

**Introduction to Christian Theology – Lecture Notes**  
**Module 1; Session I**  
**WHAT? HOW? WHY?**

**Introductory Comments:**

***The Nature Of Theological Introduction***

- The way a theologian introduces theology says much about his own theological convictions. The numbers of available introductions are legion. We have chosen two, Erickson & McGrath, because they represent two opposite ends of the Evangelical perspective.

***Method and Prolegomena in Theology***

- Some introduction courses end up being one big excursus on “how to” or “how should” one do theology. This course, on the contrary, will attempt to answer three questions through an outline of the basic content of theology. The prolegomena or methodological rules of theology are given by the text of Scripture itself, i.e. scriptures determine the content and method of theology. Thus Karl Barth, for instance, starts his 13 volume *Dogmatics* with the biblical witness to God’s self-revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (CD I\1, 239f)

***The Cruciality of the First 3 Steps-- Theology is, in one sense, all about asking the right questions.***

- **What?** A definition of theology- (*Theos-God* + *logos-word*= Theology or words about God), but this can be too simplistic, as you will soon see.
- **How?** Some of the ways others have proceeded in the past, and are proceeding in the present inform how we do theology today, like it or not. So one of the questions is, “how has it been done?”
- **Why?** We will be making some suggestions as to why theology is important throughout this course. You will not be surprised to discover that I consider it to be extremely important. You will also discover in your reading that others think it either unimportant, or important for differing reasons.

**I. What is Theology? Historical and Contemporary Answers**

***a) Early Patristic answers***

- ‘Patristic’ comes from the Latin term, *Pater*, meaning Father: Most date this period from the 1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century. Others date it up to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

**Tertullian (c.160-c.220)**

- **Tertullian** was a North African theologian and controversialist writing from 196-212. Very little is known of him except from his writings. He was born in Carthage, North Africa. Originally he was a pagan who converted to Christianity in his 30's. He is often regarded as the *Father of Latin theology* – he wrote almost all of his treatises in Latin.
- Tertullian was strongly opposed to making Christian theology dependent on sources other than the Bible. He is famous for the question, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, what has philosophy to do with theology?” He wrote extensively, but only 30 writings survive. There were many more. He wrote works on Philosophy, Dogmatics, Apologetics, Didactic (catechetical and moral teachings) and miscellaneous topics. His views on women would not go over well today.
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- *For Tertullian, theology is characterized by its desire to be faithful to the Scriptures. In doing so, however, Tertullian would use Latin words like persona, substantia, trinitas, etc. that would become stock language for Western theology. He was Orthodox for the most part, though his works were later condemned because, among other things, of his involvement with the Montanists. –an early sect who claimed to be prophets, and to know when and where Christ would return.*
- In his *Contra Praxeas*, he introduces for the first time in theology the idea of the Trinity as a way of interpreting Father, Son and Holy Spirit as they appear in the Scriptures. But in doing so, Tertullian's desire was to remain faithful to the text. Theology is equal to the faithful interpretation of the Scriptures from Tertullian.

#### **Origen of Alexandria (c.185-c.254)**

- Without question the greatest Christian thinker between Paul and Augustine. He was prodigious in his output – kind of like the Karl Barth of the Early Church. But he is better known for his exegetical works. He was an extremely creative thinker with immense influence that even exerted itself on the formation of the Nicene Creed. His Theology was debated for almost a century in what is known historically as the “Origenist controversy”. As a guide to the spiritual life he was second to none “On Prayer” and “An Exhortation to Martyrdom” are still read today as classics of faith and devotion.
- Origen called himself a “man of the church” and was deeply committed to the Apostolic “*Rule of Faith*”. However, his penchant for Platonism often got him into trouble and he was later anathematized because of his supposed Christological *subordinationism*. That is, the Son is a lesser (created?) person in relation to the eternal Father. He tended to reflect the Gnostic concept of the “hierarchy of being”.
- In his *De Principe*, his chief theological work and regarded by some as the first “systematic theology”, **Origen saw the task of theology as answering the questions left open by the apostles. Theology is the discipline of answering to the fullest extent the questions left unanswered, but alluded to in the Canon, which was known in his day as the ‘rule of faith’.** Therefore, *Origen saw theology as necessarily a speculative task because of the middle and neo-Platonist culture in which he had to work. Christianity would have been hopelessly irrelevant if it did not engage the questions of the culture and employ the answers offered in Platonism. So theology is the discipline of offering*

*speculative answers, which extend what we already know in the Canon, to what we should know based on the questions it leaves open.* Unfortunately, Origen left himself open to the Platonizing of the Christian faith, which, as we shall see later has had tremendous consequences for Christian Theology in the West.

## **b) Medieval Answers – Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas (354-1275 A. D.)**

### **Augustine (354-430 A. D.)**

- Augustine was probably the greatest theologian that the church has ever known since Paul. He was the great summarizer of the *Patristic* era, and the great motivator of the *Reformed, Protestant* era. He remains a figure of intense interest in the fields of History, Philosophy and Theology. He shaped Christian doctrine in every major category, but especially the doctrines of ***Revelation, God, Trinity, Sin, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology***.
- Augustine was born in 354 in *Thagaste*, North Africa and spent most of his life in North Africa. Monica, his mother, played an important part in his life. She was a Christian, but his father was and remained a pagan. He considered Christianity intellectually unacceptable as a youth, thus his interest in Philosophy. His *Confessions*, must reading for any Christian, certainly us males, reveal a wild and misspent youth. They remain a Classic of faith and devotion, as well as a great study in human interiority. He studied Rhetoric in Carthage and became a Manichean because it promised a faith that was reasonable – ***Manicheanism*** was a form of Platonist Gnosticism that emphasized the value of the intellect, rhetoric and philosophy, and especially the writings of the ***Neo-Platonist, Plotinus***.
- Augustine taught Rhetoric at Carthage and Rome, where ***Ambrose***, one of the great orators of Christianity, was a preacher. He was deeply influenced by St. Ambrose' preaching and intellectual skill and this no doubt played a part in his conversion to Christianity. He was baptized into Christianity in 387, ordained to the priesthood in 391, became bishop of Hippo in 395 where he ministered, wrote, preached and debated until his death. His writings are vast and thankfully, they have been passed down faithfully through the centuries, unlike Origen, whose writings were lost by various means.
- ***For Augustine, theology was not only a faithful interpretation of the Scriptures, or a speculative task within culture, but also a faithful re-presentation of the Apostolic Tradition. It included apologetics, instruction, preaching, and systematic investigation of the church's doctrine.***
- His apologetic theology is best seen in his works against the Donatist and the Pelagians. His speculative work is best seen in his *City of God* and his systematic investigation of theology can be seen in his *Trinity*, perhaps his most important work. Here the issue of

the relationship between *reason and revelation* finds its first full treatment as a *problem* for Christian theology.

### **Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)**

- **Anselm of Canterbury** was born in Aosta, North Italy; He was trained at Bee, Normandy and later appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He was converted late in life and took monastic vows but later joined the ranks of the secular (non-cloistered) clergy. Anselm was deeply influenced by Augustine, whom he absorbed through every pore.
- *Anselm saw theology as the church's response to situation requiring theological clarity. . He also made famous Augustine's statement that theology is "faith seeking understanding" – "fides quaerens intellectum". Anselm also thought that the task of theology must include reason as a secondary source for its propositions. Still his insistence is that theology is faith, seeking understanding.*
- Almost all of Anselm's theological works are occasional. Anselm's most famous works were *The Proslogion*, a work on the ontological argument for the existence of God, and *Cur Deus Homo* – which tries to answer the question "Why God became man?" The latter work is where he lays out his famous and influential theory of the atonement known as the "*satisfaction theory*".

### **Thomas Aquinas (1231-1274)**

- Thomas Aquinas is unanimously considered to be the greatest of the Medieval Theologians. He was born near Naples 1224/5, of Italian nobility. He was a Benedictine oblate at *Monte Cassino* until 1239. Aquinas studied the Arts at Naples University where he encountered Aristotle. After a fight with his family over joining the Dominican Order, which lasted over a year, and during which his brothers locked him up, he finally joined the Dominican order against his family's wishes. They eventually sent him to study Philosophy and Theology in Cologne, where he consumed the vast majority of the western intellectual tradition in a space of 1-½ years, (1252-54.). His teaching career began in 1256 and continued until death. He wrote some 9 million words, the greatest collection of which is contained in the *Summa Theologica*, (unfinished it was 1,500,000 words). This becomes the standard reference work for theology for hundreds of years.
- *For Aquinas, theology was the orderly synthesis and systematic exposition of the church's cardinal doctrines In the light of revelation and creation, through reason. His own theology followed the question/answer method and saw as its task the inclusion of all other branches of learning including philosophy. Theology is, according to Aquinas, the "queen of the Sciences" and therefore the ultimate source for meaning. As a result the Summa was a synthesis of Scripture, Theology, Philosophy, Law and Nature. Theology is not just the study of the revelation contained in Scripture, but the study of everything, with the starting point being God. "Theology is also the sacred teaching itself, still active, in the mode of developing and explicating the seeds in the soil of human reason". It attempts, in terms somewhat different than Anselm, a "faith seeking understanding". But with the accent on understanding, so that reason threatens to usurp faith as the starting point.*

### **c) Reformation Answers to "What is Theology?"**

### **Martin Luther (1483-1546) - famous for his “95 Theses”, which he published in 1517**

- The Reformation, beginning with Martin Luther, saw a move back to the *Patristic* emphasis on the explication and interpretation of Scripture as the substance of theology. *Luther clearly joins hands with Augustine in stating that theology was “faith seeking understanding”, but the emphasis is just as clearly on the text of Scripture as the point of departure for this faith.* In his first lectures on the Psalms he writes, “*No one arrives at a knowledge of the Godhead if he is not first brought low and has descended to a knowledge of himself. For here he also arrives at a knowledge of God.*”
- Thus, Luther distances himself from the *Mediaeval Scholastic* approach to theology, which conceived of it as the task of confirming the *reasonableness of revelation*. *Here he shares Calvin’s view in that theology is the coming to knowledge of God and self, only in the reverse order. Justification by faith is the point of departure; the rest is worked out from there.* But the knowledge of God and the self are to be gained only in mutual relation. It is not true that for Luther, knowledge of self would first be necessary in order to arrive at the knowledge of God. *The starting point, and only authority for this knowledge is the Scripture, where God has revealed Himself and ourselves.* Luther’s theology is centered on a close reading of Scripture and oriented towards the preaching and pastoral life of the church.

### **Calvin (1509-1564)**

- **Calvin** was born and raised in Lyon, France. He studied at the universities of Paris, Orleans and Borge. Without question he was the greatest theologian of the Christian church during the *Reformation* and for a long time after. He was very influential in Geneva, Switzerland for much of his life, where he wrote, pastored, worked and preached every waking moment of his life. He taught and wrote prodigiously and preached almost daily using nothing but the Greek text in front of him. His Biblical commentaries are masterpieces of exposition and way ahead of their time. They remain a model of careful exegesis to this day.
- *He was greatly influenced by Luther and joined him in his rejection of scholasticism and tradition as an authority for theology. He too claimed the Scriptures to be the soul source for theology, authority and practice in the life of the Church. Theology had the task of the systematic description and interpretation of the teachings of the Bible. He too, was one who, like Augustine, “write as they learn and learn as they write.”*
- His *Institutes* testify to his consistency in theology, thus he is known as *the* Systematic theologian *par excellence*. For Calvin, *theology arrived at an orderly exposition of the Christian faith revealed in the Scriptures and exemplified in Christ.* Unlike Origen, Augustine, Anselm or Aquinas, *Calvin was unwilling to go beyond the sacred page and speculate. Theology is preeminently faithfulness to what the text says and no more.*

### **d) Enlightenment Answers**

#### **Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804)**

- Without question **Kant** was the greatest philosopher of the Enlightenment, and perhaps of all time. His influence is felt in every aspect of life in our secular/religious Society. He

was the one who gave the most comprehensive and precise definition to “the Enlightenment”. In his little paper entitled “What is Enlightenment?” he answers with a simple Latin phrase, *sapere aude*- “dare to know”. He had a tremendous influence on theology especially as it was mediated through **F. D. E. Schleiermacher**. His most read books are *Religion Within The Limits Of Reason Alone* and *The Critique of Pure Reason*.” But he also produced major works in ethics, and education.

- For Kant, the *task of theology is to explicate the true nature of religion as a theory of the human moral impulse. If theology will be true to its impulse it will do away with superstition and explicate the Christian faith along purely moral lines.* He rejects any appeal to supernatural revelation as unreasonable and superstitious.

### **Schleiermacher (1768-1834)**

- **Schleiermacher** is reputed to be the Father of Modern Theology. He was born of pietistic parents and attended Strict Pietistic School (1783-85). He attended a strict Pietistic Seminary at Barbe (1785-87) but rejected the doctrine of *vicarious sacrifice* because of the influence of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. His father was devastated. He studied Kant at the universities of Halle and *Drossen* and loved his works. His favorite authors were *Kant, Goethe, Schiller- all of whom were enlightenment thinkers!*
- Schleiermacher’s answer to the question “What is theology?” came in his famous book *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. There he says that *theology is the explication of the feeling of absolute dependence on God. The goal of theology and the religious life is, like Jesus, to attain this feeling in a continuous stream of consciousness.* His massive volume on dogmatics called, *The Christian Faith*, works this out in all the doctrines of the church. All of which receive major revision and reduction in the process.
- *His whole focus is that theology, in the long run is practical. It moves from Historical, Systematic, to philosophical and finally Practical theology. He introduced these divisions to the theology faculty at U of Berlin. Now we do it too.*

### **e) Modern and Post Modern Answers**

#### **Karl Barth (1886-1968)**

- **Karl Barth** was born in Basel, Switzerland, May 10, 1886. Johann (Fritz) Barth, his Father, was a conservative professor of Reformed Theology. Studied with Germany’s leading lights including, Harnack, Hermann, Troeltsch, Von Rad, etc. Some details of life: Basel to, Göttingen, and Bonn, back to Basel. For more details on this giant of 20<sup>th</sup> century theology see J. B. Webster’s, *Karl Barth*, in the Cambridge University Press series *Outstanding Christian Thinkers*.
- *For Barth theology is the exposition of the self-revealing God of the Bible for the sake of the church. This is the primary substance of theology. As such, theology is also*

*proclamation. When the church is preaching it is doing theology and vice versa. But it is also always a “beginning again at the beginning.” As Eberhard Jüngel writes, “by this beginning, to which the theologian must always return, Barth meant a concrete, specific, understandable beginning. ... Barth took the beginning to be concrete, for the beginning had a name: Jesus Christ. Always to begin anew with Jesus Christ- that, for Barth, is certainly how one goes forward and, in going forward, can encounter the unexpected.” Theology is always an orientation towards, a drawing attention to this person. (E. Jüngel, Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy p. 19)*

### **Pannenberg (1928-Present)**

- **Pannenberg** is a German Lutheran Systematic Theologian widely regarded as the greatest living protestant theologian. He is emeritus professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Munich. He is a prolific author and has recently published a massive three volume *Systematic Theology*. He is considered to be the last of the great German theologians, too which some add, *amen*? He is very influential in Evangelical circles, especially in the theology of Stan Grenz, Roger Olsen, and Le Ron Schultz. Theology is a science in relation to others and is done in conjunction with reason and history. *Theology is the rational and historical exposition of the coming into being of God in the realm of human history as the eschatological arrival of the truth. As such theology is the church’s teaching regarding the truth revealed in Scripture and may, therefore, be considered as truth claims.*

### *f) Some Evangelical Answers*

#### **Carl F. H. Henry (1913- 2003)**

- **Carl F. H. Henry** was for many years the leading Evangelical theologian according to *Time Magazine* (1978). He was a journalist originally until his book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism* propelled him into a professorship at Fuller Seminary. In his 9 years at Fuller he wrote 9 theological books. Henry founded *Christianity Today* in 1968 and it was destined to become a multi million dollar voice of Evangelicalism. His major work is his 6 vol. *God, Revelation and Authority*.
- *Theology is, for Henry, the exposition of Biblical propositions in a rational manner with application to the individual and corporate life of the church. Theology must see scripture as its source. “Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; scripture is the verifying principle; logical consistency is the negative test of theology; and coherence its subordinate test. The task of Christian Theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.”*

### G. C. Berkouwer (1903-1995)

- **G. C. Berkouwer** was a Pastor Theologian in *Gereformeerde Kerken* in Holland his entire adult life. He was educated at the Free University of Amsterdam and eventually appointed to the Chair in *Dogmatics* there in 1945. He was a Calvinist in the tradition of Abraham Kyper and Herrmann Barnick, both of whom have had a significant influence in their own right.
- *For Berkouwer, the task of theology is to correlate the knowledge of Scripture gained through the Spirit with the objective knowledge of God in Scripture. As such, theology is the exposition of the authoritative Scriptures, which serves as a boundary. Theology is also the exposition of the salvific content of the Scriptures, which summons us to personal faith. Thus, theology is both the correlation of personal faith and divine revelation with the Scriptures as the boundary.*
- So lets Summarize the first question in term of the revelation-reason polarity – (Patristic period): Theology as exposition of Scripture (*Tertullian*) – Scripture and Culture (*Origen*) – Scripture and Reason (*Augustine*), (**Mediaeval period**) Faith, Reason and Scripture (Anselm) –Reason, Tradition and Scripture, (Aquinas), (**Reformation period**) – Scripture, Tradition, Faith and Reason (Luther and Calvin), (**enlightenment period**)– Reason, and Experience (Kant and Schleiermacher), (**modern-postmodern**)- Reason vs. Revelation/Experience/Faith (Barth, Henry, M.C. Taylor- See his Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology)

## II. How Should Theology Proceed; Historical and Contemporaneous

### a) *The Centrality of the Scriptures in the History of Theology*

- For some, the Patristic period is marked by its insistence on Theology proceeding on the basis of Scripture alone – Tertullian, Chrysostum, and Irenaeus. It is also marked by the insistence of some that theology proceeds to answer questions from other sources (namely culture + Philosophy) – *Origen, Clement of Alexandria*. Here, the Scriptures are still central, but *philosophy and reason* are almost equally important

### b) *In the Middle Ages, beginning with the transition in Augustine*

- In the *Middle Ages* theology is increasingly done with reliance upon external sources to the Bible. Augustine employed Platonic arguments throughout, especially in his work on the Trinity. –Neo Platonism stressed the inwardness of rationality and the image of God. Thus Augustine tries to argue the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity from the *analogy* of human inwardness. (Mind, Will and Emotion are analogous to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit)
- The Scriptures are still central for *Augustine* however, and his apologetic approach to the Donatist and Pelagius have bequeathed to the Christian Church a rich theology of sin, humanity and grace. Yet his tendency to Patronize had long lasting effect on the church and has caused some to reject him altogether.



- **Anselm's method** can be described as a theology that places *priority of faith over reason* but makes reason a necessary partner in the theological enterprise. By insisting on a rational proof for the existence of God, Anselm prepared the way for a continuous battle in theology over the priority of reason vs. revelation and vice versa. Anselm seems to give priority to revelation over reason in his famous conclusion, "I believe in order that I may understand", but makes no mistake that it was rational knowledge he was after. He writes:

*"Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me, when I seek you, for I cannot seek you, except you teach me, nor find you, except you reveal yourself to me."*  
*Proslogion*

Accordingly, he writes in a prayer at the preface of his book:

*"I do not endeavor to look, to penetrate your sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this I also believe – that unless I believed, I should not understand."*

- **Aquinas**; This trend towards the use of reason, the reliance upon philosophical sources and then the necessity of revelation as the procedure for theology was supremely exemplified in Thomas Aquinas. Make no mistake that Aquinas laid the emphasis on *Scripture* as the primary source for Theology. His method, however, belied an over emphasis on the *role of reason* and the significance of other sources for theology. For him, truth known by reason and truth known by revelation are both commended by God. But the truth attainable by revelation *must also be shown to be reasonable*.
- It is also a fact that Aquinas assumes that the truths of reason are not in opposition to the truths of revelation; i.e. revelation will never contradict that which seems true to reason. God confirms what is true of revelation whereas what is true of reason is confirmed by reason itself. *"Therefore, those things which are received by faith cannot be contrary to our natural knowledge."* The problem of this equal relationship between reason and revelation as a justification for truth comes when philosophers like *Descartes* and *Kant* showed that it was possible to contradict revelation by what we know to be rationally true. Thus, in the enlightenment, reason triumphed over revelation.

### c) *The Reformation return to Scripture,*

- With the *Reformation* return to Scripture the method for doing theology once again focused on the exposition of Scripture. Both Luther and Calvin are outstanding examples of this. **Luther** argues that we should consider every book of Scripture a **"gospel"** because a gospel is nothing more than a book that tells us about Christ and all of Scripture tells us about Christ. Theology proceeds to discover the Gospel before all else. There is only one Gospel expanded by many apostles and biblical writers. *"Thus, the Gospel is and should be nothing else than a chronicle, a story, a narrative about Christ, telling who he is, what he did, said and suffered."*
- Theology then proceeds by telling us that Christ comes to us first as a gift and second as example. Theology is faithful when it explains the Gospel from every text of Scripture, without reference to anything else.

- **Calvin:** In his theological method, Calvin proceeds, as did Luther, from the soul authority of Scripture. Theology is not responsible to priest, creed or tradition, but only to the *inspired Word of God*. In the truest sense the church lives from the Scriptures and not vice versa. The Scriptures, attested to by the Holy Spirit is the soul authority for theology and the method by which theology proceeds. Calvin writes:

***“For by His word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion.”***

- The Scriptures records for us the teaching necessary for salvation and the Christian life. Theology must follow scripture so that it will not fall into error. Scripture has its authority from God and theology must be subject to that authority. The church is grounded in Scripture and where she strays from it she ceases to be the Church. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the power and authority of Scripture, and enables us to interpret it. The Scripture is self authenticating and above being subject to rational proof. So theology should be when it is faithful to Scripture.

#### ***d) The Priority of Reason over Revelation***

- **Kant** – Kant’s influence on modern theology cannot be over emphasized when it comes to the question of how theology should proceed. His *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* and *Critical Philosophy* remains a major obstacle to those who engage in questions of method. For the most part Kant rejected the corporate, historical, traditional and liturgical aspects of religion. Thus, the first task of theology is to divest itself of all superstitions – including the clergy that keep them. True religion consists in this, says Kant, ***“that in all our duties we regard God as the universal legislator who is to be revered.”*** Everything else is mere religious delusion and spurious worship. (*Werke* VI, p. 107)
- Theology must therefore advance a rational and critical concept of God as a perfect being. But this can only be done via negativa – speaking in anthropomorphic and/or negative language, because no rational or linguistic process can ever arrive at God. In his lectures on Philosophic Theology he stresses the need for theology to proceed on the basis of pure and practical reason. Theology cannot entertain a divine source of revelation because we have no means to verify its revelatory status.
- In Kant’s philosophy, the individual is left to decide on the basis of pure reason how theology should proceed. Not unlike the pluralism of John Hick. He is still a challenge to some Christian thinkers.

#### **ii. F. D. E. Schleiermacher – Dennis the Menace**

- According to Scheliermacher there are no absolute divides between Christianity and either culture or science.
- Therefore, ***Christian thinkers do theology by using the full range of their critical reason and investigative powers.***
- ***But, theology must also be a communal task since it is built on shared experiences.***
- ***Theology must proceed to explicate the meaning of redemption within this cultural and communal context.***

- *In Christian theology, everything is to be related “ the redemption accomplished through Jesus of Nazareth. All theology must explicate this experience wherever it finds it – vis-à-vis – other religions.*
- *Theology then, proceeds by engaging reason, the text, culture and tradition in order to explicate the feeling of absolute dependence on God.*

*e) The Contemporary (Modern-Postmodern) Debate*

**i) Revelation – Karl Barth**

The history of the church has been marked by the recurring debate as to how theology should proceed. *Should it proceed on the basis of revelation – using only the Scriptures and what we know from the created order? Should it proceed rationally, justifying with the mind what we receive from all sources? Should tradition and culture be allowed a formative role? Should we limit ourselves to one method or a combination?*

The history of theology suggests that where theology has gone astray at times, it was because it took its *marching orders* from sources other than the Scriptures, i.e. *culture, reason, tradition*. On the other hand, where theology has attempted to proceed on the basis of Scripture as the self-revelation of God, it has been a tremendously fruitful and creative time in theology. This can be demonstrated in the Reformation and Neo-orthodox Movement in 1920's and the Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards.

Certain theologians follow Kant and insist that the theology of the Christian church must be rational reconstruction of the best of humanity (Gordon Kaufman, John Hick). Still others believe that theology must listen closely to the culture, find out what its questions are, and devise answers to them. (D. Tracey, S. Grenz) and a host of others. Yet, a few still see the retrieval of tradition as a way to do theology. Taking the best of the past and making in fit the current context. (Post-liberals like George Lindbeck, Radical Orthodox theologians like John Milbank, and historical theologians like T. Oden).

Still others insist that revelation must be the sole authority and point of departure for theology. This view has a rich tradition that dates back to Paul and includes Tertullian, Chrysostom, Irenaeus, Jan Huss, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, John Calvin and a host of theologians since the Reformation. This emphasis on revelation as the sole authority and means of theology has taken on many handmaids from time to time, like Natural theology, Reason, Culture, and Tradition, but the view is distinguished by its insistence on the sole authority of revelation. Modern theologians who insist on this point of departure include such diverse theologians as *Karl Barth, W. Pannenberg, Carl Henry, G. C. Berkouwer* and *Stanley Grenz* to name a few.

**ii) In Evangelicalism.**

**The emphasis in evangelicalism has always been on the authority of Scripture,** and /or proceeding to do theology through careful exegesis, consistent hermeneutics and faithful application of the text. This remains the stated purpose of Evangelical theology today, despite the fact that many interpret it differently. Grenz puts his own interpretation on this noting that Evangelicals are less concerned with the inspiration and inerrancy and more concerned with the devotional use of the bible. He writes;

- “ As Puritan concerns and Pietist renewal converged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they gave birth to an evangelicalism that looked to Scripture as the vehicle through which the Spirit worked the miracles of salvation and sanctification. Sparked by their experience of the nurturing work of the Spirit through the pages of the Bible, *evangelicals’ overriding aim was to allow the message of the Bible to penetrate into the human hearts* and to encourage the devotional use of the

Bible. ...Rather than constructing theories about the Bible, awakening evangelicals were content simply to cherish the Scriptures” (See S. Grenz, *Reviewing the Center*, p 64f)

While there is much truth in this interpretation, it does not adequately account for the concern for the right interpretation and theological use of the Scriptures that marked both awakenings, as exemplified in the works of *Edwards, Whitfield, Wesley, Spurgeon*, and a host of others. These men were certainly content with the Bible as a devotional book, but they were also *careful exegetes and theologians* in their own right, even if they did not conceive of themselves as such!

### **III. Why is Theology Important? Historical and Contemporary Answers**

#### ***a) Theology edifies the believer and the body of Christ. Origen***

- ***Origen's*** three-fold interpretation of body, soul and spirit which were equal to the literal meaning, the moral meaning and the spiritual meaning may have been wrong headed hermeneutically speaking, but his stated goal was the edification of the believer from spiritual immaturity to spiritual maturity. I believe this should be the aim of all our theological endeavors. The goal is spiritual maturity in the knowledge of God.

#### ***b) Theology makes sense of our creaturely existence. Aquinas***

- ***Thomas Aquinas*** writes; “Now those who believe this truth, of which reason affords a proof, believe not lightly, as though following foolish fables (II Pet. 1:16). For divine wisdom Himself, who knows all things most fully, deigned to reveal to man the secrets of God’s wisdom: and by suitable arguments prove his presence, and the truth of His doctrine and inspiration, by performing works surpassing the capability of the whole of nature, namely, the wondrous healing of the sick ... and the inspiration of human minds... and not by force of arms, nor by the promise of delights, but amidst the tyranny of persecutions, a countless crowd embraced the Christian faith”. ***Summa Theologica***

#### ***c) Theology preserves and explicates the Gospel.***

- ***Calvin*** saw the following as his chief task; the exegesis and application of the Bible for the life of the church. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* stand as a testimony to the tie between theology and the text of scripture, as a product of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, interpretation and application. ***When theology proceeds with this uppermost in its mind it will preserve and explicate the gospel.***
- ***Luther*** considered every book of the Bible a Gospel, therefore the task of the theologian is to ***attend to the text of Scripture so this message can be rightly interpreted, explicated in sermon, and applied to the Christian life.***

#### ***d) Theology speaks to the inner life of humanity.***

- ***Schleiermacher's*** feeling of absolute dependence cannot be the grounds for doing theology, but it can teach us that Christian theology speaks to the heart as well as the

head. We must not divorce our intellectual faculties from our inner life. We are, whether we feel it or not “absolutely dependent on God”. But the feeling, when we have it, should never be dismissed as mere emotion. The role of experience in theology has a place, but it must never be given 1<sup>st</sup> place.

**e) Theology rehearses and clarifies the Story of Redemption for the church.**

- Theology is the church’s self-testing through self-description, in terms of its faithfulness to the Gospel story. **Karl Barth, Hans Frei** and to some degree **Stan Grenz** all see this as an essential reason to do theology. Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* gets its name from this overriding concern on the part of Barth to re-present the message of Scripture to the Church so that it may be clear as to its content and truth. He writes;
  - **“As a theological discipline, dogmatics is the scientific test to which the Christian church puts herself regarding the language about God which is peculiar to her.”** (CD I/1, p. 1). Here Barth is concerned to see theology as a function of the Church. **“The church confesses God, by the fact that she speaks of God. She does so first of all through her existence in the action of each individual believer. And she does so in the second place through her special action as a community; in proclamation by preaching and administration of the Sacrament, in worship, in instruction, in her mission work within and without the church, including loving activity among the sick, the weak, and those in jeopardy.”**(Ibid) As such **“the church produces theology in a special and peculiar sense, by subjecting herself to a self-test. She faces herself with the question of truth, i.e. she measures her action, her language about God, against her existence as a Church.”** (CD I/1 p. 2) That is, her existence is as a body called out by, and grounded in, the person of Jesus Christ. In this sense theology, as communal self-description, takes its cue from the Biblical story of Christ in his redemptive action.
  - Furthermore says Barth: **“The question of truth, with which theology is throughout concerned, is the question as to the agreement between the language about God peculiar to the church and the essence of the church. The criterion of Christian language, in the past and future as well as in the present time, is thus the essence of the church, which is Jesus Christ, God in His gracious approach to man in revelation and reconciliation. Has Christian language its source in Him? Does it lead to Him? Does it conform to Him? ... Thus as Biblical theology, theology is the question as to the foundation, as practical theology it is the question as to the aim, as dogmatic theology it is the question as to the content, of the language peculiar to the church.”** (CD I/1, p. 3)

**f) Theology equips the saints for a life of proclamation and cultural engagement.**

- C. F. H. Henry is considered by some as the greatest theologian of the Evangelical tradition. But his overriding concern in theology was that it speaks to the world regarding the truth and practicality of the Christian faith. His very first book, *The uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, was written to counteract what he saw to be a withdrawal of fundamentalist theology into a ghetto, effectively removing it from the

cultural stage. His book was a call for theology to re-engage culture with a rigorous, intellectually appealing, yet practically oriented message. Grenz characterizes this aspect of his thought well stating:

- *“In addition to chiding fundamentalism for its loss of social conscience, Henry concluded that the movement had abandoned its intellectual task, which he saw as shaping the mindset of society. He feared that unless fundamentalism changed its course, it would soon be reduced to an insignificant sect, having no influence on the wider culture. Therefore, he boldly challenged his colleagues to seize the hour, convinced that the time was ripe ‘for a rediscovery of the Scripture and of the meaning of the Incarnation for the human race.’ As an evangelical ‘restorationist’, he envisioned nothing less than the reemergence of ‘historic Christianity’ as a vital ‘world ideology’, because ‘the redemptive message has implications for all of life’. The task of setting forth the intellectual (theological) foundations for such a revitalizing of historic Christianity formed Henry’s passion and consumed his career.”* (Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, p. 88)

- **Bernard Ramm** – In his, *Evangelical Heritage*, Bernard Ramm shared the same concern for a proclamational view of theology. He asserted that theology could lead to a saving knowledge of God, however limited it may be. “The task of the theologian, he declared, is to set out the genesis and structure of God’s ectypal revelation which God has given humankind in special revelation”, i.e. theology is a proclamation of the Gospel. This is an aspect of theology that he shares with Barth that evangelicalism would do well to exploit fully!

## Introduction to Theology – Lecture Notes Module 1; Session II – God in His Revelation

### Introductory Comments

#### *a) The Doctrine of Revelation in Scripture and Tradition*

- Scripture makes it clear that it claims to speak the very word of God in terms of His *sovereignty* and His will for His creation. Scholars may quibble about the details of certain passages, but the *Scriptures* are overwhelming in terms of *its claim to be God's self-revelation*. Whether we believe the Scriptures or not is quite beside the point in respect to the claims it makes for itself.
- In *tradition* the doctrine of revelation has enjoyed less certainty as an ecclesial doctrine. It has been one of the key issues of debate, for and against, since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century engagement with heresy. Though *Orthodox Tradition* has always affirmed divine revelation, it has always struggled with the felt need to bring the handmaids of *philosophy, reason, tradition and experience* to confirm its basic *truth claims*. In doing so, theology has often opened itself up to being swallowed up by one of these so-called handmaids. *Achieving a balanced doctrine of revelation remains a central concern for the church*. As we shall see, I think a balanced doctrine is achievable, but not without *faith* and *a recognition of human rational limitations*.

#### *b) The central debate has been the question of relationship between reason and revelation.*

- The history of Christian theology is, in some sense, a history of the loss and recovery, from time to time, of the doctrine of revelation in the face of human reason. *Modernity*, and its emphasis on *human reason*, has had the upper hand since the enlightenment. But the *Postmodern critique* of modern reason claims to have dethroned this idea of the rational imperial self. In the long run, this claim of Post-modernity may be over stated; still it has served well to point out to us (even if *via negativa*) the need for a more Biblically centered doctrine of revelation.

#### *c) A basic working definition of Revelation.*

- That makes this definition one of the most important statements you will hear and read in this class. As a working definition we will be employing one of the most influential creeds in Evangelical and Reformed theology, The Westminster Confession. According to which *revelation is*:

*The whole council of God. It concerns all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life. It is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of man. WC 1.6 paraphrase.*

- As we proceed through a brief analysis of Revelation in terms of its content, authority and eternal perspicuity, we will begin to understand why the Westminster divines chose this route. Let us turn now to our exposition of the basic *doctrine of revelation*.

## I. The Nature of God's General (Universal, Natural) Revelation

### *a) Revelation has always turned on two axis; General Revelation and Special Revelation.*

- Of the two concepts, general and special revelation, the most contentious by far is the precise nature of God's universal, natural, revelation of himself. - Though the other aspect has been intensely debated as well. What, if anything, can we know about God from the created order in its physical, animal and human expressions?
- The debate in the *middle ages* was mild compared to the debate since Calvin. It is generally agreed that a natural theology (General Revelation) of some sort has always been a part of the church. Paul in Romans 1 initially laid it down and 2, received some refinement in the works of Tertullian, Origen and Chrysostom, and were formalized in the theology of St. Augustine. *Thomas Aquinas*, under the influence of *Aristotle*, *Augustine* and *St. Anselm*, made General Revelation a very important component in his *Summa*. It enjoyed wide support with varying degrees of minor discussion through the middle ages. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, however, it would receive a treatment by Calvin that still sets the terms of the debate today, despite Immanuel Kant's severe criticism of it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, we turn briefly to Calvin for some orientation on General Revelation, especially since the Westminster divines, whose definition we have taken, were greatly influenced by him.
- *Calvin's doctrine of General Revelation* has an objective and subjective side. We have a knowledge of God within our rational capacity known as the *sensus divinitas*, or *semen religionis*, and/or the *sensus deiti* which causes us to be religious beings and to agree that some *God* does exist, either through a *general religious consciousness*, or a sense of *servile fear of God*, or even a "troubled conscience". These three, says Calvin, exempt us from any excuse making at the judgment. Granted it is a knowledge of God via the negative, subjective side of humanity and has no saving power, because this knowledge is distorted and made impure by our own insistence in either ignoring it or denying it. Calvin writes,
  - *"As experience shows, God has sown a seed of religion in all men. But, scarcely one man in a hundred is met with who cultivated it, and none in whom it ripens – much less shows fruit in season"* (Ps. 1:3) (*Institutes, I. Bk I. 48.*)
- Rather than foster this subjective seed of divine knowledge we either, turn away from God and "flatly deny his existence", or we "fashion a God according to our own whim. Thus is overthrown that vain defense with which many are want to gloss over with superstition. For they think that zeal for any religion, however preposterous, is



- sufficient.” While this seed of religion is there in humanity and is uncontested, yet **“by itself it produces only the worst fruits”** and not saving knowledge of God. (I,1.51). But there is, according to Calvin, a second source of General Revelation. He writes that; **“The knowledge of God shines forth in the fashioning of the universe and the continuing government of it.”** (*Institutes*, I.1.51)
- If the revelation of God, subjectively, leads humanity to obscure it, then the objective revelation of God in creation, **“strips us of every excuse”**. God reveals himself and discloses himself in the “whole workmanship of the universe.” Indeed, man himself, created in the image of God, is the “loftiest” of this source of divine self-revelation. This is God’s objective self-revelation. So Calvin does appear to have a stronger doctrine of general revelation than some imagined? As Dowey writes: **“While it is true that a negative sign stands over the whole revelation in creation in Calvin’s theology, we must not allow this sign to erase from our minds the magnitude of the sum thus negated.”**( Edward Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, p. 73). Despite our inability and disobedience in regard to receiving General Revelation, it is there for us to see. For Calvin, the “actual guilt of man is the result of actual rejection of an actual revelation that remains clear.” (Edward Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, p. 73)
  - And yet there is **“a great gulf fixed”** for Calvin between the original purpose of revelation in creation and its function. While man was created with the capacity for revelation in both its subjective and objective mode, he is functioning, in fact, **“under the conditions of sin”**. **“It no longer achieves its original purpose, but it operates only to involve the whole human race in the same condemnation.”** (*Institutes*, I.IV.1,2) “Men who are only taught by nature, have no certain, sound or distinct knowledge, but are confined to confused principles, so that they worship an unknown God.” (I.V.12) This leads Calvin to an important conclusion vis-à-vis the extent and usefulness of General Revelation. This is conclusion that we must keep in mind, if we hope to have a balanced view of revelation. He writes:
    - **“Vain therefore, is the light afforded us in the formation of the world to illustrate the glory of its author, which though its rays be diffused all around us, is insufficient to conduct us into the right way. Some sparks are kindled, indeed, but they are smothered before they have emitted any great degree of light.”** (*Institutes*, I.1, 51)
  - For Calvin, only Scripture can lead us into the right path for a knowledge of God. This reformed doctrine of *general revelation* is shared by many today despite the growing emphasis on the power and ability of general revelation to lead to a saving knowledge of God (vis-à-vis **Religious Pluralism**).

**b) The objective aspect of Revelation, Calvin’s 3 categories; Nature, History and Humanity.**

- Millard Erickson calls these three realities listed in the heading above, ‘*modes of revelation*’. He agrees with Calvin that this is the general sense of Scripture in Ps. 19:1 – “the heaven declare the glory of God”, and Paul’s proposal in Rom. 1:18-20. These passages, along with the “nature Psalms”, suggest that God has left evidence of Himself in the world. The same can be said in history. God’s self revelation can, according to Calvin and Erickson, be seen in the trends and events that occurred in the past, e.g. the

preservation of Israel. The problem is, however, that history is a discipline that carries with it a hermeneutical presupposition allowing the interpreter of history to put their spin on the events. This makes it a highly suspect category of General Revelation. In the idea of humanity as a microcosm there is some merit for seeking points of General Revelation as the popular book, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* makes clear. The Psalmist himself mused about his wonderful constitution. (Ps. 139)

- The idea that the human religious tendency, or “sensus divinitas” is however, much more suspect than we are given to believe today. Erickson agrees with Calvin that such an impulse is “marred and distorted” and yet he remains somewhat optimistic of its continuing significance. I, for my part, suspect it more than anything because, as Calvin points out, it is precisely where we are apt to either deny **God** or fashion *gods* after our own likeness. This is also why Barth was so suspicious of it.

c) *The question of “natural theology”, which, as.*

- Erickson defines “**natural theology**” as the construction of a theology on the basis of general revelation “apart from the Bible”. This tradition stems from Augustine through Anselm to Aquinas who is seen as the one who perfects natural theology. The crucial question about general revelation here is; ***Can it be used to support a theology inferred from humanity and created order?*** To do so involves, as Erickson suggests, certain assumptions.
  1. One is that, in God’s self-revelation in creation, “**patterns of meaning are objectively present even if no one perceives, understands and accepts this general revelation.**” Included in this is the idea that the universe and the world as we know it has been this way since creation.
  2. The second point is that there is **an assumed integrity on the part of the person who is able to ascertain this natural theology.** That is, they stand above the natural effects of sin and the fall in their ability to recognize and interpret “the handiwork of God”, i.e. the angelic doctor Aquinas.
  3. Thirdly, ***they assume that there is a good degree of congruity between the human rational faculty and the external world.*** The order of the rational faculty reflects the order of creation. Therefore, the human mind can draw inferences from its interpretation of our experience of creation. All of it will come out even in the end in that our experience of the world will be shown to be commensurate with revelation through the use of reason. Where contradictions exist, time will bring congruity between mind, creation and special revelation.
- As **Erickson** suggests, “*the core of natural theology is the idea that it is possible, without a prior commitment of faith, in the beliefs of Christianity, and without relying on any special authority, institution or document, to come to a genuine knowledge of God on the basis of reason alone, i.e. the capacity to discover, understand, interpret and evaluate the truth.*” (Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*)

- In *Thomas Aquinas'* teaching, all truth is either of the sort that comes from either the lower realm of nature, or the higher realm of revelation (grace). The knowledge of the higher realm must be accepted on the basis of Scripture while the knowledge of nature can be deduced by reason. He claimed much for pure reason – including the ability to prove the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the supernatural origin of the church. (Aquinas' 5 ways) The doctrines of the higher realm, Trinity, incarnation, etc. require the knowledge and authority of Scripture.

### **The Cosmological Argument as a Case in Point**

- The argument goes like this, in brief: Everything we know by experience has a cause. There cannot be an infinite regress of cause because no effect could have arisen. There must be therefore, some uncaused cause, or “unmoved mover”. This “unmoved mover” is God. We do not need special revelation to show us this, but it names the unmoved mover for us.
- *Aquinas adds to this basic argument 4 other related arguments for the existence of God.*
  - **The teleological Argument (from telos meaning order or end)**
  - This is commonly known as *the argument from design*. Here the argument focuses upon purpose, i.e. garden or watch assumes the existence of a Gardner or Watchmaker. The universe exhibits mechanisms that have a telos (or end) suggesting a designer. The universe cannot have come together haphazardly in such cases. Thus the designer is God.
  - **The anthropological/moral argument**
  - The anthropological argument sees some aspect of human nature as a revelation of God. Of all the arguments this one appealed most to Kant. According to him, all of us possess a moral impulse, i.e. a “categorical imperative”. Since our moral actions do not often reward us the question begs itself - “Why be good?”. There must be some sort of reward for our moral actions. This led Kant to postulate God and the immortality of the soul. This moral order serves as a proof for the existence of God, though we cannot be sure that he exists, nor can we know what he is like. The cosmological, teleological and anthropological (moral) arguments all proceed from experience, i.e. *a posteriori*. But there is only one of Aquinas' arguments – the ontological argument, proceeds from an *a priori* or rational standpoint. It is this one that Kant criticizes most, to the point of undoing all of the others.
  - **The ontological argument**
  - Literally the **ontological** argument means, “from ones own inner being”, and it is a purely Rational argument that prefigures Descartes *cogito ergo sum*. Anselm was the first to formulate it in his *Proslogion*, though he was influenced by Augustine's book on the *Trinity*. The argument postulates God as that being which is the greatest of all conceivable beings. Such a being cannot, not exist (for the non existent being of our conceptions would be greater if it had the attribute of existence) Thus, God exists.

- Kant's arguments against the arguments for the existence of God in his critique of *Pure Reason* and *Practical Reason* are aimed primarily at this argument. One cannot argue, says Kant, from the attribute of being because such an attribute does not exist. There can be no comparison between a being that exists and a being that does not exist because beings that exist cannot have qualities of beings that do not exist. The only difference one can predicate between them is existence. One cannot imagine a being exists simply because another being exists, i.e. the imaginary dollar vs. the real dollar. "Existence is not a necessary predicate of the greatest of all conceivable beings." Such a being (or dollar) may exist – or it may not – we cannot know.

**d) *The Critique of Natural theology***

- **Kant's critique of Natural theology** in his *Prolegomena Towards any Future Metaphysics* and *Critique of Pure Reason* was very effective in shutting down all attempts at Natural theology in Protestant circles for a long time, though Schleiermacher's argument can be seen as a sort of argument from experience. Indeed, until recently, natural theology was suspect in modern circles. Recently the debate has been renewed with an attempt to reclaim Aquinas for Protestant Theology among radical orthodox theologians. Despite the claim of natural theology to rational footings, few philosophers and theologians since Kant have taken it seriously.
- The problem inherent in natural theology is that it works to our disadvantage if our proofs are inadequate, as Kant's critique shows. The problem with some natural theology (and apologetics) is that they contain assumptions that are easily assailable. This is the case with Thomas' argument from causation since one effect may have several causes and vice versa. The whole idea of the dynamic reality of the universe is popular among physicists today. It's the Old Hereclytean flux. The Teleological Argument falls under the same critique. The argument from design was virtually destroyed by David Hume, *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*.

**For Barth's Critique** – Read McGrath's summary of Barth's critique in his *Introduction to Theology*.

**e) *The Biblical Witness to General Revelation:***

***The student should study these passages in their respective contexts and come to their own conclusions visa vie natural theology***

- Psalm 19:1-4 Clearly the Psalmist views creation as giving some evidence of God's glory. Rom. 1:18-32; 2:14-16 Speaks of God's wrath as just, because we have refused the witness of creation. Erickson takes Calvin's line of thought here. In Acts 14:15-17 the argument appeals to God's witness to himself. In Acts 17:22-31 –the Mars Hill passage – we see something like the religious impulse argument. Erickson argues that all of these passages argue for general revelation without natural theology.

### *f) Implications of General Revelation*

- Can those without special revelation *avoid condemnation and judgment?* – Rom. 2:14, Gal. 3:10-11; Gal. 3:23-24. What is the distinction between *internal and external law*? We ought to be able to conclude on the basis of law and nature that God exists. “In other words, the knowledge of God which all human have, if they do not suppress it, should bring them to the conclusion that they are guilty in relationship to God.” But! you may object; What if we throw ourselves on the mercy of God – as in the Old Testament? What about Abraham, who was justified on the basis of his faith. Regardless, as Paul insists, the basis of salvation is always faith in the work of Christ, whether one is conscious of this or not – *be it promise or present reality*.
- It is *theoretically possible*, says the apostle (Rom. 2:1-16) for a saving knowledge of God without Christ; In Rom. 3 he closes this option off. “Thus it is apparent that in failing to respond to the light of general revelation, which they have, people are fully responsible, for they have truly known God, but have willingly suppressed that truth. Thus, general revelation serves, as does the law, merely to make us guilty, not more righteous.” (Erickson, *Intro...*)

### **Other Limited Implications of General Revelation**

1. General Revelation gives us *common ground* with unbelievers and can serve as a point of departure for discussion. All have a modicum of the knowledge of God.
2. There is a *theoretical possibility* of some knowledge of divine truth outside of special revelation. General revelation can help confirm scripture but not vice versa. It is a supplement to and not a substitute for. It can really only serve a negative purpose. – Sin affects all human knowledge.
3. God is *just* in condemning those who have never heard the gospel in the full and formal sense. No one is completely without opportunity. Thus all are responsible.
4. *World religions* are a reflection of the reality of general revelation, though the knowledge of God contained in them cannot lead to saving knowledge. They are distortions of Biblical truth.
5. Harmony does exist between general revelation and Special Revelation, but great care needs to be applied lest special revelation comes under the general revelation as with scholasticism before and after the Reformation and rationalism after the Enlightenment.
6. Genuine knowledge and genuine moral behavior are the products of a gracious God, not human products. “Truth arrived at apart from Special Revelation is still God’s truth.” (A. Holmes, *All Truth is God’s Truth*)

## **II. Revelation Proper: Special or Particular Revelation**

*a) By Special Revelation we mean God’s manifestation of Himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemption relationship with him.*

- The Hebrew word *galāh*, and the Greek word, *αποκαλυπτω*, both express the idea of uncovering, disclosing and revealing. See also the Greek: *epiphania* form the verb

- φανερωω – To make manifest. This is the stock and trade language for the Biblical doctrine of special revelation. But why is special revelation necessary? Humanity, through sin, lost its favored status before God, and thus the capacity for full relationship and knowledge of God. To regain fellowship, knowledge of God is necessary that goes beyond the creaturely realm and the natural finiteness of fallen human understanding. Being spiritually blinded by sin, God’s special revelation in Word, act and being becomes necessary. The goal of special revelation was and is the reestablishment of the God/human relationship to its ideal form.
- Knowledge about God serves the purpose of *knowledge of God* and is limited to this. Thus, the knowledge of God in his special revelation is not exhaustive. “The merely curious are not accommodated by special revelation”. While special revelation may be termed “remedial revelation”, this is not an indication that humanity’s knowledge of God before the fall was a complete general revelation. We are simply not told about this. Gen. 1:28; 3:8. There was a type of special revelation from God before the fall – instructions, e.g. “Do not eat...”
  - Sin is the instance of the need for Special Revelation. This was the case because sin had cut us off from the presence of God. God must now reveal His will regarding the human fallen condition as well. ***Sin, guilt and depravity had to be met with redemption, atonement and reconciliation.*** General revelation cannot relay the substance of this redemptive plan. ***“General revelation gives us the concept of God – special revelation give the precepts of God.”*** Both general and special revelation has “a common subject matter yielding a complementary and harmonious understanding.”

### ***b) The Nature of Special Revelation***

- ***1. Special revelation*** is first of all personal in nature – i.e. Person to person: God to men (***Ex. 3:14***). It is covenantal from beginning to end – Genesis to Revelation. Cf. Psalms, Prophecies, Gospels, Epistles, all have personal traits and covenantal language. ***Neither is scripture a formal theological presentation.*** The scripture contains not a set of universal truths as its first intent, but concrete statements about various human situations, to which the truth must bare witness. It is not necessarily a book of doctrines and creed though creedal formulas do exist. The subject matter pertains primarily to God’s plan of redemption. Neither is it, per se, a book of cosmology, science, history etc. though there is some information of this sort.
  - ***“The Bible does not digress into matters of merely historical concern. It does not fill in gaps in the knowledge of the past. It does not concentrate on biographical details. What God reveals is primarily Himself as a person, and especially those dimensions of Himself that are particularly significant for faith.”***
- ***2. It is also “anthropic” in nature*** – God is transcendent despite his personal revelation. He lies beyond sense experience as an all knowing, all-powerful, ever-present being. He is not subject to the confines of space and time. They are in God. Revelation is – in the terms of ***Exodus 3:14f*** –the condescension of God the Savior. God’s revelation of Himself takes on a form that makes our comprehension of Him possible. I.e. ***it is anthropic.***

- **This is not strict anthropomorphism** as such, but a revelation of God wherein God accommodates Himself to human language, thought and action. – *God commandeers language*. Thus, the language in which God’s self revelation was originally deposited was an ancient language and it presents its own problems. The scriptures also tell of God’s self revelation in *dreams, visions and prophecies*. The Old Testament is replete with examples.
- It was not a particular type of experience employed, but how the experience was utilized to reveal God. The incarnation is anthropic in the sense that *God accommodates Himself to humanity* – He was human in every way. There were exceptions to this type of Revelation – Jn. 12:28; Jn 2.
- **3. Special revelation is also analogical in nature.** This issue however, is hotly contested in theology – K. Barth and E. Przywara debated whether analogy, the comparison of God to humanity via negative and positive metaphors etc, drawn from human experience can say anything certain about God. Here, language becomes an important aspect of God’s self-revelation. The theory is that God uses aspects of the universe **that show likeness to Himself**. God’s actions, for instance, can be **known by human actions analogically**. God’s love is **mirrored in our love**, etc. Trinitarian **analogies abound**. Analogy proceeds on the basis of the **qualitative sameness**, i.e. human power vs. God’s power. God is in much greater degree than what we are – or the opposite of what we are not / finite/infinite.
  - *“We cannot grasp how much more of each of these qualities God possesses, or what it means to say that God has our knowledge amplified to an infinite extent. Having observed only finite forms, we find it impossible to grasp infinite concepts. In this sense God always remains incomprehensible.”* (Erickson, *Introducing...*)
- God cannot fit into our finite capacity for knowledge. “Although what we know of Him is the same as His knowledge of Himself, the degree of our knowledge is much less.” God is the one who makes the analogy, not us. It is an analogy of relation – *analogia relationis*. We ourselves cannot be the source of the analogy because we do not see ourselves from God’s side or God’s self from His side. **Only God, who knows all things, can give us an analogy that adequately explains Himself to us.**

c) *The form(s), modes of special revelation – Means, modes, forms*

**1. Historical Events** – e.g. the call of Abraham, the Exodus, etc.

- The *Old and New Testaments* witness to God’s providential care and self-revelation in a number of events of *history* recorded therein. The principle event is of course, the *Incarnation*, but it is a category all its own. God has **acted in history**, and in so doing he reveals himself to be a saving God. His action speaks of his character.

**2. Divine Speech** – God’s speaking and his acting go together.

- The Scriptures constantly affirm that God has spoken in all **forms of literary and vocal address**, in the Law, the Writings and the Prophets. (Jer. 18:1; Ezk. 12:1-8, 17, 21, 26; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1, Amos 3:1.) There is a consciousness of divine address throughout the

Scriptures. Heb. 1:1-2. God's actions require God's words to express their meaning. **Speech, for God, means a commandeering of human language for His purposes.** It is always in the *form of human language - Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew.* God's speech is therefore **mediated speech.** It can be audible, silent and inward, or written.

- It is **concurrent** in terms of the written inspired text under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the text, revelation and divine inspiration have merged. *God directed the thoughts of the biblical writers through the Spirit.* These revelations are not recollections, but *divine impartations.* Quite frequently, the spoken word is **the interpretation of an event.** Not only the event itself, but the interpretation of the event constitutes revelation. Without God's express purpose declared in the event itself, it becomes meaningless. **Even the incarnation requires divine interpretation** or we would miss it. "We must conclude that the interpretation of certain events is a modality of revelation as genuine as that of God's acts in history."

**3. The Incarnation** – This is the most complete and definitive form of God's self-revelation. Jesus life, speech, action, death and resurrection all constitute *the substance of this revelatory event.*

- Christ in his humanity must represent a *mediation* of divine revelation but this revelation is still a full revelation of God in terms of knowledge for salvation. Heb. 1:1-2 declares that "God has spoken through his Son." The incarnation is the pinnacle of God's self-revelation as event. It fulfills, summarizes and explicates all other forms of revelation. *Jesus life, message, ministry and atonement surpasses all other revelation.*
- According to Matt. 5:11, Jesus is the self proclaimed πληρωω (pleroo), – fulfillment, of the Old Testament. As the fulfillment of the OT Jesus speech is God's speech. Everything about Jesus is a revelation about God because He is God. John 1:1-18 is the most definitive statement of this. John declares that He was, - ἦν (en) – God. This was also the confession of the centurion at the cross, Matt. 27:54; Lk. 5:8. In Jesus Christ, therefore, revelation as act and Word come together. He both spoke the Father's Word and demonstrated His attributes. *He was the most complete revelation of God, I John 1:1; Jn. 14:9.*

### **EXCURSUS: Special Revelation, Propositional or Personal**

- The Scriptures are not just the communication of information about God but are the presentation of God's self revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God tells us about Himself in Word, in action and in person. Revelation is not strictly propositional but contains propositions that are derived from God's personal revelation. Faith requires mental ascent, but also personal commitment. *Scripture does indeed contain doctrines to be believed, but such doctrines speak of personal realities.* Faith must be propositional, but also necessarily personal belief precedes trust but cannot dispense with trust. It must be something you can take to the bank.
- **Theology is also a problem for itself in this regard.** All theological traditions want to distinguish their theology as true over against another. How does one decide on the truth or falsity of a given doctrine without resorting to propositionalism? *Revelation is not either personal or propositional it is both – and.* What God primarily does is reveal himself, but He does so at least in part by telling us something about Himself.



- **Scripture as Revelation.** Revelation, as propositional truth can and has been preserved. It can and has been *inscripturated*. *“And this written record, to the extent that it is an accurate reproduction of the original manuscripts, is also by derivation, revelation and entitled to be called that”*. (Erickson, *Introduction...*) If revelation is defined as “only the actual occurrence, the process or the revealing, then the Bible is not revelation ... If however, it is also the product, the result of the revealed, then the Bible may also be termed “Revelation”. Such revelation would have to be inspired, and preserved in this inspired state.
- **Is revelation progressive?** It is sometimes said that later revelation build on early revelations from Old Testament to New Testament. The question is; are they complimentary, supplementary? They are both complementary and supplementary. Redemption is process and revelation happens only as it coincides with redemption. *God’s self revelation in the Scriptures far exceeds General Revelation and makes His will for us clear. It is both personal and propositional.*

### III. Scripture as Theology’s Norming-Norm

#### *a) The Inspiration of the Scriptures: Fact or Fiction. I Tim 3:16*

- *By inspiration of Scripture we mean* the divine election, inbreathing, (θεπνευοτος) and guidance of the biblical writers for the express purpose of ensuring the trustworthiness and efficacy of their writings through the ages (Is. 30:8; Heb. 2:2). *Furthermore, God’s Spirit was operative upon both the writers and their writings, and He continues to be present in their testimony throughout the history of the church, preserving it from corruption. By the gift of inspiration the Biblical writings are made the repository of divine truth as well as the only channel of divine revelation.*” (D. Bloesch *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, with my modifications).
- Such inspiration is *verbal inspiration* in the sense that the Scriptures came about as the consensus of divine and human activity. The divine activity does not totally *supersede* humanity but works congruently with the human so that the scriptures are the product of both God and man, but under the divine authorship of God. (Is. 59:21; Ex. 31:18; II Sam. 23:2; Is. 49:2; I Cor. 2:13). Such inspiration is also *plenary* meaning that the Scriptures are inspired in their *entirety*. The words of both the prophets and apostles are inspired. II Pet. 3:2.
- Erickson’s definition runs as follows: *“By inspiration we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God”* Which is too weak! The Word of God had to be written to better preserve revelation. Inspiration has to do with the means of relaying divine Revelation to the writers. In this sense Revelation and inspiration belong together. The *totality* of Revelation was not given by inspiration. Jesus did and said many things that went unrecorded according to Jn. 21:25.

#### *The Fact of Inspiration in Scripture*

- The Scriptures everywhere assume, and often explicitly claim divine inspiration for itself. This may be circular reasoning, but so are other systems of thought in other religions, e.g. Islam. Besides, there are other reasons to believe in the divine inspiration of Scripture. The *Scriptural witness to itself* is valid if taken with other evidence. II Pet. 1:20-21, “Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from (απο θεου) (apo theou-from God). The impetus for writing was the moving of the Holy Spirit. II Tim. 3:16 claims that Scripture is God breathed. (θεοπνευτος) – θεος + πνευμα (theos, God + pneuma, breath). As such they had value for doctrine, reproof, equipping, etc.
- Furthermore, Acts 1:16, Peter claims the same authority for the Psalms. The way he quotes Ps. 69:25; 107:8, “It is written in scripture”, is to be taken as equivalent to “God has spoken it”. The prophetic witness in this regard is overwhelming. Jer. 30:4; Amos 3:1; II Sam. 23:2. In the Gospels *Jesus Himself claimed inspired authority for the Scriptures*. Jn. 10:35; Matt. 5:18, 24:2; Lk. 22:27. Clearly Jesus regarded the Old Testament as Scripture.

#### ***b) Theories of Inspiration***

- Our conclusion is that The inspiration of Scripture is a fact from the Biblical point of view. ***But what exactly does inspiration mean?*** A number of theories have been advanced.
  1. For some it means inspiration was a matter of *spiritually guided intuition*, i.e. a special gift, like artistic talent, yet a natural permanent possession. This is very problematic in that it reduces Scripture to a set of Greek religious writings.
  2. The *illumination theory* maintains there was influence of the Holy Spirit but only in terms of heightening their powers of spiritual sensitivity.
  3. The *dynamic theory* emphasizes the combination of divine and human elements in the process of inspiration with the Divine controlling the process.
  4. *Verbal theory* maintains that the actual words were directed by the Holy Spirit but not dictated.
  5. *Dictation theory* – God dictated word for word. The human element is all but eliminated.

#### **The Extent of Inspiration**

- Jesus and the New Testament writers regarded every word, syllable and punctuation mark of the Old Testament as inspired. II Pet. 1:19-21; Jn. 20:34-35. The phrase “all the Prophets”= Scripture. Lk. 24:24-27, 44-45; Matt. 5:17-21. – “every jot and tittle.”

### **III. The Trustworthiness of Scripture**

- The *inerrancy* of Scripture has been hotly debated in Evangelical circles. The doctrine states that the Scriptures are fully inerrant – without error – in all that it teaches, and records in complete detail but only in the *autographs*. Such a view is central to the Evangelical understanding of authority and truth. It is a corollary to the Doctrine of Inspiration and the last step in Doctrine of Scripture.

### a) *On the Various Conceptions of Inerrancy*

- There is a great deal of difference in various meanings of this term. Here are the main ideas.
- 1. **Absolute Inerrancy** holds that *the Bible*, in all of its phases, historical, scientific and theological, *is without error in the autographs*. The impression is that the Biblical writers wanted to give us scientific facts as well. Thus apparent discrepancies can and must be explained. (e.g. II Chr. 4:2)
- 2. **Full Inerrancy** also holds that the Bible is completely true in that its aim is to give us a theological account and spiritual message, **not a scientific or historical one**. Full Inerrantists say that scientific facts are recorded as observed by the human eye and are only exact as they are visually observed.
- 3. **Limited Inerrancy** regards the Bible as *inerrant and infallible in its salvific content*. Scientific and historical facts reflect a world-view rather than actual states of affairs. The Biblical writers were limited to what the culture of that time knew to be true scientifically and historically. Revelation and inspiration did not apply to mundane facts. Consequently the Bible may seem to contain errors, but these are reflections of the Biblical authors world-view. But this is of no great significance since the Scriptures intend to teach a theological and Spiritual message.

### b) **The Importance of Inerrancy.**

- Why should the church be concerned about this seemingly negative concept? Some see the issue as time wasted and church splitting and inflammatory. While some of these points are well taken, there is, as Erickson notes, a practical issue that is important in relation to inerrancy. **That of Belief – or Epistemology**. Three key areas are included in this thought.

#### i) **The Theological Importance of Inerrancy**

- Jesus, Paul and the New Testament all viewed the Scriptures as authoritative and inspired. If so, this would imply that the Scriptures must coincide with God's omniscience. His omniscience would so affect the author of the text that he would write error-less-ly. Thus, His being entails the inerrancy of His revelation. *If Scripture were shown to be in error, would this not deny its inspiration?*

#### ii) **The Historical Importance**

- Inerrancy is the historical legacy of the church from Paul to Luther. Historically, when inerrancy is abandoned, there is theological error. *History is the laboratory that has proven the need for a doctrine of inerrancy.*

#### iii) **The Epistemological Importance - How do we come to know what we know to be true?**

- If we base our theological propositions on the Scripture as a trustworthy and reliable source for truth, then it stands to reason that the Bible should be written without error.

Thus, it is of utmost importance that we claim the Scriptures to be inerrant. Otherwise, some other basis for doctrine – a general theory of religion/philosophy must be found. *This means that certain key doctrines will be lost. Trinity, virgin birth, etc.*

*c) Defining Inerrancy.*

- *“The Bible, when correctly interpreted in the light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all it affirms.” – i.e. full inerrancy.*

What does this mean?

- i. It means that *inerrancy* pertains to what is affirmed or asserted, rather than **to what is merely reported**. Are Job’s comforters always right? Everything in the Bible is truth and all truth is in the Bible, but not everything in the Bible can be regarded as truth.
- ii. We must judge the *truthfulness* of Scripture in terms of what the statements meant in the cultural settings in which they were expressed. – i.e. the use of symbolic numbers etc. The concept of “son”.
- iii. The Bible’s assertions are fully true when judged in accordance with the purpose for which they were written, i.e. 10,000 men as opposed to the exact number. What would be considered accurate **9,000-9,560**? It depends on the purpose of the reporting. If the idea is to confer proportion in a general sense then estimations are O.K.
- iv. Reports of historical events and scientific matters are in phenomenal rather than technical language – i.e. how things appear to the eye.
- v. Difficulties in the text should not be prejudged as error. – Fools often rush into conclusions about them. (e.g. Judas in Matt. 27:5; Acts 1:18).

*e) The finality of the Scriptures: Objective and Subjective aspects of Authority.*

- With the advent of postmodernism we have the wholesale rejection of external authority in favor of personal, experientially based, belief systems. The postmodern question is: Is there an authoritative person, text or institution for faith? “Is there a text in this class”? Are we subject to the authority of a creator God? Is the Bible the deposit of His authority in written form? These questions will persist into the foreseeable future and so theology must be ready to give an answer.

What about the role of the Spirit?

Revelation is God’s word in the inspired Scripture. For the reception of revelation we need the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. **Because:**

- 1) Because of the ontological difference between God and us– God is transcendent – We are limited in our understanding of God.
- 2) We require certainty on faith issues – thus, the Spirit must illuminate and bring assurance of faith.
- 3) We require the illumination of the Spirit because of our sin. Matt. 13:13-15. cf. Rom. 1:21, 11:8; I Cor. 2:14. The work of the Spirit regenerates us so that understanding is possible. John 14-16 describes the continuing work of the Holy Spirit of truth.
- 4) Teaching all things. We need the Spirit as a teacher to lead us into all truth.
- 5) Witnessing to Christ must be done in the power of the Spirit who impresses the Word of God upon the heart of the recipient.
- 6) Convicting the world of sin cannot happen without the application of God’s word in the power of the Spirit.

According to Erickson the Holy Spirit ***“Guides us into truth, calling to remembrance the words of Jesus, not speaking on his own, but speaking what he hears, bringing about conviction, witnessing to Christ. This work seems not so much a new ministry, or the addition of new truth not previously make known, but rather an action of the Holy Spirit in relationship to truth already revealed,”*** i.e. no new revelation. (Erickson, *Introducing...*)

Objective and subjective aspects of truth.

Authority thus resides in the Scriptures as illuminated by the Holy Spirit, not just the literary reality called the Bible. ***American fundamentalism omitted the role of the Holy Spirit calling for an objective quality in the Bible’s revelation and ability to bring us to knowledge “ a chapter a day keeps the devil away.”***

On the other hand, others over emphasize the subjective role of the Spirit subordinating the text to “what the Spirit told me it means!” It is actually a combination of both objective and subjective aspects. The written word correctly interpreted is the objective reality of God’s word while the Spirit’s illumination is the subjective reality of God’s word. Both are in concert.

END OF UNIT 1

**RELS 160: Introduction to Christian Theology**  
**Module 1: Session III: *God as Transcendent, Immanent & Triune***

**Introductory and Comments:**

- The doctrine of God in the history of dogma is probably the most important of all theological themes, along with Christology. The council's of Nicea and Chalcedon were points of clarification in terms of God's self-revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God's self-revelation in Scripture is primarily Trinitarian, especially the New Testament. Thus, the Trinity may serve as the proper point of departure for theology. Here we are following Barth's *Theological Prolegomena*, which consists of an exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity.
- The doctrine of the Trinity is extremely important in today's theology – especially around recent debates about communal theology – *Perichoresis* (περιχώρησις), a word that means interpenetration-communication within the Godhead. It is often described as the 'divine dance' though this hardly does justice to it. See for example Stanley Grenz', *Theology For The Community Of God*, Chapter 2.

**I. God's Being in His Transcendence and Immanence**

***a) The centrality of the doctrine of God. All systems start with God.***

- All of ones theology is determined from ones doctrine of God. It supplies the whole framework for the rest of your theology. For instance, The Trinity in Barth's theology leads to the threefold division of theology into God the Creator (Father), Reconciler (Son), and Redeemer, (Holy Spirit). It affects even the way you live and your efforts to please God. If God is only a judge you live in fear. Erickson is quite right that a renewed understanding of the doctrine of God is needed today.
- Openness theology is not the way to go because it reduces God to a dependent being, (more on this later). See, C. Pinnock, D. Basinger, J. Sanders, et al. in the book *The Openness of God*. It is also true that some speculative approaches leave us with less than a personal God. (Stephen Chernock's, *The Attributes of God* is a classic example)

***b) God as transcendent and immanent.***

- God is said to be immanent within creation and transcendent from creation. Both truths are taught in Scripture. Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:27b-28 speak of his Immanence. Isaiah tends to emphasize God's transcendence, Is. 58:8-9; 6:1-5.
- ***Immanence means*** God's presence and action in creation, in the human race and in space and time. As such His influence is all-pervasive in nature. ***Transcendence means*** that God is not merely a quality of nature or humanity but stands above and beyond them as a ***supreme being***. Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and us is expressive of this "wholly otherness". His holiness and purity transcend our own nature absolutely.

- The task of theology is to keep these two doctrinal realities in balance. Thus, we need to be cautious about using spatial terms. As a Spirit that is all pervasive yet transcendent, space does not apply to God. God's being is of another type than ours, *though we are in His image*. God's immanence speaks of His presence in creation, *yet His presence is not a product of necessity*. God does not need creation *per se*. God is transcendent, self sufficient, and therefore over creation as its Creator and Lord. So here is the theological problem stated simply:
- *If we emphasize immanence we risk identifying God with the world, making him one with us.*
- *If we emphasize transcendence we lose sight of His reality and emphasize God's absence and, in his stead, focus on human effort to reach God.*
- *The following implications flow from this:*

#### Implications of Immanence – as taught in Scripture

- i) *God is not limited to working directly in nature to accomplish His will.*
- ii) *God is not limited to using His chosen people to fulfill his plan, e.g. Pharaoh & Cyrus.*
- iii) *God is directly involved in creation, we should live in the light of this.*
- iv) *We can learn, in a limited way, about God in His creation.*
- v) *God's immanence gives us points of contact with unbelievers.*

#### Implications of Transcendence

- i) *A greater being than human beings exists in changeless perfection.*
- ii) *God is beyond complete human comprehension.*
- iii) *God's act of salvation is a divine act of a transcendent God.*
- iv) *God will always be differentiated qualitatively from humanity.*
- v) *Reverence is appropriate to God's being from us.*

#### **c) The Nature of God's Attributes**

- Attributes are those qualities of God, which constitute what He is in His self-revelation. They are part of His very nature, not just projections of our own human qualities. They should not be confused with God's acts, though they flow from and are congruent with His actions.
- These attributes *apply to God in His triune existence* and thus are shared equally in the Godhead. These attributes are *permanent qualities of God's eternal being*. They are *inseparable from his being and essence*. They express His whole being. God's attributes *express God's single revealed nature*. Yet, there is a sense in which *God is incomprehensible*. Finally, despite these attributes, *we cannot exhaust the knowledge of God* in His self-revelation.

#### **d) The Classification of the Attributes**

- Many different theologians use different categories depending on different text. But most agree on the nature of the two groupings and which belongs to which. Erickson uses the Greatness and Goodness of God. We shall refer to them as ***God's Majestic Attributes*** (Is. 6:1-6) and ***God's Moral Attributes*** (I Jn. 4:4). Here we are following Louis Berkof's *Systematic Theology*.

## **II. The Majestic and Moral Attributes of God**

**a) The majestic attributes:** These concentrate on the more *transcendent* aspects of God's being.

- i) **God is Spirit** (Jn. 4:24, 1:18; I Tim. 1:17, 6:15-16)
  - He is beyond the limitations of human physicality. Where God is referred to in the Scriptures in physical terms, these must be understood as *anthropomorphisms*. *Theophanies* are quite different in that they are not clearly attributed to God's actual presence.
- ii) **God is a Living God:** "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14)
  - Heb. 11:6 tells us that God exists and that this must be believed. God is the Living God of Israel as opposed to the dead gods of the nations. The New Testament speaks of a living, active God; I Thess. 1:9; Jn. 5:26; Gen. 1:1 & Jn. 1:1. That is, God's living is His living in, for, to and from Himself. He is self-sufficient life. God, as a living being, overflows with agapic love and creates out of His overflow, but not out of necessity. In this sense we must speak of God as the *self-caused cause*, the *unmoved mover*, the *living One*. He is in need of nothing or no one.
- iii) **Personality:** In the Scriptures God is a personal being. He has individual, ontological existence. (See A. W. Tozer's excellent devotional book *The Pursuit of God* on this) He has a name that bespeaks His being, that is, "I am". (The Hebrew concept of name implies independent existence). Having a name, he becomes a knowable entity. Ex. 20:7. It is to be revered. God is a person who acts. Ex. 3:13f; Gen. 3. He comes down and communes. God knows, feels, and wills. He is personal in every sense of the word. God's person is a person in relation; reciprocating our action (Barth call this *entsprechung*=correspondence). He is not subject to our manipulation, but does enter into covenant relation.
- iv) **Infinity:** He is beyond the scope of limited human experience in terms of:
  - ❑ **Space** – God is not limited to space. He has no place as such. His immensity and omnipresence mean he is in and beyond space. God cannot be localized to a particular part except in Jesus Christ of history. ***He is omnipresent***. Jer. 23:23-24; Ps. 139:7-12; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8
  - ❑ **Time** – "Time is in God" – God is not subject to time. He has no beginning or end. Ps. 90:1-2; Jude 25; Eph. 3:21; Is. 44:6, Rev. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13. Yet, God is conscious of the passage of time – macro and micro-cosmically. He is



transcendent over time and yet time is in Him as a product of His being. ***He is Lord of the past, the present, and the future.***

- **Knowledge** – His infinity pertains to His omniscience. His knowledge is immeasurable – He knows all things. Rom. 11:33; Ps. 104:24. When I asked my daughter to define this for me she said; “*He is the utmost hard drive that never needs reformatting.*” His knowledge is the source of His wisdom in creation, covenant and consummation.
  - **Power** – His infinity pertains to His power – omnipotence. God is *El Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1) ***God almighty.*** According to Jer. 32:15, 17; Matt. 19:26 “All things are possible” with God. His power is manifested in nature, in Heaven, and even in the underworld. God’s power is commensurate with the rest of His divine attributes. His power never contradicts His being and He uses it freely.
- v) **The Immutability of God.** Ps. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17; Num. 23:19. His immutability involves His constancy and faithfulness to the Covenant. His immutability extends to His plan for creation (*contra openness theology*). Where Scripture speaks of God’s “changing” or “repeating” it means either.
- i) They are *anthropomorphic/ anthropopatic* texts, i.e. God’s actions/feelings in human terms.
  - ii) They are extensions of God’s plan to a new stage.
  - iii) They are rather a change in human nature before they are a change in God. (Nineveh)

**b) God’s Moral Attributes** – Without these, God would be a capricious tyrant or a platonic demiurge.

#### **i) The holiness of God**

- God is holy in terms of His uniqueness – Holy (αγιος=hagios) means “set apart for special use.” God is, in this sense, majestic in His holiness – This could be part of His majestic attributes. See. Ex. 15:11; Is. 6:1-4 – qādōsh – which means God is “marked off”. God is holy in His actions and will not tolerate evil and sin. Is. 6. The holiness of God makes us aware of our sinfulness (Is. 6:5, Lk. 5:8) He commands only what is right and never commands or commends evil. ***His righteousness*** means His congruency in act and being with His law. The good, in terms of righteousness, can only be what is right. God’s righteous actions and decrees ***facilitate relationship.***

#### **ii) God is Just**

- God always acts in conformity to His law and thus applies it. God’s justice is His righteousness enshrined in the word of His law. Thus, He judges sin and holiness to the fullest extent of the righteous law. He is, as judge, impartial in dealing with His creatures. I Sam. 8:3; Am. 5:12. God expects His creatures to stay within the relational parameters.

#### **iii) Integrity**

- His veracity and faithfulness means Divine integrity and God’s genuineness. He is the “true” God. Jer. 10:5. Jn. 17:3; I Thess. 1:9; I Jn. 5:20; Rev. 3:17, 6:10. God is real; true to His self-revelation; not other than what He says He is.

#### **iv) Veracity**

- He represents Himself as He really is. (I Sam. 15:29; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18) God cannot lie or be contrary to His nature. He thus requires our integrity and honesty; be true; speak true. He condemns Israel for cheating in business. (Deut. 25: 13-15). A God of truth is best served by presentation of truth.
- God's **Faithfulness** (or Constancy) is a major them in relation to covenant fidelity in the Scriptures, Num. 23:19; I Thess. 5:24; I Cor. 1:9; II Cor 1:18-22; II Tim. 2:13; I Pet. 4:19. The faithfulness of God is demonstrated repeatedly in Scripture. Exodus is the classic OT example. Thus we are to be faithful in covenant with Him. Ecc. 5:4-5; Ps. 61:5; Josh. 9:16-21.
- c) **"God is Love"** – The crown of His moral attributes. It is described by **I John 4:4-12** as the basic attribute of God. **Ἀγάπη love is the love that comes** from God and flows to us. The gospels speak of the relationship between Father, Son and disciples as love. The love commandment is the greatest commandment.

God's love is:

- *Benevolent – understood as unselfish giving. Jn. 3:16; Deut. 7:7-8*
- *Gracious– understood as unmerited giving. Titus 2:11; 3:4-7; Eph. 2:8-9*
- *Merciful – understood as unhindered giving – He pities us. Ps. 103:13; Deut. 5:10; Mk. 1:41.*
- *Persistent –understood as unrelenting giving. Rom. 2:4; 9:22; I Pet. 3:20*

d) *In God justice and loving kindness.*

- God's love does not put aside His righteous judgment. If His mercy is severe it is because His love is beyond measure. *God desires relationship with us, but we transgress relational boundaries.* Justice could be seen as God's loving attempt to bring us back. Jesus Christ bears the brunt of God's just requirements. The tension is resolved in Christ. *God is just but His justice is loving justice; God is love but His love is a just love.*

### III. God as Unity in Triunity – God's 3-Fold Self Revelation

a) *The Biblical Teaching*

- The doctrine of the Trinity is distinctive to the Christian faith. Others accuse Christianity of tritheism or polytheism – e.g. Islam, Unitarians. Yet, in terms of faithfulness to the biblical witness; the Trinity is crucial to the church. God's being cannot be fully comprehended without addressing His Triunity. The doctrine of the Trinity affects all other doctrines, especially Christology and *Pneumatology*. The doctrine of the Trinity also makes sense of the Biblical revelation of God in terms of worship, witness, action and being. How do we make sense of the Scriptures employment of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *"This Triunity of God is the Scriptural witness to His self-revelation"* Barth.

i) The *oneness of God* – The Hebrews was strict monotheists as they are today. (Compare Islam)

- The first two of the Ten Commandments begins on a firm note of monotheism. Ex. 20:24. God will not tolerate the worship of any other God besides Him. The *Shema Israel* (Deut. 6:6-7) enshrines this in creedal form. Israel is to love God because He is to be the single object of their love. Jas. 2:19; I Cor. 8:4, 6, also make it clear that God is one.

ii) Yet, the Scriptures speak of the *threeness* of God as well.

- This is true of the New Testament witness in particular; but also Old Testament passages testify to God's multiplicity as well as his singularity. The following is clearly affirmed.

**The Deity of God the Father** is unquestioned in either the Old and/or New Testament. I Cor. 3:4,6; I Tim. 2:5-6, Jesus refers to Father as God, as well. Matt. 6:25 "Your heavenly Father", Matt. 19:23-26; Jn. Ch's 10 & 17 – "I and the Father are one."

**The Deity of Christ** is equally well attested to. Phil. 2:5-11; Jn. 1:1,14 (left out by Erickson!); Heb. 1.1f The Son is superior to the angels. The "I am" passages of John's gospel are direct claims to deity. Jesus claimed to be able to do what God does. Forgive sins, Mk. 2:8-10.

**The Holy Spirit is also viewed as divine.** Acts 5:3-4;

- The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete, convictor and teacher of divine truth, Jn. 16:8-11. He is directly involved in the salvific process – conviction, regeneration. Jn. 3:8. He conveys gifts of service and power. I Cor. 12:4-11. He is the presence of God inhabiting the believer. I Cor. 3:16-17. He is mentioned in creedal form with Father and Son. Matt. 23:19; II Cor. 13:14; I Pet. 1:2.

e) *The three-in-oneness – Triunity -of God*

- Thus the Scriptures affirm that God is triune in His self-revelation as "Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The Hebrew name for God, however, is helpful. Elōhim is plural. Gen. 1:26, "Let us make man in our image". The Repetition of the plural seems to make the point. In Is. 6:8 the prophet is asked by God, "who will go for us". The shift is from the singular "God" to the plural "us". In Gen. 1:27 we see that just as man and woman can be one (*èchād*) so God is one (*èchād*)
- In the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) they are linked as three in one. II Cor. 13:1 expresses the same separation in unity. In John's gospel the threefold formula appears again and again. Jn 1:33-34; 14:16,26; 16:13-15; 20:21-22. The Son is sent by the Father, Jn. 14:24 and comes forth from Him, 16:28. The Spirit is given from the Father and proceeds from the Father and Son. The prologue of John's Gospel is also full of Trinitarian language. Ὁ λογος προς τον θεον, c.f. Jn 1:1-14; Jn. 10:30; 14:9; 17:21. Thus *the doctrine of the Trinity is clearly assumed in the Scriptures.*

b) *Historical Constructions*

- In theology the doctrine of the Trinity did not become a live issue until the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. It was raised by theologians like Tertullian and Origen, among others. It developed roughly as follows:

*i) The economic view of the Trinity*

- Hippolytus and Tertullian developed the doctrine along economic lines. They refer to the biblical witness as “the order of salvation” in the “economy of God’s self-revelation”. Tertullian was most influential, using the word “Trinity” (Lat. *Trinitas*) for the 1<sup>st</sup> time. With Tertullian the words *substantia* and *persona* were also used in relation to the Trinity for the 1<sup>st</sup> time. The doctrine is not fully worked out until the Christological and Pneumatological debates are worked through at Nicea, (325) Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (450). The economic Trinity is the term used to refer to how God revealed himself in the order of salvation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Several views arose to explain this economic Trinity.

*ii) Dynamic Monarchianism (Theodotus, late 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century)*

- This doctrine of “Sole Sovereignty” Maintained that God was dynamically present in the life of Jesus but no real presence of God within him. It came at baptism – Never caught on – but gave rise to Modalism.

*iii) Modalitic Monarchianism – a wide spread heresy in the 2<sup>nd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> century.*

- Modalism appeared to affirm the Trinity, but in actuality it denied it. It desired to preserve the unity of God and yet the deity of Christ. For Modalists there is only one God who can be designated Father, Son or Holy Spirit. The terms point to God’s 3 modes of revelation but not to distinct persons. They are successive revelations of the same person. God is only one person with 3 different names. However this view failed to give full weight to the 3 as persons according to the Biblical evidence. E.g. Jesus’ baptism denies this doctrine expressly where the Father, Son and Spirit are all present. See also Matt. 28:19f

*iv) The Eastern Orthodox Formulation*

- **The council of Nicea** dealt with the deity of Christ in 325 A.D.
- **The council Constantinople** (381) dealt with the deity of the Spirit in 381 A.D..
- **The council Chalcedon** dealt with the co-eternity-unity and Trinity of the three and the two natures of Christ. The Cappadocian Fathers, who were influential at Nicea, spoke of **Perichoresis** of Father, Son and Spirit. Later on the Eastern Orthodox view emphasized one *ousia* (substance) 3 *hypostases* (persons) with the emphasis on the latter. That is, the one Godhead exists simultaneously in 3 modes of being or hypostases – undivided nature in divided persons. The identity of nature but not of persons was their goal. They are persons in the Godhead in the sense that we are human persons in humanity. Each hypostasis is the *ousia (essence-substance)* of the Godhead, but distinguished by personal traits. Thus, it appears to avoid modalism, strict monotheism, tritheism and Platonism in that:

- 1) There is a distinction in activity in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, Revelation is one action involving all three persons.

- 2) The concreteness and indivisibility of the divine substance is emphasized. There is no multiplicity of the divine substance, only persons.

### **What then are the essential elements of a doctrine of the Trinity**

- 1) The *unity of God* – God is one, not several. Yet in relational unity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 2) The *three persons are all divine because they are of one substance*. Each is divine in the same respect as the other, co-equal in divinity.
- 3) The *threeness and the oneness of God are not in the same respect* ~ the contradiction being only apparent. We cannot go the route of modalism and identify their oneness and threeness.
- 4) The Trinity is *eternal*
- 5) The *function* of one member may, for a time *be subordinate to the other*, esp. the Son and the Spirit. This is to accomplish God's plan. This does not entail the diminution of the divine status of either. Nor is it an eternal subordination.
- 6) Obviously, the Trinity is incomprehensible, and this must be part of the doctrine itself.

### **Introductory Comments:**

- The “Openness Theology” of C. Pinnock, D. Basinger and others has raised the contemporary debate about God’s sovereignty. Openness theology denies that God is completely sovereign regarding His plan for creation vis-à-vis human decisions.
- The continuing problem of God’s relation to creation is at stake here. Add to this the difficulties caused by an over emphasis on *immanence* and *transcendence* and it makes the doctrine of God’s sovereignty crucial. The doctrine of God’s sovereignty is further compounded by the problem of evil and suffering (*Theodicy*) vis-à-vis God’s care for creation.

### **I. God’s Sovereign Plan: God the Creator and Innovator**

- God’s sovereignty is God’s primal decision issues in affirmative action. These actions take created order in the direction of God’s purpose

#### ***a) Sovereignty: A working definition.***

- ***God’s sovereign plan*** is His eternal decision, which renders certain all things which shall come to pass. Such a plan reflects God’s primal decision and design (architect). This involves two related theological principles.

\***Predestination**, which relates to the eternal condition of moral agents.

\***Foreordination**, which refers to the decisions of God with respect to any matters within the realm of cosmic history. Predestination relates more to soteriology and will come up there, though K. Barth puts it here as God’s choosing of humanity in Christ. Foreordination has a broader meaning as we shall see. It includes both His foreknowledge and His action on that basis. We shall return to these concepts later.

#### ***b) The Biblical evidence for the sovereignty of God is clear***

- i) ***Old Testament*** – The Old Testament ***ties God’s sovereignty to the concept of covenant***. The concept of covenant has a long and detailed history. Gen. 1:6-15. That is, in the OT God is all powerful in His role as creator. But God is also a loving personal creator. God’s will and rule after this pattern are everywhere assumed in the Old Testament, e.g. rain (Is. 37:26; 22:11; Ps. 27:10-11; 37; 65:3; 91; 121; 139; 16). God’s plan is also seen as His effectual plan in that He will do what He promised (Is. 14:24-27; Job 42:2; Jer. 23:20; Zech. 1:6). It is also a prominent theme in wisdom literature (Prov. 16:4; 3:19-20; Job 38)
- ii) ***New Testament*** – The Gospels have Jesus affirming God’s sovereignty throughout (Lk. 21:20-22; Matt. 26:24; Mk 14:21; Lk. 22:22; Jn. 17:12; 18:9) In the NT the ***fulfillment of prophecy is the fulfillment of God’s plan*** (Matt. 1:22; 2:15; 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; Jn. 12:38; 19:24). Jesus had a clear sense of God bringing history to its goal (Mk. 13:7-10). This attitude is reiterated by the apostles in Acts (Acts 1:8; 2:23)

- Paul's writings everywhere assume God's sovereign rule (I Cor. 12:18; 15:58; Col. 1:19; Gal. 3:8; 4:4-5). **Romans 9-11 is an extended argument for the sovereignty of God.** Romans 8:28 "For we know that all things..." **you finish it from memory!**

c) ***The nature of the divine design for creation. General characteristics.***

- i) God's plan is from all eternity: Ps. 139 in the primal will of God to be for us, i.e. it has no chronological sequence.
- ii) God's sovereign plan is made in His divine freedom to do so. Is. 40:13-14
- iii) The end of God's plan is God's own glory. Eph. 1:5-6, Is. 48:11
- iv) The plan of God is all-inclusive. Eph. 1:11. No areas fall outside of His plan
- v) God's plan is efficacious. What he has purposed will come to pass. Is. 14:14, 27
- vi) God's plan relates to His actions but is also consistent with His nature. The outcome of God's decisions and actions are congruent with His nature.
- vii) God's plan is His decision regarding creation, preservation, direction and redemption.
- viii) The human agent is included in God's divine plan. (Jn. 6:37; Acts 13:48)
- ix) God's plan is unalterable in its grand design. (vis-à-vis anthropomorphisms; Jonah; Gen. 6:6)

d) ***God and humanity as agents in relation: action and correspondence***

- Is God's action or human action logically prior?
- i) ***Calvinists*** believe God's action is prior to human action. God is not dependent on our action.
- ii) ***Arminians*** allows for human action; we have the free exercise of our will. Matt. 11:28 The key to this is God's foreknowledge in the formation and execution of His divine plan as we shall see below.

e) ***A moderately Calvinist view***

- A key to understanding the sovereignty of God is the unconditional nature of God's plan. God's foreknowledge is His favorable disposition or ***election*** in the light of knowledge. Rom. 8:29; 9:11-13. ***Election*** is the determining feature of God's foreknowledge. God and humanity must be thought together so that the human is always included in the plan of God. *Institutes* I.1
- If God decrees what will happen. This means humanity will not act contrary to this course of action. Those who could act differently, in fact act in a predetermined way. We are predisposed in our freedom to act in certain ways. I am therefore limited in my freedom to act. I am free to choose many options, but my choice is influenced by who I am. ***God renders it certain that at that one particular point I would freely decide to move in a certain fashion.***
  - ***Is this view compatible with human freedom?***
- It depends on one's view of freedom. Could and would are different modes of action. Freedom cannot be total spontaneity and random choice because there is no such thing. There is a measure of predictability in human actions and freedom. ***"But if by freedom is meant ability to choose between options, human freedom exists and is compatible with God having rendered our decisions and actions certain."*** (Erickson, *Introducing...*)

- It might seem that the divine choice we have argued for is the same as the Arminian idea of foreknowledge. There is a significant difference, however. In the Arminian understanding, there is a foreknowledge of actual existing entities. God merely confirms what He foresees they will do. God has in the Calvinist view, foreknowledge of all possibilities. God foreknows which individuals will exist and what they would do. **How do we distinguish between God's Wish and God's Will?** Is there a self contradiction in God? Does He will sin and then command against it? We must distinguish between what God wills and what God wishes. His wish is His general intention i.e. his ideal values. His will is His specific intentions in a given situation. *"There are times, many of them, when God wills or permits events and entities, that He does not really wish."* E.g. Job. **God's Will and the Need for Human Action must be balanced in theology.** God's ends includes His means and we are part of the means. It is faithfulness of God, not success in his plan that is the measure we use.

- f) *Historical Considerations* – other views of the plan of human history. (Read Erickson on this)
- i) Reincarnation and East Asian religions
  - ii) Doomsday philosophies – i.e. nuclear holocaust
  - iii) Nihilistic existentialism – pessimistic wandering
  - iv) Social Darwinism – the evolution of the species (utopianism)
  - v) Marxism – the utopia of absolute equilibrium
  - vi) Liberalism- The supremacy of human reason

## II. God's Good Creation – *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

- God's primal plan became existential reality through divine action. God's first work, from our point of view, was creation.

### a) *Why is the doctrine of creation important*

- i) It is a great Biblical theme (Gen. 1:1 – Jn. 1:1) Covenant and Creation go together.
- ii) It has always been an article of our faith. (The Apostles Creed is explicit on this)
- iii) This doctrine has implications for other doctrines. Eg. Salvation, consummation, etc.
- iv) The doctrine of creation differentiates Christianity from other religions.
- v) It encourages dialogue on the natural science front. This is being revived today.
- vi) The issue has been divine in the history of Evangelicalism.

### b) *Creatio ex nihilo: The work of the triune God*

- God created the universe "Out of nothing" i.e. without preexisting material. God's creating was direct and immediate vis-à-vis reality, but progressive vis-à-vis material. **All that exists came into being through God's action, *Ex nihilo*.** Explain the primal origin of that which exists, especially "From the beginning (foundation). Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Lk. 11:50; Jn. 17:24; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3. See Erickson p. 131. "These phrases show that creation involves the beginning of the existence of the world, so that there is no pre-existent matter." C.f. Rom. 4:17; II Cor. 4:6; Heb. 11:3; These passages indicate that God wills creation to be and it comes into existence.



- However, creation is an entity entirely distinct from Himself and not part of Him. The phrase *Creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) is all inclusive. God is the source for the entirety of reality. (Jn. 1:3). *Creatio ex nihilo* is also the work of the **Triune God** (Gen. 1; Jn. 1; Gen. 2; 3; Ps. 96:5; Is. 37:16; I Cor. 8:6.) The Trinity constitutes the one form of the universal causation in terms similar to that of the architect, project manager, and carpenter. Creation is from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. ***Its purpose was to glorify God***; Ps. 19:1, each part of creation glorifies God.

**c) *The theological significance of creation***

- i) Everything in creation is dependent upon God for its existence. There is no other God but God. He caused all things to be.
- ii) The *original* act of creation is unique. No other being can reproduce it.
- iii) *Creation, as a product* of God's hand, is intrinsically good. There was nothing evil in God's original creation. Gen. 1:31. There was no dualism between matter and spirit.
- iv) Creation makes us responsible stewards. We cannot shirk responsibility for the fall.
- v) The doctrine of creation as good is supported by the incarnation.
- vi) The doctrine of creation as good restrains us from harsh asceticism.
- vii) The doctrine of creation makes us interdependent – personally and materially.
- viii) The doctrine of creation distinguishes us from God and yet binds us to Him.
- ix) The doctrine of creation points out our limitations as creatures.

**d) *Creation and the question of science***

- Theology was “queen of the sciences” for many years. The rise of science in the modern period has been problematic for theology. The Scopes trials in the U.S. brought the confrontation to a head. The debate now surrounds the creation = evolution debate.
- The Bible must be understood in light of its purpose: to make it possible for humans to be ***salvifically related to God***. Scientists have dismissed the Scriptures too quickly and creationists have employed the text in ways it was not meant to be. Erickson holds the view that “God created in a series of acts which involved long periods, and which took place an indefinite time ago.” This does justice to both. The question of evolutionary development is also important but we will not pursue it here. Theistic evolutionists vs. creationists vs. evolutionists, the debate is endless here. Erickson opts for progressive creationism, e.g. Heb. (kinds), and I like that option. God created the basic categories and mutations go from there. Evolution is just another theory: approach to the data is everything.

**Implications**

- i) Everything that exists has value. Each part has its place (concern)
- ii) God's creation is primitively direct and continuously indirect (partnership)
- iii) We are justified in scientifically investigating creation (within limits)
- iv) Only God can be said to be self-sufficient.

### **III. God's Sustainment of Creation: Providence**

- **A definition** – “By providence we mean the continuing action of God by which He preserves in existence the creation which He has brought into being, and guides it to His intended purpose.” It comes from the Latin *providere* – to see ahead, foresee. **God knows our future. Providence lends us assurance that God cares for us. In providence God maintains and guides creation.**

#### ***a) Providence as preservation – Biblical perspectives***

- Numerous passages in Scripture speak of God's divine preservation of creation, Ezra 9:6; Col. 1:17; Ps. 104; Exodus; Jesus, Matt. 6:26-33. There are a number of theological dimensions of providence as preservation.
  - i) The inseparability of God from His creation in terms of love and care. Jn. 10; Rom. 8:35-39.
  - ii) Though we are not spared from trial, we are sustained. Jas. 1:2; Rom. 5; Phil. 1:6; 4:19.
  - iii) God is immanently involved in His creation – Contra Deism et.al.
  - iv) God's providence as preservation means a certain regularity in creation.

#### ***b) Providence as God's ordering of creation (governance, guidance)***

- God's activity in the universe ensures its divinely appointed purpose. God's governance is His execution in time of His plans before time. God governs all of creation, including animal life - Ps. 104:21-29, and human life – Jn. 2:21. He is sovereign in all circumstances. I Sam. 2:6-7; Gal. 1:15-16. He is sovereign even in the casting of lots. Pr. 15:33; in the use of the *umin and thummin* of the High Priest in the OT God is always the one who decides the lot. He is sovereign over all creation, heaven and earth, Ps. 103:19-22, including salvation, Acts 2:32.

#### ***c) Providence; Governance; Sin and Evil***

- How do we distinguish God's actions in relation to human sin? Does God cause or permit sin?. In relation to sin God can: prevent, permit, direct or limit. (Jas. 1:14)
  - i) God can at times prevent us from sinning – Ps. 19:3.
  - ii) God will at times permit us to sin – Rom. 1; 2; Ps. 81:12-13
  - iii) God will at times direct sin – make it turn out for good – Acts 2:36 Joseph
  - iv) God will at times limit sin and its effects – Job 1:12
- What are the theological implications of this understanding of Providence?
  - i) God's governing activity is universal. Rom. 8:28
  - ii) God's providence extends to all creation and creatures. Matt. 5:45
  - iii) God's government is towards a good end. Prov. 3:4-5; Jer. 29:11
  - iv) God's providence is especially concerned with His elect. Lk. 15:3-7
  - v) Our activity and God's activity are at times complimentary. Prayer can help.
  - vi) God is sovereign in His government. Gideon. Jud. 6:36
  - vii) Not all events can be directly attributed to God. E.g. (e.g., Hitler and the final solution). Be careful not to build a natural theology on God's providence.

**d) Providence and prayer – Is prayer necessary if God is sovereign?**

- God's plan cannot be altered by human prayer. Yet we are commanded to pray (Jas. 5:16). Prayer **bespeaks a partnership** between humanity and God. Prayer, like evangelism, is **God's means to an end**. Thus, prayer is critical. But prayer also **serves a maturing function** in the life of the individual. Prayer **reinforces our dependence** and gives God a chance to speak to us.

**Excursus on Miracles and Providence**

- Miracles are the unusual interventions of God into normal affairs of the universe. They are a special supernatural work of God's providence which transcends the usual patterns of nature. There are 3 views.
  - i) Miracles are Manifestations of **little known natural laws**. But this is contradictory and vague.
  - ii) Miracles contravene the laws of nature, and thus are impossible, except by supernatural means. Jesus' miracles fit this category and is the theological basis for them.
  - iii) Miracles are a supernatural countering of natural forces..

**e) Evil and the doctrine of providence**

- The nature of the problem was well put by David Hume when he asked: Can God prevent evil? If so, why does he not prevent evil? A number of solutions have been offered, such as God is not omnipotent; God has simply determined all. Evil must be the natural opposite to goodness. Others simply reject evil outside of sin. A total answer is beyond human ability either from a theological, philosophical and or scientific point of view. Some other suggestions are:
  - i) Evil is a necessary accompaniment to creation as a part of free will.
  - ii) Some call for a reevaluation what constitutes evil and good.
  - iii) For others Evil as a result of sin in general = the results of the fall
  - iv) God is seen by open theists as an equal victim of evil –Gen. 6:6.

END OF UNIT 2

**Introduction to Christian Theology**  
**Module 1: Session V: God Incarnate: The Person of Christ (*Humanity*)**

**Introductory Comments:**

- The historical tendency to emphasize the deity over the humanity of Christ is a common theological misunderstanding in Evangelical circles. On the other hand, the modern, secular emphasis on His humanity to the exclusion of His Deity is even a greater threat to a proper Christology. Not only that, holding the two natures doctrine is crucial to a proper soteriology. Without a balanced perspective, we can risk confusing the nature of salvation. For salvation to be secured we must affirm the full deity and humanity of Christ.

**I. The Criticality of Christ's Humanity**

*a) Jesus overcomes the gap between God and man as "God for man".*

- God must take the initiative in closing the qualitative gap between Him and us. As "God for man", He brings the transcendent one into created reality.

*b) Jesus overcomes the gap between God and man as "Man for God".*

- Our fellowship with God is guaranteed in our being united with Christ. He transverses the spiritual and moral gap from the human side. His humanity is therefore a real humanity and not partial or illusory. If He was not man for God, then we cannot have union with God. "For the validity of the work accomplished in Christ's death, or at least its applicability to us as human beings, depends upon the reality of His humanity, just as the efficacy of it depends upon the genuineness of His deity." (Erickson, p. 224)

*c) Jesus is thus the presence of God within the human setting.*

- As such God is able to relate to us in our suffering and trials through Christ. John's gospel speaks of the incarnation as the "tabernacle-ing" of God in our midst as fully human (Jn. 1:14). As such He was fully human and therefore acquainted with the human condition with all it entails.

**II. The Biblical Material**

*a) The Gospel witness – There are plenty of references to the humanness of Christ.*

- He had a fully human body, in terms of birth, experience etc. Apart from His miraculous conception He was a normal male in respect to humanity. (Luke 2:52; Jn 4:5-6) He had a typical family history and sense of identity. He had a *normal "development"* in terms of growing in wisdom (Lk. 2:52). He grew tired from time to time (Jn. 4:6) and experienced

thirst (Jn. 19:28). His death involved the same physical, emotional and psychological characteristics. (Heb 2:17-18). Jn. 1:14, tells us that the word “became Flesh” (*sarx*) and dwelt among us. (I Jn. 4:2-3a). His person made a real physical impact on His disciples (I Jn. 4:2-3a). John is interested above all in the Jesus He has “heard, touched and seen). Paul considers Him the one human who reverses the fall of Adam in Romans 5.

***b) The Gospel witness to His psychological nature.***

- John understood Jesus’ humanity in its full psychological sense. Jn. 13:23 John refers to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” meaning he had affection for John. The fact that He has compassion on the needy is clear evidence of this. (Jn. 9 – the man born blind; Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). He felt compassion to the point of tears (Jn. 11:33-35). He experienced joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). He even experienced anger (Jn. 2:14-18), understood as “Righteous indignation”. He was also deeply spiritual (Lk. 6:12). He feels the anguish and pain of separation from God (Mk. 14:23-50; 15:34).
- He knew and understood in human terms; but His knowledge exceeded ours. Yet, as a man, Jesus was limited in His knowledge. “No one knows the day or the hour of the coming of the son of man,” he told his disciples.

***c) The Epistolary witness regarding His humanity, suffering and temptation.***

- Paul describes Him as a “man, like as we are” born under the law. (Gal 4:4). Hebrews tells us that He was “in all points tempted” (Heb. 2:14; 17-18; 4:12-15)

### **III. Early Heresies Regarding the Humanity of Christ**

***a) Docetism – I John is aimed at dispelling this heresy.***

- It was started by a specific group of Christians known as Docetists. It claimed that Christ only “*appeared*” to be human in Jesus. It takes its name from the Greek word δόκεω (*dokeo*), which means, “to seem or appear”. ***Docetist’ believe*** that because matter is evil Jesus could not have been human. The incarnation was contrary to God’s impassible and unchangeable nature. Thus the humanity of Jesus in physical terms is just an illusion. He was more like a ghostly apparition than a reality. While the deity of Jesus was real and complete – His humanity was unreal\

***b) The Apollinarian proposal***

- ***Apollinarians*** was a 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop from Syria and was concerned to retain the true unity of the Son. He thought that the idea of a human and divine (*νοῦς -nous*) mind in Jesus was contradictory. Thus, on the basis of Jn. 1:14 he said that Jesus was human only in terms of physical attributes; not mental or psychological. He was a compound unity with only some human elements; mostly divine. As the **λόγος** He only assumed human flesh and not human mind. What animated the fleshly Jesus was this divine **λόγος**. All His immaterial aspects, such as soul, will, intellect, were divine. Thus, He was different from the rest of humanity. It was ***His divinity*** that preserved Him from sin and impurity. As you can ascertain, ***Apollinarianism failed to do justice to the full humanity of Christ.***

### c) *His virgin birth*

- ***The virgin birth*** remains a controversial doctrine of the humanity of Christ. The fundamentalist/modernist debate – pro and con- has filled many a theology book.
- What ever we say about it we must affirm that the “virginal conception” was not the result of a sexual relationship. The Scriptures tell us she had no sexual relations until after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:25). Her pregnancy was a supernatural event that does not entail copulation between God and Mary. The Biblical evidence includes: Matt. 1:18-25; Lk. 1:26-38; Is. 7:14.
- The theological significance of the virgin birth is important because it is a doctrine taught by Scripture and thus commands belief. It is indispensable to the sinless ness of Christ and it is equally indispensable to the incarnation of Christ in terms of the union of the two natures in Christ. God, without sexual relation,, supplied, through a mysterious act , the human male component for conception. The virgin birth requires only that a normal human being be brought into existence. “This could have occurred without an incarnation, and there could have been an incarnation without a virgin birth”. (Erickson, *Introducin Christian Doctrine*) The virgin birth is a subsidiary doctrine helping us support the doctrine of the incarnation and sinless perfection of Christ.
- *It is important for the following reasons.*
  1. *It reminds us that our salvation is supernatural (Jn. 1:13)*
  2. *It reminds us that salvation is a gift of grace*
  3. *It reminds us of the uniqueness of Jesus the Savior*
  4. *It reminds us of the sovereignty and power of God*
- *Final note on the sinless ness of Christ (Heb. 4:15)*
- Biblical data includes: Heb. 7:26; 9:14; Jn. 6:69; I Pet. 2:22; I Jn. 3:5; II Cor. 5:21. Jesus claimed sinless perfection for Himself (Jn 8:29-46). He was falsely accused of blasphemy because of this claim. While Jesus could have sinned, he would not have. He was in all point tempted “in the same way as us” but without sin. (Heb 4:15). He knew full well the full force of temptation
  - ***“The man who yields to a particular temptation has not felt its full power. He has given in while the temptation has yet something in reserve. Only the man who does not yield to temptation, who, as regards that particular temptation, is sinless, knows the full extent of that temptation.” Leon Morris***
- Jesus *true humanity* is understood to be a pre-fall condition, not a post-fall assumption of humanity. Sin is precisely humanity’s “not wanting to be fully human”. ***Thus Jesus is the only truly human individual, “the standard by which we are to be measured.”*** (CDIII/2)

## **IV. The Implications of the Divine Human Nature of Christ for Soteriology**

a) **The atoning death of Jesus can truly avail for us** – if Christ, as divine-human, has died for us then our salvation is secure. He can relate to us as “man for God” and “God for man” He was the perfect sinless priest and sacrifice

**b) He can identify and thus intercede for us.** He has experienced all of the vicissitudes of the human experience that we have.

**c) He can be a true human example for us.** His moral teaching and behavior is a viable ethic for Christianity, as long as we understand it to be a work of God by the Holy Spirit in our individual lives.

***d) He is the image of our true humanity. He is the truly human person.*** Barth reminds us that Christ is the New Adam, who displaces the false image of our humanity that was the old Adam. (CD III/2, p. 132f)

***e) He testifies to the fact that, in its purity, humanity is good.***

The goal of the Gospel of God is to “recreate us into the image of his own dear Son.”

***f) He testifies to the fact that God, the transcendent one, has become immanent and active within our world.***

## Introduction to Christian Theology

### Module 1: Session VI: The Two Natures Doctrine (*Divinity*)

#### **I. The Importance and Complexity of the Two Natures Doctrine**

##### *a) How are we to relate the two natures of Christ as Divine and Human*

- Like the Trinity, all attempts seem to resolve into mystery. The unity of the two natures is crucial to the incarnation as Divine act. The atonement must be the work of both God and the man Jesus Christ. The two-natures doctrine posits an understanding of the absolute unity and distinction to two apparently contradictory natures. The question for theology becomes, “how do we reconcile the existence of two natures in one, in Christ?”

##### *c) As deity, Christ is all knowing, all-powerful and ever present.*

- He has all the attributes of the Godhead in every respect. His becoming human involves a limitation, even divestment of these divine prerogatives. Not much is said expressly in the Scriptures relative to this doctrine, except for the passage in Philippians 2:5f. But the general sense of Scripture does support it.

#### **II. The Biblical Material for the Two Natures Doctrine**

*a) The Scriptures introduce no duality in Christ’s thought, life and action (Jn. 17:21-22). He is not treated as being divine at one point and human at another.*

*b) The prologue of John’s gospel claims that Christ’s deity is of a single subject, who is also said, in the same passage, to be human. (Jn. 1:1-14)*

##### *c) Paul also speaks of Christ as a single divine and human being*

- Everywhere in the N, Jesus is seen to think, speak and act as one unified subject. (Gal. 4:4; I Tim. 3:16; I Jn. 2:1-2; 4:2, 15; 5:5). I Cor. 2:8 and Col. 1:13-14 clearly identify the unity of Christ’s deity with His atoning work. Cf. Jn. 3:13)

#### **III. Some Early Heresies Regarding the Two Natures Doctrine**

- Very late in church history, theologians began to reflect on this. Once *Nicea* and *Constantinople* clarified the genuineness of each of the two natures, the question of their exact relation was able to come to the surface.

##### *a) It came first via Nestorianism.*



- Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople around 428 A.D. In his attempt to settle the semi-divine nature of Mary as *theotokos* he had to claim that Mary bore a man, Jesus, who became the vehicle for God (Christ). The two natures were conjoined rather than unified in Christ. His view implies a split in Christ between divinity and humanity. He was later condemned at the Council of Ephesus, 431 A.D.

**b) Eutychianism: (Eutyches ca. 375-454)**

- He was an Archimandrite priest of a monastery in Constantinople. He declared that after His birth, Christ only possessed one nature. God was made into human flesh and as such was a perfect human; sinless and pure. He claimed that there were two natures (divine and human) before birth, one after, because the divine was fused with the human to become perfect humanity. In the end the humanity was absorbed into the Divinity eliminating humanity. It was almost Docetic in form, and certainly influenced by the *Gnostic dualism* current in his day.

**c) Adoptionism**

- Adoptionism claims that Jesus started out as a mere human, but was adopted by the logos, or Christ. The adoption event was the baptism of Jesus by John. Thus, a human Jesus became possessed of Divine nature. It is based primarily on Baptism accounts and Jn. 3:16 “begotten”

**d) Kenotic Christology**

- Perhaps one of the most promising explanations is based on Phil. 2:7. The Greek work κενωω (kenoo) used in Phil 2:5-7 means to empty. According to this text, say some theologians Christ emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives. The divine attributes of Christ were temporarily laid aside for the human but He retains His moral attributes.

**e) The Doctrine of Dynamic Incarnation**

- According to this theory the two natures are not to be understood in terms of an *ontological distinction*, which relies on Trinitarian differentiation, but one that claims the *active presence and power of God in the man Jesus*. The difference between Him and us is His *possession of divine presence and power*. Needless to say, this contradicts Col. 2:9; Jn. 1:18; 8:58 and Jn. 3:16.

## **IV. The Basic Tenants of the Two Natures Doctrine**

**a) With Scripture and Chalcedon as our starting points we can say the following about Christ.**

- Both the unity of the divine and human persons and their integral separateness are insisted upon. They remain so unconfused, indivisible, unchangeable and inseparable. What can we gather from Chalcedon’s negative answer?
  - i) The Incarnation was *more of an assumption of human attributes than a giving up of divine attributes*. Phil. 2:6-7. Christ emptied himself by “taking the form of a servant”. “While He did not cease to be one in nature with the

Father, He became, *functionally*, subordinate to the Father for the period of the Incarnation”.

- ii) The *union of the two natures* meant that they did not function independently. He is always divine-human agent. He was limited in the exercise of his attributes but was no less divine. He fully chose to limit His divine attributes
- iii) *Divinity and humanity are both most fully known in Christ*. His humanity is “Real Humanity” as opposed to imperfect humanity, and His divinity is vested in His Lordship.
- iv) Keep in mind that the Incarnation is *divinely motivated*. The question is how can God become man and not vice versa?
- v) Jesus being is *complex by His very nature*. Thus room for mystery is needed.

END OF UNIT 3

**Introduction to Christian Theology**  
**Module 1: Session VII: The Work of Christ as Atoning Sacrifice**

**Introductory Comments:**

- Christ's work is uniquely suited to His place in the triune being of God. We study the person of Christ in order to understand the depth of the atonement. Who He was specially fitted Him for what He was to do.

**I. Stages in Christ's Work**

***a) Humiliation – Incarnation.*** Jn 1:14 – the Word became flesh

- The NT highlights the humility and subjection of Christ under the conditions of humanity Phil. 2:6-7; Gal. 4:4. In this passage we see that He gave up equality with God. He gave up, as we have seen, the independent exercise of His will. He took the form of a servant or slave and was born in a manger
- Gal. 4 tells us that He was born under the law and thus fulfilled it. (Matt 5:17-21) He was circumcised, brought to the temple and was fully Jewish. He was humiliated, even unto death, and descended into Hades.

***b) Exaltation – Resurrection***

- But Jesus overcame death, hell and the grave, thereby undoing the power of sin. His resurrection is the crux of the Gospel story: highly deb. The empty tomb stands as witness as do the apostles of this overcoming. His resurrection was bodily and yet glorified according to Jn 20:25-27. And Paul tells us that our resurrection will be patterned after His, I Cor. 15:44 . As such, His resurrection represents, symbolically and really, the triumph over sin

***c) Exaltation – Ascension and Session at the right hand of the Father***

- After His resurrection Jesus reassumes his position with the Father and the Spirit. He foretold this on a number of occasions, Jn. 6:62; 14:2; 12; 16:5,10,28. Luke also spoke of this event, Lk. 24:50-51; Acts 1:6-11. Furthermore, it is an important theme in Paul, Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; I Tim. 3:16. So also the book of Hebrews, Heb.1:3; 4:14; 9:24.
- His ascension is a translation into another realm. It is a translation of His whole being back into the presence of God. His humanity remains intact. His ascension facilitated the returning of the Spirit, Jn 16:7. He also went “to prepare a place for us” Jn 14:2-3. In the mean time the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, carries out the work of redemption through believers. Yet, as the ascended one He is still present in the power of the Spirit, Matt. 28:20. His ascension is to a position of authority and power at the

right hand of the Father, Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:33-36; Eph. 1:20-22. In this position He is ever making intercession on our behalf Heb. 7:25.

**d) Exaltation – the Second Coming – Parousia**

- This brings Christ full circle in terms of redemption. His coming is known only to the Father, Matt. 25:31, and at His coming every knee will bow, Phil. 2:10-11. At this time the full authority and power of Christ will be revealed once and for all, and all creation will come under his headship.

**II. The Functions (Offices) of Christ; Prophet, Priest and King**

**a) The revelatory role of Christ – Christ the Prophet**

- As *the* Prophet, Jesus reveals the Father to us. He clearly understood His role as prophet, Matt. 13:57, and the crowds hailed Him as a prophet at His triumphal entry, Matt. 21:11. His prophetic ministry fulfills and extends all prophets before Him. His prophetic office both stands in, and transcends the Old Testament understanding. He declares that on the day of the Lord he will come again, in fulfillment of prophecy. As the Prophet He proclaims good news (Is. 40:9; 52:7) as the *Good News of the coming of the Kingdom of God*.
- As the Prophet, His revelatory role transcends time and space. His incarnation is a continuation of His role as revealer in time. He continues His revelatory, Prophetic, role in and through the Spirit, Jn. 14:26. As Prophet, Priest and King He will finally reveal God's eternal plan at the *eschaton*. I Cor. 13:12; I Jn. 3:2

**b) The Kingship of Christ – His Lordship.**

- In the Scriptures the Messiah He is often referred to as King. Is. 9:7 Says that He will sit on David's throne. His righteous rule will last forever, Heb. 1:8 and He brings with Him the kingdom of God, Matt. 13:41. Paul tells us that His Lordship is from everlasting to everlasting, Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:17. He is Lord of creation and Lord of the church, Col. 1:18. While Paul speaks of His humiliation, this does not entail His abdication of the throne, Phil. 2:9-10. At the *eschaton* His rule and reign as the Davidic Messiah will become complete.

**c) The Reconciling work of Christ: Intercession and Atonement**

- The high priestly prayer of Christ is a prayer for our *reconciliation to God* and one-another. His reconciling work continues at the right hand of the Father. ***Christ's atoning work is the basis of His reconciling power.*** That makes the Atonement the crucial point in Christian theology. Therefore, the Atonement is the place where Christ's ontological reality as the God man has practical implications for our salvation. Our ***doctrines of God and Christ*** here show themselves to be *true or false*, in terms of *their ability to effect our spiritual reconciliation with God*. Only and effective atonement can meet the human spiritual need of salvation from sin and death.

### **III. Theories of Atonement – A rich and complex doctrine**

- Sometimes the abundance of Biblical material leads to *an abundance of theological theories*. Such is the case with the atonement.

#### **a) The Socinian Theory of Atonement: Christ as example**

- Faustus and Laelius Socinus (16<sup>th</sup> century) developed this theory. They rejected vicarious atonement understood in Anselm's terms as satisfaction of the divine law. Their whole theory is built on I Pet. 2:21 wherein they see Christ as merely an example of *suffering love*. The death of Christ filled our need for an example and demonstration of love, which we can follow, with the help and grace of God. The problem is that they ignore many Scriptures that either deny their view, or support a completely different idea more fully. The very passage they use undermines their position against Anselm. For example, their reading of I Pet. 2:21 ignores the context of substitution in vs. 24. They claimed our redemption is based solely on our adoption of Jesus teaching and example. This view greatly influenced the Enlightenment.

#### **b) The Moral Influence Theory: Atonement as a demonstration of God's love**

- This view was developed in embryonic form by *Peter Abelard* (1300's) and later expanded into a full theory, *Horace Bushnell* (1802-1876). They saw God's nature as essentially love. Thus, we need not fear His justice and judgment because the atonement demonstrates this love. Our own attitudes keep us apart from God, not God's just punishment. Sin is sickness for which God's atonement in Christ is the universal cure. Our awareness of the demonstration of His love influences our decision to be for Christ.

#### **c) The Governmental Theory: Atonement as a demonstration of Divine Justice**

- *Hugo Grotius* (1583-1645) understood God's holiness and justice as absolute, and disobedience as a serious matter requiring serious consequences. Sin, as disobedience, is a violation of God's law and deserves punishment. But, says Grotius, God's love tempers the implementation of His justice.
- While God has the right to punish sin; He is not mandated to do so. Thus, God has acted in such a way as to govern our disobedience. He acts with a view to the best interest of those under His rule. *"It was necessary, therefore, to have an atonement which would provide grounds for forgiveness and simultaneously retain the structure of moral government. Christ's death served to accomplish both ends"*. (Erickson, *Introducing...*). According to Grotius, Christ's death *was not a penalty but a substitute for the penalty*. It was a *limited display of the results of disobedience*. It is a deterrent, if you will.
- Thus, our turning to God for forgiveness shows God's good government. God can forgive sins without a breakdown in His sovereignty and justice. There is, of course, little Scriptural basis for this view. Is. 42:21 are sometimes referred to. It is inferred from the general sense of Scripture.

**d) *The Ransom Theory: Atonement as victory over the forces of sin and evil***

- This is claimed by most theologians to be the standard view of the church Fathers, (see especially Gustaf Aulen's *Christus Victor*). It dominated all other views until Anselm and Abelard. Origen was one of the major promoters. He saw creation as a cosmic drama. Origen considered Satan to be the ruler of the created realm. God will not interfere in the same manner as Satan did, and therefore offers a ransom to Satan. (Mk. 10:45)
- The question surrounds the recipient of the ransom. According to Origen God *deceived* Satan into receiving the soul of Jesus as payment for Sin. His release from of Satan through resurrection meant the loss of control of Satan over all Creation. Thus, it is also referred to as the *triumphant* view of the atonement as expressed in the Latin term *Christus victor*. The ransom theory is very problematic on Biblical grounds. Theologically, it is difficult to conceive of God as a deceiver. Rom. 6:6-8; Gal. 3:13. *Christ nullified the control of Satan through a once for all sacrifice as our substitute and this is a victory, but the "transaction" took place between the Father and the Son.*

**e) *The Satisfaction Theory of Atonement: Atonement as compensation of the Father***

- This is the most objective of all theories. It emphasizes Christ's death as a satisfaction of God's righteous demands. Anselm is the first to fully express it. In his book, *Cur Deus Homo*, "Why God Became Man?" Anselm answers that God became man in order to eliminate the power of sin. Sin was a transgression of God's righteous law, and disobedience reflected on God's honor. God's honor must be restored and compensated for. Satisfaction, to be effective, had to be rendered in terms greater than the offense of the offender. Only Christ could do this. Thus, only God could make satisfaction for God. Yet, such satisfaction had to be made by man. Thus, it had to be rendered by someone who was God and man. Consequently, the Incarnation is a logical necessity. As the sinless and innocent one, Christ fulfilled the compensatory requirement. Christ did not have to die, but chose freely to do so.

*Each of these theories possess some aspect of the truth as follows:*

- 1) *Christ's death gave us a perfect example to follow*
- 2) *Christ's death gave us a perfect example of God's love*
- 3) *Christ's death underscores the seriousness of sin and severity of judgment*
- 4) *Christ's death underscores the victory of God over evil and sin*
- 5) *Christ's death renders satisfaction for God's righteous demands*

***Which do you think is the center around which the others may be organized?***

#### **IV. The Central Theme of the Atonement**

**a) *Background factors – The doctrine of God, creation and redemption.***

The nature of God: the doctrine of Atonement must be seen in this context God is so complete, perfect and holy; therefore He cannot abide sin.

The status of the law: The law is the expression of God's purpose and will. The law is built upon and proceeds from His nature. To disobey His law is to transgress His nature. It is God's means of relating to His creation. Failure to obey either by commission or omission is a serious offence. Gen. 2:15-17; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 6:8 – Death!

The Human Condition. Total depravity means our utter inability to overcome sin. Thus, the atonement is needed to do this

Christ as God and man is the only solution. His humanity guarantees our representation. He is one with us. His divinity guarantees the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. Gal. 4:4-5 tells us that His atoning sacrifice is more than sufficient. This atoning sacrifice was His decision.

The Old Testament context: Christ as the fulfillment of the O.T. is the theme of Hebrews. The Old Testament concept of *kāphar* can mean to cover over or hide from view. This is the concept behind the *Day of Atonement*. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, God saw the people in light of the sacrifice so that their sins of the past were covered. Is. 53 makes the idea of vicarious sacrifice clear, and uncontested in terms of the day of atonement.

#### ***b) The New Testament teaching on atonement***

##### ***i) The Gospel emphasis on atonement carries the Old Testament concept forward.***

- Christ's own testimony to His sacrificial death is staggering. He had a profound sense of destiny, Jn. 10:36; 3:17. He understood His death as the *fulfillment of the Old Testament*, especially in terms of Is. 53: see Mark 10:45 Mk. 8:31; Lk. 22:37. He understood it as a "*ransom*" in terms of satisfaction, Mk. 10:45. He also saw His death as a "*substitutionary*" atonement, Jn. 15:13, "Greater love has no Man than that he lay down his life for a friend". His death is on behalf of the whole world, Jn. 18:14. He understood Himself as a *sacrifice*, Jn. 17:19; Jn. 1:29. Therefore, and as such, He was the true source and giver of the life that comes from the Father

##### ***ii) The Pauline Writings. "God was in Christ reconciling the world" II Cor. 5:19.***

- In the Pauline material Christ's death is understood as an act of *reconciliation*. We are deserving of God's wrath in every sense of the word, Rom 3:21-26. "*But now*" – in Christ Jesus, a way has been opened up. Thus, Paul sees Christ's death as a sacrifice, in that he died in stead of us. I Cor. 5:7; Rom. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20. Paul also maintains that Christ died on our behalf, as a fellow human being, Rom. 8:32; Eph. 5:2; Gal. 3:13; Rom. 5:8; I Thess. 5:10.
- Furthermore, Paul regards the death of Christ as *propitiatory*, Rom. 3:25. The propitiation means more than just covering. It also means cleansing. God's wrath needed to be appeased and the demands of His law met. Propitiation means that God's righteousness and mercy have been done justice. "So then, Paul's idea of the atoning death is not simply that it covers sin and cleanses from its corruption, (expiation), but that the sacrifice also appeases God who hates sin and is radically opposed to it, (propitiation)". (Erickson, *Intro...*)

#### ***c) The basic meaning of atonement***

- i) **Sacrifice:** Hebrews 9:6-15, The once a year sacrifice on the day of atonement, *Yom Kippur*, is fulfilled in Christ, who is the once for all sacrifice. Heb. 10:5-18 repeats this. He is also the perfect High Priest who now mediates for us
- ii) **Propitiation: means both appeasement of God's justice and the exercise of His love.** Forgiveness follows adequate offering
- iii) **Substitution: He died in our place.** He was numbered with the transgressors, Is. 53:12b. He was the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jn. 1:29. Christ is our sacrifice in that He died "instead of" (anti) us, Lk. 11:11. As such Jesus acts on our behalf, *huper*, Rom.5:6-8; 8:32; Gal. 2:20.
- iv) **Reconciliation: the end of enmity.** The squaring of the account. God reconciles us to Himself. Reconciliation is God's act of receiving the world into His favor in renewal or relationship. God turns toward us.

**e) Some ramifications of the Penal Substitution theory**

- i) *Penal substitution theory confirms total depravity – the cost is great.*
- ii) *God's nature is not one sided – He is loving and just and vice versa.*
- iii) *Grace is the only way, through atonement.*
- iv) *The effectiveness of the atonement provides security for believers.*
- v) *We must never take lightly the salvation we have. I Jn. 4:10.*

END OF UNIT 4