

# THE PERTINENCE OF PARADOX IN THEOLOGY

## Its Uses and Possibilities\*

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### A. INTRODUCTION

"That the present situation in theology is one of an ever-increasing pluralism is by now a truism,"<sup>1</sup> David Tracy asserted in *Blessed Rage for Order* in 1975. Twenty years later, a social trend predictor whose 1980's Megatrend books were on the best sellers' list, John Naisbitt pronounced again "that the paradox (he has) formulated is key to understanding the new era we are entering."<sup>2</sup> Pluralism is definitely the mainstream of the twenty-first century. The unison and universality brought about by the enlightenment and scientism<sup>3</sup> is dashed as the

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\* This writer believes that all comedies are only parodies of tragedies paradoxically shown as comedies as long as This Age still persists while awaiting the Age to Come. During the writing this essay, my trusted friend, y, showed me there could be glimpses of true comedy even though tragedy still prevails. To y, I dedicate this short essay.

<sup>1</sup>David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1975), 3.

<sup>2</sup>John Naisbitt, *Global Paradox* (London: Nicholas Brealy Publishing Ltd., 1994), 12.

<sup>3</sup>An important element of modernity is a common, singular, and objective truth brought about by scientific findings. Science represents the universal truth agreeable by all people because of its objective observable nature. Even though the objective nature of science is now challenged

world comes so much closer together because of ever advancing communication technologies.<sup>4</sup> Different world views from regions of the earth clash with each other as they represent opposing value systems and thought patterns. East and West each has her own history and developmental path. Culturally, western thought is more or less linear as deductive logic would demonstrate.<sup>5</sup> The Christian concept of time is linear as the Eschaton will mark the end of an age. A new age will bring about a markedly different and distinct new creation of God. However, eastern thought would point to the circular pattern of nature. Reincarnation is typical of eastern religions. Could there be some truth in the eastern culture? Theologians working on today's theology cannot ignore the fact that Western patterns of thought cannot and will not monopolize the making of theology.<sup>6</sup> While the author does not advocate an era of eastern thought dominance yet he believes this is the time for east to meet west. The title obviously magnifies the thesis of this paper; a paradoxical configuration is probably a way to construe the theology of today. Just as we pointed out earlier in this paragraph that paradox is playing an important role in this world economically and politically, it will also play a significant role in theological formation. With insights provided by the Bible, we can suggest how pluralism and the use of paradox are compatible<sup>7</sup> to classical/evangelical theology.<sup>8</sup>

This paper will attempt to demonstrate the validity of paradox in human experience first. The second part will examine a solid evangelical work in biblical interpretation, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*<sup>9</sup> by D.A. Carson, to show that careful and responsible

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by new findings of quantum physics, the idea of an objective singular truth of modernity remains.

<sup>4</sup>Al Gore, the Vice President of the United States of America, in a speech made in 1994, proposed the popularization of the "Information Superhighway", the use of INTERNET, and prompted the ever increasing communication opportunities of different parts of the world.

<sup>5</sup>F.S.C. Northrop has an excellent treatment delineating the thought patterns of different cultures of the west, American and Europeans, and the east, specifically India, Japan, and China in *The Meeting of East and West, An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding* (Woobridge, CT: Ox Bow Press, 1946, reprinted 1979).

<sup>6</sup>Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West*, 436-478.

<sup>7</sup>The compatibility of paradox with evangelical theology is often challenged (most of the time not directly) in theological formation and Bible interpretation. Details are the subject of this essay.

<sup>8</sup>The classification of classical/evangelical is approximated with the classification of "Orthodox Theology" in *Blessed Rage for Order*, 24-25.

<sup>9</sup>D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility, Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

biblical interpretation requires the admittance of paradox. The third part will show how a paradoxical theology could meet the Kantian dualistic imposition on theology<sup>10</sup> squarely and yet be biblically sound. The fact-value split imposed by Kant has to be discussed and be dealt with<sup>11</sup> as theologians seek to make theology relevant. It is crucial that theology is the place where supernatural and universal meet the mundane and particular (individual persons). With the fact-value split, the universal would not be able to meet the particular as delineated in the Lessing Ditch.<sup>12</sup> Theological endeavors could be in the business to provide a

<sup>10</sup>The Kantian dualistic world view pretty much imposed itself on subsequent theological construction by forcing it either to comply or to reject dualism. Peter Hodgson put it mildly in *Christian Theology rev. ed.* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), "...since it brought into the question the objectivity of many of its claims." (12) Karl Barth is one of those who was so unmistakably controlled by this Kantian dualistic mindset that he, in his reply to Brunner, bluntly rejected any possibility of dialogue between the "natural" and the "supernatural" as in Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, "No", *Natural Theology*, trans., Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Canterbury Press, 1946), 62. On the other hand, Dietrich Bonhoeffer opposed this dualistic restrictive by proposing a "religionless Christianity" which began the run of secularistic theologies. Details will be discussed later in this paper. Further discussion can be found in Lancelot S. Tong, *The Pertinence of Paradox in Biblical Interpretation: An Experimental Approach to Hermeneutics*. Bethel Theological Seminary Unpublished Th. M. Thesis, (1984), 30ff.

<sup>11</sup>The jolt of Kant in epistemology is so far reaching as described in Jerry Gill, *The Possibility of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 70, that "Obviously there were others before (Kant) who helped to develop the position. My contention is that in the thought of Kant this dualism is expressed in an especially precise and far reaching fashion. Kant drew the line for this dichotomy in a way which has not been equaled in pointedness and profundity." Karl Barth who was so keenly aware of Kant's influence that in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. B. Cozens and H. H. Hartywell (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973), 266, he said, "The singularity of Kant's position can be seen already by the fact that, comprehensive and typical in both directions as it is, it is a solitary one. ... the connexions he lent the eighteenth-century spirit a pregnancy of expression which, for all the connexions he has here, makes of him an incomparable figure, so on the other hand in spite of every connexion, as a surmounter of this spirit he does not align himself with the companion figures of the new age - the line of succession leading from Rousseau by way of Lessing and Herder to Romanticism. He stands by himself - in this respect he can only be compared to Goethe after him - a stumbling-block and rock of offense also in the new age, someone determinedly pursuing his own course, more feared than loved, a prophet whom almost everyone even among those who wanted to go forward with him had first to reinterpret before they could do anything with him."

<sup>12</sup>With Lessing, there is an unbridgeable gap between the supernatural/universal ideal and particular human experience. The saying of Lessing in "On the Proof of the Spirit and Of Power", *Theological Writings IV*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957) 134, "...viz. that to take such a historical truth and with it to jump (referring to Kierkegaard's leap of faith)...to a quite different class of truths, and to demand of me that I should form all my metaphysical and moral ideas accordingly; to expect me to alter all my fundamental ideas of the nature of Godhead because I cannot set any credible testimony against the resurrection of Christ: if that is not a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*, then I do not know what Aristotle meant by this term. (with its foreshadowing of Kierkegaard's leap)...That, that, is the ugly broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap. If anyone can help me over it, let him do it, I beg him, I adjure him. He will deserve a divine reward from me." A general and simple understanding could be found with Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. IV (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1963), 126-131. For further and more detailed

proper paradoxical structure to bridge the gap. The last part of this paper would be a more speculative section of the uses of paradox. Pluralistic world views are accommodated in a more flexible structure.

## *B. THE RELEVANCY OF PARADOX IN HUMAN EXPERIENCES*

### *1. Paradox Defined*

Paradox, in essence, is not a self-contradictory entity. Paradox is a phenomenon in which seeming incompatibles come together. Webster's Dictionary defined paradox as:

1. a tenet or proposition contrary to received opinion. 2. a statement or sentiment that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet perhaps true in fact; an argument that apparently derives self-contradictory conclusion by valid deduction from accepted premises.<sup>13</sup>

The first definition from Webster says it well. A paradox is contrary to the "received" option, that means, a paradox is not necessarily truly contradictory. The second definition also points out the condition and helplessness of simple logical deduction. From the point of view of simple deduction, paradox is self-contradictory, but it is not so when seen from a wider point of view.

From another point of view, James Hastings has the following observation which shall be quoted in full:

A paradox is a statement or proposition in which on the face of it is (a) apparently self-contradictory or (b) apparently incredible or absurd, or at least marvelous, because contrary to common sense in some wider or narrower sense, or (especially) because contrary to 'generally received belief' on the subject in question. In all these usages the implication is not necessarily that the 'paradoxical' proposition is true -- 'true though it sounds false' -- but that the proposition is not necessarily false because of its 'paradoxical' character.

Many times in the history of human thought a bold and happy paradox has been able to overthrow an old and accredited but erroneous belief, and in the course of

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discussion please refer to Richard Campbell, "Lessing's Problem and Kierkegaard's Answer", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 19 (1966), 35-54 and Henry E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment, His Philosophy of Religion and its Relation with Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966), 80-100, and Leonard P. Wessel, *G.E. Lessing's Theology, A Reinterpretation* (Hague: Mouton & Co., 1977), ch. 5.

<sup>13</sup>Philip Babcock Cove *et al.*, eds., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, unabridged (Springfield, MA: C & C Merriam, 1976), 1636.

time has become a universally accepted truth -- 'sometimes a paradox, but now the time gives it proof' (Hamlet III. i. 115). In this sense, Hobbes defined a paradox as 'an opinion not yet generally received.'

As a rhetorical figure, a paradox is a device for illuminating as with a sudden flash a neglected aspect of the subject or for clinching an argument with a memorable phrase.<sup>14</sup>

From a practical point of view, paradox is no longer seen as proposition. Paradox could be seen as a motivation force to change the scene of complacency.

The above two definitions basically describe the appearance of paradox, their apparently self-contradictory character. A self-contradictory notion carries the idea of either-or situation. It means, logically, either this is true or that is false. However, paradox can also be "both-and". A "both-and" paradox heightens the opposing relationship of an idea or nature of certain substances. This is the kind of paradox this essay will talk about. As Hobbes concluded that paradox is an opinion not yet "generally received", the idea in paradox of this essay shares this same conception. In the mean time, paradox might be seen as an apparently self-contradictory concept. But the paradox is a "both-and" paradox which illustrates the mutually complementary opposing sides of ideas. Paradox is not necessarily a linear concept with only two opposing sides. It could be multi-dimensional (the multi-dimensional model of paradox will be discussed in the fourth section). In addition to the two definitions in Webster's Dictionary and James Hastings, the above supplement will serve the purpose.

Human expression is often paradoxical. In no way can humanity be explained by logical reasoning<sup>15</sup> alone. The complexity of human experiences and the intertwining of human thoughts make logical systems inadequate to penetrate the depth of humanity.

However, since the Age of the Enlightenment, science has been predominantly regarded as the fountain of truth. As logic is the father of science, no science can be found without logic. Science is based on

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<sup>14</sup>James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol IX (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 632.

<sup>15</sup>"Logic" and "logical system" here means linear logic or syllogistic logical system. The term "reason" and "human reasoning" also mean linear syllogistic logical reasoning. This sense of "logic" and "reasoning" is assumed throughout the essay unless otherwise noted.

inductive and deductive logic. Believing in the supremacy of science, many people regard logic as the only way to true knowledge. Yet logic still cannot explain many things. Though logic may help to determine what is "true" and what is "false" in some situations, it cannot help define most life experiences. Given a mathematical paradox, logic can almost always be used to prove the fallacy of the problem posed. But in a paradox of everyday life, logic may be completely helpless.

## 2. *Everyday Experiences as Paradox*

An example of experiential paradox is found in the relationship of husband and wife (or between lovers). The love between them is a mixture of "agape" and "eros".<sup>16</sup> Their love towards each other is at times a demanding and selfish love as well as a free-giving and sacrificial one. These two kinds of feelings intertwine with each other at the core of their relationship. But it is logically impossible to be self-giving and self-serving at the same time, in the same context, and to the same person. This is the very paradox of everyday life. However, by the terms of deductive logic, this kind of human love is self-contradictory; the logical conclusion is that there is no such relationship. Another classic example is the antimony discovered by Kurt Grelling in 1908:

call an adjective autological if it is true of itself (the adjective 'short' is short) and heterological if it is not true to itself (the adjective 'monosyllabic' is not monosyllabic). Is the adjective 'heterological' itself heterological or autological?<sup>17</sup>

The above two examples show that whether paradox is artificial as the antimony, unavoidable as "agape" and "eros", it is part of human experience. Howard Slatte further points out that paradox is not only valid by its own right; logic itself or the very fabric of logical reasoning is integral to paradoxes:

Here the striking paradox of polarity looms large within the reasoning process. Two opposite disciplines of reason, the inductive and the deductive, are

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<sup>16</sup>"Agape" and "eros" are used in a cultural sense that the Christian Church makes "agape" the highest form of self-giving and sacrificial love limited to God, and "eros" the self-serving kind of love between humans. This is thus used in spite of their respective philological or lexical meaning here.

<sup>17</sup>Alfred E. Blumberg, *Logic: A First Course* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1976), 79. The argument is delineated as following:

Premise: There is a village in which the barber shaves any male villager if and only if that villager does not shave himself.

Conclusion: Therefore, the barber shaves himself if and only if he does not shave himself.

The conclusion is self-contradictory. Hence the premise from which it is validly inferred that there is a barber with the indicated property -- must be false.

coordinated empirically into a fuller form of knowledge (in science). But this ... is not actually synthesis .... Their heterogeneity is more pronounced than their homogeneity, yet they coordinate .... Basically, this intrinsic shifting of mental methods of thought means that the scientific discipline ... requires the fulcrum of human intuition and the method of deductive reasoning to utilize its lever of inductive logic. Paradoxically, then, the rational structure is built upon the foundation of the irrational....<sup>18</sup>

We may push Slaatte's argument a step further here. Since we notice that reasoning itself is based on a paradoxical arrangement of a priori understanding then it is also possible to discover that reality or nature is arranged in paradoxical situations at times. The proposal is that paradox is first a possibility in reality and second a possibility in the biblical record. If logical reasoning fails to interpret the reality reflected in the Scripture, paradox could well be the answer.

Taking another perspective, we can examine further the paradoxes of human existence. As has been mentioned before, the paradox of "agape" and "eros" between husband and wife, in reality can be extended to other aspects of family life. This kind of paradoxical feeling as well as paradoxical category operates on every facet of human life. Another example which has the closest affinity with biblical narratives would be in the form of tragedy and comedy.<sup>19</sup> Sad to say, however, comedy is often built on tragedy. A particularly cruel joke was devised by the writer during his Seminary years.<sup>20</sup> It describes an absent minded professor who needs all the help he can get. One day when he got home after work he found nobody at home. The door was locked and the house looked empty. Trying hard to remember what had happened to his house, he dimly remembered that he might have moved. Then he saw a girl walking towards him. Her face was familiar. Even though

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<sup>18</sup>Howard Slaatte, *The Pertinence of Paradox* (Washington D.C.: University of America Press, 1982) 100-101.

<sup>19</sup>Slaatte, *Paradox*, 2-3, "It is being recognized more and more today that there are innumerable issues in life and thought which cannot be resolved by either the analytical or synthetical processes of pure reason. The problem is one of man, the reasoning existent. Man, whatever else he may be, is a complex, unpredictable and ambivalent creature impossible to define or explain adequately either by scientific detachment or rational concepts. It is to be expected, then, that much of his existence should bespeak the paradox, for it denotes a fundamental tension within thought and existence. Basic to human tragedy, paradox expresses what evokes a tear when a lover, who learns he is going blind, relinquishes his fiancée from her promise to marry him. Reflected in comedy, it captures what evokes a chuckle when the wind whips off the Cardinal's cap."

<sup>20</sup>In order to give credit to where it is due, it should be noted that the primary joke was given by Dr. Millard Erickson in his theology class. The last punch line is the device of this writer to heighten the sense of tragedy in the face of comedy.

he could not remember her name, he recognized that she must be somebody he knew. He jumped at the chance to ask the girl, "Do you know where did the people of that house moved to?" The girl replied calmly, "Mom knows that you would get lost, so she sent me to bring you home. Come with me, Dad." Usually the joke drew thunderous laughs at this point. After the laughter subsided, the writer would comment that the absent minded professor's momentarily lapse of memory was one of the several consequences of a heart attack as documented in *Heart Sound*,<sup>21</sup> a documentary fiction of a heart attack patient. That usually drew a dead silence right away. This "joke" shows the tremendous power of paradox to shock human conscience from complacency into reality. Is not the Scripture doing the same to readers (It is particularly obvious in Jesus' use of parable and pithy sayings.<sup>22</sup> Thus theology, as the child of Bible interpretation, naturally should bear the same responsibility to bring reality to her readers, too. Nevertheless, the writer does not assert that all things operate within the paradoxical category (and it should not be) as opposed to operating within the limits of human logic in a time-space category. The purpose of the argument is to point out the existence and the very pertinent function of paradox in human lives.

A rational approach, leaving out the possibility of paradox, is out of touch with reality. A solely rational hermeneutical system is definitely in violation with the very nature of the Scripture itself. The God who created human beings by His very own hand is the same God who inspired the Scripture. Since the Scripture is for all human kind and not exclusively for logicians, it is reasonable to expect paradoxes in the Scripture. And if the Scripture contains paradoxes, then the classical logical approach is inadequate to deal with the hermeneutical problems of the Scripture. Thus it is logical (ironically so) to assume that theology would include paradoxes and paradoxical construction.

### 3. *Paradox in Bible*

#### *The Bible as History*

One of the arguments against paradox in biblical interpretation is a hermeneutical one. Critics argue that the apparent paradoxes are the result of rhetorical usage. Or they argue that the paradoxes are only of

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<sup>21</sup>Martha Weinman Lear, *Heart Sound* (New York: Pocket Book, 1980), 213-214.

<sup>22</sup>The parable of the mustard seed (Mk 4:30-32), the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). The pithy saying of Who is the greatest (Mk 9:35), the life saving life loser (Mk 8:35).



particular concern on particular issues. This is an appeal to historical situations. Paul may say something different in Galatians from James in the Epistles of James. Paul emphasized salvation by faith alone in reaction to the pressure of the Judaizers. Paul needed to assert strongly "faith only faith." But James, who in his own time faced another set of problems, admonished the "twelve tribes in dispersion" to observe the law (James 2). As an effort to teach the Galatians about the inclusivity in Christ,<sup>23</sup> Paul denounced any works done towards salvation. There is such a discontinuity within salvation history that the Gentiles are included in it with no strings attached.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the Galatians should not even try to obtain favor from God by practicing circumcision; they should rely totally on God's acceptance. However, James, facing a Jewish audience who was familiar with Old Testament traditions writing a highly practical pastoral letter as an unquestioned head of the Church of his day, wanted to set forth the theonomic life in its essentials, that is, life lived according to God's law.<sup>25</sup>

The common approach to resolving this problem is the historico-grammatical method. It will render a pseudo-harmonious theology of James and Paul. Theologians tend to explain away the apparent differences and paradoxes by asserting the differences in historical situation. They assume that each biblical writer had a well-defined "Orthodox" theology as blueprint when he wrote the epistle.<sup>26</sup> The task of the exegete is to use this same blueprint to assess each individual book's appearance. Any deviation from the assumed blueprint will be assigned to the historico-grammatical department for adjustment. In his commentary on the Epistle of James, James Adamson rendered the "Law" being mentioned in the epistles as the "Sovereign Law", the law

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<sup>23</sup>J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 95-99.

<sup>24</sup>Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 99-100.

<sup>25</sup>James Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 20. Adamson's view is taken from an older work, but relatively current major commentaries reveal no drastic change from Adamson's 1976 commentary. Cf. James B. Adamson, *James: The Man & His Message* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1989), Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988).

<sup>26</sup>It is convincingly demonstrated that there was no settled orthodoxy in the early church. James D. Dunn has an excellent treatment of this subject in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) especially Part II of the book. A later book by Dunn which deals specifically with Christology is equally valuable as in *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980).

of love<sup>27</sup> which is not the literal code of law. Adamson's assertion neglects the positive effect of James 2:8-12. James was definitely trying to prove the function and positive effect of the Law. The term "Sovereign Law" is an assumption of the aforementioned orthodox blueprint. However, this assertion is assumed to be the result of the so-called historico-grammatical interpretation approach. Donald Burdick, one of the well recognized evangelicals, has a typical example of the phenomenon. He claimed that "The Epistle of James is without doubt the least theological of New Testament books...the delay in canonical recognition of the epistle was its lack of theological content."<sup>28</sup> In another words, James is only a situational and pastoral admonition without a clear theological conviction.

### *The Bible as Literature*

The grammatical side of the historico-grammatical approach also undermines the reality of paradox. The interpreter attributes the apparent contradictory materials as mere rhetorical devices. Berkeley Mickelsen in his *Interpreting the Bible* has a good example which shall be quoted in full as follows:

In dealing with the imprecatory elements in the Psalms, the interpreter should regard them as the poetic expressions of individuals who were incensed at the tyranny of evil, yet whose attitude towards retribution is so colored by their sense of being wronged or of the blasphemy committed that they speak out in language (cf. Pss 109, 137) far removed from the teaching that one should leave judgment to God, or from Jesus' statements of the treatment of enemies. Of course, no Old Testament poet knew the teaching of Jesus! But the revelation of God in the Old Testament did speak about vengeance: 'Thou shalt not take vengeance ...' (Lev 19:18). The intensity of the poet's feelings are certainly the product of his experiences.<sup>29</sup>

Mickelsen's main concern here is to defend the harmony of different theologies in the Old Testament. He resorts to an argument of rhetorical devices. But then he fails to address the reality of rhetoric. Rhetoric's purpose is to make one believe. With personal involvement and conviction, rhetoric is used to persuade others to assent.<sup>30</sup> That is to

<sup>27</sup>Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, 34.

<sup>28</sup>Donald Burdick, "James", *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. ed. Frank Gaebelien (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 164.

<sup>29</sup>A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 333.

<sup>30</sup>Wayne Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of

say, the imprecatory device is used to urge the readers to assent to the psalmist's concern, i.e., to kill them cruelly. Therefore, a paradox becomes unavoidable in light of the context of the Canon which on the one hand exemplifies love and on the other hand advocates horrendous massacre.

The appeal to historical situation works the same way as "rhetorical" understanding. These approaches correctly point out the *Sitz im Leben* and linguistic usage in the biblical text. They shed light on our understanding of the horizon of the ancient author. However, one cannot automatically translate these to the horizon of Twentieth century readers.<sup>31</sup> Taking the psalms as a simple example, historico-grammatical analysis may be able to assess the meaning of the particular original author but it will not be able to conclude the meaning of the many layers of editors of the Book of Psalms, the "Canonizer"<sup>32</sup> etc. Historical method may at some time (if it is ever possible) be able to sort out the *Sitz im Leben* in each stage of the canonization process, but which stage should an interpreter take as the *Sitz im Leben* of *crux*?<sup>33</sup>

### *The Revisionist's Hermeneutics and the Idea of Paradox*

The above problems are dealt with briefly by Tracy.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that the historico-grammatical hermeneutic is inadequate as a method of interpreting the meaning of the Bible. As Paul Ricoeur pointed out, from the author to the written text the development of the text has already gone through several "distanciations". These distanciations prohibit straight forward application of historico-grammatical interpretation to the Scripture.<sup>35</sup>

Many modern interpreters seem to be aware of this idea of "distanciation". Some who try to determine the *Sitz im Leben* of the original text realize there are "events" behind the text. Some take the "events" as the source of meaning like Vincent Taylor who favors

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Chicago Press, 1974), 137-139.

<sup>31</sup>Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutic and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 120.

<sup>32</sup>The term "Canonizer" used here roughly represents the gradual process of canonization.

<sup>33</sup>An example is given by Thiselton in *The Two Horizons*, 118.

<sup>34</sup>Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 73-79.

<sup>35</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," *Philosophy Today* 17 (1973), 129-41.

source criticism and redaction criticism<sup>36</sup> and sees meaning resting in the event, or they take the situation as a foundation from which to obtain the meaning of the text.<sup>37</sup> For these theologians, the background information determines the meaning; thus the "Quest for the Historical Jesus" looks behind the text of the New Testament. The interpreter's task becomes a historian's task because the meaning lies in the event behind the text.

As examples, source criticism, redaction criticism, and the "Quest for the Historical Jesus", etc. are each movements with an awareness of "distanciation". Each of them has its own unique way to deal with each layer of "distanciation". The tragedy lies in the fact that efforts are not concentrated on the text but rather on the process of "distanciation".

Tracy outlined the problem of "distanciation" further as following:

The first development with which we are concerned is the process of linguistic 'distanciation' expressed, for example, in the character of written as distinct from spoken language. Summarily stated, this recent development in contemporary linguistic and hermeneutic theory allows the prospective interpreter to understand that a written text, precisely as written, is distanced both from the original intention of the author and from its original reception by its first addressees.<sup>38</sup>

Tracy argued that since it is impossible and unprofitable to dwell solely on the *Sitz im Leben*, the next step is to put energy into the existing text, namely, our Scripture. Ricoeur has already pointed out there are more distanciations than just from the writer to the text.<sup>39</sup> The major block that still remains is in the leap from the text to the readers. Therefore, Tracy again proposes:

A second major development in contemporary hermeneutic (theory) ... is the insistence that the contemporary interpreter must distinguish clearly between the 'sense' and the 'referents' of the text and hence between the methods needed to explicate each. The 'sense' of the text means the internal structure and the meaning of the text as that structure can be determined through the ordinary methods of semantic and literary-critical inquiries. The 'referents' of the text do

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<sup>36</sup>Patrick Keifert, "Meaning and Reference: The Interpretation of Verisimilitude in The Gospel According to Mark," University of Chicago Unpublished Dissertation (1982), 64-65.

<sup>37</sup>Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 74.

<sup>38</sup>Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 90. Tracy's position here is formulated from Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory. The idea of distanciation is explained in Ricoeur's *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus in Meaning*. (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

<sup>39</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus in Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 20-44, 131-144.

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not pertain to the meaning behind the text (e.g. the author's real intention or the social-cultural situation of the text). Rather, to shift metaphors, 'referents' basically manifest the meaning 'in front of' the text, i.e., that way of perceiving reality, that mode of being-in-the-world which the text opens up for the intelligent readers.<sup>40</sup>

Tracy correctly put the meaning of Scripture up front in the text. Thus the task of the interpreter is no longer that of a historian. An interpreter should be and become a reader of the text itself. Taking this idea into account, the shape of the whole Canon seriously begins to make sense. As a whole piece of literature rather than different pieces of historical information glued together, the text should be viewed as a self-sustaining and self-contained piece of work. The differences within the whole should be accepted as one of its functioning devices. If the differences appear to be paradoxical then it is this function it is serving. The Scripture itself exhibits paradoxes as one of its literary features. An interpreter is compelled to recognize and accept the existence of paradoxes. Then the theologians' task is not to harmonize the text but to figure out what function (or functions) the paradoxes serve in the text and in our contemporary world.

### C. THE RELEVANCE OF PARADOX IN THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

#### 1. A Case Study

*Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*<sup>41</sup> is chosen because this book represents the solid application of historico-grammatical interpretation of biblical materials and careful handling of extra-biblical materials relating to the interpretative task which is the hallmark of evangelical scholarship. Carson himself is one of the leading biblical scholars, highly recognized in evangelical circles. His name is synonymous with evangelical.<sup>42</sup> The investigation will demonstrate that even good historico-grammatical interpretation would render an affirmation of paradox thus enabling a paradoxical explanation in theology.

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<sup>40</sup>Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 57.

<sup>41</sup>See footnote 9.

<sup>42</sup>D.A. Carson is Research Professor in New Testament of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Two of the Old Testament examples given by Carson is the paradox between Freedom and Bondage. The first Scriptural text is 2 Samuel 24 (cf. 1Chronicles 21:1-7). This passage records how King David was moved to take a census of the Israelites. But the result is a punishment against the people of Israel. In the 2 Samuel passage, King David is incited by Yahweh to order the census. Nevertheless, David feels guilty about the census and asks Yahweh for forgiveness. The context of 2 Samuel suggest the nature of David's sin is pride because he wants to assure himself of a great armed force (cf. 2 Samuel 24:3). However, "it is (never) very clear in what way David here sins."<sup>43</sup>

The motivating force behind this incident is Yahweh; Yahweh incited David to take the census. It seems David had no choice but to enroll his fighting men. But the end result is punishment. Ethically speaking, David must have free choice to make his sin morally punishable. If the plan is Yahweh's, then David is just an instrument to express Yahweh's anger. The question posed is whether David is or is not free to be responsible for the census.

A parallel passage often exegeted in conjunction with 2 Samuel is 1 Chronicles 21. The latter passage does not pose any problem by itself because David was said to be prompted by Satan. However, it causes a great tension or even more problems when it is read together with the 2 Samuel passage.<sup>44</sup>

The next text is Isaiah 10:5-19 and Jeremiah 50-51. These two passages are very similar and both of them can demonstrate the tension of bondage to divine will and freedom of the human will. The Isaiah passage tells how Yahweh uses Assyria to punish Israel and then avenges Israel against Assyria. The emphasis of the passage is Yahweh's absolute sovereignty. Yahweh "manipulates nations the way he manipulates tools (Isaiah 10:15); so it is the most pompous arrogance to suppose one may act independently of (Yahweh)".<sup>45</sup> But then is Yahweh justified in punishing Assyria for what she has done? Carson argues sharply for not resolving the tension:

...that brings us to the other side of the question. It is possible that the prophet believes Assyria to have overstepped her commission (10:7), but it is at best a

<sup>43</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 11.

<sup>44</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 12.

<sup>45</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 13.

secondary point...honor for Assyria; yet it is inadequate to say, with Rowley, that God chose a nation like Assyria for its punitive task simply because he saw that 'the very iniquity of their heart would lead them to the course that He could use.' The expression 'used' does not make God so secondary and contingent. On the other hand, Calvin's warning is well advised: 'We must not suppose that there is a violent compulsion, as if God dragged them against their will; *but in a wonderful and inconceivable manner* (italics mine) he regulates all the movements of men, so that they still exercise of their will.' Indeed, it is for the self-aggrandizement at the core of the Assyrian will that she will be condemned. From the passage, one might almost conclude that Assyria would have borne no chastening at all if only she had adopted a humble servant spirit towards Yahweh.<sup>46</sup>

Two passages from the Gospel of John will further illustrate Carson's treatment of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in tension. Both of them involve the condemnation of Jesus. In John 11:49-52, the prophecy of Caiaphas raises the sovereignty-responsibility tension a notch higher.<sup>47</sup> Since Caiaphas did not speak only on behalf of himself. As High Priest, he was also speaking on behalf of God. His pronouncement of Jesus' death which could save the "nation" from peril signified the will of God. However, the intention of Caiaphas is definitely different from God's. Caiaphas' interest is to protect the position of himself and the aristocracy. Yet the text does not mislead the readers about the cause or effect of his prophecy. So Carson concluded that "so crucial a saving event as the death/exaltation of Jesus Christ could not be thought to turn on the whim of a sinful man. God himself was behind it...When Caiaphas spoke, it was God who was speaking..."<sup>48</sup> Then who was the author in charge of the prophecy? There is no question in Caiaphas' mind that he is the author with his full intention imbedded in his saying. Yet the text suggests otherwise. God is the true author who is really in control.

Now we turn to Pilate, the governor who effectively put Jesus on the cross. John 19:10f gives a paradoxical as well as ironical description of Pilate's role in determining the fate of Jesus:

'You will not speak to me ('me' is emphatic in form and position)?' Pilate's own recognition of his authority 'makes nonsense of all the shifts to which he resorted to the attempt to avoid making a decision.' (*op. cit.* Carson; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 129). Jesus' reply does not deny Pilate's authority,

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<sup>46</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 13-14.

<sup>47</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 128.

<sup>48</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 129.

but insists that the Procurator would not have had any authority at all over him had not the entire handing over of Jesus been determined 'from above', i.e. by God.... This does not exonerate Pilate...<sup>49</sup>

Again we face the "who is in charge" situation. The problem here is acute as the text suggests Pilate is guilty, only less so than Caiaphas.

At the end of his investigation, Carson concluded that any one-sided inclination towards either divine sovereignty or human responsibility is the result of reductionism yet reductionism, is a dead-end street.<sup>50</sup> Carson preferred to leave the tension intact and let it be a "restless tension".<sup>51</sup>

The writer salutes Carson for his careful analysis and scholastic integrity in dealing with biblical materials. Such efforts show that the biblical materials, when integrated into a whole, creates unavoidable tension. Whenever there are polarities, there is tension. Tension indicates two opposing forces are pulling each other. Both of them are viable only because of the existence of the other. This is what paradox precisely is. Even though Carson refused or decided not to use the term "paradox", nevertheless, the reality of paradox is demonstrated. I salute Carson because of his courage not to avoid the issue like many evangelicals<sup>52</sup> but rather to face the paradox head on.

## 2. *Rebuking Kant*

This writer will not discuss the dichotomy imposed by Kant, which has been established in previous pages. The focus will be on the solution of paradoxical theological construction in response to Kant. We can consider fact and value in a paradoxical relationship; each one of them will function as a corrective to the other to demonstrate the reality of everyday existence. Reason itself depends on faith for its very

<sup>49</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 129.

<sup>50</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 220-221.

<sup>51</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, 220.

<sup>52</sup>A few of the "reductionist" approaches are cited in the previous pages illustrating how Adam Adamson and Donald Burdick resolved the Faith vs Work tension. Edwin A. Blum in "1, 2 Peter", *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin & J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 286, deals rather unfairly with 2 Peter 3:9 with a premillennial Calvinistic presupposition. He concluded that free will is no longer an option of interpretation. Even though the above cited references are a bit dated, however, after checking some recent commentaries as the Word Biblical Commentaries Series and the New International Greek Testament Commentaries Series do not offer much differences in this respect.



reasonableness,<sup>53</sup> and faith manifests itself not as mental state but in concrete act as dictated by biblical data.<sup>54</sup> If we can look at certain biblical data in paradoxical relationship, we can probably look at Kant more squarely without being subject to his dualism.

Let us use Lessing's dictum as a case in point. Lessing assumed the impossibility of the merging of the two horizons<sup>55</sup>: the horizon of the historical happenings and the horizon of the contemporaries. These two horizons are merged in a paradoxical relationship. According to the Kantian concept, there is no contact point between the historical happenings and the ontological truth. The Scripture shows us that these two incompatibles meet at two points. The first is the incarnation of Jesus Christ - the logos becomes flesh. God's truth becomes particular in the humanhood of Jesus. The life and death of Jesus is no doubt the first meshing of value and fact. The second point of contact is basically our only tangible point of contact at this time, that is, the Scripture. In other words, the Scripture is our sole source for truth claims. This is where the Holy Spirit comes to be the dominant figure. The Holy Spirit is the one who energizes the merging of the two horizons, first by inspiring the author and second by enlightening the readers.

The very nature of the incarnation is paradoxical. One may call the two natures of Christ a paradox. The logical pattern is clear. Two examples follow:

Man is not God  
 Jesus is Man  
 Jesus is not God

God is not a man  
 Jesus is God  
 Jesus is not a man

Nothing is more obvious than the fact that Jesus is a man and is God at the same time, and yet this is a paradox. In reality, the Scripture

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<sup>53</sup>As discussed in Part A, Section 2.

<sup>54</sup>Prime example is the offering of Isaac as a burnt offering by Abraham as interpreted by *The Epistles of James*.

<sup>55</sup>This term is borrowed from Anthony Thiselton's *The Two Horizons*. Special reference to Lessing's dualism and its connection with Kantian dichotomy can be found in 64-65.

shows us that paradox is real and is acceptable. For the early church, the arguments revolved around Ebionitism and Docetism! These are the polarities of the paradox. Theologians who seek to avoid this paradox can only stress one side of the Scriptural representation. The Scripture speaks of both and leaves the rest up to the imagination of theologians. Applying Millard Erickson's admission that it is impossible to keep every logical strand in perspective at all times,<sup>56</sup> it would be fair to say that the Christian's unofficial Christology is never a truly orthodox position at all times.<sup>57</sup> It seems one may consider Jesus as the Galilean at some time and as Christ divine at other times. The writer considers this phenomenon natural and healthy. This is one of the ways the Scripture presents our Lord.

God who is spirit becomes flesh in which God and man dwell. When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he was asserting his ontological position. When Jesus suffered and died, he was stating his historical, particular position as a man. A simple question makes a good illustration of the paradoxical nature of Jesus' incarnation:

"Did Jesus know the Scripture when he was an infant?"

Informed person could see the paradoxical tension implied in this question. From this, it is obvious that the universal indwelled Jesus particular; particular and universal co-exist in the same Jesus. When something is particular and universal at the same time, it is paradoxical.

When this principle is applied to biblical interpretation, it is safe to say that the particulars as recorded in the Scripture can also be universal in truth claims. As has been emphasized before, a paradox has two-sides. It cautions against any over-emphasis of the universal aspect of Scripture. In other words, the Scripture is capable of sustaining

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<sup>56</sup>Millard Erickson summarized the mood of believers and theologians alike towards the paradox of Trinity and Two Natures of Christ: "In practice even orthodox Christians have difficulty clinging simultaneously to the several components of the doctrine. Our use of these several analogies suggests that perhaps in practice or in our unofficial theology *none of us is really fully* (italic mine) trinitarian. We tend to alternate between Tritheism, a belief in three equal, closely related gods, and modalism, a belief in one God who plays different roles or reveals himself in three different fashions" in *Christian Theology*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 340.

<sup>57</sup>Judging from what he said about the Trinity and according to the writer's understanding of Erickson, it is entirely possible that such a comment be made on Christology as with the Trinity.

universal truth claims without losing its historical boundary. The merging of the two horizons is actually a paradoxical merging of the universal and the particular.<sup>58</sup> The past becomes contemporary because of the working of the paradox. The advantage of the paradox is the constraining effect of the tension of the two poles.

#### D. CONCLUSION

##### 1. *Constructing Theology for Today*

Bernard Ramm calls for a new paradigm for theology in his *After Fundamentalism*<sup>59</sup> in the eighties. Ramm suggested that the paradigm of the old is not adequate to deal with the problems brought by the Enlightenment.<sup>60</sup> As a matter of fact, the bulk of our theology today is a system of apologetics.<sup>61</sup> Most of the systematic doctrines were formulated apologetically.<sup>62</sup> The attention given to the doctrine of inerrancy is out of proportion compared to the importance of the doctrine of inspiration in light of inadequate formulation of the doctrine of canon.<sup>63</sup> This shows us how an apologetic effort affects any systematic formation of theology. Another shortcoming of apologetically formulated theology is the tendency to appeal to a "from above" approach.<sup>64</sup> Most of the apologetic efforts towards inerrancy are based on a prior assumption that God would not allow any mistakes in His book! This is not to deny the many noble efforts of evangelical theologians, but an apologetic

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<sup>58</sup>Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 51-114.

<sup>59</sup>Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism, the Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 1-4.

<sup>60</sup>Ramm, *After Fundamentalism*, 4.

<sup>61</sup>Looking at the history of the development of various creeds, especially the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds, we see no carefully planned systematic theology. Even the great Calvin who set out to write the monumental *Institutes* has an anti-Roman motive in mind.

<sup>62</sup>Ramm, *After Fundamentalism*, 4-8.

<sup>63</sup>It seems there was never a conference for the discussion of the doctrine of inspiration and canon as well attended and as massive as the Chicago Conference of Inerrancy by evangelicals. This writer does not deny the importance of inerrancy. However, inerrancy is a derived doctrine of inspiration instead of the other way around. Without a proper discussion of inspiration, no doctrine of inerrancy could be formulated meaningfully.

<sup>64</sup>"Article XI" of Chicago Statement of Inerrancy asserts that inerrancy is caused "from above." This writer considers a "from below" possibility of inerrancy which could be derived from the Lutheran conception of perspicuity of the Word.

approach to theology is decidedly inadequate and unappealing.<sup>65</sup> Ramm used the model of Karl Barth as a beginning point. He asserted that Barth has provided the best paradigm to do theology since the Enlightenment. Whether Ramm succeeded in proving his thesis in his book, *After Fundamentalism*, is beside the point here. The important issue is Ramm's concern for an updated model with which to do theology. Ramm's concern,<sup>66</sup> combined with the aforementioned inadequacy of the apologetic approach to theology, certainly cries out for a competent system of theology.

Tracy championed a revisionist's approach to construct theology<sup>67</sup> which is a conscious effort to move away from the historical, apologetic dimension of doing theology. In other words, this is more a theology of praxis than a theology of revelation, a theology from below than a theology from above. However, that is not to say this approach does not take the text, namely, the Scripture, seriously. The fact is that this approach tilts towards a theology of praxis. The real control is the faith community and its language and experience. This writer considers that Tracy should be applauded for his conscious breaking away from an apologetic approach. In order to dialogue with the contemporary world without quarreling, pure apologetics has to be abandoned. This writer would term this kind of approach a theology of refinement and a corrective to apologetic theology. It is more practical and less defensive. Since no theology comes to existence out of vacuum, the question here is whether the theology is borne out of apologetic concern or is from a concern for refinement. A classic example would be the Fundamentalist movement at the turn of the century in America. In the early years, theology was developed to combat Liberalism. *The Fundamentals*<sup>68</sup> are apologetically

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<sup>65</sup>The polemic of Harold Lindsell is definitely not appealing and has not contributed much to the good of the formulation of an adequate doctrine of inerrancy. See his book, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976). This writer would probably agree with Lindsell's apologetic concern but disagree with his closed-mind approach to such an important doctrine of evangelical faith.

<sup>66</sup>Ramm's concern is again echoed in our days though from a slightly different angle. Evangelical theologians lament the lack of respectable and viable theology as we enter the twenty-first century. Evangelical theology is not heard or even considered an option by our culture. "...the realm of first order thinking, which can exert a tremendous, albeit indirect, influence on modern life remains largely untouched by evangelical insight." *Op. cit.* Mark Noll, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., and David Wells, "Evangelical Theology Today," *Theology Today* 51 (1995), 495-507.

<sup>67</sup>Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, ch. 3.

<sup>68</sup>Examples can be found in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., [1908]).

oriented. After World War II, however, the emergence of Evangelicalism stood as a development or refinement (or corrective) of Fundamental Theology. The work of Carl F. H. Henry, one of the most prominent figures in Evangelicalism, is much less apologetic in tone and much more positive in approach.<sup>69</sup> In light of the discussion above, we summarize in the following diagram paradigms of theological construction:

<b>Function of Theology:</b>	Apologetic	↔	Development
<b>Degree of Direct Historical Influence:</b>	Direct	↔	Correcting
<b>Degree of Divine Intervention:</b>	Direct Revelation	↔	Human Experience
<b>Approach:</b>	From Above	↔	From Below

### Perspective of Theology Development

## 2. Unity and Diversity

Having briefly discussed how theology is formulated, we now come back to the heart of the issue, that is, the function of paradox in the formulation of theology. The big question here is "how to do it?"

Paradox's great advantage is its flexibility. It is precisely the nature of paradox to prevent any hardening of methodology. It is impossible and not advisable to hammer out a fifty percent "from above" and fifty percent "from below" approach. It is also not the direction of paradox to pick a model in between. The function of paradox is best termed a paradox corrective. A paradox corrective is a factor which functions differently in different situations. Paradox is not a fixed element but is rather a conceptual tool with "fluid function." The fluid function will be discussed in more details in the following paragraph.

<sup>69</sup>An example here is Carl F. H. Henry, "The Perils of Independency" and "The Perils of Ecumenicity," *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology*, ed. Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 341-353.

One of the functions of paradox is to allow disparate points of view to be maintained in theology. It also guards against extremism by insuring a tension of counter perspectives. Bernard Ramm has called for a new paradigm for theology which would be one of development rather than of apologetic reaction. That is to say, this paradigm starts out as a relatively clean sheet of paper. As a post-apologetic development of theology, it would be open enough to account for "fluid function". Before discussing in details the nature of "fluid function", let us look at a possible example.

In reviewing the historical trends, this perhaps may be found in the methodology coming from the revisionist's approach. This arises from an awareness of the relationship between human experience and hermeneutics. Drawing insights from the late Wittgenstein, it takes a very different course from the Kantian epistemology, as well as from the Enlightenment. Wittgenstein's concept of language games gives life to religious language. Religious language is meaningful because language is part of meaning. "The meaning of a given statement is the reason why and the way in which it is made."<sup>70</sup> In other words, this Linguistic Phenomenological paradigm is a paradigm of development.

However, this approach, like all other systems of theology, is indeed not perfect. This is a theology of praxis. It needs a corrective in the long run to affirm the revelatory side of the truth.

We shall not investigate this system of theology further here. First, the revisionist's model of theology is only one of the many models and second, Linguistic Phenomenology is not the focus of this essay. It is used to demonstrate the fluid function of paradox in the formulation of theology. Historical, theological trends oscillate between praxis and revelation. If we can have the paradox corrective built into a theology, the fluid function will be constantly at work to formulate a theology suitable for its time.

We return here to the theoretical aspects of paradox. Since paradox is not fixed at a point, it allows the tension between divine revelation and human experience to constrain movement as well as allowing movement in many directions. The above diagram tends to give a linear representation of paradox. In fact, paradox can function in a multi-

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<sup>70</sup>Jerry Gill, *The Possibilities of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 101.

dimensional framework. This capacity for creating a multi-dimensional structure is more appealing than a linear dialectical model, for it allows for more diversity in more directions within the unity of its total framework. Paradox allows for the co-existence of diversity within a unity.

When Dunn suggests in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* that there was much diversity of doctrine in the early church, he is also suggesting these diversities were really options at that time.<sup>71</sup> Somehow, he fails to see that the unifying force behind all these diversities is the Scriptural witness, from which all possible diversities draw their foundation. As the Scripture itself has a paradox corrective from within, the diversities were drawn together in the formulation of doctrines. Whatever diversity that was not within the boundary of the Scripture was not kept. Even though there were many diversities, unity was held by the paradox corrective.

### 3. *The Pluralistic Society*

Another feature of our time is the pluralistic world views. A competent theology should be capable of making room for these changes in society. Tracing the very essence of this issue, there is again a tension between a theology "from above" and a theology "from below". Before the epidemic-like outbreak of pluralistic world views, a "from above" theology was sufficient. It dominated the existing world view and there was no challenge from other world views. All people lived, worked, and died under this one world view. No question were asked and no complaints were made. When faced with a pluralistic society, adjustments had to be made in order to make theology relevant. Today a third-world missionary faces a completely different culture and political system than that of the Western world. Mission history tells us how Western theological hegemony failed time after time to evangelize the nationals.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps a third option exists. That is to say, the missionary could formulate a theology indigenous enough to deal with the national situation

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<sup>71</sup>Dunn, *Unity and Diversity of the New Testament*, ch. XI.

<sup>72</sup>The book by John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity, The First Encounter* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983) is very helpful to illustrate the point. A particular case is cited on 117-123 about how K'ang-hsi Emperor, who embraced Western science giving much freedom to Jesuit missionaries initially, came to reject Christianity at the end because of his concern over the cultural hegemony of Christianity.

yet biblical enough to be faithful to the Scripture. This is where a paradox corrective comes in. The paradox corrective regulates the oscillation between a "from above" and a "from below" theology. It functions in theology as it does in hermeneutics. Hermeneutics and theology are so closely related that any change in hermeneutics will affect its resultant theology. The concept of paradox makes theology a much more flexible and versatile element in today's society. Paradox allows a greater versatility because it does not fix theology at a particular point. Like planets revolving around the sun, paradox allows theology an orbit, but always within the boundary of Scripture.

#### *4. Paradox and Scripture - Descriptive or Prescriptive*

Howard Slaatte describes two types of paradox. One of them is an oppositional paradox and the other is complimentary.<sup>73</sup> We are dealing here with the complimentary both-and paradoxes as recorded in the Scripture. These are descriptions of historical happenings, stories. The Scripture is in a sense, a historical record. It is a theological record of how God and humans meet in history. It is also a theological record of human beings' encountering other human beings. Therefore, the paradoxes of the Scripture are a natural expression of the relationship between God and His creation in general. Another feature of the Scripture is its form. The Scripture is composed largely of historical narrative and, to a lesser extent, poetry. (The Epistles and Apocalyptic literature also can be arguably considered as narrative because they either speak to a historic occasion or are written in a narrative style.) As a rough classification, there are two literary styles of the Scripture: narrative and poetry.

Making this point, we find that Scripture consists basically of stories. They are stories told in narrative form and poetic form. The poetic elements are only another aesthetic rhetorical style for telling the story. The Psalms talk about how a man can petition God for deliverance, see his petition granted, and then rejoice (this is a typical lament psalm!).

If we understand that the biblical writers were writing stories, then we discover that paradoxes function descriptively. Paradoxes are descriptions within the story. They describe the tension in reality. Actually

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<sup>73</sup>*Op. cit.* Slaatte, *Paradox*, 5, "Both constitute a meeting as a coincidence or exception to rule, thus stressing the opposite per se more than their meeting. This is an 'either-or' type of paradox. The other way may be said to reflect the meeting of opposites as something essential to the understanding of things. Posing a vital relationship and mutual relevance of opposites, such a paradox is a 'both-and' type."



this tension holds the stories together. Therefore, paradoxes in stories are "both-and" paradoxes. They describe the "mutual relevance in opposites". Paradoxes function to keep the story, or more precisely, the drama of life, (ironically) true to life. They tell the readers the story is true and the drama is life-size.

We shall turn to a more passionate side of the paradox here. Paradox in life is described as drama exhibiting itself in comedy and tragedy. The paradox in life drama is the capability to evoke tears in a joke.<sup>74</sup> A Scriptural paradox is found in the Salvation drama. What Christians are celebrating is a new life because of Jesus' death. We rejoice because of the tragedy that happened to the person Jesus.

Now we have a clear understanding of the type of paradox one can find in the Scripture. The paradoxes maintain the coherence of a story; they do not pull apart from each other but rather pull together. They are descriptive in nature. They are not a prescriptive device, like a rational proposition. Paradoxes describe relations, describe how opposites were brought together. Therefore, they can function as a corrective. Accepting the reality of paradoxes enables the theologian to keep a bipolar or multi-polar theology coherent. Paradoxes also prevent any elements at the extreme ends from abandoning Scripture.

In the previous paragraphs, a multi-dimensional framework of paradox was mentioned. Saying the framework is held together by the paradoxical corrective means the paradox describes the coherence existing within this framework. It is a "both-and" paradox with a descriptive function.

### *5. Paradox and Logic*

Paradox and Logic are not incompatible with each other. All paradoxes come from logic and all logic have their own paradoxes.<sup>75</sup> Paradox has its own limitation in the formulation of theology. Logical deduction and induction are necessary in any normative theological proposal.

The above section has demonstrated the function of paradox in describing relationships and in describing reality in its intricate coherence.

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<sup>74</sup>See the joke about the absent-minded professor in Section A.

<sup>75</sup>See Section A.

Paradox helps theologians and biblical interpreters describe the boundary of Scriptural witness. Since paradox is flexible there need not be a precise demarcating line of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy will not be limited to one point but will be described rhetorically as an orbit. Like a mathematical equation, paradoxes set the parameters within which orthodoxy behaves in a prescribed manner. As in an equation, there are both constants and variables.

Theology is more complicated than a mathematical equation as theology involves human subjective judgment. Nevertheless, the analogy is adequate here. Scripture shows there are normative patterns in the Bible. Logical induction and deduction function to prescribe these normative patterns. They are like the constants in the equation. Without logical deduction and induction, no prescriptive normative truth is possible. Along the same lines, an equation without constants simply does not function. That equation will not have a definable pattern. This means the equation does not represent anything because it can be anything.

Actually, paradox and logic work hand-in-hand in theological construction. One of them alone is inadequate to deal with reality. Theologically, paradox is a corrective in describing relationship, while logic is the instrument for prescribing normative patterns. Without normative patterns, paradox will have nothing to describe. Similarly, without paradox, normative patterns will exist without coherence.

#### *6. A Last Remark*

The thesis of this essay is to demonstrate the existence of paradox in the Scripture and its function in theological construction. It has been shown that paradox is pertinent in hermeneutics, especially in interpretation of narrative. Its very function in describing theology is extremely important in today's pluralistic societies. A descriptive theology is more flexible in dealing with new issues springing up everyday in this "high-tech" society. It does not only give propositional truth but describes truth. A computer which has only binary capacity cannot describe tragedy and comedy. Paradox is where humanity is superior to machine.

Paradox is also important in the indigenization of theology. A descriptive theology is less overriding than a propositional prescriptive theology. With the described relationship, nationals are free to plug in their variables.

Paradox's flexibility invites changes and correction. It has no prescribed format. The fluidity of paradox enables new paradigms to be formulated to cope with changing situations.

## ABSTRACT

Paradox, by itself is often an unwelcome term in theological construction. This paper attempts to point out the legitimacy of paradox. Hopefully, paradoxes in theology can be utilized and recognized, and will become one of the tools to construct today's theology. Since the Age of the Enlightenment and through the influence of the philosophy of Kant, the fact-value split has become a constraint in theological construction. The use of paradox provides space for a theology which makes possible the coherence of fact and value. With this kind of space, theology has a built-in corrective.

## 撮 要

弔詭，是一個不太容易被接納的名詞，本文試圖指出弔詭的合法性，並且希望將神學中弔詭的使用清楚陳明，使之成為建造神學的其中一個工具。自啟蒙運動、康德哲學以降；事實與價值的割裂成為做神學的一個桎梏，而使用弔詭則賦予神學一個空間使事實與價值產生關連，並且因著這個空間使神學擁有自我校正的功能。