




CONTENDING FOR THE **FAITH**



Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the Saints (Jude 3).





‘With customary thoroughness and exacting exegesis, Professor Reymond leads us through a maze of theological topics which call out for a clear biblical perspective in our day. The doctrine of creation, the nature of the new covenant, the continuing authority of the fourth commandment, and the real nature of Roman Catholicism are a few among the important subjects covered. Those who are lost in a fog of modern uncertainty about the unity of Scripture, religious inclusivism and the nature of the Christian life will find Reymond a sure and clear guide. His guiding principle is that God can be glorified in our theological reflection only as we listen to the teaching of his authoritative Word. Reymond is a much needed prophetic voice in our day, calling us to pay attention to ‘Thus says the Lord.’

Iain D. Campbell
Free Church of Scotland, Back, Isle of Lewis



CONTENDING FOR THE **FAITH**

LINES IN THE SAND THAT STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH

ROBERT L. REYMOND



MENTOR

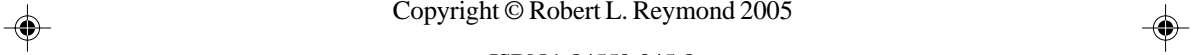




To my two colleagues in the
Department of Systematic Theology
at Covenant Theological Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri

Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr.
and
Dr. David Clyde Jones

who taught me through my association with them
more theology than either of them ever realised,
I dedicate this book
with profound gratitude.



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Preface

When I began my formal teaching at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri in 1968 my professorial title was assistant professor of systematic theology and apologetics, which title I took seriously until I was granted full professorship at which time my title was shortened to professor of systematic theology. As a professional apologist I felt the keen responsibility to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3) in those areas where I thought I had acquired some competency.

The articles in this book, for the most part, are a selection from around two hundred papers in the areas of systematic theology and apologetics that I wrote originally for the seminary classroom. Over the years I distributed them, even those that had been written originally as addresses, to my classes for student discussion during a single class period at Covenant Seminary and now at Knox Theological Seminary in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Some class discussions spilled over to a second or third class period. The one thing these articles generally have in common is their apologetic flavor, that is to say, each in its own way contends for the biblical and Reformed faith as I understand that faith. Several have been published before; some are seeing public light of day for the first time.

I offer them now to a broader readership because, in my opinion, they address topics that generally are being debated within the church at large today. The article, “The Contributions of Ugaritic Study to Old Testament Study” is the one exception here, but I opted to include it because of its apologetic value for demonstrating what I regard to be the proper approach to Old Testament study. It is my hope that these papers will generate more light than heat, but if any of them should generate some heat, which may well occur, so be it. But the reader may be assured that it was never my intention when I wrote these articles merely to generate heat; my intention was and always has been to defend the Faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

Robert L. Reymond
July 2004





Chapter One

The Justification of Theology with Special Application to Contemporary Christology

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

Theology, once acclaimed “the Queen of 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 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. One might even wonder wherein resides the justification for such a gathering as this, called for the express purpose of advancing the cause of theology. 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 mind, to be justified?


If this conference were a conference in philosophical theology, to this question I would respond with one very simple basic sentence: God has revealed the truth about himself, about us, and about the

Note: I read this paper at the Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics sponsored by Rutherford House, Edinburgh, Scotland, August 26-31, 1985.

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

²The 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.





Contending for the Faith

relationship between himself and us in Holy Scripture; therefore, we should study Holy Scripture. The product of such study would be theology. Or we might say this another way: If there is a God, he must be someone we should know; and if he has spoken to us in and by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, that very fact is sufficient warrant in itself to justify our study of the Scriptures. Indeed, it mandates the study of the Scripture, or what amounts to the same thing, the engagement of men's minds in the theological enterprise. We would even urge that not to study Scripture, *if God has revealed himself therein*, is the height of folly and the clearest evidence of a certain kind of insanity!

This particular ground or justification for the study of theology is so overwhelming that all other reasons, from an apologetic perspective, would be unnecessary. And I say again, if this were a conference in philosophical theology or apologetics, that this would be the justification I would offer for doing theology. Then the remainder of this paper would be devoted to the task of stating the case for what has often been called the first principle of the Christian faith, namely, that God is "really there" and that he has spoken to us, rationally, authoritatively, and univocally, in and by the inspired Scriptures of his prophets and apostles. This I have already attempted to do in my book on apologetic method, entitled *The Justification of Knowledge*,³ so I see no need to restate the entire case now. Suffice it to say simply at this point that, for me, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are self-attestingly, self-authenticatingly of divine origin as to content and message, the Word of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, carrying inherently within them their own divine *indicia*, such as

the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope [goal] of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery [disclosure] it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.V),

which properties, the *Confession of Faith* reminds us, are arguments whereby the Holy Scripture "doth *abundantly evidence* itself to be

³Robert L. Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge* (Third printing; Phillipsburg, New Jersey, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984).



The Justification of Theology

the Word of God” (I.V; emphasis supplied). If my concern today, may I say again, were purely and strictly an apologetic one, it would be Augustinian/Anselmic/Calvinistic fideism, expressed in the phrase “*credo ut intelligam*” (“I believe in order that I may understand”), whereby the child of God through *believing* study seeks an ever fuller *understanding*⁴ of the self-authenticating truths of God in Scripture, that I would urge and defend.

The nature of this conference, it seems to me, however, calls for the explication of a different kind of rationale for engaging in the theological enterprise, and this I would suggest should be done along lines more biblical than apologetical.

The Biblical Justification for Theology


When we inquire into the issue before this dogmatics conference on the justification of theology, if I understand its 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:⁵ (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 (see, for

⁴*Fides quaerens intellectum.*

⁵I 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.



Contending for the Faith

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* [*diermēneusen*] 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 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 of 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 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, as 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. Whose 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 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



The Justification of Theology

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 found need to postulate a creative mind. The Gospels offer us one.⁶


Beyond dispute the four Gospels depict Jesus of Nazareth as entering deeply into the engagement of the 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 labors.

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 (didaskontes)* 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, to baptize, and

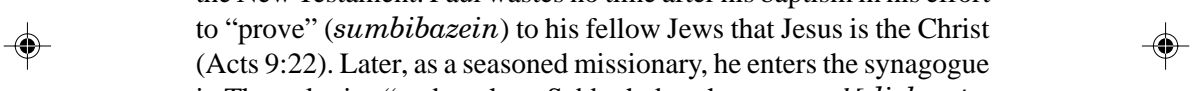
⁶C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: James Nisbet, 1952), 108-10. Two caveats are in order here, however. First, while we obviously appreciate Dodd’s granting to Jesus alone the creative genius to bring these several Old Testament themes together to enhance understanding of his person 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.



Contending for the Faith

to 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 apply this knowledge to all phases of our thinking and conduct.”⁷ 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 (see 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



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” (*sumbibazein*) 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, explaining* [*dianoigōn*] 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* [*diakatēlegcheto*] the Jews in public debate, *proving* [*epideiknūs*] *from the Scriptures* that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:28; emphasis supplied).

Nor is Paul’s evangelistic “theologizing” limited to the synagogue. While waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens Paul “*reasoned* [*dielegeto*] not only in the synagogue with Jews and the God-fearing Greeks but also *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 (see his quotation from the Greek poets in 17:27) without, however, any accommodation of his message to what they were

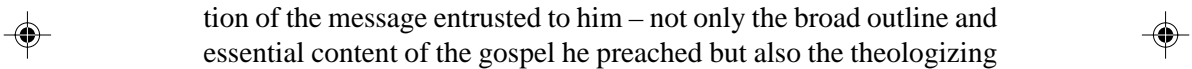
⁷John Murray, “Systematic Theology,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXV (May 1963), 138.




The Justification of Theology

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 Savior 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 (*dialegomenos*) daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus over a two-year period, not hesitating, as he would say later (see 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).



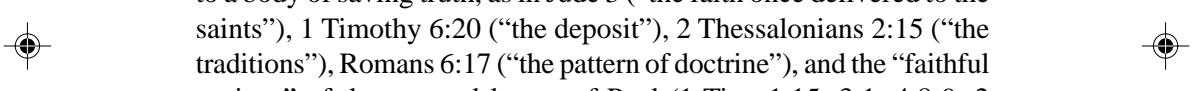
No doubt we see in Paul's letter to the Romans, his major exposition of the message entrusted to him – not only the broad outline and essential content of the gospel he preached but also the theologizing method he employed. Notice should be taken here of the theological flow of the letter: how Paul moves 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 flows from God's justifying mercies toward us. It detracts in no way from Paul's "inspiredness" (1 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) even 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 and necessary consequence" the conclusion he desires his reader to reach (see 3:5, 9; 4:1, 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 (!)



Contending for the Faith

and that Abraham is the spiritual father of the uncircumcised Gentile 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 draw, to say the least, 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,⁸ for our attention is already called in the New Testament to a body of saving truth, as in Jude 3 (“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).⁹ 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 with Scripture, collating, deducing, and framing doctrinal statements into creedal formulae approaching the character of church confessions had already begun (see, 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 (see, for example, in Acts 15:1-16:5 the activity of the Apostles in the Jerusalem assembly, laboring not as Apostles but as elders in the deliberative activity of preparing a conciliar theological response to the issue being considered then for the

⁸See J. N. D. Kelly, “Credal Elements in the New Testament,” *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, 1950, 1960).

⁹See George W. Knight, III, *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Letters* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1968), for an exposition of these “faithful sayings.”



The Justification of Theology


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 theologizing 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 (see 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 primary concern should be: Is our theology correct? Or perhaps better: Is our theology *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 the Evangelical's continuing engagement in orthodox theology. Just as the central issue of the church's theology in the Book of Acts was christological (see 9:2; 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 center stage in current theological debate. While the conciliar Definition of Chalcedon in AD 451 espousing a two-natured Christ has generally satisfied Christian orthodoxy, that Definition has fallen upon hard times in the church of our day (see, 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 simultaneously has been increasingly rejected not only, it is alleged, on biblical grounds but also as a contradiction, an impossibility, indeed, a rank absurdity. As a result, it is widely affirmed



Contending for the Faith

today that Christology in a way heretofore unparalleled in the church is simply “up for grabs.” It constitutes “a whole new ball game.”

The Johannine phrase, *ho logos sarx egeneto* (“the Word became flesh”) is at the center of the modern debate and in its own way, as a point of departure, crystallizes the major issue of the current controversy: Is Christology to be a Christology “from below,” that is, is it to take its departure from a human Jesus (*sarx*, “flesh”), or is it to be a Christology “from above,” that is, is it to begin with the Son of God (*ho logos*, “the Word”) come to us from heaven? And in either case, what precisely is the import of John’s choice of verb: 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, internecine party strife and rancor 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 expressed in 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 negative Chalcedonian adverbs” (*asunkutōs* [“without confusion”], *atreptōs* [without transmutation”], *adiaretōs* [“without division”], *achōristōs* [“without separation”]) describe not so much how the two natures –



The Justification of Theology

the human and the divine – *are* to be related in the unity of the one Person of Christ as how they are *not* to be related, still 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 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 as the result of the “assured results” of “Enlightenment criticism” – a new hermeneutic reflecting canons of interpretation neither derived from Scripture nor sensitive to grammatical/historical rules of 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 *I* 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,"¹⁰ specifically "the mythological language of Gnosticism."¹¹ For Bultmann, all the emphasis in this statement falls on *sarx* ("flesh") and its meaning, so that "the Revealer is nothing but a man."¹² Moreover, the Revealer's *doxa* ("glory") "is not to be seen...*through* the *sarx*...; it is to be seen in the *sarx* and nowhere else."¹³

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 dwelt among us," and because John's sequel to this latter phrase is "and we beheld his glory *as* [the *hōs* here denotes not only comparison but also identification]¹⁴ of the unique Son of the Father" whom John then further describes as "the unique one, God [himself; so F. F. Bruce], who is in 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* that has understood that the revelation of *God* is located precisely in the *humanity* of Jesus,¹⁵ and that they are not statements about the divine *being* of Jesus but rather the later church's

¹⁰Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, translated by G.R. Beasley-Murray from *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 61.


¹¹Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 61.

¹²Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 62; see too his statement: "It is in his sheer humanity that he is the Revealer" (63).

¹³Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 63.

¹⁴See F. Büschel, "*monogenēs*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, 740 (fn. 15).

¹⁵Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 62f., 60.



The Justification of Theology


mythological shaping of the *meaning* of Jesus for faith!

Can the exegete who is not a follower of the highly personalized, 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 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 facticity.

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* (see “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” (see John 21:24), which glory he identifies *as (hōs)* the glory of his divine being as “unique Son of the Father”? And just how observable Jesus’ divine glory was is evident on nearly every page of the Gospels, in every sign-miracle he performed, a glory which neither bystander could overlook nor enemy deny (see 2:11; 3:2; 9:16; 11:45-48; 12:10-12, 37-41; see Acts 2:22: “as you yourselves know”; see too, Acts 4:16: “...and we cannot deny it”).¹⁶ 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 (see John 20:25, 27, 29), and because the only possible implication of Christ’s resurrection appearance for the nature of his *being* (see Rom. 1:4) impacted inescapably upon him in terms of his exclamation: “[You are] 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

¹⁶It 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, his miracle manifested his glory, and his disciples believed on him *as a consequence*.



Contending for the Faith

only the Fourth Gospel but also the New Testament as a whole finds intolerable. A careful consideration of each context will show that *theos* (“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; see also Col. 2:9). Hundreds of times Jesus is called *kurios*, “Lord,” the Greek word employed by the LXX to translate the Hebrew Tetragrammaton (see, 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 (see, for example, Ps. 102:25-27 and Heb. 1:10-12; Isa. 6:1-10 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 (see 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 that 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 a pre-Christian Gnosticism has been seriously challenged by much recent scholarship.¹⁷

¹⁷See Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidence* (Updated edition; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), particularly Chapter 12; see also C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (CUP, 1955); the Dodd *Festschrift*, *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, edited by W. D. Davies and D. Daube (CUP, 1956), especially the articles by W. F. Albright and R. P. Casey; and Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), LVI.