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FAITH AND THEOLOGY

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The question is sometimes asked, "Does a theologian need to have faith in God to do theology?" The answer is an unequivocal, "Yes!" As the Scripture says, "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is" (Heb 11:6). Two much more difficult questions to answer are: "What kind of faith should a theologian have?" and "What should be the object or the focus of his or her faith?" Throughout this article we will consider three aspects of faith which give at least a partial answer to these two important questions. First, let us look at the nature of faith.

The Nature of Faith

The Object of Faith. When we speak of faith, we recognize it has no meaning in itself apart from what it can trust. If the theologian wrestled with theological concepts that made no claims, the question of whether faith is needed would never arise. But the claim of Scripture to be the Word of God given to man, and the claim made by Jesus Christ about Himself as recorded in Scripture, is what raises the question about the kind of faith the theologian should have, and what the focus or object of his faith should be.

If, for example, Jesus only claimed to be a prophet or a teacher, it would not require much faith to accept His claim. But when He claims to have preexisted Bethlehem, to have been born of a virgin, and to be God in the flesh, faith in Him becomes more difficult, because more ground is given for questions to be raised concerning such claims.¹ This was the case with Nicodemus when Christ said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye

believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" (John 3:12). "If Nicodemus could not receive Christ's teaching, illustrating the work of grace upon the heart, how could he comprehend the nature of His glorious heavenly kingdom?"²

The more theology and history we study, especially the turbulent history of the Christian church, the more important faith becomes. The more we consider the various opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the decisions of ecclesiastical councils—with their discordant voices—the more our faith needs to reach out for certainty.³

Faith, therefore, must continue to clarify the relationship to its object. Does this mean that the task of faith is to reshape its object, in the light of the latest research, to make it more palatable to modern man and that this responsibility belongs to the theologian? Considering the claims of God's revelation, the answer is "No." To the contrary, faith does not mold its object, but is itself molded by it. Faith is determined by Scripture and the claims of Jesus Christ as written. Faith is a response to its object, and the object of biblical faith is Jesus Christ. He calls for an ever-present childlike faith, to which many are not willing to risk the commitment.⁴

The Primacy of Faith. One reason for such hesitancy lies in faith's recognition of the role of reason, and her reluctance to place trust beyond reason's claimed sphere. To exercise faith requires an acknowledgment of the limitations of reason and the recognition of the boundary of reason's competence. If reason is such that it demands nothing less than absolute certainty before it will trust, then faith is excluded and the demands of reason have become excessive. Theology has no need to fear the proper function of reason, for it is a gift of God. What theology does have to fear is a view of reason that claims total competence for itself.⁵

Faith is the acceptance of an authority beyond the natural bounds of reason, and in that sense it involves the individual's willingness to be subject to something or someone outside of himself or herself. Submission to an authority outside of oneself is, therefore, inherent and vital to biblical faith. This does not mean that once submission is present no more problems regarding faith can exist. Faith is never stationary or static, it demands constant as-

assessment of its relationship to the claims of Scripture. If reason alone were sufficient to determine what one believes, the problems of self-will and pride would not arise.⁶

The perception and appreciation of truth depend less upon the mind than upon the heart. The truth of Scripture must be received into the soul. If the truth of Scripture could be submitted to reason alone, pride would be no hindrance to its reception. The theologian's advantages for obtaining a knowledge of the truth, however great, are of no benefit to him unless they are accompanied by a conscientious surrender to clearly stated biblical principles and a renunciation of every sin that the Spirit of God points out to him. The Pharisees were not seeking to know the truth, but some excuse for evading it; Christ showed that this was why they could not understand His teaching.⁷

Self-will and pride are challenged by the authority Scripture claims for itself. It is obvious, particularly in this last generation, that something is needed that man does not and cannot produce of himself. If self-will and pride are in the heart, faith becomes powerless. Faith means commitment to what reason may be able to present but can never guarantee. Therefore, the constant opposition of the claims of authority and self-will guarantees that there will always be present a challenge to maintain one's faith, particularly for the theologian.⁸

The Function of Faith. Faith cannot function in isolation. It can only be understood in relation to Scripture, and to function in relation to the community of faith. Rugged individualism may be an admirable human quality, but faith is not strictly a private matter. While the decision to believe may focus on the individual, if it leads to preoccupation with self—instead of self-forgetfulness in the service of others—it is not the kind of faith the Scriptures speak about. Although an individual struggle of faith is essential to decision-making, a slothful faith becomes the devil's workshop, which he uses to turn in upon itself.⁹

When faith turns in on itself, believers begin to trust in their faith for salvation. They likewise begin to focus on keeping up a name for being persons of faith. This in turn leads them to protect their reputations within the community of faith.

If such persons have reputations for being gifted theologians

or preachers, successful evangelists or administrators, persons of prayer or special devotion, there is danger that they will make shipwreck of their faith. Often a great effort is made to maintain the reputation. If such live in the fear that others do not appreciate their value, they are certainly losing sight of Christ.

True faith leads believers to look away from self to Christ, even to look away from their own faith in Christ, to the Object of their affection, to their Savior and Lord. As theologians we may go through the whole formal round of study and research, we may even pride ourselves on our faith in Scripture, but unless Christ is woven into all that we say and do, we will be working for our own glory. Our faith will have become our god!¹⁰

For faith to survive it must become part of that special "community of faith" that began with righteous Abel and continues to our own day. While faith stands in primary relation to God, it also stands in relation to the community—the living community as well as the written one. The living community is not here to pacify its own concerns and engage itself in conversation with its own kind alone, but to be externally oriented—attempting to serve the needs of an alien and hostile world.¹¹

The Witness of Faith. To expect faith of itself to hold steady and to focus on Christ and the community of faith without wavering is to lose that faith by misunderstanding its nature. How quickly Peter's faith fled between the time of his affirmation, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and his triple denial, "I do not know Him!" (Matt. 16:16; 26:69-75). His loss of faith in Christ should be a constant warning to us that the possibility of our loss of faith stands as near to us as does our present possession of it!

Daily we need to direct our faith toward Jesus Christ, who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. When our lives are at stake—as was Peter's—then the depth of our faith will be seen for what it is. If it is rooted in Christ, it will stand; but if rooted in self, in some form of theological idolatry masking the self, then it cannot stand.

There comes a time for faith fearlessly and yet responsibly to give witness to its object. To keep our faith focused solely within an intellectual context, forming a kind of cloistered community, is to seal its doom. It is not so much the baptism of water that tests our faith in Jesus Christ—although in some instances it may—but the

“baptism of fire” we may face from time to time and ultimately in the end-time persecution. It will either melt our faith in Christ or make it more precious than ever.¹² The words of William Bathurst express it very well when he says:

O for a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by many a foe;
That will not tremble on the brink of poverty, of poverty or woe;
That will not murmur or complain beneath the chastening rod,
But in the hour of grief or pain, of grief or pain can lean upon its
God;
Lord, give me such a faith as this, and then, whate'er may come
I'll taste e'en here the hallowed bliss, the hallowed bliss of an
eternal home.¹³

The more we study theology the more we need to affirm a childlike faith in Jesus Christ according to Scripture (1 Cor 15:1-4). Faith freely and willingly takes the risk of total commitment, recognizes the limits of reason, prompts the believer to surrender self-will and pride, becomes involved in the community of faith, and is fully aware of its vulnerability. Faith is tested by opposition and at times by the fires of persecution. We need to continue to do theology, but it must be done by faith in the Christ of Scripture in order to be able to stand (Luke 18:8). Let us now consider the second aspect of faith, faith in Scripture.

Faith in Scripture

Faith in Revelation. When we speak of Scripture we speak of revelation. And by revelation we mean that which man by his own unaided reason cannot know. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). God’s intentions must be disclosed to us. If there were no revelation from God, and if men could gather on their own everything they needed to know, then the humanistic approach to truth would be legitimized. And the church with its claim to be established by revelation, would be a travesty of truth, serving as a mere opiate of the people.¹⁴

1. Revelation always comes unexpectedly. It is not part of the historical process as man understands it, because God’s intentions

cannot be understood solely from a study of the natural order of things. Revelation is a special breaking into history, an extra-historical disclosure of God’s intentions for this sinful planet on which you and I live, and there is no way of knowing what His intentions are for us except by revelation.¹⁵

2. Revelation is the Word of God. This means that God has communicated His intentions to us in ways we can understand. Now, if this communication from God has no more inherent power than comparable human words, then revelation would not be taken seriously. The Word of God has power to do what ordinary human words cannot do. However, the revelatory quality of words does not come from the words themselves, but from their Source.¹⁶

3. Revelation is directional. It tells us where to look. The difficulty that sometimes confronts faith is to know whether what was waited for has actually arrived, and that what was foretold has entered history at a specific point in time. That point in time is always a time of opportunity. To embrace that opportunity means salvation, but to neglect it means disaster.

The Exodus revealed God’s plan at a specific point in history, a time of opportunity to respond in faith, and it created Israel. The coming of the Son of God to this earth was another time of opportunity to respond in faith, which proved disastrous for Israel as a nation but proved good news to those who believed. Revelation enables man to see and understand those moments in time which historical study alone is bound to miss.¹⁷ Today is another such moment in history when neglect of the revelatory signs of the end will spell disaster.

Faith, therefore, acknowledges that God’s revelation can be seen—as in the case of Jesus Christ—and that His words recorded in Scripture can be understood. Faith sees those special moments in time when God acts, accepts those revelatory insights through His prophet that God gives, and responds accordingly.

Faith in the O.T. Man is always free to say “Yes” or “No” to God. But faith is man’s, “Yes” and never his “No.” The Hebrew term for faith comes from the root *'mn*. An adverb form carries the familiar meaning: amen, verily, truly. The Bible writer usually employs the Hiphil form of the verb to express human trust or belief

in God (for example, Gen 15:6). Nothing was so sure to the Hebrew, so permanent or so reliable as God.

Faith is declaratory not causative. Its basic religious meaning passes into the moral one of "resolution," especially in the face of danger.¹⁸ One reason why the meaning of faith in the OT is conveyed in verb forms is because the Hebrews regarded faith not as something that a person has, but rather something a person does. It is not a possession, it is an activity.¹⁹ This is why James says, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

The objective fact of what a man believes is the ground of the Hebrew faith, not how a man feels. Man stands before God as a creature in relation to the Creator. He accepts the fact of God and his own dependence on God. His faith also recognizes the gulf that exists between him and God because of sin. Therefore, penitence and obedience are emphasized, that is faithfulness to God, rather than faith as a quality of belief directed toward God.

For the Israelite, the moral aspect of faith took precedence over the intellectual and emotional aspect. Faith is trust in the God of the covenant who, in His providence, brought Israel into special relationship with Himself. The Hebrews' trust in the God of the covenant also included the fear of God. To the Israelites these two basic attitudes of trust and fear were not incompatible. The only intellectual activity that mattered to them was that which began from the presupposition of faith—a faith that stood in awe before the living God whom they trusted.²⁰

Faith in the N.T. For Jesus, faith in God was the foundation of His ministry. His intimacy and communion with the Father reveals the depth of His faith. Faith in God meant that He saw God's presence and endorsement of His ministry and that the kingdom of God was at hand.

This was also true of the apostolic church. To have faith meant to have faith in God's decisive activity for the redemption of man. This was not just a general belief in God or even in the proclamation of the saving activity of God, but rather faith in what God had done for them through Jesus Christ. It was faith in God as Father and Ruler, and in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.²¹

According to Paul, only if a man has faith is he in right relationship with God and able to understand himself and to act

rightly. Faith is not the goal of man's religious development, as we find with Philo and also some Christian philosophers, but the beginning of man's development.

For Paul there are no ethics apart from faith in Jesus Christ. This is the opposite of Socrates' answer to man's dilemma when he said that virtue is knowledge and if people know what the good is, they will naturally do it. Paul speaks of conformity to God's will as revealed in the moral law of the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8-10). For him, faith meant to hear and obey—as well as the motivation to do so out of a sense of gratitude to God for all that He had done for him.

Paul saw no reason why man should not keep all the commandments; and though this was not always easy, it was not impossible. For him faith leads man to recognize his sinfulness, his inability, his helplessness to do the will of God without Divine help. Faith abandons self-sufficiency and welcomes dependency. Through faith man is freed from his former self, and is empowered by the Spirit to live a new life in Christ. Faith does not produce an overscrupulous anxiety, but conviction and certainty of relationship with Jesus Christ and with things not yet seen.²²

While faith expresses our trust and confidence in the Person of Christ and does not simply assent to a doctrine or a creed, to believe what the Scriptures say about God and about Jesus Christ is to accept their doctrinal content. As Paul said, "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3, 4). Faith is not independent of doctrine as some are inclined to think.²³

Faith means to live by the truth it receives from God in His Word, and, resting on God's promises, gives thanks for His grace by working for His glory. Faith involves the right belief about God, His character, and His purpose for man as revealed in Scripture. It knows that God cannot lie, that He is trustworthy, and therefore accepts the divine testimony as totally reliable.²⁴

Faith and the Reformation. During the patristic period the concept of faith became narrowed. Through the formulation of orthodoxy—though there was need for this in order to counter

heresies—as well as the intellectualism of Origen and others (who regarded faith as an inferior substitute for *gnosis* or knowledge) faith became identified with credence. Consequently, faith came to mean little more than a vote of confidence in the theological hierarchy of the church.

The Reformers changed this. Luther rediscovered in Scripture the rich significance of biblical faith. The Reformers insisted that faith is more than orthodoxy, not merely *fides* (belief), but rather *fiducia* (trust)—personal trust and confidence in God, in His mercy to us through Jesus Christ. This took faith out of the realm of meritorious works and made it an appropriating instrument, an empty hand outstretched to receive the free gift of God's righteousness in Jesus Christ. Again faith is seen not merely as an acceptance of theologically formulated doctrines, as essential as these are, but also as trust in Christ's accomplished work climaxed at Calvary as the only and all-sufficient ground of man's salvation.²⁵

Faith and the Modern Mind. "Each theologian's view of the nature and saving significance of faith will depend on the views he holds of the Scriptures, and of God, man, and of their mutual relations."²⁶ Unfortunately, there are some aspects of modern Protestant theology in which faith in Christ has become a human work upon which man's salvation depends. This, in effect, has become the Protestant version of human merit.²⁷ It must be remembered that faith, like all the gifts we receive from God, is also a gift. Therefore, those who exercise faith do not deserve any credit for doing so.²⁸ "Faith is not our Savior. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits."²⁹

Protestantism has also allowed liberalism to psychologize faith, reducing it to a sense of contented harmony with God through Christ. Faith is understood as an optimistic confidence in the friendliness of God, apart from Scripture. Too often it is nothing more than a religious state of mind.³⁰ Faith is seen as personal development, as "stages" of faith oriented to oneself and arising out of an effort to translate experiences into meaningful propositions, without the suppressed "error" of identifying faith with certain beliefs.³¹

However, to talk of faith in such generic terms without its being rooted in Scripture—not just sprinkled with Scripture—is

not true faith. A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him as the Savior of the whole world, or which is only an intellectual assent to truth, can never bring healing to the soul. "It is not enough to believe *about* Christ, we must believe *in* Him." Faith is not merely a favorable opinion we hold about Christ. Faith will benefit us only if we accept Him as our own personal Savior. Saving faith is a transaction by which we join ourselves in covenant relation with God. This is the kind of faith by which the soul becomes a conquering power.³²

The mighty acts of God through Jesus Christ cannot be properly understood apart from Scripture. Faith in God and faith in the veracity of Scripture need to be taken in tandem. There can be no absolute certainty concerning these acts apart from the Word and from faith in the Word. As Calvin says, "Take away the Word and no faith will remain."³³ Faith does not mean that we take the raw material of secular history and give it the significance of salvation history. If faith is based only on its own significance, defined in terms of its own supposed divinatory faculty, its own interpretive power, or its own charisma of investing it with meaning, then it is not biblical faith.³⁴

Sin has so blinded modern man that he cannot understand how the Scripture can be God's Word, or even reliable in regard to the realities about which it speaks. Nor can he see the necessity to renounce self, and, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, permit himself to be drawn to Christ as his Savior and Lord. Man does not seem to understand that faith is a gift of which God Himself is the Author.³⁵ In some measure faith is given to every human being and enables men and women to receive God's other gifts. But this precious gift can only grow as exercised by continually appropriating the Word of God. Faith is strengthened only as we bring it in contact with what is written.³⁶

If there is no confidence in Scripture, it is hard to see how there can be real faith either in God or in the testimony about Him. It is by our believing the words and works of Him as recorded in Scripture that Jesus Christ is received and believed. If faith comes by hearing or reading the Scriptures as Paul says (Rom 10:17), it comes by hearing what is written as the Word of God by the illumination of the heart and mind through the Holy Spirit. That is why faith

can be so confident, because it is a trust in God evoked by God. This also is why faith is so total and so powerful.³⁷

Faith and the Reorientation of Life. Biblical faith sees life from the perspective of eternity. It is an inward compulsion born of gratitude not only to trust God but to obey Him, to do exploits in His name, to be faithful, and to bring forth fruit unto righteousness.³⁸ Faith is not merely a human response, it is a work of the life-giving Spirit, and as such it is a living and acting faith. Justification and sanctification cannot be separated. While faith alone justifies, the faith that justifies is never alone. The fruits of faith are fruits of righteousness.³⁹

Some point to a supposed dispute between Paul and James over the function of faith, but when rightly understood there is no conflict between these two inspired writers. The whole Bible has one Author, One who cannot lie, and who certainly will not contradict Himself. James addresses a situation in which antinomianism threatened the church because the strong soteriological interest of Paul regarding faith had been misunderstood and misapplied.⁴⁰ As James said, The devils also believe there is one God and tremble, but show me your faith by your works. Without works faith is dead (see James 2:18-19, 26).

Biblical faith is not double-tongued. But there are—and always will be—men and women throughout Christendom who teach one thing in the classroom and preach another in the pulpit. They may be devout Bible students and put forth much effort in the quest for truth, but they preach vigorously from the very texts they deny in the classroom. Students begin to wonder at this *volte-face*, this about face, that takes place when their teachers enter the pulpit.⁴¹ Such unethical, unprofessional, un-Christian approach to biblical truth in the face of Jesus Christ who taught what He was and was what He taught, is inexcusable and the height of hypocrisy. Christ's words not only expressed His experience, but His character.⁴²

It is one thing to treat the Bible as a book of good moral instruction, to be listened to as far as is consistent with the spirit of the times, but it is another thing to accept the Scripture for what it really is—the Word of the living God—the Word that is our life, that molds our actions, our words, our very thoughts. To hold God's Word as anything less than this is to reject it, and this very rejection

by teachers who profess to believe it, is one of the foremost causes of skepticism and infidelity among our students.⁴³

"Those who feel at liberty to question the Word of God, to doubt everything where there is any chance to be unbelieving, will find that it will require a tremendous struggle to have faith when trouble comes. It will be almost impossible to overcome the influence that binds the mind which has been educated in the line of unbelief."⁴⁴ Wrong habits of thought, especially thoughts of unbelief, become a despotic power that fasten the mind as in a grasp of steel.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, in spite of the dishonesty of some and the heresies and misrepresentations of others, the Remnant Church will not lapse from any part of her biblical faith. God will maintain His truth and will not allow man to deny it forever. Faith in the truthfulness of what is written will be sealed by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all of God's people who unreservedly commit themselves to Scripture.⁴⁶

Theological Idols

Lastly, let us consider the third aspect of faith, making theological idols. Whenever we restrict Scripture and confine it to our own wishes we have fashioned an idol for ourselves. In essence there is no difference between today's theological idols and the ancient forms of idolatry against which God warned His people. Again and again He spoke through His prophets and told the Israelites how irrational it was for them to fashion idols from the same wood they used for cooking and from which they made a fire to warm themselves. How then could they bow down and worship these wooden idols as if they were gods (Isa 44:12-20)? Are we any different? I submit for your serious consideration five of the more prevalent theological idols currently being worshiped, not only in the theological community but also by men and women in the pew.

Catholicism. Thomas Sheehan says that at the dawn of her third millennium the Christian church is undergoing a theological crisis. The crisis grows out of a belief, now freely asserted by both Catholic and Protestant theologians and exegetes, that the historical data indicate that Jesus did not think He was divine and died without intending to found the religion we call Christianity. The

crisis is between who Jesus apparently thought He was, a special human prophet, and what Christian believers now take Him to be, the divine Son of God.

According to Sheehan Christianity begins not with Jesus but with Simon Peter, whose faith acknowledged Him to be the Christ; therefore, Christianity maintains itself throughout history by staying in continuity with that first great believer and is present wherever someone traces his or her faith back to him and to those first believers. The essence of Christianity is its historical continuum with Peter and the apostolic church rather than directly with Jesus of Nazareth. Those who choose to preserve this continuity with Peter's evaluation of the prophet from Galilee can then lay claim to be called a Christian. Jesus' understanding of Himself is not essential to Christianity, but Peter's is.⁴⁷

This perversion of Scripture makes man's faith—traced back to Peter's faith—the rock on which the church is built and the redeeming factor in our salvation. It puts man's faith at center stage in place of Jesus Christ. For all intents and purposes Scripture is set aside and becomes an adjunct to the continuum of man's faith rather than having his faith rooted in the Christ of Scripture. The golden image of man's faith has been set up in the modern Plain of Dura, and these exegetes are admiring their own workmanship.

Fundamentalism. If by Fundamentalism we mean those who believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, that each word was inspired by God, then B. B. Warfield would be considered one of the ablest upholders of this concept.⁴⁸ Some extreme verbal inspirationists believe that every book in the Bible, every chapter of each book, every word of Scripture, every syllable, and every letter is the direct utterance of the Most High.⁴⁹

Too often, however, the spirit found among extreme verbal inspirationists is not the spirit of Scripture and certainly not the spirit of Jesus Christ. For some, doing theology means taking on a militancy that becomes a matter of subduing their enemies. In their hands Scripture becomes the zealot's knife.

The writers of Scripture were not God's pen, but His penmen. The words they used were their own, but the thoughts were those given and directed by the Holy Spirit. The words of the Bible are not inspired, but the men who wrote them were.⁵⁰ While the Bible

uses the language of men, it is nevertheless an infallible revelation of God's will, a union of the divine and the human, the same kind of union we find in Jesus Christ.⁵¹

We need to remember that "those who bring to the investigation of the Word a spirit which it does not approve, will take away from the search a spirit which it has not imparted."⁵² There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to destroy those who do not appreciate our theological ideas.⁵³ It is a Jehu-spirit which says, "Come . . . see my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10:16). This kind of spirit is gratifying to self and gives a sense of false assurance, yet all the while the soul is defiled with the plague-spot of unsubdued, uncontrolled selfishness and self-worship.⁵⁴

Descriptive Theology. According to K. Stendahl the "history-of-religions school" felt the need to make Jesus more palatable to the contemporary mind. It emphasized the distance between biblical and modern times, and what emerged was a descriptive approach to the study of Scripture. The fact of the Exodus or of the resurrection of Jesus was not so much their concern as was the significance those events had for the writers and readers who lived at the time. The "Sitz im Leben" view became the way to study Scripture. Soon biblical theology was swallowed up by the study of the history of biblical thought. As a result the gap between the Bible and our time was widened and the question of scriptural meaning was split into two tenses: "What did it mean to them?" and "What does it mean to us today?" The "history-of-religions" school, with its embrace of descriptive theology, denuded the Scripture of its normative authority.⁵⁵

Descriptive theology, it is said, can be carried out by believer and agnostic alike. They can work side by side as historians since no other tools are called for than those involving the description of the text. The question which descriptive theology cannot answer is: "Who was right about Christ—the Jews or the Christians?" When descriptive theology attempts to answer such questions, it is no longer descriptive theology. Those, therefore, who commit themselves to using this method of studying Scripture must remain neutral and limit themselves to what the text meant in its own setting and no more. As a result, descriptive theology will never be normative

regardless of attempts to make it so. For descriptive theology to be true to itself it can only focus on what the Scriptures meant in the past and consequently, for them, the Bible becomes a book of the past with little practical meaning for today.⁵⁶

The prophets spoke less for their own time than for the ages that followed and for our own time.⁵⁷ But the descriptive approach to Scripture makes the Bible little more than a story book with good moral lessons and examples of religious heroism. Thus the theologian can easily sweep aside any normative application that he wishes to discard as being unpleasant or unacceptable to his thinking. He can mold Scripture into whatever image he wishes to create.

But the Scriptures were intended to be normative throughout time, for they were given for our admonition (1 Cor 10:11). This is especially true of the Decalogue, which was not conceived by the Israelites nor with meaning only for them, but is normative for us as well. Whether our theology has become descriptive and is simply handed down as an Adventist tradition, or is normative for all peoples for all time will soon be seen. When theology confines Scripture to fit its own contemporary convenience and destroys people's faith in the Scriptures as God's normative revelation, it has set up another idol to worship.

Neoorthodoxy. Karl Barth's *Romans* grew out of concern for his parishioners at Safenwil for whom he rejected the prevailing liberalism of his mentors at Marburg and Berlin. Barth's focus became the Word of God.⁵⁸ He saw Scripture as a witness to the revelation of the triune God as the Revealer, the Revealed, and the Revealedness.⁵⁹ He holds this understanding of Scripture as an alleged barrier against the concept of the Scriptures' being a corpus of fixed propositions which can be systematized into a theology. The Word of God, Barth says, is the Person of Jesus Christ, who is not bound by the verbal form of Scripture but speaks to us again and again in the form of proclamation—for He is the ever-present Word of God. Thus, it is Christ Himself, the Living Word, who becomes the great obstacle to those who wish to reduce the propositions of Scripture to a human system which they can control. God's faithfulness consists of His freedom to come to us through the ever-present Christ and to do this as often as He wishes.⁶⁰

According to Barth Scripture is only the depository of proclamation of the Living Word from the past by the mouth of man. Therefore, what is written is simply a record of the church's proclamatory history and not of divine revelation. Scripture as witness then and proclamation now are the same continuing event. Barth sees Jeremiah and Paul back there and the preacher of the Gospel today as one and the same proclamation of and witness to the Living Word of God.⁶¹

Thus, neoorthodoxy makes an encounter with the Living Word more important than Scripture itself, which means that God's revelation becomes little more than an existential event. Personal encounter even supersedes the need for the comprehension of the truthfulness of biblical facts.⁶² What neoorthodoxy fears—making the Scriptures more important than Christ—is a legitimate concern which we ought to share. It is not impossible to grasp the facts of revelation and yet not know the One of whom the Scriptures speak (John 5:39-40).

But as Carl F. H. Henry points out, the loss of the concept of revelation as something to be grasped and understood has had devastating consequences. To deny the rational intelligibility of divine revelation is to forego the connection between faith and adherence to explicit beliefs. Neoorthodoxy rejected the objective, verbal character of revelation and simply made it a human—though apostolic—interpretation of the deeds of God and an existential inner response to a spiritual confrontation. Yet Jesus, in His own teaching endorses the view that revelation takes conceptual-verbal form. He not only identified His words as revelation but also identified the Word of God in terms of what stands written.⁶³

Henry rightly decries the fact that the emphasis on divine self-disclosure as a personal but non-cognitive confrontation of man has become too widely entrenched. Neo-Protestant reconstruction of the doctrine of divine revelation, he says, has eliminated its external and objective features and focused on personal encounter. Consequently cognitive revelation has been forfeited and transmuted into an inner awareness of forgiveness and into a subjective relationship with God, while the issue of objectively valid truth is bypassed.

What Barth inadvertently did was to repudiate a prophetic-

apostolic deposit of truth identical with the sacred texts, and made the so-called present Word-event become more important than Scripture. The claim that divine revelation is personal rather than propositional makes faith in Christ something different from an acceptance of the truth about Him as stated in Scripture. The Bible, Henry says, gives no basis for the theory that the Word of God must be something different from what is written.⁶⁴

The theological significance of the neoorthodox position has grave eschatological consequences. We need to put the Living Word—Jesus Christ—and the written Word in proper perspective. Without a doubt, Christ is more important than a book, even more important than Scripture. On the other hand, it is Christ Himself who directs us to the primacy of Scripture and Christ comes to us through Scripture.

It was the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus who withheld His self-disclosure to the two disciples and directed them to the written Word as their assurance. He began with Moses and the prophets and showed them all things concerning Himself (Luke 24). Had He first made Himself known to them, their hearts would have been satisfied and they would have hungered for nothing more. But it was necessary for them to understand that their faith should be established upon what was written. It was the written Word that would keep their faith strong when in a few short years they would have to face the overthrow of Jerusalem.⁶⁵ The basis of their faith needed to have some rational content concerning who Christ was, not simply an experience with Him, not just three cheers for a resurrected Lord!

The crowning act of eschatological deception will come when Satan personates the "Living Word." Many will believe that Satan is the expected Christ who has come to save the world. Then, in his assumed character of the "Living Word," he will claim to have changed what is written. He declares that those who listen to the written word and persist in keeping the seventh day are blaspheming his name. But the people whose faith is rooted in what is written will not be misled. They will see that the teachings of this false christ are not in harmony with the Scriptures.⁶⁶ They will not accept the personation of the "Living Word" to take precedence over the written Word. Some, however, will see this as blasphemy, as

bibliolatry, the worship of a book over the Person of Christ. It will be said of those who rely on what is written—as it is already being said—that they need this kind of external authority to lean on to bolster their faith, because they do not have a mature relationship with Christ, as if a relationship with Christ is contrary to faith's reliance on Scripture. It will be believed that such alleged bibliolatry must be rooted out, especially if it denies the world the promised blessing from the one whom they believe is the "Living Christ." The theological idol of neoorthodoxy will be believed and worshiped, and not a few will be deceived.

Relevancy. Under this heading are numerous theological attempts to make Scripture more acceptable to modern man. The demythologization approach by Rudolph Bultmann would be one such example as he attempts to free from the NT accounts the real, underlying biblical message. He wants to avoid coming to the present generation with the demand that it accept what he regards as an outworn view of the world. According to Bultmann it is unnatural for us to demand that contemporary man accept as true the biblical framework of stories which made up the biblical writers' own thought-world. Modern man can only do so at the expense of sacrificing his intellect, he claims.⁶⁷

This kind of approach de-emphasizes the authority of the biblical text and shifts the focus of authority in the direction of man's judgment over Scripture. Bultmann argued that it is impossible to do exegesis without coming to the text with modern presuppositions. The interpreter must come to the text with relevant questions or with a specific way of raising questions.⁶⁸ However, the kinds of questions we bring to Scripture often predetermine the answers we seek, and in turn these answers are accepted as Scriptural truth. Scripture will, however, redefine our questions.

The incarnational view of Scripture is still another means of molding the Word of God into a "golden image." According to this approach the Bible is seen as providing case studies from which lessons can be drawn to make the Word of God more "practical." The loci of such theological constructions shift from an authoritative Scripture to the needs of the current community, from the author-text to the reader. Scriptural authority becomes a "classic text" in the sense that it speaks with power to all peoples and is

flexible and open to a wide variety of interpretations as most case studies are.⁶⁹

This kind of cognitive bargaining, with the desire for a more acceptable Christian lifestyle, has brought about a subtle shift from an emphasis on being born again (with resultant conformity to the will of God) to the marketability of the text by making it more palatable for contemporary society. Consequently, adjusting to our intellectual surroundings becomes more important than shaping our surroundings by the biblical message.

The attempt to make Scripture more palatable to contemporary society employs a hermeneutic by which the diversity of the individual writers is emphasized to the exclusion of their deeper unity. So what we have is the theology of Isaiah or of Luke or Paul, the canon within the canon, progressive revelation, the "maturity theory" by which later passages become more reliable than former ones instead of simply clarifying them, and the symbolic or metaphorical expression of God's redemptive activity. All of these in one way or another destroy the underlying unity and reliability of propositional revelation.⁷⁰

In his reply to David Edwards, John Stott says that an a priori resolve to believe and obey whatever Scripture may be shown to teach, means to be committed to Scripture in advance to whatever it may be found to say. As he points out, such an open, unconditional commitment to Scripture is no longer acceptable to some. Their biblical selectivity often rejects the plain Scriptural teaching on the atonement, miracles, or homosexual partnerships on the basis that such teachings are unbiblical, because they are unacceptable to today's society.⁷¹ This gives supremacy to man's reason, experience, or whatever else over Scripture. This conflict, Stott says, goes back to Luther when he said to Erasmus, "The difference between you and me, Erasmus, is that you sit above Scripture and judge it, while I sit under Scripture and let it judge me!"⁷²

When men fashion revelation to form their own little theological gods and bow down to worship them and be warmed by the glow of the acceptance of these gods, they have fallen into the lowest form of idolatry that can be conceived. They use the Word of God to fashion their own idols. This is not faith, but the greatest presump-

tion. This is not worship of the God of Israel, but blatant self-idolatry.

Conclusion

The time is fast approaching when the Sabbath of the fourth commandment will become the fulcrum, the pressure point, if you please, which will divide Christians between those who believe what is written and are willing to stake their lives on it, and those who believe Scripture can be legitimately molded into the image they want for their own survival.

In the light of our eschatological considerations, it is imperative that we reach out in faith and hold on to Scripture as instructed by the Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life for us so we need not perish but receive eternal life (John 3:16). There can be no greater insult to God's unbounding grace than to make light of the provisions made for our salvation as delineated in Scripture. Out of the deepest appreciation for what the Son of God has done for us, let us hold on to what is written as He did when He was here (Matt 4:1-11).

In some quarters there is skepticism as to what the Scriptures say. Human reasoning and imaginings are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God. That which should be received as granted, is surrounded by a cloud of unbelief. Nothing is beyond attack. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines. This is one of the signs of the last days. Satan is determined to place everything connected with the Word of God under a cloud of suspicion and doubt. But the Lord has preserved the Bible by His own miraculous power in its present shape and given it to us to be our guide.⁷³

We keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment not because of the authority of the community, not because it is our tradition, not because of a "Sitz im Leben" theology, not because it has been voted by the church, and not because it is a matter of demonstrating our own strong faith. It is not for any of these reasons that we worship God on the seventh-day. We worship on that day out of grateful obedience for what God, the Father, through Jesus Christ, has done for us, and that is the reason why we submit ourselves body and mind to the written Word under the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

There will always be subjects in the Bible too difficult for us to understand. But this is no reason to doubt the Word of God and to fashion it into the image that we want it to be. Too often a certain pride is mingled with doing theology, and it is too humiliating for us to admit that we do not always understand the inspired words. We feel that our unaided human wisdom is sufficient to enable us to comprehend whatever is written. Too often we feel no need of submission to the Holy Spirit's leading, no need of faith in His unseen hand that stands ready to guide us.

Without the Holy Spirit, however, we are continually liable to misinterpret the Scriptures. Without prayer and faith, the heart is not in tune with God and in the very study of the Bible doubt and skepticism may grow, and Satan stands ready to suggest interpretations that are not correct. Our vision may become distorted, and that which is plain may be covered with doubt and unbelief. And too often the real cause of our doubts and questionings is the love of self and sin.⁷⁴

As we near the end, men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. One after another will claim to have new light which contradicts the light that God has given us under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We are not to receive the teachings of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture and pile it as proof around their theories of truth, which is something that has been done again and again throughout our history.⁷⁵ They select portions of Scripture and misapply them to support their erroneous theories and by doing this place both Scripture and the testimony of Jesus Christ in a framework of error. Those who do this, do not have the proper faith either in the Scriptures or in the testimonies of Christ no matter what they say.⁷⁶

Too often we are caught up with concern about how inspiration works, how the Word of God was transmitted, what the process was by which the Word of God came to us, and soon we begin to process the Word. This is all the more tempting in an age of technology and computers. We are living in a generation when everything must be analyzed and torn apart until nothing can be accepted at face value, not even the Scriptures.

We define and define until the gospel dies the death of a thousand definitions, and our faith finds no reliable footing and begins to die. We end up dissecting the Word of God, when we ourselves need to be dissected to expose the wickedness of our own hearts (Jer 17:9; Heb 4:12). Too often we are tempted to exercise power over the Word of God, and in the process we think we are making it more the Word.

The Word is the Word in and of itself. It is the Word of the living God. It stands over against us, calling us to faith, strengthening our faith, bringing it to culmination. Too often we forget that not the most eloquent in speech, not those who are the best versed in theology, are the most light-bearing Christians, but rather, those who work humbly and dependently for the Master.⁷⁷ There is need of the infusion of the Spirit of God. Too often we depend more on our own learning than upon Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord.⁷⁸ "The ability to give a reason for our faith is a good accomplishment, but if the truth does not go deeper than this, the soul will never be saved."⁷⁹

There must be silence in the soul. Our thoughts must be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. Our pride and boastfulness of scholarship, our self-sufficiency, must stand rebuked in the presence of the Word of God.⁸⁰ We must understand that the Scriptures do not depend on the process of man's reasoning to bring people from darkness to light, from sin into the kingdom of God. It is faith that accepts the divine, God-given testimony that the Scriptures are the great power of God which under the Holy Spirit bring men and women to the foot of the cross.⁸¹ The more we search the Bible, the deeper grows our conviction that it is the Word of the living God, and as we turn its sacred pages, we bow in humility before the majesty of God's revelation.⁸²

Faith seeking understanding, that is the theological task before us. Human thought seeking to understand what God has revealed. Does the theologian need faith to do theology? The answer is an unequivocal, "Yes!" but a faith that is always trusting what is written in Holy Scripture and with humility and awe is continuously seeking to understand.

Endnotes

- 1 Frederick Sontag, *How Philosophy Shapes Theology*, Problems in the Philosophy of Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 290-293.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), p. 173.
- 3 White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 595.
- 4 Sontag, p. 294.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 299.
- 7 White, *Desire of Ages*, pp. 455-456.
- 8 Sontag, p. 301.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 302-304.
- 10 White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 7:958.
- 11 Sontag, pp. 305-309.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 310-312.
- 13 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), Hymn No. 533.
- 14 Sontag, p. 320. Sontag points out that God's intention through revelation is to disclose by special events that which is not observed by all men at all times. Therefore, "if one demands 'universality' as a criterion for all valid knowledge, revelation is ruled out from the start as an unacceptable and provincial source. Or, if the epistemology in use denies all transcendence of either natural modes of knowledge or existence, revelation is excluded, since it is meaningful only as a communication from a higher order and as a form which exceeds natural modes," p. 321.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 322.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 323-326. See also White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957). "There are some that may think they are fully capable with their finite judgment to take the Word of God, and to state what are the words of inspiration, and what are not the words of inspiration. . . . There is no finite man that lives, I care not who he is or whatever is his position, that God has authorized to pick and choose in His Word." 7:919.
- "I would have both my arms taken off at my shoulders before I would ever make the statement or set my judgment upon the Word of God as to what is inspired and what is not inspired. How would finite man know anything about that matter? . . . Never attempt to search the Scriptures unless you are ready to listen, unless you are ready to be a learner, unless you are ready to listen to the Word of God as though His voice were speaking directly to you from the living oracles. Never let mortal man sit in judgment upon the Word of God or pass sentence as to how much of this is inspired and how much is not inspired, and that this is more inspired than some other portions. God warns him off that ground. God has not given him any such work to do." *Ibid.*
- "Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God's Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. Tell all such they simply do not know. They simply are not able to comprehend the things of the mystery of God. What we want is to inspire faith. We want no one to say, 'This I will reject, and this will I receive,' but we want to have implicit faith in the Bible as a whole and as it is." *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 334-335.
- 18 E. C. Blackman, "Faith, Faithfulness," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 2:222-223. Hereinafter listed as *IDB*.
- 19 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 3:938-22.
- 20 *IDB*, 2:225-227.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 230-232.

23 Gresham J. Machen, *What is Faith?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), pp. 46-48.

24 The first Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms just such a position: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history." (See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), 31. See also White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911). "The warnings of the word of God regarding the perils surrounding the Christian church belong to us to-day. As in the days of the apostles men tried by tradition and philosophy do destroy faith in the Scriptures, so to-day, by the pleasing sentiments of 'higher criticism,' evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism, the enemy of righteousness is seeking to lead souls into forbidden paths. To many, the Bible is as a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion. The work of 'higher criticism,' in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives," p. 474.

25 J. I. Packer, "Faith," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 400-401. Hereinafter noted as *EDT*. "Since the doctrine of justification was not understood, the soteriological significance of faith was misconceived, and faith (understood as orthodoxy) was regarded simply as the passport to baptism (remitting all past sins) and to a lifelong probation in the church (giving the baptized opportunity to make themselves worthy of glory by their good works).

"The scholastics reproduced the equation of faith with credence, distinguishing between *fides informis* ("unformed" faith, bare orthodoxy) and *fides caritate formata* (credence "formed" into a working principle by the supernatural addition [sic] to it of the distinct grace of love). Both sorts of faith, they held, are meritorious works, though the quality of merit attaching to the first is merely *congruent* (rendering divine reward fit, though not obligatory), and only the second gains *condign* merit (making divine reward due as a matter of justice). Roman Catholicism still formally identifies faith with credence, and has added a further refinement by distinguishing between "explicit" faith (belief which knows its object) and "implicit" faith (uncomprehending assent to whatever it may be that the church holds). Only the latter (which is evidently no more than a vote of confidence in the teaching church and may be held with complete ignorance of Christianity) is thought to be required of laymen for salvation. But a mere docile disposition of this sort is poles apart from the biblical concept of saving faith," p. 401.

See also "Faith," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), Volume Two. Hereinafter listed as *ISBE*. In this article G. W. Bromiley points out that "the patristic age, for all its magnificent achievements, quickly lost sight of the essential element in NT faith and tended to subsume faith under 'the faith,' or assent to the faith. This was not without reason, for the early Church had to face heresies that might easily have destroyed its message. There was need both to formulate the orthodox faith and to regard assent to it as an important element in true Christian profession. . . . A transformation of life was expected as part of conversion to Christianity. Yet a trend toward intellectualization of faith is plainly to be seen.

"It was Martin Luther supremely who rediscovered the doctrine of justification by faith and therewith the rich signification and significance of faith in a biblical sense. His own lack of assurance and his intensive biblical study brought him to this epoch-making understanding, which had dogmatic and practical ramifications far beyond anything he himself had first envisaged. . . . Faith is a looking away from all human merit to the unique merit of Christ Himself. In this sense it is not a first step which must followed by other steps if there is to be justification. It embraces the whole life of the Christian, so that there can be abiding assurance of forgiveness in spite of postbaptismal sin," p. 272.

- 26 Ibid., p. 402.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 White, "The Training of Workers," in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, December 1, 1904), p. 7.
- 29 White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 175.
- 30 EDT, p. 402.
- 31 James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith, The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), pp. 10-13. Although Fowler admits to revelation, grace, and faith as a gift, he is more nearly neo-orthodox in his view of Scripture with its emphasis on encounter than he is with the Reformation position of Scripture. As he says, "Faith development studies confirm the judgement that human beings are genetically potentiated—that is to say, are gifted at birth—with readiness to develop in faith." 303. However, "the idea that it is necessary only to develop the good that exists in man by nature, is a fatal deception." White, *Steps To Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1908), pp. 18-19.
- 32 White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 347.
- 33 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), III/2.6
- 34 Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 1:157.
- 35 ETD, p. 400.
- 36 White, *Education* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), pp. 253-254.
- 37 G. W. Bromiley, "Faith," *ISBE*, 2:271.
- 38 Ibid., p. 272.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 IDB, 2:234.
- 41 J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), p. 124.
- 42 White, *Education*, p. 78.
- 43 Ibid., p. 260.
- 44 White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1992), 68-69.
- 45 White, "Words to Teachers and Students," in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, March 12, 1908), p. 8.
- 46 Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, p. 124.
- 47 Thomas Sheehan, *The First Coming, How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), pp. 5-8. "The apparent difference between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith' is not a new problem in Christianity. Since the last century liberal Protestant scholars like Adolf von Harnack and agnostics like Ernest Renan have tried to strip away what they thought were the church's divinizing embellishments of Jesus of Nazareth so as to arrive at the 'real' (that is, the human) prophet of Nazareth.
- More recently Roman Catholic exegetes and theologians have joined the discussion. With the encouragement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Catholic scholars now teach that the Gospels are not accurate 'histories' of Jesus but religious testimonies produced by the second and third generations of Christians, whose faith that Jesus was the their savior colored their memory of his days on earth. Thus, even though all Catholic biblical scholars believe that Jesus is God, they do not necessarily maintain that Jesus Himself thought He was the divine Son of God, who had existed from all eternity as the Second Person of the Trinity," p. 6.
- "Christians have at their disposal only the same public evidence about Jesus that everyone else has—but they interpret the data differently. That is, Christianity is a 'hermeneusis,' or interpretation. Its beliefs and doctrines are but one of many possible and equally valid ways of understanding the universally available empirical data about Jesus of Nazareth. Christians may claim that their faith is based on revelation, but as far as one can tell empirically, such revelation is a name for the historically relative and culturally

- determined hermeneutical process in which Christians, confronting the humanly available information about Jesus of Nazareth, choose to interpret him as their savior, who reigns with God in heaven," p. 7.
- 48 C. T. McIntire, "Fundamentalism," in EDT, 433-435; and I. S. Rennie, "Verbal Inspiration," pp. 1138-1140.
- 49 G. C. Berkhouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 23. While Berkhouwer does not disparage the childlike acceptance of Scripture by the fundamentalists and their defense of the trustworthiness of revelation against an overemphasis of Scripture's human nature, he does point out with the critics that there is danger of an incorrect connection between certainty of Scripture and certainty of faith. Some consider the theory of verbal inspiration as an attempt to make the basis of certainty of faith immovable by substituting an infallible book for an infallible pope. 21-35. For a brief historical overview of the concept of inerrancy of Scripture, the application to Scripture of higher and lower criticism, and the fundamentalist response see Alan Richardson's article, "Scripture, Authority of," in IDB, 4:248-251.
- 50 White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 1:19-23.
- 51 White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. v-vii.
- 52 White, "The Word of God," in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, August 22, 1907), p. 8.
- 53 White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 487.
- 54 White, "The Right Use of Talents," in *The Signs of the Times* (Oakland, California: Pacific Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, November 20, 1884), p. 1.
- 55 Whether the facticity of Scripture is relegated to the past by the "history-of-religion" school or superseded by an existential meaning above the facts of history, the objective is the same—to make the Scripture more palatable and acceptable to modern man. See R. C. Roberts, "Bultmann, Rudolf," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 180. For Bultmann the world view of the Bible is impossible for modern man to believe. He points out that there is an alternative to demanding the literal acceptance of the biblical world view or rejecting it out of hand. The key, he says, is to view the New Testament with an eye for the self-understanding as expressed by the primitive Christian community. The word "historie" refers to the events on the ordinary level of history which are open to investigation, but "geschichte" refers to a level of true occurrence, the timeless meaning which is supposed to be above history. See also Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 133-140.
- 56 K. Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:418-425. Stendahl continues in his article to speak to the hermeneutical question as raised by descriptive theology which is beyond the scope of this paper. See also, Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology* (Revised Edition), Basic Issues in the Current Debate (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 35-39.
- 57 White, "Heart Piety Essential," in *The Signs of the Times* (Oakland, California: Pacific Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, April 2, 1896), p. 5.
- 58 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Author's Foreword (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), I/1: vii-xiv.
- 59 Ibid., p. 339ff.
- 60 Ibid., p. 156ff.
- 61 Ibid., p. 114ff.
- 62 Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), pp. 66-74.
- 63 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1976), 2:12-13. Henry also points out that critical scholarship tends to undermine God's revelation by minimizing the original inspiration of Scripture by giving the impression that contemporary scholars are divinely inspired whereas the biblical writers at best are credited with only a high degree of insight coupled with extensive fallibility. "As a result both

the legitimate basis of the canon and the reliability of the revelation are clouded. Ministerial students are indoctrinated in the decisive importance of such alleged sources as J, E, D, P, Q and Ur-Marcus, postulated sources for which the critics have adduced neither actual original sources nor extant fallible copies," pp. 13-14. See also Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, Translated from the German edition, *Gibt es ein synoptisches Problem?* by Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992).

64 *Ibid.*, 3:248-249 and pp. 482-483.

65 White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 796-800. See also White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 1:20-21. "Prepossessions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ. The disciples traveling to Emmaus needed to be disentangled in their interpretation of the Scriptures. Jesus walked with them disguised and as a man He talked with them. . . . He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. How quickly He straightened out the tangled ends and showed the unity and the divine verity of the Scriptures."

66 White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 624-625.

67 Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, editor, *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 135. (For a more complete discussion see the entire section on Bultmann by Robert D. Knudson, pp. 131-162.)

68 David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 166-167.

69 Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), pp. 10-11.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 289.

71 David L. Edwards, *Evangelical Essentials*, A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue With a Response from John Stott (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 104-105.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

73 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:15.

74 White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 105-113.

75 White, *A Call to the Watchman* (pamphlet, no imprint, 1910), 14-15.

76 White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 2:83.

77 White, "The Work In Oakland and San Francisco," in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, November 29, 1906), p. 7.

78 White, "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord," (*Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1906), p. 12.

79 White, *Last Day Events*, p. 70.

80 White, "The Word of God," in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, August 22, 1907), p. 8.

81 White, "The Southern Field," *The Southern Watchman* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, April 24, 1902), p. 5.

82 White, *Education*, p. 170.

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SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

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Introduction

The subject of "Scripture and Theology" has had my conscious interest ever since my student days. As part of my graduate work I took a major in Systematic Theology for the M.A. degree in the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. I could not leave this area of interest and subsequently took a cognate in Contemporary Theology as part of my my Ph.D. program at Vanderbilt University, while majoring in Biblical Studies. I continued to work and read, write and publish, lecture and teach with a mind toward both Scripture and theology.

It may be said from the start that this subject of "Scripture and Theology" is at the heart of the modern crisis in theology. And there is a crisis in theology in Christianity at large as has not existed at any time before. Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a microcosm of the larger world around us, we are not immune to the larger crisis of theology.

It is a truism to say that modern theology at large is like a boat floating in the uncharted waters of a stormy ocean without anchor or compass. Has this reality of theology in the larger sphere of Christendom become a reality in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? If it is not a reality yet, or if we are on the way for it to become a reality within the Advent movement, then it is high time to think together about the impact these powerful forces can have on Adventist theology and teaching.

An indisputable fact of our time is that modern theology is plagued by an unimaginable pluralism. Anything goes. This is