

# *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*

## **A Textbook of Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants**

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### CHAPTER VI

#### THE DOCTRINAL USE OF THE BIBLE

Part of the task of hermeneutics is to determine the correct use of the Bible in theology and in personal life. The doctrinal interpretation of the Bible is the work of the theologian. It is advancing beyond the grammatical and the historical sense to the fuller meaning of Scripture. Grammarians may differ over grammatical points in exegesis which may or may not influence theology, but the differences among theologians are sharper and more profound because theologians are dealing with the full implications of Biblical truth. A strictly grammatical and exegetical study may never discuss the problem of the Trinity, but the problem is inescapable to the synoptic method of the theologian.

Theological interpretation is thus characterized by: (i) an extension of the grammatical meaning to discover its fuller theological significance, and (ii) a synoptic view of all the Biblical data on a given subject.

The justification for doctrinal hermeneutics is the claim of Scripture to contain a knowledge of God which may be expressed as teaching (*didachē*). Biblical religion is not merely religious experience, nor are its teachings religious speculations. Biblical religion is grounded in the objective knowledge of God. It is in philosophical language a *revelational theism*. The constant allegations that the Bible is treated by the orthodox as a "theological Euclid" or as a storehouse of "intellectual propositions about God" are not true. Belief in an objective revelation in Scripture is not immediately reducible to dry intellectualism in religion. Certainly the Reformers and the great Reformed theologians are not so guilty. But neo-orthodox writers have stated that orthodoxy represents intellectualism in religion (i.e., faith is assent to dogma or creed), and this has become the "standard" interpretation of orthodoxy by their followers without the followers taking the trouble to see if this really represents orthodoxy. Intellectualism is a disease which can infect *any* theological system including neo-orthodoxy.

Belief in a genuine revelation of God in Scripture, then, leads the conservative Protestant to believe that the Scriptures are capable of theological interpretation. Our Lord Himself made *teaching* one of the great items of the Great Commission. He was in His own ministry a *doctrinal* teacher. We note that people were astonished at His teaching (Matthew 7:28); He claimed His doctrine was from God (John 7:16); and He invited men to discover its divine origin (John 7:17).

Paul speaks of obeying doctrine from the heart (Romans 6:17) and warns us of false doctrines (Eph. 4:14). He warns Timothy to be careful of sound doctrine, referring to doctrine at least twelve times in the books of Timothy. In 2 Timothy 3:6-17, *the first profit of the Scripture is doctrine*.

Doctrine gives the Christian faith its substance and form. If there has been no disclosure of God in Scripture then there can be no doctrine, but if there has been a disclosure then doctrine is possible. From the divine disclosure doctrine is deduced, thereby giving the Christian faith its substance and content.

That the Scriptures contain a valid revelation of God in the sense that the Fathers and the Reformers so understood was repudiated by Schleiermacher, Ritschi, and religious liberalism in general. Now that liberalism's beliefs have been pounded out quite thin on the anvil of criticism, it is apparent how mistaken they were. Orthodoxy and neo-orthodoxy concur in believing that religious liberalism is theologically bankrupt.<sup>1</sup>

In that neo-orthodoxy so vigorously attacks propositional revelation, and accepts revelation as inward encounter, and reduces the Bible to the level of "witness" or "instrument," it is to be questioned if it has escaped what liberalism did not. How a non-propositional revelation gives rise to a *valid* propositional witness is the unsolved problem of neo-orthodoxy. It is our prediction that when neo-orthodoxy passes from the evangelistic stage to the critical stage a "propositional wing" will develop. As yet it is not clear how a contentless revelation (non-propositional) gives rise to a propositional witness (Scripture).

All forms of orthodoxy (Eastern, Roman Catholic, Protestant) have historically accepted a divine revelation which forms the grounds of a valid theology. For this reason we can give assent to Newman when he wrote:

I have changed in many things: in this I have not. From the age of fifteen, dogma has been the fundamental principle of my religion: I know no other religion; I cannot enter into the idea of any other sort of religion; religion, as a sentiment, is to me a dream and a mockery. As well can there be filial love without the fact of a father, as devotion without the fact of a Supreme Being.<sup>2</sup>

Doctrinal hermeneutics commences where exegetical hermeneutics leaves off. It works with the understanding that it is to be very much guided by *general hermeneutics*. Therefore a theologian builds upon general hermeneutics. The principles we suggest to govern doctrinal studies of the Bible are:

(1). *The theologian is a redeemed man standing in the circle of divine revelation.* He is a changed man; he has undergone regeneration. He is a committed man; he has found the truth in Jesus Christ and in Scripture. He comes not as a religious speculator but as a man with a concern. He seeks the fullest explication he can of the meaning of the divine revelation and his personal experience of the grace of God. His motivation to engage in theology stems from his experience of the gospel, and he seeks the meaning of that Book from which the gospel is preached.

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1 See two very shrewd and important critiques of liberalism at this point in C. W. Dugmore, editor, *The Interpretation of the Bible*. T. W. Manson, "The Failure of Liberalism to Interpret the Bible as the Word of God" (pp. 92-107); and John Lowe, "The Recovery of the Theological Interpretation of the Bible," (pp. 108-122).

2 *Apologia pro vita sua* (Everyman's Library edition), p. 65. This is in contrast to the modernists' position as defended by Sabatier in *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion*, and, *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*. Also, Harnack, *What is Christianity?*

This has cardinal significance with reference to the way the entire Bible is treated. It is fundamentally a record of divine love, divine redemption, and divine salvation personally received. We are dealing with a dimension of truth in addition to that of symbolic formalism (mathematics, logic), and more than the problems of causal connections (science). In theology we deal with the personal, the moral, the ethical, the spiritual, and the invisible. Theological science must then be carried on within this circle of faith and commitment, and not as dry, abstract or impersonal investigation.

Further, this means that the main themes of theology will be the great truths about God (His love, His grace, His divine action), about man (his creation, his sin, his future), and about Jesus Christ (His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His ministry as a priest, His return).

The Bible is mistreated when it becomes a handbook of prophecy and world politics (pyramidism, British-Israelism, Russellism) for such an approach misses the heart of the Bible: namely, *the Christological-soteriological nexus*.

The Bible is mistreated by hyperdispensationalism (and dispensationalism if it is not careful) when it spends its energies in delineating the unfolding of a plan of numerous and discrete periods. The chief task of the interpreter is to assign the various passages of Scripture to their correct periods. If this is not done then wrong doctrines and practices, it is claimed, are taught and enforced at the wrong times. Such a pigeon-hole method of interpretation is far short of the great evangelical and conservative tradition in exegesis.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to eliminate prophetic nor dispensational interpretation, but it does assign to them their correct proportion in the divine revelation.

(2). *The main burden of doctrinal teaching must rest on the literal interpretation of the Bible.* In our treatment of general hermeneutics we maintained that the literal meaning of the Bible was the first and controlling principle for the understanding of the Bible. This principle is to be carried over into doctrinal interpretation.

This does not deny that substantial doctrinal truth is conveyed symbolically, parabolically, typically, and poetically. But as previously indicated, the symbolic *et al.* (i) depend on the literal sense for their very existence, and (ii) are controlled by the literal. For example, the effort to spiritualize the Levitical priesthood and so make it a justification for a clergy-priesthood, is to be rejected as it lacks New Testament verification.

The great doctrines of the faith should be those which can be determined by the literal approach to the meaning of Scripture. A theology which ignores this *control* could well bring us back to the confused labyrinth of so much patristic and medieval exegesis.

(3). *The main burden of our theology should rest on the teaching of the New Testament.* Although the Old is prior in time the New is prior in method. The New Testament is the capstone of revelation, and God's word through the supreme instrument of revelation, His Son (Hebrews 1:2). Because it is the

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3 Cf. J. C. O'Hair, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*. For an examination of the system of John B. Graber, *Ultradispensationalism* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1949).

*final, full, and clear* revelation of God, it would be foolhardy to make the New revolve around the Old.

In the New Testament is the life of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14). In its pages are recorded His birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. In the epistles are the full revelation of ethical, spiritual, and theological truth. Christian theology must then plant itself squarely within the New Testament. Whatever divergences there might be among the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant theologians, they have agreed to this point: *the worth of the Old Testament to the Christian Church is that it is in seed and preparatory form a Christian document.*

This is by no means to be construed minimizing the Old Testament, nor is it a detraction from its divine inspiration. It is the recognition of the truth taught in Scripture itself that the full light of revelation shines in the New Testament. The great doctrines of faith, sin, atonement, Christ, sanctification, resurrection, heaven, hell, and the new earth with its new Jerusalem are all most clearly developed in the New Testament.

This means that a theologian must have a historical sense in his use of cross-references and proof texts. Otherwise his Scriptural evidence is collated without any sense of proportion or relative importance. This sense of proportion of importance is indispensable in Biblical theology.

(4). *Exegesis is prior to any system of theology.* The Scriptures are themselves the divine disclosure. From them is to be derived our system of theology. We can only know the truth of God by a correct exegesis of Scripture. Therefore exegesis is prior to any system of theology.

Great mischief has been done in the church when the system of theology or its framework has been derived extra-Biblically. Pantheism was the bedrock of Schleiermacher's theology. Logical pantheism was the pole around which Hegel interpreted Christianity. Kant's notion of Christianity was guided by his theory of ethics. Ritchi's theology is predicated on Kant's philosophy. Much of neo-orthodoxy is inspired by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Ebner, Kant, and Buber.

If the grounds of Christian theology is the revelation of God, then theology must be grounded in revelation and not in philosophy.

The historic Protestant position is to ground theology in Biblical exegesis. A theological system is to be built up exegetically brick by brick. Hence the theology is no better than the exegesis that underlies it. The task of the *systematic* theologian is to commence with these bricks ascertained through exegesis, and build the temple of his theological system. But only when he is sure of his individual bricks is he able to make the necessary generalizations, and to carry on the synthetic and creative activity that is necessary for the construction of a theological system.

Philosophy does have a role to play in theological construction but it is not in itself either the *data* or the *principium* of theology. Its function is ancillary. It provides the theologian with what Kuyper in his *Principles of Sacred Theology* calls "the logical action." The theologian uses the principles of formal and applied logic in hammering out his system. He familiarizes himself with the problems philosophers and theologians have had in common during the history of both philosophy and theology. He learns the validity of various types of argumentation. He discovers the criticisms by philosophers of theologians, and learns to judge wherein the philosopher has been right and wrong.

The exegetical theologian and systematic theologian seek to determine the content of the divine revelation. The philosophical theologian is the watch-dog and detective.

He keeps his eye on contemporary philosophy to see what is developing there and its possible relationship to Christian theology for good or evil. He scans the writings of the scientists to see the implications and importance of contemporary science for Christian faith. He scrutinizes theological publications to see what ancient heresy might be here disguised in modern dress, or what philosophical system or assumptions are presupposed.

The church needs both the exegetical and the philosophical theologian, and she suffers when she is in want of either. The exegetical theologian protects the church from the misinterpretations of the heretics, and the philosophical theologian protects the church from the improper intrusion into Christian theology of non-Christian principles.

(5). *The theologian must not extend his doctrines beyond the Scriptural evidence.* A scientist is at liberty to spin as many hypotheses as he wishes. In weeding out the true from the false he is guided by logic and experimentation. He has no right to claim truth till these two judges have handed in their decision in the affirmative. All scientific speculation is controlled by logic and experimentation, and speculation is not treated as fact till it passes these two monitors.

What answers to this in theology? What is the control we use to weed out false theological speculation? Certainly the control is logic and evidence. The *evidence* is the Scriptures themselves. It is our conviction that many of our troubles in theology are due to the fact that theologians have extended themselves beyond the data of Scripture and have asked questions about which no answer can be given. There are many points about the atonement on which we can render no precise decision because the Scriptures are silent. What was the relationship *precisely* of the two natures at the moment of sin-bearing? In what *exact* sense were our Lord's sufferings penal? To what *exact* degree did He suffer? Similar such questions can be asked of the Incarnation and of the Trinity. So lacking are we of information of such pin-pointed questions that much of our theological definition is by negation, i.e., we may not know what the *exact* truth of the doctrine is, but we know what *cannot* be true.

Every sentence has implications. The sentences of the Scriptures have implications, and the sentences we say about the Scriptures themselves have implications. Science uses logic and experimentation to weed out the true implications, test an implication's truthhood or falsity. The very creative and synthetic task of theology drives us beyond exegesis. The theologian must use all the care and intelligence and learning he has to fill out *correctly* what is implied in Scripture. Therefore he must be aware of his predicament and keep as close as he can to his Biblical data.

Many are the questions asked about heaven--will we eat? Will we wear clothes? Will we know each other? Will we remember loved ones who are lost? Will family ties be reunited? Will we see the Trinity or just the Son? Will babies become adults? Will we speak Hebrew or Greek? The *best* answer will not be the most clever nor the most sentimental, but the one within the *limitations* of the Biblical data on these subjects. Where Scripture has not spoken, we are wisest to be silent.

Certainly great care must be used in formulating statements about the relationship of the divine sovereignty to human freedom. Perhaps much of our trouble in this regard is due to the posing of questions to which there is no Scriptural material for answers. The importance of the great Calvinistic-

Arminian debates of the past are not to be minimized but something of the *spirit* of Faber's remarks ought to color our thinking in this regard, and could well be extended to other theological problems.

It may not be the most philosophical, but it is *probably the wisest opinion which we can adapt*, that the truth lies somewhere between the two rival systems of Calvin and Arminius; though I believe it to exceed the wit of man to point out the *exact* place where it *does* lie. We distinctly perceive the two extremities of the vast chain, which stretches across the whole expanse of the theological heavens; but its central links are enveloped in impenetrable clouds and thick darkness.<sup>4</sup>

Training in logic and sciences forms an excellent background for exegesis. It will give the interpreter the requisite background in the general rules of logic, the principles of induction and evidence, and the practical uses of the same in laboratory work. So much of exegesis depends on the logic of implication and the principles of induction and evidence, that it is unwise not to have a working knowledge of the same. Laboratory work which is properly supervised can inculcate into the student a reliable sense of what is evidence and what is not.

Minister, Bible students, and interpreters who have not had the sharpening experiences of logic and science may have improper notions of implication and evidence. Too frequently such a person uses a basis of appeal that is a notorious violation of the laws of logic and evidence, yet may have a tremendous appeal to an uncritical Christian audience. *The pursuit of a blessing should never be at the expense of truth.*

In summary, there is no simple rule which tells us that we have gone beyond our Scriptural data. The dangers of so doing ought always be in the mind of the interpreter and the theologian so that they may be ever so careful to keep their exegetical and theological work within the limitations of the Biblical data.

(6). *The theological interpreter strives for a system.* A system is a corpus of *interrelated* assertions. A telephone book or a catalogue is not considered a system in the proper sense of the word for they are nothing more than convenient classifications of data. The theologian strives to present the *system of truth* contained in Sacred Scripture. This involves: (i) a systematic formulation of each individual doctrine of the Bible with the data gathered intelligently from the entire range of Scripture. This results in exegetical-theological studies of such topics as God, man, sin, redemption, and Christ. All the important references will be treated exegetically. Then the individual references will be used to forge the unified Biblical doctrine of the subject matter. (ii) The individual doctrines will be interrelated into a coherent systematic theology. How we understand the divine Person bears directly on how we think of the plan of redemption. Our doctrine of sin in many ways determines how we formulate our notion of salvation. This interplay and interrelation among doctrines is inevitable. The goal is a formulation of all the great doctrines of Scripture into one grand edifice of Christian Theology.

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4 Faber, *Discourses*, I, 478-79 (cited by Horne, *op. cit.*, I, 423. Italics are in Horne's statement). The differences between Calvinism and Arminianism are not meaningless and are capable of some decision. We accept the general system of Calvinism in theology, but we do not believe that the precise relationship of sovereignty and freedom can be dogmatically stated.

We concur with Hodge<sup>5</sup> that this is to be an inductive procedure. The theologian to a degree imitates the scientist. The theologian is the scientist; the "facts" to be examined are in Scripture; and the procedure is inductively directed. The theologian is to be a careful collector of facts. He tries to be as thorough and systematic as any scientist. His rules of evidence, however, are not experimentation and observation but Biblical hermeneutics. Just as the scientist strives for a systematic formulation of his knowledge, so the theologian strives for *systematic* theology.

It is true that the theologian does more than what we have here outlined. Into the formulation of any doctrine must go what may be learned from the history of both theology and philosophy. The history of philosophy is important because many of the problems of theology have been problems of philosophy; and many attacks on Christian doctrines have been made by philosophers. For example, it would be rather foolhardy to discuss the immortality of the soul without a glance at the Platonic literature on the subject, or the existence of God without taking into account the criticisms of Kant. The great schoolmen were both theologians and philosophers as were the two greatest minds of the early church--Origen and Augustine. Systematic theology demands a minimum acquaintance with the history of philosophy if systematic theology is to be written with competence.

The history of theology is indispensable for the theologian because no man is wise enough to ignore the great men of the past who have literally slaved on the great theological problems. The major doctrines of systematic theology have been under discussion for almost two millennia, and every theologian must also be a historical theologian, if he is to properly find his way around in systematic theology.

It has been the faith of orthodox theology in all its expressions that there is one great system of truth taught in Sacred Scripture. It is true that the Lutheran theology does not press for a system as much as the Reformed theology does, but to claim that the Lutheran theology is indifferent to system in theology is to go contrary to the nature of the theologies they have produced. However, religious liberalism and neo-orthodoxy have challenged the very existence of *systematic* theology.<sup>6</sup> Both agree that the Bible contains a medley of contradictory theologies. It was under this belief that there emerged such studies as Pauline theology, Petrine theology, and Johannine theology. Such theologies are even taught in some orthodox schools without a realization of their birth in religious liberalism.

Liberalism claimed the unity of the Bible to be the unity of the religious experience it proffered. What each generation has in common is not the same theology, but the same religious experience.

Neo-orthodoxy claims that the unity of the Bible is the *unity of perspective* (Aulén, Barth, Brunner). What each generation has in common with every other generation is the same theocentric attitude in faith, or the same Christological orientation to all theology.

The question is of course the nature of the unity of the Bible. Is it a unity of religious experience (liberalism), or a unity of perspective (neo-orthodoxy), or the unity of doctrine (orthodoxy)? Certainly it is not the claim of orthodoxy that we can *completely* systematize the teaching of the Bible. The very character of the Bible as a *historical* revelation prevents that. But the *ideal goal* of theology is to attain

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5 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I, 9 ff.

6 Tillich's use of the word systematic in his work, *Systematic Theology*, does not refer to the traditional notion of systematic theology but to his method of the correlation of all methodological knowledge with theology.

to a systematic theology which faithfully represents the teaching of Scripture. Some neo-orthodoxy reasoning is that because it is difficult of achievement it is impossible of achievement, but we do not believe that you can deduce impossibility from difficulty.

Nor are we to forget the *historical progression* of revelation. Systematic theology takes into account this process, and so claims that systematic theology is not the effort to harmonize all the teaching of the Bible as if it were all on the same flat level, but that the systematic teaching of the Scripture *is in its final intention*.<sup>7</sup>

We do not believe that any neo-orthodox theologian or even liberal theologian would baldly say that theology is to consist of *completely discrete doctrines*. Even Kierkegaard who affirmed that an existential system is impossible with man developed a series of interrelated propositions. The mere listing of doctrines is no more theology than chronicling is the writing of history. Although the determination of the system of theology as contained in Scripture may be difficult, we do not believe that either liberalism or neo-orthodoxy has given sufficient reason to give up the quest for unity, nor have they themselves engaged in the opposite canon--a mere listing of discrete, unrelated doctrines.

(7). *The theologian must use his proof texts with proper understanding of his procedure.*

The use of proof texts is perfectly legitimate. Both liberalism and neo-orthodoxy have strongly castigated the orthodox use of proof texts, and not with good reason. There is no doubt that the Scriptures quoted closely yield the doctrines of orthodoxy, not liberalism nor neo-orthodoxy. Neither liberalism nor neo-orthodoxy can hold their positions if held to a strict citation of Scripture.

That both liberalism and neo-orthodoxy are inconsistent at this point is evident to anyone who will take the care to read their works and see how they too cite proof texts--when the honey is to their taste. A proof text is used even to prove that one should not use proof texts! "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," (2 Cor. 2:6). The writings of Barth and Brunner are replete with proof texts, but with no justification why one verse is not admitted to theological debate, and another one is. We may cite the Bible in general but not in particular. But how is a general truth known apart from being forged from particulars? The method of religious liberalism to pick and choose verses to taste is now admitted even by the neo-orthodox as a wretched method of treating the Scripture. Speaking of the liberals' treatment of Scripture, Lowe writes that "Those who could not bring themselves to disregard what was said by our Lord or by St. Paul or John, unconsciously read into their texts the modern views they liked best. It was the nineteenth century substitute for the discarded allegorical method."<sup>8</sup>

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7 For the important recent literature on the unity of the Bible see the excellent bibliographical references in H. H. Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible*. Davies (*The Problem of Authority with the Continental Reformers*) claims that one of the glaring weaknesses of Calvin's theological method was that he failed to employ the principle of progressive revelation. The result was that he treated all verses in the Bible as having the same value in theological construction.

8 *Op. cit.*, p. 115. Burrows (*An outline of Biblical Theology*) cites enough Scripture to require an index of twenty-nine pages. Evidently proof texting is not as bad as we were told. He does say the older method of citation without regard to historical background was mechanical and therefore wrong. But evidently proof texting correctly done is proper. The objection against orthodoxy at this point must then be against *how* it was done, not *that* it was done. Brunner, in his *Dogmatics*, I, cites more than 400 verses in 353 pages of text. Barth cites over 2,000 in his *Dogmatik*, I/2.

The conservative insists the citation of Scripture is nothing more than a special application of "foot-noting" which is standard scholarly procedure. It would be a rare work of scholarship which cited opinions of authorities without indicating the passages in which these opinions were expressed. If a scholar claims that Anaximenes taught this, or Socrates that, or Aristotle something else, he is expected to cite the evidence in terms of the writings of these men as contained in the critical editions of their works, or in writings of contemporaries or near-contemporaries who are commenting on the beliefs of these men. If a scholar claims Aquinas held a certain position about men's creation he is expected to give the reference or references. The liberal and neo-orthodox objection to the use of proof texts reflects a deep theological prejudice (both against a valid revelation of God in Scripture) rather than a rebuttal of a false method of scholarship.

There is no doubt that the proof text method is capable of serious malpractice. The mere listing of proof texts is of no value unless each verse is underwritten by sound exegetical work. It is disconcerting to discover how many verses set down in a book of theology to prove a point melt away when each is examined rather vigorously from the standpoint of exegesis. Not only does it appear that many verses are used that have no relevance but frequently a verse is used whose meaning is actually very different from the one intended by the inspired writer.

For example, Zephaniah 3:9 refers to God returning to the Jews a *pure language*. Many have taken this to mean that the Jews will speak Hebrew in the millennium. The actual meaning of the text is that God will give the Jewish people a *clean* language (morally and ethically) in contrast to an impure language.

Many of the older theologians were guilty of citing a verse in the Old Testament to prove something with reference to salvation and justification, and treating it as if it were as clear and lucid as something in Romans and Galatians. This is one of the most unhappy features of the older theologies which has been happily corrected by a much better sense of historical and progressive revelation, nor can the beneficial influence of dispensationalism be gainsayed at this point.

It is almost instinctive with conservatives to grant a point in theology if a proof text is given. Sometimes the array of texts to prove a point is rather imposing. *But there must be a sound exegetical examination of every text cited* or else we are guilty of superficial treatment of Scripture. The use of proof texts is only as good as the exegesis undergirding their citation. No theologian has a right merely to list verses in proof of a doctrine unless in his own research he has done the requisite exegetical work. It means that every theologian must be of necessity a philologist. Part of the greatness of Charles Hodge as theologian was that he was an able expositor before he was a professional theologian.<sup>9</sup> There is no question that the heart of the striking power of Calvin's *Institutes* is that Calvin was a great expositor and he brought the richness of his expositions into magnificent use in his theological writing.

Furthermore, the theologian must use his texts in view of their context, and in view of their place in the Scriptures. His textual evidence must have a sense of proportion, so that they will have the proper weight of evidence assigned to them. For example, the doctrines of original sin, Satan, the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection are far more dependent for their explication on New Testament passages than on Old Testament ones.

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9 Note the wonderful tribute paid to Hodge's commentary on *Romans* by Wilbur Smith (*Profitable Bible Study*, p. 174).

(8). *What is not a matter of revelation cannot be made a matter of creed or faith.*

It is the heritage of the Reformation that only what is taught in Scripture is *directly* binding to conscience. We can loose and bind only as we are in accord with Sacred Scripture.

We thereby object to Catholicism which adds to the revelation of Scripture the moral unanimity of the Fathers, the ecumenical creeds, the decisions of the ecumenical councils, and the *ex cathedra* utterances of the papacy. The Roman Catholic Church does not add these as additional revelation, but as authoritative interpretations of the revelation (the deposit of faith in Scripture and Tradition), *and binding to the conscience.*

We thereby object to cults and sects which add to Scripture the voice of man in the form of official handbooks (Mormonism, Christian Science, Russellism, Seventh Day Adventism--with its veneration of the writings of Mary Ellen White), or the writings of their leaders which possess for all practical purposes the authority of an official handbook.

We thereby object to men who would equate their interpretations with the Word of God. To believe that one has an acceptable interpretation of Scripture is not objectionable; to forget humility and human imperfection and so to equate one's interpretation as identical with the divine revelation is objectionable.

We thereby object to speculations about matters in Scripture which lead men beyond the Scriptures themselves. Many of the older sermons on hell were far in excess of the teaching of Scripture, e.g., Jeremy Taylor's sense-by-sense description of the torments of the damned. Precise statements as to who the anti-Christ is, are not matters of faith, even though the *Westminster Confession* stated it was the pope. If the Scriptures affirm he is to be revealed (*apokalupthē*, 2 Thess. 2:3), how are we to know who he is till he is revealed?

We thereby object to infringement on Christian liberty by men who make their own moral judgments with the certainty and authority of Scripture. What is specifically condemned in Scripture, we have the right to condemn today. What is condemned directly in principle in Scripture we may condemn today. For example, dope is not directly condemned in Scripture, but certain the principle which condemns drunkenness condemns the use of dope. What is not directly condemned in Scripture, or what is not condemned by immediate application of a principle, must be judged by Christian conscience, but cannot be made as binding as things directly condemned or directly condemned in principle. We must apply the truth of Scripture to life today; otherwise we are not true to our trust. But in so doing we must be ever so careful not to put our interpretations of matters in our culture on the same level as Holy Scripture. The more debatable items are to Christian consciousness, the more tentative should be the spirit of our interpretation. When we brashly identify our interpretations of problems in morals, ethics, and separation with Sacred Scripture, we are making something a matter of faith which is not by its nature a matter of revelation.

There is no system of politics, economics, or culture taught in the New Testament. We may believe some system of economics, etc., is more Christian than another, but we cannot artlessly equate this system with the New Testament teaching. The surprising thing of the Church is its apparent vitality which enables it to live through a variety of political, economic and cultural systems.

The encroachment of the word of man upon the Word of God is a danger we should constantly be alert to, and with all our strength we should maintain the freedom of the Word of God from the word of man.

(9). *The theological interpreter must keep the practical nature of the Bible in mind.*

The Scriptures are not a handbook on all there is to know. They are not a handbook on *all* there is to know about God or religion. The Scriptures do not profess to be a *complete* body of knowledge. The intention of Scripture is to supply man with the knowledge of salvation (2 Timothy 3:15), and what is necessary for a godly Christian life (3:16-17). Only what is in some way related to these two themes is discussed in Scripture.

Much that our speculative appetite would desire is not there. The Scriptures do not contain typical Greek expatiations on epistemology and metaphysics. The problem of evil is not discussed in the abstract but in the concrete. The book of Job is a theodicy not about how evil exists in a good God's universe but how it is that the God of Job permits this specific man of godly character to undergo such sufferings. Habakkuk wants to know why the law is slack and judgment does not go forth (1:4). Why is it that the God of the Torah with eyes too pure to behold evil tolerates Torah-breakers in Israel? Malachi speaks of those who say there is no value in serving God (3:14) because the wicked are prospering, not the righteous.

The Scriptures do not treat of everything because their content is controlled by their central purpose, the story of divine love and redemption. Human curiosity asks more than this. But we must stay its demand and keep our attention centered on the central message of Scripture.

The oldest saw in this regard is: "where did Cain get his wife?" Where Cain got his wife contributes nothing to the movement of the Bible, so that romantic sideline is ignored. The science of historiography informs us that no history can be exhaustive. All history writing is selective, and the principle of selection is determined by the historian. This accounts for the history of music, the history of theology, the history of art, etc. Biblical history is then that special selection which in some measure--infinitesimal or great--contributes to the story of salvation.

(10). *The theological interpreter must recognize his responsibility to the church.*

The issues proposed in the Scriptures are the greatest in man's entire range of knowledge. The Scriptures speak of an eternal penitentiary, hell, man's greatest disvalue; they speak of heaven, man's greatest bliss; and they speak of salvation, man's most wonderful experience. Further, the Scriptures profess to teach this with the authority of God, underwritten with supernatural credentials by its writers. There are no greater issues before the human race than these.

Whatever the variations in detail might be, it is nevertheless true that the Eastern Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Reformers agree that: (i) the Scriptures are the truth of God; (ii) the Scriptures do teach the unspeakable woe of hell, and the indescribable bliss of heaven; and (iii) salvation from one destiny to the other was wrought by the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh.

All Biblical criticism and theological writing should be done in the light of these sobering

considerations. This is not meant to put any check on the quest for truth, nor to impose any sort of ecclesiastical control in theological matters. But millions of people now believe the historic Christian gospel, and no man should dare shake their confidence in their belief without taking the full measure of the significance of his act.

Such a stricture applies to the critic, the theologian, and the man who would reinterpret Christianity and bring us the "true" gospel. James informs us that there should be few teachers (3:1) because the condemnation of a teacher--if he lead the flock astray--is great. All such proposed changes should be seriously pondered before being offered to the Church.

After carefully stating that the Bible is to be read and interpreted by each believer for himself, and that no priestly caste is to be the official interpreter of the Bible, Hodge says:

It is not denied that the people, learned and unlearned, should not only compare Scripture with Scripture, and avail themselves of all the means in their power to aid them in their search after the truth, *but they should also pay the greatest deference to the faith of the Church.* If the Scriptures be a plain book, and the Spirit performs the functions of a teacher to all the children of God, it follows inevitably that they must agree in all essential matters in their interpretation of the Bible. And from that fact it follows that for an individual Christian to dissent from the universal Church (*i.e.*, the body of true believers), is tantamount to *dissenting from the Scriptures themselves.*<sup>10</sup>

(11). *No doctrine should be constructed from an uncertain textual reading.*

Doctrine should be established solely from those passages about which textual criticism has raised no doubts. The copyists made many mistakes in copying the New Testament. Sometimes they copied the same line twice or made other such mistakes of dittography. Sometimes they took a part of a later verse and for some reason or other inserted it in a former verse (cf. Romans 8:1 and 8:4). Sometimes a liturgical usage of later times is added to a verse (cf. "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen," of Matthew 6:10). The numerous types of mistakes have been collected in the various books on textual criticism, and no Bible student or minister should seek to express himself on matters of textual criticism till he has familiarized himself with the subject.

The fact is that there are textually insecure passages in the New Testament, and doctrine should not be based on that which might potentially be the voice of man and not the voice of God. The ending of Mark's gospel is a case in point. We are certain of the text through Mark 16:8. But from verse 9 on, the text is not certain. Some scholars are rather certain that the text originally ended with verse 8. Others offer reasons for the retention of the long ending. But until scholars are able to settle the text more certainly no doctrine may be built from this passage about baptismal regeneration, speaking in tongues, casting out of demons, picking up serpents, drinking poison, or divine healing.

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<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 184. Italics are mine.

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