? Submit yourself to God. Then you shall be saved and your works shall follow after you. If not, you will be lost and the profit of your labor will be given to the meek who shall inherit the earth.

That is the central point of our witness unto men. In the pride of their hearts, they worship and serve the creature, that is, themselves, more than the Creator. The natural
man must be challenged in this, his assumed autonomy. He must be compelled to look into the face of God.

**General Revelation—All Know God**

Men must be told that the revelation of God round about them and the revelation of God within their own constitution is clear and plain, rendering them without excuse. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom 1:20–21).

All men know God. Every fact of the universe has God’s stamp of ownership indelibly and with large letters engraved upon it.

All men know not merely that a God exists, but they know that God, the true God, the only God, exists. They cannot be conscious of themselves, says Calvin, except they be at the same time conscious of God as their creator. This general revelation of God stays with man whatever his attitude toward God may be. When he sins against God, he must sin against this God whom he knows. Otherwise sin would be sin in a vacuum. Even in the hereafter, the lost and the evil angels still know God.

**None Know God**

Yet these same men to whom we must testify that they know God, must also be told that they do not know God. They walk in the midst of this world which is an exhibition house of the glories and splendors of God, full as it is of the works of His hands, and they ask, mind you, whether God exists. They profess to be open-minded on the question. They say that they will follow the facts wherever these may lead them. But invariably they refuse to follow these facts. They constantly conclude that God does not exist. Even when they conclude that a god exists and that with great probability, they are virtually saying that God does not exist. For the true God is not surrounded by, but is the source of possibility. He could not possibly not exist. We cannot intelligently think away God’s existence.

When working in the laboratory as scientists, men act as though they are not dealing with materials that belong to God. They are like a thief who, entering into your home and exploring all kinds of things within it, claims that the question of the ownership of the house is of no concern to him. They are like those who go hunting in a woods clearly marked “No Gunning,” without a permit from the owner.

How absurd, says the objector. Do you mean to say that men really know that they are creatures of God, and that there is punishment awaiting them if they are not thankful and obedient to Him and yet pretend to be looking for Him if haply they may find Him? Do they know God and yet not know Him? How contradictory, how utterly absurd is this religion which you are asking me to believe. Your Bible is full of contradiction. It says that man is made in the image of God, with freedom to choose for or against God. Yet you say that man has no freedom; he simply must do what his God has determined shall
be done. You say that by virtue of man’s creation in the image of God, he knows God, and at the same time you say that these image bearers interpret all things amiss since they do not know God.

The answer is again: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” If you do not accept this God you are like a man swinging his arms in a vacuum.

**God’s Attitude**

Once more: Not only do all facts reveal God but they, in revealing Him, manifest His attitude toward men. God is love. He loves Himself above all else. He loved Himself from all eternity when He had as yet made no creatures to love. But when He made creatures, He made them lovable like Himself. He loved them because in loving them, He loved Himself above all else. He made man perfect. And loving mankind, He offered them eternal life. It was seriously meant. It was no farce. All men disobeyed God. All came under His wrath and curse. God continued to love Himself; He therefore had to punish every insult to His holiness.

**The Common Curse**

To be sure He had from all eternity chosen for Himself a people in Christ and He had from all eternity chosen Christ to redeem a people for Himself. Yet when those who are the elect of God, together with all men, were disobedient to God, they were under His wrath. So real was this wrath and so serious the threat of eternal punishment, that, if they were to be saved, Christ had to be punished in their stead.

Those then whom God loved with an everlasting love, He at the same time regards as objects of wrath because of their sin.

How absurd, says the objector! How contradictory! Your witness for Christianity makes no sense to a self-respecting, intelligent person.

The objector has the same objection all the time. It is to the effect that we are insulting the dignity of human personality. We are running roughshod over his moral sensibilities and over the legitimate claims of his power of reason. Is he to be asked to believe that human personality is thus absolutely determined by the creation and the all-controlling providence of God?

**Law Written In Hearts (Rom 2.14–15)**

To add insult to injury, the Bible tells us that all men as they know God, in that knowledge know the difference between good and evil. The requirement of God comes clearly home to the consciousness of man. In this sense the law of God is written in his heart. For every fact in revealing God requires man to use it to the glory of God. If the world is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof then God wants man to own His sovereign sway over all things. He wants him not to act at any point as though he did not need to recognize God’s ownership.
Law Not Written

At the same time the Bible says to these men that they do not have the law of God written in their hearts. According to the promise of God to Jeremiah (Jer 31:31) He will write His law upon the hearts of His people. Then they will be able to say: “O, how love I thy law.” Man the sinner is told that he cannot know the truth and cannot love righteousness. Sinners are said to have their understanding darkened and to be enemies of God at the same time that they are told that they do know God and that they have the knowledge of right and wrong. And each time, the natural man is challenged to forsake his own judgment and submit to the judgment of God as He speaks in Scripture.

Common Grace

But what, you ask, does the question of Common Grace have to do with all this? Most of you will anticipate the reply. In the question of common grace there confronts us the same sort of situation that we have with respect to all other teaching of Scripture. Common grace presents us with a teaching that seems to contradict other teaching of Scripture.

Let us take the first and main point of the pronouncement made by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. In this first point mention is made of a favorable attitude of God to mankind as a whole, without distinction between elect and reprobate. As God was favorably disposed to the human race before the fall and offered the race as a whole eternal life, so even after the fall God gives His good gifts to men everywhere, thereby calling them to repentance and to performance of their task. The Christian view of God in relation to man must always begin, as Berkouwer has emphasized, from this idea that God at the beginning of history was favorably disposed to mankind. And then in amazement we note that even after the fall, when mankind as a whole has become the object of His wrath, God still continues to give good gifts unto men and by these gifts He calls them to repentance. “Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee, (that is, is calculated to lead thee) to repentance” (Rom 2:4)?

Now how can this universal call to repentance be harmonized logically with the doctrine of election? God did not intend that all men should repent. Instead He intended from all eternity that some should not repent. How could they repent unless they heard the gospel of salvation through Christ? And to many millions of men this gospel was never offered. Many never heard of that only name by which they must be saved; and that is surely God’s doing. The Church is, no doubt, at fault if it is not zealous in its missionary enterprise. Ultimately, however, it was God’s doing that millions of men lived in the darkness of heathendom and never heard the word of Life.

But you say: “Paul does not assert that they were called to repentance in the sense that those who are confronted with the gospel are called to repentance unto eternal life.” Even so the problem remains: How can God have any attitude of favor unto those men whom He so obviously has not included in the number that could possibly be saved through the gospel of the blood of Jesus Christ?
Well, the answer is that we cannot comprehend how it is possible but that the Scriptures reveal it to be true. And so we must learn to say to ourselves and to take seriously the words that, in following Paul, we say to the unbelievers: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?”

And what does this mean for us as Christians of the Reformed Faith?

### Not What It Means To Barth

In the first place it means that we cannot join Karl Barth in reducing God as He is in Himself to a relation that He sustains to His people in the world. Barth virtually seeks to meet the objector’s charge that Christianity involves a basic contradiction by rejecting the idea of God as He is in Himself and of God’s counsel as controlling all things in the world. He says that Calvin’s doctrine of God’s counsel must be completely rejected. Only when it is rejected, is the grace of God permitted to flow freely upon mankind. And that means that God’s love envelops all men. To be sure, for Barth there is reprobation but it is reprobation in Christ. The final word of God for all men, says Barth, is Yes. It matters not that men have not heard of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. For Jesus of Nazareth is not, as such, the Christ. All men are as men, of necessity in Christ. All grace is universal or common grace.

From the historic Christian point of view this is simply to say that the concept of grace is so widened as no longer to be grace at all.

How truly Herman Bavinck anticipated, as it were, this most heretical of heresies of our day when he pointed out that in the last analysis one must make his choice between Pelagius and Augustine. The grace of God as Barth presents it is no longer distinguishable from the natural powers of man. All men to be men, says Barth, must have been saved and glorified from all eternity in Christ.

This is how Barth would meet the objection against the idea of the sovereign grace of God. There is no longer any sovereign God and therefore there is no longer any grace.

### Common Grace According To Romanism

In the second place there are the Roman Catholics. To be sure they have not gone to the extremes of Barth or modern liberal Protestantism. They have not wholly reduced the being of God to a relationship to mankind. They have not, in modern Kantian style, made of God a projection into the void. Even so they have no sovereign God. Their God does not control whatsoever comes to pass. For in their view man has ultimate freedom to set at naught the purposes of God. God, therefore, cannot reach the individual directly and determine his will and destiny. God can only reach toward the individual by means of classes.

God cannot, on the Romanist view, unmistakably make His imprint of ownership upon man. The image of God in man does not reach down into the penetratum of the consciousness of the individual. If it did, the Romanist holds, man would lose his freedom. For freedom, in the Romanist sense of the term, means a bit of ultimacy or autonomy; a sharing in the freedom of God. The idea of man’s participation in the being
of God or his participation with God in a common being, precludes the idea of man’s being truly made in the image of God.

It follows from this that Romanist theology speaks of Adam as being originally in need of grace. Man then needs grace because he is finite. Accordingly, after man fell into sin he needed the same grace, but still only the same grace. Thus, the concept of nature and grace takes the place of sin and grace. And the meaning of both sin and grace is thereby changed.

Thus, once more the attempt is made to satisfy the objection against the sovereign grace of God and His electing sovereign power, by reducing the difference between special and common grace.

It is then not necessary to say: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” For the idea of grace is largely made over to his taste. And though very vague on the subject, Romanist theology therefore, like Barthianism and liberal Protestantism, holds that man’s being lost is ultimately determined by man himself. Man is lost, Roman Catholic theologians often say, because he has not lived up to the light of nature that God has given him. And so the light that God gave unto the heathen for their conversion was really meant for their eternal salvation. And it is only because by their sins they live out of accord with that light, that God gives them over to eternal death. Thus it is again man, not God, who ultimately decides his eternal destiny. And thus the problem of “contradiction” is solved by removing one of the horns of the dilemma.

Common Grace According To The Remonstrants

Then thirdly come the Remonstrants or Arminians, who teach that “there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive and absolute. Likewise: there is one election unto faith and another unto salvation, so that election can be unto justifying faith, without being a decisive election unto salvation.”

The central point of these words and similar ones from the Five Articles Against the Remonstrants(First Head of Doctrine, Rejection of Errors, 2) is that the final determination of the destiny of individual men is still left in the hands of men instead of in the hands of God. Again God cannot reach the individual except through a general invitation. God may begin the process of salvation by offering general grace to all. But this must mean that God in a general way intends to save all. No answer is given to the question that if God intends to save all men, why did He not make salvation known to all through the spreading of the gospel news? There is reference to the idea that they have not used the light of nature aright and thus have made themselves unworthy of the better news of the gospel.

But again on this basis, the answer to the objector against the sovereign grace of God is not voiced in the words: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?”

It is not till we assert that the ultimate destiny of all men everywhere, and therefore of each man individually is, in the last analysis, determined by God, that the problem of common grace comes clearly before us. For only when it is seen that according to
Scripture God controls all of history and all the deeds of all men, evil deeds as well as good deeds, that the question is squarely before us as to how then God can have any attitude of favor to those whom He has from all eternity intended not to redeem.

Reprobation Must Rest On The Will Of God

We, therefore, cannot avoid taking note of a point of view sometimes advocated by those who are committed to the Reformed Faith. I refer to the idea that reprobation rests ultimately upon the sin of man as the final cause. Reprobation is then said to be an act of punishment of God upon sin as committed by man. In this respect reprobation is said to differ from election. Election is said to proceed from God’s eternal plan directly. But reprobation is not thus directly an act of the eternal plan of God. Reprobation is thus said not to be equally ultimate with election.

But surely, it is apparent that such a point of view leads us off the highway of the Reformed Faith and tones down our witness to the world. The world needs the sovereign God of Scripture. Hence we must say that reprobation is not ultimately an act of justice with respect to the sin of man. It is rather an act of the sovereign will of God. The fully Biblical and therefore, fully Reformed, position is not reached till God in His sovereign decree is made the ultimate cause of all that comes to pass in this world through the deeds of men, whether these deeds lead to their final destruction or by God’s grace to their final glory. Hence, too, we dare not say that Adam could, in the last analysis, have chosen to be obedient just as well as disobedient. The fall of man is the proximate cause of reprobation (propingua reprobationis causa). But, says Bavinck, and again: “For that reason the fall of Adam, sin in general and all evil, is not only seen in advance but also in a sense willed and directed by God. There must therefore be, though hidden from us, a reason why God willed the fall: There is an altius Dei consilium which precedes the fall.”

Once more: There is but one and that an all-comprehensive plan of God.

Quite properly Bavinck refers in this connection to the reply that Calvin gave to Pighius when the latter objected to the counsel of God as the final source of the determination of the destinies of all men. In dealing with the 9th chapter of Romans and, therefore, with the difference between Esau and Jacob, Calvin says:

“Now if this being ‘afore prepared unto glory’ is peculiar and special to the elect, it evidently follows that the rest, the non-elect, were equally ‘fitted to destruction’ because, being left to their own nature, they were thereby devoted already to certain destruction. That they were fitted to destruction by their own wickedness is an idea so silly that it needs no notice. It is indeed true that the wicked procure to themselves the wrath of God, and that they daily hasten on the falling of its own weight upon their heads. But it must be confessed by all, that the apostle is here treating of the difference made between the elect and the reprobate, which proceeds from the alone secret will and counsel of God.”

Then Calvin goes on to treat of the passage from Isaiah already quoted in which he speaks of the blinding of man’s eyes. He points out how utterly destructive of the idea of the sovereign grace of God it would be if anything that is done by men is made the ultimate or final cause of their destiny. All men were corrupted in their nature by the fall.

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1 Ibid.
2 Calvin’s Calvinism, p. 76.
of Adam. If this their corruption were the ultimate cause of their reprobation then God Himself would be confounded when seeking to save men. For all would then be bound to be reprobate. “If the wickedness of man be still urged as the cause of the difference between the elect and the non-elect, this wickedness might indeed be made to appear more powerful than the grace of God which He shows toward His elect, if that solemn truth did not stand in the way of such an argument: ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.’”  

Of the words of John who also quotes the passage from Isaiah Calvin says: “Now, most certainly, John does not here give us to understand that the Jews were prevented from believing by their sinfulness. For though this be quite true in one sense, yet the cause of their not believing must be traced to a far higher source. The secret and eternal counsel of God must be viewed as the original cause of their blindness and unbelief.”

**Proximate And Ultimate Cause**

In answer to all objections made by those who seek the ultimate issues of life and death in man, Calvin distinguishes between proximate and ultimate causes. Man is the proximate and responsible cause of his eternal punishment. Men must be told that they will be eternally lost if they persist in their rebellion against God. They must be called to repentance. Even so, back of their belief or unbelief is the sovereign will of God. It is of that God that we must witness. If men object and disbelieve we yet reply: “Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?”

Quite in accord with Calvin, Bavinck asserts that the difference between the Reformed and other approaches to the doctrine of grace is that they—following Augustine—did not stop with secondary causes but dared to climb up to God as the first and ultimate cause and therein found rest for their thought.  

But in finding rest for their thought did they think that they could logically penetrate the mystery of the relation of this ultimate will of God to the will of man as the secondary cause either of obedience or disobedience? Not at all. With Calvin they would say: “Here let human reasonings of every kind that can possibly present themselves to our minds cease forever.”

Shall we not say this to ourselves, and mean it, with respect to the problem of common grace? How can God have an attitude of favor unto those who are according to His own ultimate will to be separated from Him forever? The first and basic answer is that Scripture teaches it. But then we can see that in order to be disobedient and, therefore, to be punished for their own sin, they must be confronted with God in all that they do. Historical causes have genuine meaning just because of God’s ultimate plan. God reaches down into the self-consciousness of each individual. If the heathen are adding to their sins and to their punishment, and if for additional sin they are, as Paul tells us, given over unto still further sin by God, we can see that they must have the face of God, as long-suffering and as calling them to repentance, before them. And we can also

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4 p. 81.
see that, therefore, the restraint of God by which men are kept back from greater sin and from greater punishment is something that is an unmerited favor unto them.

We have not come into full sight of this problem till with Calvin and Bavinck we trace all things back to the sovereign will of God. Only then does the problem appear of how such a God, who ultimately has fixed the destinies of men, yet promises or threatens what is opposed to this destiny. And the problem is as acute in the case of the elect as it is in the case of the reprobate. How are good deeds of men called their good deeds if they are gifts of God?

Moreover, when I add with Bavinck that though sin and its eternal punishment for some men is a part of the plan of God and, therefore, in a sense willed by God, yet they are not willed in the same sense and in the same manner as are the grace and salvation of the elect—I have not thereby met the objection of him who charges the Christian religion with contradiction. "We shall need simply to hold both to the genuine meaning of historical causes and to the all-inclusiveness of God’s will as the ultimate cause.

On the other hand, I cannot meet the objector by trying to show him that God is quite consistent with Himself since He, by His will, has determined to elect some and not elect others. If I say that God’s work in the direction of reprobation and in the direction of election differs not at all then I am merely saying to the objector, in effect, that I would solve his problem by denying the meaning of secondary causes altogether. I must then wipe out the distinction between the revealed and the secret will of God. And I must say therefore that God’s eternal election of men implies that He had no attitude of disfavor unto them even for their sins. Thus I would wipe out the necessity for their atonement in history through the redemptive work of Christ. Says Calvin: “Let no one deceive himself by vain self-flattery. Those who come to Christ were before sons of God in His divine heart, while they were, in themselves, His enemies.”

Let us, rather than try to meet the objector’s desires for supposed consistency in logic, not deny the fact of God’s revelation of His general favor to mankind or the fact of God’s wrath resting upon the elect. To meet the objector and satisfy him we should have to deny the meaning of all history and of all secondary causes. We should need to wipe out the difference between God and man. To the objector it is contradictory to say that God controls whatsoever comes to pass and also to say that human choices have significance.

All Teaching Of Scripture Is Apparently Contradictory

Rather let us say with Calvin: “And most certainly there is nothing in the whole circle of spiritual doctrine which does not far surpass the capacity of man and confound its utmost reach.” If we are really to witness to men for God then it must be the God of Scripture, the Sovereign God of whom we testify. This God demands that we submit our whole man, with all its powers, to Him. This God, therefore, wants us to tell men that they have really met Him; that they are really confronted with Him; that they really know

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2 Idem., p. 405.
1 Op. Cit., p. 84.
2 Idem., p. 82.
Him; that their deeds of obedience or disobedience have genuine meaning in His sight; that if they believe they will be saved and that if they do not believe they will be lost. They must be shown that they are kicking against the pricks always and everywhere since they do not submit their thoughts captive to the obedience of God or of Christ. And we do not thus witness if we ourselves reduce history to something that is meaningless.

Natural Theology And Common Grace

But there is another side to the story. If we are to witness to the God of Scripture we cannot afford to deny common grace. For, as noted, common grace is an element of the general responsibility of man, a part of the picture in which God, the God of unmerited favor, meets man everywhere. But neither can we afford to construct a theory in which it is implicitly allowed that the natural man, in terms of his adopted principles, can truly interpret any aspect of history. For the natural man seeks to interpret all the facts of this world immanentistically. He seeks for meaning in the facts of this world without regarding these facts as carrying in them the face and therewith the claims of God. He seeks to determine what can and cannot be, what is or is not possible, by the reach of human logic resting on man himself as its foundation.

Now surely, you say, no Reformed person would have any commerce with any such view as that. Well I do not think that any Reformed person purposely adopts such a view. But we know how the Roman Catholic conception of natural theology did creep into the thinking of Reformed theologians in the past. And the essence of this natural theology is that it attributes to the natural man the power of interpreting some aspect of the world without basic error. Even though men do not recognize God as the Creator and controller of the facts of this world, they are assumed to be able to give as true an interpretation of the laws of nature as it is possible for finite man to give. It is admitted that man as a religious being needs additional information besides what he learns by means of his own research. But this fact itself indicates that on this basis the knowledge of God about salvation has no bearing upon the realm of nature. The realm of nature is said to be correctly interpreted by the natural man.

On this basis it is quite possible for Christians to join with non-Christians in the scientific enterprise without witnessing to them of God. The Christians and non-Christians have, on this basis, a certain area of interpretation in common. They have common ideas in the sense that they agree on certain meanings without any difference. It is not merely that they are together confronted with the natural revelation of God. It is not merely that men are all of them together, made in the image of God. It is not merely that they have in them the ineradicable sense of deity so that God speaks to them by means of their own constitution. It is not merely that, as Kuyper stressed, all men have to think according to the rules of logic according to which alone the human mind can function. It is not merely that all men can weigh and make many scientific discoveries.

Witness-Bearing In The Laboratory

All these things are true and important to maintain. But it is when in addition to these it is said that there are common notions, common reactions, about God and man and the
world to all this speech of God, on which there is no basic difference between Christians and non-Christians, that natural theology is confused with natural revelation. And it is allowed that those who assume that the facts of this world are come from chance and those who presuppose that the facts of this world are created and controlled by God, have essentially the same interpretation of these facts. Thus the Christian scientist and the non-Christian scientist could work together in the laboratory for days, for weeks and years and the Christian would have no other witness to give to his friend than to invite him to the prayer meeting or the Sunday service.

The Christian would on such a basis only reap the reward of his little faith were his friend to refuse to be interested in his religion. This friend, more consistently than the Christian, gives witness to his own faith. He will insist that he cannot believe in such a God as the Christians want him to bow unto since this God has created and determined all things. This God, he will say, does not allow men to experiment freely in the laboratory. The non-Christian may give witness to his faith in such words as these: “Your God hampers me in the making of my hypotheses. If I believe in Him I may make only such hypotheses as are in accord with the doctrines of creation and providence. I could not then think of evolution as a legitimate hypothesis with respect to the origin of man. Does not your God say in your Bible that man has not come from animal ancestry but is directly created in the image of God? Moreover your God, besides taking away from me the idea that any hypothesis may be taken as on a par with any other at the outset of an investigation, insists that I shall accept the contradictory position that supernatural things may happen and influence the order of the natural. That,” he says, “makes the realm of natural law itself something that can be arbitrarily interfered with at will.”

Thus the Christian working in the laboratory is confronted with the necessity of leaving the laboratory, giving it over entirely to the unbeliever or witnessing to the fact that only if Christianity is true is science possible and meaningful. Are we then to fail to witness for our God in the field of science? Is it only because the unbeliever has never been confronted with the full implication of Christianity for the field of science that he tolerates us in his presence still? And are we to have a theory of common grace that prohibits us from setting forth the witness of God before all men everywhere? Is not the Christ to be set forth in His cosmic significance by us after all? Is it not true that there could be no science if the world and all that is therein is controlled by chance? Is it not true that the non-Christian does his work by the common grace of God? A theory of common grace based on a natural theology is destructive of all grace, common or special.

Surely the witness to the God of the Scriptures must be presented everywhere. It must be, to be sure, presented with wisdom and with tact. But it must be presented. It is not presented, however, if we grant that God the Holy Spirit in a general testimony to all men approves of interpretations of this world or of aspects of this world which ignore Him and set Him at naught.

The non-Christian scientist must be told that he is dealing with facts that belong to God. He must be told this, not merely in the interest of religion in the narrower sense of the term. He must be told this in the interest of science too, and of culture in general. He must be told that there would be no facts distinguishable from one another unless God had made them and made them thus. He must be told that no hypothesis would have any relevance or bearing on these same facts, except for the providence of God. He must be told that his own mind, with its principles of order, depends upon his being made in the
image of God. And then he must be told that if it were not for God’s common grace he would go the full length of the principle of evil within him. He would finish iniquity and produce only war. His very acts of courtesy and kindness, his deeds of generosity, all his moral good is not to be explained, therefore, in terms of himself and the goodness of his nature but from God’s enabling him to do these things in spite of his sinful nature. “Will you not then repent in order to serve and worship the Creator more than the creature?”

**Infra- And Supralapsarianism**

Our conclusion then on the problem of common grace may, I hope, be along the lines marked out by Bavinck on the issue of infra- and supralapsarianism. Bavinck sought to avoid extremes in either direction. And how avoid extremes? How attain a balanced view? By not allowing our logic to dominate over the teachings of Scripture.

Supralapsarianism, when held without full regard for all Scriptural data, led to a stressing of the final destiny of men through election and reprobation to such an extent as to render the means by which that end is attained of little value. It led to a virtual denial of second or historical causes.

Infralapsarianism, when held without full regard for all Scriptural data, so stressed the significance of the historical fact of sin as the cause of the lost condition of men, as to endanger the basic importance of the fact that back of all the historical choices of men is the one all-controlling plan of the sovereign God. It led, sometimes, to a virtual denial of God’s plan as the first or last ultimate cause as controlling all finite causes.

We shall not thus, argues Bavinck, permit our reason to legislate with respect to Scriptural data. Ours is a sovereign God. His glory is the end of all things. But we cannot say that this glory, in the case of the reprobate, is manifested only and exclusively in the righteousness of their punishment. There is, while they are in this world, proceeding from them that which cannot be explained exclusively in terms of their reprobation. So also we cannot say that God’s glory, in the case of the elect, is accomplished exclusively in God’s grace to them in Christ. There is much of sin in them that displeases God. That which proceeds from their “old man” is not from, but against the grace of God. So in the case of the reprobate; their doings are better than their principle of evil, if not governed by God’s common grace, would lead one to expect.

Supra- or infralapsarianism, taken as some advocates of these views have taken them, were faulty in their imposing of the reach of human logic upon the data of revelation.

Is it not thus with us who love the Reformed Faith today? Do we not need to come to an “agonizing re-appraisal” with respect to the whole matter? Our witness must come clearly before the world. We all love to honor God for the work of the Reformers. That work found its climax in the idea of the sovereign grace of God freely proclaimed unto men.

Shall we, the sons of that Reformation, bedim its challenge to men by going off on tangents in order to satisfy the illegitimate objections of sinful men?
A Balanced View Of Common Grace

There lies before us the highway of the Christian Faith. May we ever drive upon it, without veering either to the left or to the right. If the wheels of an automobile are out of line the car will gradually tend to run off the pavement. You cannot drive an automobile effectively with one wheel on the pavement and the other on the soft shoulder next to the road. Let us in all kindness, warn one another not to go off the highway either to the left or to the right.

Going off to the right by denying common grace or going off to the left by affirming a theory of common grace patterned after the natural theology of Rome is to fail, to this extent, to challenge the wisdom of the world.

In neither case is the call of God to man made truly universal. In denying common grace we say, in effect, that God does not really call some men to repentance at all. In affirming a natural theology type of common grace, we fail to show that God calls all men everywhere and in all dimensions of life.

In neither case do we show man the full glory of the gospel and of the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Ye are my witnesses!
Where Do We Go From Here In Theology?

Nels F. S. Ferré

At Evanston many recognized the need for a deeper American theology. In Europe I was once told by a group of Christian leaders that they were looking to America for a revival of effective theology. Europe is too tired, they said, to produce constructive thought. Having lived through two world wars and standing on the edge of undreamed-of destruction, its more mature leaders are too shocked by events to think daring thoughts about God’s ways with human history. With a frustrated future, the younger leaders, too, seem unable to create a theology of hope. These Christian leaders therefore urged us American theologians to produce an effective Christian theology.

The embarrassment at Evanston and the request from these European leaders coincide with a general turn to theology. To religion there is a rush. The more thoughtful in this rush are increasingly devoting their attention to theology.

Such a turn to theology is healthy, for theology is study concerning God. By God we mean the ultimate nature and purpose of existence. Therefore the turn to theology is really a deliberate attempt to understand the ground of our being, the goal of our lives, and the direction which we must choose in order to fashion the goal of our lives in line with the ground of our being. The turn to theology is thus our deliberate confrontation of our most important decisions, whether as persons or as a society.

Let us, then, turn to theology. There are positions which put strong stress on objectivity, or something external to our faith as being its standard, there are also positions which magnify the subjective, our inner response, or our “existential involvement.” Our task in this analysis is to describe and to evaluate these two positions, showing afterwards that they require each other, and that only by the right combination of the two can we begin to move forward toward a genuine and creative theology.

Religion In Life

The position which puts strong stress on objectivity may perhaps best be characterized by three representative movements: Fundamentalism, the High Church wing, and “Barthian” biblicism.

A. Fundamentalism evinces real strength. It builds on the Bible as inerrant and all-sufficient truth. There is a sturdy givenness about its faith. Actually its main position is,
for the most part, a continuation of classical Christianity. Fundamentalism at its heart antedates and ignores modern scholarship. The fact that the biblical faith is simply taken for granted facilitates an unquestioning and unwavering allegiance to supernatural Christianity. Fundamentalism also accepts as innate to revelation, propositional truth. What is written is true and “there” for any reader, whether he believes or not. The Revelation as such is not dependent in any way upon the response of the reader nor affected by it. There is also an evangelical warmth, zeal and at-homeness on the part of Fundamentalism which makes faith vital and all-encompassing.

Unfortunately Fundamentalism also suffers from critical weaknesses. It is pre-critical! According to the best knowledge we have, which is generally agreed upon and responsibly taught, the Bible is not literally true. A high-ranking church official came to one of my colleagues at the seminary with an anguished heart because his high-school daughter had come to ask him whether she was to believe, as to the age of the earth, what she was taught in Sunday school from the Bible or by her geology teacher in high school. He himself, he said, could kind of believe both points of view according to convenience, but he did not want his daughter to live in a split world of knowledge and faith.

Biblical literalism, although valuable for its stark objectivity, has also occasioned divisions in the church as different people have seized upon different statements from the Bible as of paramount importance. Under biblical literalism as sole authority the church has grown by fission, providing creative variety and competitive drive, to be sure, but, even more, confusion and weakening competition.

Without a principle for discriminating use of the Bible, Fundamentalism has failed to apprehend a God great enough or good enough to answer the need for worship which the Bible itself, at its highest, has awakened. No religion can serve its age unless its main truth and its highest aspirations are equal to, and go beyond, the moral sensitivities of its most thoughtful and dedicated people. As a whole, too, Fundamentalism has sponsored a dualism in which there has been neither hope for, nor concern with, the world as such. Fundamentalism has therefore generally dampened man’s desire for constructive social and political participation and, in fact, encouraged cultural sterility.

The strength of Fundamentalism cannot be doubted, nor can the warmth and genuineness of its worship and fellowship; but it suffers from too many and serious weaknesses to become the kind of creative theology which is now almost a matter of do or die. It cannot fully satisfy the enormous hunger for the power of redemptive religion which has already been awakened by the needs of our day.

B. The High Church wing of Christianity, moreover, possesses strength in its objective control. This strength is organizational and in terms of allegiance to a well-defined tradition. There is power in revered tradition, in the holy heritage of divinely established continuity, and in commonly accepted, authoritative means of worship. Such control allows a considerable theological flexibility, which during days of change in thought is a decided asset to faith. Members of High Church movements know also the binding power of a close-knit community. They experience satisfying importance in belonging. Besides, those within this wing are usually esthetically and culturally mature. Worship is wed with beauty.

Nevertheless the High Church wing has its own kind of weaknesses. It suffers from an “in-group” psychology based on external standards. Its kind of objectivity becomes the occasion for an offish exclusiveness. Usually it feels little need for, and often cannot
even tolerate, Christian inclusiveness. With its limited conception of the church comes
often a narrow conception of God, the church, and the plan for salvation. Too often High
Churchism is, in fact, the religion of a privileged group or of those seeking security
within organizational control and historic definiteness and rigor.

C. “Barthian” biblicism, again, has until recently been the strongest current in modern
Protestantism. Its strength has consisted in its avowed return to main-line Christianity. It
has aimed at the classical biblical faith, but by being open also to biblical criticism, it has
avoided one of the central weaknesses of Fundamentalism. Its acceptance of a genuine
degree of existentialism has given it a flexibility and accent on personal decision, even in
thinking, which has relieved its objective rigidity. It has also exhibited a truly prophetic
quality in social matters, without being hamstrung by any social theory.

All the same, “Barthian” biblicism has its weak points. Its doctrine of Revelation,
eschewing propositional content as well as external criteria, is too vague to focus the
Gospel for thought and conduct. Thus this kind of objectivism ranges all the way from a
“sophisticated Fundamentalism” to a nearly contentless existentialism, where little is
believed either as to history or as to present power for transformed experience. This
position often becomes “new modernism,” as Van Til styles it.

“Barthian” biblicism also lacks a constructive doctrine of the Church and of Christian
experience. It has no real doctrine of creation and creativity, either, as far as God’s own
presence is concerned. Nor is there an organic connection of any kind between revelation
and redemption on one side and, on the other, between creation and history. Barthian
biblicism, at least, falls far short of any natural capacity to relate biblical objectivism to
education, social theory, and secular concerns. Barth himself has made stabs in the
direction of these needs; but he has never opened his central gospel to these spheres.
There must, to be sure, be a strong difference between the Gospel and the world, and no
mere rational or moral continuity between the world of biblical faith and our sinful world
is possible; but if God is both Creator and Redeemer, there must be a real relation
between the world of redemption and that of creation which is accessible to the Christian
community, Christian interpretation, and Christian action.

The second position which was mentioned in our opening survey was the one which
puts strong stress on subjectivism.

A. The most obvious among these positions is Liberalism. Liberalism, in general,
makes reasoned experience its standard for truth.

The strength of liberalism lies in its openness to truth, its aim at consistency of
interpretation of “the unity of truth,” its vigorous advocacy of the relevance of religion to
life, and its constant stress on experience, as both the standard and the goal of religion.
Liberalism rightly abhors the arbitrary, the unrelated, and the merely traditional or
orthodox faith. Liberalism wants fact, reason, experience, and personal and social
relevance.

The weaknesses of liberalism, oppositely, are a man-centered mood and method.
When man’s experience and reason are made final judges of truth, right and goodness, it
is hard to find the absolute and eternal faith which judges and saves man. The standard
for faith cannot center in man if it is to be a saving faith. Liberalism failed to see that the
basic approach to method is not a matter of conflict between faith and reason as acts of
man, but between revelation as God’s act, and both faith and reason as man’s response.
Liberalism also became greatly guilty of cultural accommodation, even of the accommodation of actions, whereas it should have discovered the imperative to transform the ways of the world by the power of the Word. As Forsyth passionately maintained, Liberalism centered too much in the world rather than in the Word. Because of its stress on continuity, liberalism lacked a principle and power of exclusion. It failed to see that there is no way at all from man to God because of the chasm between God and man, between Creator and derived being, between eternity as God’s time and our kind of time, and it smoothed out by false theory the sharp differences between the Church and the world, and between the Christian Revelation and other religions. It had a much needed principle of inclusion, but failed to establish the principles of exclusion. In other words, its continuity was premature and sentimental. Besides, liberalism enervated the believer until he usually had no burning convictions and no imperious zeal for evangelism and missions.

B. The second kind of subjectivism is existentialism. By existentialism is meant primary emphasis on man’s decision rather than on his ideas and experience. Existence precedes essence, and between them is a gulf unbridged by reason. Man has to think as a concrete occasion of experience with regard to his religious ultimate with his own human destiny hanging in the balance. Revelation comes through events, not through ideas. The choice of daring faith concerning these events alone affords revelation for the chooser. This approach is hard to nail down except by saying that it stems from Sören Kierkegaard, who made choice concerning one’s eternal destiny the very passionate heart of faith, a choice made in the awesome terror of a darkness where there is neither an objective revelation nor a dependable reason in things religious. For him, subjectivity raised to its highest degree was truth, absurd and awful, offensive and foolish, yet life and peace for those who walk in its narrow Way.

Few have followed Kierkegaard the whole way. Yet he has influenced most alert modern thinkers, particularly in the field of religion. Rudolf Bultmann, perhaps Europe’s leading religious thinker today, is deeply influenced by Kierkegaard through the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Probably the most highly respected theologian in the United States, Paul Tillich, has received into his thinking a large dose of existentialism. Both Bultmann and Tillich have, at least, rejected classical Christian supernaturalism as impossible in the face of a century of science. Tillich is a profound systematic thinker and relies on a correlation of philosophy and theology which presupposes the universality of the *logos*; but neither by philosophy nor theology does he ever break the circle of subjectivity far enough to emerge into an objective Christian supernaturalism.

The strength of this position is obviously its modernity. The offense for today’s educated man is the supernatural. Existentialism offers no hard affirmations, scandalous to a this-worldly naturalist. At the same time modern existentialism is wise enough to make heavy use of classical symbolism, particularly that of Christian theology. It poses as a return to a fuller and more real Christian faith, with the supposedly impossible superstructure of Christian supernaturalism sloughed off. It can speak of the resurrection of Jesus, for instance, without any reference to his resuscitation, to his being raised by God; and it can refer to our resurrection, even of the body, with no thought of personal life after death. It can speak of the necessity of eschatology, without having a unilinear view of time and without expecting any actual end of our history as such.
Existentialism is also more flexible than a faith based on a given external Revelation, entailing propositional truth and normative principles of ethics. As a matter of fact, Tillich can make self-criticism the very “principle of Protestantism.” With regard to social criticism, existentialism is virtuously mobile. It never becomes a discontinuous minority, aiming at a kingdom not of this world, nor an idealistic social action group, striving for irrelevant “perfection.” Existentialism is strongest, therefore, in the suits of modernity and freedom.

The weaknesses of existentialism—if we continue to employ this vague characterization for want of a better one—are the lack of effective supernaturalism; the fugitiveness of modernity; the lack of stability in social theory and criticism; and the absence of adequate ground for a doctrine of the church and Christian experience.

The Christian faith is indelibly supernatural. God is the Creator, Ruler, Judge, Savior and fulfiller of this world. Only in terms of life after death, personal life in a new dimension and eternal, does the Christian faith provide any hope at all commensurate with its promises. Reason and faith are both frustrated apart from Revelation, the actual incoming of the fulfilling news of God’s purpose and Presence, over the long stretches of time and in the fullness of time. The gospel of modernity may be easy to accept but, being untrue, it lacks the power of the Gospel. This form of godliness cannot save. The knowledge of this world passes away, but the supernatural Word of God abides forever.

Flexibility is good, but not at the expense of the sameness and permanence of the Gospel. Even though rigid rational and moral principles are of man’s making and witness to his insecurity and are therefore to be rejected, there is a lasting pattern in the love of God whereby we are bid to imitate him (Eph 5:1). This supernatural Revelation of God’s love in Christ comes not only as a Person, but as a meaningful purpose both for life and civilization. This new way of living finds its embodiment in the Christian community. The Church is bid to enact and thus to exemplify the pattern for the new community. The Church can do so only when it consists of those actually born again into newness of life by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Existentialism lacks the supernatural dimension of Christian experience and of the Christian community. It knows no Holy Spirit who actually is the Lord of history as well as the Love of the Church, whereby God’s holy providence directs the destinies of nations as it also guides consecrated lives.

Fortunately I can point without hesitation to a Christian theology with full stress on both objectivity and subjectivity, and both within the organic necessity of truth. The Christian Revelation alone can provide the whole truth for life.

The Christian faith is grounded in the bedrock of the historic Revelation. The Christian faith therefore acknowledges a necessary mediate relation to God. This historic givenness of Revelation, however, has itself both an objective and a subjective side.

A. The objective side comprises God’s own presence and work in the Christ-deed, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Bible. The Christ-deed is God’s own incoming into human history as the Son. The Christian faith stands and falls with its affirmation not only of the power but of the presence of God in human form. In Jesus the God who is love has come, acted and spoken. Not that God was absent from history until Jesus came, but, rather, that then he came in matchless fullness as the turning point of all history. Then he came as eternity fulfilling time. The Christ-deed is God’s act of Revelation and Redemption in the fullness of time. The universal, unconditional, sovereign Love, who is
God, has come, acted and spoken for the salvation of all men that whosoever believes and lives this Gospel of God’s love might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

The Holy Spirit, moreover, in one of his aspects, is God himself, God in the Church. As Jesus was born of Mary, yet became enmanned by God the Son, so the church has its own authentic human side, as a human community, while yet indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Revelation at its most intimate and real is always, as Robert Barclay pointed out, by “the inward and objective Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit, like Christ, becomes organically, personally, united to the Christian community; Christ being the pattern, structure and substance of Love, while the Holy Spirit is God’s energizing, whether for counseling, comforting, enlightening, sanctifying, assuring or establishing. Christ is ultimate to each new creature; the Holy Spirit is ultimate to the community of creatures in Christ. To receive Christ is to be born again as a new person, but also inevitably to be born into a new fellowship of the Spirit. Christ is the pattern of the unity of God in the individual believer and for the community of faith. The Holy Spirit is the energizer of Christ, the alpha and the omega of the new creature, for the fullness of self-being in Christ and in the Christian fellowship. The Holy Spirit is God in the Christian community and for each member of it. His presence and work are through and through objective, of God and not of man, but part and parcel also of man’s new creaturehood in Christ and in the Church, thus also genuinely and inseparably the decisive aspect of man’s new subjective situation, as an individual and as a social being.

Objective, too, is the Christian Church. It comes from God. It comes as God. It comes for man. As a human institution it is of man. It is man’s response to God in the Christian community. Yet the Church is not made up, first of all, of man’s response, but of God’s gracious calling in Christ by the Spirit. The Christian Church is primarily God’s presence and power for a new kind of community on the part of those who are new creatures in Christ. The Church is the extension of the Incarnation, of the Atonement and of the Resurrection, not as a self-sufficient prolongation of Christ nor as the vicar of Christ or substitute for him. It is Christ, present as “the head of the body.” It is the contemporary Christ in human history. It is the Holy Spirit calling, winning and perfecting saints, those called by God and justified by him. It is Christ giving himself ever anew in a broken body and the shed blood. It is the Love who is God, caring in the Community of Concern. Still the Christ comes within the weaknesses of the flesh as the triumph of saving power, no longer in the physical body of Jesus, but now in the risen body of the universal Church, in those who know the reality of his universal love to save, to create and to promote community.

Besides the Christ-deed, the Holy Spirit and the Church, on the objective side of the Christian faith, there is also the Bible. The Bible is an objective strand of history reporting man’s response to God’s Christ-deed, his sending of the Holy Spirit, and his founding of the Church. The Bible has its authority in the God who has thus acted to save mankind. The Bible is the exemplifying history of human experience interpreted by God’s love in Christ. The Bible shows us God’s preparation for the Christ-deed and the culminating revelation and redemption of man. When the Bible is read with dedicated intelligence as the living Word of God’s universal love, we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. “The truth as it is in Jesus” becomes our criterion of all truth and conduct, showing us both the nature and the will of God. The Bible becomes the
objective rule of faith, the lamp for our feet, illumining the will and way of God with all men and for all times.

These four, the Christ-deed, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Bible, are the four objective factors of the Christian faith in history that are permanently valid. They are the mediating realities through which we come to God. They determine whether our faith is genuinely Christian and therefore fully in line with truth.

B. Four are the objective factors of God’s revelation; there are also four subjective factors to be taken into account. The first of these is the response of the original faith-witnesses. They were real and free human beings reporting as best they knew. Because they responded as finite human beings, touched with sin, to the holy facts of God’s saving presence and mighty acts, the biblical record shows us the absolute truth, but not absolutely. Even as the Son came incognito in order to preserve our freedom to find God in the fullness of experience—including after his coming, however, his very presence in human history—even so the holy Book comes not as an errorless compulsion confronting finite man, but as the saving fullness of objective reality touched with the foibles and fallibilities of the original faith-witnesses. The Truth to which they testified is altogether and absolutely true, the way in which they testified to that truth was by reporting what they saw and heard as they saw, heard and remembered it over a history of oral tradition and fallible transmission of writings. The reality of the fullness of God’s saving love in his Son, his universal concern for all men, thrusts itself upon all who are ready to accept and to walk in the light of the holy Incarnation, but amidst secondary contradictions and misinterpretations due to the subjective failings, both of life and light, on the part of the early disciples.

Secondly, the Church as the community of confirmation has not made sharp and constant the one and only criterion of God in Christ as holy and universal Love. There is a whole history of subjective response to God’s historic Revelation. The original errors of the first faith-witnesses have persisted as part of the holy tradition along with the holy Gospel. The chaff has never been winnowed from the wheat. These errors and misinterpretations have accumulated in Christian history, due to the subjective and fallible nature of our response, and have become solidified in Christian theology, particularly as this has become expressed in terms of alien philosophies and divergent world-views. The community of confirmation transmits through history the reality of the Gospel, man’s constantly vertical relation to God in acceptance, forgiveness, and fulfillment, but the confirmation has been through a glass darkly, a situation which has made it possible for many to worship the shadows as the Light, either because they prefer the darkness to the Light or because no one has trained them to distinguish what is truly light from darkness. The whole history of confirmation has been a history conditioned by a subjective response on the part of the believing community to God’s objective acts of salvation.

Thirdly, our present knowing the historic Christian faith, the work once wrought by the Holy Spirit, is subjectively conditioned. How we know it, depends upon the quality of our own response, both in intensity and in the kind of faith which is ours. Only already translated saints could respond perfectly to God’s historic deeds in Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Bible. We therefore must be humble about our own reception and interpretation. Our witness to others of our holy faith must be humbled by the consciousness of the forgiveness of our sins and of our failings as finite men. However
absolute God’s part in the historic revelation, there is always our human side to it which is both relative and clouded by sin.

In the fourth place, man’s creative response to God’s objective self-disclosure is also subjective. History presents new situations. Revelation cannot be repeated exactly as it came. History requires constant choice, the relating of the old to the new. The Church is not only the community of confirmation, but also, in some sense, a community of experimentation. History demands new thought. The new, too, while unavoidable, is always dangerous. We men are sinful and finite, and as such we handle the immortal message of God’s redeeming love. We sometimes essay being creative without first being triumphantly redeemed or without being fully in the service of the Holy Spirit. The finiteness we cannot avoid; sin also besets us too easily. Therefore as the contemporary community of experimentation we actually impose a subjective element on the Gospel we present. Only a few keep close enough to Christ and are sufficiently trained to follow anew “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,” and even they judge as creatures, not as God himself.

There is, thus, the mediate relation to God, presupposing the historic Christ-deed, the Holy Spirit’s work up to now, the Christian Church as the community of confirmation and as the community of experimentation, and the Bible. All of these involve objective and subjective factors of God’s work and man’s response. Without these mediate relations there is no Christianity. The Christian faith is a historic reality with which we have to do. It claims nothing less than the revelation and saving activity of the absolute God. Therefore to accept the Christian faith is to renounce all other faiths as either inadequate or false at heart. There can be only one absolute Revelation, in whatever way God’s wider work in nature and history be afterwards related to that Revelation.

Nevertheless, the Christian faith is not merely mediate. It worships a living God. Man’s basic relation in life is to God. The horizontal direction is ever under the vertical. Jesus knew that God is Spirit and must be worshiped immediately in Spirit and in truth. The four objective factors in history must therefore become objective for present experience, structuring God’s immediate Revelation. The Christian faith lives by such encounter of the Living God. The historic faith mediates the content of the Christian experience, even as what we now experience could never be interpreted for what it is apart from the history of our experience. The Christian faith is mediated immediacy.

Therefore God must reveal himself ever afresh in the Christ-men. The living Christ is God as Son conclusively fulfilling those who understand and accept him. God must become Christ in us “the hope of glory.” He who once came to fulfill his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus must keep coming to fill full that purpose by his ingression organically—redemptively and creatively—into all men. Man finds fulfillment only when God becomes his true subject. The human self is not eliminated or curtailed by God’s taking complete possession of it, but is fulfilled and made free. We are made for God and for his community; the more passive we are to him, therefore, the more active we become and the more real as human selves. The more we resist him the more we are slaves to what is alien to our deepest selves. Therefore God must continue his holy Incarnation to express himself and to finish in glory his own creation. God also will enter us as the Holy Spirit, the guide and energizer of our new life in Christ. Christ is the perfect fulfillment of God’s purpose for us and of our human natures. The Holy Spirit is the intimate companionship
of God within that new relationship. We are not only born again by the revolutionary entrance of Christ in our lives, making us new creatures in him, but we are also allowed to grow in grace and in the fruit of the Spirit by means of the present objective work of God the Holy Spirit.

The Church also becomes in the present the creator of creeds, not the mumblers or even repeaters of them. A creed is not Christian if it is other than a symbol which directs faith. Such a symbol is existential, the mediating context of an immediate confrontation. The early Councils wrote afresh the creeds. They were creative of new and better insight, as well as defensive of false directions for faith and practice. Dark years and deadened periods of history imprisoned faith within the contexts of the past, putting the living heart of confession within the corpse of formulation. The throbbing life of commitment which once created a symbol to match its information and decision became embalmed within the cadaver of a former faith. God must work ever afresh to write creative creeds that free the spirit, match its present knowledge, and serve as the occasion for its fullest commitment. The creed is Christian only when it is the declaratory statement of contemporary worship and theology. Although it structures faith, it is expressed by it creatively, not imposed upon it.

The Bible, too, is living Light. Too often the Bible is only a book; dead fuel never catching fire. The Bible mediates God’s objective self-revelation as the Son. There can be no other Revelation that is real and final than God as holy Love, conclusively and universally concerned for all men and able to the uttermost. Yet such a God is present now as the Author of his living Word, lighting ever fresh candles. The Bible cannot become a closed canon without denying the Christian faith at its very heart: that God lives and encounters us now for our salvation and that prayer and worship are no empty rituals but living relations to the One Lord. The Bible is God’s living speech to men, and therefore the Bible is buried in mediacy unless it is resurrected in the immediacy of present Revelation for contemporary needs. Revelation is not limited by mediacy, but is ever open to the illimitable truth of God. God still publishes his Word, will publish it to the end of time, and great should be the company of them that publish it!

There are, then, the following four objective immediate Revelations of God in the present: (1) His revelations through the God-men of every today; (2) through the Holy Spirit, not merely as a decisive event on Pentecost, but as God the present Guide into all truth; (3) through the Church as the real Presence in human history of the new creatures in the eternal Son of God and as the continuing community of the newborn, and (4) through the Bible as God’s living speech in direct experience, the kind of speech which generated the written Word.

The subjective side of this objective immediacy of God as Universal Love we may think of particularly, for our purposes, in terms of our response for one world in Christ. God wants to make of one spirit all the divided men of human history. He wants to create true, unlimited community to the utmost of our allowance. He never compels fellowship, but, as we let him, he breaks down barriers of religion, race and nature, and unites men in the unity which is ever creative diversity. Our side is to be open and effective channels of communication for the grace of God, whether on the level of creation or on the level of redemption.

He also wants intensively to renew the whole social order with his healing freshness. Our opportunity in this sphere is to consecrate to him our every talent and attention.
Every vocation under God becomes a divine calling. God today is calling plumbers and preachers, economists and politicians, educators and housewives to work away, each in his own way, to make a new social order. With cobalt bombs and computing machines, with jet planes and television, with general education and specialized social engineering, this job is too big for any of us and for us all!—except we remember well and believingly that ours is only the subjective side of the great objective acts of God which have made this new world possible.

Our response is even more for the celestial oneness of the whole company of God on earth. The Holy Spirit is one, and all in him are one. Therefore the present divisions and competitive wastes in church life are due to man’s refusal to own the Holy Spirit. Sectarianism denies Christ. We cannot picture the creative nature of the Church which the Holy Spirit can effect, but we can accept him and start to build within his creative design. He will himself unfold it, if with all our lives we dare to trust him for a new day of cooperative concern for all men. Man is made for the Christian kind of community, for freedom and faithfulness in fellowship based on Christ’s love, and made possible only by that love. Subjective is our response, and we weary quickly except as we usher out into the great unknown of God’s creative will within the peace and power of the Holy Spirit. We need also the eschatological response to God’s creative Bible, the Bible of Contemporary Revelation read towards the future. What God has done in the past is recorded for our decision in the present for the future. The Bible, past and present, must be released as the full pattern of God’s love for man within which we can creatively discover the unity of truth, for all life and thought, both theoretical and living, but only on the widest possible screen of what God is about to do to conclude all things in heaven and on earth in Christ.

We need, then, in conclusion, a Christ-centered evangelical supernaturalism, based on Revelation found only by faith, generating and sustaining freedom, open to reason and using it fully, energized by the Holy Spirit of truth and concern for the individual and for society, made conclusive in Christian community, which lives to the glory of God and finds fulfillment only within his will. Against such a faith, alive in love, firm in God and flexible within the humility of human finiteness, no power of evil can prevail. Such a faith has been given once for all as our own holy heritage. Let us arise to take full possession of it!

From Paul Tillich

Nels Ferré in the preceding article emphasizes “the need for a deeper American theology.” After having reviewed different contemporary theologies, he proposes a solution which he starts with the sentence: “Fortunately I can point without hesitation to a Christian theology with full stress on both objectivity and subjectivity and both within the organic necessity of truth.” This is certainly a high claim, as Dr. Ferré himself feels when he adds: “The Christian Revelation alone can provide the whole truth of life.” These

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statements lead necessarily to the question: Is the Christian Revelation, or is the theological understanding of this Revelation the subject matter of the article and of theology? According to the title it is obviously the theological understanding of the Revelation. But if this is the case, the claim of a theologian that the theology he outlines is completely balanced and that it stands “within the organic necessity of truth” is much too high a claim for any theology.

In his first part the author lines up the contemporary theologies in two series, the one which he calls objectivistic and the other which he calls subjectivistic. Now “subject” and “object” are philosophical concepts with a long and intriguing history. Therefore, if these concepts are used in a scholarly way, one must ask: In which realm of reality are they contrasted and what is their precise meaning in this realm? In physics “subjectivity” means arbitrary interference with methodological research; in history it can mean the same, but it also can mean “understanding”; in theology it means participation with one’s whole being. Ferré calls the “liberal theology” subjectivistic. But it would be at least equally justified to call it unduly objectivistic, especially in its reliance upon the scientific research into the “life of Jesus.” In this respect Barth’s theology is subjectivistic, insofar as the faith which for him mediates the revelation is an act of self-surrendering subjectivity, in the sense in which Kierkegaard uses the term. But neither Kierkegaard nor the Existentialists (including this reviewer) can be subsumed under the category of the “subjective.” Existentialism describes correctly, and in this sense “objectively,” the human predicament. In doing so it has rediscovered elements of classical theology which had been lost by liberal theology, both in its idealistic and in its naturalistic form. Existentialism deals with the estranged human subject and his world, but that does not make it subjectivistic. The reality of contemporary theology cannot be grasped by the terms “objective” and “subjective,” especially not if used without qualifications.

In his criticism of existentialist theology, Dr. Ferré gives it credit for its ability to make itself understandable to the modern mind, but he limits this credit by pointing to the transitoriness of every theology which is tied up with a special philosophy. To this criticism I want to say, first, that it is the function of theology to make the Christian message understandable to every new generation and that there is no eternal theology. Secondly, it must be emphasized that existentialism is not a philosophy, in the sense of the changing systems of philosophy. There is no existentialist system. In the moment in which the existentialists become constructive they turn to other traditions, be it humanist or mystical or pietistic orthodox ones. Existentialism is a matter of questions, not of answers. It raises the question of man’s estrangement and possible reconciliation. But its positive answers are not existentialist.

In the second part of his article Dr. Ferré develops his system of theology, which is striking by its lack of theology. The classical tradition within which the author counts himself uses the logos, the power of conceptualization, courageously and thoroughly! The early Fathers, the scholastics, the Protestant Orthodoxy, Schleiermacher and Ritschl were not afraid of the logos. They all asked: What does it mean, if we say that God is, that the world is fallen, that Jesus is the Christ, that there is reconciliation? They did not accept the symbols without trying to interpret them in logical words. Even the mystery of the Trinity was interpreted in this way by Augustine. I do not see that Dr. Ferré has taken this function of theology seriously enough. He uses the traditional Christian terms, wrongly assuming that we know the range and the limits of their meaning without a full,
conceptually strict investigation. Certainly, every real Christian is gripped by the power of the biblical words and even of the classical creedal statements of the Church. They mediate something to him that is more important than logical understanding. And nobody can be a theologian who is not gripped in this way by the Christian message. But it is not enough for the theologian to repeat these terms and to relate them to each other. His task is to understand, even if understanding means methodologically pointing to the limits of understanding. Much insight is needed in order to see the mystery in its right place, and not to use it as the way of escaping dangerous questions. There is one theological (or philosophical) concept used by Dr. Ferré in order to characterize his theology, the word “supernaturalism.” He accuses existential theologians of a “lack of effective supernaturalism,” and positively states: “The Christian faith is indelibly supernatural,” and “The supernatural Word of God abides forever.” The term “supernatural” has, like the terms “subjective” and “objective,” many different meanings. One can use it for man’s spiritual life, for his historical existence, for the realm of pure essences. But neither of these possible connotations is meant, if one speaks of supernaturalism. One wants to guarantee the freedom of God from the world and his power over the world. This is a justified concern, and I would agree with Dr. Ferré if he wanted to emphasize this point. But supernaturalism is meant by him in a quite different sense. It is meant as the affirmation of a world above the given world, a divine supra-world with special structures and qualities. God is in this supra-world, though not confined to it. He works in our world, appearing in it in special manifestations, interfering with its processes, sending his Son into it, directing it toward a moment of the temporal process in which he will annihilate it, except for those who have been and will be taken into the supra-world for an endless continuation of life beyond death.

Nobody can deny that the Christian symbolism in Bible and Church supports this view, and that it favors an intensive religiosity and a feeling of an intimate personal relation with the Divine Being—as impressively manifest in the writings and speeches of the author. But the theologian cannot accept the restatement of the Christian symbols as a theological answer. He is aware of the problems implied in each of the symbols mentioned above. He must reject the attempt to take these symbols literally. He must try to interpret them, also for our generation. He must, above all, understand the symbolic character of the supernaturalistic language of religion. It is not this language which is dangerous. It is the natural language of religion. But a theology is dangerous, which, in the name of the logos, takes this language literally, because it makes the infinite finite, the eternal temporal, the Divine One part of a universe which consists of two parts, subjecting it to the structures of being which, like fate in the Homeric religion, determine the actions and the destiny of the gods. Where the myth is taken literally, God is less than the ultimate, he is less than the subject of ultimate concern, he is not God in the infinite and unconditional sense of the great commandment.

This is my question addressed to the author of the article: “Where do we go from here in theology?”
Dr. Ferré represents the best in modern theology and he represents it well. In his present effort to deal fairly with each school of thought, he has some strictures to make on liberalism: “When man’s experience and reason are made final judges of truth, right and goodness, it is hard to find the absolute and eternal faith which judges and saves man.” We need, he says, “a Christ-centered evangelical supernaturalism.” On the other hand, he has some good things to say about fundamentalism. It represents, he says, “for the most part, a continuation of classical Christianity” and shows an “unwavering allegiance to supernatural Christianity.” Are we, then, to have a theology that is “beyond Fundamentalism and Modernism,” but in which Fundamentalism can keep the substance of its faith, while liberalism also preserves its own values? That is what Dr. Ferré seems to desire.

But on the basis of Dr. Ferré’s article and his other writings, the fundamentalist must ask: What may we be permitted to retain as the substance of our faith?

(1) Will we be allowed to believe that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is the Word of God? Ferré answers that “literalism” is a hindrance to faith. He argues that if we would proclaim the true gospel we must not barricade ourselves behind a book. Absolute authority, he says, “cannot appear in absolute historic form without freezing history.” Ferré thus rejects the basic position of classical Christianity to the effect that in the Bible men have a direct and final revelation of God.

(2) Will we then, continues the fundamentalist, at least be permitted to hold to our doctrine of God as “a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth”? The answer is again in the negative. Ferré contends that “all the attributes of God are now essential and relational at the same time. God has no time of isolation before creation; being now enjoys no status of priority over becoming.” Creation is therefore “as intrinsic to God’s nature as His very being.” Ferré thus rejects the basic position of classical Christianity with respect to God. For Ferré God does not exist separate from the process of the universe.

(3) Less confident, the fundamentalist now asks: May we then not continue to profess that “the only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person forever?” The reply is once more in the negative. As he does not separate God from the process of the cosmos, so for him the divine nature of Christ has no attributes that make it basically distinct from his human nature. For the idea of the Chalcedon creed that Christ is a divine person Ferré frankly substitutes the idea that he is a human person. “His

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personality began in his mother’s womb and through all eternity continues separately as a personality of human origin and of created status.” Accordingly the Christ of Ferré is only gradationally, not qualitatively, distinct from other men. The “exceptional in Jesus is what most fully exemplifies our own potential nature and destiny.” Thus Ferré also rejects the historic Christian doctrine of the person of Christ.

(4) With increasing hesitation the fundamentalist now asks: May I then retain anything of the classical Christian doctrine of the work of Christ that he came to do for man? May I say that “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us”?

Naturally Ferré’s answer is once more “no.” Since the Creator does not exist separate from the process of his creation, he is not the law-giver to man. Sin is therefore not to be defined as “any want of conformity unto or breaking of the law of God.” Sin is rather “the perverted thwarting of our most basic needs and of our most serious longings.” Thus the suffering of Christ is not substitutionary but exemplary. “The uniqueness of Jesus was in his being the irreversible exception who yet exemplifies what is most potential in us all and in God’s total purpose.” Thus history is self-atoning. God through Christ is in history and sees to it that universal love shall prevail among all men at last.

Dr. Ferré’s idea of the work of Christ is, therefore, clearly opposed to the orthodox view of the work of Christ. His view of God and of the person and work of Christ are naturally of a piece. As such they are radically opposed to the classical Christian view of God and of the person and work of Christ.

(5) Finally, though very hesitatingly now, the fundamentalist asks: How about the consummation of history? Is there to be a final judgment day? May I continue to confess that “the end of God’s appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient”?

The answer is more emphatically in the negative than ever. Ferré argues that the justice of God is completely in the service of his love. All punishment, he says, is remedial. The “translating and transpowering role of the Spirit” includes all mankind. “There may be many hells. There may be enough freedom even in the life of hell for man to keep rejecting God for a very long time. Hell may be not only unto the end of the age, but also unto the end of several ages. It cannot be eternal, but it can be longer than we think?” The idea of an eternal separation between those who are saved and those who are lost, as fundamentalism believes it, is, according to Ferré, basically hostile to the moral consciousness of man.

It is now clear that on Ferré’s view the fundamentalist cannot really retain anything of what he himself considers to be the substance of Christianity. All the answers of the Shorter Catechism would have to be “reinterpreted” beyond recognition if they were to express a theology such as Ferré recommends. The basic difference between the Creator

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4 Ibid., p. 189.
6 Evil and the Christian Faith, Harper & Brothers, 1947, p. 44.
7 The Christian Understanding of God, p. 203.
8 Ibid., p. 230.
and the creature has to be rejected. For it is to be substituted the idea of a Reality in process, including God and man. And this view of an all-encompassing process is based on human experience as self-explanatory instead of upon the Bible as the Word of God.

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It is, of course, great gain to have seen this contrast clearly. The modern and the classical Christian position are diametrically opposed to one another. They differ at every point because they differ in their root principles. It is not that one view lays more stress on reason and the other on faith, that one is more God-centered and the other more man-centered. Both seek to combine faith and reason. Both believe in God as well as in man. Both are Christ-centered. Both believe in the love and grace of God. But all along the line the connotations of these terms are mutually exclusive of one another. And it is not a matter of difference at the point of theology alone.

Involved in each position is a philosophy of science as well as of theology. Involved in each is a philosophy of fact as well as of methodology. Two mutually comprehensive views, built upon mutually exclusive presuppositions stand over against one another. Both are aware of the fact that “the ultimate is necessarily the ground for explaining all else, but cannot itself be explained by anything else.”

But if such is the case, is there then any basis for fruitful discussion between the two? To seek for a point of contact in some neutral ground is futile. The starting point, the method and the conclusion of the modern theologian are involved in one another. The same is true for the believer in historic Christianity. Moreover, for the fundamentalist an appeal to neutral territory is fatal. For the idea of “neutrality” implies the idea that abstract possibility is above God, that the Universe, or Reality, inclusive of God and man, is “open.” And this is precisely the process philosophy to which the modern theologian adheres.

Instead of seeking for a neutral point of contact in the way Roman Catholic apologists do, the Protestant should place himself for the sake of the argument upon the position of the modern view.

It then appears that in the modern view two principles, that of pure irrationalism and pure contingency and that of pure rationalism and pure determinism, are kept in balance with one another. On the one hand pure irrationalism and contingency imply the impossibility of distinguishing one fact from another. Even mere counting of facts becomes impossible because counting presupposes a discernible difference between one fact and another fact. On the other hand pure rationalism and pure determinism imply the impossibility of using the law of contradiction fruitfully in relation to facts. Granted that facts could be found they would, as soon as the principle of contradiction is applied to them, congeal into one block of being. All logic would be purely formal or analytic, as all factuality would be purely contingent. Thus there would be no system at all, or all would always have been systematized. Science would be impossible. Human experience would be meaningless. If the individual speaks it is, alas, no longer the individual that speaks. These general remarks may now be applied to Ferré’s view. Though opposed to all forms of naturalism his own view is still a process philosophy.

On the one hand Ferré’s principle of discontinuity leads to pure contingency and irrationalism. His “Jesus” is so completely immersed in the process of history and the evil

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9 *Christianity and Society*, p. 8.
that is part of history as to be unable to do anything in the way of saving men at all. Why
should he be spoken of as “the first-born among many brethren?” Why should he even be
held up as an example to men? Ferré cannot tell us how his Jesus is God or even knows
God.

It is no wonder then that Ferré’s primary concern is “not validity but adequacy.” We
operate, he says, from “the central meaning we see” by the “self-authenticating
illumination of the spirit.” “The deepest solutions, anyway, are not in thought but in the
spirit.” 10 His faith in God is purely irrational. His view is based on vision. When he says
that we know “the God of perfect power and perfect love” and that this God “will perfect
with all certainty that which He has here barely begun” this “knowledge” is naught but
beatific vision that has no intelligible relation to the historic scene. We cannot, on his
basis, “take off” from the level of historic fact to God at all.

On the other hand Ferré’s principle of continuity leads to pure identity between God
and man. According to this principle there is no need to “take off” from historic fact in
order to reach God. And there is no need for Jesus as an exception, as the “selective
actual” in order to lead men to their Creator. It is because men already have the criterion
of true love within them that they chose Jesus to represent them. “Continuity from below
takes on continuity from above, but this continuity is itself continuous from God down.”
11 The Spirit of God is operative in all things from the beginning. In human freedom, “the
highest stage of discontinuity” is “looked at from the opposite perspective … God’s
highest continuity.” 12 Human freedom of necessity spells sin. But the Must of sin is
absorbed by a bigger, all-encompassing and all-compelling Must of grace. All men
inevitably participate fully at last because all men have always participated potentially in
the idea of God as universal love. Thus does Ferré’s principle of continuity lead to blank
identity.

Of course the two principles, that of pure continuity and that of pure identity never
appear thus baldly by themselves. There is a “dynamic synthesis” between them. Pure
equivocism and pure univocism are kept in solution. But underneath this “dynamic
synthesis” there is hidden the dilemma that either one knows nothing and can ask no
questions or one knows everything and need ask no questions.

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In conclusion it is well to fix our attention on this dilemma as it shows itself in its
stark nakedness when he deals with man’s knowledge of God.

On the one hand there is the frank and avowed profession that man can know nothing
about the Absolute. It is said that “mere fact decides nothing about the nature of the
absolute.” What one believes about the Ultimate is therefore, in the last analysis, a matter
of pure, that is irrational, faith. Any god we know is finite. The absolute God, one on
whom all our “objectivity” rests, is a projection. Such a God is indeterminate.

On the other hand there is the frank and avowed profession that man does know the
Absolute. And there is the assumption that man knows all about him.

There is first the universal negative assertion about the nature of God implied in
Ferré’s rejection of fundamentalism. The facts of history, of logic, and of human moral

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12 Ibid., p. 138.
experience are said to make the fundamentalist idea of God obviously impossible. It is thus assumed to be the easiest possible thing for man to say that God is not eternal and unchangeable in his being and properties.

There is, secondly, the universal positive assertion about the nature of God implied in Ferré’s acceptance of God as unconditional Agape. Faith in this God is said to be knowledge of this God. And any “knowledge” not based on this knowledge is said to be inferior or false knowledge. Various forms of naturalism as well as older liberalism are rejected because their view of knowledge is not based on this all-encompassing Absolute. Thus the facts of history are on the one hand said to tell us nothing about God and on the other hand to tell us all about God. These facts are said to point nowhere, and at the same time absolutely away from the God of fundamentalism and toward the God of the modern theologian. Such procedure is unintelligible and destructive of the very experience upon which it is supposed to rest. But such a procedure would seem to be the only alternative once the classical Christian position is set aside.

Classical Christianity presupposes the existence of God as self-sufficient. It holds that this God has created the universe and by his providence controls it. All the facts of the universe are what they are, ultimately, because of the place that they occupy in history as the realization of the plan of God. All facts, therefore, clearly point toward God. In particular does the constitution of man as made in the image of God point toward its original. Every man unavoidably knows God (Rom 1:19–21). Self-consciousness presupposes God-consciousness.

But because of sin every man seeks to suppress the truth about himself. The sinner does not want to meet his creator. The natural man holds down the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). He is spiritually blind (Eph 4:18). Unless on the basis of Christ’s work in his “room and stead” the Holy Spirit regenerates him, the sinner will not repent and accept the truth. Challenged each day by the face of God as impressed on each fact that he see, not the least on those that he himself discovers, he always rationalizes his unbelief.

On the other hand those who do believe do so not because they are morally superior to others; faith is the gift of grace. Being saved by grace they realize that all their “strong reasons” for not believing were at bottom futile. It was a kicking against the pricks, a rationalization of man’s rebellion against God. Even to deny this God intelligently, one has to presuppose him. Only whole response to this God saves the whole man.

From Alden Drew Kelley

Greatly welcomed should be the effort of Nels Ferré to explore the frontiers of an ecumenical theology. No more urgent task confronts the Christian theologian today. In both charity and courage, he has essayed to delineate the dominant contemporary trends and to expose their respective limitations. As we have learned to expect from Dr. Ferré,

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1 Alden Drew Kelley, M.A., S.T.D., D.D., is President and Dean of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois; member of the Joint Commission on Approaches to Unity.
this has been done with a firm but delicate touch. There is always an evident artistry in the balanced composition, depth of perspective, and luminous detail of his work.

Surely commendable is the insistence that a truly ecumenical theology must be both "objective" and "subjective"; be grounded in Revelation and responded to in both faith and reason; be expressive of both the doctrines of Creation and Redemption; and related both vertically to the Eternal God and horizontally to history, past, present, and future. There is manifested throughout Dr. Ferré’s discussion a conscientious desire to explicate fully the “both-and” character of our Christian theological tradition as over against the inevitable distortions and classical heresies of the “either-or” approach.

It does, then, seem somewhat unfortunate that the author fails to appreciate that the various Christian traditions which he criticizes would, given the opportunity, equally reject the “either-or” category and with conviction declare their adherence to the principle of “both-and.” All of them without exception would be convinced that their particular emphases did render full justice to the “objective”-“subjective,” to Revelation-response in faith and reason, to Creation-Redemption, and to time-eternity.

Moreover, the implications of the first two sentences at the beginning of Part 3 would seem to be that previously described viewpoints were not really Christian and failed to place “full stress on both objectivity and subjectivity.”

In view of this evident astigmatism, one is impelled to examine a little more closely the author’s view of our theological landscape and the rather abstractionist painting which is offered as a true picture of reality. In fact, there is discernible some confirmation of one’s suspicion that basically the author’s position is not so much “Where do we go from here?”

as “What do we go back to?” The answer appears to be within the general tradition of Protestant pietism.

Much may be said for the contribution that pietistic thought and devotion has made in the long history of Christianity. But it is difficult to believe that that particular strand of theological emphasis is the wave of the future in ecumenical theology. Certainly, it will be one element, if for no other reason than its enormous and widespread influence particularly on American Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant.

Here a paragraph from Daniel Jenkins may be to the point.

The extent of the influence of Pietism and the closely related movement of Revivalism on the development of Protestantism in both America and Britain, and through them on the consciousness of large sections of the population of the modern world, has still been inadequately estimated.... It reacted against the coldness and formalism and intellectualism of Post-Reformation religion by a strong emphasis on the warmth and tenderness of the personality of Jesus and on the need for a spontaneous act of conversion as the individual’s response to Him. It stimulated a strong sense of fellowship among the members of a particular religious group, but it was a fellowship among those concerned chiefly for the cultivation of the internal life of individuals, the so-called “spiritual life.” This was suspicious of institutionalism because it might quench the Spirit and it had little conception of the Church as a permanent society with a divinely ordained form and a public responsibility for the Christian ordering of all parts of the common life of believers....

These movements [Pietism and Revivalism] have had the great virtue of possessing terrific evangelistic power. They have produced more new Christians than any other form of church life in the modern world.... But they have produced Christians with a very undeveloped conception of the Church. This is partly because of the emotional and individualistic attitude toward religion which we have seen them to possess. It is also partly because they were either cut off from the
rich traditions of older-established churches concerning the relation between the Church and the Gospel or knew those traditions only in most unsympathetic forms. The attitude was understandable, and that it should have arisen was a grave reproach to those who belonged to the more mature churches. But it is seen in increasingly wide circles today to be dangerously naïve and false to the plain import of Scripture.²

To be explicit, we have doubts as to the possibility of acceptance by those Christian bodies in the World Council of Churches which are within the historic and orthodox Christian tradition, of a number of the author’s suggested points.

1. The apparent inclusion under the one category of “objective factors in history” of the “Christ-deed” (i.e., the Incarnation), the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Bible. Ordinarily the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity have been regarded as “uncreated” existences even though their activities in the world are historically conditioned. Church and Bible are purely historical and contingent realities.

2. It does not seem adequate to think of God as Love only. Is he not Power also? Is he not the God of Nature as well as of History? Is the tradition of Calvin to be ignored entirely in favor of that of Luther?

3. There appears to be a profound ambiguity in the author’s view of the “Christ-deed” and the Holy Spirit, who seem to be both decisive events and continuing historical processes.

4. It is unsatisfactory to describe the Church functionally as primarily a “creed-making” group or the Bible as “God’s living speech in direct experience, the kind of speech which generated the written Word.” The Church, the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Family of God, is not exhausted in meaning by the concept of “creed-making”; and, in some sense, the canon of Scripture is closed even though it speaks relevantly to our immediate existential situation.

Perhaps Dr. Ferré’s difficulties arise from the failure to give full weight to the radical discontinuities, the unique unrepeatable decisive events, which are the mighty works of God in history. The Christian myth is not merely a symbol for continuing historical processes. It has a vertical dimension and is a referent to the timeless.

Just here we might direct our attention to Section B of Part 1, which sets forth a critical analysis of “the High Church wing of Christianity.” With a great deal of it we must agree. But it says both too much and too little. Included under the category of “High Church” would be not only Anglicanism but also certain Lutheran groups, some Presbyterians and other “reformed” Churches, the Old Catholics of Europe, the Polish National Catholics of the U.S.A., the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and the so-called “lesser” ancient churches of the East; all members of the World Council of Churches. The two paragraphs are hardly adequate as descriptive of the strengths and weaknesses of such a heterogenous grouping.

It is not easy to reconcile the criticism offered by Dr. Ferré with the following words from an address by Andreas Rinkel, Archbishop of Utrecht:

Our Lord founded the “Church” and not an institution with rules, laws, functions (liturgical, ceremonial) and ministering personnel all exactly defined in advance. His Gospel proclaims the realization of the Kingdom of God, and the external form of the Church is only a means to that end—but a means which He Himself gives, inescapable and indispensable, absolutely necessary for all those who want to attain to His Salvation. So too the Gospel contains the principles which establish the Ministry though without ministerial prescriptions, and the principles which call forth the means of grace, though without liturgical description. He founded a living organism, not an organization, not a constitutional law.

Along the same line of thought one may refer to the Declaration of the Orthodox Delegates Concerning Faith and Order, which was delivered at a plenary session of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The whole of the Christian Faith should be regarded as one, indivisible unity. It is not enough to accept just certain, particular doctrines as basic as they may be in themselves, e.g. that Christ is God and Saviour. It is compelling that all doctrines as formulated by the Ecumenical Councils, as well as the totality of all teaching of the Early, Undivided Church, would be accepted. One cannot be satisfied with formulæ which are isolated from the life and experience of the Church. They must be assessed and understood within the context of the Church’s life.

Far from being characterized by an “offish exclusiveness” and an antipathy to “inclusiveness” as suggested by Dr. Ferré, the problem of the Orthodox Churches is basically their insistence on “the total, dogmatic Faith of the Early Undivided Church without either subtraction or alteration,” to quote again from the same document of Declaration. The proponent of an ecumenical theology is faced with the colossal task of assimilating, or at least with nice discrimination doing justice to, a closely knit and coherent philosophico-theological apparatus or construct. It is a big lump to swallow even for the most Catholic-minded in the tradition of the Reformed Churches.

Turning now to the churches of the Lutheran tradition, we may well consider the paragraph set forth by Gustaf Aulen in This Is the Church, edited by Anders Nygren. Luther is a man of surprises. We hear him thundering against the pope in drastic phrases. For instance, we hear him say that the pope dispenses “his offal and poison, a doctrine of men, but he neglects the gospel, yes he even persecutes it, because it does not serve him!” We hear him say how the sacrament is misused and distorted, and how the hierarchy transgresses. We should naturally expect the result to be a radical rejection of the Roman Church. But on the contrary, in the next instant we hear that the Roman Church is holy, and all its episcopal offices are holy, and … the reason for this holiness of the Roman Church is that in it are still found “baptism, the sacrament, the Word of the Gospel, the Holy Scriptures, the church’s offices, the names of Christ and the name of God.” In passing we point out that when he here speaks of the “name” of Christ and of God, he does not mean only that God and Christ are named, but, as the context shows, that God and Christ are actually at work in the church…

The factors which effect and condition the holiness of the church also effect and condition its unity at the same time. Christ works through the Word, the sacrament and the ministry. Abuse and misinterpretation, however fateful, cannot forestall his acting. Where Christ is, there is the church on earth as one holy and universal church.3

Perhaps even more striking, for some, would be the plea for toleration, “Christian inclusiveness,” a charitable openness, by E. L. Mascall, a noted Anglo-Catholic theologian of Christ Church, Oxford.

We ought at all costs to avoid that theological and liturgical purism which assumes that to our own age and to it alone God has granted a fully integrated and perfectly balanced comprehension of the revelation given to the Church in Christ. Nevertheless, it may well be … that we are now in a better position than Christendom has been in any time in the last four hundred (or perhaps in the last sixteen hundred) years to recover something of that wholeness of outlook which, however imperfectly, characterised primitive Christianity. And if we, as Western Christians, are to make this attempt we must be more ready than we have commonly been to call in question the attitudes and formulations that have become habitual among both Catholics and Protestants as a result of the disputes of the sixteenth century.

I do not think that an Anglican need feel that he is being in any way disloyal to his own church in adopting such a questioning attitude. He is, I would maintain, bound to adhere to that appeal to primitive wholeness which so notably distinguishes the great Post-Reformation

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Anglican divines, with their emphasis upon Scripture and the Fathers. But I cannot see that he is bound to hold that either Anglican liturgy or the Anglican divines were at all points successful in making that appeal; the last thing that the Anglican divines would have claimed for themselves is infallibility, whatever may be true of some of the continental reformers. It has, I think, become clear in recent years that the great tragedy of the Reformation lay in the fact that, while the great majority of Reformers were desperately anxious to return, for both their ecclesiastical order and their liturgical forms, to the practices of primitive Christianity, neither they nor anyone else at the time had any adequate knowledge of what primitive Christianity was.\(^4\)

The point of the foregoing quotations from spokesmen of the diverse traditions of the “High Church wing of Christianity” is that they are illustrative both of the great variety of viewpoints comprehended by Dr. Ferré under one label and of rather typical utterances which would seem to belie the particular criticisms set forth by the author.

This is not to say that there are not many weaknesses, obvious weaknesses, in the position of “High Church” advocates. (For example, the all too frequent confusion between the Kingdom of God and the empirical Church.) But the errors and inadequacies are not on the whole those designated by Dr. Ferré.

Well, where do we go from here in theology? It is certainly much easier to be critical of the forward cutting edge of new ventures than to undertake the risks of similar enterprises. Nevertheless, it does seem that a truly ecumenical theology must in some way take account of those Christian traditions characterized by “objectivity” as well as “subjectivity.” They cannot be ignored even though they be quite inadequate as they stand or even heretical. This is to agree with Dr. Ferré as to the principle of “both-and.” But it is to suggest that the formula must be far more inclusive and intensive in its application; both more comprehensive and more profound.

It is impossible, for example, to conceive of a “Coming Great Church” which does not in some way embrace the insights and contributions of the traditions of Catholicism, Fundamentalism, Calvinism (both classical and “neo”), Lutheranism, religious existentialism, Christian humanism, and the Pietism which Dr. Ferré so ably and attractively represents. God has not left himself without a witness in even the most improbable places.

It is not likely that our own feeble efforts and dull wit will come up with a definitive theological synthesis. In fact, it is doubtful that the unity of Christendom will be achieved in any sense through doctrinal agreement, no matter how ingenious. A theological view is the product of life, not thought alone; it is properly “existential.” The new theology will be the effect of a new life together in Christian oneness with each other and with Christ, and not its cause.

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\(^4\) In *Corpus Christi*, London, 1953.
How Religion Views Survival
A Protestant View: "The Authority Of Scripture"

Tomorrow
1956
Autumn 1956, Pages 67-71

The orthodox Protestant turns to the Scripture for his answer to basic problems of life and death. In this he stands over against all those whose final source and standard of truth is human experience. His outlook therefore differs basically from that of all the major schools of ancient and modern philosophy, not excluding those that believe in a personal god. His outlook also differs basically from that of all major schools of modern Protestant theology, such as those connected with the names of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl and Karl Barth. These modern theologians do, to be sure, make much of Scripture. This is especially true of Barth. But none of them accepts the Scripture as being, in the original manuscripts, the direct and final revelation of God. None of them believes that any such revelation is available to man. With Immanuel Kant all of them hold that human knowledge is relative to man as in some measure self-sufficient.

Finally the outlook of the orthodox Protestant differs, though not so radically, from that of the Roman Catholic church. The Roman Catholic interprets life in terms of reason plus Scripture. His teaching on all major doctrines is therefore always a synthesis of two mutually exclusive points of view.

God’s Supernatural Commandments

According to the Scriptures, God is the creator of the universe, and he controls by his providence whatsoever comes to pass. The word ‘possibility’ got its original meaning from this fact. What God intends to do, that, and that alone, is possible. Man’s knowledge of this truth is embedded in the fact that he is created in the image of God. For man to recognize and act upon this truth is for him to think and live according to the law of his being.

God thus addressed his will to man through his constitution as made in the image of God and through the facts round about him, all, as made and controlled by God, manifesting the will of God. But God also addressed himself to Adam supernaturally. God assigned to him his task in the created world. He was to do all things to the glory of God. As such he was to love God with his whole heart.
Thus at the beginning God’s law (a) in nature (b) in his own constitution, and (c) as expressed in direct supernatural commandment, formed the environment for Adam as an ethically responsible person.

Then, at an evil hour, Adam listened to Satan. Satan suggested, in effect, that Adam place his own experience above the law of God. In following this advice he assumed that the facts and laws of nature (the forbidden fruit) are not subject to God’s control. He assumed that God could not predict what would happen. Nobody could. God, with him, was surrounded by an environment ruled by chance. Thus he introduced the notion of pure contingency and irrationalism. But he introduced this notion of contingency and irrationalism by at the same time making another and correlative assumption to the effect that he, man, could, in advance of any experience, determine or predict that God could not predict anything at all.

This second assumption involves the idea of pure determinism and rationalism. Still further, in assuming that the universe about him does not operate according to the law of God he also assumed that he himself, to act truly according to the law of his being, must not act according to the law of God. Thus sin is “any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” And the wages of sin is death.

All men were involved in this sin of Adam for all were represented by him. “Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Rom 5:12). All men are therefore guilty through Adam. All men are, so far as they are self-consciously confronted, through nature, through their own constitution or through the knowledge of the Scriptures and its content, with the law of God, guilty and subject to punishment. “There is none righteous” (Rom 3:10). And as all are guilty so all are polluted. They are “wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil.”

“Will God suffer such disobedience and apostasy to go unpunished? By no means; but He is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins, and will punish them by a just judgment temporally and eternally as He has declared Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.”

“Regeneration Of All Things”

Thus the sinner is bound to be defeated. God is self-determinate. He loves himself as the infinitely holy one. In attacking God man meets with self-frustration. He must forever own that God’s law for him was his true good and that his declaration of independence from God spelled his permanent defeat. The mountains and the hills will refuse to annihilate him when he faces the wrath of the Lamb. Everlasting punishment, therefore, follows for man upon his hating instead of loving God.

Yet God’s primary purpose in creating man was that he should love Him. So he sent his own Son into the world that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). And Christ “renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image,

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1 Heidelberg Catechism, Lords Day 3.
that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for His benefits—”

In Christ we “put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.” Eph 4.24, Col 3.10

Moreover, with the renewal of man in Christ goes the “regeneration of all things.” The meek shall inherit the earth. In the new heaven and earth only righteous shall dwell. God maintains himself and his cause among men. Satan and those who love not God and their fellowmen are cast out into outer darkness forever. But those who repent, those whose sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus, shall enter into eternal joy. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt 25:46).

In the interest of further clarification the following remarks are in order.

The orthodox Protestant feels that the question of human survival can not be fairly and squarely put except upon the presupposition of the truth of the framework of Scripture outlined above. Questions that rest upon the assumption of the autonomy of human experience evince the fact that the sinner seeks to “hinder the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). Knowing God, and therefore knowing themselves to be creatures and sinners against God, all men seek to suppress the truth. This is true even of “good” men, of men that are enabled by the Spirit of God to lead “moral” lives.

Their “virtues” must be appreciated. Without them all would be chaos. Even so it is, in the last analysis, in the interest of excusing themselves, when they ask whether God exists and whether there is life after death. Deep down in their hearts all men know that God has made them for eternal joy or for eternal woe; for eternal joy if they worship and serve the Creator, for eternal woe if they serve and worship the creature.

“Survival Cannot Be Proved Or Disproved”

By way of objection, appeal will be made (a) to the facts of experience as discovered by science (b) to the laws of logic and (c) to man’s moral sense. Does the orthodox Christian not know anything about the sciences of physics, biology, psychology and history? Does he not know that these have made belief in the Bible in this traditional form forever impossible for informed and honest men? Does he not know that according to the best of philosophers the ideas of God and immortality are at best postulates of human experience? And does not his own moral sense cry out against the idea that anything any man does in this life can make the difference of eternal weal or woe?

The orthodox Protestant is aware of all this. He freely admits his own sympathy with these objections. Nothing human and nothing sinful is alien to him. But by grace he has learned to serve and worship the Creator through Christ the redeemer. On the authority of Scripture he accepts what he believes. But then, looking around he also sees that those who thus make objection to the Scriptures and its teaching have no foundation on which to stand. Objecting against the “arbitrary” idea of God ultimately determining the destiny of every man, they themselves surround the human person by an environment controlled by chance. Objecting against the “determinism” of the biblical idea of God, they themselves “prove” or “disprove” the survival of human personality by reducing it to impersonal law.

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3 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 32.
Thus mere survival cannot be proved or disproved because proof does not take place in the purely irrational realm of chance. And meaningful survival cannot be proved or disproved because if there is meaning, on this basis, then there is no individual to perceive the meaning. When the individual speaks it is, also, no longer the individual that speaks.

Only on the presupposition that God exists, that the scheme of things presented in Scripture is true, is there any view of fact, of logic and morality that has meaning. That which has been frankly received on authority then appears to be at the same time the only reasonable position to hold. Not holding it implies the destruction even now of human personality. To be able intelligently to deny the God of the Scriptures one must first presuppose him. The same holds true for the ideas of eternal life with God or eternal “life” without God.
Dr. Carl F. H. Henry’s book *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology* is small in size but rich in content. It gives a bird’s eye view of the current theological scene. And, of course, it gives this survey from the evangelical point of view. In particular it wants to discover the opportunity and therewith the responsibility which the present situation affords for the propagation of the gospel.

**Dr. Henry On The Older Liberalism**

Take a look first, says Henry, at the “modernist revision.” Look at Harry Emerson Fosdick as a spokesman for older liberalism. “Instead of depicting Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of all men, Dr. Fosdick tells us simply that Jesus of Nazareth was the first and finest Christian.”¹ But now “the tide of theological thought in our day has turned against this view, and acknowledges once again the uniqueness of the Hebrew-Christian revelation of redemption and the centrality of the cross of Christ.”²

Liberalism “exaggerated God’s immanence, minimized man’s sinfulness, concealed Christ’s supernaturalness and the centrality of his redemptive work; attached utopian expectations to history, ignored the task of evangelism.”³

But Henry’s deepest convictions do not seem to be well expressed in such words as these. After all, if liberalism only exaggerated God’s immanence, then its God and the God of Scripture would still be the same God, and Fosdick’s religion would still be the Christian religion. But Henry agrees with Machen’s contention that Christianity and Liberalism are two mutually exclusive religions. Speaking of Liberalism, Henry says: “Evangelical theology, on the grounds of Scripture, logic, history, and experience, must repudiate it as a perversion of essential Christianity, a conclusion shared even by thinking former liberals.”⁴ Barth and Brunner too “have expressed themselves no less pointedly than did J. Gresham Machen … in delineating the intrinsic differences” between liberalism and Christianity.⁵ “Barth does not hesitate to speak of modernism as a heresy.”

¹ p. 27.
³ p. 29.
⁴ p. 31.
⁵ p. 30.
Problems Now Facing Us

Stopping to think for a moment at this point, we observe that in very brief compass Henry has thrown at least three major problems into our laps.

One problem springs from the fact that some “thinking former liberals” as well as “neo-supernaturalists like Barth and Brunner” are said to agree with evangelicals in thinking that liberalism is heretical because “rooted in speculation instead of in revelation.”

Now, we do not know who these “thinking former liberals” are. Henry does not name them here. But as for Barth and Brunner, at least one thing is certain, namely, that for them the Bible is not the infallible Word of God. For them the Bible is not even a direct revelation of God. Barth, to be sure, says that the Bible is the Word of God. For him the Bible does not merely contain the Word of God. It might therefore seem as though in his basic approach Barth is with the evangelicals rather than with the liberals. But can the approach of a man who says that the Bible is God’s Word “so far as God allows it to be such, so far as God speaks through it” be said to be less speculative than that of the liberals?  

A second problem, related to the one already mentioned, pertains more specifically to the question of standard. Quite clearly Henry wants “a pure biblical theology.” Yet he also says of liberalism that “evangelical theology on the grounds of Scripture, logic, history, and experience must repudiate it as a perversion of essential Christianity.” To what extent are “logic, history, and experience” to be used to test whether a theology is speculative or is a “purely biblical theology?”

In his large work on *Christian and Personal Ethics* this question keeps coming up. In it Henry distinguishes between “revealed ethics” and “speculative ethics.” But we are perplexed when he also says that “biblical theology rejects idle speculation as much as Existentialism does.” But existentialism does not even pretend to get its point of view from Scripture as the Word of God in any sense. It appears then that (a) evangelicals, (b) Barthians, and (c) Existentialists, not to speak of the “thinking former liberals,” are all said to be opposed to a speculative approach in religion.

But does not the reason for the rejection of a speculative approach determine the value of such a rejection? What if the Barthians and the existentialists should reject speculation because of their own ultimate nominalism and irrationalism? Henry himself tells us that the existentialists insist “that individual existence supplies the only starting-point of significant decision.” “The post-Kierkegaardian movements insist that there can be no objective discrimination between ethical claims.” Are evangelicals, with their belief in an infallible, direct revelation of God deposited once for all in the Bible, to take comfort from a position which rejects the rationalistic speculation of classic liberalism but substitutes for it the utterly irrationalist position of existentialism? And is irrationalism, with its assumption that there cannot be a direct revelation of God available

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6 *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 1:1, p. 112.
7 p. 133.
8 *Ibid*.
9 *Idem*., p. 135.
10 *Ibid*.
to man in history and therefore in the Bible, any less speculative than the more rationalist view of the older liberalism?

This leads us to a third problem. Is there any real meaning in mere negations? Do negations signify anything except in terms of affirmations? When the evangelical rejects the speculative approach of classic liberalism he does so in terms of his positive belief in the Bible as the infallible Word of God. But when the existentialist rejects the speculative approach of classic liberalism he does so from his positive belief that reality cannot be expressed in any type of system, whether of “reason” or of “revelation.” When the evangelical speaks of his having faith, he points to the Bible and what it teaches about God and man as its object. When the existentialist speaks of his having faith he points to an indeterminate some sort of something as its object. And the nature of faith is determined by the nature of its object. If I believe in the God who reveals himself directly in Scripture then my faith is one thing. If I believe in a “god” who has not given because he cannot, in view of his indeterminate character, give such a revelation, then my faith is quite another sort of thing.

How then are evangelicals to evaluate the current rejection of the “speculative character” of old modernism? Must we or may we assume at this point that what “the tide of theological thought in our day” means by “the uniqueness of revelation” and by “the centrality of the cross” is basically anything like what the evangelical means by such expressions? Suppose that modern theologians are “caught up in the tide of antimetaphysical and irrational thought”?  

11 This is obviously true of existentialism. And suppose that it is necessary to show that the ethical perspectives of Kierkegaard, Barth, and Brunner are rooted fundamentally in a philosophical perspective rather than in any special divine revelation?” 12 Are evangelicals then to rejoice in the fact that they are surrounded by speculative irrationalism as their fathers were by speculative rationalism?

Henry has better things to suggest than that. He asks us to realize that evangelicalism is based upon “radically different premises” from those of modernism. 13 And we have just heard him say in effect that the same holds true with respect to the relation of evangelicalism to the views of Kierkegaard, Barth, and Brunner. But if this is the case then little comfort can be taken from the rejection of the speculations of old modernism by neo-orthodoxy. For this rejection is then largely based on philosophical speculations. Why should evangelicalism rejoice in the speculations of a largely irrationalist philosophy as over against the speculations of a largely rationalist philosophy? What an irrationalist philosophy means by the “uniqueness” of Christianity can be little more than brute meaningless factuality. And what it means by the “centrality of the cross” can be of little more significance than to say that somehow out of an infinite ocean of Chance organization has sprung.

Our basic response to the analysis of Henry’s book is therefore that, following his leadership in thinking of evangelicalism as built upon one set of premises and in thinking of rationalist or irrationalist modernism as built upon another or opposite set of premises, we shall seek not to be led astray by words. We cannot build a system of theology the way children build block houses. We cannot go to the dictionary and ascertain the mean-

11 *Christian Personal Ethics*, p. 133.
13 *Evangelical Responsibility*, p. 29.
ing of the words “transcendence” and “immanence” in order then to say that pantheism overstresses immanence and deism overstresses transcendence while theism keeps the two in balance. The classic modernism does not merely exaggerate God’s immanence. It had a wrong view of immanence. Its immanence virtually amounts to identity. And neo-orthodoxy does not merely over-emphasize God’s transcendence. It has a wrong view of transcendence. Its idea of transcendence is virtually that of separation.

Evangelicalism is not a nicely balanced mixture of identity and separation. Evangelicalism is not the middle point between non-Christian systems of philosophy as they swing back and forth between extreme rationalism and extreme irrationalism. There is nothing that evangelicals need to warn men against more than to be caught by the pendulum swing of human speculation. If the evangelical rejoices in the movement of the pendulum as it today turns away from rationalism he should realize that this pull away from rationalism is accomplished by the power of its correlative, namely, irrationalism. Again, if the evangelical rejoices in the movement of the pendulum as it turns away from irrationalism he should realize that the pull away from irrationalism is accomplished by the power of its correlative, namely, rationalism. Evangelicals should always listen to Henry when he says that evangelicalism builds upon different premises from those of any form of speculative theology.
Calvin As A Controversialist

Torch and Trumpet
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There is back of all that Calvin wrote a deep joy because of sins forgiven. He knew that through Christ he had been reconciled to God. He therefore looked with deep compassion upon the multitudes of men about him who knew not this reconciliation with God. These multitudes of men had no one to point them to the Christ and to what he wrought for sinners on Calvary’s cross. Instead of leading men to Christ through the Scriptures, the Church of Rome usurped the place of Christ. Forbidding men to rest secure on the promises of Christ, the Church held them suspended over the abyss of hell.

How Calvin rejoiced in the work of Luther through whom Christ and his righteousness had been brought to humble believers! With what care he wrote brief statements of the faith in order that every man might readily possess the central truths of the gospel! A lifetime of labor went into the exegesis of Scripture and the writing of his Institutes in order that ministers might preach Christ from the Word, according to the analogy of faith, for the building up of the people of God in the most holy faith.

Defense

But Calvin realized that the gospel cannot be faithfully preached unless it is also faithfully defended: “For the Lord hath appointed us ministers of his doctrine with this proviso, that we are to be as firm in defending as faithful in delivering it.” ¹ And “when a struggle for life must be endured, few know what it is to defend the cause of Christ.” ²

Calvin knew that Satan was back of all the opposition to the pure preaching and teaching of Christ. And he knew that Satan seeks to accomplish the destruction of the Church of Christ in various ways.

Extreme Opposition

During Calvin’s early days, Francis 1, the king of France, undertook a violent persecution of the Protestants in his land. “The German princes, who had espoused the cause of the Gospel, and whose friendship Francis was then courting, feeling offended with him at his persecution of the Protestants, the excuse offered … was that he had not

¹ Calvin’s Tracts, Edinburgh 1851, Vol. 3, p. 345.
² Idem., p. 242.
punished any but the Anabaptists, who substituted their own spirit for the divine Word, and held all civil magistrates in contempt.”

In this circumstance Calvin raises himself up to his full height and says: “The characteristic of a true sovereign is, to acknowledge that, in the administration of his kingdom, he is a minister of God.” Identifying himself with his people he adds that they suffer persecution because they believe it to be life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent (Jn 17:3).

But back of the king, Calvin knows, is the Apostolic See. The priesthood of Rome has become the adversary of God’s people. “The true religion which is delivered in the Scriptures” matters little to them “provided not a finger is raised against the primacy of the apostolic See and the authority of the holy mother church.”

**Importance Of Scripture**

“If only the Pope will remove himself and no longer stand in the light of the sun! Those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture …”

“Enlightened by him, we no longer believe either on our own judgment or that of others that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured—as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it—that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God.”

It is thus that Calvin seeks to keep open the line of communication between Christ and his Church. That which pretends to be the Church but is not subject to the voice of Christ, speaking in Scripture, acts as a tyrant of God’s people, either directly or indirectly through the civil power. And those who pretend to need no church, even when it speaks on the authority of Christ in his Word, live in darkness. Satan employs Francis the king, the “Holy See,” and men’s own follies in order to keep them from obedience to Christ.

How then are men to be relieved from an evil conscience? Only if from Scripture, as the very mouth of God, they learn that Christ Jesus “died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.” Then they will have the existential knowledge of God through Christ. For then they will no longer listen to the speculations of churchmen about the essence of God apart from his revelation in Christ. Covenant-confrontation with God in Christ then takes the place of the “frigid speculation” of scholastic theologians. With Christ speaking to them in Scripture, men will also realize that “true religion must be conformable to the will of God as its unerring standard.”

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5 Idem., p. 9.
7 *Ibid*.
1 Idem., Prefatory Address, p. 10.
2 Idem., p. 61.
Covenant Communication

To defend the faith means, therefore, for Calvin (a) to keep Satan from introducing static into the instrument through which Christ speaks to his Church and (b) to keep Satan from obstructing the response of faith and obedience that the Church should give to its Head. Covenant communication between Christ and his Church must at all costs be maintained. In his hatred of Christ, Satan is out to destroy this communication. The true servant of God must watch lest all his labor in preaching and teaching should serve the purposes of Satan rather than those of Christ. The true servants of Christ must protect the sheep from themselves, from false shepherds, and from Satan. How else can believers grow in the grace and knowledge of their Savior? And how else can the Church, the people of God, proclaim God’s message to the world?

Throughout his life, Calvin followed the straight-forward course which he set for himself when first he defended the benighted Protestants in France. Always his basic interest was the building up of God’s people in the faith. But always too he kept watch lest, in one way or another, this building process was obstructed by Satan. Only a small fraction of his work in this field can be indicated.

Open Confession

One of Satan’s subtlest schemes was that of keeping believers from openly confessing their faith, “holding it enough to worship Christ in mind, while they gave outward attendance on Popish rites.”

With deepest sympathy Calvin writes to a friend on this subject. He pities his friend for living in “that Egypt in which so many Idols and so much monstrous Idolatry” are daily presented to his eyes. But let him not begin, lest he would commence his ruin, to consider any policy of keeping silent when Christ would be confessed before men.

Whenever any semblance of good or convenience would withdraw us one hair’s breadth from obedience to our heavenly Father, the first thought that ought to present itself for our consideration is, that everything, be it what it may, which has obtained the sanction of a Divine command, thereby becomes so sacred as not only to be beyond dispute, but also beyond deliberation.”

“In short, the Lord calls his followers to confession, and those who decline it must seek another master, since he cannot tolerate dissimulation” (false pretence, hypocrisy—K.). By dissimulation we would serve that cruel master Satan, rather than our merciful Savior who confessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate and was crucified when he did.

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4 Calvin’s Tracts, Vol. 3, p. 360.
5 Idem., p. 365.
6 Idem., p. 366.
Timid Colleagues

The Confession of the Church, Calvin maintained, must not only be of the individual believer, it must also be of the church. When first settled at Geneva he “published a short formula of Christian doctrine, adapted to the church of Geneva, which had just escaped from the pollutions of the Papist.” His “first object was to obtain from the citizens … an open adjuration of the Papacy, and an oath of adherence to the Christian religion and its discipline, as comprehended under a few heads.”

Here then Calvin would lead in a clear-cut public and corporate confession of Christ. But “most of his colleagues, from timidity, keeping aloof from the contest, and some of them (this gave Calvin the greatest uneasiness) even secretly impeding his work” sorely tried Calvin’s courage. His courage was rewarded and Satan was defeated, for “the senate and people of Geneva solemnly declared their adherence to the leading doctrines and discipline of the Christian religion.”

Discipline

Calvin’s whole approach to the Reformation of the church was existential because it was scriptural. The clarity of God’s revelation in Christ through Scripture was basic in all that he undertook. Hence, as noted, his opposition to all speculation. Hence also his insistence that the table of the Lord must not be defiled.

In a running controversy with Rome Calvin therefore rejected its doctrine of the mass as an attack on the finished sacrifice of Christ. And in Geneva Farel and he “openly declared, that they could not duly dispense the Lord’s supper to a people so much at variance among themselves, and so much estranged from all ecclesiastical discipline.”

“Flagrant immoralities” and “old feuds” “between some of the best families” were the occasion of this bold position of Calvin and his colleagues.

For their bold stand Calvin and his colleagues were ordered to leave the city.

Cunning Of The “Mother Church”

Would the church at Geneva be able to continue its brave corporate witness to Christ after Calvin was banished? Wouldn’t it die out for lack of fearless leadership? Satan took no chances. He clothed himself in the cloak of piety in order to lead the Genevan people back into bondage.

Cardinal Sadolet wrote a letter to the Genevan people calling them his “very dear brethren in Christ.” It seemed good, he says “to the Holy Spirit and to me … to write somewhat to you.” He speaks of “their hope in Christ,” and of the “blessing of complete

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7 Calvin’s Tracts, Vol. 1, p. 29.
8 Ibid.
9 Idem., p. 30.
10 Idem., p. 32.
1 Idem., Vol. 1, p. 3 ff.
and perpetual salvation”: which they may have “by faith alone in God and in Jesus Christ.” They must realize that it is this that the Catholic Church has been transmitting to them. “This Church hath regenerated us to God in Christ, hath nourished and confirmed us, instructed us what to think, what to believe, wherein to place our hope, and also taught us by what way we must tend towards heaven.”

Will not his “dearest brethren” then return to mother church forsaking modern novelties? Think of the judgment day. If you have returned to the church you may meet it with confidence, having in her been obedient to the Gospel. But if you have not returned you must meet the judgment day with fear. Suppose you were one of the “authors of dissension.” You would then have to say to the Judge, among other things, that you had cast aside the church, and appealed directly to the sacred blood of Christ in order that you might thereafter be able to do, with greater freedom, whatsoever you wished. With such cunning deception did “Mother Church” seek to woo her wandering children back to herself.

There was at this time, says Beza, no one at Geneva able to answer Sadolet. Will Calvin come to their defense? Have they not cast him out? If Sadolet and Satan had put their trust in this circumstance they did not realize that Christ had prepared for himself in Calvin a faithful shepherd. He informs Sadolet that, “though at present relieved of the charge of the Church of Geneva,” … “God, when he gave it to me in charge … bound me to be faithful to it forever.”

### The Holy Spirit

“I am compelled,” says Calvin, “whether I will or not, to withstand you openly. For then only do pastors edify the Church, when, besides leading docile souls to Christ, placidly, as with the hand, they are also armed to repel the machinations of those who strive to impede the work of God.” When Sadolet appeals to the Spirit of Christ, Calvin asks, “What comes of the Word of the Lord, that clearest of all marks, and which the Lord himself, in pointing out the Church, so often recommends to us? For seeing how dangerous it would be to boast of the Spirit without the Word, he declared that the Church is indeed governed by the Holy Spirit; but in order that that government might not be vague and unstable, he annexed it to the Word.”

### Subjectivism

To appeal to the Church as above the Word is, argues Calvin, to appeal to man instead of to Christ. “We are assailed by two sects, which seem to differ widely from each other. For what similitude is there in appearance between the Pope and the

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2 Idem., p. 9.
3 Idem., p. 10.
4 Idem., p. 18.
5 Idem., p. 27.
6 Idem., p. 29.
7 Idem., p. 35.
Anabaptists? And yet, that you may see that Satan never transforms himself so cunningly, as not in some measure to betray himself, the principal weapon with which they both assail us is the same. For when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency certainly is to sink and bury the Word of God, that they may make room for their own falsehoods. And you, Sadolet, by stumbling on the very threshold, have paid the penalty of that affront which you offered to the Holy Spirit, when you separated him from the Word.”

Ours must be the Church “whose supreme care it is humbly and religiously to venerate the Word of God, and submit to its authority.” A soul “when deprived of the Word of God, is given up unarmed to the devil for destruction.”

Calvin disclaims for himself and for all believers the ability so perfectly to expound the Word of God as not to fall into error. But therefore it is all-important, he maintains, that the judgment of all believers, and therefore of the Church must be subject to the voice of Christ as it speaks in Scripture.” When the believer has diligently sought thus to obey the voice of Christ, then, and then alone, he need not fear the judgment day. Think of one of these believers, says Calvin in his reply to Sadolet, and hear him at that day: “They charged me with two of the worst of crimes—heresy and schism. And the heresy was, that I dared protest against dogmas which they received. But what could I have done? I heard from thy mouth that there was no other light of truth which could direct our souls into the way of life, than that which was kindled by thy Word.”

When the Church had replaced the Word as the final rule of faith “there was none who duly considered that one sacrifice which he offered on the cross, and by which he reconciled us to himself—none who ever dreamed of thinking of his eternal priesthood, and the intercession depending upon it, none who trusted in his righteousness only.” Calvin would protect his flock that they might live and die in the faith of Christ, their righteousness.

The Council Of Trent

But it was not alone the local church of Geneva which Calvin sought to defend against an individual Romanist theologian. At the Council of Trent (1546) the Church of Rome met to do by argument what it had failed to do by persecution. This “Sacred, Ecumenical, and General Council of Trent, lawfully met in the Holy Spirit” was interested in “Extirpating Heresies and Reforming Manners.” The council met under the presidency of the legates of the Holy See.

In replying step by step to the pronouncements of the Council Calvin again makes central the doctrine of Scripture: “We especially repudiate their desire to make certainty

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8 Idem., p. 36.
9 Idem., p. 50.
10 Idem., p. 53.
11 Ibid.
12 Idem., p. 56.
13 Idem., p. 57.
1 Calvin’s Tracts, Vol. 3, p. 61.
of doctrine depend not less on what they call agrapha (unwritten), than on the Scriptures. We must ever adhere to Augustine’s rule, ‘Faith is conceived from the Scriptures.’”

And with the Roman Church’s denial of the sole authority goes its denial of the sole sufficiency of the work of Christ in the salvation of sinners. “Paul claims the whole work for God; they ascribe nothing to him but a little help.”

Moreover, the false teachers dishonor the Holy Spirit as they dishonor the Son. They refuse to make “God the author of a good will.” And faith, Calvin urges, is what it is because of its object, Christ. “Let us remember that the nature of faith is to be estimated from Christ.” With Christ clearly revealed in Scripture and Scripture accepted as the Word of Christ by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, the believer may live and die in the certainty of acceptance of God. Faith “is destroyed as soon as certainty is taken away.”

**Election**

Finally, in order to protect Christ’s little ones from a church that takes their Christ away Calvin traces their salvation back to their election. But this election is in Christ. To appeal to election apart from Christ is, for him, the acme of self-deceptive speculation. He says that “nothing is more pernicious than to inquire into the secret council of God, with a view of thereby obtaining a knowledge of our election …” This is “a whirlpool in which we shall be swallowed up and lost.” But the matter is quite otherwise when we contemplate that “our Heavenly Father holds forth in Christ a mirror of our eternal adoption.” For “no man truly holds what has been given us by Christ save he who feels assured that Christ himself has been given him by the Father, that he may not perish.”

For Calvin, the idea of election is anything but a philosophical notion, to be placed either at the beginning or at the end of a construction of human thought. For Calvin it is Christ, speaking through his Word, who bids men to trace their salvation back to God the Father who chose them in his Son to be his children. The clarity of the revelation of Christ in Scripture, the certainty of faith and election go together. These truths cohere with one another. They are not deduced from one another. They are all taught by Christ, who is the Truth. In suppressing Christ as the Truth the Romanist church took away from God’s people all the riches purchased for them by Christ.

**Truth And Peace**

Was Calvin then only for Truth and not for peace? Far from it. Often enough he acted as mediator between extremists in the Protestant fold. But he knew the truth of Christ’s

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2 *Idem.*, p. 70.
8 Calvin’s many discussions on the Lord’s supper were all of a mediating nature. Cf. *Tracts*, Vol. 2.
gospel is the only bond of peace. 9 We are, therefore, not to “bargain concerning the eternal and immutable Truth of God, how far it is to prevail!” 10 There are those who would contrive “a kind of specious Pacification” which would leave us “a half Christ” “but in such a manner that there is no part of his doctrine which they do not obscure or bespatter with some stain of falsehood. And this artifice for deforming piety they send forth—so help them!—under the name of Reformation.” 11 “Whatever may happen, let it be our resolute determination to listen to no terms of peace, which mingle the figments ofmen with the pure truth of God.” 12

To pacify dissension the advocates of a “specious Pacification” contend “that we are not to stand out pertinaciously on other points, provided the doctrine of free Justification remains safe.” 13 Can we as Protestants not rally round this central point so as to have peace among ourselves and repel our common foe?

Calvin replies that there “is a great difference between merely uttering the one expression—we are justified by faith—and setting forth the whole matter in a distinct explanation.” 14 And the latter must be done if the Church is really to be Reformed. To be sure, catechisms and brief statements of faith must be used for the instruction of God’s people. But such instruction itself must be protected by a setting forth of the full significance of the doctrine of justification by faith, against the errors of Rome. The denial of this doctrine is, in the case of Romanism, a part of its speculative system. In particular it is its false doctrine of man and of God that underlies the Romish falsification of justification by faith.

It is therefore not “from a love of disputation” or because “we will not allow anything to be passed over that does not altogether please us” that we must undertake to show that in Romanism we have the interweaving of the doctrine of justification with a pagan system of thought.

In order “to maintain the doctrine of justification entire” it behooves us “to have a sure definition of faith.” 15

“With regard, then, to the obtaining of Righteousness before God, I say that we must necessarily hold the following viewpoints concerning Faith: —First, that it is an undoubting persuasion, by which we receive the word brought by Prophets and Apostles as truth sent from God. Secondly, that what it properly looks to in the Word of God is the free promises, and especially Christ, their pledge and foundation, so that, resting on the paternal favor of God, we can venture to entertain a confident hope of eternal salvation. Thirdly, that it is not a bare knowledge which flutters in the mind, but that it carries along with it a lively affection, which has it seat in the heart. Fourthly, that this faith does not spring from the perspicacity of the human mind, or the proper movement of the heart, but is the special work of the Holy Spirit, whose it is both to enlighten the mind and impress

9 Idem., The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church, p. 240.
10 Idem., p. 241.
11 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Idem., p. 249.
the heart. Lastly, that this efficacy of the Spirit is not felt by all promiscuously, but by those who are ordained to life.”

“Unless these points are put beyond controversy, though we may ever and anon repeat like parrots that we are justified by faith, we shall never hold the true doctrine of Justification.”

Only a glimpse has been given of Calvin as a controversialist. Of the wider implications of his work for science, art, and philosophy we have not been able to speak at all. But so much has been shown as to enable us to see him as valiant for truth. And for him Christ was the truth. Calvin truly counted all things but loss for the knowledge of Christ. Only if Christ speaks to his people and if his people speak to Christ will the triune God be glorified.

Did Calvin make no mistakes? Are we to engage in hero-worship? Calvin himself confessed his mistakes and grievous faults. Is there not a single wart that we can see on his face? But in his testament, executed shortly before his death, he said: “I also testify and declare, that, in all the contentions and disputations in which I have been engaged with the enemies of the Gospel, I have used no impostures, no wicked and sophistical devices, but have acted candidly and sincerely in defending the truth.” Would that we might be able to speak likewise in our day.

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18 *Calvin’s Tracts*, Vol. 1, p. 87.
When we think back to Calvin and his valiant defense of the faith we can only wish that to some extent we might be filled with as much love for the truth and hatred of sin as he was.

Impartiality

When Calvin was about to die he had a deep consciousness of his lack of faithfulness in the performance of his duty. He had this consciousness all his life. Even so, if there is one mark that sets him off from others it is his faithfulness in witnessing for his Lord. He was faithful particularly in that he was impartial. And this appears especially in one particular trait. He insisted that the will of Christ must be done by himself and his friends as well as by his foes. He did not “protect his own crowd” the way we tend to do. He did not “cover up” for his “cronies.” He was not a “church politician.” He did not “wisely time” his attacks on unrighteousness. He was not “tactful.” He was not a “good psychologist.” He was not afraid that “his building program at Geneva” would suffer if he should speak the truth about the heresies and immoralities of the Genevans. He did not stop speaking the truth lest he should “lose his job” or his reputation as a “nice man.” To high and low, to rich and poor, to friend and foe he made known the will and wish of Christ. He did this “not at some convenient time later” but here and now. Not that he was indifferent to consequences; but he left the consequences to God.

Yes, he was courteous. Yes, he was kind. He observed good form. He addressed the king of France and other authorities in language becoming their dignity and office. Nonetheless he told them that their high authority laid upon them special responsibilities for the advancement of the cause of truth. We could all do with a “shot in the arm” of this sort of thing.

The Subjectivism Of Rome And Barth

Obviously Calvin was thus forthright and impartial in his approach to men because he knew that he could present them with the will of Christ as clearly expressed in the Scripture. Only if we really have in the Scripture the clear expression of the will of Christ
do we have anything of telling significance to say to men at all. The Scripture is Christ speaking to us as the church and to us as men.

If we had something of Calvin’s spirit what would we do today?

We would, first, as Calvin did, classify Roman Catholicism with subjectivism. Fully appreciating the fact that the Roman Church did hold to some extent to objective revelation, Calvin yet took its method to be essentially the same as that of the individualist subjectivism of the Anabaptists. The “Holy See,” in Calvin’s eyes, ultimately represented the wisdom of sinful man against the wisdom of Christ.

Second, we would classify Barthianism, too, with subjectivism. Perhaps our indifference to the Reformation principle of “Scripture alone” is the tell-tale token of the cancer of subjectivism among us today. Yes, we pay lip service to this principle of *Scriptura Sola*. But our “policy” stops our righteous indignation with those who take away the Scripture from the church of God. Barth has taken away the Scriptures from the church of Jesus Christ. He says that God is wholly hidden even when wholly revealed in Christ. And therefore the Scripture is said to be only a witness to the Christ. But if taken as such then the Scripture witnesses to a Christ in whom God’s revelation is also wholly hidden when wholly revealed. In the end the Scriptures and the Christ of Barth witness to the blank.

Yet as Evangelicals and Reformed Christians we keep writing articles and books to show how objective is Barth’s faith. Is it not wonderful, we say, that, over against the subjectivism of Bultmann, Barth insists on the objective foundation of the Christian faith in the Christ-Event? Has he not recently asserted his belief in the resurrection of Christ? He may, we are told, not always agree with us on the exegesis of Scripture; he may even do serious injustice to some doctrines of Scripture, but at least he is our ally against Rome and against modern subjectivism by his theology of the Word.

Yet all this is plainest self-deception. Are we to be deceived by a form of words once more? Shall we be deceived because Barth uses some of our shibboleths? Yes, Barth says that Scripture is the Word of God. He also says that the man Jesus is God. But then he adds that which cancels out and annuls these assertions. He says that in the words of the Bible and in the person of Christ God is wholly hidden. Barth believes in the resurrection of Christ as *Historie*. “How wonderful!” we shout. But Barth adds that the true objectivity of Christ’s resurrection is primarily in *Geschichte*, rather than in *Historie*. Herewith he cancels out every iota of objectivity in Luther’s or Calvin’s sense of the term. But to this we shut our ears. We call Barth an ally against Rome. Yet he is in fact far more subjective than is Rome. We hail Barth as an ally against Bultmann. Yet Barth has dipped his brush in the same pot of subjectivism as has Bultmann. The Christ of Barth, no less than the Christ of Bultmann, is the Christ of speculation rather than the Christ of Scripture.

**Speaking The Truth In Love**

I know where this sort of thing comes from in my own case. I do not like to be alone. I would like to have my little church and my little group to be in with a large and influential movement in the world today. I would like to be well thought of by Barth and the other great theologians of the day. But Calvin, following Paul and Paul following the Christ himself, require me to speak the truth. I must speak the truth in love. I have sinned
grievously in not speaking it in love. I have all too often spoken it in self-love apart from Christ. But I must not cover up this sin by the far greater sin of not speaking the truth at all or clearly through my failure to distinguish it from falsifications of the truth.

**False And True Ecumenicism**

Third, if something more of Calvin’s spirit were in us than there seems to be at present we would, as he did, distinguish between a true and a false ecumenicism.

a. A true ecumenicism seeks to have a fellowship with and, so far as possible, witness to Christ with those who seek to make their thought subject to the Christ as he speaks through his infallible Word.

Calvin was deeply appreciative of the work of Luther, Melanchthon and other Reformers. He sought them out. He took the initiative in trying to come to a common Protestant defense of the faith against the common foe, Romanism. Justification by faith was enough for him. But then it must really be justification by faith in the Christ of the Scriptures. Communion, fellowship, love for fellow-evangelicals, by all means! But all this in the Christ of the Scriptures. A common Protestant witness to the faith, by all means. But not at the expense of truth as it is in Jesus.

b. A false ecumenicism is based on a Christ-ideal projected by men who do not bow to the Christ of the Scriptures.

We find such a false ecumenicism today in the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

In the movement represented by this Council you will find the admirers of Barth’s theology as well as the followers of other leading modern theologians.

The influence of this movement has, in recent years, extended itself to the field of education. *The Christian Scholar* is a magazine published under the auspices of the Commission on Christian Higher Education. This Commission is, in turn, an agency of the National Council.

The Christ presented in *The Christian Scholar* is clearly not the Christ of the Scriptures. To believe in the Scriptures and in the Christ of the Scriptures, in the way Luther or Calvin did, would be, according to *The Christian Scholar*, sectarianism. Even the sectarian principle is, of course, good and useful as a contribution to “larger church,” only it must then be reinterpreted in terms of the “current theological revival.”

The Christ of the “large church” cannot be directly known from Scripture. Accordingly those who represent him on the college campus must not present to men anything like a world and life view in his name. “A Protestant theory of the university demands no creedal commitment, nor a system of theology or Christian world view to be communicated to each generation of students.”

What must our reaction be to this modern ecumenical movement? Calvin showed himself willing to “discuss difference” even with representatives of the Church of Rome. But he was unwilling to join with them in a program of witness-bearing to Christ, in the interest of opposing a common foe, the Turks. Shall we stifle our witness to Christ by

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submerging it in the witness of the “larger church” led by Barth and the other new-modernist theologians? And shall we permit the virus of the “current theological revival” to be injected into the educational institutions of the land without so much as raising a voice of protest?

(1) Calvin knew that his people must openly and fearlessly, regardless of consequences, confess the Christ before men lest he refuse to confess us before the Father and his holy angels. In his day words were swords. He lived constantly in jeopardy of his life. Nothing but the grace of God will enable us to do likewise in our day. He urged those who pleaded the example of Nicodemus to stand up for Christ by day as well as by night.

(2) Calvin had brave but also a number of timid colleagues. In true humility and holy boldness he stirred them up so they might stand with and next to him in the common task of witness-bearing of the church.

(3) Calvin had friends who turned liberty into license, who were Protestants because they hated priests. The Reformer of Geneva insisted that they must be Protestants first of all because they loved Christ and wished to manifest their faith in lives of true obedience to the Lord. Men of every station must submit themselves to the discipline of the gospel.

(4) Calvin was basically the theologian of the Word and of the Holy Spirit. Hence he was opposed (a) to the Church of Rome with its false claim to objective truth, (b) to every form of ecumenicism that would lead back to the subjectivism of the Church of Rome, and (c) to every form of sectarianism which is subjectivism in individualist dress.

May God in our day give us grace openly, unitedly to preach and teach the Christ of the Scripture so that men may not be misled by modern subjectivism even when it appears in the guise of the “new church” and “the theology of the Word,” leading men astray with a false Christ.
Karl Barth’s view of Scripture is not that evangelical Christian creeds. In place of historic or orthodox doctrine of Scripture as being of direct revelation, he would substitute the idea of the Bible as indirect revelation.

The Bible is not, argues Barth, to be at all with the revelation God gives to man. God is wholly hidden as well as wholly revealed in his revelation. Therefore though revelation is historical, we can never say that history or anything historical is directly revelational. Accordingly, the Bible is only the witness to revelation.

On this view, the text of the Bible has the “form” of the world.” As such it consists of fallible words written by fallible men. But God was not ashamed of its fallible words, nor of its scientific and historical errors, and its theological contradictions.

In holding to such a view of Scripture, Barth is not merely making concessions here and there to modern science or to modern higher criticism. The matter goes much deeper than that. For Barth it is quite wrong to take the Scriptures to be infallible in the orthodox sense of the term. It would be to deny, in effect, the sovereign because hidden character of the revelation of God. To hold to verbal or plenary revelation with respect to the Bible is, for Barth, to try to control the revelation of God. The form of the Bible, as we have it, is that of the cosmos, which stands in opposition to God. The nature of faith is determined by the nature of its object. If the object of faith is the direct revelation of God in the Bible, then that faith is itself made into a direct experience of the revelation of God. Yet as true revelation is always hidden, so true faith is also always hidden. For faith is actually participation in revelation.

On Barth’s view, therefore, the orthodox doctrine of Scripture is inherently destructive of the gospel of the saving grace of God to man. The grace of God is made subject to conceptual manipulation on the part of man. Thus it comes to be at the mercy of some who think they possess it to the exclusion of others who do not possess it.

Barth’s rejection of Scripture as the direct revelation of God springs from his idea of revelation. But his idea of revelation is itself his doctrine of Christ. In his *Church Dogmatics* Barth seeks to deal with every teaching of the Bible in Christological fashion. Barth’s rejection of the historic Christian doctrine of Scripture springs, therefore, from his rejection of the historic Christian doctrine of Jesus Christ. To be sure, just as Barth says that the Bible is the Word of God, so he also says that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. But neither the Bible as an historical document nor Jesus of Nazareth as an historical human being can be taken as directly revelational of God. God must be thought of as wholly hidden as well as wholly revealed. That is the essence of Barth’s dialectical relation of God to man. And in order to maintain this doctrine he rejects the idea of the direct revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth as much as he rejects the idea of the direct
revelation of God in the Bible. Everything in the world of history is, as such, neutral, relative and ambiguous.

**Fellowship With Jesus**

Since there is no direct identification of God’s revelation in history we must not look for the sinlessness of Jesus as being a quality of his character that distinguishes him from other men. The sinlessness of Jesus consists in the fact that he desires to live wholly by the grace of God. And it is the sinlessness of Jesus as thus understood that constitutes for Barth the idea of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. This atonement is inherently for all men. All men are inherently, says Barth, fellowmen with Jesus.

Not even in the resurrection of Jesus Christ does Barth see any direct identification of God’s revelation with anything that took place in history. Over against Bultmann, Barth does speak of the objective fact of the resurrection of Christ. But nowhere does he identify that resurrection with a fact of history. All that happened in connection with the resurrection, says Barth, happened but happened not in our time, not in history as a direct revelation of God. It all happened in the “pure present,” in *Geschichte*, not *Historie*. To identify, the resurrection of Christ with a fact of history would, according to Barth, destroy at its central point the entire gospel of the free grace of God. In particular it would destroy the idea of grace as being inherently for all men.

**Is The Resurrection Historical?**

For all men have not heard of the resurrection of Christ as an historical fact. Yet all men are inherently participant in the grace of Christ. To be sure, Barth does not teach universalism in a rationalist and determinist fashion. His dialecticism is always both irrationalist as well as rationalist. Accordingly he speaks of the “open situation of preaching” and of the real significance of faith. For all that, he lays the greatest possible stress on the idea that men cannot successfully resist the grace of God.

It is their relation of acceptance with God through Jesus Christ that constitutes, according to Barth, very being. Man cannot frustrate the eternal decision of God as grace for him. Jesus Christ is the only reprobate. The Bible knows nothing of eternal punishment.

Though they oppose God men are none the less elect in Christ. They are elect in Christ though wholly unaware of it. Their knowledge of God does not at all depend upon their knowledge of anything that took place in history. In fact nothing that takes place in history could be of such importance as to accomplish the salvation of mankind.

Something more needs to be said about Barth’s view of the atonement. In the fourth volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth deals fully with this subject.

Barth tells us that the steps of Christ’s work of humiliation, and the steps of his work of exaltation do not follow one another in history. These states “follow one another” in *Geschichte*. The two states of Christ are therefore always equally present as aspects of the one *Geschichte*. *Geschichte* is the present; Jesus Christ constitutes this *Geschichte*.

Barth realizes that this “dynamic” view spells destruction to the “static” view of the historic Christian position. Barth says he has actualized the incarnation. This is in accord
with his idea that in the incarnation God turns wholly into the opposite of himself. In the incarnation God goes into estrangement from himself and man returns unto God. These two, the humiliation of God and the exaltation of man, are two component parts of one act.

**Sinful Into Divine**

In the act of atonement God takes into union with his own being a creaturely, sinful being. But this assumption of man’s sinful being into divine being is itself a continuation of the *Geschichte* in which God is God.

As *Geschichte* God unwinds himself as world history. As such he operates under the burden and danger of world-history. On the cross God disappears in the night of death. But in this going into death by God the atonement of the world took place. Man’s participation in the being of God is accomplished through God’s participation in the being of man. The man Jesus is originally the man for whom atonement has been made. In justifying the Son, God first of all justifies himself. Other men are also justified.

God’s grace is therefore the original relation of all men toward God. Atonement does not follow but precedes the creation and fall of man. Atonement, not creation, is the original act of God. For in Jesus Christ the being of God is also the being of man.

The wrath of God upon man is therefore never final. In fact, the wrath of God is a form of grace. As the one rejected man, Jesus is and remains the one elected man and in him all the reprobate are elect. The wrath of God finds no object.

Faith in Christ on the part of the believer is, accordingly, participation in God’s own *Geschichte*. This participation is inherently for all men. Calvin had no eye for this. He had two classes of men, elect and reprobate. And for him the reprobate did not share in the saving work of Christ.

Calvin’s doctrine of election and reprobation, according to Barth, must be replaced by a “purified supralapsarianism.” Then we no longer have the idea of one class of men who will suffer eternal separation from God and of another class of men who will forever live in glory with Christ. Reprobation is then penultimate but never ultimate. The very idea of election is election of all men. The very idea of election in Christ is election of all men in Christ. The very idea of grace is that grace is the original relation of God to all men. It was Calvin’s basic fault, according to Barth, that he misconstrued election, election in Christ and therewith the very idea of grace. Calvin therefore did not see that faith in Christ is the original relation of all men to Christ, faith as actual participation in the revelation of God in Christ.

It is clear, therefore, that Barth rejects *in toto* the biblical teaching of the substitutionary death of Christ. Barth takes away the very foundations of this doctrine. He substitutes a process philosophy for the biblical idea that God is the creator of man. Barth rejects the idea of the historic fall of man. Barth rejects the idea that in the crucifixion, as a fact of history, Christ bore the wrath of God for his people. Barth rejects the idea that in his resurrection, as a fact of history, Christ rose for our justification.

Thus the very foundations of historic Christianity, as well as its central facts, are destroyed in Barth’s theology. Barth’s activistic view of Scripture, his dynamic view of Christ, his dove-tailing of all the events of the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Christ into one Event in the realm of *Geschichte*, are all of a piece. They are the
product of an attempted synthesis between Christianity and modern existentialist philosophy. In this synthesis-theology all the teachings of the Bible are maintained—verbally. But they have all received new meanings. And these new meanings are quite to the liking of the natural man. When the natural man is informed that he is the object of God’s grace, that grace is built into his very being, he need not heed the biblical command to repentance. He need not prostrate himself at the foot of the cross. He need not flee the wrath of God to come. Whether he knows it or not he is already in “Christ.”

Surely this is a gospel which is ‘another gospel.’ The Christ of Barth is no more able to save men from sin than is the Christ of Paul Tillich.
Philo Judaeus was a Jew who lived c. 30 B.C.—c. A.D. 45. The five books of Moses were his favorite study. He regarded the Bible, i.e. the Old Testament, “as fully inspired in the sense that God used its authors as passive instruments for communicating his will.”

Living in Alexandria, Philo had also learned to love Greek philosophy. So he set out to harmonize Greek philosophy and the teachings of the Old Testament. How did he do it? He did it by the method of allegory. “He compares the literal sense of Scripture to the shadow which the body casts, finding its authentic, profounder truth in the spiritual meaning which it symbolizes.” Thus, “while adhering strictly to the letter of the law, he can regard it as a divinely authorized veil covering the whole complex of Greek philosophical ideas which he found intellectually congenial.”

The modern form of allegorization may be expressed by the German word *Umdeutung*. We would call it reinterpretation. Modern theologians do not flatly reject the Bible as the Word of God. On the contrary they affirm it to be such. They are Christian theologians as Philo was a Jewish theologian.

At the same time modern theologians are committed to the principles of modern philosophy as Philo was committed to the principles of Greek philosophy. Accordingly modern theologians use *Umdeutung* in the way that Philo used allegorization.

**1—Bultmann**

One of the most obvious forms of *Umdeutung* in our day is that employed by Rudolph Bultmann. His brand-name for it is demythologizing. Only by demythologizing the New Testament, argues Bultmann, can we get its real, its deeper, its spiritual, its authentic message. Orthodox theology, in refusing to demythologize the New Testament, misses the real message of the gospel, Bultmann insists.

**2—Tillich**

A little less obvious form of *Umdeutung* is found in Paul Tillich. His brand-name for it is Symbolism. There is, says Tillich, only one point “at which a non-symbolic assertion about God must be made.” Such an assertion is “that everything we say about God is

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2 Ibid. p. 20.
3 Idem.
symbolic.”  

To get the real, authentic meaning of any particular doctrine it must be symbolically expressed. And then the general rule holds that “every religious symbol negates itself in its literal meaning, but it affirms itself in its self-transcending meaning.”

The “Symbol” of the Fall

Thus the Fall of man must be taken “as a symbol for the human situation universally, not as the story of an event that happened ‘once upon a time.’”  

“It is, so to speak, a ‘half-way demythologization’ of the myth of the Fall.” Only by this half-way demythologization can we see “the transhistorical quality of all events in time and space.”

The “Symbol” of Condemnation

Refusing to take the Fall symbolically orthodox theology also refuses to take the idea of condemnation symbolically. Orthodoxy speaks of “eternal condemnation.” “But this is a theologically untenable combination of words. God alone is eternal,” Tillich writes. Therefore “eternity is the opposite of condemnation.” Thinking symbolically enables us to see that we must think of God as a God of wrath “in preliminary terms” not in “ultimate terms.”

The “Symbol” of Christ

A literalistic orthodoxy, argues Tillich, has no way of properly connecting the Christ and his work to the fall of man. The symbolic approach enables us to see that the finite does not limit God “but belongs to the eternal process of his life.” Thus the symbol of the Christ enables us to understand “what man essentially is.”

By thus “analyzing the differences between historical, legendary, and mythological elements in the Gospel reports, historical research has given systematic theology a tool for dealing with the christological symbols of the Bible.” Only thus can we show the “rationality” of the Christian religion. And this is what the principles of modern thought require of us, according to Tillich.

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5 Idem.
6 Ibid. p. 29.
7 Idem.
8 Ibid. p. 40.
9 Ibid. p. 78.
10 Idem.
11 Ibid. p. 77.
12 Ibid. p. 91.
13 Ibid. p. 93.
14 Ibid. p. 108.
3—Barth

One of the least obvious forms of Umdeutung is that employed by Karl Barth. His brand-name is Geschichte. And that, any first year German student will tell you, means history. When Barth therefore insists against Bultmann that we must believe in the resurrection of Christ as a real Event, as real Geschichte, shall we not rejoice? Does not Geschichte mean history? Does not Barth, therefore, defend the real historicity and with it the true objectivity of the resurrection of Christ?

Unfortunately Barth also uses the word Historie. And that, looking a little puzzled now, the first-year German student will say, also means history.

In what way then do Geschichte and Historie differ for Barth? In general we may say that for Barth Geschichte is the genuine, the real, the objective history primarily back of though also found in Historie, the ordinary events in space and time.

The resurrection of Christ as the great objective and all-illuminating Event on which all Christianity is based, is therefore primarily a matter of Geschichte, in Barth’s view.

Pure Saga

Ministers using the Heidelberg Catechism as a guide for preaching will have to learn a drastically new approach if they would follow Barth.

They must realize that though there is history in the Bible it is always history shot through with Saga and that there is much of Saga in the Bible but always shot through with history. 15

Creation-history is, to begin with, pure Saga (reine Sage) It is only by thinking of it in this fashion, argues Barth, that we can think of creation as real history (Geschichte) It is only thus, says Barth, that we can avoid reducing the actual event-character of creation to the general idea of myth. And only thus can we avoid reducing the actual and unique event-character of creation to the historical relativism of orthodoxy, as he sees it.

The original perfect state of man is, therefore, not to be identified with something that took place at the beginning of history in the ordinary sense. When Christ is said to be the last Adam this means that he is the real and therefore the first Adam. Our participation in the history of Adam has no independent significance; it is rather an indirect witness of the reality of Christ.

Barth’s Christology

Christ is the only real man. All men are men as participants in the manhood of Christ. Accordingly sin is an “impossible possibility.” God’s wrath upon sin is only a particular form of the manifestation of his grace. It is, as with Tillich, a preliminary, a penultimate but never an ultimate judgment. God is his revelation in Christ. Christ is his work of atonement. And atonement is atonement for all men or it is no atonement at all.

To preach rightly on the person and work of Christ is, accordingly, to realize that the relation between God and man is that of Geschichte. Once the minister has this vision he

15 Kirchliche Dogmatik, 3:1 p. 88.
will no longer speak of the steps of humiliation and of exaltation in the life and work of Christ as though they followed one another in time. All that happens between God and man happens, says Barth, in *Geschichte* and therefore in the Pure Presence in which there is no before or after measured by a calendar.

**Reinterpreting Christianity**

In all three cases, that of Bultmann, that of Tillich and that of Barth, Christianity is reinterpreted in terms of the principles of modern thought. These principles require the idea that man is inherently in the process of becoming divine. The Christ of the theology of these men, as of that of many others, expresses this view of reality as process.

It is only by *Umdeutung* that these men can make what is at bottom no more than non-Christian philosophy to appear to be Christian theology. They are as skillful in their work of *Umdeutung* as Philo was in his work of allegorization. And Barth is, apparently, the most skillful workman of all. There are far more people who think that Barth’s theology is basically in line with the historic Christianity of Luther and Calvin than there are that think this of Bultmann or Tillich. Yet, in reality, Barth’s idea of *Geschichte* is, in its effect, just as destructive of the doctrines of grace as is Tillich’s idea of Symbolism or Bultmann’s idea of Myth.

To say this is not to charge Barth any more than the others mentioned with deliberate deceit nor is it, God forbid, to judge their hearts. It is just to say that as allegorization tended to reduce Christian truth to Greek speculation in the early church so *Umdeutung* tends to reduce Christianity to modern speculation. Greek speculation is, moreover, the mother of modern speculation. Both forms of speculation make God in the image of man and project a Christ who merely brings to realization the goodness already inherent in man.

As evangelicals we need no such reinterpretation of the historic Christian faith. The way to understanding lies not down the bypaths of speculation, but along the road of submission to Jesus Christ as he has spoken to us in his Word.
The “American Scholar” of Ralph Waldo Emerson has apparently become the “Christian Scholar” in our day. The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. is, in large measure, responsible for this. Through its Commission on Higher Education this council publishes a quarterly journal entitled *The Christian Scholar*.

In a Supplement Issue (Autumn 1954) we have a “Report of the First Quadrennial Convocation of Christian Colleges” and in a Special Issue (Autumn 1958) we have “Addresses and Reports of the Second Quadrennial Convocation of Christian Colleges.”

Other recent issues of *The Christian Scholar* are devoted to such subjects as “Christian Apologetics and the University,” “The Christian in Philosophy,” and “The Church College and Philosophies of Education.”

The discussion throughout is not limited to “church-related colleges.” All American Protestant institutions are in view. The question therefore pertains to the Christian Scholar teaching in any such institution. How is his Christian commitment related to his work as a scholar?

It is assumed that the religious commitment of the Christian Scholar does and should have a bearing upon his teaching in the field of science or philosophy.

Eugene Carson Blake, as president of the National Council of Churches and Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. writes an article that may give us a first glimpse of the Christian Scholar as he seeks to influence the secular subjects of a college.¹ Blake deplores the fact that “the leading schools in our basic intellectual disciplines are still non-Christian, anti-Christian, or materialistic.”² And this is true because our whole culture is largely materialistic. But the chief blame for this sad state of affairs, says Blake, is to be placed upon the church and her theologians.

Naturally it is the church and the theologians that must provide the leadership in a general reformation.

“But preachers can’t do the job without the scholars, and theological scholars can’t do it without the universities and colleges.”

“Where is the trained economist who, expert in the Old Testament and New, as well as in his own field, will really give us the lead in the Christian reformation of a free economy?”

“Where is the biological scientist who has digested both Genesis and Darwin sufficiently to change the present truce between science and religion into a unity of imaginative insight and truth?”

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“Where is the psychologist who knows both Freud and Augustine well enough to give a real lead to the development of a Christian doctrine of sin that will stand up?”

“Where is the philosopher-theologian who can write a *Summa* or *Institutes* for today?”

“Unless these men arise, the rising vitality of American churches will be no more ultimately important than the Childrens Crusades were against the Moslem Conquerors of the Holy Land.”

The picture drawn by Blake is imposing enough. There is to be a company of Christian Scholars who, as a mighty army, having received their “inspiration from God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and proficient in their respective fields of study, will impregnate the whole of our culture with their vision.

This company of Christian Scholars, with the theologian in the vanguard, must not, if they would really contribute to the “World-Wide Non-Roman Christian strategy,” be hampered by any outmoded “fundamentalist anti-intellectualism” for “the general effect of the verbal and literal interpretation of the Scriptures which is the basis of all fundamentalism was to impugn the human reason and resist the modern empirical mood in favor of a rigid *a priori* straight jacket.”

### The Via Media

The Christian Scholar is, therefore, to walk the middle of the road. At least he must avoid the extremes of mechanism and materialism on the one side and fundamentalist authoritarianism on the other.

A goodly number of Christian Scholars are enthusiastically responding to the clarion call of President Blake. They are asking themselves and one another, when met in convocation, how they may implement the vision of a truly Christian culture.

There is basic agreement between these Christian Scholars that the vision of a Christian culture cannot best be implemented through denominational programs. Such programs are bound to creeds and individualistically conceived theologies. “We live in the Twentieth Century,” cries Robert L. James, Jr., Y.M.C.A. Secretary of the Student Christian Movement in the Middle Atlantic Region. “Priority in the Twentieth Century goes to obedience to [the most relevant statement of] the central truth that the one God is reconciling the whole world to Himself.”

To be sure, the sectarian principle need not be and must not be entirely dropped. “It is quite proper to draw upon the Sect idea in dealing theologically with corporate expressions of the pursuit and organization of truth.” But then this sectarian principle, stressing as it does the “uses of diversity,” must at most supplement the Protestant principle, stressing as it does the Unity of outlook by all that are united in Christ. Says Williams: “It will be entirely appropriate for some new ‘Protestant’ theory of college

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5 *Idem*.
education to develop on American soil as a consequence of the current theological revival and a theological reconception of the Sectarian principle in the realm of academic fellowship.”

The Theological Revival

So far only some broad lines have been drawn. Let us call up Dr. Jones to represent the Christian scholar for us.

Dr. Jones feels himself to be a dedicated man. He has heard lectures on “Christ and Today’s Campus,” and “The Theological Foundations of the Christian College.” He has caught from Robert L. Calhoun’s address on “Christian Vocation off the College Campus” the vision that he must seek “to develop in all fields of instruction, recognition and concern for what we have become accustomed to speak of as Christian perspective.”

To get a hearing for the Christian perspective, Jones knows, he must respect the empirical mood of the scientist. Surely creation is “the first work of God’s grace.”

Above all he must be humble. This implies that he must not claim that his creed or the Bible contain ready-made answers for any human problem. When the Bible speaks of “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ … it intends to say that this knowledge is practical knowledge for the whole man to the end that his life shall be saved. It is not knowledge of nature, although interpretive of nature. It is not merely speculative knowledge, although it engenders and enriches speculation. It is not propositional truth, although it must seek to make affirmations having propositional integrity. It is a knowledge which has an absolute practicality because it illumines man’s central anxiety, lostness and hurt; and because it heals what it reveals.”

Dr. Jones will therefore assure his colleagues and students that “the nature of God believed in requires an openness toward the order of fact…. There are no theological maps of the mind of God from which we can deduce particular facts about our world.” “The Bible speaks of the Creator as a hidden God.” Therefore “all precise interpretations of his will are in principle open to question.”

The Christian scholar, Jones realizes full well, “does not turn us into arrogant masters of the truth of God’s purpose toward his whole creation.” “Faith is not a matter of cognitive assent to true propositions because faith is not primarily cognitive and is not a matter of assent to propositions at all.”

Thus the principle of free inquiry in any field is not to be questioned. For “when I accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior I am not weighing evidence at all: I am accepting him as defining the possibilities of my life.”

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3 Ibid., p. 207.
4 Special Issue, Autumn 1958, p. 306.
5 *Idem*.
7 *Idem*. 
refuse to play by the rules of the intellectual game and even less the right to supply his own rules.”

With the principle of free inquiry thus guaranteed Dr. Jones will yet wish to present the insights of the Christian faith “as a live option in the student’s search for meaning and wholeness.” “Faith (via the propositions implicated in it) can be relevant to the intellectual disciplines taught in the curriculum.”

What a vision this, thinks Jones. A college which “centers on a powerfully informed, vigorously disciplined and committed faculty, consciously operating as a community of the Church, ‘bought with a price.’ Such a dedicated group, having its life in the antiphony of work and worship, could expose the student to a responsible Christian intellectual community of a unique kind.”

The composite portrait of the Christian scholar represented by Dr. Jones must now be regarded from the more positive point of view. If the Christian perspective must, on the one hand, forswear presenting propositional truth and, on the other hand, must be relevant to all the intellectual disciplines of the curriculum, how is this to be done? It must be done by means of Jesus the Christ. In him the answer must be found as to “the relationship of Christian faith to the academic enterprise.” The Christian college “seeks to provide a unifying point of view for its educational program through the Christian faith.”

“The unifying element is founded on the faith that all truth, though partially apprehended and fragmented under the conditions of existence, is not unrelated to the Truth revealed in Jesus Christ. The Christian faith makes the strange assertion that in Jesus Christ believers have encountered the ultimate truth about themselves and their universe.” All disciplines “involve at one point or another concern with the ultimate.”

But in Jesus Christ this encounter is especially illuminating. For the Christian scholar Christ is “the Truth.”

The Truth as it is in Christ may be shown to shed its light far and wide. The “pre-convocation study commission” of 1958 dealing with “the theological foundations of the Christian College” deals with this fact under the heading of “the traditional theological doctrines of creation, fall and redemption.”

The doctrine of creation “might seem to be an obvious example of the worst kind of speculation and dogmatism about a supposed event in the past concerning which we have no scientific knowledge.” But the study commission reassures us that the doctrine of creation “is not a statement about an event in the past, but about the relationship between

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8 Ibid., p. 310.
9 Idem.
10 Idem.
11 Ibid., p. 275.
12 Jerald C. Brauer in Ibid., p. 238.
13 Idem.
14 Ibid., p. 239.
15 David J. Maitland in Ibid., p. 231.
16 Ibid., p. 276.
17 Idem.
God and the universe” and that therefore “it has the most practical consequences in every
day life and in education.”

If then we purge the doctrine of creation from its fundamentalist detritus we are
justified in thinking of creation as providing the scientist as well as all others with a
foundation for “belief in the knowableness, goodness, and purposiveness of the
universe.” The idea of creation also gives us “respect for material things,” “belief in the
centrality of personality,” “belief in man’s humility as well as his dignity” and “belief
that man is a creative creature.” And though the Christian scholar is primarily
interested in “the Protestant principle” he may at this point be encouraged by the
Anglican divine E. L. Mascall who says that “the world, as the Christian conceives it, is
thus an ideal field for the application of the scientific method, with its twin techniques of
observation and experiment.”

As to the doctrine of the Fall it too, of course, does not refer to a date in the past. It
means rather that “somehow” it has “become second nature for man to oppose the will of
God…. Fallen man in rejecting God seeks to make himself or some other creature the
center of meaning and so becomes an idolater, absolutizing the relative.” And “for the
academic man, idolatry usually means that some system of ideas is made absolute…. When it is claimed for instance that Christian theology as a system of ideas has the
answers to all our problems, this also is idolatry and a denial of God.”

“The doctrine of Redemption means that through his relation to God in the context of
a reconciling and reconciled community (the Church), the individual becomes a different
kind of person, a new being, a transformed creature.” And this doctrine of redemption
“has several academic consequences and implications.” These “all center around the
notion of community. The academic community … must ultimately partake of some of
the essential qualities that define the religious fellowship itself. More especially it should
become a community of acceptance and forgiveness and not just a ‘community of
scholars’ in the usual sense.” A “community of acceptance” will “arouse the anxieties,
contradictions, rebellion, and emptiness that are in each one of us.” “The doctrine of
redemption implies that a Christian college should be an independent center of radical
criticism…. For the Christian college the roots of freedom of inquiry lie deep within the
nature of Christian faith itself. All ideas, doctrines, principles, people, and institutions are
criticizable in principle as well as in fact. Doubt and skepticism are part of our Christian
heritage.”

In an “Additional Statement of Section One” we are informed that the report of the
Study Commission on creation, fall and redemption “was not intended to constitute a full
and direct theological justification for the existence of the Christian college.”

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18 Idem.
19 Idem.
21 Ibid., p. 278.
22 Ibid., p. 279.
23 Ibid., p. 280.
24 Ibid., p. 281.
25 Ibid., p. 282.
This report “approached the theological foundations of the Christian college through various theological tensions or polarities.”

“It was recognized that the intellectual life contains an ambiguity in its very essence.” It should be recognized, therefore, that the Christian Answer is not unambiguous. When speaking to his colleagues the Christian scholar in true modesty admits that though “the final truth has already been disclosed in Christ” any college is “in its essence ... committed to the search for truth.” God’s grace “is deeper than all our searching” but “the truth is not in our possession.”

The Christian scholar must therefore maintain that “the Gospel provides the charter of freedom for the Christian college.” But he must always do this with the full recognition of the principle that the truth of this gospel cannot come to man otherwise than in ambiguous form.

“Therefore non-Christian scholars should be able to find a congenial place within the community of the Christian college.” In the setting of the Christian college the doctrine of creation therefore means that “Christians and non-Christians stand on a common human level in their encounters.” “The Christian doctrine of creation provides for a common human relatedness wherein we are literally members one of another regardless of the presence or absence of religious beliefs.”

The section of the convocation of 1958, in thus speaking of creation and fall and redemption “unanimously voted to recommend to the continuing committee of the Protestant Council that a diversified committee of theologians and other educators be appointed to study the theological foundations of the Christian college during the next four years and to report to the next Quadrennial Convocation of Christian Colleges.”

There is indeed an obvious need for clarification so far as the report just reviewed is concerned. If the doctrine of creation provides us with a common “human relatedness wherein we are literally members one of another regardless of the presence or absence of religious beliefs” then what need is there of redemption at all? And if the whole intellectual life “of man contains an ambiguity in its very essence” how is Jesus Christ, granted he is placed in the center of the work of redemption, to be of any help at all? Is there anything unambiguous known of him?

Before asking other similar questions we turn to an article by George H. Williams on “The Christian College Today.” With keen penetration Williams discusses the idea of “Christian learning.” That is, he says, the problem for the Christian scholar. Williams has given much thought to this problem.

Says Williams: “The theological problem of Christian education is the epistemological problem of the relationship between faith and knowledge or between grace and reason.”

26 Idem.
27 Ibid., p. 283.
28 Idem.
29 Idem.
31 Ibid., p. 283.
32 Ibid., p. 193.
33 Cf. his The Theological Idea of the University published by the Commission on Higher Education of the National Council of Churches (New York, 1958).
34 Special Issue, Autumn 1958, p. 195.
We have, says Williams, at least the ingredients of a coherent and rather exciting theology of learning and of the Christian community of scholarship.”

The first and “by far the most important of some five distinguishable university themes is the paradisic motif.” Williams at once ties this in with “the Fall of primal man” and the “divine sapientia which Christian man may possess through baptismal regeneration, sacramental incorporation into the Second Adam, and sustained inspiration from the Holy Spirit in the community of self-discipline and the fellowship of Christian grace or love.” He adds that, “On this view the Christian college campus is, so to speak, a bit of Paradise provisionally restored, a walled garden in which the fruit of knowledge may once again be savored by virtue of the work of Christ in the restoration of the clouded image of the divine in men.”

Second there is the military motif. According to it learning is a kind of spiritual warfare in which man seeks to withstand “the onslaughts of Satan in the form of sloth, carnal temptation, and spiritual pride including heresy.” In terms of this military motif the college is “the training ground of a Christian militia determined to engage in combat with error in the surrounding world.”

Third we have the transferential theme. According to it there is a “community of seekers and custodians of the truth,” a “venerable Republic of Letters … with its own laws and liberties antedating not only the State conferring its charter but even the church which has sponsored it.”

“And this brings us to a fourth motif, namely the christological sanction for the authority of the Christian teacher as prophet.” “On this view the Christian professor, clear about his calling, is a minister or officer in the larger Kingdom of Christ; and for him, in contrast to the pastor or priest, it is precisely his vocation to deal forthrightly with faith in the context of reason, experimentation, hypothesis, and academic dialogue with colleagues who may not share his Christian convictions. In this ministry he should not be trammeled by ecclesiastical ties. It is sufficient, in order to be called and subsequently sustained by the sponsoring denomination of his college, that he profess that for him Christ is the Veritas which makes him free.”

In the fifth place Williams adds the “critical or judicial” theme, “of both the Christian faculty and indeed the university as such in the midst of the world.” “On this view the center of the university is what in Europe is called the aula.” Here “spiritual men judge all things but are themselves judged by none save by Veritas itself which the Christian members of the faculty are also free to interpret as Christ, the Supreme Judge at the Great Assize.”

36 Idem.
37 Idem.
38 Idem.
39 Ibid., p. 197.
40 Idem.
41 Ibid., p. 198.
42 Idem.
43 Ibid., p. 199.
Speaking of these five motifs and their relationship to one another Williams says: “Perhaps the most accessible or obviously meaningful of these five symbols or themes is the christological sanction of the spiritual autonomy of the Christian professor.”

This done, Williams takes up the problem involved in the paradisic motif. Does not this motif on principle separate “human scientia, empirical knowledge from divine revelation?” If, to avoid this, we quietly drop the idea of the Fall “as an historic narrative” and also quietly drop the Fall “as it might affect a Christian doctrine of knowing” is there then any plausibility in the idea of a “unique historic and universally redemptive act of fulfillment of the Law in the utter obedience of Jesus Christ in knowing and willing one thing?” The church must needs “face up to the fact, that the central doctrine of the Church, the Atonement—with all its doctrinal, sacramental and constitutional explication—is ultimately implicated in any casual or accommodative decision he might make about the paradisic motif in the realm of epistemology. Thus the redeeming Church and the Christian college are alike bound up with a conception of Creation and the Fall; and the Christian scholar must study its implications for his activity as scholar in library and laboratory no less than as a dutiful worshipper in the college chapel and as a sponsor of the Christian action group on campus.”

All this is exceedingly helpful in our search for the Christian scholar as the National Council of Churches is sponsoring him. By means of his five motifs Williams covers the whole question of Christian learning in formally admirable fashion. There is no such disjointedness in his article as we found in that of the group of men dealing with the theological foundations of education. In the article by Williams everything is finally related to the christological motif. Williams wants to be “epistemologically more precise” than a loose use of such words as “‘inspiration,’ ‘depth,’ ‘dimension,’ ‘context,’ ‘concern,’ ‘existential’ ” and “‘committed’ ” permits.

Let us ask then whether Williams can offer us the epistemological clarification that we sought earlier.

Williams finds no help in the “Thomist clarity” by which Roman Catholics seek to solve the problem of the relation of revelation and reason. He prefers “a biblical-Augustinian stress on event, on experience, and on the interpenetration of the realms of faith and reason.”

Looking then at “The Protestant Principle and the Call of the Christian Scholar” Williams harks back to Luther’s phrase to the effect that the Christian is simul justus et peccator. He tells us how Dean Douglas Horton in 1958 spoke of “each Protestant Christian in the context of the university as simul certus et dubitator.” Then he adds: “The Christian scholar, I would avow, is simul praescitus et scrutator.” For Christians “are no less seekers than the secular scholars and researchers on the same terms with and using the same methods as those of our colleagues who avow no such allegiance as we

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44 Idem.
45 Idem.
46 Ibid., p. 200.
47 Idem.
48 Idem.
49 Ibid., p. 201.
50 Ibid., p. 204.
own.” 51 “Assured of a Truth which is at the same time God’s love” the Christian scholar is “confident in the prosecution of his researches and tentative constructions amid the fragmentation, the incompleteness, and even the ambiguities of the ever expanding realms of knowledge. The Christian researcher is secure under the aegis of him who is the Truth that sets men ever free.” 52

We shall therefore require no creedal commitment of the Christian scholars. We shall only insist “that the whole of their scientia be seen within the epic and the cosmic perspective of that biblical vision of the truth which begins with the created order, searches for meaning in human history, declares that it was precisely in a man—a person like ourselves, not in some impersonal force—that God was most clearly manifest in his reconciliatory action within creation, a perspective finally that holds ever before them the question of that invisible goal towards which we hasten.” 53

Here, then, in the portrait of the Christian scholar presented by Williams the problem of learning is finally focussed in Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is placed at the center of the “cosmic perspective.” Surely then the Christian scholar will not work with his non-Christian colleagues on the basis of creation “regardless of the presence or absence of religious beliefs” as was claimed by others at the 1958 Convocation.

If there are any points that need clarification in the views of Williams this clarification must be made at the central point of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Williams is, of course, well aware of the fact that the basic problem remaining on his view is that of the relation of the biblical and the secular interpretations of history. But he would solve this problem by “the principle of luminous particularity, of the concretion of event within event like some chemically complex organic compound.” 54 “The view that I have of biblical and ecclesiastical history from Eden to the ecumenical movement (to take one ‘theological’ discipline as an example of the work of the scholar simul praescitus et scrutator) is that it must be studied and expounded as any other branch of history but that there yet remains a difference in emphasis and perspective.” 55 “Biblical-ecclesiastical history and general history might be compared respectively to organic and inorganic chemistry. The basic elements are the same in both, but the clusterings of historical events which are picked up for scrutiny and analysis by the ecclesiastical or biblical historian are often much more complex than those scrutinized in secular history. Think of the Synoptic narratives with the frail debris of earlier texts within texts, faint echoes within echoes of oral tradition. Moreover the operation of the Spirit as a fluid or force or catalyst in binding and loosing these increasingly complex historical compounds may be taken as a legitimate hypothesis of inquiry into the history of the biblical and ecclesiastical community, the more so for the reason that they, whose life and work are being chronicled and interpreted, themselves took seriously the operation of the Spirit.” 56

Here then we have a well-integrated position that the Christian scholar may present to his colleagues and students. In presenting this position to his non-Christian colleagues he

51 Idem.
52 Ibid., pp. 204f.
53 Ibid., p. 205.
54 Ibid., p. 206.
55 Idem.
56 Ibid., pp. 206f.
does not antagonize them by challenging their scientific mood or method. If these colleagues should fear the paradisic and martial motifs inherent in Williams’ position they may rest at ease because the sectarian principle coming to expression in these motifs has been reconceived “as a consequence of the current theological revival.”  

The principle of the “luminous particularity of person and event and chosen people” is nowise meant to deny the “universality and the mysterious depths of history and especially the history of the ongoing community of faith.” There is here no primitive form of supranaturalism which “transforms the infinity of God into a finiteness which is merely an extension of the categories of finitude.”

Williams is simply arguing that “biblical and ecclesiastical history have a notable contribution to make to the curriculum of both the denominational college and the mixed university,” because in its principle of luminous particularity it brings light from above into history and nature that would otherwise be dark.

Looking at the efforts of Williams as a whole it must be said that we need still further epistemological precision than even he has given us. And we need it at the point of primary importance to him, namely his principle of luminous particularity.

How, we would ask, can this principle be of any help in our effort to find integration for intellectual inquiry?

In the first place it seems not to have been made plain to us how we may identify Jesus Christ. He is said to be “a man—a person like ourselves.” And he is found in history. But this, by itself, can scarcely be of help and comfort to us. We must also know how he differs from us. Williams says that “God was most clearly manifest in his reconciliatory action” in Jesus. Did he reveal himself as such? And if he is *ver e Deus* as well as *ver e homo* could he speak of God the Father and of himself as God the son without transforming by his very speech the infinity of God into the finitude of man? Is it not unreconstructed sectarianism to think of anything like an unambiguous revelation of the sovereign God to man? That is to say, does not the very idea of particularity, on Williams’ basis, require for its correlative the idea of the wholly hidden God? If it does, then what becomes of “the luminous” character of the particularity that we have in Jesus?

In other words, there is no evidence to show that Williams has been able, any more than any one else, to identify Jesus Christ as the one through whom the Christian scholar can find meaning in the subjects that require his analysis.

Secondly we ask what meaning is there to the idea of atonement on the basis of Williams’ theology? Granted that his Jesus Christ could be identified, how could he atone for the sins of other men? Surely not because of the fact of his manhood as such.

As a human person he would himself need atonement. And if he is also divine, then he is this in a way unbeknown to himself.

Then, too, why should men need atonement? If they are men at all, they are, on Williams’ view, already participant in the atoning work of God. With the dropping of the

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57 Ibid., p. 207.
58 Idem.
60 Williams in *op. cit.*, p. 207.
61 Ibid., p. 205.
62 Idem.
idea of unambiguous revelation even in Jesus Christ, how could men ever become sinners? There was no known revelation of God’s love which men might set aside.

In short, there is nothing to indicate that for Williams Jesus Christ is anything more than a symbol for Veritas. His position constitutes no basic advance over that of Plato. In Plato’s philosophy men are men to the extent that they participate in God. To the extent that men are “fallen” they are such by virtue of the very idea of temporal plurality and particularity. The luminousness of particular men or of any particular man lies in the assumed principle of man’s participation in God.

There is, accordingly, no room for a Mediator in any unique sense in Plato’s thought. Every man, if he is a man at all, needs mediation. On the other hand every man, if he is a man, needs no mediation. Plato was unable to bring his two worlds, the world of Ideas and the world of sense, into any intelligible relation to one another.

There is no evidence to indicate that Williams has been more successful than Plato. In accordance with the fashion of modern thought, Williams works with an abstract and ultimate impersonal principle of rationality or truth and an equally ultimate and abstract principle of particularity. These are kept in balance with one another as limiting concepts of one another. It is assumed that the rational principle is somehow to be victorious over the irrational principle.

In this Christianity of the limiting concept Jesus Christ is made the symbol of the victory of the rational principle over the irrational principle in reality. But all symbols point beyond themselves for their meaning. How should the Christ-symbol be an exception to this? If he were, how could we know anything of this fact?

When Williams finally makes his appeal to the Holy Spirit as a “fluid or force or catalyst” as a help in binding and loosing the “complex historical compounds” surrounding the appearance of Jesus Christ, not even this brings any relief. The fact that the apostles “took seriously the operation of the Spirit” can scarcely be ascertained, inasmuch as in the Synoptic gospels we have only “faint echoes within echoes of oral tradition.” 63 And even if the gospel records were all that any modern historian could wish they were, there would still be the fact that they could only point to a symbol that in turn must point beyond itself. The Holy Spirit is, for Williams, no less a limiting concept than is Jesus Christ.

But we turn now to an article by William H. Poteat on “The Incarnate Word and the Language of Culture.” 64 This article deals specifically and minutely with the question we found unanswered by Williams. In an earlier article 65 Poteat sought to define some central issues facing the Christian scholar. In this article he spoke of First Order Decisions and Second Order Decisions. “I will call the ultimate evaluations (and the symbols in which they are expressed, which constitute the foci of communal existence), First Order Decisions.” 66 Then the “day to day evaluations … of the community which has its existence through this relatively stable set of First Order Decisions” are to be called Second Order Decisions. 67 Now a “Christian College is a community of persons

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63 Ibid., p. 207.
64 The Christian Scholar, June 1956.
66 Ibid., p. 12.
67 Idem.
united in the rational pursuit of truth in which the dominant and effective First Order Decisions ultimately express the affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord; where therefore Second Order Decisions and evaluations ultimately express a response to Him.” Or more specifically “a Christian college is a community where men understand themselves, the world and their own corporate life in terms of the First Order symbols of Incarnation, Creation, Fall and Eschatology.”

“Jesus Christ as bearer of Grace and Truth is the ultimate concern of the Christian College.”

In his second article Poteat now asks the particular question how first order and second order decisions must be related. And this enterprise he calls a third order activity. We are therefore to engage in a piece of “category-analysis.” And “‘the Owl of Minerva only begins her flight when it is already dark.’” Now Poteat already told us in the earlier article that there must be “a tolerable order among the First and a real logical and psychological relation between the Second and the First; else the Community is destroyed.”

Now then we are to start from our central first order decision to the effect that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. When the apostle Paul went out to the Athenians with this motto “he accepted a challenge that Christianity had to accept, if it was to persist in believing that Jesus Christ was truly the Son and that His Father was truly maker of Heaven and earth. Any separation of the Father and the Son would have meant both that Jesus Christ was not related to the whole of human existence and that the one God had not been incarnate in that existence.”

For an understanding of Poteat’s position it is well to start from the problem of the relation of Christian to Greek thought. Poteat argues that “apart from Christianity, God is known only as ‘not this … not that …’” But Christianity with its motto that Christ is Lord of all posits a positive relation between God and man. “What is important for us is that Christianity seems to be making a quite positive claim that there is a paradigmatic experience” that is “crucially related” to our ordinary experience.

Our ordinary experience is of two sorts. We live first in “the realm of necessity.” We also live in “the realm of freedom where, for example, I use the personal pronoun, ‘I’, ‘about’ myself.” Now “the Christian claims that certain very peculiar sorts of ‘events’ … occur in the realm of freedom.” These peculiar events, the Christian speaks of as occurring about himself. And he refers to them in such terms as redemption, reconciliation and atonement. “At the same time the Christian seems to be claiming that the realm of freedom and what ‘happens’ there is crucially connected with the realm of necessity and what has happened there; that redemption is inextricably related to the Jesus of history; that to be reconciled with God in the ‘confrontation’ with Jesus of

68 Ibid., p. 17.
69 The Christian Scholar, June 1956, p. 113.
70 Ibid., p. 114.
71 Ibid., p. 114.
73 Ibid., p. 120.
74 Ibid., p. 119.
75 Idem.
Nazareth ‘causes’ us—in a peculiar, if not embarrassing, sense of the word ‘cause’—to confess Him as the Christ.”

We need therefore “a third kind of ‘event,’ namely, the Christ, who is neither just the Jesus of history, nor yet just the ‘effects’ in my life ‘wrought’ in the realm of freedom, but a new reality who is known neither as an object in the familiar sense, nor as an ‘object’ in the unfamiliar sense, i.e. in the way I am aware of my own I. He is neither an object to me as is the historical Jesus; nor is he just the same kind of thing as my experience of my own subjectivity.”

It is in this way, says Poteat, that the Christian claims that “God is positively known ‘within’ what we now call the historical world; or more properly, His paradigmatic activity is encountered in relation to a paradigmatic experience within the historical world [in the familiar sense] thus constituting a new ‘history’—the history of the Church—where the Christ is known and, in any case, where the symbol ‘Christ’ is used.”

It is in this manner too that Poteat hopes to attain a “practical unification of the language of profane history and the language of ‘processes’ in the realm of freedom.” But Poteat does not flatter himself by thinking that he has explained anything by this elaborate construction. He speaks of the “obscurity surrounding the ambiguous, if not the equivocal use of words like ‘experience’ and phrases like ‘practical unification’ that are to be held to account.” Let us therefore follow him as he seeks to “back-track” himself. If there is any way by which he can show us how we can make Christ Lord of all and yet hold on both to the method of Greek philosophy and to the post-Kantian bifurcation between the “realm of freedom” and the “realm of necessity,” we are anxious to learn of it.

Poteat seeks to devise a way by which we can intelligently speak of a “third kind of event,” the Christ-event. Biblical religion, he says, does not follow the method of Eastern mysticism. “Biblical religions … are informed by the basic analogy of the I-Thou relation.”

“The practical experience of personal reconciliation with God in confrontation with the Jesus of History is the experience of the Christ!” How then do I “exhibit” the “logical peculiarity” of my Christ-experience?

To do so I may begin with event in the ordinary or first sense. This event happens in the “realm of necessity.” Then I take event in the second sense. This event happens in the “realm of freedom.” I am familiar both with event in “sense-one” and event in “sense-two.” Now how about event in “sense-three”?

I have no difficulty with the “Jesus of history.” He fits into events in sense-one. Nor do I have any difficulty with my “practical experience of personal reconciliation with God.” Here I refer to an event in sense-two. For “when I myself have this experience in relation to the symbol (The Christ), I am not dealing with anything symbolic, but directly know the very reality symbolized! If I may put it awkwardly, I am no longer referring to

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76 Idem.
77 Idem.
78 Ibid., pp. 119 f.
79 Ibid., p. 120.
80 Idem.
81 Ibid., p. 121.
82 Ibid., p. 122.
a reality; I am in that reality. As it is said: ‘If any man be in Christ …’ Yet I am in that reality not as a molecule of water is in the ocean, but as a person is in a personal relation.”

When now I say that “the Jesus of history,” an event in sense-one, and my “experience of reconciliation,” an event in sense-two, are causally related, I use the word cause in a “peculiar, if not embarrassing, sense. Perhaps it would be easier if we said ‘internally’ rather than ‘causally’ related.”

I really need to use a different language for each of the two series of events just mentioned. But I employ a “practical unification of languages” when I refer to Jesus Christ. “And I said the unification of the two different languages gave rise to the symbol ‘Christ’ and to a whole new language including the word ‘history”—now, however, understood as heilsgeschichte—and phrases like ‘Holy Spirit,’ ‘the Body of Christ,’ ‘the real presence,’ etc. Here, on this level, the use of the word ‘event’ in the expression, ‘Christ-event,’ would be called event in sense-three.”

How is this unification of languages accomplished? To reduce both languages to one “meta-language” may at once be rejected as “hopelessly misguided.” Shall we then arrange the languages hierarchically? To do so would leave “unsolved the problem of how the strata are related to each other.” Perhaps then the “‘ordinary-language philosophers’ are moved by a sound instinct at this point. They seem to sense that a clue to this puzzle is to be found in practice in the actual using of language.” We must think of the connection of the two languages as “not logical but practical. They have their sole connection in the experience and activity of the user of language, who ‘stands behind’ every particular language which he may find it expedient to use about the world, even the meta-language which he uses about other languages.”

This “user of language” is “the presupposition of all language use.” He therefore “systematically eludes languages and meta-languages ad infinitum.”

Thus by theory we can “as a matter of principle” never “locate the connection” between the various languages used by the language-user. I must speak of the unification of languages, but this unification must always be practical rather than theoretical. “This irreconcilable difference between specation and action … stands between every other view of reality and Christianity.” “For Christianity believes that God is Act par excellence; and is known paradigmatically in the intersection of ‘event-in-sense-one’ and ‘event-in-sense-two,’ which gives rise to the ‘event-in-sense-three’ through and within that very act whereby I am myself. The divine is crucially known in Christ—that experience which includes the practical unification of components which are susceptible of description in terms of ‘Jesus of history language’ and ‘reconciliation-redemption...”

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83 Idem.
84 Ibid., p. 123.
85 Idem.
86 Idem.
87 Idem.
88 Ibid., p. 124.
89 Idem.
90 Ibid., pp. 124 f.
language.’ And Christ is known only in my own existence in my enactment of myself, since for me to exist is not to be a possibility, but to act!”⁹¹

When Poteat has reached this conclusion he adds: “At this point, there is an inclination, no doubt, to suspect that all the sleight-of-language ingenuity of the foregoing adds up to a practical denial of the Incarnation, that the Jesus Christ here set forth is not only patently not the Christ of the Creeds and classical formulations, but that he is not real in any sense!” ⁹²

It is from this point in Poteat’s discussion that our criticism of his position may take its beginning. Poteat has indeed concentrated his best efforts upon the question of central importance for the Christian scholar. Who is the Christ that must be presented as the central unifying force in the educational curriculum? How is he Lord of all man’s knowledge and action? Where is he to be found?

If Williams dealt with the same problem when he expounded the principle of “luminous particularity of person and event and chosen people.” From Williams we learned that our view of creation, sin and redemption ultimately depends upon our view of Christ. But he was unable to identify the Christ for us.

Is Poteat any more able to do this than was Williams? The answer must be in the negative. His event-in-sense-three, that is, his Christ-event, has no ascertainable identity. To have any identity the Christ must be self-identifying. How else is he the Lord of all? The Christ of Poteat is identified by the human self, that has first identified itself without the relation of subjection of itself to its Christ. It is the human subject, wholly self-sufficient as Act, that is for Poteat the presupposition of all predication, even about Christ.

The Christ that proceeds from such a starting-point is, in the nature of the case, nothing more than a projection of the autonomous self. The voice that comes from this Christ to man is indeed from above, but only in the manner in which President Eisenhower’s own voice returned to him from a satellite shot into space from the earth.

Again our human “experience of reconciliation” could, on this basis, be no more than reconciliation with our own ideal, projected selves.

And how could sin be anything more than self-estrangement? If no Christ can be identified, then no God can be identified. Then too, with Poteat, the Holy Spirit is no more than a projection. There is then no rebellion in man against the love and law of the triune God. Hence the idea of forgiveness of sin and the experience of reconciliation has no reference to any of the three persons of the trinity.

But we must go on from the event-in-sense-three, the Christ-event, to the event-in-sense-two, the experience of the self. Poteat makes the uncritical assumption that the human I as operating in the “realm of freedom” can be taken as the presupposition of all human language or predication. We may call this Poteat’s religious assumption. He gives such meaning and content to his Christ as he can in terms of the ultimacy of the “free” human subject.

Yet this “free” human subject, this event-in-sense-two, has as little content as has his event-in-sense-three, his Christ-event. Poteat’s series of events-in-sense-two stands in a purely negative relation to his series of events-in-sense-one.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 125.
⁹² Idem.
If his “free” self were to stand in any positive relation to the series of events-in-sense-one, to the “realm of necessity,” then the self would lose its freedom and therewith itself. On the other hand, if any of the events in the “realm of necessity” were to have any positive bearing on the series of events in-sense-two, then the “realm of freedom” would be swallowed up by the “realm of necessity.” Poteat admits that he has to use the word cause in a “peculiar” sense, if he is to speak of any relation between the events in the realm of freedom and the events in the realm of necessity. It is plain that he should have said that he had to use the word cause in a wholly unintelligible way.

It would appear then that Poteat’s appeal to the “practical unification of language,” is a measure of desperation. The appeal to a “practical” unification is made in the face of admitted inability to show any logical connection between the language-strata employed. This is a candid admission of irrationalism as to the relation between his three series of events. But the irrationalism involved in his position can be seen for what it is, only if it is noted that Poteat cannot show how logic has anything at all to do with any of his language-strata or with any of his three series of events.

Is the “realm of necessity,” as Poteat presents it, something with which logic has anything to do? Not so that such can be shown to be the case. Logic is an activity of the human subject, the “I.” This “I” has, in Poteat’s scheme, as it has in that of Kant, been able to find itself only by its separation from the “realm of necessity.” The “freedom” of the “I” and the necessity of “the realm of necessity” depend upon their entire separation from one another.

This remains true even when the self is made the foundation of the categories of the realm of necessity. For the self as foundation for the category of causality turns, on this basis, into the transcendental self. That is to say, the self is itself depersonalized when positively related to the “realm of necessity.”

Still further this depersonalized transcendental self or unity of apperception only “contributes” the form of the necessity of the realm of necessity. This form requires as its correlative the idea of pure matter which, because pure is meaningless particularity or Chance. Thus the “realm of necessity” is, so far as there is real activity or power in it, nothing but Chance. We have reached the principle of a pure non-luminous particularity. It is the entirely single, and therefore entirely meaningless, thing.

Yet the free self of the series of events-in-sense-two is, in Poteat’s thought, to be defined by way of contrast to the realm of necessity. In Greek philosophy this was not yet the case. In Plato the individual human self was not a fully real self. It was real only by participation in the eternal and changeless, trans-personal Reality. In Aristotle only God, again not as existing in a numerical oneness but as a specific or generic unity, was at the opposite end of pure potentiality.

But with Kant the free personality of man has taken over the function of God in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. This personality is, therefore, no longer defined in terms of its participation in a form or universal above him. He has to be himself the source of universality in his environment. This “free” personality, with no law-giver above him, must take the place of law-giver to what is beneath him. And yet he can no more sustain a positive relation to what is beneath him than the god of either Plato or Aristotle sustained a positive relation to non-being or pure potentiality.

When therefore Poteat posits the free self, the human I, as the ultimate presupposition of predication he has crossed the Rubicon. From that point on it is impossible for him to
do anything but reduce the Christ of Christianity to a subordinate position. His Christ is said to be “Lord of all.” In reality he is the servant of would-be-autonomous man. Is not this man the “creator of all?” He alone gives “order” to all. In the intellectual realm he does this without so much as a reference to his own Christ. Those of the study section at the 1958 convocation who said that in the realm of “creation” the Christian and the non-Christians can cooperate without any reference to their religious differences were not wrong. That is they were not wrong because, together with Poteat, they assumed that the realm of necessity is not subject to their Christ. He is not really the creator of the “realm of creation” at all. And God the Father is in none but a Pickwickian sense the providential controller of this realm.

If therefore the “free” man, as Poteat portrays him, introduces his Christ at all, this Christ comes too late to be of any use as an intellectual unifying center of any college curriculum.

Even in the ethical or practical realm this Christ is only an intellectual construct of the self that has done without him in the realm of necessity. The perspicuity or clarity of God’s revelation to man through Christ was a cardinal doctrine of the Reformation. It was stoutly maintained by the Reformers, against Romanism. And why? Roman Catholic thinking had done what Poteat says all Christian thinking must do, namely made peace with the method of Greek philosophy.

The Greek philosophers had given an interpretation of God’s revelation to man in the cosmos. Poteat assumes, as Romanism assumed, that this interpretation of revelation on the part of Greek philosophy is virtually identical with God’s manifestation itself. He even asserts that the entire problem of the relation of Christianity to culture consists in relating the essentially true interpretation of “nature” given by the Greeks to the “revelation” of Christ in Scripture. He asks rhetorically how there can be any disharmony between the revelation of God the Father and God the Son. The Reformers would reply that there is no difference there but that for this very reason there cannot but be an unreconcilable difference between the misinterpretation of “nature” given by sinful man and the revelation of God in Christ. Poteat’s own statement to the effect that without Christ men can think of only such a God as has a negative relation to the world shows that the approach of Greek philosophy cannot be harmonized with the approach of Christianity.

How can it be the essence of the problem of Christianity and culture to show that we can and must believe both in God the Father, who is only an abstract formal principle and is negatively related to a cosmos, and in God the Son, who is positively related to the world as redeemer? It is only if we thus make a false contrast between the Father and the Son that we must have a “practical” rather than a theoretical unification of languages. Where, on this basis, is there any field for the operation of logic at all except in formal exercise?

For the moment, however, we are concerned to indicate that to sharply set off the realm of freedom from that of necessity, is not to make “room for faith.” Poteat is denying Protestant Christians their right to believe in Christ. By means of his own Christ he is taking away the Christ of Luther, of Calvin and of Protestant creeds. The Christ of Luther and Calvin can be unmistakably identified in history.

The “realm of necessity” is itself a manifestation of the fact that by him all things were created and still consist. The Christ of Luther and Calvin spoke plainly to men
through the Old Testament. This Christ revealed the Father as, from the beginning, positively related to men in creation, and in the covenant. It was against this Christ that men knew they had sinned. It was this Christ who came into the world to redeem men from sin. He sent his Spirit to direct his servants, the Apostles, into the clear interpretation of the meaning of his work. Hence the Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture.

None of the Reformers claimed that their own interpretation of the Scriptures was infallible. Nor did they rest their idea of the clarity of the revelation of God in Christ upon their own ability to fathom the mystery of God’s being. On the contrary their doctrine of the clarity of revelation rested upon their conviction that God need not be known comprehensively to be known truly. Their belief was that human knowledge is analogical to God’s knowledge. But they based their idea of analogical knowledge upon the biblical idea that man is created in the image of God.

This they did over against Romanism. The Romanist doctrine of analogical knowledge is based primarily upon the Aristotelian doctrine of analogical being. On this view the distinction between God, the Creator, and man the creature is not basic to and determinative of the idea of human knowledge. For in being as analogical, there is, on the one hand, the idea of pure non-being and equivocism and, on the other hand, the idea of pure being and univocism. Equivocism and univocism are then “somehow” made correlative to one another.

On this basis there could be no clear and direct revelation of God to man. On this basis the intellectual enterprise of man is inherently ambiguous. And, accordingly, man is not to blame if he does not find the truth. The fault lies with “God,” and with “Christ,” who did not clearly reveal himself.

It is this idea of an imbedded, irremovable ambiguity in the relation between God and man that Poteat, following Kant, now assumes in his analysis of the “Christ-event.” And it is rationalism of the purest water to say in effect that God in Christ cannot clearly manifest or reveal himself in “the realm of necessity.” It is not to insist on true humility on the part of man to say that he cannot conceptually know anything of God. Nor is it evidence of true humility to insist, by a priori reasoning, that we can know no Christ against whom we have sinned and by whom we have been redeemed. To say or assume such positions is to assume that man can, in effect, make a universal negative proposition about all reality, including both God and man. It is, at the same time, to place the human self in a vacuum. It is to isolate the conscience of man from his cultural task. So far from furnishing a foundation for ethics it takes away such a foundation entirely.

We cannot but think, therefore, that the whole problematics as formulated by Poteat when he seeks to relate event-in-sense-one to event-in-sense-two and then introduces event-in-sense-three as a unifying factor is basically destructive both of Christianity and of culture. Poteat cannot show how any event in any of his series is intelligibly related to any other event in the same series. Nor can he show how any event in one series can be intelligently related to any event in another series. His “Jesus of history” is simply enmeshed in the “realm of necessity,” the necessity of which is relieved only by an admixture of Chance. If such a “realm of necessity” were knowable, then the event “Jesus of history” would be in no sense different from all other events of the same series. His Christ, as experienced in the “realm of freedom” could not be known by mediation through “the realm of necessity.” If the “apostles at first hand” had an experience of this
Christ, this could mean nothing to us. The apostolic kerygma would be at most echoed back to themselves. But even the “apostles at first hand” could experience no other Christ than one of their own projection. If he were more than that, he would be wholly unknown to them. Thus the “practical unification of languages” turns into an irrationally founded, religious rejection of the Christ of the Reformation.

It may now be observed that our criticism of the position of Poteat is basically the same as our criticism of the position of Williams. We appreciate the epistemological precision that both of these men have sought to give to the “Christ” so uncritically accepted by so many of their colleagues. But not even the greatest epistemological precision can lead to a basically intelligible view of Christ, so long as this Christ is himself interpreted in terms of man who is first assumed to be intelligible to himself without this Christ. A Christ who is not the presupposition of the intelligibility of both the “realm of freedom” and the “realm of necessity” and of their relationship to one another, cannot serve as a principle of unification of what is taught in the college curriculum.

Let us go back also to the members of the study section of the convocation of 1958. When they, and others writing in The Christian Scholar, assure us that in presenting Christ to their colleagues as a unifying center for all branches of learning, they make no pretense of speaking in terms of an infallible authority, and are by all means ready to be scientific in their approach to their own Christ as well as to all other subjects, we would invite them to look into the foundations of their religious assumption.

What is this foundation? It is the autonomy of the “free” man, and his intelligibility to himself without any Christ who is really Lord of all. And with this goes the idea of a universe that is not created and providentially controlled in any sense that the Reformers would recognize as biblical. That is to say the Christ of the modern theological revival, as well as the Christ of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, must operate in a vacuum.

Assuming this ultimate irrationalism, the modern theologians, at the same time, assume an ultimate rationalism. By their logic they legislate for reality in such a way that only such a God and such a Christ is allowed to exist as cannot reveal his identity in any unambiguous way to men. All this is done on the ultimate and infallible authority of the “free” man, who himself, if he had enough internal coherence to say I, operates in a vacuum of pure Chance.

It thus appears that the Christian Scholar of the modern ecumenical movement is really only the American Scholar of Emerson in a new guise and in a new role. The Christian Scholar of the ecumenical movement has a religious mission. His task is to influence and control American educational institutions in the name of his Christ. But it is not the Christ of the Scriptures he presents. It is a Christ that is a projection of his own would-be self-consciousness. And herein lies his basic similarity to the American Scholar of Emerson.

Says Emerson: “The one thing in the world of value is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive.” 93 “Free should the scholar be—free and

brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, ‘without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution.’ ” 94

Here is the starting-point of the American Scholar. Here, too is the starting-point of the Christian Scholar. Emerson said that if a single man will “plant himself indomitably on his instincts and there abide, the huge world will come round to him.” 95 The Christian Scholar is more “humble.” He would have the whole world of education come around to his Christ not to himself. But his Christ is his own projection, nothing more. His Christ is the transcendental self, that is all.

Said Emerson, “Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul…. Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates Himself in man and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of His world. He said, in this jubilee of emotion, ‘I am divine. Through me, God acts; through me, speaks.’ ” 96 The Christian Scholar would also make his Christ say: “Through me, God acts; through me God speaks.” But in the case of the Christian Scholar no less than in that of the American it would be the soul acting and speaking through its constructed Christ for its own redemption, i.e., activation.

Said Emerson, “Yourself a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost, cast behind you all conformity and acquaint men at first hand with Deity.” 97 The Christian Scholar projects the Holy Ghost as he projects the Christ, reducing both to the same limiting concept, in order thus to acquaint men with deity proceeding from himself.

In one point the Christian Scholar seems to stand at the opposite pole to that of the American Scholar. “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist” said Emerson. 98 Now the Christian Scholar, under the aegis of the ecumenical movement by all means wants conformity. He wants all men to organize their whole life and culture by means of his projected Christ-ideal.

But the difference at this point is not basic. The nonconformist today is the believer in the Christ of Luther and Calvin. He is the unreconstructed Sectarian. He continues to hold that man’s whole self must be interpreted by Christ and in terms of Christ as Christ identifies himself by his Spirit in his Word. And Emerson would be as anxious to keep this sort of non-conformity at arm’s length as the ecumenical movement is anxious to keep him out of the “larger church” and the educational institutions of the land.

Said Emerson, “Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion.” Only “that Which shows God in me fortifies me.” 99 “Men have come to speak of the revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead.” 100 For the Christian Scholar, too, only a Christ who is not mediated by

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94 Ibid., p. 164.
95 Ibid., p. 170.
96 “Divinity School Address,” in Blau: op. cit., p. 593.
97 Ibid., p. 602.
100 Ibid., p. 596.
the events of the realm of necessity, a Christ who elicits from man what is already within him, is a Christ that lives.

Said Emerson, “There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same.” “Of the works of this mind history is the record.” 101 It is this universal nature which gives worth to particular men and things. “All laws derive hence their ultimate reason; all express more or less distinctly some command of this supreme, illimitable essence.” 102 In the light of the “two facts, namely, that the mind is One, and that nature is its correlative, history is to be read and written.” 103

There is nothing in this Faustian rhapsody on the self-sufficient, all-controlling free man to which the Christian Scholar cannot subscribe if only the name of Christ is given to the “Soul” of Emerson. To be sure the Christian Scholar has more respect for science than Emerson did. But this greater respect for science makes his Christ all the more a romantic figure. If science is said to deal with the realm of causation, and ethics, or religion, is said to deal with the realm of freedom, there can be no logical reason for a hierarchy of values with the Christ-event at the top. But then “with consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do.” “Trust your emotion.” If you do, then you can still construct your pyramid and pin up a Christ who symbolizes “spiritual values” as “somehow” above the realm of science.

Commitment to such a Christ will not disqualify the Christian Scholar in the eyes of his secular colleagues. When he speaks to them of the “central fact of Revelation” the Christian scholar does not mean to withdraw his Christ from examination in terms that he and his non-Christian have in common. “Clearly our Christian faith,” says Sir Walter Moberly, “should be the unifying principle and the supreme motive force of all our main activities.” 104 But “if we are to attempt any creative job, we must be ‘in form’... A more or less dutiful conformity with an inherited pattern of thinking, living and worshipping is a wretchedly inadequate equipment for any initiative in ‘Christianizing’ the university.” 105 Rather than come forward with his unreconstructed sectarian views the Christian Scholar seeks gradually to induce respect for “Christian values.” Christian Scholars “should ascertain what is the greatest measure of ‘christianization’ which will commend itself to non-Christian colleagues without whose genuine and unforced co-operation nothing can rightly be done.” 106

Surely a Christ conceived as the apex of a romantically conceived hierarchy of “Christian values” built by the free man of Immanuel Kant will offend no one. And he will be of no help. On the contrary, when built into the educational institutions of the land as well as preached in the ecumenical church he will deceive men into thinking that they are at peace with God while in reality the Wrath of God still rests upon them.

102 Ibid., pp. 5f.  
103 Ibid., p. 38.  
104 The Crisis in the University, London, 1949, p. 308.  
105 Ibid., p. 309.  
106 Ibid., p. 310.
The only Christ who can save man, man and his culture, is the Christ who is the Christ of Luther and of Calvin, the Christ by whom all things consist, the Christ who identified himself in this world and saved men from the wrath to come.
John J. De Waard Dies Suddenly

The Rev. John J. de Waard died in his sleep in Ottawa, Ontario early on Sunday morning, August 9, 1959. He had gone there by bus on Saturday from his home in Rochester, N.Y.

He lodged at the home of a member of the Christian Reformed Church, and it was reported that he seemed to be quite well when he retired. His body was discovered in bed. Funeral services were held in the Memorial Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Rochester, from whose pastorate he had retired at the first of the present year. The Rev. George J. Willis, pastor of Memorial Church, was in charge of the service. Participating were the Rev. John P. Galbraith, representing the missions committees of the denomination, on which Mr. de Waard had served; the Rev. John P. Celland, representing the Board of trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary, of which board Mr. de Waard was vice-president; and the Rev. Professor C. Van Til, who represented the faculty of the Seminary.

Mr. de Waard, a charter minister of the Presbyterian Church of America (now the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), had served two pastorates during the thirty-three years of his ministry: first in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin and then in Rochester, New York. His death came in his sixty-seventh year. He is survived by his wife and six children, the youngest of whom is sixteen.

The following address was given at the funeral service by his close personal friend, Dr. C. Van Til.

Address At The Funeral

Dear Friends:

Will you listen with me to the words of the Apostle Paul: “For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tm 1:12).

When we are called upon to commit unto the Lord the remains of one of his servants the last thing that we would do is to engage in eulogies. Only Jesus Christ, as Saviour, deserves to be praised. He only could say without qualification: Be ye followers of me. Paul, the Apostle, also said: “Be ye followers of me,” but he added “as I also am of Christ.”

And in the letter to Timothy from which my text is taken Paul urges his “son Timothy” to “endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”
Paul had preached Jesus Christ and him crucified, Jesus and the resurrection. Together with the other apostles he had cast in his lot with Jesus Christ who said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

**Opposition**

But when Paul preached opposition broke loose; opposition of Jews, opposition of Gentiles and back of all the opposition of men, the opposition of Satan.

Did Paul never fear? Oh yes, he did. But a heavenly vision was given him when he was about to enter Corinth and in this vision the Lord said to him: “Be not afraid, Paul, but speak for I have much people in this city.” And now as he, toward the end of his days, looks over his life and labors he speaks with joy and exultation, not of the past as past, but of the past with its fruit for the future.

All his life and all his labors Paul has committed to the name of Jesus. Was the world about to swallow up his effort at the end of his life as the desert swallows up a bucket of water? Not at all! His Saviour had told his followers: Fear not, I have overcome the world. It is the will of the Father to give unto you the kingdom. “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn 14:1–3).

Is Paul afraid that Jesus cannot fulfill these promises to his followers? No, he is not. “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day,” he writes.

On what did such positive assurance rest? Was there any partial fulfillment of these promises of Christ? Could he prove by reason beyond the word of Christ himself that all power had been given unto him? No, in the last analysis, Paul listened to the words of the self-identifying Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life. Yes, Paul did show that the wisdom of the world has been made foolishness with God. But he did even this because he knew that if Christ could not be believed then no man can be believed and life is vain.

With what unspeakable joy, as well as dread, did Paul, that great servant of Christ, hear the voice of that Christ: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Since that heavenly vision appeared to him one holy passion filled his frame. From persecuting the followers of Jesus he turned into the most intrepid preacher of that Name by which alone men must be saved.

When, therefore, he said: “Be ye followers of me, as also I am of Christ” he wanted his followers to be as certain as was he that in committing themselves and their labors unto him they would receive their reward by his grace.

**Following Paul Who Followed Christ**

In similar fashion and, as it were afar off, I can hear our departed brother speak. Scarcely can we hear him say, even in imagination: “Be ye followers of me,” except he would add loudly, “even as I am of Christ.” But his life and labors, he did commit unto
Christ and with simple trust and childlike faith he clung to Jesus as his Saviour from sin. The joy of simple faith was his portion.

**To Cedar Grove**

With high determination to know nothing save Christ and him crucified he entered the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America at Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, in 1925. But in that church modernism had gained the ascendancy. A false Christ was being proclaimed in the church. The biblical truth that Jesus Christ as Son of God and Son of Man died on the cross to bear the wrath of God for his own, that they might not be cast into outer darkness but come into his blessed presence, was laughed out of court in this church. And those who protested against the preaching of this false Christ were being silenced in the church. De Waard was one of those who protested and whose voice of protest the authorities in the church sought to silence. The Presbytery of Wisconsin voted to dissolve the pastoral relation between himself and his church. Then when he entered a complaint to the Presbytery about this matter his complaint was summarily dismissed.\(^1\)

**The Whole Church**

But de Waard’s fight in the Presbytery of Wisconsin was a part of a struggle in the church as a whole. A “momentous decision” had to be made at the Syracuse General Assembly in 1936.

At that Assembly the “great betrayal” took place. Here the authority of the church was placed above the authority of the Bible. And “the most important non-judicial case” at this Assembly “was that of the Rev. J. J. de Waard of Cedar Grove, whose pastoral relations had been dissolved by the Presbytery of Milwaukee when he refused to promise not to criticize the official boards.”\(^2\) Said Dr. J. Gresham Machen: “We look with sadness upon the tragedy of a church that has dethroned the Lord Jesus Christ as its King and head.”\(^3\)

But Christ must be preached. Said Mr. de Waard: “In Cedar Grove, where it has been my privilege to preach the gospel for eleven years, we have moved to higher ground.”\(^4\) Yes, the new church in Cedar Grove did stand on higher ground physically. But what the preacher primarily meant was that he was now free to preach the grand particularities of the gospel, the whole counsel of God. With deep sympathy and sadness of heart for those who stayed behind, misguided by church authorities as they were, did the pastor join his flock in the building of the church “on higher ground” both physically and spiritually.

“The task before us is more difficult than that which the Lord has thus far donethrough

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1. This was in November 1935; *The Presbyterian Guardian* December 2, 1935.
2. From a report of the Assembly by H. McAllister Griffiths; see *The Presbyterian Guardian* June 22, 1936.
us. We will have to educate our people in the specific doctrines of the Reformed Faith, beginning with our children."

By the “grand particularities of the gospel” he meant the truth of God’s sovereign grace and power to bring unto salvation those whom he would.

The new church at Cedar Grove was dedicated on January 20, 1937. The new program of preaching and teaching the Christ of the gospel was, again, a part of the program of the church as a whole.

**The Presbyterian Church Of America**

Was it all to be easy now? Was there to be no further struggle? Far from it. At the third General Assembly of the new church, The Presbyterian Church of America, it appeared most clearly that some in the church had not the courage of their conviction with respect to the preaching of the whole counsel of God. There were those who wished to place the “American Presbyterian tradition” on a par with Scripture. And Dr. Machen had on January 1, 1937, passed to his home above.

It was then that others, not blind followers of Machen, but those who with him wanted to preach the Christ of the Word alone, took the lead and under their guidance the church went forward.

As moderator of that 1937 Assembly, de Waard was among the foremost of these men. On his return homeward he compared the work of the church to that of the children of Israel as they were confronted with the Red Sea on their passageway to the promised land. “Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.” “To go forward is the Lord’s command but there are different excuses for disobedience to it.”

“We have come a long way. It would not be surprising if some were tempted now to discontinue moving forward. We are not yet in the land of rest and will not be for a long time.”

**Cedar Grove And Rochester**

It was with that resolute purpose to go forward that our brother spent the rest of his days in the two con-gregations that he served—Cedar Grove and Rochester Memorial.

**Westminster Seminary**

For many years de Waard was the vice-president of the board of trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary. The importance of training young men for the ministry he ever kept in view. In his student days at Princeton Seminary he greatly admired Dr. Geerhardus Vos as well as others of the teachers there. Students must learn many things, but above all else they must learn to find the meaning of Scripture as the

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6 *Presbyterian Guardian* September 1937.
infallible Word of God. With that ideal in mind he worked for the development of Westminster Seminary since 1929.

**Retirement**

At the conclusion of 1958 he retired from the active ministry. But he was still going forward. He was reading widely in the theological literature of the day to observe the movement not only of the churchmachine of the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. but to observe the apostasy of the church of Christ as a whole. And with what joy did he study the new works of sound preachers of the faith in order that with the help of them he might the better preach here and there to the people of God.

**The Last And First Sabbath**

It was Saturday night, August 8, 1959, that he went to sleep in Ottawa in order on the next day once again to preach the gospel. But this time he went to sleep in Jesus. He went to “higher ground.” He went forward because by his Saviour he was taken upward into his presence. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rv 14:13).

Not to be idle, not merely to gaze upon the face of the Saviour but to serve and worship that Saviour without the terrible burden of sin and all its entail, that is his portion now.

You who remain behind of his family quite properly mourn your loss. But your mourning will be turned to joy if you follow him as he followed Christ. You may cherish the memory of your departed one, yes, as a simple-minded, kind-hearted and ever-patient husband and father. How he loved and enjoyed his family! But you will remember him, beyond that, as one whose life was absorbed in the service of his Saviour. And what holds for the family and the relatives holds for the congregations of Cedar Grove and the Memorial Church. It holds for all of us who have known the departed in any capacity. Let us follow him as he followed his Saviour and Lord lest his life and labor testify against us in the day of days.

I heard him preach the funeral service of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Smither, in Plainfield, Michigan. He was deeply moved. With all his natural eloquence he pleaded with her children and grandchildren to follow her, in following her faith in her Saviour.

In the solemn silence of death now and therefore with far greater eloquence and with deeper concern does he plead with you, not to follow him as a model man, but to follow him in his faith in Jesus, and in his service of that Name through which alone we must be saved. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

**Recent Preaching**

In a sermon on Jeremiah 3:12–13 which he had with him in Ottawa where he was to have preached on that last Sunday he speaks of the day when “no man shall ask for the
ark of the covenant of the Lord.” Jeremiah saw the vision of the city of God which John on lonely Patmos Isle also saw. In the new Jerusalem which John the Apostle saw, there was no temple. For the Lord God is the temple thereof. Wrote John de Waard: “No one will ask about the church, all will be church. And in those days all will be the word of God, without any element of human speculation of the natural wisdom of man.” Then will be fulfilled the words of the Lord: “I will not look upon you in anger.”

My God how wonderful thou art
Thy majesty how bright!
How beautiful thy mercy-seat
In depths of burning light.

He also had a sermon dated for August 9, 1959, on 1 Thess. 3:13. It begins as follows: “I am talking to you, beloved congregation, in our Lord Jesus Christ, about the coming of our Lord and Saviour: the Christian longs for the day. Often he sings quietly to himself:

My knowledge of that life is small
The eyes of faith grows dim.
But ‘tis enough that Christ knows all
And I shall be like Him.”

“Faith anticipates this coming. Faith makes it possible to celebrate this event and so prepares us for the day when with him, we shall be seen in great glory.” In conclusion he used these words: “You live in a world which seems to be mad and is going to its own destruction. Russia, America, but let me cease naming the troubles that beset us. In the midst of death we live by the hope of his coming. God grant you all a solid faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the victory …”

In Williamsport, Ontario (June 7, 1959) he preached on Phil. 3:20. The topic of his sermon was Expectation. And the last section of it dealt with: Expectation and our Glorification. Christ is coming. He will “change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil 3:21). We cannot understand. In speaking of our glorified body we must mostly speak in negative terms. Our glorified bodies will not be under the power of sin, etc. But though we do not understand we do believe because Christ has told us that our bodies shall be like his glorified body.”

In his last sermons de Waard was obviously preoccupied with the idea of Christ as the deeply sympathizing Saviour who spoke of the many mansions in his Father’s house where he wants his followers to be in his presence. But it was ever that same Christ, the self-identifying Christ, that was the subject of his preaching. In the face of the opposition of a false church, at the deathbed of the saints of God, as the great expectation of his life he spoke of that Christ, without whom is everlasting death, and with whom is everlasting joy.

May we be followers of him in his signal Christian virtues, the chief of which may well have been that he never complained to his friends about injustice done to him by those who opposed his program of work. But may we, above all, be followers of him as he was of Christ.

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