

GOD WHO IS RICH IN MERCY



Essays presented to
Dr. D. B. Knox

edited by

Peter T. O'Brien
*Vice Principal,
Moore Theological College,
Sydney, Australia*

and

David G. Peterson
*Head of the Department of Ministry,
Moore Theological College,
Sydney, Australia*

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Chapter 2

"THUS SAYS THE LORD":

The Dogmatic Basis of Biblical Theology

GRAEME L. GOLDSWORTHY

I

The discipline of biblical theology has diverse origins depending on how we identify it. It is sometimes represented as emerging as a revolt against excessive dogmatism, particularly that of Protestant scholasticism.

The more recent and clearly self-conscious discipline also arises out of a rejection of the extreme liberalism of the history of religions movement.¹ Brevard Childs sees the modern American brand as an attempt to break the impasse in the fundamentalism-modernism controversy.² Yet it could be argued that the real impetus for biblical theology comes from the Reformation, for there lie the presuppositional roots of a truly biblical theology.

The reformers recognised that false presuppositions produce false results. If we focus only on their attacks on the moral, ecclesiastical and doctrinal corruptions of the mediaeval church, we may easily miss the radical nature of the revolt against the presuppositions of mediaeval scholastic theology. It is difficult to find modern Protestant apologies and dissuasives which deal with fundamental theology, that is, with the presuppositional apologetics of Roman Catholicism. We are better served by the works of the reformers themselves. Calvin's *Institutes*, for example, begins with an all-out attack on the nature-grace synthesis of Thomism. He reserves his polemics against the schoolmen for later, but mercilessly attacks the error of human philosophy and builds up the biblical presuppositions for a true Christian epistemology. It is impossible to avoid the implications of Calvin's argument for the destruction of Roman Catholic fundamental theology and with it the whole Roman system.

Aquinas rejected the rationalism of Augustine and Anselm by denying all innate ideas or innate knowledge of God. Instead he adopted an empiricism which was inimical to the biblical doctrine of original sin. By what is evident to the senses man is capable of

developing a philosophical framework within which revelation is defined and understood. Calvin's thinking on the matter is clearly seen in Book I of the *Institutes*. Here he speaks of the God-consciousness innate in all mankind, but which is suppressed and corrupted through sin. This general revelation of God within man and within the creation leaves sinful mankind without excuse. Only special revelation is able to bring the sinner to a true understanding of God. The key to Calvin's epistemology may be said to lie in his understanding of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the word. Here Calvin differs radically from Catholicism and later liberal Protestantism. The Spirit enables the sinner to perceive that Scripture is objectively God's self-authenticating word.

The conjunction of Word and Spirit finds its centre in Jesus Christ.³ In Book II Calvin develops this epistemology via the gospel. To do so he deals with the relationship of the whole Bible to the epistemological-soteriological centre which is the person and work of Christ. And this is the matter which lies at the heart of biblical theology. Both Luther and Calvin established presuppositional approaches which gave rise to a method of biblical study which was rooted in the Bible itself. It was seen that the objective gospel of our free justification in Christ went hand in hand with an historical understanding of the redemptive story in both Testaments. Luther's redefinition of the locus of grace in the historic Christ overthrew the Thomist view of salvation by grace alone where grace was solely located in the Roman church and specifically in the sacraments.⁴ Such grace was by definition inoperative in Israel and thus only allegory could save the Old Testament for the church.

Calvin, like Luther, was able to break free of the mediaeval four-fold sense of Scripture and saw the plain sense of the OT as the partial revelation of that which is fully revealed in the gospel. That Christ was revealed in all Scripture established the unity of Scripture. That there is historical development of revelation leading to fulness in Christ means that there is distinction between the Testaments.⁵ All this is worked out on the basis of the self-authenticating Word incarnate revealed to us in the self-authenticating Word inscripturate. Thus Calvin's first book unfolded his epistemology in the section dealing with the knowledge of God the Creator, and then his soteriology in the section on the knowledge of God the Redeemer. This logical order of matters in the *Institutes* should not obscure the fact that soteriology and epistemology are inseparable, so that our knowledge of God as Trinity is an epistemological spin-off of being saved by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This point is crucial to the question of theological method. It will be necessary for Christian

metaphysics to put the ontological Trinity as the ultimate presupposition. Likewise, it will also be necessary for a Christian epistemology to put the self-authenticating Christ as the ultimate presupposition. The two are inseparable and the one does not stand without the other.

Modern Reformed apologetics, especially as expounded by such philosophical theologians as Cornelius Van Til and Gordon Clark,⁶ has endeavoured to be consistent with Calvin's theological insights by refusing the empiricism of virtually all the non-Reformed apologetics: liberal, evangelical, Lutheran and Roman. Fundamental to this is the understanding of God as Creator, man as the image of God, and original sin as a radical intrusion into and dislocation of the relationship between God and his image. Thomism weakened original sin by its doctrine of the likeness of God in man as a superadded extra which bears the brunt of sin's effect leaving the image virtually unscathed. Thomism along with liberalism and Arminianism thus establishes human knowledge, reason and logic as the common ground between the believer and the unbeliever upon which an apologetic is based.

Calvinism admits no such common ground since the sinner so effectively suppresses the truth that he is incapable of correctly interpreting reality. The only common ground is the very thing the unbeliever refuses to admit is there; his innate knowledge of God as the image of God, his *sensus deitatis*. Even our common humanity and human interests in themselves provide no real common ground for understanding truth. Certainly believers and unbelievers work side by side in the sciences, humanities, arts and politics. But they can never agree on the ultimate meaning of their common humanity and interests. The one interprets everything in relation to the self-sufficient and all-sovereign God who reveals the truth by his self-attesting word, and the other interprets everything in relation to a supposed self-sufficient, autonomous self.

The dogmatic framework within which Reformed apologetics and theological method are worked out could be summarized thus:

- i. Every single datum of the universe is theistic.
- ii. The knowledge of this is innate to man.
- iii. Sin involves the suppression of what is known about God and His universe.
- iv. Special and redemptive revelation culminating in Jesus Christ is needed to deal with the hostility and guilt of man as well as with his suppression of the truth.
- v. A special work of the Holy Spirit combined with the gospel proclamation is needed to bring the rebellious reason and will

of man to repentance and faith with an apprehension of the truth.⁷

The Calvinist apologetic as a practical outworking of this epistemology thus sets out to do at least three things:

- i. Far from assuming some recognizable common ground with the unbeliever as point of contact, it frankly admits, indeed asserts, that no such common ground is open to us.
- ii. It seeks to show that if the unbeliever is consistent with his presupposition of human autonomy he has no basis for ultimate knowledge.
- iii. It appeals to the real common ground which the unbeliever denies, the innate *sensus deitatis*, and seeks to show that only on the basis of Christian theistic pre-suppositions can we know anything truly and ultimately.

The Calvinist knows that the gospel alone brings submission to the truth, so his evangelism and apologetics work hand in hand to assert that God has spoken in Jesus Christ and that this word is self-authenticating.

The centre of what the converting sinner sees is the gospel; the life, death and resurrection of Christ as the heart of revelation and the basis of redemption. If he is consistent with this gospel in his self-analysis he will realise that his faith in Jesus Christ is not brought about by acquiescence to evidence that commended itself to his once God-rejecting and unbelieving mind. In fact, in his conversion he has turned his back on everything that would have commended itself to his unbelief. His newly forming Christian epistemology starts with the self-authenticating Christ through the equally self-authenticating Scripture. He further learns that through this Christ of Scripture alone, who is also the Christ of space and time, he comes to understand God and himself. Furthermore, to be consistent with this revelation he has to acknowledge that not only has the gospel converted him, but that this conversion was necessary in a radical sense. He has not simply adopted a belief system which is a variation on already existing ones and thus shares common ideas with them. He has in fact been brought from darkness to light and has real cognition of ultimate truth for the first time in his life.

To the degree in which our convert develops his thinking inconsistently with the gospel, he may be misled into thinking that the reason he came to faith was that he was convinced by certain historical arguments and evidences. The subjective consciousness of his intellectual struggle towards final assent in faith may obscure the fact that it was the objective word which only came by revelation and

enlightenment by the Spirit that actually enabled him to see the arguments and evidences correctly. But if he is consistently and well instructed he learns that at no time has he been able to adduce evidence beyond revelation by which he can test the truth claims of revelation. In fact the very opposite is true for he can only understand the significance of extra-revelatory data in the light of revelation. Nor can he apply some axiomatic logic to determine what is a reasonable interpretation of the texts of Scripture, for God speaks sovereignly and not in submission to some logic which supposedly is beyond and above him. To apply such tests to revelation is to assert that the creature has the right to test the truth claims of God's word by criteria independent of that word. It is significant that the first use of such reasoning is recorded in Genesis 3.

Because of the gospel the convert struggles daily for sanctification of his whole being. Intellectual and epistemological sanctification is the believer striving to bring every thought into submission to Christ. In this he starts not with some supposed scientific objectivity and neutrality, for there is no such thing. He starts where everyone starts: with a presupposition beyond which it is impossible to go. All presuppositions resolve themselves into one of two categories which are mutually exclusive. Human predication presupposes either the sovereignty of God or the autonomy (sovereignty) of man. The Christian presupposition can be stated in different ways. It can be put as ultimate metaphysical reality: the ontological Trinity. It can be stated as existential experience: God caused me to believe. It can be stated as the mediation between God and believer: Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Christ. Or it can be stated as the epistemological point of contact: the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the truth of Scripture. From the human point of view the commonality they all share is simply that the Bible tells us so.

The implication of all this for biblical theology is that it can never be a purely descriptive discipline. That it is descriptive is integral to its method, but it is never merely descriptive.⁸ From the outset there is the question of what is being described and whether the biblical material is true both descriptively and in interpretation. Are we given in the texts only what ancient man believed God said and did, or have we God's sure word on the matter? The history of biblical theology shows beyond doubt that its results are governed by the theologian's *a priori*s. Most of the recent biblical theologies have been produced by scholars who brought unbiblical presuppositions to the task. However, the question under discussion is not so much the shortcomings of liberal biblical theologies as the relationship of a dogmatic base-line to the method of biblical theology.

II

Reformed theology, then, made a radical reassessment of the basis of Christian epistemology and thus of all theological method. By abolishing natural philosophy as the basis of fundamental theology and apologetics, it re-established the sovereignty of God as the presupposition of all human endeavour. By removing the implicit humanism of the Thomist synthesis, Reformed theology was able to restore a biblical assessment of both unredeemed and redeemed humanity. It recognized that the word of God interprets every datum in the universe. Many twentieth century biblical theologians have asserted that it is primarily the data of history which reveal. They have done so on the basis of certain philosophical presuppositions which rule out propositional revelation through word and rational thought-forms.⁹ The argument that human language and thought forms are insufficient to express the truth about God is self-defeating, for on that basis nothing at all can be known or predicated about God.

The missing factor in the event-as-revelation approach is the fundamental biblical assertion that the God who has spoken through the prophets has lastly spoken to us through His Son. A number of NT texts point to Jesus Christ as the first principle, the presupposition and goal, the Alpha point and the Omega point of all theological endeavour (e.g., Rom 1:16; Rev 1:8,17; 22:13). In these loci biblical and dogmatic theology find their common origin. The gospel is the power of God for our full salvation which includes noetic regeneration. The Christ of Scripture becomes the Alpha point for theological investigation by subduing the rebellious mind with its godless presuppositions. Regeneration means that an epistemological reformation takes place and develops into a Christian-theistic mind set. The renewed mind accepts without argument that God has spoken. Because knowing God is integral to salvation, Jesus as way, truth and life has radical noetic significance.

In terms of actual encounter the Gospel narratives have much to tell us. We frequently see two epistemologies at work in the opposition of belief and unbelief. The person, work, word and signs of the Christ are either believed or rejected. But there is never a merely rational apprehension which separates them. Jesus made the distinction on the basis of whether men belong to one or other of two opposed principles or realms. Of the religious unbelievers he says:

"You are of your father the devil."

"Because I tell you the truth you do not believe me."

"The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

"You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep."

(John 8:44-47; 10:26)

On the other hand he says:

"He who is of God hears the word of God."

*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."
(John 8:47; 10:27)*

The two epistemologies are also shown as radical opposites in 1 Corinthians 1-2. In this Paul restates the claims of Jesus in Matthew 7:24-27 to be the very source of wisdom. Christ, says Paul, is the wisdom and power of God. That this wisdom is seen by unbelievers to be folly underlines the fact that their unbelief is regarded as self-evidently the basis for truth. There is no common ground in these two positions, for unbelief will never accept that the ultimate reference point is anywhere but within its own closed system with man at the centre. On the other hand, belief acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is given in order that we might understand. Thus true understanding is the result of faith, not its source.

Because of sin Christians are to some extent always inconsistent with the gospel and will be until the day of glorification. This inconsistency reaches into our intellectual life, in faulty epistemology, hermeneutics and theologizing. In our noetic sanctification we struggle for consistency with the gospel in our intellectual activity. It is impossible to avoid some form of dogmatism in our theologizing. In fact it is impossible to avoid it in any area of thought or investigation, and the anti-dogmatist is showing his inconsistency in denying his own presuppositions. Such terms as "objective" and "scientific" allegedly place the investigator above the reproach of being dogmatic. Yet the dogmatic principle of unbelief is as dogmatic as that of Christian presuppositionalism; the difference being that its presuppositions are not based on reality. It should be noted that a dogmatic or presuppositional basis for exegetical and biblical theology does not mean that dogmatic theology as a total discipline precedes and is the basis of exegesis. Either way the relationship of the various aspects of biblical study can never be simply stated in terms of temporal order. There is a distinction to be made between dogmatics and the dogmatic basis for exegetical and biblical theology, yet the two are not totally separate.¹⁰

In biblical theology it is acceptable to speak of the theology of Paul, of Isaiah, or of some other biblical book or author. Do we not thus acknowledge that the dogmatic systematizing method which we apply to the finished canon already exists at various stages within the process and is integral to redemptive history? The NT use or uses of the OT illustrates the point. If broadly speaking the NT is a theology of the OT, or if it contains diverse theological applications of the OT, what kind of theologizing is in evidence? Let us take the example of the experience of the apostles.

Allowing for different emphases in the Gospels and Acts, we can nevertheless discern a pattern. Accordingly, we see a typical situation of a Jew, not necessarily of a particularly pious disposition, who is confronted by Jesus' authoritative "follow me". During the time of Jesus' ministry to them, the disciples strive to follow him in his teaching about the kingdom of God. They were men of the OT, as were the Pharisees. But this special encounter with Christ and his word turns them in a direction of biblical interpretation and theologizing which is very different from that of the Pharisees. This process is slow and not without difficulties and misunderstandings. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi highlights the problem. On the one hand God is revealing to them who Jesus is: the Christ of God. On the other hand human presuppositions play Satan's game and oppose Christ's path to suffering and death. When that death eventuated, the disciples' hope for the kingdom of God gave way to the despair of the two who walked the road to Emmaus.

It was the resurrection that rescued the disciples from total disillusionment, but they still had much to learn. Thomas needed the "touch me" invitation in order to be reassured that it was really Jesus who stood before them as bodily resurrected. Mary Magdalene needed the "do not touch me" rebuke to be shown that the resurrection transformed their relationship with Christ. The disciple's question, "will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" showed how little they understood the nature of that transformation and what it meant for the kingdom. Jesus' answer told them that the kingdom was such as would make its progress in the world by means of their Spirit-powered gospel testimony. What happened at Pentecost in fulfilment of Jesus' answer shows the completion of the process. For the disciples the simple "follow me" began a long and often difficult transformation. At Pentecost all that their experience of Jesus meant was made clear to them. So with absolute certainty they preached the event as the saving act of God and called men and women to repentance and faith.

The divergence of Christian theology from Judaism can be seen in the climax to Peter's sermon, "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). We cannot say that Peter arrived at this conclusion on the basis of the OT texts referred to in his sermon. There is no self-evident link between Jesus and the OT promises which makes him, and him alone, to be the fulfilment. To predicate such a logic would invert the relationship of the Testaments making the New primarily dependent upon the Old for its meaning. It would mean that accurate description of Jesus of Nazareth in a way that is open to believer and unbeliever alike would lead to the

grasping of this link. The biblical evidence is rather that the calling of Christ in the gospel event, coupled with the testimony of the Holy Spirit, was the basis upon which the dogmatic assertion is made that Jesus is Lord and Christ. Then and only then can the OT promises be interpreted as speaking of the Christ.

We may conclude, then, that Christ authenticated himself and established the dogmatic basis upon which the first Christians engaged in the task of understanding and interpreting their Old Testament scriptures. From the outset a fundamental Christology determines biblical theology. It is Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, who informs the biblical theologian of what actually is happening in the whole expanse of revelation; that is, of what principles are at work. Only within this framework can we say that the biblical theological task is descriptive. The apostolic witness that Jesus fulfils OT promise provides us with the substance of Jesus' own exposition of the way that all Scripture speaks of himself. To the question, "how does God address man?" the gospel answers that he does so through a sinless, saving word who is in himself the perfect divine-human relationship.

It is on this Christological and therefore Trinitarian basis that the biblical theologian must deal with all Scripture. Every word of YHVH to Abraham, Moses or one of the prophets bears an essential relationship to Jesus Christ by which its full meaning is given. If such words are taken to be merely expressions of man's groping for an idea of God and his actions, they lose their characteristic as being the word which God himself speaks to man. To be consistent with the Christian starting point, the biblical theologian must conclude that all Old Testament words are about Christ. Christ in the gospel is for us the hermeneutical principle and the exegetical norm. Exegesis is a derivative of the dogmatic norm in that the God-man acting in space and time for our salvation establishes the principles of grammatico-historical exegesis. A docetic Christ producing a docetic Bible would address only a mystical experience in man. Grammatico-historical exegesis could not proceed on such a basis. Even the philological processes in exegesis derive from who and what Jesus Christ is as the divinely rational communication to man who is also a rational communicator by virtue of his being made in the image of God. The dynamic and progressive nature of revelation is never in question. Most would agree that by contrast with dogmatic and credal theology, biblical theology is concerned primarily with the dynamics of revelation. Insofar as it may be concerned with the question of normative Christian teaching, it will view such doctrine as the result of the process from the beginning of God's dealings with man. Fundamental to the biblical view of revelation is that it is never mere

information giving. Much of the criticism of the concept of propositional revelation seems to imply that the evangelical theologian regards revelation as *mere* proposition.¹¹ We must repudiate the false dichotomy between God's communication of truths about himself and his communication of himself.

Reformed presuppositionalism is, however, not uniformly accepted by evangelicals. For example, Clark Pinnock comments that "it is evident that an authority claim is *not* self-validating".¹² This raises some difficulties. We are bound to say that revelation has saving significance for all who are caught up in its process as well as for us who are at the end of the process. The sometimes fleeting glimpse we are given of Bible characters should not obscure the fact that they often lived a life-time under the revelation they received. While they could not have developed systematic theologies of the kind spawned in the Christian church, these people lived with a concept of who and what God was, what he had spoken to them, what he had done for them, and what he required of them.

Pinnock's empiricist apologetics seems to lack biblical theological perspective. For the Christian it is, as Pinnock says, important that we maintain that Jesus lived, died and rose again. Historic evidences point to the central affirmations of the Christian faith. Christians do not place their faith in a myth. But Pinnock confuses the *fact* that God acted in history with the necessity of historic evidences to authenticate the Bible's truth claims. Could God never have said a word to man and have communicated it as his sure word without leaving historic proofs to authenticate it? Surely it was part of the serpent's strategy to convince Eve that God's word needed such validating. Pinnock says "the validity of Christian theism rests upon its historical credentials".¹³

But what are the historical credentials upon which Adam's theism rested, or Noah's or Abraham's? Adam before the fall was in a unique situation, but is relevant to the question. He was free to live responsibly as man created in God's image. He had the freedom to use creatively his cognitive, reflective and volitional powers. He could organize the data of his experience, for example, in naming the animals. He could make valid inferences about events such as "this is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh". But he always needed the self-validating word of God in order to know God and himself.

When God spoke to Noah his interpretation of the world's corruption may have provided some point of contact with Noah's thinking. But the command to build the ark was as unreasonable and as irrational as anything could be, unless there was an acceptance of

who God was and of the authority of his word. Similarly with Abraham there were no historical data upon which he could base the authenticity of the command and the promises of God. Indeed, the whole trend of the patriarchal narrative is to show that there was faith which seemed to fly in the face of events and which was sustained, against the historical evidences, by the authority of God's word.

According to Exodus 6, Moses' certainty that Israel would be redeemed from Egypt is based on the promise of Abraham's God. Moses began without historical authentication, other than the truth traditions about God's promises to the fathers, and he believed. Pharaoh received first-hand historical authentication of YHVH's word through Moses yet he never believed. When the saving event of the exodus was complete, God restated the significance of the event, but the great dogmatic formulations which followed were not mere inferences based on event. That the event placed the people in a special relationship to God was not self-evident. Only the self-validating word of God could inform them of that.

Gradually the historical events became incorporated into the revealing and saving data. When God identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this was a claim that commanded trust not verification. One of the characteristics of the whole promise-fulfilment pattern in Scripture is that the fulfilment often does not outwardly commend itself as such. This is why prophetic literalism as a hermeneutical principle is mistaken and has a greater affinity with pharisaic Judaism than with apostolic Christianity, which proclaimed Jesus' resurrection as the fulfilment of all the prophetic promises (Acts 13:32-33). Historical empiricism does not seem to address itself sufficiently to those revelatory situations in which past event is minimal, even non-existent, and in which the assertion is about what God is going to do. Evangelical empiricism of course acknowledges the word of God with the event but suggests that the event authenticates the word. The biblical pattern is the reverse. Even when believers rehearse past saving events, the reality of the event is vital not to authenticate the word, but to effect in space and time the salvation of men. Recalling the event and establishing its historicity only has value because the event is interpreted salvifically by a sure word from God.

So the dynamics of historical revelation proceeded on the basis that Abraham's God had both spoken and acted. Israel never saw the acts of God as self-evident. Any attempt to pre-empt or to subvert the word-event relationship ended in such disasters as the episode of Aaron's golden calf or the loss of the ark at Ebenezer. The validity of the prophetic oracle lay in the fact that the prophet spoke a word

from YHWH. While some prophetic predictions could be tested by their fulfilment or non-fulfilment, this test did not purport to be and could not be, a universal means of validating the prophetic word (Deut 18:22). Such a test would have failed the later prophets over and over unless we are meant to wait until the eschaton before the test is applied. Simeon, like Abraham, waited for the consolation of Israel, and it must be presumed that he did so because, in the face of so much contrary evidence, the prophetic "thus says the Lord" spoke to him sovereignly and evoked faith in the word of God. The true prophet contrasts with the false in many observable ways, but finally it is a question of which prophet has actually stood in the council of the Lord so as to proclaim God's authentic word (Jer 23:18-22).

III

The dogmatic basis of biblical theology is widely recognized in theory as we see especially in the theologies of the OT. Walter Eichrodt acknowledges that the NT is necessary to illuminate the meaning of the Old.¹⁴ Edmund Jacob asserts that Old Testament theology must be a Christology because in Christ all that was revealed in the OT is brought to perfection.¹⁵ He nevertheless rather inconsistently regards biblical theology as a strictly historical discipline supplying the raw material to dogmatics.¹⁶ Th. C. Vriezen is more explicit in saying, "A Christian theology which clings to the revelatory character of the Gospel and recognizes Jesus Christ as its Lord and Saviour cannot but maintain the revelatory character of the Old Testament."¹⁷ He then contradicts this assertion by saying that we must abandon all a *priori* thinking (which is itself the expression of an a *priori*). G. A. F. Knight recognizes that none of us can escape our presuppositions especially in writing biblical theology, and he quotes N. W. Porteous: "For the biblical theologian neutrality would be unscientific."¹⁸ Regrettably we have to agree with Jacob that OT theologians have largely used philosophical a *prioris* foreign to the Bible in dealing with it theologically.¹⁹ Furthermore it is difficult to see how the expressed Christian presuppositions of such theologians as these mentioned above have figured in any significant way in their respective works.

We must agree with John Goldingay that presuppositionless theologizing is impossible.²⁰ He rightly makes a distinction between presuppositions and dogmatic theology as a whole which re-expresses biblical faith in contemporary categories. But this does not alter the fact of the dogmatic commitment of the biblical theologian which must influence his method and his conclusions. The biblical theologian always proceeds on the basis of his answer to the question "what do you think of Christ?" in order to understand the theology of the whole Bible.

Modern Roman Catholic theologians have also investigated the relationship of dogmatics and biblical theology. Gerald O'Collins refers to a warning of the "prejudice against prejudice" and says, "In the case of Christian theology this means being aware of — and not standing against — the major presupposition: theologians know the triune God and do so primarily in the light of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and the events closely linked with that story."²¹ O'Collins himself is understandably working within a Thomist framework which enables him to approve of philosophical categories other than those derived from special revelation. Karl Rahner's address as dogmatician to the exegete is also enlightening: "If you knew your Scholastic theology better your exegetical tasks would be easier not harder." Rahner urges the exegete to take note of the *a priori* principle of dogma and fundamental theology.²² In like manner Schillerbeeckx sees the exegete as an enquirer who believes.²³ Schnackenburg points to an important discovery of biblical theology, namely that the early Church used the OT in a dogmatic, that is Christological, way.²⁴

The Protestant theologian Hans-Joachim Kraus comments on the tendency of Roman Catholic theology to resist a cleavage between biblical and dogmatic theology, but in any case, he says, biblical theology cannot accomplish its role without systematic points of view, particularly in the area of hermeneutics.²⁵ The Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical theologians thus remind us that the question is not whether there is a dogmatic basis for biblical theology, but rather what is the right dogmatic basis.

From one point of view, biblical theology is what makes dogmatics necessary. If it were not for the progressive nature of revelation, then all texts would stand in the same general relationship to the believer. Dogmatics is the discipline of saying what the total redemptive and revealing activity of God means for us now. It recognizes that all texts do not stand in the same relationship to us now, but that in view of the unity of revelation they do stand in *some* identifiable relationship to all other texts and therefore to us. Biblical theology examines the diversity within the unity. Logically, then, the texts demand first exegesis then biblical theology and hermeneutics leading finally to dogmatics. But this logical progression is simplistic for it ignores the whole epistemological question that we have examined. It is simplistic because it assumes a neutral relationship between the sinner and the word of God. It is simplistic because it is not true to the internal evidence of the Bible itself. Theology did not begin with the completion of the canon of scripture. Moses and the prophets formulated their theological concepts on the basis of their certainty that God had spoken to them. They too had to ask about redemptive-

history as it reached to them from the past. They had to understand what the past revelations meant for them in their here and now. Biblical theology thus observes and describes the dogmatic theologies of bygone ages.

The dogmatic basis of biblical theology lies in the fact that no empirical datum of exegesis has independent meaning, and no datum of theology or interpretation has independent meaning. Facts, logic and method are not independent of revealed truth. To grant them such independence would be to set up a natural theology in opposition to revelation. There are no self-evident rules of logic and investigation which enable exegesis to proceed safely without first submitting to the gospel by which the truth-suppressing framework of humanism is replaced by the fear of the Lord.

There is an unacceptable imperialism in some biblical studies that implies that only the expert can penetrate to the message of the text. A truly scientific exegesis endeavours to make contact with the text while at the same time acknowledging that it is the text, and through it the living God, which makes contact with all believers. When biblical theology has been divorced from its dogmatic basis in the gospel it has assumed another basis drawn from non-Christian philosophy. For the Reformed theologian a biblical theology of the Old Testament is a concept which requires qualification, for such a work will always be incomplete until the meaning of the Old Testament is brought to its fulness in the person and work of Christ.

Once we accept that the OT is interpreted by the New we have rejected a purely descriptive approach to biblical theology. The NT establishes its own dogmatic basis in the proclamation that Jesus is Lord. Biblical theology shows that this dogmatic basis is the full expression of the word of YHVH in the Old Testament. "Thus says the Lord" comes to its ultimate grandeur in the prophetic office of Christ and it is the keystone of all theological endeavour. Word and historical event, which together constitute redemptive history, the context of revelation, are the subject of biblical theology. Whether or not he abides by the classic Christology of Chalcedon, the biblical theologian cannot truly question his texts without first submitting himself to their searching question: "What do you think of Christ?"

Notes

1. J. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 8. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958) chap. 1.
2. B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) chap. 1.
3. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (tr. F. L. Battles; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) I.ix.3; xiii.7-9,11-3.
4. J. S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1969) 49-50.
5. *Inst.*, II.ix-xi.
6. C. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975). G. H. Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977).
7. Van Til, "My Credo" in *Jerusalem and Athens* (ed. E. R. Geehan; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 3-21. R. L. Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979).
8. The understanding of biblical theological method expressed in this paper is in general agreement with that of G. Vos (*Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948]) and F. I. Andersen ("Biblical Theology" in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* [ed. E. H. Palmer, G. G. Cohen, etc.; Marshallton: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968]) II:63-70.
9. The case for propositional revelation is argued by D. B. Knox in "Propositional Revelation the Only Revelation", *RTR* 19 (1960), 1-9. See also J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (London: IVP, 1958) 91-4. The matter is also discussed in various works of L. Morris, F. Schaeffer and C. Pinnock.
10. Dogmatics is a term used generally as synonymous with systematic theology. While biblical theology is sometimes seen as a revolt against a rigid form of dogmatics, the two have their valid expressions and are interdependent. This is discussed by J. Murray ("Systematic Theology II", *WTJ* 26 [1963] 33-46) and R. B. Gaffin ("Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology", in *The New Testament Student and Theology* [ed. J. H. Skilton; Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976] 3).
11. J. I. Packer shows the weakness of this view in *God Speaks to Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 49-52. See also Francis Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972) 90-4.

12. *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 42. See also Pinnock's essay, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences" in *Jerusalem and Athens*. But Knox (*The Everlasting God* [Welwyn: Evangelical, 1982] 15-26) argues in favour of the self-authenticating Word of God.
13. *Biblical Revelation*, 45.
14. *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1961) I:31.
15. *Theology*, 31.
16. *ibid.*, 12, 31.
17. *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) 9.
18. *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1959) 7.
19. *Theology*, 23-26.
20. *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Leicester: IVP, 1981) 17-8.
21. *Fundamental Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981).
22. H. Vorgimler ed., *Dogmatic versus Biblical Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1964) 39, 42.
23. *ibid.*, 129.
24. *ibid.*, 149.
25. *Die Biblische Theologie* (Neukirchen — Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970) 392.