

The Necessity for Systematic Theology

by

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1. The Necessity for Systematic Theology

Last Saturday, while travelling to Los Angeles, I listened on my car radio to an evangelist broadcasting from the other end of the country. While claiming to preach the word of God as a Bible-believing Christian, he preached a faith I could not recognize as Scriptural, nor the God I hear speak in the Bible. This man assured his converted and unconverted listeners that “God is *always* on your side.” He also spoke of God as our “Daddy” in heaven, rich in resources and eager and anxious to help us if we only would allow Him to do so. I could not recognize in what he preached the sovereign God of Scripture nor anything that resembled His commanding word, the Bible. The evangelist was a humanist who was using, or trying to use, God as the greatest possible resource available to man; central to his thinking was man and man’s needs. He lacked any systematic theology of God; instead, there were traces in his brief message of a theology of man as the true center and the god of things.

Very briefly, systematic theology says that God is God. It declares that, because God is sovereign, omnipotent, all-wise, all-holy, and knows from eternity all that He ordains and decrees, therefore there is no hidden possibility or potentiality in God, but that God is both fully self-conscious and totally self-consistent. Only with such a God is systematic theology possible. Wherever faith in the sovereignty of God declines, there too systematic theology goes into an eclipse.

The word *systematic* in systematic theology means, among other things, first, that it is a comprehensive, unified statement of what Scripture as a whole teaches about God. The revelation of God in Scripture is brought together in summary and comprehensive form, and the results of Biblical theology, the exegesis and analysis of Scripture and its meaning, are organized and set forth.

Second, the word *systematic* means that the totally sovereign God, who does not change (Mal. 3:6), is truly knowable. He is always the same. Men change character, grow and regress, but God is always the same, totally self-consistent and absolutely sovereign. Only about such a God is a systematic word possible. This is why modern theology cannot produce systematics. Karl Barth’s position was a denial of the possibility of systematics. Thus, he wrote,

But it is not “the Almighty” who is God; we cannot understand from the standpoint of a supreme concept of power, who God is. And the man who calls “the Almighty” God misses God in the most terrible way. For the “Almighty” is bad, as “power in itself is bad. The “Almighty” means Chaos, Evil, the Devil. We could not better describe and define the Devil than by trying to think this idea of a self-based, free, sovereign ability...God and “power in itself are mutually exclusive. God is the essence of the possible; but “power in itself is the essence of the impossible.¹

¹ Karl Barth: *Dogmatics in Outline*. (New York, N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1949). p. 48.

Barth's God is not the God of Scripture who declares, "I am the Almighty God" (Gen. 17:1). Barth's God is a limiting concept, the product of a man's imagination. Barth gives us only a systematic exposition of his unbelief; he cannot give us a systematic theology of the God of Scripture.

Similarly, Haroutunian held that systematic theology was impossible, because such a doctrine of God cannot do "justice to the complexities of human life."² The center of Haroutunian's theology is human life: the God of Scripture cannot in any degree nor in any sense impinge on the sovereignty of autonomous man. Hence, for him systematic theology is an illusion,³ because the God of systematic theology is by definition excluded from all consideration.

Third, systematic means that the presupposition of theology is not the mind of autonomous man but the sovereign God of Scripture. Systematics, no more than apologetics, seeks to prove God and His existence; rather, it presupposes the triune God as the only ground and means of reasoning and proof. As Van Til has so excellently demonstrated, "All the disciplines must presuppose God, but at the same time presupposition is the best proof."⁴ On any other presupposition, if logically applied, no proof is at all possible, because all reality is reduced to brute factuality, as Van Til has shown.⁵ Instead of brute and meaningless factuality, all the universe gives us God-created factuality only, and hence the necessary presupposition of all thinking is the triune God.

Fourth, as Van Til has always stressed, systematics denies the concept of neutrality. There are no neutral facts, no neutral thoughts, no neutral man nor reason. All men, facts, and thinking either begin with the sovereign and triune God, or they begin with rebellion against Him. Systematics affirms that God; the denial of systematics is a denial of God.

Fifth, systematics is necessary if men are to think intelligently and logically. Without the concept of systematics and the God it sets forth, we cannot hold to a rational and understandable universe nor to any meaningful order therein. Unregenerate man's reason and logic operate against the background of chaos and a meaningless void, so that reason and logic are in essence more than irrational: they are absurd. Systematics not only makes reason reasonable, but it declares that there is a necessary and meaningful connection between all facts, because all facts are the creation of the sovereign and omnipotent God and are thus revelations of His purpose and order. The idea of preaching the whole counsel of God is only a possibility if systematics is a reality.

² Joseph Haroutunian: *First Essay in Reflective Theology*. (Chicago, IL: McCormick Theological Seminary, 1943). p. 10.

³ *Idem*.

⁴ Cornelius Van Til: *An Introduction to Theology*, vol. I. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1947). p. 3.

⁵ See R. J. Rushdoony: *By What Standard? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til*. Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, (1958) 1974); and R. J. Rushdoony: "The Word of Flux." (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1975).

Otherwise, there is no necessary and real connection and unity in the word of God, and we have instead a developing, changing word and plan under different dispensations. We have then a fragmented word, not a whole counsel which is a necessary and authoritative unity.

Thus, without systematics there is no word of God, and, indeed, no such God as His revelation in Scripture sets forth. We have then another god with an occasional word which is made up of flashes of insight, and of superior powers to man, but no absolute, almighty, and sovereign God whose every word is infallible, and whose revelation manifests the only possible system of truth. This living God declares, "I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 46:9). There is no other God, no other truth, no other possibility, system, or meaning outside of Him. He is God the Lord.

2. Causality and Systematics

The Greeks no less than Biblical thought held to the idea of causality, but with a difference. The Greek concept of causality was closely tied to its belief in potentiality. All being was held to be full of potentiality, so that new developments in being were always possible. Luke tells us, in Acts 17:21, “For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new things.” The *new* was very important to these Greek philosophers, teachers, and students: it was an indication of the next step in being perhaps, a glimpse into the areas of possibility. As Van Til notes,

They believed in “the mysterious universe”; they were perfectly willing therefore to leave open a place for “the unknown.” But this “unknown” must be thought of as utterly unknowable and indeterminate.⁶

For Greek philosophy there was no determined character to the created universe because they did not believe in the absolute, sovereign, and predestinating God. Their idea of causality thus simply held that there was a connection between contextual events, but it denied that any sovereign person, plan, and decree created and determined those events.

Much later, as a result of Christian influence and scholarship, the idea of natural or physical laws developed. This concept held that, whether in physics, chemistry, biology, or any other area of study, certain patterns of connection indicated an over-all law which necessitated a determined pattern of events. This presupposed a universe, not a multiverse, and a fixed and predetermined law governing all creation. The Greeks could see ideas or patterns within creation, but no fixity or necessary and continuing pattern.

On Greek terms, therefore, a systematic theology was impossible. At best, any system noted had to be tentative and temporal, not eternal and binding. Thus, as the Greek mind faced the early church, it had one basic idea which had fixity: it held that systematics must be by definition ruled out and an open universe retained. New potentiality had to be allowed, and no eternal decree permitted.

Thus, the Biblical doctrine of the incarnation was ruled out, because it meant that eternity determined time, and God controls history. It meant that the two ultimate substances for Greek thought — mind and matter — were alike created and absolutely controlled by God. For the word to become flesh meant that the Greek idea of being was invalid, and that its philosophy was unsound, because it rested on a false premise with respect to being and potentiality. Tertullian saw this clearly, and, in *On the Flesh of Christ* (III), declared,

Since you think that this lay within the competency of your own arbitrary choice, you must needs have supposed that being born was either impossible for God, or

⁶ Cornelius Van Til: *Paul at Athens*. (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1954). p. 6.

unbecoming to Him. With God, however, nothing is impossible but what He does not will.⁷

For Tertullian, there is a necessary and systematic logic and coherency to all God's works, so that his idea of causality and potentiality is not grounded on the Greek idea of being and a developing potentiality but on the sovereign, unchanging, and triune God. As a result, Tertullian declares, "What is written cannot but have been."⁸ When the Scriptures speak, it is infallibly: it is the absolute God whose every word is truth who speaks that word. There is no possibility outside of God, nor is there any hidden or unknown potentiality within God: He is totally self-conscious and totally determines all by His perfect will. The strength of Tertullian's argument is that he grasped, however defectively applied at times, the necessary systematics of Biblical theology.

Greek thought combined with Christianity could at best give only a tentative systematics, and at heart it carried a denial thereof. Wherever theology began with the God of Scripture, however, it confronted the world of the pagans with systematics.

In the second century, Tatian, schooled in Greek philosophy, turned to Christianity when he grasped the fact that it provided a systematic theology and therefore a coherent view of all things. However weak Tatian was in some areas of thought, his grasp of this fact, the necessity of systematics, is telling. Tatian wrote of his conversion from Greek philosophy through a reading of "barbaric" (Biblical) writings thus:

And while I was giving my most earnest attention to the matter, I happened to meet with certain barbaric writings, too old to be compared with the opinions of the Greeks, and too divine to be compared with their errors; and I was led to put faith in these by the unpretending cast of the language, the inartificial character of the writers, the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the government of the universe as centered in one Being. And, my soul being taught of God, I discerned that the former class of writings lead to condemnation, but that these put an end to the slavery that is in the world, and rescue us from a multiplicity of rulers and ten thousand tyrants, while they give us, not indeed what we had not before received, but what we had received but were prevented by error from retaining.⁹

The government of the universe centered in God, Tatian found to be the foundation of both intellectual and personal freedom. It meant spiritual and material freedom, and it also meant intellectual freedom from the dead-ends of Greek philosophy. As against the conclusions of such philosophy and pagan religions, Tatian declared,

⁷ Tertullian, "On the Flesh of Christ," III, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. XV, *The Writings of Tertullian us*, vol. II. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1874). p. 167.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁹ Tatian, "Address of Tatian to the Greeks," ch. xxix, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, III, *The Writings of Tatian and Theophilus: and the Clementine Recognitions*, (1875). p. 34.

But we are superior to Fate, and instead of wandering demons, we have learned to know one Lord who wanders not; and, as we do not follow the guidance of Fate, we reject its lawgivers.¹⁰

Tatian saw that the results of Christianity include a new life, faith, law, and society. Having another lawgiver, the Christians live in terms of another law than do the pagans.

The determination of history is not from time, but eternity. “Our God did not begin to be in time: He alone is without beginning, and He Himself is the beginning of all things.”¹¹ As against the cyclical view of history, Christians hold to God’s purpose, culminating in the resurrection of the dead.¹²

For Tatian, the creation of all things by God requires the government of all things by God’s law. Accordingly, he declared,

On this account I reject your legislation also; for there ought to be one common polity for all; but now there are as many different codes as there are states, so that things held disgraceful in some are honorable in others. The Greeks consider intercourse with a mother as unlawful, but this practice is esteemed most becoming by the Persian Magi; paederasty is condemned by the Barbarians, but by the Romans, who endeavor to collect boys like grazing horses, it is honored with certain privileges.¹³

Quite rightly, Tatian saw all things at stake in the doctrine of God, i.e., in that Biblical view which required systematics. The doctrine of the sovereign and triune God means that there is a necessary order in the universe, that all things are inter-related and have a common key to the meaning, that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and also one law in the universe. Events do not reveal the hidden potentiality of being but manifest purposes of the sovereign God. Man does not make and adapt laws to meet the new leaps in being but applies the revealed law of God to all of life. Causality is personal in essence, since all things are the handiwork of God the Lord. Causality is not, as with the Greeks, the impersonal and blind outworkings of a being rife with unrealized potentialities.

If we deny the possibility of systematic theology, we deny the God of Scripture. We are then on the road to denying not only theology but all knowledge, because factuality has been denied its created meaning and its purpose.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. ix, p. 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ch. iv, p. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, ch. vi, p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ch. xxviii, p. 33.

3. The Systematics of Common Life

It is commonplace in our time to stress the irrationality of man. In a very real sense, this is a valid assertion, if we view man from the perspective of some standard of reason we hold to be necessary and true. For the Christian, the humanist is irrational, whatever form his rationalism takes, modern, classical, Hindu, Buddhist, or any other form. For the modern humanist, all non-humanists (i.e., all who are not modern “scientific” humanists) are thoroughly irrational. Each and every one, however, is rational in terms of his basic presupposition. Man’s reasonings work out the implications of his faith, so that a man’s reason applies the yardstick of his faith to all things and is in essence a religious activity.

In this sense, we must affirm that men are highly rational, but that their reasonings are warped, because their religious premise is warped. All reasoning rests on a religious premise of faith with respect to reality.

Moreover, because man is created in the image of God, even in his fallen estate he remains aware of the implications of that image within him. He seeks to create, however, his own principles of knowledge and order, so that fallen man remains dedicated to the principle of systematics. Although by denying the triune God man has denied the foundations of systematics, he remains an incurable systems builder. He denies the validity of systematics to God in order to attempt to build a systematics of being.

Man is a creature whose life is an outworking of his faith. In terms of that faith, man is logical and systematic in the basic thrust and direction of his life. Man lives in terms of what he believes, and his life is the logical and rational development of certain religious presuppositions.

A telling illustration of the logic of the common man appears in a study by G. G. Coulton. According to Coulton,

In modern Sicily, among the poorest classes, an executed criminal is a saint. Pitre has noted that men pray “in the name of the holy gallow-birds.” This is perfectly logical. The crowd has seen a man publicly executed after partaking of the holy wafer, which would not be given to him unless he had just confessed and been absolved. His soul is, at that moment, unquestionably on the right side of the balance; next moment he is launched into eternity. By all ecclesiastical logic you are more certain of that man’s final salvation, after due purification in purgatory, than of the most saintly liver whose last moments had been less convincing; therefore the Sicilian vulgar pray for help to the souls of the holy gallow-birds.¹⁴

This logic may make the theologians wince, but the fact remains that the logic of these Sicilians is faultless, if their premise be granted.

¹⁴ George Gordon Coulton: *Ten Medieval Studies*. (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1959). pp. 192-193.

Thus, in Hindu thought the religious concern is “not with a relationship between man and God, but with the realization of the nature of the self.”¹⁵ It should not surprise us therefore that Hindu life is marked by a radical egoism and an unconcern for the sufferings of others. This is not because Hindus have something lacking in their make-up, but that they are logical and rational terms of their faith.

Similarly, Gautama, or Buddha, the Enlightened One, called for the middle way of non-involvement in life. The resultant unconcern of Buddhism with social problems is a necessary consequence of this faith. The Jain doctrine that all matter is possessed of life leads to pacifism, vegetarianism, and non-violence, but not to love, mercy, and charity. The goal is not compassion but a disentanglement from the pain and misery of life. The activism which Mahatma Gandhi and other imported into Hindu life was borrowed from the West; it will survive and thrive only to the degree that Hinduism is altered and dies. The logic of common life requires a simple connection between faith and life, a systematic connection. The sophistications of intellectuals who attempt to breed hybrids do not endure.

Moreover, where systematics is absent, a vacuum does not develop; another systematics replaces it. Thus, in the churches, many ministers never preach the whole counsel of God, or if they do, they do so in a wooden and inadequate manner. The result is that few people in the church are ever exposed to the Christian systematic theology. Their pastors are one-text or one-theme preachers, proclaiming salvation and little else, unless it be ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. In the absence of a systematics grounded on Biblical theology, most Christians function in terms of the logic and presuppositions of their humanistic and statist education. *Without systematic theology, God cannot be central in the lives of ministers and members.* The church cannot flourish on alien foundations, and it has not. It is not enough to proclaim adherence to the infallible words, or to the five points of Calvinism, if such an adherence is not grounded on systematic theology. Without systematics, we have smorgasbord theology and religion, and it is quickly replaced by another faith because of the logic of the common life. Van Til is right:

Non-indoctrinated Christians will easily fall a prey to the peddlers of Russellism, Spiritualism and all of the other fifty-seven varieties of heresies with which our country abounds. One-text Christians simply have no weapons of defense against these people. They may be able to quote many Scripture texts which speak, for instance, of eternal punishment, but the Russellite will be able to quote texts which, by the sound of them and taken individually, seem to teach annihilation. The net result is, at best, a loss of spiritual power because of a loss of conviction. Many times, such one-text Christians themselves fall prey to the seducer’s voice.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ainslee T. Embree, editor: *The Hindu Tradition*. (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1966). p. 50.

¹⁶ Van Til: *An Introduction to Theology*, I, p. 6.

Moreover, as Van Til points out, “The unity and organic character of our personality demands that we have a unified knowledge as the basis of our action.”¹⁷ If this unified knowledge is not provided by the theologians, it will be provided by someone else. Human action requires that unified knowledge. Man’s being requires a systematics, and he will either live or die in terms of it. His faith will lead him to action or inaction, to suicide or life.

Thus, systematics cannot be avoided. The only question is, which systematics? Every non-Biblical system has collapse built into it. It rests on false premises, leads to false conclusions, and cannot give a valid and rational interpretation of the nature and purpose of life and the world.

A systematic theology derived from Scripture is widely denied today as an impossibility. The reason for this is that such deniers are concerned rather with affirming another system, such as a systematic anthropology, man as creator of his own essence and lord of his own being. Such attempts, however, are a futile passion. Only a Bible-based systematics can stand and is valid.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 5.

4. The Coherency of Scripture

There can be no systematic theology if the God of Scripture is not a coherent unity, and if His word is not a coherent whole. An incoherent God, who has elements of unrealized potentiality in Himself and who cannot speak a necessarily infallible word, is incapable of being either the foundation of any systematic theology or of being God. Thus, those who find in Scripture only flashes of insight, and a sometimes incoherent movement toward realization, see no God at all. They are simply mining a vast deposit of earth in the hopes of finding a few nuggets of gold in all that void.

Systematics requires that we recognize the necessary connection between all aspects of Scripture and all forms of Biblical doctrine because there is a unity in the Godhead which makes for a unity of meaning. We must thus see that there is a necessary unity between predestination, circumcision, and baptism.

Predestination is the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in relation to all His works. All things were made by Him in terms of His sovereign purpose and counsel, and the totality of His work was determined from all eternity by no other consideration than His own sovereign will. Hence, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism,

Q. 7. What are the decrees of God?

A. The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. (Eph. 1:11; Acts 4:27, 28; Ps. 33:11; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 9:22,23; 11:33)

Circumcision was the covenant sign of membership. All males were circumcised as infants on the eighth day (Gen. 17:9-4). To refuse to circumcise meant a departure from the covenant. Why the circumcision of babes? If children could not understand what the covenant meant on the eighth day of their lives, how could they then be covenant members?

Circumcision witnesses to the sovereignty of God’s electing grace. To baptize or to circumcise a child of eight days means simply that it is not the child’s choice, not act of faith, nor personal decision that makes for salvation. It is not the act of circumcision or baptism which saves a child, but, rather, the act is a witness to our faith that salvation is not an act of man but of sovereign grace.

The secondary factors, man’s duty to rear his children in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), are very real. They cannot be neglected. But the early age of circumcision and then of baptism witnesses to the sovereignty of grace.

To hold that infant baptism is not the coherent principle of doctrine, in terms of predestination and circumcision, is to undercut sovereign grace and to deny the validity of systematics.

Similarly, the common failure to relate infant baptism to predestination is again an evidence of a lack of systematic theology. Infant baptism is commonly practiced for traditional and

ecclesiastical reasons. All kinds of far-fetched attempts at justifying it doctrinally are advanced, some of which seriously undercut God's sovereignty and give power and determination to the church and its sacrament instead. Bitter reactions against such perversions are understandable and to a degree healthy, but we cannot therefore undercut the sovereignty of grace in salvation.

The sovereign God does not require the age of discretion or understanding to save a man. Infants and idiots can be and often are, by sovereign grace, made a new creation. The marks of grace are not the marks of man's understanding but rather the handiwork of the sovereign and gracious God. While the learned and mighty planned the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the children in the Temple cried out, "Hosanna to the son of David" (Matt. 21:15- 16). If, as we are told, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9), it is clear that the regeneration of babes is no problem to Him.

No doctrine of Scripture exists in a vacuum, or in isolation from any other doctrine. The unity of doctrine rests on the unity of the Godhead. Systematic theology is the affirmation and declaration of that unity.

Without systematics, and by denying systematics, to cite an extreme example, some Hindu thinkers have used Christ and the Gospels as aspects of Hinduism. By denying the sovereign God of Scripture and His infallible word, they have been able to abstract Christ and the Gospels from their context and to place them in an alien one. In the process, of course, Jesus Christ ceases to be Himself, and the Gospels become alien documents. By denying in full the systematics of Scripture, such Hindus are reducing Christ to a datum in their world, as one fact among many. A Christianity without a systematic theology differs from these Hindu constructs only in degree, not in kind.

5. The Limits of Systematic Theology

Systematic theology must be rigorously Biblical. Its purpose must be the development and organization of Biblical theology. What the Scripture manifests as revealed history, prophecy, law, and wisdom, systematic theology sets forth in systematic form.

Systematic theology cannot be speculative. Speculative theology is a departure from Biblical faith, whether it presents itself as Reformed, Arminian, Scholastic, modernist, dialectical, or anything else. Speculative theology begins, not with an act of faith in the triune God, but with presumption and an implicit denial of faith. Basic to speculative theology is the assumption that human logic can penetrate into the recesses of eternity and into every corner of the mind of God to draw certain “necessary” conclusions. These conclusions rest, not on Biblical theology, but rather on the conclusions of human logic. Logic has its good and proper functions, but the mind of God so exceeds the mind of man that it must be said that man’s logic cannot go beyond its appointed and temporal task; man’s mind and logic can never play Peeping Tom into the mind of God, who declares to man, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD” (Isa. 55:8).

As an example of this, we have in Calvinism three schools of thought with respect to election. *First*, there are the supralapsarians, for whom the decree of election takes precedence over the decree of creation. *Second*, the sublapsarians see the decree of election contemplating man as fallen, and then God, out of the fallen mass of humanity, chooses to predestine some to eternal life. *Third*, the infralapsarians saw the election as at one and the same time to creation, the fall, and the redemption. The sublapsarians have in the main prevailed and have held that infralapsarianism in effect denies the vicarious atonement, and supralapsarianism has reprobation precede sin in the decree. A little thought makes clear the amazing audacity of all three, each of which presumes to read the mind of God and chart the structure of His reasoning, as though the processes of God’s mind are comparable to man’s. All these positions assume a time sequence in God’s thinking, a blasphemous assumption. All three positions involve a blasphemous presumption on the part of the mind of man and a projection of human thought processes into the mind of God. This kind of thinking began with the rise of Calvinistic Scholasticism. Since then, many an able and godly theologian has felt duty bound to comment on lapsarianism as one of the great exercises of theology, but, by the grace of God, not too many have developed any great enthusiasm for it. All the same, the plague of lapsarians is still with us.

Another example of speculative theology is the argument about the birth of the soul, an argument which comes down to us from the early church. How is the soul of the baby in the mother’s womb brought into being? *First*, the Preexistents held that, at the beginning of creation, God created the souls of all men, which are only united to bodies at the time of their conception or birth. Justin Martyr and Origen espoused this doctrine, which was later condemned in A.D. 540 by the Council of Constantinople. Its pagan origin was obvious, and its condemnation deserved. The poet William Wordsworth, in the ode, “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” espoused it, as did other Romantics.

Second, the Creationists insisted that every rational soul is from God by an immediate act of creation. Pelagius and others adopted this view, because it separated the soul of man from the fall

of Adam and left only the body as an heir to the fall. As a result, while seemingly exalting the creative power of God, this view actually exalted man and made him innocent and capable of self-salvation. In modern philosophy, Leibniz had creationist ideas.

Third, Traducianism held that both soul and body were generated by the parents through the normal process of sexual reproduction. The Augustinians, Lutherans, and Calvinists have been Traducianists in the main and have given the doctrine the flavor of orthodoxy. Clearly, Traducianism does not have the glaring defects of the other two positions, but this is not enough to give it a clean bill of health.

The argument about the generation of the soul rests, *first*, on presumption. Man professes to know the details of God's creative method and speaks with confidence about the mind of God when he cannot express his own will and mind with clarity or certainty. The argument is illegitimate and presumptuous.

Second, the argument rests on an alien religion, Hellenism, and its view of mind and body as two separate and alien substances. Traducianism comes closer to bringing them together, but it has not challenged the premise of the argument, the presupposition of two differing substances. The difference in being for Scripture is not between mind and body, or soul and matter, idea and form, but between the uncreated being of God and all created being. The whole point of this argument of speculative theology is, like all speculative theology, illegitimate.

In Genesis 3, in the temptation of Adam, and in Matthew 4:1-11, the temptation of our Lord, Satan presents himself as one who can read the mind of God. This is *the first* great premise of the temptations, Satan's assurance that he knows and can declare the mind of God. "Yea, hath God said?" (Gen. 3:1). Satan offers the true reading of God's mind. *Second*, Satan invites man, the first Adam and the last, and all men in them, to read the mind of God, to become speculative theologians, in effect. Only so can they deal successfully with God and prosper themselves. The invitation of Satan to man is to let his mind soar into contemplation of the hidden thoughts of God. "God doth know" (Gen. 3:5) certain things, and Satan declares that, with some logical speculation, man can know the same.

The fallacy of speculative theology is the fallacy and sin of Satan's plan and plea. Man is required to read the revelation of God, to read the word of God, not the mind of God apart from or beyond the word. For man to know the mind of God requires a mind equal to God. The revealed word of God, which truly sets forth God's righteousness and holiness, assures us that God is true to Himself. There are no contradictions in His being, so that we can fully trust His word. Man, however, as a creature, and, more, as a fallen creature and thus doubly limited, does not know himself or his world fully or truly. How then can he presume to know not only the mind of God but every jot and tittle thereof? What man is summoned to know is the revealed word of God, and himself and creation in terms of it.

Speculative theology is not only presumptuous but also barren. Its rise leads to the impotence of the church. Its false premises lead to false conclusions, and to a departure from reality, and hence from the task of theology. It was Origen, a speculative theologian, who castrated himself. That act has its symbolic meaning. Speculative theology, because of its destructive nature, is the

castration of theologians who embrace it. Origen began with bad theology — Greek theology with its belief in two substances. His flesh was giving him sexual problems. The answer was simple: off with the offending flesh! To his dismay, lust continued. His bad theology had made him doubly impotent, and irrelevant as well.

6. Abstract Theology

For fallen man, it is this world which is the real world. Anything beyond the world of time and space is for him simply an idea or an abstraction. Because fallen man regards the physical universe as the real world and usually the only world, anything which may be necessary to posit as existing beyond this world is by comparison limited, ghostly, or unreal. It becomes a limiting concept, a myth, a rational abstraction, or something similar.

At the same time, the “reality” of the physical universe is enhanced or increased by absorbing into it whatever is necessary to make of the cosmos a self-sustaining unity. The idea of *Nature* is the great example of this fact. Nature is seen as a complexus which is a self-sustaining objective order with its own inherent power and workings. The world-view of the Deists, despite many alterations of the framework, is the basic view of Nature in ancient and modern thought. Nature is the sum total of all reality and yet somehow not only a unity but a corporate thing possessing its own inherent or native law, development, or structure. But this Nature so commonly invoked is merely an immanentist substitute for the idea of God. *Nature* is a collective noun, used to sum up all physical reality; to ascribe any law, structure, development, or power to that collective noun is to indulge in myth-making.

There is, however, an urgent necessity for such myth-making in anti-Biblical thought. To accept Nature as merely a collective noun means that law, structure, development, and power can then be understood only by reference to another world. The God-idea then becomes more than a limiting concept and an abstraction and becomes a necessity. If, however, we retain this anti-theistic point of view to any degree, to that degree our theology becomes *abstract theology*, because our essential or primary reality is not God but Nature. We may even believe God is not dead but “real,” but He will only be real enough to snatch us out of this world, not to govern and predestine both us and the world.

We also have many who will affirm predestination and the sovereignty of God formally, but abstractly, because in practice their theology remains abstract.

To be specific, how can anyone affirm the sovereignty of God concretely and realistically, without opposing and denying the sovereignty of man and the state? If we affirm God’s sovereignty but do not challenge humanistic doctrines of sovereignty from the pulpit and pew, in the home, the Christian school, the voting booth, and the halls of Congress, and elsewhere, we are either denying our profession of faith or affirming a two-worlds theory, i.e., that God is sovereign in the supernatural realm, but Satan governs and triumphs in space and time. We are then not Christians but Manichaeans.

Similarly, to affirm predestination by God and to assent to socialism in any form is to say that there are two realms of predestination: God predestines the soul, and the state predestines the physical and natural life of man by its planning and control.

Again, if we hold to an abstract form of systematics, we will talk about atonement without seeing that, apart from Christ’s atonement, man will seek atonement by sado-masochistic activities. As a sadist, he will attempt to lay his sins upon other people, and as a masochist he will attempt

through selfpunishment to make self-atonement. Politics, religion, marriage, and all human relationships will manifest sadistic or masochistic activities wherever men are without Christ. For the pulpit to preach Christ's atonement without seeing its very practical consequences of deliverance from sado-masochism, and the results of a society which is dedicated to sado-masochistic works of atonement, is to hold to a Manichaeian or an abstract theology.

The result of such an abstract systematics is the radical irrelevance of the churches which profess it. The fact that, in the United States of the 1970s, well over 50 million adults profess to believe in Jesus Christ as born-again believers, and yet the nation drifts more strongly into the ways of humanism, is indicative of the extent to which theology has become abstract.

An abstract theology is only formally or technically systematic. Systematic theology must of necessity deny, because God is sovereign, that there are any neutral facts, or any areas of neutrality. All factuality is God-created and God governed and interpreted. *All facts are therefore theological facts*, and every area of life, thought, study, and action is a theological concern. Education, politics, science, the arts, the vocations, the family, and all things else are theological concerns. A theology which does not involve itself in every area in terms of the sovereign God and His infallible law-word *cannot* be systematic: it is merely abstract.

Thus, it is not enough for theology to say that the whole world was ordained and created by God, but also the whole of history and all things therein. None of it is ordained or predestined to manifest the viability of autonomy for the world, for man, or for Satan. There is no independently functioning person, thing, or realm.

Thus, we must avoid the error of abstraction. It is the mark of little or no faith. God is not real for those who preach an abstract theology, or, if real, He is remote and pale in their thought.

Similarly, those who immerse their theology into history have no transcendental and sovereign God. Thus, the modernists see only the world of "Nature" as the real world. Hence, for them the only real god is a god who is totally immanent, fully a part of the cosmos. The result is the death of theology and a turning to sociology.

Both the immanentists and the abstractionists deny, to all practical intent, the living God. Both stress heavily the poetic and metaphoric nature of Scripture and its language, because talk of a *jealous God* makes God all too real and vivid. We are therefore always cautioned by such men that, when God declares,

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them [images], for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Ex. 20:5-6),

we must understand that the language is anthropomorphic and to be seen as figurative, designed to teach. Is this so? Exodus 34:14 is more emphatic: "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD whose name is JEALOUS, is a jealous God." St. Paul speaks of idolatry in any degree

as something which provokes God to jealousy (I Cor. 10:22). By abstracting jealousy from God, we also abstract every other aspect which indicates personal response, so that love and hate in God are replaced by formal and technical responses. God fades steadily into an abstraction. We can no more comprehend the jealousy of God than we can His predestinating counsel and decree, but we must accept God as He is in His revelation in Scripture, not as He is smoothed out and reinterpreted by philosophers and theologians. If we allow their ideas about the sovereign and jealous God to govern us, we have an abstract god, and an abstract god is no god at all. Again, a god we can comprehend is no god at all: he is no bigger, if as big, than we are. The God of Scripture we cannot comprehend, for as He declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts then your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9). We can know Him truly in His revelation, and every "fact" about God is totally consistent with every other, but we cannot comprehend Him or know Him exhaustively. Abstract theology seeks to reduce God to the dimensions of man's mind. Lapsarianism, as we have seen, is an example of this. Lapsarianism seeks to penetrate the mind of God and to chart its workings; it ends up with a minimal god who is reduced to the level of man's logic and to the temporal nature of man's thought.

The roots of abstract theology are in Greek philosophy, with its belief in the ultimacy of ideas. Abstract theology makes God over into the great Idea, in whom all ideas reside in one coherent and intellectual whole. This, the god of the theologically minded intellectuals, is not the living God of Scripture but an abstraction. If we bow down before an abstraction, we bow before an image created by the mind of man, and we are idolaters.

7. Systematics and Possibility

We have seen the dangers in speculative theology and in abstract thought. It is necessary now to look briefly at another manifestation of the same kind of evil — the question of *possibility*.

In many theologies, a whole world of possibility exists apart from God. In fact, some professors and sometimes pastors delight in raising hypothetical questions relative to possibilities outside of God's decree. Thus, a favorite seems to be, "What would have happened if, after Eve submitted to the tempter, Adam had refused? What would God have done then?"

Similarly, the Scofield Bible notes manifest the same mentality. Thus, we are not told that Jesus, in His Triumphal Entry, entered Jerusalem as the Messianic King, but rather that He made a "public offering of himself as King," and, being rejected, the cross became necessary.

All such thinking involves an implicit denial of the God of Scripture. The premise concealed in these ideas is that the God revealing Himself in the Bible does not exist. If God is indeed God, then *all possibility* exists in terms of His sovereign decree, and there is no possibility outside of God. To imagine a fall involving only Eve, or a possibility with regard to Christ's entry other than that God ordained and brought to pass, is to deny the sovereignty of God. God is not then in control of history, but man and chance govern it.

All factuality is God created and God ordained. Nothing exists apart from His creation and purpose, and every fact in creation is totally created, governed, and directed by the sovereign God. Even more, every aspect of history, every moment of time, and every event therein is of God's ordination. This total predestination extends to the very hair of our heads (Matt. 10:30), and to every atom of all creation. There is no existence, potentiality, or possibility outside of God's ordination.

To affirm any possibility outside of God is to affirm the ultimacy and sovereignty of chance. It means that God is not sovereign, and that a vast and unlimited reservoir of possibility exists outside of Him. This great reservoir of possibility can at any moment limit, undercut, or alter God's purposes and deny His deity.

Those who raise the question, "What would have happened if, after Eve submitted to the tempter, Adam had refused? What would God have done?" are indignant when I object to their supposedly harmless theological exercise. But what they have done is to insist on the ultimacy of chance and its priority to and superiority over God. Chance events can impede, alter, or destroy God's purpose, and sovereignty is clearly conveyed to the great god, chance.

Some theologians, who claim to believe in systematic theology, still affirm the idea of possibility outside of God. Clearly, all non-Reformed theologies, and humanists, affirm such a doctrine of possibility. Why? Is it not in fact a fearful destiny for man to be taken out of God's sovereignty and providence and placed under chance? However "hard" a doctrine predestination may be, it still places us under God's total government and in a universe of total meaning. The affirmation of any possibility apart from the decree of God, on the other hand, places us in a meaningless

universe, and in the context of senseless events. Why do men choose such a faith and defend it passionately?

The answer is that, *whatever the cost*, this view of possibility gives man autonomy over God. In a graveyard, the living man is king over all, and man the sinner prefers a graveyard without God to the Garden of Eden with God. Chance reduces his universe to senselessness, but man becomes god over this chaos.

James Daane, in *A Theology of Grace* (1954), holds that it was finally and ultimately in Adam's power not to sin. Only so, he holds, can we hold to any genuinely Christian faith which preserves man from sheer determinism. Such a position clearly contradicts Scripture — such verses as Ephesians 1:4,5 — and denies that, before the foundation of the world, we were *predestined* unto salvation. It would reduce God to playing a situation-ethics type of game, *reacting* to man rather than creating and governing man.

Moreover, to speak then of free will is wrong on several accounts. Among other reasons, *first*, men like Daane insist on viewing man's freedom in an absolute sense. But man is a creature, and his freedom is a creaturely and limited freedom. Man does not choose his own nature, time and place of birth, sex, aptitudes, or anything else in this direction. Because he is a creature, not God, and not the first cause, man's freedom is a limited, derivative, and secondary freedom. Man's freedom is the freedom to be the man God created him to be, not the freedom to be a god. Moreover, his creaturely freedom differs in terms of his estate, i.e., the states of innocence, the fall, grace, and glory each gives man a differing form of creaturely freedom.

Second, free will cannot exist in a vacuum. If the sovereign God of Scripture be denied, the alternative is a world of chance and meaningless events in which freedom has no meaning. In the Greco-Roman world of the early church, the pagan thinkers who affirmed the free will of man against the church fathers also ended up with no freedom at all. In their universe, as C. N. Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture* makes evident, freedom could not exist. The forces of the environment, hostile, fortuitous, and alien to man, overwhelmed man. Freedom cannot exist in a world of chance and anarchy; freedom presupposes planned movement in an orderly and purposeful world.

Third, we have here two alien views of possibility. Those who oppose the sovereignty of God insist that possibility means simply a vast, meaningless, undirected, and fortuitous realm of erupting events, i.e., a universe of chance. They are insistent that possibility be linked with chance, even though such a concept of possibility reduces history and the universe to chaos. Possibility thus becomes the product of accident rather than necessity. The mentality of the gambler is a faith in the sovereignty of accident and chance; the mathematical odds against him are meaningless. In fact, the "long shot" appeals to him most because, believing as he does in chance, he must affirm the result which best expresses the idea of chance. Reasoning with him on the facts of the matter will not work, because reason is ineffectual where the faith is not in reason but in chance.

On the other hand, for a Christian possibility is not linked with chance but with necessity, and both possibility and necessity are inseparable from the decree of God. No possibility exists

outside of God's decree. Because God is God, He is the source of all possibility, and nothing can alter or delay His decree.

Thus, the question about Adam, and the possibility of Adam's continued innocence, is invalid and immoral. It presupposes something other than God as ultimate, namely, chance. The foundation of all systematic theology must be, not abstract nor speculative theology, but Biblical theology and the sovereign God of Scripture. Anything else gives us finally another religion.

8. Systematics and Proof

On May 2, 1977, television viewers had an opportunity to see the film, *The Search for Noah's Ark*. The producers of the film had as their intention the presentation of the evidences for the historicity of the Biblical account in order to convince the unbelieving of the truth of Scripture.

On the following morning, in a barber shop in Angels Camp, California, two or three men discussed the film. They were conservative Americans, with an old-fashioned American and Christian rearing, but without faith. They were agreed that the film “proved” that Noah’s Ark is actually on Mount Ararat and that the story of Noah was in some sense true. Did this convince them that the Bible is true, and that the God of Scripture is the living and sovereign God? Far from it. Rather, it convinced them that scientists, like orthodox Christians, are trying to force a rigid system onto the universe and thus will not allow for the reality of a vast realm of mysterious and chance events. Their conclusion was very simple: “If Noah’s Ark is true, so are flying saucers.” Having begun with the premise of a universe of chance, with all factuality a product of chance, the “evidence” for Noah’s Ark was for them a telling “evidence” for their own presuppositions.

I thought, as I talked with the barber, that no more telling illustration of the truth of Dr. Cornelius Van Til’s apologetics can be imagined. Unless we begin with the sovereign and predestinating God of Scripture who is the Creator and determiner of all things, we cannot have any conclusion which will see the “facts” of Scripture as God-created, God-ordained, and Godgoverned facts. For all who begin with alien presuppositions, the “facts” of Scripture will be either myths or else “evidences” of a universe of chance. Their reality as facts will be as brute factuality, not God-interpreted factuality.

A few years ago, I clashed with a university professor, whose work is exclusively with graduate students, and whose reputation is international as a scholar. He became more than a little angry at my statement that the universe is totally rational because the absolutely rational God stands behind it and is the Creator and predestinator of it. The universe, he insisted, has only “a thin edge of rationality,” man, and is apart from man nothing but irrationality and chance. Again, I was reminded of Van Til, who writes,

The modern man is in the first place a rationalist. All non-Christians are rationalists. As descendants of Adam, their covenant-breaking representative (Rom. 5:12), every man refuses to submit his mind in the way of obedience to the mind of God. He undertakes to interpret the nature of reality in terms of himself as the final reference point. But to be a rationalist man must also be an irrationalist. Man obviously cannot legislate by logic for reality. Unwilling to admit that God has determined the law of reality, man, by implication, attributes all power to chance. As a rationalist he says that only that is possible which he can logically grasp in exhaustive fashion. As an irrationalist he says that since he

cannot logically grasp the whole of reality, and really cannot legislate for existence at all, it is chance that rules supreme.¹⁸

The meaning of man's revolt against God, his original and basic sin, is his will to be his own god, determining good and evil for himself (Gen. 3:5). The implication of this is that man, in order to establish himself as god and as the source of meaning and interpretation, is reduced to legislating all meaning out of the universe in order to establish himself as god. Only by emptying the universe of all meaning can man then declare himself to be the determiner and source of meaning. The world of man alone provides "a thin edge of rationality" in the universe. The world of man, however, gives us then a world of competing gods, and we have the bloody horrors of the twentieth century, the wars of the would-be gods.

Legislating all meaning apart from man out of the universe means exactly that. Nietzsche demanded a world beyond good and evil; Dewey as educator called for a world beyond grading, beyond truth and error. Walter Kaufmann has called for a world beyond guilt and justice. No criterion, law, norm, or standard beyond the man-god can be allowed to exist.

Van Til has pointed out that, "There must be absolute truth if there is to be even the possibility of error."¹⁹ If we deny that absolute and sovereign truth, and if we allow even an atom to exist in independence from it, then we have denied the sovereignty of God and created a realm of escape from good and evil, truth and error, and from guilt and justice. And if an atom of matter, or a single moment of time, can escape from, or step out from under, the absolute decree and government of the triune God, then all things else can readily do the same. To cite Van Til again,

Unless we presuppose the doctrine of temporal creation and the complete control of all things in the universe by the providence of God, God is confronted by that about which he cannot legislate by means of his thought. In particular, since on the idealist assumption man is not created by God, the mind of man can initiate that which is new and unpredictable by God. God will wonder and hope that the laws of logic will somehow control reality, but he cannot assure the fact that they will. These laws are then independent of his nature.²⁰

Systematic theology is thus impossible unless we begin, *first*, with the absolute predestination of the sovereign and ontological Trinity, and, *second*, the doctrine of creation. Only so is God the Lord. Only then can we declare that there is a system, a law, and a structure to all things. The choice is not between some law intermingled with a doctrine of chance, miscalled freedom, on the one hand, and the doctrines of "rigid Calvinism" on the other, but simply between God and chance. If an iota of chance is allowed into the universe, then God's sovereignty is denied, and God is not God.

¹⁸ Cornelius Van Til: *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976). p. 174.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Moreover, we cannot allow the apostate definition of freedom and “free will” to stand. For men in revolt against God, language is an instrument of warfare, to be used in the war against God. Freedom is therefore defined as correlative to chance. It is held to mean independence from structure and law, and is in essence unpredictability. The meaning of freedom thus is made identical with insanity, but this does not describe it adequately, because “insanity” has a structure and pattern to it, and the various forms of insanity are classified and named. Freedom is equated with a radical independence from all law and compulsion. But such freedom does not exist, because the universe is not a world of chance, nor are all events in total isolation from all other events. Brute and isolated factuality does not exist. Every person, thing, or event has in the background a vast complex of causes, influences, conditioning factors, and forces which have produced that person, thing, moment, or event. Its freedom is to be what it is, and what God ordained it to be. Compulsion is that which interferes with the matrix of convergent causes. I am a servant of God, and whatever interferes with my calling, or tries to prevent it, is compulsion to me. I am predestined by God, and therein is my freedom. I am not under nature, nor am I the creator of man. If a tyrant seeks to prevent me or hinder me in my obedience to the Lord, that is compulsion, and it is tyranny. Tyranny means in origin rule apart from God’s law. God’s law, in the form of both predestination and Biblical law, is to *me freedom*.

Not only do truth and error have meaning because God is the absolute truth and the sovereign and predestinating Lord, but also freedom and slavery have meaning only because God’s sovereignty is the source of all meaning and prediction. Apart from the sovereign God of Scripture, no meaning and no system is possible. Systematic theology thus alone gives us any ground for faith, God, life, and meaning. Apart from Him, we have nothing and can prove nothing. Apart from the sovereign God of Scripture as our presupposition, the search for Noah’s Ark readily becomes a “proof of chance and of flying saucers. The end of all non-systematic apologetics is absurdity.

9. Practical Systematics

Every man's life is governed by an implicit systematic theology, by certain presuppositions which form a coherent whole and govern his thoughts and life. I have, over the years, worked and talked with a great variety of peoples, of differing races (American Indians, Negroes, Europeans, Asiatics, Latin Americans, North Americans, and others). It is the great myth of the modern intellectual that only he is capable of intelligent, logical thinking. Implicit in his arrogant faith is the assumption that wisdom began with him and his kind. Apart from the intellectual, it is held, and before him, men were and are "primitives," and their thinking is mythical and pre-logical. One can counter by pointing out that no greater myths have ever been created by the mind of man that those of modern man. Some of these myths are: evolution; the natural goodness of man (or, at worst, his neutral nature); and the myths of origins and of history this faith leads to; modern anthropology and its myths concerning man's nature and society; the myth of salvation through politics and education; and much, much more.

The intellectuals to the contrary, men are everywhere logical and systematic in their thinking. The problem lies not in their thinking but in their presuppositions.

Our Lord declares, "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.... Wherefore by their fruit ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:17-20). What our Lord insists on is the unity of man's being: "A good tree *cannot* bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). Pastors and psychologists are all too busy trying to convince us that this logical sequence is not true, that a good tree can, in fact, produce evil fruit, or that men can "gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles" (Matt. 7:16). A fig tree may produce a light crop, but it will not produce thistles, nor will it bear any other fruit than its own.

Creation as God made it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Because of sin, it became fallen. By virtue of Christ's redemption, it is being restored. Its goal is an eternal and glorious estate.

In each of its fourfold estates, man and the creation can never depart from God's sovereign purpose. The Creator is a unity; God is one. In each estate, man manifests a systematics which is either a declaration of God's sovereign word and purpose or is a manifestation of man's imitation of God. The redeemed man can sin, *hamartia*, i.e., miss or fall short of the mark, but he is still aiming at and moving toward that mark. He is not guilty of *anomia*, lawlessness, and cannot commit this sin if he is regenerate. If, however, he is persistently missing the mark, it means that he is actually not regenerate but lawless, anti-law. In I John 3:4, we are told that, "Whosoever committeth sin [i.e., practices and abides in sin, *hamartian*, continually] transgresseth also the law [*anomial*]: for sin [the continual practice of sin *hamartia*] is the transgression of the law [is lawlessness, *anomia*]."

A polytheistic religion fathers a polytheistic psychology. The polytheism of Greece led to a dualistic and tripartite psychology of man. Practically, this meant that Socrates could be regarded as a man of virtue although a homosexual. Such a judgment is impossible from a Biblical perspective. Man does not have a being of diverse origins held together by a paradoxical tension. In Greek thought, man has in him two differing kinds of being: form (or idea, mind, spirit) on the one hand, and matter on the other. Each has its own entelechy, its own nature and destiny. In

addition, for Greek thought man is subject to a variety of forces and influences, astronomical and terrestrial, which also shape his life and character. As a result, a man could do evil and still be good “at heart.” A radical division was possible between man’s faith and life, his ideas and actions, his moral principals and his immoral practice. Because of this disparity of nature, man could not be effectively judged: the criminal in act could be a saint at heart.

The influence of this Greek and polytheistic psychology is still dominant in the life and “spirituality” of the church. Its practical effect is to turn Christianity into a polytheistic cult. It involves a radical denial of the doctrine of creation, and, in church circles, we can see that, where the doctrine of creation is underestimated, neglected, or bypassed, psychology takes precedence over all else in preaching. Understanding man, especially sinful man, becomes a problem. Instead of the simple test of God’s law, as our Lord requires it in Matthew 7:15-20, we have instead the conversion of man into a mystery who cannot be judged. He is a product of his environment; he is a grand mixture of good and evil; he is both saint and devil, and so on. He is everything except a creature who is either a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker.

The logic of polytheism, its “systematics,” creates a view of man which requires the radical destruction of the Christian perspective. An education rooted in evolutionary theory, as statist education is, will produce an alien world and life view.

Thus, in one sense, only Biblical faith can have a systematic theology, because it alone sets forth the sovereign and omnipotent God whose rule and power are total. All creation is a unity, because He is a unity. All logic, material things, and all things else have the coherence of His creation decree and purpose. Every departure therefrom is suicidal (Prov. 8:36). Only Biblical religion can present the systematics and unity of all creation, because it alone is the word of the triune God who is Lord over all. Thus, no other religion or philosophy can develop a valid systematics, and all must, in the long run, deny the validity of systematics.

Man, however, is created in the image of God. He may consciously affirm an anti-God faith; he may deny the possibility of systematics and call it an illusion. He will, all the same, inescapably act in terms of the “systematics” and logic of his unbelief. He cannot say, because of his polytheism, that one segment of life has meaning, and another none. He cannot close the door to any area of his life and keep out the dark from his supposedly lighted closet. The logic of his unbelief permeates the totality of his life.

The image of God in man answers to the reality of God, His decree, and His creation purpose. St. Paul makes this clear in Romans 1:17-20:

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifested in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

First, St. Paul makes clear that *all* men know God; they know the truth of God and “the invisible things of him.” Because they are created in God’s image, and because their own being, as is all creation, is revelational of God, the knowledge of God is inescapable knowledge.

Second, men “hold the truth in unrighteousness.” They suppress or misapply it, because they are determined not to acknowledge or to know God. Their problem is sin, not a lack of knowledge. As a result, the framework of faith, its systematics, is held by men in unrighteousness; it is misappropriated and misapplied.

Third, because men everywhere have this inescapable knowledge of God, their problem is not unbelief in the sense of an inability to believe intellectually, but rather unbelief as a moral resistance to an obvious and overwhelming fact. All men *know* the truth of God’s revelation; “the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). The unregenerate, however, resist God and suppress the knowledge of God, because they are determined to be themselves gods (Gen. 3:5). Thus, while all men everywhere know the truth of God, they refuse to acknowledge God. Their unbelief in God is an insistence on their own ultimacy. Unbelief in this sense is not lack of knowledge but moral warfare and revolt against the sovereign God.

Fourth, this means that Paul, when he declares, “The just shall live by faith,” (and Habakkuk earlier, Hab. 2:4), means something more than mere belief: *faith is saying Amen to God*. It is bowing down to His sovereignty and lordship, and it is living by God’s decree and providence, not by man’s. Faith thus is saying Amen to God’s “systematics” and denying our own as sin and as a pretentious impossibility. Man’s systematics is a ladder resting on nothing and reaching out into a cosmic void. But man, created in God’s image, cannot escape the mandate of that image. His entire life should be a pilgrimage and a calling to develop the implications of the earth in terms of knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion under God, to move toward that “city which hath foundation, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). The Bible provides man with the blueprint for that city in its law. The systematics or building plan is entirely of the Lord. Man cannot abandon the necessity for that city: it is a God-created, God-ordained necessity. In his sin, however, man perverts that calling. He substitutes his own pseudo-systematics and declares, “Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (Gen. 11:4). But the broken systematics of man has no foundation in reality; it has no metaphysical and moral roots and is thus an illusion.

Systematic theology is not an attempt to systemize scattered ideas or truths found in Scripture, but is rather a setting forth of the inescapable unity of God’s being, His revelation, and His purpose. A false systematics sees the need for a synthesis of scattered and vague ideas; in the “systematics” of unbelief, a few facts are rescued out of an ocean of brute factuality to provide a practical or existential logic and system for living. True systematics presents the inescapable unity, order, and design of God’s being and creation.

In the false systematics, we can be told, as some lecturers have done, that Biblical eschatology gives us various, diverse, and random perspectives, so that we cannot speak of Biblical eschatology, but must rather speak of Biblical eschatologies. The unity and coherence of Scripture is denied in favor of a new principle of unity and coherence, man. Sartre denies the

unconscious and holds to the self-consciousness and self-coherence of man. The implication of such a position is that the world is incoherent, and God, if He exists, is also incoherent.

To *cohere* is to stick or hold firmly together, to be logically coherent. God is coherent and infallible. Man, St. Paul makes clear, is morally incoherent; he knows God but denies God because man is in rebellion against God. Man suppresses the truth of God, which he knows in every atom of his being, and then tries to reproduce the systematics of that inescapable knowledge in terms of his own being rather than in terms of God.

Only Biblical theology can set forth a true systematics, but every humanistic theology will work to re-create a new systematics out of man's being. When men like Haroutunian attack the idea of a systematic theology, it is simply an attack on the systematic theology of the God of Scripture.²¹ Implicit in all such attacks is a summons, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" (Gen. 11:4). Theirs is a systematics of nothing, and its destiny is confusion (Gen. 11:7-9).

²¹ Joseph Haroutunian: *First Essay in Reflective Theology*. (Chicago, IL: McCormick Theological Seminary).

10. Faith

One of the curses of the church is its lust for respectability. The scholars of the church look to the scholars of the world for approval and status. They look at the wealth and the buildings of the humanistic university and, in their hearts, long for the imprimatur of the fallen world. For them, the millennium begins when the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, or *Saturday Review* speak well of their books; but this happens only when these scholars crucify Christ afresh.

This hunger for respectability is as old as the church. It meant in earlier days rephrasing the gospel in the language and thought of Greek and Roman philosophy, and the result was another gospel, or, at best, a compromise and perversion of the word of God.

This deeply rooted hunger for respectability, and peace with the enemy, explains too the hatred toward those who will not compromise. Dr. Cornelius Van Til's uncompromising apologetics has earned him the hostility of the compromisers. Those who lust for respectability resent deeply the work of a man who makes clear that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." They refuse to admit the possibility that "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). As a result, they rephrase the problems of theology in order to concede to the world the validity of its "problems"; they give respectability to unregenerate man. Instead of being a sinner, whatever the university degrees he carries, they portray him as a man with honest intellectual problems which deserve weighty philosophical and theological considerations. These compromisers insist that man's problem is intellectual unbelief, i.e., a question of knowledge, rather than a matter of sin.

But St. Paul witnesses powerfully and plainly against this heresy. In Romans 1:17-20, Paul declares:

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness: Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Paul tells us, *first*, that *the knowledge of God is inescapable knowledge*. We are told this again and again in Scripture. It is plainly set forth in Psalm 139, in Psalm 19, and elsewhere. It is the obvious implication of the doctrine of creation. God having created all things, all things are revelational of Him and manifest His purpose and glory. Because God is totally the Creator, no other hand being present in creation, all things are totally revelational of Him: they can reveal nothing else other than God their Maker. As the psalmist, David, declares, "If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Psalm 139:8). Not even hell, the habitation of the devil and his cohorts, and of the fallen and reprobate dead, can witness to anything other than the triune God.

It is this fact of creation that constitutes the common ground between all men and the point of contact: all men *know* God, although only the redeemed *confess* Him. Van Til writes,

It is only when we begin our approach to the question of the point of contact by thus analyzing the situation as it obtained in paradise before the fall of man that we can attain to a true conception of the natural man and his capacities with respect to the truth. The apostle Paul speaks of the natural man as actually possessing the knowledge of God (Rom. 1:19-21). The greatness of his sin lies precisely in the fact that “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God.” No man can escape knowing God. It is indelibly involved in his awareness of anything whatsoever. Man *ought*, therefore, as Calvin puts it, to recognize God. There is no excuse for him if he does not. The reason for his failure to recognize God lies exclusively in him. It is due to his willful transgression of the very law of his being.

Neither Romanism nor Protestant evangelicalism can do full justice to this teaching of Paul. In effect both of them fail to surround man exclusively with God’s revelation. Not holding to the counsel of God as all-controlling they cannot teach that man’s self-awareness always presupposes awareness of God.²²

Man’s problem is not unbelief in the sense of ignorance, but unbelief in the sense of a refusal to obey God, because man insists that it is his freedom to become his own god (Gen. 3:5).

We know that sin is an attempt on the part of man to cut himself loose from God. But this breaking loose from God could, in the nature of the case, not be metaphysical; if it were, man himself would be destroyed and God’s purpose with man would be frustrated. Sin is therefore a breaking loose from God ethically and not metaphysically. Sin is the creature’s enmity and rebellion against God but is not an escape from creaturehood.²³

Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness; “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen,... so that they are without excuse.” Men cannot think on any other terms than God’s; they misappropriate that truth and attempt to use God while denying Him. Their knowledge and sciences depend upon the truth of God, but they insist on a world of brute and meaningless factuality while developing their learning on the concealed premise of God’s eternal counsel, decree, and order.

Second, Paul clearly does not mean by faith a rational assent or belief. Habakkuk 2:4 tells us that “the just shall live by his faith.” This does not mean belief as mere acceptance of a proposition. For Habakkuk, it meant that the righteous man, in the midst of judgment, invasion, and devastation, lived and acted on the presupposition that this was the work of the righteous God who required him to live and obey Him in the face of all things. The righteous are those who rely on God’s word and act on it. So too Paul means by faith, not rational assent, but saying Amen to

²² Cornelius Van Til: *The Defense of the Faith*. (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1955). p. 109.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

God, obeying His every word (II Cor. 10:3-6), and acting on God's truth and law. Sin is rebellion against God and the transgression of His law. Faith is trust in God, a total reliance on Him, and the obedience to His word which God requires.

Now the point of all this is that a systematic theology which presupposes that unbelief (a lack of faith) means ignorance (a lack of the knowledge of God) will be alien to Scripture. It will presuppose a non-creating god, even though it may affirm the doctrine of creation, because its god is alien to this world. Such a god, not having made the world, can only introduce knowledge of himself into the world as something alien, a novelty to the world. His "revelation" would then provide a curiosity, not a necessity, because it would not be basic not constitutive of the nature of the universe. We could then be interested in, or believe in, such a god in the same way that we are interested in okra: it may or may not be to our taste, but it is not relevant to our life unless we choose to make it so.

Anti-presuppositionalist theologies and philosophies reduce God to the level of okra. He ceases to be the inescapable truth of all things, knowledge of whom men cannot eradicate, however much they suppress it. Knowledge of Him is so inescapable that, if men silence the witness within them and in their midst, "the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40).

Faith means saying Amen to, and relying totally on, the triune God with all our heart, mind, and being, and acting on and in terms of the reality of God and His law-word in every area of our lives. If faith is reduced to, and believing on Christ becomes, a mere assent to knowledge or to reality, then antinomianism becomes a logical necessity. There is then no inescapable link between faith and works. On the contrary, to say then that we are saved by faith logically means that we are saved without any necessity for works ensuing. The doctrine of the "carnal Christian," who is "saved" but is still totally godless in his life, is a logical consequence of such a "faith only" doctrine.²⁴

The presuppositions of such a view of faith and belief are not Biblical but Hellenic. The Biblical doctrine presupposes the unity of all created being under the triune God and His counsel. Hellenic thought holds to the division of reality into form (mind, ideas) and matter. The two are alien substances, co-existing paradoxically and in dialectical tension. The realm of faith is then the realm of ideas — of the spirit — and not of matter, works, and law. The gap between the two is not readily bridged and, at best, only artificially so.

There is then, let it be noted, no systematics in the life of man. A man whose being is made up of two alien substances, or possibly three, has no necessary and systematic unity in his being. There is then a war between his members which is metaphysical, whereas the inner warfare which Paul describes is moral. The Hellenic idea of man sees a contradiction between man's constituent parts which is metaphysical and inescapable; it is a necessary and continual war as long as man is in a body. Paul's warfare is moral and subject to defeat or victory. Man is at war with God, his Maker; this warfare is one in which every atom of his being is involved, but, because every atom

²⁴ For a critique of the carnal Christian doctrine, see Arend J. Ten Pas: *The Lordship of Christ*. (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978).

of his being is God's handiwork, man's total being wars against himself. The Holy Spirit too witnesses to God's truth, which his unregenerate and fallen nature, his flesh, resists.

The "Pauline" warfare is not anti-systematics, because it speaks of a war which sets forth the totality of God's claims and the radical and far-reaching nature of God's system of truth. The unity of man's being witnesses, despite its moral revolt, and even in its moral revolt, to the unity of God's truth. It is a witness to systematics.

If, however, every man is his own god, and this is a metaphysical fact, then the only unity of truth is a purely internal one. Each man is his own self-defined and self-created system. We have then a multitude of self-enclosed and isolated systems which are existential in nature. When philosophy abandoned the God of Scripture, it abandoned systematics, and, after many vain attempts at creating a system apart from the triune God, finally abandoned the traditional discipline of philosophy as irrelevant. Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and every other area became relics of the older philosophy, except in existentialism. The existentialist followed the logic of Kant and reduced the world to the mind of man, and, within that world, a moment by moment systematics now became possible. The world was radically reduced, but its unity was restored.

When we speak of *believing*, and of *faith*, in terms of the word of God, then we are in that unified field of consequences and relationships which makes a systematic theology inescapably obvious. If we lack that Biblical perspective, then we will follow an anti-Biblical model, and usually that of classical Greek philosophy. Scholasticism saw salvation from such a perspective, and, as a result, the developing unity it posited led finally to existentialism. In the interim, more and more initiative slipped into man's hands, so that faith came to be redefined. Aquinas strove valiantly to be faithful to Scripture, but his presuppositions were Aristotelian. He insisted on the unity of faith and works, but faith was defined as an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth and motivated therein by an act of will moved by the grace of God. In that act of intellect, as in the act of will, it is not the sovereign God whose eternal decree governs, but a first cause which is linked together with man as the determiner. The implicit dialectic of nature and grace works to disunite faith and will; faith as an intellectual assent is not a total reliance on and acting in terms of God and His word; and the sovereignty of God as the first cause is not the same as the sovereignty of the absolute Lord and Creator, who makes and predestines all things. Behind Thomas Aquinas stands another and an existential loyalty derived from Aristotle: "The human soul is incorruptible" (*Summa Theologica*, I, Q 75, art.6). Here speaks, not Genesis 1 and 2, but Hellenic philosophy: the soul is pure form or idea, and hence incorruptible. At the end of this presupposition stands Sartre; at the beginning, the tempter and Genesis 3:1-5.

Protestant evangelicalism, however, is also Scholastic. It sees the soul as something separate from the body, and posits the old division common to all sons of Plato and Aristotle. "Faith alone" thus does not mean, for all such, justification by God's sovereign grace and predestinating decree, but rather the separation of faith and works. *Faith* then stands for man's sovereign will, and man is summoned to come forward and believe in Jesus and to accept Christ's offer of salvation. Christ becomes the petitioner and pleader before man the sovereign. But if man is sovereign, then he is his own savior, and both the tempter and Aristotle, and Sartre as well, are

vindicated. It is man's task then to save himself and to develop his own systematics, moment by moment. Truth then is a do-it-yourself proposition, and it is as meaningless as man.

11. Systematic Anthropology

Faith and belief in Scripture mean hearing and obeying the word of God; they mean, not mere intellectual assent, but the submission, the reliance on and the development and reshaping of our whole being in terms of God's law-word.

Paul makes clear that unbelief is not a lack of the knowledge of God but a refusal to submit to God's lordship and authority out of unrighteousness (Rom. 1:17-20). Man rejects God's authority and lordship in favor of his own (Gen. 3:5); this is unbelief in the Biblical sense. The consequence of this revolt against God is the perversion of man. Homosexuality is presented by Paul as the burning out of apostate man (Rom. 1:27, burned *out*). The life of the reprobate man is a life of hatred against all authority (Rom. 1:29-32). The reprobate hate God, they hate parents, they boast of themselves, and they are implacably hostile to all authority.

Then Paul makes clear why there can be no word and no salvation from man. *First*, both God and fallen man have a word, a system, and a plan of judgment. In Romans 2, Paul contrasts the judgments of the ungodly, and their inherent plan and system, with the judgments of God. Man the sinner presents himself as the judge, but Paul says, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest" (Rom. 2:1). Man apart from God, whether in or out of the church, is under judgment. Man under God is man living in terms of God's word and in faithfulness to God's law: "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision" (Rom. 2:25). Status before God is on God's terms only: it begins with sovereign grace, and reveals itself by keeping God's law.

Second, man's system and word are products of depravity, not wisdom. "There is none righteous, no, not one," and, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10,12). Their words spring from a poisoned well. "Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips" (Rom. 3:13). Paul cites verse after verse from the Old Testament to sum up God's judgment on man. Every system of thought devised by man is thus from a poisoned well and under judgment. This is especially true of Phariseism, which uses the law, interpreted to mean humanistic goals, as a means of justification. But no man is justified by works; no man earns an independence from God by his own actions (Rom. 3:20-30). Salvation brings freedom, not from God, but from judgment and reprobation. The redeemed are now free from sin and death, the consequence of their own system (Gen. 3:1-5), and are totally under God's dominion and law. Hence, faith does not make void the law: "God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). The law is now established over and in us as God's way and an aspect of His system and eternal decree.

What Paul makes clear is that, because of his depravity, there is no tenable system from fallen man. Fallen man simply works out the implications of his depravity in his life (Rom. 1:24) and in his thought (Rom. 1:21-23).

Man's system is in essence the tempter's thesis in Genesis 3:1-5. *First*, there is no sure word of God ("Yea, hath God said?"), and no assured decree of predestination (Gen. 3:1, 4). Man lives in an "open" universe, and the potentiality of man is the essence of that openness. The limitless potentiality and actuality of God make the universe, totally open to God, a closed realm to

rebellious man. For the universe to be open must mean, fallen man holds, that the limitless potentiality must be transferred to man. The system replacing God's eternal and foreordained decree is man's potential and existential decree.

Second, logically, this means that man, not the Lord, is god. Hence the culminating point of the temptation is that man "shall be as god" (Gen. 3:5). A new government, god, and law shall prevail. This requires a systematics of man, a systematic anthropology. Instead of systematic theology, we are given a systematic anthropology. As a result, the mind of man becomes a matter of great concern. The psychology of man gains great attention from humanism, because the ultimate point of reference, potentiality, and coherence is the supposedly autonomous mind of man. Primitive tribes, perverts, mental defectives, criminals, children, and adults — all varieties of men — are painstakingly studied in order to give man the raw materials for the new systematics. Not surprisingly, modern anthropology began with Charles Darwin. As Dampier stated it, "It is hardly too much to say that modern anthropology arose from the *Origin of Species*."²⁵

Politics becomes the practical sphere of action of every systematic anthropology, because it is through politics that man seeks to apply the humanistic decree of predestination to man and the world. Basic to the idea of systematics is the fact that it has inherent in it the element of necessity. For the orthodox Christian, things are ordered by God and have in and behind them the necessity of God's decree. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). This necessity is not only in their own lives, but in all things, for, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

The goal of systematic anthropology, modern politics, is to substitute the decree of man for the decree of God. More than one humanistic group and society have looked to the ant hill and the beehive as the model state: all things exist by order and plan. So, it is held, should man, but the source of the plan must be man himself. Man must remake himself and his world in terms of his own autonomous will.

Theological writings in the modern world are thus political writings, and the most influential preaching in the modern era is political speaking. In the 1970s, the United States has seen an American President, Carter, disavow any Christian influence on his decisions, while professing to be a "born-again Christian," and at the same time affirm a humanistic doctrine of human rights with religious zeal. The systematic anthropology of Carter, and of other self-professed Christians politicians, is a very clear one.

It is thus a serious error on the part of churchmen to look for modern challenges to the systematic theology of Biblical faith from church sources only. Such challenges, however real and important, do not represent the main challenge. Systematics has on the whole left the church for politics. The political thought of Soviet theoreticians is rigorous in its attempts to be systematic, and Western political theorists are no less dedicated.

²⁵ Sir William Cecil Dampier: *A History of Science*. (New York, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1944). p. 303.

It is, moreover, a requirement for systematic theology to place every area of life and thought under the jurisdiction of God the Sovereign and His law-word. Polytheism openly posits many gods and hence many jurisdictions. As a result, a particular god could be escaped by leaving his jurisdiction. Hence, the Syrians of old held of Israel, “Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they” (I Kings 20:23).

We find, however, similar opinions in many church circles. Christianity and the state must be kept strictly separate (a very different idea than the separation of *church* and state; the one posits a religious and theological division, the other an institutional one): Other churches insist on seeing the state as exclusively secular and hence under reason, not Scripture. Thus, we are told by a Lutheran, in a review of a work by F. A. Schaeffer,

Similarly, one finds in the author a typically Reformed desire to structure government according to Biblical and even Christian principles. He would like to see the Bible made the lawbook of the land, if not literally, at least indirectly. He describes with approval Paul Robert’s mural *Justice Lifts the Nations*, with Justice unblindfolded and pointing her sword downward toward a book which is written “The Law of God,” and adds: “To whatever degree a society allows the teaching of the Bible to bring forth its natural conclusions, it is able to have form and freedom in society and government.” While we indeed recognize the Scriptural truth that “righteousness exalteth a nation” (Proverbs 14:34), we must affirm that human reason, the natural knowledge of God’s law, and the power of the sword — not the revealed word of God — are basic principles for secular government.²⁶

To hold that there is one kind of faith and obedience in the church, and another in the state, is hardly in agreement with Scripture!

The systematic anthropology which manifests itself in politics links to itself modern science, i.e., post-Darwinian evolutionary science, as the basics of the new faith. Scientific politics is to provide the new decree of predestination, the new source of authority and power, the new decree of election and probation. Failure to see this fact means irrelevance to the triune God and His word. It means that we have a neoplatonic church theology which holds its doctrines in abstraction from the real world, from that unity which constitutes the God-given creation. The more that neoplatonic faith abstracts itself from the context of the material world, the clearer and the higher its ostensible spirituality. Neoplatonic religion will thus produce an abstract theology in which irrelevance is a mark of purity. Its doctrines will become neoplatonic ideas, and the church will become a monastery or convent, a place where withdrawal from the context of the world is a virtue.

The modernist, however, will seek relevance, but again on platonic terms. Marx, after Hegel, saw the Idea or world spirit as dominating the historical process, so that History became the Idea. The

²⁶ C. Kuehne, cited from the *Journal of Theology* (CLC). June, 1977, in *Christian News*, 10, 30 (July 25, 1977).

state is the Idea in time, and hence the relevance of the particulars is denied in favor of the Idea, the State.

The ruthlessness of modernist social action in condemning capitalists, fundamentalists, Calvinists, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, “fascists” (all their opponents), and others speaks of a contempt for the *matter* of History as against the Idea, the State. Even more than systematic anthropology, systematic theology must include law, politics, work and calling, the arts and sciences, and more. There are no limitations on the sovereignty of the triune God, nor on His jurisdiction. To mark off systematic theology as an area having the church and its doctrines as its province is to manifest polytheism. Universality or catholicity is the mark of God’s kingdom, but modern man has surrendered it to philosophy first and now to the state. This surrender is sin and heresy.

Not until systematic anthropology is replaced by a truly systematic theology can churchmen call themselves Christian.

12. Inevitable Systematics

Religion will always govern a man's world, and it will do so systematically. Man works continually toward a systematics to express his faith. He seeks that systematic expression of faith in life and thought, in art, science, architecture, sexuality, politics, and all things else.

Urban construction is an expression of a world and life view. Schneider has described this fact in urban planning, in the works of Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Kublai Khan, Peter the Great, Stalin, Kubitschek (Brasilia), Louis XIV, the two Napoleons, and others. Of some cities he wrote:

The ancient cities...usually excluded everything that grew naturally, and this is true even now of many Oriental cities. One might be tempted to call this the logic of city building: man does not care to see anything save what he himself has created. It appears most strikingly in St. Peter's Square in Rome.²⁷

The absence of natural space and trees was not accidental: it was planned. Only man's creation was to appear.

In other areas, the emphasis is on a totally controlled nature, formal gardens, man-trained shrubs and trees, and a park which manifests man's hand at every turn.

The 1960s saw a war against all restraints on man by either God or man. A consequence of this form of humanism was a hostility against culture, development, or utility in the natural realm, and the ecology movement resulted. Man does not want the slightest snail troubled, because he rejects any and all interference with his own life style.

Man's religion is a working concern: it works steadily toward systematizing his life and world in terms of man's presuppositions. The regulations of an age are expressive of the faith of an age, and its concept of ultimacy. The unity of God's creation is an aspect of our inescapable knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18-21). Men cannot long tolerate a schizophrenic or double-minded state: they work to resolve the conflict of principles even when it means a major inner and outer tension and battle. There are distances in the universe, but no watertight compartments divide reality into unrelated realms. One of the constant problems of scholarship is this tendency to isolate data in terms of areas of study, so that determination is seen in terms of one's area of specialization. Momigliano has rightly observed, with respect to studies in the history of ancient law, that "A wrong interpretation of economic or religious facts can easily lie at the root of a wrong interpretation of legal facts, and vice versa."²⁸

²⁷ Wolf Schneider: *Babylon is Everywhere: The City as Man's Fate*. (New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Com., 1963). p. 222.

²⁸ Arnaldo D. Momigliano: *Studies in Historiography*. (New York, N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1966). p. 243.

Religion will always govern a man's world; it will do so systematically, and it will provide the unifying principle to make all things cohere one to another. This is a function of religion, to provide coherency, but a false religion, instead of providing coherency and systematics, will result in confusion. The reason for this is, as Van Til has shown, that "No sinner can interpret reality aright."²⁹ He begins with a false premise, a misplaced doctrine of ultimacy, and he proceeds systematically to false conclusions. By making himself ultimate, the sinner begins and ends with a falsehood. His false premise means that every aspect of his being is corrupted by that falsehood, and every act and thought is similarly affected and infected. Van Til cites this same effect in the life of Satan:

Scripture tells us that Satan and his hosts were created perfect. Satan originally tried to dethrone God and has tried this throughout the ages. Yet, in the nature of the case, he can never succeed in doing this. God would not be God if he could be dethroned. Accordingly, Satan's knowledge appears as false. He has made and continues to make logical deductions about reality that are untrue to reality. Satan managed to have Christ crucified in order to destroy him. Did he not know that by the crucifixion of Christ his own kingdom would be destroyed? So we see that though, on the one hand, Satan's power of ingenuity is great, he constantly frustrates himself in his purposes: he is constantly mistaken in his knowledge of reality.³⁰

Since the fall, man continues to think systematically, but from a false premise. He will commonly think logically, but from a false starting-point. He premises his every use of the law of contradiction on a contradiction: he holds it in abstraction from the ultimacy of the triune God, the Creator of all things, including the mind and the logic thereof, as though a law could exist in a chaos. Instead of applying the law of contradiction to his own irrational efforts to prove or to judge God, he should apply it to his own proud presuppositions and condemn himself as illogical.

When man denies the fact of creation and of the fall, he asserts thereby the ultimacy and the normalcy of himself and the world. If the world is not the creation of God, so that creation can be dated, the world is ultimate. If it is ultimate, it is normative, because there is nothing then beyond man and the universe to judge them. The errors of philosophy in the past have stemmed, Calvin declared, from this assumption of normalcy.

Hence proceeded the darkness which overspread the minds of the philosophers, because they sought for a complete edifice among ruins, and for beautiful order in the midst of confusion. They held this principle, that man would not be a rational animal, unless he were endued with a free choice of good or evil; they conceived also that otherwise all difference between virtue and vice would be destroyed, unless man regulated his life according to his inclination. Thus far it had been well, if there had been no change in man, of which as they were ignorant, it is not

²⁹ Van Til: *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 92.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 91f.

to be wondered at if they confound heaven and earth together. But those who profess themselves to be disciples of Christ, and yet seek for free will in man, now lost and overwhelmed in spiritual ruin, in striking out a middle path between the opinions of the philosophers and the doctrine of heaven, are evidently deceived, so that they touch neither heaven nor earth.³¹

Such an assumption by philosophers leads to the claim of autonomy for the mind of man, so that the normative is what man says and does. Van Til adds further,

Moreover, according to Calvin, the primacy of the intellect as taught by the philosophers, in virtually denying the fact of sin, therewith in practice always denies the Creator-creature relationship. For man to ignore the fall is always tantamount to ignoring his creation. It is the proper part of the creature to subject himself to God; it is the part of the sinner to refuse such subjection.³²

Presuppositions are like roads; as long as we are on a particular road and travelling, it will lead us to a particular destination. To go elsewhere, I must take another road. To speak of the systematics of all things is simply to say that given presuppositions about what is ultimate will lead to given conclusions. Modern man has tried to make reason creative; the freedom of reason would then be its power to create a new reality, declare new presuppositions, and create new conclusions in terms of man's autonomous reason and powers. But man's mind is religious and therefore logical. It is a created mind, the handiwork of the triune God, and therefore its processes, even in man's fall, are totally governed by the eternal decree of God and the necessary logic of His creation.

On the other hand, God thinks and creates out of nothing. There is nothing outside of God to govern, influence, or in any way condition His mind and activity. The *language* of God is thus, like God Himself, eternal and unchanging. The British sociologist, Basil Bernstein, has rightly observed, "If you change the culture, you change the language."³³ The languages of man change as man changes.

Man rebels against changes which come from outside of himself, changes required by God's constitution of things, and strives instead for self-created changes which will set forth his own creative power and ultimacy. The more radically thus that a culture stresses the ultimacy of man, the more radical will be its attempts to create self-made changes, to be totally revolutionary in the humanistic sense. The given and inherent systematics of all things must be replaced by the new systematics of man. The reality of the old order must be negated and the reality of man's new order affirmed.

³¹ John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. I, Ch. XV, VIII, vol. I. (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936). p. 215.

³² Van Til: *op. cit.*, pp. 33f.

³³ Maya Pines: *Revolution in Learning: The Years from Birth to Six*. (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, (1966) 1967). p. 192.

Systematics is thus at work because of this impulse in every area of life, to create religiously and therefore politically, educationally, theologically, philosophically, economically, and in every other way a new system for man, a new and necessary world order.

Man, however, cannot create or think out of nothing. All the building blocks of his systems are borrowed from God's world. The systems builders, such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Barth, Moltmann, and others, give us to a degree a novel world, a new arrangement, but the building blocks are old ones; they all have a history, and the steps of their edifice are readily traced. The essence of modernism was well stated in the last century by Octavius Brooks Frothingham (1822-1895), who wrote:

The interior of any age is the spirit of God; and no faith can be living that has that spirit against it; no Church can be strong except in that alliance. The life of the time appoints the creed of the time and modifies the establishment of the time.³⁴

Existentialism stresses more fully this call for total dependence on self-existence, but, like all things else, it manifests its history clearly. It has a given existence and essence in terms of that history, and behind that history stands God's eternal decree.

Thus, although humanism seeks to offer a new word and a total word, its systematics is made up of broken and borrowed fragments of another order, and it cannot escape from God's order because it cannot escape from itself.

The Christian thinker, on the other hand, does not reject God's word, world, nor God's ordered course of growth in history. He builds on that inheritance, knowing that, at his best, he is simply a step in a glorious unfolding, a fallible and small step, but an ordained one. Not only are the marks of such thinkers as Anselm, Calvin, the Westminster Standards, Berkhof, and especially Cornelius Van Til very obvious in my writings, but, even further, my writings presuppose them all and are simply a supplement of observations and developments, hopefully one stairway riser in the construction of a magnificent structure, the kingdom of God.

The lightning flashes, the thunder crackles, rumbles, and rolls, and the rain falls onto a thirsty ground, to nourish and bless it. Behind that sequence, which brings bread and drink to our table, stand influences and causes from the solar system, and behind them all the providence and government of God. There is an order, a systematics, in the falling rain and the sprouting seed, and in the life of all living things. Moses in Psalm 90 speaks of this order in all things, and declares in awe, "LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

Systematics is more than an intellectual exercise; it is a glimpse into the nature of life and of God's order and purpose. It is in our mind and our blood, and our denial of it is our own suicide and disaster.

³⁴ O. B. Frothingham: *The Religion of Humanity*. (New York, N.Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1875. Third Edition), pp. 7f.

Systematics and its presuppositions of a rational order governed by the eternal decree of God cannot be limited to “theological matters” (i.e., to the formal discussions of classroom theologians) without risk of a Hellenic presupposition of two substances. When reality is divided into mind on the one hand and matter on the other, two diverse and ultimate substances, then the order of the mind is a different things than the order of matter. One substance may lack order and meaning, or, one substance may seek to impose order on the formless realm of the other, or, again, both may have their own inherent order or lack of it. In such a perspective, the order of physics is alien to the order of logic.

In the Biblical perspective, instead of form (mind) and matter, we have the uncreated being of God, and the created being of the universe. The order of all things comes from the mind of God, and His eternal decree orders and ordains all things. We have then no sharp line of division between physics and ethics; the fall of man affects the ground beneath man’s feet (Gen. 3:14-19), so that the whole of creation awaits its own release from the fall into the glorious liberty of the children of God through Christ (Rom. 8:19-23). Physics and ethics have a systematic connection and inter-relationship in terms of Scripture. The fall affected man and the universe. Deuteronomy 28 tells us that there is a necessary and essential connection between man’s faith and obedience and the material things of his existence, to the very fall of the rain and the fertility of the soil. Given the doctrine of creation, this is necessarily so. Failure to see that connection and unity stems from a faulty or a false systematics.

When man attempts a new word and a new systematics to replace God’s word and decree, man must struggle to impose his decree on an alien world. Let us grant for a moment, for the purpose of visualizing the humanist’s predicament at its best, that the world has evolved out of nothing and is a realm of brute factuality. Man then faces an ocean of non-meaning and in effect declares, Let there be meaning, because I shall, by science, education, politics, and other means, decree my meaning and impose it on the “universe.” Man then seeks to create a world, not out of nothing, but out of an alien something, racing against time and eternal death. This task is impossible enough, but how much more so is it impossible when we recognize that the world has an inescapable and necessary meaning in terms of its Creator, who alone governs and sustains it. The attempt by man to impose his word on God’s universe, and to replace God’s order with a manmade system, is sin, insanity, and death.

13. Neoplatonic Systematics

In the world of ancient Greek philosophy, reality is made up of two alien substances — mind (or ideas, forms) and matter. Instead of the division of Christian thought between the uncreated being of God and the created being of all else, the division is between mind and matter. In all forms of neoplatonism, this Hellenic division prevails, and it is basic to the way modern man regards himself.

It is basic also to intellectualism. The intellectual may philosophically reject Greek dialecticism, but in practice he applies it. The world for him is divided between the men and the realm of ideas, and the men and realm of practice and work. The modern university thus perpetuates a Greek faith by its implicit faith that the realm of ideas represents a higher realm than that of practice. Much of the hostility of the intellectuals to capitalism, technology, the life of the middle classes, to manual labor, and much, much more stems from the unacknowledged premise that the life of ideas represents a higher stage of being. This sense of superiority is implicit in academicians, writers, the press, and in all members of the intelligentsia.

Our concern, however, is more specifically with the seminary, a modern institution for the training of the clergy. The modern seminary is too often a neoplatonic institution through and through. Its concerns are ostensibly Christian; they are in reality ecclesiastical and neoplatonic. We cannot begin to grasp the reason for the faltering life of the church apart from that fact.

A very obvious indication of this neoplatonic division in the life of the seminary appears in its curriculum. The seminary curriculum is divided between two kinds of subjects or courses, the academic and the practical. This is at once a plain indication of the radically neoplatonic life of the seminary. Moreover, there is no question as to which side has prestige. The academic is held in high respect; the practical is regarded with very low esteem and is seen as a concession to the requirement of church life. Students view the practical courses as a nuisance, as they usually are, and fail to see that the academic courses are equally wretched.

The division between the academic (the realm of ideas or the mind) and the practical (the realm of practice and matter) is plainly Hellenic and neoplatonic. There is no hint in the Bible of any such division. The Bible does not speak often of “the wise” (or, “ancients”), as in Ezekiel 7:26; Jeremiah 18:8, but the reference is to a class of rulers, *elders*, men who ruled by the law of God. The modern division in the seminary is not of Biblical origin.

The presupposition of all Greek philosophy was in an ultimate impersonalism. The highest kind of thinking was abstract and impersonal, on the assumption that such thinking was closer thereby to reality. In terms of this alien tradition, the seminary, in its academic courses, adopts an abstract and critical analysis as the “key” to learning. Students are rigorously trained in this intellectualistic approach to the text of Scripture, to apologetics, systematics, and all things else. Our Lord gives an emphatically different perspective: “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7:17). Knowledge and practice are inseparably united: they cannot be divided, because life is not divisible into two constituent kinds of being.

Very simply stated, as God gave His word to the prophets of old, He did not divide it into a spiritual and a practical word. The word is not segmented into one section for Christian scholars to meditate over, and another for others to act on. There is no abstract and intellectual word as against a practical word. Merely to suggest such a division is to make apparent how ridiculous an idea it is. Where God declares Himself to be the eternal and sovereign Lord, the Creator, it is in order to assert His authority and to make clear His power to command. Thus, in Isaiah 45, we have many declarations with regard to God as Creator. We are told by God, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil; I the LORD do all these things" (Isa. 45:7). This text has been the object of much intellectual discussion: Is God the author of sin? What does He mean by creating evil? How shall we translate the word rendered evil? The word *create* is in the Hebrew *bara*'; does this make God the author of sin?

Is not the point of the text rather to stress the incredible arrogance and insanity of sin, of disobedience to God? We are not asked to probe into the mind of God with respect to the mysteries of God's absolute sovereignty and man's responsibility for sin. We are rather required to hear and obey. God demands of the disobedient and the rebellious:

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begetteth thou, or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? (Isa. 45:9, 10).

The goal God has in mind He very plainly sets forth:

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear (Isa. 45:22, 23).

The seminary approaches this word blasphemously. In the academic segment of its neoplatonic lives, it subjects this word to an historical analysis. Was this word indeed written by "First Isaiah" or "Second Isaiah," or some later Isaiah? What was the historical situation which governs and conditions the text? What religious and mythical allusions are there in this chapter? The text is studied in *abstraction*, as though God were not speaking to the scholars. As for the plain mandate of God's word, let us leave that to the practical courses. There, the student can study, again with alien premises, the working life of the Christian community. Moreover, the practical departments will make their neoplatonic bows to the realm of the spirit. Is preaching to be taught? We must be *expository*. The text is to be analyzed and carefully expounded, and the preacher becomes a dissector of the Bible. Preaching becomes an anatomist's dissection report out of the laboratory. We are told that expository preaching at its best is exegetical. Now exegesis means to set forth the meaning of the text; but is it exegesis if it is done with neoplatonic presuppositions, so that we contemplate an abstraction?

Thus, one very prominent and very able seminary professor cited as a model expository sermon, clearly exegetical, the following outline for Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”:

- I. What things were originated (the heavens and the earth).
- II. By Whom they were originated (by God).
- III. When they were originated (in the beginning).
- IV. How they were originated (by creation).

This professor, whose name out of respect I omit, because he was a superior man, all the same gives us a “model” sermon for providing information. But Christian preaching does not provide information in abstraction. God’s word never speaks to satisfy our curiosity but to command us. God declares the facts of creation so that we might know our place therein, our calling, and His mandate. God’s word is a declarative word, the Christian preaching must be a declarative word. Exposition-exegesis smacks of the classroom, of the seminary and its neoplatonic divisions, dissections, and abstractions.

The systematics of neoplatonism is thus very clearly set forth in the curriculum of the seminary. On the one hand, we have Old Testament and New Testament departments, and church history and theology-philosophy departments. The seminary scholars are located here. Their favored students are prospective scholars, future professors, and they tend to regard the everyday life of faith as somewhat removed, and as belonging to that other realm of the seminary, the practical departments. To give some degree of hollow prestige to the teaching of churchmanship, missions, preaching, and the like, these departments are given such high-sounding names as “Departments of Practical Theology.” The plain implication of this common designation is that the more prestigious departments of theology are impractical. The truth is that both kinds of theology are impractical and neoplatonic. The various departments of impractical theology never really satisfy the Christian hunger of students, despite their prestige, because they are abstract and unrelated to God’s reality. This is one reason why student after student in seminary testifies that he dries up spiritually, losing his cutting edge and vigor. The contact with life is lacking, and thus the subjects become impractical and irrelevant. The student tends to starve in a land of potential plenty. In my youth, when more pastors were still scholars, one of the sad facts was that many of these orthodox men were great experts in Ritschl, who was suddenly obsolete, as Karl Barth began to command attention, and the focus of their theological training was thus out of kilter.

What shall the prospective pastor do? Turn to practical theology? But practical theology departments are just as impractical, and the student, if he does not turn his back on the seminary, is made over into a warped and fragmented man.

The very gap — and often tension — which exists between the faculty members of the two branches of the seminary is evidence of the failure of the seminary, and of its neoplatonism. The “practical” men are normally taken from the pastorate; they are good at public relations, promotions, financing, pulpiterring, and the like, and sometimes fuzzy on doctrine. The scholars on the faculty are at best judiciously tolerant of these men: the seminary, after all, is dependent on the churches. At worst, the practical men are regarded as a necessary evil, to be suffered but

not allowed too much place in the curriculum. The scholars are usually self-consciously removed from practical considerations.

The fact that Calvin and Jonathan Edwards were pastors, as were Augustine, Athanasius, and others, is to modern scholars merely an *historical*, not a *relevant*, fact.

What has the seminary done to the life of the “church?” The Christian synagogue has become progressively more and more under the influence of the “practical” interests, as the neoplatonic dialectic collapses. The academic departments become more and more abstract. The scholars draw closer, not to the church, but to other scholars. Seminary accreditation is now held to be a necessity. Reformed and evangelical scholars seek fellowship with other scholars, often irrespective of theology, in scholarly organizations and societies. They write, not for the thoughtful believer, but for other scholars. (Almost all evangelical and Reformed scholarly works are written with a nonexistent modernist audience in mind; most are thus pathetic in their futility. They seek to “prove,” not to declare.)

The systematics of neoplatonism works to break the dialectic tension between mind and body and to establish their implicit dualism. Because of this, the seminary works to create, with each generation, a more and more irrelevant type of religion, with neoplatonic eschatologies of retreat and withdrawal.

But in neoplatonism, despite the presence of the two substances, *one* is superior, the spiritual. It is the higher realm. The higher realm for the scholars is the ideational. For the “practical” men, and for the church members, it becomes the “spiritual,” the charismatic, the emotional, and the “heart” realms of activities of “love.” In both cases, the wholeness of God’s word, and its materiality, becomes lost.

The modernist senses this loss, and he adopts the other half of the dialectic, the material. As against a non-Biblical spiritual religion, he adopts a non-Biblical materialistic religion. In either case, antinomianism prevails, and humanism is triumphant. The faith becomes irrelevant to God and life.

An excellent example of the academic abstraction is the book by Jack Rogers, editor: *Biblical Authority* (1977). The “problem” of Biblical authority is discussed. Typically, for the seminary mind, or the academic mind, all articles of faith are essentially *problems* for scholarly analysis. Infallibility and inerrancy are discussed, often in abstraction from one another, and generally in abstraction from the doctrine of God. The results are exercises in irrelevance and futility.

Critical analysis is basic to the life of scholarship, and to humanism. Its presupposition is the ultimacy of judgment by the autonomous mind of man. Kant developed criticism as a formal tool, but, before him, the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment had proclaimed “the omnipotence of criticism.”³⁵

³⁵ Peter Gay: *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism*. (New York, N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967). p. 145.

Criticism is neither rationalism nor empiricism in essence: it is anti-theism. It is intolerant of any fixed body of truth, or of any unquestionable fact (i.e., God, the infallible and inerrant word, six-day creationism, etc.). Criticism's certain word is the critical and analytic word of the critic. It calls for the endless dissection of every challenge to the omnipotence of criticism. It is a demand for the right to question everything, and to declare criticism as man's compass rather than God's word.

Anselm of Canterbury declared, "I believe so that I may understand." His starting point was faith in the triune God and His word, and then the searching Christian analysis of all things in terms of that word.

Critical analysis has roots in Abelard's, "I understand, in order that I may believe," but the latter half of that statement is false, and the first, deceptive. In reality, the submission of Christian faith is alien to that premise. The goal is, "I criticize, that I alone may stand." Its hidden premise is the autonomy of the critic, and his ultimacy.

Critical analysis can never see the relevancy of the word of God to the world because it fails to see God and His word as living and relevant. The goal for critical analysis is more analysis, and more criticism.

I am often told by members of the scholarly fraternity that my own writings, and the position of Chalcedon, are interesting, but that I need to enter into scholarly dialogue and into the world of critical analysis in order to be relevant! This statement is often made with courtesy and friendliness, by persons who want my work to gain "prestige."

But the goal of ideas is not criticism but action. Christian analysis determines the relevancy of ideas and action to the word of God and works to enhance the vitality of the relationship of thought and work to God and to His word. It works under mandate, not in a scholarly limbo. And this, of course, is the predicament of the modern seminary: it is in neither heaven nor hell, but in limbo, and it is irrelevant to God's word and world.

14. The Goal of Systematics

A society under the influence of neoplatonism will seek to be spiritual, or, in revolt, to be materialistic. Both goals are illusory, because spirit and matter can never be isolated, and the whole man is involved in his every activity.

In Marxism, we have the revolt from idealism, i.e., the reign of platonic ideas, to materialistic determination. Of course, the extent to which Marx abandoned neoplatonism is questionable: he is clearly an intellectual heir of Plato.

In spite of this, Karl Marx did succeed because he broke clearly with one aspect of the older tradition, the reign of criticism. Again, it is true that a new kind of criticism, Marxist in form, replaced the older humanistic standard of criticism, but, all the same, Marx was openly hostile to the entire philosophic tradition of humanism when he declared, in his eleventh of the "Theses on Feuerbach," "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."³⁶

According to Marx, idealism rests on the primacy and determining power of mind or ideas, whereas in reality, he insisted the prior and determinative factor in history is not mind but matter. Ultimacy for the idealist is in ideas; for the materialist, it is in matter. As a result, Marx interpreted history in terms of the processes of production. Civil society in its various stages and institutions is the outcome of material forces. This is also true of all theoretical products and all forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, and so on. To hold otherwise, Marx insisted, is "idealistic humbug." For Marx, "not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory."³⁷

For the open or implicit idealist, ideas are ultimate, and therefore, whether the idealist is an empiricist or a rationalist, criticism is basic. Critical analysis is the necessary application of the principle of ultimacy, man's autonomous mind, to the problems of man, time, and history. With the decline of Christian faith, philosophy became powerful in history, beginning with the Scholastics, renewed by Descartes, and culminating in Hegel, for whom the rational is the real. The *philosophes* could with reason speak of the omnipotence of criticism, because the basic faith of the day ascribed it to critical analysis.

Marx dethroned the primacy of ideas, and the older form of humanism. Philosophy accordingly lost its preeminence to sociology and to politico-economic theories. These were philosophies and ideas, to be sure, but ones which asserted the priority and ultimacy of the material. The joy of Marx and Engels over the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* is understandable.

³⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *On Religion*. (Moscow, U.S.S.R.: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955). p. 72; K. Marx and F. Engels: *The German Ideology*, pts. I, II. (New York, N.Y.: International Publishers, (1947) 1960). p. 199.

³⁷ Marx: *The German Ideology*, p. 29.

Darwin accepted meant the acceptance of a mindless universe, and hence the inevitability of materialistic determination.

Mechanism was rejected by Marx. His is a *dialectical* materialism: he is still in the tradition of Greek dialectics. The idea now was transformed into an opposing force in history, formidable, but predetermined for destruction because the material must triumph. Both practice without theory, and theory without practice, were rejected. Ideas were not abandoned for mechanism. They were retained, but grounded in matter.

Biblical faith, on the other hand, denies the ultimacy of both mind and matter and declares both to be aspects of God's creation. There is thus no determination by either mind or by matter. The omnipotence of criticism is denied, as is the determination of all things by material forces. God being sovereign, omnipotent, and ultimate, all things are determined by Him, from all eternity. The Christian's approach to the world is not in terms of criticism, nor revolution, but in terms of God's regenerating power. Like the idealist, the Christian is interested in interpretation, but not the interpretation of critical analysis. God's interpretation of all things is set forth in principle by His enscriptured word. It becomes the duty of the covenant man to see all things in terms of that word. But, like the Marxist, he cannot regard interpretation as a goal in itself: his purpose must be to *change* all things through Christ.

Thus, Christian faith, if it rests in sterile and isolated intellectualism, is false to its premises. The same is true of ecclesiastical activism in the social realm. In both cases, there is a denial of the fact that Biblical faith gives us a world and life view. Basic to Scripture is the fact that it is the word of the Sovereign and Creator of all things, so that neither idealism nor materialism can do other than deny Him. The expression of Christianity is neither in ideas nor in action, in neither criticism nor revolution, but in faith and obedience.

Nehemiah is a good summation of the Biblical faith. When his enemies saw his efforts, they at first derided them as a joke; later, they treated them as a threat. Nehemiah had two choices. He could have entered into dialogue with his enemies, to persuade them of the innocence of his efforts and to gain their good will. He could have dropped all efforts at reconstruction in favor of a rigorous policy of defense and offense, of dealing with the enemy directly and immediately. He did neither. Nehemiah and his men labored with their weapons girded on their sides. They rejected both criticism and dialogue on the one hand, and revolutionary action on the other, in favor of godly reconstruction, and God blessed them (Neh. 4).

Systematic theology cannot be simply an exercise in thinking, and a systemization of Biblical thought. It must be thinking for action in terms of knowing, obeying, and honoring God by fulfilling His mandate to us. It cannot be in abstraction from battle. It is related to what happens in church, state, school, family, the arts and sciences, the vocations, and all things else.

Systematic theology is thus far more than a course in the seminary curriculum the purpose of which is to organize the student's ideas about theology. Systematics presupposes an ordered knowledge because God is absolute order, and God requires that man, created in His image, bring all things within his province, including man himself, into line with God's order and purpose. The Bible is a manual for dominion under God: it declares God's word and

requirements, and it summons man to obey. The Bible gives us God's marching orders for creation. Systematic theology cannot content itself with organizing information. The incarnation is at the heart of our faith. The incarnation of God the Son is a unique event, but its implications are universal. What God requires of man and the earth must be embodied in all our lives and activities, in all that we are and do, or else we deny the word, and the God who gave the word.

We began by stating that systematics says that God is God. To say that God is the Lord means that we are to be totally under the absolute government of His word, because we are totally His creation, and our redemption is totally His work, and a manifestation of His sovereign grace. No theology, and no preaching, can faithfully set forth the God of Scripture without making fully clear His absolute ownership of us, so that we, our lives, callings, families, substance, and time must be totally commanded by Him. This is, of course, the task of all theology, and of all preaching. What systematics does is to set forth in particular clarity the unity, particularity, and order in the word of God in order better to arm the man of God. Systematics works to strengthen epistemological self-consciousness by striking out against the inconsistencies of smorgasbord religion. It works to uproot alien presuppositions and to clarify the Biblical mandate. Systematics, however, stresses not man but God, so that man's sin, his calling, and his future are seen, not in terms of man's hopes and needs, but in terms of God's purpose and order. Because man is a sinner, he is man-centered. He seeks to make the universe revolve around him and his needs. Man-made religions reflect this orientation. Their goal is the fulfillment of man, and God is a resource in that purpose. Systematic theology, however, must work to restore perspective to religion, to give it its necessary God-centered focus, in brief, to let God be God.

Because theology has so often become abstract, or materialistic, it overlooks the plain words of Scripture:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccles. 12:13-14).

This is an unpretentious goal, but it is the Scriptural one. St. Paul makes clear the same setting aside of the world's ways and wisdom, declaring,

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness: but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe....God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence (I Cor. 1:18-21, 27-29).

15. Systematics and Lordship

The goal of systematics is to declare that God is the Lord: He is King over all creation. “The LORD is King for ever and ever” (Ps. 10:16). “Yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever” (Ps. 29:10); “he is a great King over all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved” (Ps. 47:2-4). A faithful systematics declares, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations” (Ps. 145:3,13).

With this in mind, let us glance briefly at the life of a churchman and politician, a man very clearly superior to most churchmen and politicians. He is a tither and a loyal, hard-working church member. He is also a Mason, and his memoirs of life on Capitol Hill indicate no mandate to apply Biblical TO requirements to law, politics, and much else in every man’s working life.³⁸ He can relate President L. B. Johnson’s stories about flagrantly illegal voting with the same relish as Johnson, and with no sense of the obscene travesties on the life of the republic. Moreover, he can cite the words of Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, a blend of Deism and modern humanism, and Churchill’s faith in man, with no apparent sense of their radical contradiction to Biblical faith.³⁹ In all of this, however, he is like millions of other churchmen who feel that a very “simple” faith is satisfying to God. Of course, the clergy are even worse. Christian scholars and clergymen, who should know better, have often objected to me, “What’s wrong with humanism?” Many pride themselves on anti-systematic and smorgasbord approaches to religion. None of this is possible where God is indeed God, where His lordship is confessed and applied to the totality of our lives.

The goal of any religion, faith, or philosophy is a universal one. If it be true, it must be true for all times and places. Even hedonistic, relativistic humanism calls for the same universalism. Williams, who affirms “the truth of hedonistic individual relativism,”⁴⁰ holds, “If maximum individual long range satisfaction makes duty for decent people, it does so for rascals also. It does so for all conscious organisms. The principle is universal.”⁴¹ The humanists, who have the sorriest “grounds” for asserting a universal faith, are all the same succeeding because of their consistency of faith, their insistence on their universality of principle.

Churchmen are meanwhile faltering and failing because of their lack of any universal application. By their affirmation of the triune God, the churchmen should, more than anyone else, insist on the catholicity and universality of Christian faith and Biblical law. Very early,

³⁸ William “Fishbait” Miller, with Frances Spatz Leighton: *Fishbait: The Memoirs of a Congressional Doorkeeper*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977). pp. 25, 251, 411,414f., etc.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 387f., 397.

⁴⁰ Gardner Williams: *Humanistic Ethics*. (New York, N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1951). p. 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

however, it was precisely this factor which was abandoned. Pierre Boyle (1647-1706), first a Protestant and then a Catholic, but in essence a Cartesian, actually held that there is no necessary connection between religion and morality, a belief that brought him, in his day, much hostility. Now, more are ready to believe that atheists are not moved to a new ethical premise by their unbelief. Churchmen too often reject the idea of necessary connections between ideas and action, faith and life, and principles and things.

To reject or underrate such a necessary connection is to deny God, implicitly or explicitly, and to affirm a universe of chance connections. In a Darwinian world, of course, it follows that connections are either products of chance or are man-made. If man-made, then systematics is anthropology. No divine decree is then permitted, because God then becomes the inescapable Lord and God, not man.

The whole point of David's psalms (as of all Scripture) is that God as Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, is the necessary connection between all things. David can therefore declare, "The eyes of all wait upon thee: and thou givest them their meat in due season" (Ps. 145:15). Our Lord declares that God the Lord is the governing and necessary connection in the life and death of a sparrow, and in man's life as well, to the very number of hairs on his head (Matt. 10:29-31).

Baumer, in discussing the rise of political absolutism in the modern age, rightly sees absolutism as "closely identified with the idea of sovereignty."⁴² When sovereignty was transferred from God to the political order, absolute power began to accrue also to the state. We can add further that universality or catholicity was also necessarily transferred to the state as an aspect of sovereignty. Not surprisingly, this has led to demands for a one-world state. The feeble concept of the medieval church, catholic and mildly absolutist, has given way to modern totalitarianism. Marxism, Fascism, and the democracies each dream of a world state, catholic or universal, sovereign, and absolute. This is the ancient dream of Babylon the Great, of Babel. It will not be answered or dissolved by piecemeal and non-principled opposition.

Against the systematics of the humanistic world order, we must declare the systematics of a theology faithful to the triune God and His infallible, inerrant word. The systematics of humanism is in self-contradiction: it is false, destructive of itself and man, and vapid. But if churchmen have no systematics, they cannot counter the reigning evil: they have disarmed themselves.

When Paul wrote, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (I Cor. 9:16), he meant indeed that his calling from God was an urgent and mandatory one, but he meant far more. *Necessity* (*ananke*, that which must or needs be) means the total necessity of God's word and His government. It is inclusive of all reason, determination, and meaning. The totality of God's decree, providence, and calling placed a *necessity* upon Paul. The *necessity* is theistic, cosmic, and personal. Today, the determination in necessity is essentially and often exclusively personal. A thing is *necessary* because we deem it so. Systematic theology must affirm that the Lord God is the necessary cause, connection, will, power, and action in all things.

⁴² Franklin L. Baumer: *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600- 1950*. (New York, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1977). p. 98.

Anything short of that is not theology but anthropology. Anything short of that must abandon the psalmist to sing praises to man; the power and necessity are then ascribed to man. But David declares,

Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding (Ps. 47:6-7).

This is the task of systematic theology: to sing praises to God the Lord with understanding.

16. The Search for a Master Principle

One of the persistent problems which haunts human thought, and philosophy and theology in particular, is the search for a master principle, a universal, and sometimes a particular, in terms of which all things can be understood. The history of human thought gives us a succession of master principles and ideas, and a remarkable variety of them. These include yang and yin, karma, kamis, ideas or forms, mathematics, evolution, the existential self, and much, much more.

The quest for a master principle is in essence anti-Biblical and is destructive of Christianity. Its influence through the centuries has been to misdirect Christian thought and to lead it into alien and destructive channels. Not until we rid ourselves of this futile quest can we begin to think Biblically. Unfortunately, all of education, virtually, is committed precisely to this quest, and it is the essence of humanistic education to seek a master principle. That master principle was once viewed as more or less transcendent, and was sometimes even named "God"; now it is seen as immanent and, even more, as entirely the product of man. In any case, it is anti-Biblical and is destructive.

No master principle or idea exists in, behind, or beyond the universe. There is, rather, the Master Person, the triune God. Between an abstract master principle or idea and the totally personal God an unbridgeable gap exists. An idea is an abstraction; the triune God is totally personal, real, and concrete.

But this is not all. Because the being of God is not complex but simple and unified, all aspects of God are equally God. There is no aspect of God which represents the principle of deity, whereas other aspects are peripheral and secondary. God is totally God in all His being.

Thus, to view one aspect of God as representing the essence of His nature and/or deity is to isolate that one aspect as God over God. We cannot view God's sovereignty, His oneness, His tri-unity, His omnipotence, omniscience, eternity, grace, holiness, righteousness, His power to create, or anything else, as alone the essence of His being. God is God in all His being, and to exalt one aspect over others is to make that abstracted and abstract idea a God over God.

The same is true when we approach the Bible. If we try to probe and reach a word behind the word, i.e., a master principle which is beyond the word, we see the word as an interesting surface or clothing which veils the idea or the master principle. We then seek an abstract word and deny the actual word. In Gnosticism, this very strong belief in master principles and ideas led to the treatment of the Bible as a code book pointing beyond itself to a realm of ideas.

This bald Gnosticism is a very minor aspect of our times, but, more sophisticated in form, the same impetus governs education. The "higher" the education, the more impersonal and abstract the learning. Critical analysis seeks to penetrate beyond the real and the personal to the abstract and the impersonal as somehow the truth about things.

In its crudest form, this error has been commonplace to the sciences (but as a product of philosophy and theology). The world has been reduced to mathematics, to a machine, to matter, to atoms, to evolution, and the like. In my student days, when dead and pickled frogs were

brought in for dissection, the professor stated that, in the course of our dissection and reading on the anatomy of the frog, we were to master everything significant to be known about the frog. One girl, P.D., in humor rather than earnest, quipped, "But this frog is dead!" The professor, not at all amused, replied with an expression common to the 1920s and 1930s, "Life is an epiphenomenon." Life and consciousness were seen as irrelevant by-products; the abstraction from life was reality!

Thus, for the modern university and seminary, the wisest are those who can think most abstractly. The more they reduce reality to ideas, the greater their learning and status, and the deadlier the consequences for the church and for society. The quest for an impersonal abstraction is a quest for nothingness, and those who seek it become themselves nothing, and an encumbrance on society.

Abstraction (Latin *ab*, from + *trahere*, to draw) means the separation of a quality, idea, aspect, or principle from a total object; it rests on the premise that the best means of understanding the total object is by means of an abstraction of its quality or principle. *Analysis* comes from Aristotle, and his *analytics*; analysis considers all aspects on a par in order to isolate the key aspects for purposes of knowledge, i.e., for abstraction. The goal of analysis is to isolate, to dissect. Man the thinker (of abstract principles), having analyzed, isolated, and abstracted, then, after Kant, plays God by means of synthetic judgments which view the world as will and idea. Truth becomes what man abstracts by analysis and puts together by his logic. Such a truth is not only abstract: it is, finally, a mental construct and no more.

An education which begins with the faith that the living God is a person, not an abstraction, and that all creation is a personal fact brought forth by the totally personal God, will seek to further the practical implications of that truth. It will work to further knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion. It is not an accident that only out of Christian cultures have science, technology, and agriculture developed to a considerable degree: the concreteness of our faith requires it. The hostility to abstractness appeared clearly in the "Preliminary Principles" of *The Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*, 1788, chapter I, article IV:

That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness; according to our Savior's rule, "by their fruits ye shall know them." And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd, than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, they are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth, or to embrace it.

The humanist, however, believes in *pure* education, i.e., even when vocational it is abstract and seeks to reach abstract principles. In its greatest purity, it is learning for learning's sake, but not because truth is the object of learning, but because man can best realize his potentialities by developing his grasp of abstractions. The result is that, the more learned the man, the more commonly he is incompetent in the world of concrete things and peoples. He can handle abstractions but not reality, unless somehow he can reduce it to abstractions.

Thus, in a small city, with only a single Negro family, moderately successful, popular, accepted, and at ease, a civil rights administrator for an area, a college graduate, sought to analyze the local situation in terms of sociological abstractions. The fact was that the family was godly, hardworking, and personally a pleasure to know, but this fact did not constitute a valid abstraction for understanding “race relations” in that community. This simple incident pinpoints the problem. The humanist seeks an abstraction from the facts to understand the facts. The Christian seeks the Creator of all facts as the means of understanding the facts. The humanistic Biblical commentator tries to analyze the situation of a Bible passage historically, then to abstract from that an idea which will account for the facts. The Christian sees God as the source of the word, the situation, and the history, and sees that totally personal God at work in all things.

Men seek to project a master principle or idea into the heavens as the truth about things. However sophisticated the apparatus and intellectual ingenuity of such thinking, it remains *idolatry*. The search for a master principle or idea is an attempt in reality to deny the living God and to create an idol. It is comparable to Aaron’s idolatry; Aaron created a golden calf, but, when confronted by Moses, tried to say that the idol came out of the gold and fire as a product thereof: “And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it to me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf (Ex. 32:24). Master principles and ideas, from the Greeks to the present, are like Aaron’s golden calf: they are fashioned by men but supposedly appear miraculously as self-generated facts. But they are manmade idols and abstractions.

Systematic theology cannot be systematic abstractionism and idolatry. The personal and living God requires a faith which bears fruit, good fruit, and moves from faith to live in terms of establishing knowledge, righteousness or justice, holiness, and dominion in every area of life and thought. Godly education must be the same: it arms the people of God for battle, victory, and dominion.

Anti-Biblical education abstracts ideas from reality and scholars from the world of wholeness and action. Christian education and systematic theology immerses the godly into that world and requires an accounting of God’s people. When God called His covenant people Israel and gave them the Promised Land, that land was not a safe harbor but the main highway of the ancient world. Israel could be faithful or apostate, but it could not be abstract. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) do the same with the New Israel of God.

17. Abstractionism

We began by calling attention to the alien principle of abstraction as truth. Because Greek philosophy saw ultimate truth as an abstraction, as an idea, not a person, truth and knowledge required for them the process of abstraction. Truth is a distillation from the material context of reality. To know the truth about things meant not getting behind or beyond things, but getting to the heart of things, to what lies beneath the surface, person, or thing. According to Plato, in his *Republic*, Socrates held:

Unless a person can strictly define by a process of thought the essential Form of Good, abstracted from everything else; and unless he can fight his way as it were through all objections, studying to disprove them not by the rules of opinion, but by those of real existence; and unless in all these conflicts he travels to his conclusion without making one false step in his train of thought, — unless he does all this, shall you not assert that he knows neither the essence of good, nor any other good thing; and that any phantom of it, which he may chance to apprehend, is the fruit of opinion and not of science; and that he dreams and sleeps away his present life, and never wakes on his side of that future world, in which he is doomed to sleep for ever?⁴³

To grasp the influence of this pagan principle, let us see its application in everyday life by countless churchmen. We are told very often that we cannot judge or know someone unless we know that person's "heart," and only God knows the heart. I have heard this said of a variety of offenders — homosexuals, in one case a rapist, tale-bearers and slanderers, and so on. The Bible gives us some very concrete ways of knowing people: "...by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). What do these people do? They insist on abstracting the heart or essence of a man from the totality of his life and actions. The end result, in any Christian sense, is that all men are in the practical sense unknowable, because their heart or essence is something radically different perhaps from the actual and concrete fact of their lives.

The abstractionist has an abstract doctrine of man; the historical man is not the heart-man or essential man supposedly. The Bible requires us to regard the historical man as the real man. We cannot abstract an idea from the man and call the idea true or essential man. A man defines himself in his historical existence and in terms of God's word. God who created man provides the standard for the judgment of man, and it is the historical man, the whole man, who is judged, not an abstraction.

The Greek mind in theology goes to the Bible to abstract an *idea* about God. The tools this Greek mind uses can be outwardly Biblical: ideas such as sovereignty and the covenant can be abstracted from their Biblical context, as can the doctrine of man, to create an alien principle. (Thus, James Daane continually requires theologians to do "justice" to his abstract doctrine of man. In Thomism, it is an abstract doctrine of God.)

⁴³ John Llewelyn Davies and David James Vaughan, translators: *The Republic of Plato*. (London, England: Macmillan, 1935). pp. 534, 535.

But God has already given us His word. That word is emphatically concrete. We cannot reject the concreteness of Scripture as anthropomorphic language; rather, God's concreteness of language sets forth the totally *personal* nature of God and His creation. Attempts to defuse and denature that radically personal character of revelation are deformations thereof.

Gardner Williams, in his *Humanistic Ethics*, cited Plato's words on abstraction with approval as an "important truth." He thus summoned thinkers to *define* the good.⁴⁴ For Williams, "...the supreme being is the ultimate reality or substance of the universe": it is "structured energy" and "the collective whole of all independent being, upon which everything else in the universe depends for existence."⁴⁵ This supreme being is thus impersonal and is for Williams both the collective whole and an abstraction of that whole, in that it is impersonal energy. The necessity of abstractionism for Williams is thus inescapable. To understand reality means to pursue a necessary process of abstraction.

For the Christian thinker, however, such a process takes him away from God and is a denial of Him. When John declares that Jesus Christ is the declaration of the Father, and that grace and truth *came* in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:17-18), he makes clear the vast gap between Greek philosophy and the Bible. For truth to *come* in the person of Jesus Christ, and to be fully expressed in His person (John 14:16), goes totally against Greek philosophy. The Logos, word, meaning, or structure of the universe, says John, is not an abstraction: it is the person of God the Son.

Systematic theology thus cannot be abstract: it must be Biblical, and the Bible is personal, concrete, and historical. But to do justice to history, and to avoid turning history into a meaningless shadow against the void, it must be seen as the creation of the personal and triune God. Time is real because eternity is real. Neither time nor eternity is shadows and abstractions.

Thus, when Ezekiel (35:2) declares that God commanded him to prophesy against Mount Seir and its people, it is a word from God to a concrete people in history, who are to be judged by the eternal and ever-living God for their sins. God's concern about man's sins in any and every age is an historical concern rooted in His eternal decree and His purposes therein.

Abstractionism soon loses its hold on both time and eternity, because it seeks a truth behind and under both of them. But we cannot go behind or beyond God: we must go to Him in His word. The concreteness of that word is offensive to fallen man, because it is too clearly the personal word of the personal God. But there is no other word.

⁴⁴ Gardner Williams: *Humanistic Ethics*. (New York, N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1951). pp. 20f.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

18. Seminary Systematics

The presupposition of critical analysis is the autonomy of human thought. By means of rational and scientific analysis, free of presuppositions, man can supposedly arrive at the truth. Critical analysis thus, *first*, assumes an objective and autonomous stance on the part of man, an assumption which is pure myth, not reality. *Second*, critical analysis denies the fact of the fall as basic to the life and mind of man. Man's status as a fallen and sinful creature, a covenant-breaker, radically alters all his thinking and conditions his presuppositions. To suppose that such a man can give us an impartial and unbiased conclusion is to deny the fall and assume that man is a god. *Third*, critical analysis denies the religious foundations of human thought and sees man as essentially rational rather than essentially religious.

For a Christian to pursue critical analysis is to assume an anti-Christian intellectual stance which will progressively undermine his theological profession. Church seminaries and colleges, eager to gain academic respectability (and the lust for academic respectability is the major cause of intellectual whoredom), regularly lose their professed faith because their methodology requires another religion, humanism. Having begun with critical analysis, they regularly wind up in bed with the humanists.

Christian analysis, on the other hand, denies, *first*, that man can have an objective and an autonomous stance. Man is either a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker, and, in either case, a creature and hence never autonomous or objective. *Second*, the fall of man has clouded and twisted the mind of man. Not even the redeemed man, since he is far from perfectly sanctified in this life, is able to give an untainted analysis. Only as man seeks to think God's thoughts after Him in faithfulness to God's word, can man begin to know and understand the truth as God created it and declares it. Such valid knowledge as the ungodly gain will be wrenched out of context and given an alien meaning. *Third*, Christian analysis will always affirm that religious presuppositions govern the life and mind of man, so that man's faith will always condition his life and thought.

But what does the seminary do, i.e., the evangelical or the Reformed seminary? Almost invariably, for example, as it approaches the Graf- Wellhausen theory, it will do so from the perspective of critical analysis. The earnest and scholarly critique which follows will ably pinpoint the contradictions and errors of the documentary hypothesis concerning the Pentateuch, but, at the same time, while gaining various local battles, it loses the war. It presupposes as valid a viciously false approach. It treats unbelief as an honest intellectual problem, whereas it is in reality a moral and a religious problem. If the Bible is true, then, whether a man is a male prostitute or a cynical critic of the Old Testament text, his is a moral and a religious problem, not an intellectual question. Intellectual problems are internal questions *within* a system. A covenant-breaker has one kind of intellectual problem, and a covenant-keeper another. The intellectual problems are then questions of development, understanding, and growth within a faith and a framework, but man's presence within that framework is a religious and a moral decision.

To adopt the methodology of unbelief is to accept the presuppositions of unbelief and to surrender the faith that the intellectual problems of man as a creature have their roots in a religious and moral decision.

The seminary and college with a false moral basis will soon go astray. The battle-line is shifted from the moral to the intellectual realm to accommodate the enemy. A false systematics then undergirds the curriculum.

The seminary, thus, will endlessly analyze the theories of the adherents of the Graf-Wellhausen myth. Instead of teaching the Bible, it will be dealing with “problems” in terms of critical analysis. // *will grant moral validity to the enemy’s objections and objectives.* The student majoring in either Old or New Testament will know much about what the enemy has to say, but he can leave seminary and be unable, in an ordination examination, to name four minor prophets, spell Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Habakkuk, name the Ten Commandments, or do other like elementary things. (These are actual illustrations, from examinations.) It stands to reason that he cannot summarize the main points of Romans, I Corinthians, Haggai, or Jeremiah. He can, however, discuss ably the Graf-Wellhausen theory, so that, as a pastor, he has a good bag of stones to feed Christ’s flock.

If the student is a theology major, it is unlikely that he will leave the seminary with a full reading of any great theologian. He may be “Reformed,” but it is unlikely that he will have read Calvin’s *Institutes*. A course in Calvin, the church fathers, Luther, Van Til, or any other like thinker is very unlikely. But he will get courses on the current theological idiot of the covenantbreaker’s church. After all, must he not have a box-full of serpents for Christ’s flock?

Am I saying that it is wrong to study Barth, Moltmann, and the like? Not at all, for the specialist, *provided* he has had a firm grounding in sound theology and in good theologians first of all. Does he know, for example, Calvin’s *Institutes*, the various relevant works of Van Til, and the like? If not, he is wasting his time and defrauding God’s people. *If he* knows his Bible, and *if he* is thoroughly grounded in sound theology and *Christian presuppositional analysis*, then he can profitably deal with the enemy’s thought, and effectively cut out the ground from under the opposition.

Again and again, reform movements within the church have gone astray, and the reforming seminaries all too quickly are proud of their respectability and accreditation by the enemy. Their scholars write learned studies dissecting the enemy by means of critical analysis, and then wind up, inch by inch, yard by yard, in the enemy’s camp. All too readily they become themselves the cultured despisers of God’s humble believers and the enemies of Christ’s flock. By means of the methodology of critical analysis, they move into an alien systematics and begin to war against the household of faith.

The necessity for a truly Biblical systematic theology is thus an urgent one. If we do not view all things in terms of the triune God and His word, then we deny Him at point after point.

19. Anti-Abstractionism

The idea of God or some substitute for it keeps cropping up in antichristian and atheistic philosophies. A world without God is a world empty of meaning, direction, purpose, and reason. Man's attempts to provide a rational center and purpose prove finally absurd: death and unreason conquer all.

As a result, men resort to the idea of God in some form in order to preserve the freedom of man. Man needs a backdrop of meaning in order to develop his own meaning. Karl Barth, for example, saw clearly the radical emptiness of the universe of any meaning wherever Biblical faith is denied. Barth wanted two very different things: *first*, the freedom of man from God to be his own lord and lawmaker; *second*, the full insurance of the doctrine of God against the abyss of meaninglessness. Accordingly, he affirmed the Biblical doctrines as limiting concepts to keep back the void, provide the insurance of meaning, and thereby give man the freedom to function in a universe of ostensible meaning. Like all such efforts, Barth's attempt was a failure.

Such attempts are not new. Paul warns Timothy of the infiltration of the church by traitors who would be outwardly of the faith but in reality alien to it (II Tim. 3:1-4), and he concludes by stating that all such have "a form of godliness, but [are] denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (II Tim. 3:5).

To illustrate this fact, a seminary professor savagely criticized a student, D.C., for taking Biblical law seriously. I suppose, he said with contempt, you actually believe Deuteronomy 21:18-21 and would have a rebellious and delinquent son executed. The student answered Prof. D. thus: Let us not go into the question of the present validity of the law requiring the death of incorrigible delinquents and criminals. Let us assume for the moment that the law was dropped at the cross. Are you implying that, between Moses and Christ, for 1500 years or so, God did not require this law, which you find disgusting and contemptible? Prof. D., who claims to be orthodox, held that the law was merely a teaching device, not intended to be taken seriously or literally!

How then does one read any of God's law? How do we take "Thou shalt not kill"? and "Thou shalt not commit adultery"? (Deut. 5:17-18). For Prof. D., the law is not real, because his god is not real: both the law and his god are limiting concepts. A universal principle is affirmed as a limit, not as a fact. God becomes a fence man builds in order to protect man's universe from unreason: He is not the living God of Scripture, who "is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), but man's own limiting notions projected on to the universe, or into the future.

In a brilliant analysis of such thinking among contemporary Protestant and Roman Catholic thinkers, Greg Bahnsen has pointed out that for these men "revelation rests upon a subjective and man-centered fulcrum." For these men, "God is the future — whatever it should eventuate." G. Baum has declared, "The doctrine of God is the Good News that humanity is possible." (Here the emphasis on the limiting concept as a guarantee of human possibility is very open.) God is man's

future, what humanity can become if it uses its political strength to plan for the future. “Man must be the new source of predestination through politics.”⁴⁶

It is not, however, the modernist theologians alone who use the Biblical God as a limiting concept and as a facade for their humanism. The same attempt is common to many evangelicals and to Reformed men as well, as witness Professor D. and others like him. For these men, the Holy Spirit becomes the new limiting notion. He is detached from the “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). This is a major denial of the faith. A partial word is one in which man’s word hides behind the facade of God’s word. If I say that “Thou shalt not kill,” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery” are God’s word, but that “Thou shalt not steal” and “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Ex. 20:13-16) are culturally conditioned words to be read as such, or that the sexual laws of Leviticus 19 are also culturally conditioned, then my word is made more important than God’s word, and then I am the determiner of which word is the word of God for me; I then pass judgment on God as god over God. But this is blasphemy and unbelief.

If I likewise determine apart from the every word of God and faith in and obedience thereto what constitutes “the Spirit-filled life,” then I have raised my spirit into the office of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. This, however, is exactly what most advocates of “spiritual Christianity” have done. In the name of Christ and the Spirit, they have made their spiritual experiences a part of the life of God.

Abstractionism in religion reduces God at best to a wise counsellor, who gives us a beautiful and an inspiring word, and raises man to the center of the stage as the reality of being. Man’s word is then the determinative word, and man is the living power.

The Bible, it cannot be repeated often enough, was not given to man to be an inspiring word, but *the command word*. It is not intended to please man, but to declare to him what he is in himself, and what he must be in the Lord. The Bible is inspired, not inspiring; it is infallible, because it is the word of God. But, for the abstractionist, the Bible is often a gauche book which must be spiritualized and read symbolically in order to be made palatable.

The Bible forbids us to make any reduction or abstraction. We can neither add nor subtract from God’s one word, either in our faith and obedience, or in our textual transmission of Scripture (Deut. 4:1-2). This command is repeated in Revelation 22:18-19; now, there is a conclusion to the words of that one word.

But this is not all. Scripture requires us to take the totality of God’s given word. It also requires us to come to Him with the totality of our being. All forms of self-mutilation are forbidden to the priests of God (Lev. 21:1-5): God requires the service of the whole man. This law applies also to all men: all mutilated men are barred from the privileges of the community (Deut. 23:1). Such a man may become a believer and be assured of his eternal security in Christ (Acts 8:26-40), but the rule of the kingdom belongs to whole men and requires the wholeness of life. The Christian

⁴⁶ Greg L. Bahnsen: “Future and Folly,” in *The Chalcedon Report*, no. 97, (September, 1973), pp. 2-4.

faith cannot be abstracted into a corner of life which is separated from the rest and is called the religious or the spiritual realm. The religious realm is the totality of things.

A systematic Biblical theology will thus find it impossible to limit the religious realm to the ecclesiastical domain. God is totally God and Lord: the universe is totally under Him and His law-word. A systematic theology which is faithful to the living God will thus speak to the totality of man and his life.

It will be systematically and faithfully Biblical. To depart from Scripture is to depart from the living God. It is the word of God which reveals God, not the word of man. Therefore, "Hear ye the word of the LORD" (Jer. 2:4), not the abstractions and words of man. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa. 2:22).

Systematic Theology

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The Author

Rousas John Rushdoony (1916–2001) was a well-known American scholar, writer, and author of over thirty books. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. An ordained minister, he worked as a missionary among Paiute and Shoshone Indians and as a pastor to two California churches. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation, an education organization devoted to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. His writing in the Chalcedon Report and his numerous books inspired a generation of believers to be active in reconstructing the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. Until his death, he resided in Vallecito, California, where he engaged in research, lecturing, and assisting others in developing programs to put the Christian faith into action.

[The Ministry of Chalcedon](#)

Chalcedon (kal-SEE-don) is a Christian educational organization devoted exclusively to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctly Christian scholarship to the world at large. It makes available a variety of services and programs, all geared to the needs of interested ministers, scholars, and laymen who understand the propositions that Jesus Christ speaks to the mind as well as the heart, and that His claims extend beyond the narrow confines of the various institutional churches. We exist in order to support the efforts of all orthodox denominations and churches. Chalcedon derives its name from the great ecclesiastical Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which produced the crucial Christological definition: “Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man....” This formula directly challenges every false claim of divinity by any human institution: state, church, cult, school, or human assembly. Christ alone is both God and man, the unique link between heaven and earth. All human power is therefore derivative: Christ alone can announce that, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Historically, the Chalcedonian creed is therefore the foundation of Western liberty, for it sets limits on all authoritarian human institutions by acknowledging the validity of the claims of the One who is the source of true human freedom (Galatians 5:1). The Chalcedon Foundation publishes books under its own name and that of Ross House Books. It produces a magazine, Faith for All of Life, and a newsletter, The Chalcedon Report, both bimonthly. All gifts to Chalcedon are tax deductible. For complimentary trial subscriptions, or information on other book titles, please contact:

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