

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 11

Volume 11 • Number 1 • January 1987

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership, interpreting the Christian faith for
contemporary living.*

GENERAL EDITOR: SUNAND SUMITHRA



Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

theology:—i.e., entrusting to human hands a divine task. We are faced with the incapacity of man for the task of theology, speaking of God.

One becomes conscious of this problem only when one understands what theology truly is. As long as we think of theology in terms of religious anthropology, or of the history, psychology, sociology, phenomenology, of religion, we are on relatively safe ground—because we are dealing with nothing but ourselves. As soon, however, [p. 20](#) as we have to understand and speak the things of *God*, we are incompetent, as incompetent as any other human being. It takes a cleansing of our lips ([Is. 6](#)); it takes an act of forgiveness on God's part ([Ps. 78:38ff.](#)) to establish and restore theology to its proper position and so to its three horizons of commitment. It also takes an act of God to bring about another nodal point in history when his truth prevails again over man's lies and rebellion, and when he himself, now seemingly distant, as well as the distant church, distant humanity, and our distant neighbour come into focus again.

Dr. Klaus Bockmuehl is a professor of Systematic Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada. [p. 21](#)

The Justification of Theology with a Special Application to Contemporary Christology

Robert L. Reymond

Reprinted from Presbyterian, Spring 1986 with permission

Reymond's following article makes a very beneficial reading for several reasons. Not only does he present the four-fold justification/basis for theology but he also adequately demonstrates these bases in his own theologization. Moreover, his two case studies on Bultmann's Existential Jesus as well as Käsemann's Docetic Christ are good inquiries in their own rights. Further the choice of christology is undoubtedly a central issue in any christian theology in any time, makes this article very exciting.

Editor

The highly esteemed American philosopher-theologian of revered and recent memory, Dr. Gordon Haddon Clark, begins his 1984 book, *In Defense of Theology*, with the following statement:

Theology, once acclaimed 'the Queen of the Sciences', today hardly rises to the rank of a scullery maid; it is often held in contempt, regarded with suspicion, or just ignored.¹

If Professor Clark is correct in his assessment, that is to say, if there is today this widespread disregard bordering on contempt for theology, one might at first blush be

¹ Gordon Haddon Clark, *In Defense of Theology* (Milford, Michigan: Mott Media, 1984), p. 3.

excused if he should feel it entirely proper to be done with theology altogether and to devote his time and energies to some intellectual pursuit holding out promise of higher esteem among men. The issue can be pointedly framed in the form of a question: How is theology,² as an intellectual discipline deserving today of the church's highest interest and of the occupation of men's minds, to be justified?

² The term 'theology' is used in this paper in the somewhat restricted but still fairly broad sense for the disciplines of the classical divinity curriculum with its departments of exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical theology, or for what is practically the same thing, namely, the intelligent effort which seeks to understand the Bible, viewed as revealed truth, as a coherent whole.

THE BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR THEOLOGY

When we inquire into the justification of theology, if I understand its **p. 22** intended import, what we are asking is simply this: Why should we engage ourselves in intellectual and scholarly reflection on the message and content of the Holy Scripture? And a related question is this: Why do we do this, as Christians, the particular way that we do? To these questions, I would suggest, the New Testament offers at least the following four reasons:³ (1) Christ's own theological method, (2) Christ's mandate to teach in the Great Commission, (3) the apostolic model, and (4) the apostolically-approved example and activity of the New Testament church. Consider each of these briefly with me.

Christ's Own Theological Method

It is Christ Himself, by His example and method of interpretation, who established for His church both the prerogative and the pattern to exegete the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in the special way that it does, and to derive from those Scriptures, by theological deduction, their special application to His person and work. This is clear from the New Testament itself. For in addition to those specific occasions when He applied the Old Testament to Himself (cf., for example, [Matt. 22:41-45](#); [Luke 4:14-21](#); [John 5:46](#)), we are informed in [Luke 24:25-27](#) that 'beginning with Moses and all the prophets, the glorified Christ *explained* [*diermeneusen*] to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself' (emphasis supplied). Beyond all controversy, such an exhaustive engagement in Scripture exposition involved our Lord in theological activity in the most heightened sense.

In his small book, *According to the Scriptures*, with great sensitivity and depth of insight, C. H. Dodd develops the point I am making here. Let us listen to this eminent biblical scholar for a few moments:

At the earliest period of Church history to which we can gain access, we find in being the rudiments of an original, coherent and flexible method of biblical exegesis which was already beginning to yield results.

... Very diverse scriptures are brought together so that they interpret one another in hitherto unsuspected ways. To have brought together, for example, the Son of Man who is the people or the saints of the Most High, the Man of God's right hand, who is also the vine of Israel, the Son of Man who after humiliation is crowned with glory and honour, and the victorious priest-king at the right hand of God, is an achievement of interpretative imagination which results in the creation of an entirely new figure. It involves an original, and far-reaching, resolution of the tension between **p. 23** the individual and the collective aspects of several of these figures, which in turn makes it possible to bring into a single focus the 'plot' of the Servant poems ... of the psalms of the righteous sufferer, and of the prophecies of the fall and recovery (death and resurrection) of the people of God, and finally offers a fresh understanding of the mysterious imagery of apocalyptic eschatology.

This is a piece of genuinely creative thinking. Who was responsible for it? The early Church, we are accustomed to say, ... But creative thinking is rarely done by committees, useful as they may be for systematizing the fresh ideas of individual thinkers, and for stimulating them to further thought. It is individual minds that originate. Who was the originating mind here?

Among Christian thinkers of the first age known to us there are three of genuinely creative power: Paul, the author to the Hebrews, and the Fourth Evangelist. We are

³ I wish to express my indebtedness to conversations with Professor David C. Jones, my friend and colleague in the Systematics Department at Covenant Theological Seminary for some of the thoughts I am expressing here.

precluded from proposing any one of them for the honour of having originated the process, since even Paul, greatly as he contributed to its development, demonstrably did not originate it ... The New Testament itself avers that it was Jesus Christ Himself who first directed the minds of His followers to certain parts of the Scriptures as those in which they might find illumination upon the meaning of His mission and destiny ... I can see no reasonable ground for rejecting the statements of the gospels that (for example) He pointed to Psalm cx as a better guide to the truth about His mission and destiny than the popular beliefs about the Son of David, or that He made that connection of the 'Lord' at God's right hand with the Son of Man in Daniel which proved so momentous for Christian thought, or that He associated with the Son of Man language which had been used of the Servant of the Lord, and employed it to hint at the meaning, and the issue, of His own approaching death. To account for the beginning of this most original and fruitful process of rethinking the Old Testament we need to postulate a creative mind. The gospels offer us one.⁴

Beyond dispute the gospels depict Jesus of Nazareth as entering deeply into the engagement of mind with Scripture and drawing out original and fascinating theological deductions therefrom. And it is He who establishes for us the pattern and end of our own theologizing: if we would be His disciples, we must follow Him in making the interpretation of Scripture the basis and norm of our theology, and we must arrive finally at *Him* in all of our theological labours. p. 24

The Mandate in the Great Commission

Theology is a task of the Church; of this there can be no doubt. For after setting for us the example and establishing for us the pattern and end of all theology, the glorified Christ commissioned His Church to *teach* (*didaskantes*) all nations ([Matt. 28:18-20](#)). And theology, essential to this teaching, serves in carrying out the Great Commission as it seeks to set forth in a logical and coherent manner the truth God has revealed in holy Scripture about Himself and the world He has created.

The divine Commission to the Church to disciple, baptize, and teach all nations clearly places upon the Church, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, certain *intellectual* demands. There is the *evangelistic* demand to address the gospel to the needs of every generation; for the Commission is to disciple all the nations, with no restriction as to time and place. There is the *didactic* (or catechetical) demand 'to correlate the manifold data of revelation in our understanding and the more effectively to apply this knowledge to all phases of our thinking and conduct.'⁵ Finally, there is as we have already noted, the *apologetic* (or polemic) demand ultimately to justify the existence of Christianity and to protect the message of Christianity from adulteration and distortion (cf. [Tit. 1:9](#)). Theology has risen, and properly so, in the life of the Church in response to these concrete demands in fulfilling the Great Commission.

The Apostolic Model

⁴ C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: James Nisbet and Co.: 1952), pp. 108-110. Two caveats are in order here, however. First while we obviously appreciate Dodd's granting to Jesus alone the creative genius to bring these several Old Testament themes together to enhance understanding of His person and work, it is extremely important to insist that, in so doing, Jesus did not bring a meaning to the Old Testament that was not intrinsic to the Old Testament itself. Second, I believe that the 'Son of Man' in [Daniel 7:13-14](#) is properly to be interpreted individually as applying to Christ rather than collectively as Dodd suggests.

⁵ John Murray, 'Systematic Theology', *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXV (May, 1963), p. 138.

Such activity as eventually led to the Church's engagement in theology is found not only in the teaching of Jesus Christ but also in the rest of the New Testament. Paul wastes no time after his baptism in his effort to 'prove' (*sumbibazōn*) to his fellow Jews that Jesus is the Christ ([Acts 9:22](#)). Later, as a seasoned missionary, he enters the synagogue in Thessalonica 'and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* [*dielexato*, 'dialogued'] with them *from the Scriptures* [N.B.], *explaining* [*dianoignōn*] and *proving* [*paratithemenos*] that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead' ([Acts 17:2-3](#); emphasis supplied). The learned Apollos 'vigorously *refuted* [*diakatelegcheto*] the Jews in public debate, *proving* [*epideiknus*] *from the Scriptures* [N.B.] that Jesus was the Christ' ([Acts 18:28](#); emphasis supplied).

Nor is Paul's evangelistic 'theologizing' limited to the synagogue. p. 25 While waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens Paul 'reasoned [*dielegeto*] in the synagogue with Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as *in the marketplace* day by day *with those who happened to be there*' ([Acts 17:17](#); emphasis supplied). This got him an invitation to address the Aeropagus which he did in terms that could be understood by the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers gathered there (cf. his quotation from the Greek poets in [17:27](#)), without, however, any accommodation of his message to what they were prepared to believe. In a masterful theological summary presented with evangelistic and apologetic sensitivity, Paul carefully presented the great truths of revelation concerning the Creator, man created in His image, and man's need to come to God through the Judge and Saviour He has provided, even Jesus Christ.

But Paul's 'theologizing' was not exclusively evangelistic. In addition to that three-month period at Ephesus during which he spoke boldly in the synagogue, arguing persuasively (*dialegomenos kai peithōn*) about the Kingdom of God ([Acts 19:8](#)), Paul had discussions (*dialegemenos*) daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus over a two-year period, not hesitating, as he was to say later (cf. [Acts 20:17-35](#)), 'to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught [*didaxai*] you publicly and from house to house,' declaring to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in Jesus Christ ([Acts 20:20-21](#)). In a word, he declares: 'I have not hesitated to proclaim the *whole will of God*' ([Acts 20:27](#); emphasis supplied).

No doubt we see in the epistle to the Romans, Paul's major exposition of the message entrusted to him, not only the broad outline and essential content of the gospel he preached but also the theologizing method he employed. Notice should be taken here of the theological flow of the letter; how Paul moves logically and systematically from the plight of the human condition to God's provision of salvation in Christ, then, in turn, on to the results of justification, objections to the doctrine, and finally to the Christian ethic that results from God's mercies toward us. It detracts in no way from Paul's 'inspiredness' (Thess. [2:13](#); [2 Pet. 3:15-16](#); [2 Tim. 3:16](#)) to acknowledge, as he set forth this theological flow of thought under the Spirit's superintendence, that he reflected upon, and deduced theological conclusions from (1) earlier inspired conclusions, (2) biblical history, and (3) his own personal position in Christ. Indeed, one finds these 'theologizing reflections and deductions' embedded in the very heart of some of the Apostle's most radical assertions. For example, after stating certain propositions, at least ten times Paul asks: 'What shall we say [conclude] then?' and proceeds to 'deduce by good p. 26 and necessary consequence' the conclusion he desires his reader to reach (cf. [3:5](#), [9](#); [4:1](#); [6:1](#), [15](#); [7:7](#); [8:31](#); [9:14](#), [30](#); [11:7](#)). In the fourth chapter the Apostle draws the theological conclusion both that circumcision is unnecessary to the blessing of justification (!) and that Abraham is the spiritual father of the uncircumcised Gentle believer (!) from the simple observation based on Old Testament history that 'Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him for righteousness' ([Gen. 15:6](#)) some fourteen years *before* he was circumcised ([Gen.](#)

[17:24](#))—striking theological deductions, to say the least, to draw in his particular religious and cultural milieu simply from the ‘before and after’ relationship between two historical events! Later, to prove that ‘at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace’ ([Rom. 11:5](#)), Paul simply appeals to his own status as a Christian Jew ([Rom. 11:2](#)), again a striking assertion to derive from the simple fact of his own faith in Jesus.

The Activity of the New Testament Church

Finally, our engagement in the task and formation of theology as an intellectual discipline based upon and derived from Scripture gains additional support from the obvious activity of the New Testament church itself,⁶ for our attention is again already called in the New Testament to a body of saving truth, as in [Jude 2](#) (‘the faith once delivered to the saints’), [1 Timothy 6:20](#) (‘the deposit’), [2 Thessalonians 2:15](#) (‘the traditions’), [Romans 6:17](#) (‘the pattern of doctrine’), and the ‘faithful sayings’ of the pastoral letters of Paul ([1 Tim. 1:15, 3:1, 4:8–9; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; Tit. 3:3–8](#)).⁷ These descriptive terms and phrases unmistakably and incontestably indicate that in the days of the Apostles the theologizing process of reflecting upon and comparing Scripture, collating, deducing, and framing doctrinal statements into credal formulae approaching the character of Church confessions had already begun (cf., for example, [Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Tim. 3:16](#)). And all of this was done with the full knowledge and approval of the Apostles, indeed, with the full and personal engagement and involvement of the Apostles themselves in the theologizing process (cf., for example, in [Acts 15:1–16:5](#) the activity of the Apostles in the Jerusalem assembly, labouring not only as Apostles but also as elders in the deliberative activity of preparing a conciliar theological p. 27 response to the issue being considered then for the Church’s guidance).

Hence, when we today, under the guidance of the Spirit of God and in faith, come to holy Scripture and with all the best intellectual tools make an effort to explicate it, trace its workings in the world, systematize its teachings, and propagate its message, thus hard won, to the world, we are standing squarely in the theological process present in and witnessed and mandated by the New Testament itself!

Surely herein resides the biblical justification for the theological enterprise in our own time and our personal engagement in it. Indeed, so clear is the Scriptural mandate for theology that one is not speaking to excess were he to suggest that our concern should not be one primarily of whether we should *engage* ourselves in theology or not—the Lord of the Church and His Apostles leave us no other option here (cf. [Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:9; 2:1](#)); we have to be engaged in it if we are going to be faithful to Him. Rather, what should be of primary concern to us is whether, in our engagement in it, we are *listening* as intently and submissively as we should to Christ’s voice speaking to His Church in holy Scripture. In short, our concern should be: Is our theology correct? Or perhaps better: Is it orthodox?

A CASE IN POINT: TWO MODERN CHRISTOLOGIES

An illustration of what, for me, highlights this greater concern is what is being written today in the area of Christology. Such writing in its own way justifies in a powerful way

⁶ Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, ‘Credal Elements in the New Testament’, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, 1950, 1960).

⁷ Cf. George W. Knight, III, *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Letters* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1968), for a scholarly exposition of these faithful sayings.

the evangelical's continuing engagement in orthodox theology. Just as the central issue of Church theology in the Book of Acts was christological (cf. [9:22](#); [17:2–3](#); [18:28](#)), so also today Christ's own questions, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?' ([Matt. 22:42](#)), continue to occupy centre stage in current theological debate. While the conciliar decision of Chalcedon in AD 451 empousing a two-natured Christ has generally satisfied Christian orthodoxy, it has fallen upon hard times in the Church of our day (cf., for example, an extreme example of this in *The Myth of God Incarnate*). The Church dogma that this one Lord Jesus Christ is very God and very man and is both of these in the full unabridged sense of these terms and is both of these at the same time has been increasingly rejected not only, it is alleged, on biblical grounds but also as a contradiction, an impossibility, indeed, a rank absurdity.

The Johannine phrase, *ho logos sarx egeneto*, is at the centre of the modern debate and in its own way, as a point of departure, [p. 28](#) crystallized the major issue of the current controversy: Is Christology to be a Christology 'from below', that is, is to take its starting point in a human Jesus (*sarx*), or is it to be a Christology 'from above', that is, is it to begin with the Son of God (*ho logos*) come to us from heaven? And in either case, what precisely is the import of John's choice of verbs: the *egeneto*? Faced with such questions, is it not clear that never has the need been greater for careful, biblically-governed, hermeneutically-meticulous theologizing as the church addresses the perennial question: *Who is Jesus of Nazareth?*

Any response to this question would be well-advised to recall at the outset that the ultimate aim of the early Fathers throughout the decades of controversy over this matter (AD 325–451) was simply to describe and to defend the verbal picture which the gospels and the rest of the New Testament draw of Jesus of Nazareth. Certainly, inter-nicene party strife and rancour between some individuals made complete objectivity in the debate extremely difficult at times. But a faithful reading of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers must lead one to the conclusion that it was neither the concern just to 'have it one's own way' nor the desire to contrive a doctrinal formula so intellectually preposterous that it would be a stumbling block to all but the most gullible of men that led them to speak as they did of Jesus Christ as a two-natured single person. Rather, what ultimately underlay their entire effort, we may affirm without fear of correction, was simply the faithful (that is, 'full of faith') resolve to set forth as accurately as words available to them could do what the New Testament said about Jesus. If their creedal terms were sometimes the terms of earlier and current philosophy, those terms nonetheless served the Church well then (were they not simply 'contextualizing' the truths of Scripture about Christ?) and still do in most quarters of the Christian community in communicating who the Bible declares Him to be. If the 'four great Chalcedonian adverbs' (*asunkutōs*) [without confusion], *atreptō's* [without transmutation], *adiaretōs* [without division], *achōristōs* [without separation]) describe not so much how the two natures—the human and the divine—are to be related to each other in the unity of the one Person of Christ as how they *are not* to be related, again it can and should be said that these adverbs served to protect both what the Fathers believed the Scriptures clearly taught about Jesus and, at the same time, the *mystery* of His person as well. My own deep longing is that the Church today might be as faithful and perceptive in assessing the picture of Jesus in the gospels for our time as these spiritual forebears were for theirs.

I fear, however, that it is not just a modern dissatisfaction with their [p. 29](#) usage of Greek philosophical terminology or the belief that the early Fathers simply failed to read the Bible as accurately as they might have that lies behind the totally new and different reconstructions of Jesus presently being produced by some doctors in the Church. Rather, it is a new and foreign manner of reading the New Testament, brought in by the 'assured

results' of 'Enlightenment criticism'—a new hermeneutic reflecting canons of interpretation neither derived from Scripture nor sensitive to grammatical/historical rules or reading an ancient text—that is leading men to draw totally new portraits of Christ; but along with these new portraits of Christ, a Christ also emerges whose purpose is no longer to reverse the effects of a space/time fall from an original state of integrity and to bring men into the supernatural Kingdom of God and eternal life, but rather to shock the modern somehow into an existentially-conceived 'authentic existence', or into any number of other religio-psychological responses to Him.

Now I believe that it is quite in order to ask, over against the creators of these 'new Christs': Is the mindset of modern man really such that he is incapable of believing in the Christ and the so-called 'mythological kerygma' (Bultmann) of the New Testament? Is it so that modern science compels the necessity of 'demythologizing' the church's proclamation and to reinterpret it existentially? I believe not. In fact, what / find truly amazing is just how many truly impossible things (more than Lewis Carroll's seven, I assure you) that modern man is able to believe every day—such as the view that asserts that this present universe is the result of an impersonal beginning out of nothing, plus time plus chance, or that man is the result of forces latent within nature itself, or that man is essentially good and morally perfectible through education and social manipulation, or that morals need not be grounded in unchanging ethical absolutes.

It is also still in order to ask 'Who has better read and more carefully handled the biblical material—the ancient or the new Christologist—with reference to both the person and purpose of Jesus Christ?

Bultmann's Existential Jesus

Consider Bultmann, the exegete, for a moment as a case in point. When, in his commentary on John, he comes to [John 1:14](#), he writes: 'The Logos became flesh! It is the *language of mythology* that is here employed',⁸ specifically 'the mythological language of Gnosticism'.
p. 30 For Bultmann, all the emphasis in this statement falls on *sarx* and its meaning, so that 'the Revealer is nothing but a man'.⁹ Moreover, the Revealer's *doxa* 'Is not to be seen ... *through* the *sarx* ...; it is to be seen in the *sarx* and nowhere else'.

When one takes exception to this and observes, however, that this statement cannot mean that the Word became flesh and thus ceased to be the Word (who earlier was said to be in the beginning with God and who was God [[1:1](#)]), both because the Word is still the subject of the phrase that follows, 'and we beheld his glory as [the *hos* here denotes not only comparison but also identification]¹⁰ of the unique Son of the Father', (cf. TDNT, IV 740, fn. 15) whom John then further describes as 'the unique one, God [Himself; F. F. Bruce], who is the bosom of the Father' ([1:18](#)), one has just reason to wonder at the exegesis behind Bultmann's response that John's assertions are reflecting the perspective of *faith* which has understood that the revelation of *God* is located precisely in the *humanity* of Jesus, and that they are not statements about the divine *being* of Jesus but rather the later Church's mythological shaping of the *meaning* of Jesus for faith!

Can the exegete who is not a follower of the highly personal, individualistic, existential school of Bultmann be blamed if he politely demurs from this perspective? For here there remains not even a kenotic Christ who once was God and who divested Himself of His

⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray from *Das Evangelium des Johannes*; (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62, cf. too his statement, 'It is in his sheer humanity that he is the Revealer' (p. 63).

¹⁰ Cf. F. Buchsel, '*Monogenes*', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, 740 (fn. 15).

deity but only an existential Christ who in *being* never was or is God but is only the Revealer of God to *faith*. But of course the ‘faith’ here is purely subjective and existential, devoid of any historical fact.

The questions must be squarely faced: Is Bultmann’s interpretation preferable to that of Chalcedon? Is it in any sense exegetically sustainable? Is not the language of [John 1:14](#) clearly the language of an *eyewitness* (cf. ‘we beheld’ and the commentary on this phrase in [1 John 1:1–3](#))? And does not the Evangelist imply in his ‘we beheld’ that *others* as well as he ‘beheld His glory’ (cf. [John 21:24](#)), which glory the identifies as (*hos*) the glory of His divine glory being evident on nearly every page of the gospels, in every sign miracle he performed, a glory which neither a bystander could overlook nor an enemy deny (cf. [2:11](#); [3:2](#); [9:16](#); [11:45–48](#); [12:10–12](#); [37–41](#); cf. [Acts 2:22](#), ‘as you p. 31 yourselves know’; cf., too, [Acts 4:16](#); ‘... and we cannot deny it’).¹¹ Later, when doubting Thomas eventually came to faith in Jesus and cried out, ‘My Lord and my God’ ([20:28](#)), he did so not because an existential flash bringing new pistis appreciation of the meaning of the human Jesus for human existence overpowered him, but because his demand to see the print of the nails with his own eyes was graciously met (cf. [John 20:25](#), [27](#), [29](#)), and because the only possible implication of Christ’s resurrection appearance for the nature of His *being* (cf. [Rom. 1:4](#)) impacted inescapably upon him: ‘He is my Lord and my God!’

Bultmann’s Christology, only one of many examples of a Christology ‘from below’, represents one extreme to which faulty theologizing can lead the church—the extreme of portraying the Christ as to His being as a mere man and only a man. But this conclusion, not only the Fourth gospel but also the New Testament as a whole find intolerable. A careful consideration of each context will show that *theos*, the Greek word for ‘God’, is employed as a christological title at least eight times in the New Testament ([John 1:1](#), [18](#); [20:28](#); [1 John 5:20](#); [Rom. 9:5](#); [Tit. 2:13](#); [Heb. 1:8](#), [2 Pet. 1:1](#); cf. also [Col. 2:9](#)). Hundreds of times He is called *kurios*, ‘Lord’, the Greek word employed by the LXX to translate the Hebrew Tetragrammaton (cf., for example, [Matt. 7:21](#); [25:37](#), [44](#); [Rom. 10:9–13](#); [1 Cor. 2:8](#); [12:3](#); [2 Cor. 4:5](#); [Phil. 2:11](#); [2 Thess. 1:7–10](#)). Old Testament statements spoken by or describing Yahweh, the Old Testament God of the covenant, are applied to Christ in the New (cf., for example, [Ps. 102:25–27](#) and [Heb. 1:10–12](#); [Isa. 6:1–20](#) and [John 12:40–41](#); [Isa. 8:12–13](#) and [1 Pet. 3:14–15](#); [Isa. 45:22](#) and [Matt. 11:28](#); [Joel 2:32](#) and [Rom. 10:13](#)). Divine attributes and actions are ascribed to Him ([Mark 2:5](#), [8](#); [Matt. 18:20](#); [John 8:58](#); [Matt. 24:30](#)). Then there is Jesus’ own self-consciousness of His divine nature (cf. [John 3:13](#); [6:38](#), [46](#), [62](#); [8:23](#), [42](#); [17:6](#), [24](#); and the famous so-called ‘embryonic Fourth gospel’ in [Matt. 11:25–28](#) and [Luke 10:21–22](#)). Finally, the weight of testimony which flows from His miracles and His resurrection ([Rom. 1:4](#)) must be faced without evasion. It carries one beyond the bounds of credulity to be asked to believe that the several New Testament writers, living and writing under such varying circumstances, places, and times, were nonetheless all seduced by the same mythology of Gnosticism. All the more is this conclusion highly doubtful in light of the fact that the very presence of p. 32 a pre-Christian Gnosticism has been seriously challenged by much recent scholarship.¹²

¹¹ It is directly germane to our point here to observe in connection with Christ’s first sign miracle ([John 2:1–11](#)) that John does not say that the disciples’ faith was the pathway to the beholding of Jesus’ glory, but to the contrary, that His miracle manifested His glory, and His disciples believed on Him *as a consequence*.

¹² Cf. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, first edition, 1973; updated edition, 1983), particularly Chapter 12; cf. also C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953); the Dodd Festschrift, *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, especially the articles by W. F. Albright and R. P. Casey; and R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, p. LVI; *et al.*

Käsemann's Docetic Christ

Now, very interestingly, it is by one of Bultmann's students, Ernst Käsemann, that we find argued the other extreme in current Christology.¹³ In his *The Testament of Jesus*, Käsemann also deals at some length with the meaning of [John 1:14](#), only he argues, to use Ridderbos' words, that the Evangelist intends by *sarx* here 'not the means to veil the glory of God in the man Jesus, but just the opposite, to reveal that glory before every eye. The flesh is the medium of the glory.'

According to Käsemann, John's Jesus, far from being a man, is rather the portrayal of a god walking across the face of the earth. Commenting on 'the Word became flesh', Käsemann queries: 'Is not this statement totally over-shadowed by the confession, 'We beheld his glory', so that it receives its meaning from it?'¹⁴ Thinking it to be so, Käsemann contends that the Fourth gospel uses the earthly life of Jesus 'merely as a backdrop for the Son of God proceeding through the world ...'¹⁵ Furthermore, he urges: '... the glory of Jesus determines the [Evangelist's] whole presentation so thoroughly from the very outset that the incorporation and position of the passion narrative of necessity becomes problematical', so problematical, in fact, Käsemann believes, that 'one is tempted to regard it as being a mere postscript [*Nachklappt*] which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it organically into his work'. So great is John's emphasis on the divine glory of Jesus that, according to Käsemann, the fourth gospel has slipped into a 'naive docetism': p. 33

John [formulated who Jesus was and is] in his own manner. In so doing he exposed himself to dangers ... One can hardly fail to recognize the danger of his Christology of glory, namely, the danger of docetism. It is present in a still naive, unreflected form ...¹⁶

In sum, John 'was able to give an answer to the question of the centre of the Christian message only in the form of a naive docetism', Jesus' humanity really playing no role as it stands 'entirely in the shadow' of Jesus' glory as 'something quite non-essential'.¹⁷ 'In what sense', Käsemann asks, 'is he flesh, who walks on the water and through closed doors, who cannot be captured by his enemies, who at the well of Samaria is tired and desires a drink, yet has no need of drink and has food different from that which his disciples seek? ... How does all this agree with the understanding of a realistic incarnation?'¹⁸ He seriously doubts whether 'the "true man" of later incarnational theology becomes believable' in John's Christology.

¹³ I am indebted to Herman N. Ridderbos for calling my attention to this contrast between teacher and student. Cf. Ridderbos, 'The Word Became Flesh', *Through Christ's Word* (Translated by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.; Edited by W. Robert Godfrey and Jesse L. Boyd, III; Phillipsburg, New Jersey; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 3–22, especially p. 5.

¹⁴ Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (translated by Gerhard Krodel from *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 9–10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 77; cf. his statement. 'The assertion, quite generally accepted today, that the Fourth Gospel is anti-docetic is completely unproven' (p. 26, fn. 41).

¹⁷ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

What is one to say about Käsemann's opposite extreme to that of Bultmann? One can only applaud the emphasis here on the 'very God' character of Jesus, but surely Ridderbos is right when, commenting on [John 1:14](#), he writes:

'Egeneto, 'became', is not there for nothing. It is surely a matter of a new mode of existence. Also, not accidental is the presence of *sarx*, 'flesh', which ... indicates man in his weakness, vulnerability, and transiency. Therefore, it has been said, not incorrectly, that this statement ... certainly approximates the opposite of what one would expect if it were spoken of a docetic ... world of thought.¹⁹

Moreover, nowhere, is Jesus' humanity more apparent in a natural and unforced way than in John's gospel. Our Lord can grow weary from a journey, sit down at a well for a moment of respite, and ask for water. He calls Himself ([8:40](#)) and is called by others a man (*anthropōs*) many times ([4:29](#); [5:12](#); [7:46](#); [9:11](#), [16](#), [24](#); [10:33](#); [11:47](#); [18:17](#), [29](#); [19:5](#)). People know His father and mother ([6:42](#); [7:27](#); [1:45](#)). He can spit on the ground and make mud with His saliva ([9:6](#)). p. 34 He can weep over the sorrow Lazarus' death brings to Mary and Martha ([11:35](#)). He can be troubled (*hē psuchē mou tetaraktai*) as he contemplates His impending death on the cross ([12:27](#)). Here is clearly a *man*, for whom death was no friend, who could instinctively recoil against it as a powerful enemy to be feared and resisted. He can have a crown of thorns pressed down on His head ([19:2](#)) and be struck in the face ([19:3](#)). At His crucifixion (N.B.: he can die!) a special point²⁰ is made of the spear thrust in His side (cf. also *sōma*, that is, 'body' in [19:38](#), [40](#)), from which wound blood and water flowed forth ([19:34](#)). And after His resurrection on at least two occasions He shows His disciples His hands and feet, and even eats breakfast with them by the Sea of Galilee. Here is no docetic Christ! Clearly, in John's Christology we have to do with *sarx*, 'flesh', a man in weakness and vulnerability, a 'true man'. In Käsemann's interpretation of John's Jesus, while we certainly have to do with a Christology 'from above', the Christ therein is so 'wholly other' that His humanity is only a 'costume' and no part of a genuine Incarnation.

Where precisely does the biblical material in John lead us, however? (and here I turn to my own 'theologizing'). Does not a fair reading of John's testimony in its entirety yield up a Jesus who is true man, and yet at the same time One who is *more* (not other) than true man? And in what direction are we instructed to look for the meaning of this 'more than' save just the 'more than' of the deity of the Son of God, the One who was with God the Father in the beginning and who Himself was and is God ([John 1:1-3](#)), who 'for us men and for our salvation', without ceasing to be what He is, took into union with Himself at the virginal conception what He was not and became a man, and as the God-man entered the world from the body of a woman (cf. [Gal. 4:4](#))?

And what about Käsemann's suggestion that the fourth gospel's *theologia gloriae* so overpowers everything in its path that there is really no room in it for a *theologia crucis*, that John bring it in simply because he cannot ignore the tradition? I respectfully submit that such a perspective emanates from his own theological system rather than from exegesis and objective analysis. The *theologia crucis* fits as comfortably in John's Gospel

¹⁹ Ridderbos, *ibid.* p. 10. The reference in the last sentence is to the opinions of R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannes evangelium*, p. 244, and R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, I–XII, p. 24. But one could add almost indefinitely to this list the names of scholars who view John as self-consciously opposing docetism by his statement in [1:14](#), for example, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) p. 102, and F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 39–40.

²⁰ Cf. [John 19:35](#): 'The man who saw it has given testimony, and his teaching is true.'

as it does in the Synoptics or elsewhere. It is introduced at the outset in the Forerunner's 'Behold the Lamb' ([1:26](#), [29](#)) and continues throughout as an integral aspect of John's Christology, for example, in the several references to the 'hour' that was to come upon Jesus ([2:4](#); [7:30](#); [8:20](#); [12:23](#); [13:1](#); [17:1](#)), in Jesus' [p. 35](#) Good Shepherd discourse where He reveals that He would lay down His life for the sheep ([10:11](#), [15](#)), and in His teaching of the grain of seed which must die ([12:24](#)).

It must be clearly seen that the implication in Käsemann's intimation that the dogma of a *divine* Saviour does violence to a theology of the *cross* mortally wounds Christianity as the redemptive religion of God at its very heart. Both Christ's deity and Christ's cross are essential to our salvation. But the implication of Käsemann's point is just to the opposite effect: that one can have a theology of glory or a theology of the cross, but one cannot have both simultaneously. But, I ask, do not these two stand as friends side by side throughout the New Testament? Paul, for example, whose theology is specifically a theology of the cross can, even as John, see precisely *in the cross* Christ's glory and triumph over the kingdom of darkness ([Col. 2:15](#)). The writer of Hebrews can affirm that it is precisely by *his death* that Jesus destroyed the devil and liberated those enslaved by the fear of death ([2:14–15](#)). Clearly, Käsemann's construction cannot be permitted to stand unchallenged for it plays one scriptural theme off over against a second equally scriptural theme which in no way is intrinsically contradictory to it.

Is there a sense, then, in light of all of this, in which we may legitimately speak of both kinds of Christologies—'from above' and 'from below'—in the gospels? I believe there is, but in the sense clarified by the great Princeton theologian, Benjamin B. Warfield, now over seventy-five years ago:

John's gospel does not differ from the other gospels as the gospel of the divine Christ in contradistinction to the gospels of the human Christ. All the gospels are gospels of the divine Christ ... But John's gospel differs from the other gospels in taking from the divine Christ its starting point. The others begin on the plane of human life. John begins in the inter-relations of the divine persons in eternity.

The Synoptic gospels all begin with the man Jesus, whom they set forth as the Messiah in whom God has visited his people; or rather, as himself, God come to his people, according to his promise. The movement in them is from below upward ... The movement in John, on the contrary, is from above downward. He takes his start from the Divine Word, and descends from him to the human Jesus in whom he was incarnated. This Jesus, says [sic] the others, is God. This God, says John, became Jesus.²¹ [p. 36](#)

By these last paragraphs I have illustrated what I think the theological task is and how it is to be fulfilled. Our task as theologians is simply to listen to, to seek to understand and to explicate what we hear in the holy Scriptures in their entirety for the health and benefit of the Church and in order to enhance the faithful propagation of the true gospel. With a humble spirit and the best use of grammatical/historical tools of exegesis we should draw out of Scripture, always being sensitive to all of its well-balanced nuances, the truth of God revealed therein.

If we are to imitate our Lord, His Apostles, and the New Testament Church, that and that alone is our task. As we do so, we are to wage a tireless war against any and every effort of the many hostile existentialistic and humanistic philosophies which abound about us to influence the results of our labours.

²¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, 'John's First Word', *The Westminster Teacher*, January, 1908; cited in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (edited by John E. Meeter; Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970). I. 148–149.

Dr. Robert L. Reymond is a professor of Systematic Theology and apologetics at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. [p. 37](#)

Use of the Bible in Theology: A Case Study

Hans Walter Wolff

Reprinted from Currents in Theology and Mission, June 1985 with permission

Though coming out of a local theological debate, the following discussion on the use of the prophetic word of converting swords into plowshares has a profound as well as universal significance. Basing his arguments on scholarly and sound exegesis, the author convincingly demonstrates the need for the Church's unity to speak for disarmament as well as for a Christian life-style which is worthy of the one who went to the cross for the sake of reconciliation of man to God. The article takes up not only a burning issue of our time, namely, the question of war in an age of imminent nuclear holocaust, but also another burning issue in theology, namely a wholistic use of the Bible in developing a particular doctrine.

Editor

'Swords into plowshares'.—Several years ago young people of the church in the German Democratic Republic chose as their motto this phrase from the Old Testament prophets. They wore it, sewn upon their jackets and shirts, but this was immediately forbidden by the authorities. Yet this watchword quickly moved across the border into 'West Germany', where Christians who were members of the Peace Movement picked it up everywhere.

This prophetic word is not only made use of—even loved—by peace advocates, but it is also a matter of resolute controversy among theologians. In the face of the extreme threats to the future of the world, the lack of agreement on the meaning of this prophecy forbids us to remain silent on the matter. Rather, we ought to attempt to overcome the impasse, or lack of unity, in its interpretation. I shall attempt to make several exegetical observations which I hope will promote some unanimity in our understanding of the Christian's witness to the world.

For the sake of some methodological clarity, I begin with questions addressed to Prof. Trutz Rendtorff. In an interview with Professors Rendtorff and Dorothee Soelle, reported by the magazine *Der Spiegel* (Oct. 10, 1983, vol. 37, no. 41), Prof. Soelle made passing reference to the passage in Isaiah about 'beating swords into plowshares'. To this Prof. Rendtorff responded, 'Which prophet should we listen to, Prof. Soelle? Surely you know the word of the prophet Joel: "Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears" (Joel [p. 38](#) [3:10](#))? How do we resolve the dilemma of which biblical passage we should follow? We are not relieved of making our own individual decisions by reference to such texts.' The editor of *Der Spiegel* then asked: 'Who interprets the Christian teaching correctly, Prof. Soelle or Prof. Rendtorff?' Later, Rendtorff commented: