Evangelical Rationalism and Propositional Revelation

Donald G. Bloesch

In any in-depth reflection on the ground of certainty in Christian thought, particularly as this bears on the intermeshing of Word and Spirit, it is fitting to explore the rationalist legacy within evangelicalism. I have often observed that one of the banes of modern evangelicalism is rationalism, although it is always necessary to point out that this is a believing rationalism. In such a perspective reason prepares the way for faith and confirms faith, but it does not procure faith. Rationalists in both Catholic and Reformation traditions have acknowledged the role of the Spirit in assisting the will to embrace what reason plainly shows to be true. In the deism and latitudinarianism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Spirit was largely eclipsed by an emphasis on the universal logos and the omnicompetence of reason to discover and establish truth.

Rationalism takes the form of either the logic of deduced conclusions (as in most idealistic philosophy) or the logic of evidential confirmations (as in empiricist philosophy). The focus of biblical Christianity by contrast is on particular events in salvation history whose meaning is drawn out by faithful exposition under the illumination of the Spirit. We can perhaps speak of this as the logic of adduced meanings inasmuch as it deals with unique events and persons. In the first kind of logic the test for truth is rational coherence, in the second empirical verification. The test for truth in a more authentically biblical religion is fidelity to divine revelation. Biblical faith is free to employ both deduction and induction, but it will see these exercises of reason in terms of drawing out the implications of the truth of the gospel rather than arriving at this truth independently of the supernatural bestowal of grace.

A Legacy Reexamined

In this period of theological history we are witnessing a profound reaction against rationalistic methodology and a renewed appreciation of the mythic or narrational dimensions of Christian revelation. This reaction is clearly perceptible in evangelical circles. Many of these descendants of the Protestant Reformation wish to remain true to their theological heritage but still be conversant with contemporary themes in the academy. Some of these scholars call themselves postconservatives and seek to forge an alliance or at least some kind of working relationship with postliberals (like George Lindbeck and Hans Frei). At the same time a growing number of young evangelicals distrust the foray into narrative theology and sedulously strive to retain the rationalist agenda.
of an earlier period. They are intent on reclaiming a logocentric theology—one that is centered in the logos or reason of God as opposed to a spirit theology that aspires to get beyond rational concepts to communion with a transformative reality that impinges on the whole of both history and nature.\(^3\)

One of the pressing questions in this debate is whether the Reformers themselves held to a propositional model of revelation. Theologians of a neo-orthodox persuasion have generally though not always convincingly contended that the magisterial Reformers basically subscribed to an existential understanding of revelation, but this side of their theology was obscured by the readiness of their followers to draw upon Hellenistic (especially Aristotelian) wisdom to make the faith rationally credible and viable for their time.\(^4\)

A rationalizing thrust can be discerned in Protestant orthodoxy from the very beginning, but very few of its luminaries ever became full-blown rationalists. Even those defenders of Reformation faith in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were still prone to make a place for mystery in faith, though they were not immune to the spell of the Enlightenment. Increasingly, the emphasis shifted from an open-ended declaration of faith to a comprehensive systematic statement. Revealed truths came to be championed over symbolic expressions. Dogmatic affirmations took precedence over dramatic unfoldings. Revelation was reduced to verbal concepts as opposed to personal encounter. More and more the Bible as a book was identified with divine revelation rather than being seen as a conduit of revelation (as with the Reformers). A theology of synthesis with cultural wisdom took the place of a theology of Word and Spirit. A preoccupation with timeless truth muted the notion of historical truth. Faith was no longer childlike trust in God’s mercy but rational assent to revealed truth. In rationalism there is an identity between human thoughts and God’s thoughts. In the biblical understanding our thoughts never coincide with God’s thoughts (cf. Ps. 139:6; Job 42:3; Isa. 55:8; Rom. 11:33-34), but they can reflect God’s thoughts. In modern fundamentalism the Spirit merely aids the will to acknowledge what can be shown to be historically probable.

Rationalism tends toward a univocal predication of God over equivocity and analogy. It is assumed that our language about God directly communicates who God really is and what he demands of us. While the older Protestant theologians recognized that the mysteries of faith could not be fully grasped by human reason, they nevertheless exuded a profound confidence in the capacity of human language to give an adequate portrayal of these mysteries. William Placher sees in Reformed, Lutheran, and neo-Catholic scholasticism a "shift to univocity"—"the growing confidence that our language about God makes roughly the same sort of sense as our language about creatures."\(^5\) The seventeenth-century philosophers and theologians did not believe that God is "utterly different from us. God’s omniscience, omnipotence, and infinite goodness are the same sorts of qualities we have, differing only in degree."\(^6\) Univocity with regard to our language about God is especially evident in the writings of such evangelical
stalwarts in our time as Carl Henry, Edward John Carnell, Gordon Clark, and Ronald Nash.  

Thomas Torrance is helpful in his explication of what he calls “the Latin heresy,” which identifies the deposit of faith with a fixed formula (the *regula fidei*) that can be handed down from one generation to another.  

This rule of faith is a compendium of “irreformable truths” which is “formulated in definitive statements regarded as identical with the truths which they were meant to express.” Sacred Scripture is treated like Aristotelian first principles from which we derive theological doctrines. “Thus through processes of reasoning from first principles to conclusions,” Latin theology “sifted out the ideas deduced from the Scriptures and built them into a logico-deductive system of propositional truths and definitive articles of belief.”  

Torrance sees this development beginning with Tertullian and culminating in modern fundamentalism, which he contends “cuts off God’s revelation in the Bible from the living, dynamic being of God himself and his continual self-giving through Christ and the Spirit.” The Bible is treated as “a fixed corpus of revealed propositional truths which can be arranged logically into rigid systems of belief.”  

The rationalism that Torrance warns against is exemplified in Carl Henry, who finds the unity of Scripture in a “logical system of shared beliefs.” While acknowledging that the logos of God cannot be restricted to words, he insists that it is now veritably embodied in Scripture by virtue of divine inspiration. In this theology divine revelation becomes identical with the “logically interconnected content” of Scripture. George Hunsinger makes a potent case that Henry’s position stands in palpable contrast to both Abraham Kuyper, who saw the role of Scripture as bringing the *esse* of Christ to our consciousness, and Herman Bavinck, who viewed the scriptural narratives not as precise history but as prophecy.  

**Propositional vs. Narrative Theology**  

One can discern on the contemporary scene the emergence of a new language paradigm that heralds a decisive break with what Lindbeck calls the cognitive-propositional model of truth in the direction of an experiential-expressive model on the one hand and a cultural-linguistic model on the other. The emphasis on the Bible as narrative rather than doctrine is especially noticeable in the last model where truth becomes a matter of transmitting the symbols that bind a community together, but narration is also associated with the projection of inner experiences upon the plane of history.  

The new emphasis on narration over propositional content is striking in Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, who makes a distinction between “rational, purposive discourse” and “symbolic-mythic communication.” “Such communication does not have to do with information about the objects, processes and circumstances that fill our everyday life. Instead, it seeks assurance about what ultimately maintains and concerns us.” “Encounters with the divine *pneuma*
are beyond analysis and categorization. They are testified to, narrated, announced and disclosed. Similarly Jürgen Moltmann seeks to unite a theology of hope and a narrative concept of truth in which the truth of Christian doctrine is a reference "not to a state of being, but to a history." The truth of doctrine, he says, can only be told through the narrative of a community whose "own existence, fellowship and activity springs from the biblical story of liberation... a 'story-telling fellowship.'" The human speech that conforms most closely to divine reality is narra tional rather than propositional in form. "The foundations of orthodoxy... are to be found in narrative differentiation. At the center of Christian theology stands the eternal history which the triune God experiences in himself." While distrusted by evangelical rationalists, Moltmann appeals to pietists and spiritualists—those who are prone to base their case on the immediate guidance of the Spirit.

In this postmodern climate mythos takes priority over logos, pneumatology over Christology, henotheism over monotheism, pluralism over both exclusivism and inclusivism. The content of the Bible is no longer irreformable truth but narrative history. In many circles theologians refer no longer to a meta-story that gives unity to the Bible but now simply to a plurality of stories that are held together by the consensual memory of the people of God. The language of poetry takes precedence over the language of being in delineating the new theology. Here we see the influence of Martin Heidegger and other scholars of a neo-agnostic bent such as Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell and the erosion of the authority of the philosophers of the Age of Reason—Descartes, Leibniz, and John Locke. The gnosis that is sought in this new spirituality is not conceptual or propositional knowledge but mystical communion within ineffable reality.

Revelation is reconceived as narrational rather than propositional. A proposition in this context is a truth that is expressed in declarative statements that clearly affirm or deny what is at issue. A narration is a truth that is expressed through the telling of a story and may take the form of poetry as well as prose. Its truth is gleaned through an existential participation in the drama being depicted, so it is more experiential than strictly logical. A propositional truth is immediately accessible to reason whereas a narrational truth can be grasped only by a heightened imagination. Propositional revelation entails the communication of clear and distinct ideas (à la Descartes). Narrational revelation is the conveyance of insights that can be assimilated only through the obedience of faith. Propositional revelation carries the implication that revelation is exhaustively rational. Narrational revelation presupposes that revelation is polydimensional—appealing to the will and the affections as well as to reason and logic. Propositional revelation imparts conceptual knowledge; narrational revelation imparts affectional knowledge.

God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ cannot be reduced either to propositions or to narrations, but it enlists various linguistic and literary forms in order to
reach the hardened hearts of sinners and give guidance to the open hearts of saints. It more readily takes symbolic than theoretical form, since it has to do with mysteries beyond the pale of human perception and conception. At the same time, it can be elucidated by concepts and propositions, since its subject matter is intelligible and through the intervention of the Spirit apprehensible. Revelation can be expressed in semi-conceptual as well as mythopoetic or narrational language, but in both cases the language is incomplete and awaits further illumination from the Spirit. In conceptualization we are further removed from the original content of revelation than in narration and poetry, and this is why systematic theology must always be open-ended, subject to further amplification and even correction.

Propositional revelation as it is used in contemporary theology rests on a long philosophical tradition including Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, John Locke, and Thomas Reid. Narrational revelation finds more affinity with the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions, though there is a strong rationalistic thrust in Plato as well as in Aristotle. From the vantage point of biblical, evangelical theology, it is more appropriate to speak of a dynamic personal revelation than of either propositional or narrational revelation. The narratives themselves are not revealed truth, but they are the earthen vessels that carry truth that is both suprarational and suprahistorical.

Those who defend narrational revelation can appeal to the Bible itself, since the Bible is composed largely of narratives that are related to the unfolding of sacred history. But the Bible is not wholly narrational, for it also contains ongoing reflection upon the narratives of biblical history. In my opinion we need to steer clear of both the rationalistic theology of neo-scholasticism and the narrative theology of current symbolism. Both have only a partial grasp of the meaning of biblical revelation.

The narrative theology associated with the Yale school (Hans Frei, Lindbeck, Placher, Garrett Green) stresses the need to examine the world through the lens of the scriptural text. In the older liberal theology the world absorbed the text. In the evangelical theology I espouse, both world and text are critiqued in the light of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The infallible norm is not the text as such nor the narrative history in which the text is set but the transcendent meaning of the gospel, the product of the creative speech of God, that is imparted through the text to the world by the Spirit of the living God.

Toward a Theology of Word and Spirit

The theology of Word and Spirit I propose is not to be confused with either narrational or propositional theology, though it acknowledges that the Bible contains both realistic narrative and propositional truth. It seeks to transcend the cleavage between dogmatism and mysticism, logos and mythos. It perceives the unity of logos and mythos in the dramatic unfolding of the salvation history mirrored in the Bible. With both Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth, it propounds a middle way between equivocity and univocity—the way of analogy. We do
not attribute qualities in the creature to the Creator (the *analogia entis*), but we see the glory of the Creator reflected in the creature (the *analogia fidei*).

While sensing an affinity with the proponents of narrative theology, I contend that the Bible presents truth claims as well as stories, that it yields infallible information concerning God and his revelatory action as well as poetic elaboration of God’s mighty deeds. Against certain strands in narrative theology, I hold that the gospel is more than an inspiring story. It constitutes a metaphysical criterion that enables us to distinguish between what is true and what is false. We find truth not in the story itself but in God’s intervention in our reading or telling of the story. The truth of divine revelation is not self-evident in the Bible, nor is it immediately apprehensible (as in propositional or rationalistic theology). Neither is it inherent in the narrations of the Bible waiting to be discovered (as in some kinds of narrative theology). Truth is an event of the speech of God rather than insightful cognition on the one hand or propositional consistency on the other.

This position is not really innovative, though it may appear so in the light of the theological options available on the current scene. It was anticipated in a number of the church fathers, including Augustine, in the mainstream Reformers Luther and Calvin, in Peter T. Forsyth, and in Karl Barth. Augustine’s distinction between the sign and the thing signified reflects the Platonic polarity between the material copy and the original, but it also mirrors the biblical truth that God condescends to meet us in visible signs or acts. Luther’s contention that the whole Bible testifies to Christ reveals his commitment to the role of the Spirit in leading us beyond the natural meaning of the text to the transcendent reality of the gospel. Calvin’s distinction between the human intention of the author of the text and the divine intention attests his adherence to the Pauline emphasis on spirit over letter. The pivotal role of the Spirit in bringing illumination to the Word is set forth in the Westminster Confession which speaks of the Spirit as being the final judge in theological authority. 30 For Karl Barth the Bible and church proclamation constitute the objective pole of divine revelation and the interior illumination of the Spirit the subjective pole. Both are necessary to hear and know the real Word of God.

Thomas Aquinas is often treated as the exemplar of propositional revelation, but he too anticipates a theology of Word and Spirit. Without discounting the rationalizing proclivity in his theology, we would do well to remember that Thomas did not equate revelation immediately with sacred Scripture but held that Scripture is grounded in an antecedent divine revelation. 31 While perceiving that propositions can elucidate the truth of faith, he was convinced that the full-fledged knowledge of God “cannot be a merely propositional matter. It must come embodied ... in a human soul.” 32 Natural cognition cannot prepare the way for a life of faith apart from grace. Eugene Rogers makes a persuasive case that Thomas denied that nature is open to grace in and of itself. Nature must be vitalized by grace; reason must be perfected by faith. Faith moreover “is a perfection precisely because it is not merely an extension ... of the natural
powers of the intellect.” Thomas held that unbelievers cannot be convinced of the God of revelation by demonstrative arguments. Moreover, what God primarily reveals is Jesus Christ himself, not propositional information. This excursus on Thomas is important because many conservative evangelicals appeal to Thomas as their model in theological method.

A more convincing example of evangelical rationalism is Wolfhart Pannenberg who despite his Christocentric thrust allows the world to become another criterion for faith beside the God of the Bible. Because he believes that Anselm begins with rational argument alone, he refuses to hold that truth is decided in advance. Pannenberg adopts Augustine’s view that the affirmation of God’s truthfulness “rests on perception of the coherence and unity of all that is true.” Paul Molnar trenchantly discerns that a subtle shift in logic has taken place. “Theology shifts away from God (and the need for faith) to our perceptions and then discovers God as the locus of this presupposed unity.” Pannenberg is adamant that theology should understand the unity of reality only in the light of the Christ event. Yet “since his method is dictated by his belief that the question about the whole of reality ‘is not first envisaged from the side of Jesus Christ, but is always posed priorly . . . as the question of philosophy,’ his philosophical question about the whole of reality actually sets the ground rules for theology.” For him, it seems, revelational theology is based on natural theology, since he identifies the trinitarian God with the “field of the infinite to which the human mind is open from its origin.” Against Barthianism Pannenberg holds that the events of the historical saga of Israel’s faith pilgrimage carry their own meaning and meaning is inherent in words. Pannenberg makes an important place for myth in theological exposition, but at the same time he betrays a proclivity to resolve myth into propositional truth.

While open to the concerns of narrative theology, I agree with Colin Gunton that the time has come to reclaim the propositional dimension of revelation as well. Although truth is not a property of a proposition, propositions can attest truth. The truth of being takes precedence over the truth of statement, but the latter can transmit the former through the power of the Spirit. Propositions are not themselves sentences but declarations embodied in sentences. Propositions can be gleaned from revelation, but they always point beyond themselves to mysteries that can be only dimly grasped by the enlightened human mind. I affirm both the necessity and inadequacy of propositions in communicating revelatory truth. Propositions can serve truth but not exhaust truth. They can elucidate the truth of the gospel but not secure this truth. Faith terminates not in propositions but in the reality to which they point (Thomas Aquinas).

Jacob Neusner is helpful in his contention that narrative as well as strict logic can serve propositional truth. He draws an important distinction between “the logic of propositional cogency” and the logic of “teleological or narrative cogency.” In the first kind of logic we “offer a proposition, lay out the axioms, present the proofs, and test the proposition against contrary argument.” The second way to demonstrate propositional truth is to tell a story, which may be
historical, fictional, or parabolic. "Narrative conveys a proposition through the setting forth of happenings in a framework of inevitability, in a sequence that makes a point, that is, establishes not merely the facts of what happens, but the teleology that explains those facts." Neusner also discusses the logic that rests on sharing in a community of faith. Here we do not gain cogency through declarative affirmations, for "the cogency derives from a source other than shared propositions."

I see four options today for the church and theology. The first is a rationalistic orthodoxy that views the Bible as a compendium of propositions or a storehouse of facts inviting systematic analysis. Second is a process ontology that may appeal to Whitehead, Hegel, or Teilhard de Chardin. Here the Bible is treated as a mythical vision containing abiding insights into the human condition. The symbols of biblical discourse need to be translated into ontological concepts if they are to be made relevant to the modern situation. Third is a narrative theology that cultivates shared memories of a common tradition of faith rather than proposing a worldview or ontology that stands in competition with other ontologies. Finally, there is a theology of Word and Spirit, which I also call a theology of divine-human encounter or a theology of crisis in that its focus is on the divine judgment over human history. It does not claim to set forth a revealed metaphysic but at the same time does not shrink from engaging in metaphysical speculation, for the revelation in Scripture has profound metaphysical implications. In this theology the Bible is not fundamentally a narrative history, though it assuredly contains narrative. Neither is it a handbook of revealed propositions or irreformable truths. Instead it is the mirror of God's self-condescension in Jesus Christ. Narrative is the preponderant form of revelation but not the content. The content is the gospel and the law, a transcendent structure of meaning that is revealed by the Spirit through an encounter with the apostolic proclamation in Scripture and the church.

Because my position has striking affinity with the hermeneutics of many of the church fathers it could be called an ecumenical orthodoxy. Yet its orthodoxy consists not in simply returning to past formulations but in open dialogue with other traditions within the Christian orbit in order to express the age-old truth of God's saving act in Jesus Christ in a fresh and relevant way. Its orientation is not simply about the past but also about the future, for the full uncovering of the mystery of faith is not realizable until the eschaton when faith shall be supplanted by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

A theology of Word and Spirit will give proper recognition to rationality in faith, but it will resist rationalism—the tendency to dissolve mystery into logic. It will not hesitate to employ propositions in demonstrating the cogency of faith, but it will refuse to reduce revelation or faith to propositions. It will see faith as both credentia (intellectual assent) and fiducia (trust in God's mercy). It will be fully cognizant of the narrational language in Scripture without turning church proclamation into narration or storytelling. Its aim will not be to transmute divine revelation into "clear and distinct ideas" (as in Descartes); at the same
time, it will not affirm with Langdon Gilkey that “when a word becomes important, it becomes imprecise.” Its ultimate criterion is neither religious experience nor the biblical record but God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, which comes to us through various means, especially Scripture and the preaching of the gospel.

Under the impact of the later Enlightenment evangelical rationalism has assumed an empiricist rather than idealistic hue. Showing its indebtedness to Scottish Common Sense realism its apologetic often takes the form of evidentialism in which external evidences shore up Christian affirmations. Yet the role of deductive logic is not negated by evangelicals in this tradition, as can be seen in the manner they develop their doctrine. Evangelical rationalism in its current state tends toward factual accuracy and precision. It thereby feeds into biblical literalism. Narrational symbolism on the other hand tends toward the imaginative reconstruction of the text in question. Biblical personalism, which I uphold, tends toward the faithful reproduction of the message that resounds in the salvific events and in the scriptural text. This message, however, does not inhere in the words, but must be always spoken anew by the Spirit of God as he reaches out to both struggling saints and lost sinners with the word of life.

ENDNOTES

1 In this study I am using the term “rationalism” in the broad sense to include an appeal to empirical validation as well as to rational demonstration. Both the methods of deduction and induction presuppose confidence in human rational faculties to come to truth. John Locke, a key figure in the early Enlightenment, was an ardent defender of empiricism and a vehement critic of innate ideas. At the same time, he viewed truth as lying in the affirmation or negation of propositions “which is no more but apprehending things to be as they really are and do exist.” Frederick Copleston comments: “He was a rationalist in the sense that he believed in bringing all opinions and beliefs before the tribunal of reason and disliked the substitution of expressions of emotion and feeling for rationally grounded judgments.” Copleston, A History of Philosophy (New York: Doubleday, 1985, original ed. 1963), 5:69-70, 108.

The term “idealism” here denotes the position that views reality as fundamentally rational in nature and thereby accessible to rational investigation. It is possible to be both idealistic and empiricist (as was George Berkeley), but generally an idealist appeals to rational demonstration and an empiricist to experiential corroborations in arriving at truth.

R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996). It should be noted that some of the contributors to this last work have profound misgivings about postliberal theology. For an astute critique of narrative theology by an evangelical theologian who perceives its strengths as well as its weaknesses, see Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 119-62.

3 See James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse, *Here We Stand* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); and Michael Horton, *In the Face of God* (Dallas: Word, 1996). It is interesting to compare Horton’s *In the Face of God* and Clark Pinnock’s *Flame of Love* (InterVarsity Press, 1996). The former defends traditionalist Calvinism while the latter is clearly postconservative.


6 Ibid., 87.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 223.

11 Ibid., 226.

12 Ibid., 227.


I have chosen the term “narrational theology” to indicate any position that holds that revelation comes to us primarily in the form of story or narrative. It is broader than “narrative theology,” which often refers to a particular school of theology (such as “the Yale school” or “the Chicago school”). In the context of my theology these terms are often virtually synonymous.


Ibid., 4-5.

Ibid., 6.


Clutterbuck, “Moltmann as a Doctrinal Theologian,” 494.


Other philosophers who could be mentioned in this connection are Benedict Spinoza, who was staunchly idealistic, and Thomas Reid, who was more realistic.

In gnostic tradition God is accessible not to theoretical reason but only to flashes of insight. God is not “thought thinking thought” (as in Aristotle) but “the eternal silence” or “ineffable mystery.”

Cf. these words of the Psalmist:

My people, listen to my teaching,  
Pay attention to what I say.  
I will speak to you in poetry,  
Unfold the mysteries of the past.  
(78:1,2 NJB)

While Plato used myth as a literary device to convey abstract truths, he remained more of a rationalist than a mystic. The Neoplatonist Porphyry treated the pagan myths as “allegorical representations of philosophic truth.” Copleston, History of Philosophy, 1:474.

31 See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica I.1.2 and 2 in fin.


33 Ibid., 176.


35 Pannenberg has been appreciated by a significant number of evangelical theologians including Stanley Grenz, Roger Olson, and Millard Erickson. The Lutheran confessional theologian Carl Braaten has also had kind words for Pannenberg. Critics of Pannenberg include Robert Blaikie, Kenneth Hamilton, Paul Molnar, and Donald Bloesch. For a pungent criticism of the early Pannenberg see Robert J. Blaikie, “Secular Christianity” and God Who Acts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 155-62, 206-09.


38 Ibid., 329.

39 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology 1:359.

40 Colin E. Gunton, A Brief Theology of Revelation (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995). Gunton’s position is somewhat suspect when he claims that propositions have the capacity to “mediate revelation” (105). He is convinced that the world, the Bible, and sacred tradition also have this capacity. I would argue that the finite cannot of itself apprehend or communicate the infinite, but the infinite can enter into the finite and communicate itself. I concur with Gunton when he says that “revelation does not consist in . . . the transmission of authoritative propositions. Rather, Christianity is a revealed religion in the sense that essential to its being what it is, is its articulation by means of affirmations and confessions in which are implicit certain claims about what is true of God, the world and human life” (17). Interestingly, Gunton warns against narrative theology on the grounds that it is “too tied to the old ‘history of salvation’ theology which tends to exclude due reference to creation” (112).

41 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II –II, 1, 2 ad 2. It is well to note that Benjamin Warfield, in whom rationalist tendencies were conspicuous, came to a similar conclusion: “The revelations of the Scriptures do not terminate upon the intellect. They were not given merely to enlighten the mind. They were given through the intellect to beautify the life. They terminate on the heart.” Warfield


43 Ibid., 54-57.

44 Ibid., 55.

45 Ibid., 56.

46 Ibid., 57.


48 The theology of crisis that I endorse is focused not on the negativities of history but on God’s judgment over history, which we see in Jesus Christ. The early Barth tended to envisage cultural upheavals as the medium of God’s revelation, and therefore it could be said that he was still working with liberal assumptions. By the time of his *Romans II*, however, he viewed the crises of the time not as mediating the word of divine judgment but as directing us to the divine judgment over all humanity, which occurred in the life and death of Jesus Christ. “Crisis” became for Barth in *Romans II* a basically christological rather than sociological category (as with his colleague Friedrich Gogarten). See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 116-17, 156, 212-13, 214-16, 224-25, 284-85.


50 See Rogers’ and McKim’s helpful analysis of Benjamin Warfield on this matter in their *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 323-261. For my critique of this book see Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 131-140.
John Calvin and the Will
*A Critique and Corrective*
Dewey J. Hoitenga Jr.

Foreword by Richard A. Muller. Hoitenga explores two areas of inconsistency in Calvin's thought: the relationship of the will to the intellect and the condition of the will after its corruption by the fall.

0-8010-2154-5  144 pages  $12.99p

German Calvinism in the Confessional Age
*The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus*
Lyle D. Bierma

The systematic ordering of biblical data according to various covenantal arrangements between God and humanity plays a substantial role in Reformed thinking. This is the first attempt at a full-length study on Olevianus' contribution to this area of study.

0-8010-2111-1  208 pages  $14.99p

Turning Points
*Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*
Mark A. Noll

Noll surveys the highlights of Christian history by examining twelve prominent events.

"This highly recommended work provides a thoughtful yet comprehensive framework for the history of Christianity"

—Library Journal

0-8010-5778-7  320 pages  $17.99p

Atlas of the Bible and Christianity
Tim Dowley, ed.

A full-color atlas that features 200 computer-generated maps, plus diagrams and charts. A new biblical and church history reference by Oxford Cartographic, this work utilizes the latest in computer-enhanced satellite imaging.

0-8010-2051-4  160 pages  $29.99c