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THE VALIDITY OF HUMAN LANGUAGE: A VEHICLE FOR DIVINE TRUTH

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Doubts have arisen about the adequacy of human language to convey inerrant truth from God to man. These doubts are rooted in an empirical epistemology, as elaborated by Hume, Kant, Heidegger and others. Many theologians adopted such an empirical view and found themselves unable to defend a biblical view of divine, inerrant revelation. Barth was slightly more successful, but in the end he failed. The problem is the empirical epistemology that first analyzes man's relationship with creation. Biblically, the starting point should be an analysis of man's relationship with his Creator. When approached this way, creation (especially the creation of man in God's image) and the incarnation show that God and man possess an adequate, shared communication system that enables God to communicate intelligibly and inerrantly with man. Furthermore, the Bible's insistence on written revelation shows that inerrant divine communication carries the same authority whether written or spoken.

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As a result of the materialistic, empirical scepticism of the last two centuries, many theologians entertain doubts about the adequacy of human language to convey divine truth (or, in some cases, to convey truth of any kind). This review of the philosophical and theological origins of the current doubts about language lays a foundation for a biblical view of language.

THE CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM

One recent writer stated the problem of the adequacy of religious language in these words:

> The problem of religious knowledge, in the context of contemporary philosophical analysis, is basically this: no one has any. The problem of

> religious language, in the same context, is this: can we find an excuse for uttering these sentences we apparently have no business saying?[1]

The writer highlights two important aspects of the debate on the adequacy of language. First, the problems of religious knowledge and language arise primarily in the context of contemporary philosophical analysis. Second, the problem of religious language is inherent in the current sceptical view of religious knowledge: if we have no knowledge of transcendent realities, how could we speak about them in any meaningful way?[2] What philosophical currents have led to such a bleak view of the possibility of religious knowledge and language?

PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

Hume's Empiricism

David Hume (1711–1776) believed that all knowledge is derived from our sensations, referring to vision, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting. Experience alone is the key to understanding one's environment. Hume elevated experience as the measure of truth and held that ideas or thoughts could be valid only if they have their roots in experience.

This premise has important implications for our understanding of intangible concepts such as cause and effect, theistic arguments, or ethics. For instance, no one has ever *seen* a cause or an effect. All we have seen is a succession of events that has been repeated several times so that *in our minds* we come to connect them as cause and effect. Since nobody can observe cause or effect in a literal sense, it is impossible to *know* whether such concepts are true. One may only suggest or speculate that such concepts are true about his experience.

Knowledge is thus strictly limited to experience. It does not include speculation about experience. Concepts like cause and effect are thereby relegated to the realm of speculation rather than to the realm of knowledge.

Hume applies the same argument to Christianity, theistic proofs, ethics (especially when dealing with absolute standards), and other related concepts:

> If we take in our hand any volume—of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance—let us ask *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number*? No. *Does it contain any experimental*

[1]D. R. Broiles, "Linguistic Analysis of Religious Language," *Religious Language and Knowledge* (ed. R. H. Ayers and W. T. Blackstone; Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1981) 135.

[2]Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 6:45, 6:522, 6:44, 6:432.

> *reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence*? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing except sophistry and illusion.[3]

This position is called "empirical scepticism": any concept that does not immediately rest on experience cannot be the subject of our knowledge. Hume would not actually deny such intangible concepts. Cause and effect are helpful categories in discussing our experience, but the closest we come to *knowledge* is to assert that such categories are probable.[4] And while the concept of probability can be helpful, it cannot be described as settled knowledge. Though it may be helpful to digest the weatherman's nightly predictions, one grants them little status above that of informed speculation.

Kant's Metaphysical Dualism

The problem with Hume's philosophy is that knowledge is not just limited; it is, in fact, impossible. How could knowledge arise from sensations? Our perception of a chair is no more than various impressions like the color brown, a particular shape, and a hard or soft feeling. These impressions are combined into the image of a chair. But what makes us select only those sensations that pertain to our perception of the chair rather than one of the dozens of other impressions we are receiving, such as the room being stuffy, the smell of food, the phone ringing, etc.? It would seem that the mind has an important part in arranging all these sensations so that our world becomes intelligible. "Knowledge presupposes the recognition and comparison of causal, spatial and temporal relations, and much more. None of this, however, is provided by the senses. They give only tastes, odors, color patches and so on."[5]

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) attempted to resolve this difficulty by appealing both to the human intellect and our experiences. His basic conclusion was that the mind had certain innate categories, such as space and time, by which the sensory data could be organized and arranged, and which thus made knowledge possible.[6]

This theory does not escape all of the difficulties of Hume's empiricism. Concepts like causality and necessity are now part of the mind's makeup and help us to explain our world. But Kant's categories of the mind only help to organize and arrange the sensory data; they are of no help in thinking about the metaphysical world.

[3]D. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), sec. 12, pt. 3, quoted in G. R. Habermas, "Skepticism: Hume," *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of its Philosophical Roots* (ed. N. L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 32.

[4]Habermas, "Skepticism: Hume," 32.

[5]D. W. Beck, "Agnosticism: Kant," in Geisler, *Biblical Errancy*, 57.

[6]Ibid., 59.

Consequently, a concept of God is beyond our sensations and experiences as well as beyond our mind's makeup. Even though knowledge of experience is now possible, we are still unable to have knowledge of metaphysical realities.

Kant, however, pursued the issue further. Being a religious man, he wished to establish a rational place for God in his system. For ethics, this insistence on rationality meant that any acceptable absolute standards had to be derived from the following maxim: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should be a universal law"; that is, you should do as you want everyone else to do. This is called the "categorical imperative." From this kind of reasoning, Kant envisaged that one could arrive at all other great metaphysical ideas, like freedom, God, and immortality.[7] These concepts, though, cannot be known; they are speculations in considering the practical way of life.[8]

For Kant, then, reason was sufficient to discover all the vital truths that orthodox Christianity derived from revelation. Revelation became superfluous. Kant's insistence upon the rationality of ethics and religion left no place for divine revelation. Even so, reason could only speculate about metaphysical realities, but it could not attain absolute knowledge in this area.

Kant's philosophy, like Hume's, has no room for religious knowledge beyond that of speculation. But Kant, unlike Hume, found a place for religion in his system through his categorical imperative. His religion is not a revealed religion, but an ethical one.[9]

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Nineteenth Century Liberalism

Many nineteenth century theologians, following Hume's sceptical views, rejected the supernatural. God, Christ, angels and many other concepts of the supernatural are not immediately subject to our senses of hearing, vision, touch, taste or smell. Therefore, so these theologians reasoned, we cannot really *know* anything about the supernatural; all we have is speculation. These men came to see the world as a closed continuum without any supernatural beings or events.

Naturally, the idea followed that we have no divine revelation. In a closed continuum God could not have intervened to create any

[7]Ibid., 61.

[8]Cf. C. van Til, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture* (N.p.: den Bulk Christian Foundation, 1967) 54.

[9]In biblical exegesis a corresponding shift has been noticed, "from Luther's explicit christocentrism to ethicocentrism" (Beck, "Agnosticism: Kant," 67).

written, revealed record. "In a closed system . . . any idea of revelation becomes nonsense."[10] The emphasis shifted accordingly from God's Word to human witness. The Bible became only a record of man's experiences of the divine; and rather than revealing God, the Bible dealt with man's reactions to what he perceived to be divine. Although man's experience with the divine is important, it is inadequate to serve as the basis of a theistic worldview.

The next logical step was to forsake the Bible altogether. However, theologians generally avoided this radical step by rejecting as authoritative any human influences in the Bible while holding on to what traces of divine influence they could find. The Historical-Critical school represents this movement. The focus of exegesis became God's activity in history rather than his word about these activities. Doctrine was inferred from the historical record rather than being derived from God's statements about that record. Although God was not conceived of as intervening directly in history (as witnessed by the denial of miracles[11]) he apparently could still have some effect.[12]

Barth's Neo-Orthodoxy

It seems that one of Karl Barth's main concerns has been to recover a biblical concept of God. In order to do so, he returned to some concept of revelation, although it was not in agreement with the biblical concept. He also recovered a sense of God, in that God was supposed to speak *through* the Bible.

Yet, his effort was crippled from the beginning, because he founded his theology on the Kantian and Humean premise that knowledge is derived from experience.

> We cannot conceive God because we cannot even contemplate him. He cannot be the object of one of those perceptions to which our concepts, our thought forms and finally our words and sentences are related.[13]

Furthermore, under the ban of Kantian metaphysical dualism, he stated: "God cannot be compared to anyone or anything. He is only like himself."[14] That is, God is wholly Other, totally different from

[10]F. A. Schaeffer, *He Is There And He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1972) 63.

[11]Habermas, "Skepticism: Hume," 31.

[12]S. Obitts, "The Meaning and Use of Religious Language," *Tensions of Contemporary Theology* (ed. S. N. Gundry and A. F. Johnson; Chicago: Moody, 1976) 107.

[13]K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1936ff.) II, 1:186 (140). All references to Barth's *Church Dogmatics* as given are cited in G. H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963). The number in parentheses refers to this work.

[14]Ibid., II, 1:376 (146).

ourselves. He is completely removed from the sphere of sensory experience. Consequently, man cannot attain to a true knowledge of God.[15]

Barth's view of language proceeds from this emphasis on experience. Language, he argues, as sinful and perverted man uses it, is limited to this world.[16] Any attempt and intention to speak of God is impossible, because "God does not belong to the world. Therefore he does not belong to the series of objects for which we have categories and words."[17] And, of course, without concepts and words, we cannot speak of God.

Despite his heavy emphasis on the limitations of language, Barth makes a desperate attempt to allow language to speak of God. Theological language, "whatever the cost, must always speak and believe that it can speak contrary to the natural capacity of this language, as theological language of God's revelation."[18] How can language on the one hand be so limited that it *cannot* possibly speak of God, while on the other hand the theologian must believe that, "whatever the cost," this language *can* speak of God? The answer seems to lie in a mystical view of language. In its normal use, language refers to the objects of our experience; but in its theological use, it points to some greater reality beyond itself. A dogma seems to refer to an inner meaning that is not itself a proposition, although this inner meaning is referred to by a proposition. Barth most emphatically refuses to identify the inner meaning of a dogma with the plain meaning of the proposition, which is considered merely an impersonal, objective truth-in-itself.[19] The Bible no longer contains propositional truth, but rather becomes the vehicle through which "the prophets and apostles and he of whom they testify rise up and meet the Church in a living way."[20]

Barth's attempt to move toward a more biblical religion than what liberal theology offered was noble. However, by granting some of the premises of liberalism, he compromised his position from the very beginning. What we have left is not a biblical religion of

[15]On this basis Barth later denied that man was created in the image of God (G. H. Clark, "The Image of God in Man," *JETS* 12 [Fall, 1969] 221).

[16]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1:390 (119).

[17]Ibid., I, 2:750 (117).

[18]Ibid., I, 1:390 (120).

[19]Ibid., I, 1:313 (135). See also Clark's comments on Barth, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 129.

[20]Ibid., I, 2:582. See also J. W. Montgomery, "Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 8:2 (1965) 63–66. Note the similarity to Kierkegaard's rejection of objective divine truth in favor of subjectivity, discussed by N. L. Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," in *Inerrancy* (ed. N. L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 327.

revelation, but a system of religious beliefs that contrasts to an extreme degree man's finitude and God's transcendence. As a consequence, man cannot really know God in the traditional sense, so Barth takes recourse to existentialism; rather than choosing for revealed religion, he chooses the path of irrationalism.[21]

Some Twentieth Century Developments

Barth's idea of revelation is closely related to Kierkegaard's idea of truth as subjectivity instead of objective knowledge.[22] It is the idea that there can be "no absolute expression of truth in propositional form."[23] In contemporary theology this idea takes various forms. Some would hold that revelation is not incompatible with propositional truth but that the most important aspect of revelation is "God giving himself to us in Jesus Christ."[24] But for most writers the choice is between the person of God and propositions about him.[25] Yet others, repulsed by the idea that our speech makes God into an object, hold that any speech about God is illegitimate.[26]

The separation of the subjective understanding of truth from the objective reality to be understood gives rise to a similar dichotomy between God's words and his acts. God's words, we are told, do not convey information either about the world or about himself, primarily because supernatural words cannot occur in an experiential type of knowledge.[27] The attractive suggestion is made that the Bible is "not propositional and static, but dynamic and active; its focus is on acts, not assertions."[28] While there is an element of truth here (that the Bible is dynamic, cf. Heb 4:12), it would be wrong to

[21]"It is not surprising that Dr. Karl Barth's slogan *Finitum non capax infiniti* [the finite cannot comprehend the infinite] went together with a denial . . . of any rational understanding of revelation" (E. Mascall, *Words and Images: A Study in Theological Discourse* [New York: Ronald Press, 19547] 104, quoted in G. H. Clark, *Language and Theology* [Phillipsburg: NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980] 95).

[22]G. H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961) 76.

[23]See Montgomery, "Inspiration and Inerrancy," 53.

[24]J. H. Gill, "Talk About Religious Talk," *New Theology No. 4* (ed. M. E. Marty and D. G. Peerman; New York: Macmillan, 1967) 103.

[25]See Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," 330.

[26]H. Ott, "Language and Understanding," in Marty and Peerman, *New Theology No. 4*, 142. Yet another form of the objection is that language cannot express absolute truth, because it is "conditioned by its historical development and usage" (see Montgomery, "Inspiration and Inerrancy," 53; see our discussion later in this article).

[27]See C. F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (6 vols.; Waco, TX: Word, 1976–1982), 3:248.

[28]See Montgomery's analysis in "Inspiration and Inerrancy," 52. Pinnock shows the influence of this thinking when he states, "At the core of the biblical conception is revelation as divine activity" (*Biblical Revelation* [Chicago: Moody, 1971] 31).

minimize God's statements while exclusively emphasizing his acts in history.[29]

Bultmann and Brunner have further developed Barth's mystical view of theological language. Language about God is not merely propositional truth but is instead symbolic of the greater reality to which it refers.[30] Their program of demythologizing biblical language would presumably bring one closer to God.[31]

Heidegger's Irrational Mysticism

Heidegger takes the concept of knowledge based on experience to its logical extreme. For him, any kind of language is mystical, not just theological language. Kant had argued that knowledge of reality was only possible through the categories of the mind. Since we cannot know things apart from these categories, Heidegger maintains that we cannot know things as they are "in-themselves." So no true knowledge of reality as it is "in-itself" is possible.

The result of Heidegger's philosophy is that not only are metaphysical realities beyond the scope of our knowledge, but so are physical realities. Earlier, divine realities constituted the ineffable reality that is encountered rather than heard or understood, but now *everything* we see and experience is really ineffable. To put it in more Heideggerian terms,

> language becomes mystical message from the ineffable voice of Being. The unsayable cannot be said, only felt.[32]

Or, according to Van Til's interpretation, "there is a kernel of thingness in every concrete fact that utterly escapes all possibility of expression."[33] Thus, all of language, not merely theological language, is reduced to a function other than conveying cognitive knowledge.

At least two important corollaries of this philosophy should be mentioned. First, as we hinted, knowledge is no longer the organization of empirical data into true propositions. This would only amount to "substituting a small segment of verbalization for experiential

[29]R. K. Curtis, "Language and Theology: Some Basic Considerations," *GordRev* 1:3 (1955) 102.

[30]See N. L. Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 230.

[31]A. Dulles, "Symbol, Myth, and the Biblical Revelation," in Marty and Peerman, *New Theology No. 4*, 41.

[32]See H. M. Ducharme, Jr., "Mysticism: Heidegger," in Geisler, *Biblical Errancy*, 223.

[33]C. van Til, "Introduction," in B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948) 19.

knowledge."[34] So, while propositional knowledge may be public since many people can agree with it, the new concept of experiential knowledge is private since each person's experiences differ, if ever so slightly, from the experiences of others. "No two people see anything alike in every respect."[35]

A second corollary of this thoroughgoing relativity in language is that the study of a text no longer needs to be a consideration of the intentions of the author as expressed in the affirmations of the text; rather the text is one object among many in our environment. The text now becomes autonomous and its meaning depends on the needs of human existence at any particular time.[36] A multiplicity of meanings results which cannot be checked except by the existential truth each meaning carries for a particular person.[37]

EVALUATION

Following empirical philosophies, theologians have often considered truth more and more as a subjective event. This has dangerous consequences. If propositions merely point to some greater reality which itself cannot be expressed in propositions, then how can we know anything about that reality? If we can have a genuine experience of that reality, it would seem that we could assert at least a few objective truths about it in propositional form.

A more serious problem is this: since experience cannot be expressed in propositions, how can we know whether it is true or false? This seems impossible to determine.[38] We seem to have no means by which to distinguish an experience with a greater, evil reality from a similar experience with a good reality. Clearly, the theory that knowledge is based on experience is not a very satisfactory solution to the philosophical problem of knowledge.

With regard to theological language, the proposed choice between the person of God and propositions about him is a false dilemma. It is not a question of either/or but rather of both/and. Revelation is God revealing himself—sometimes in propositional

[34]Curtis, "Language and Theology," 99.

[35]Ibid., 100.

[36]Ducharme, "Mysticism: Heidegger," 212. Note the similarity with the distinction sometimes made between devotional Bible reading and biblical exegesis.

[37]At this point a brief analysis of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* and some of Wittgenstein's writings could be helpful, but it exceeds the scope of this article. Suffice it to mention that the basic problem remains the same, an epistemology that wants to derive all knowledge from experience alone.

[38]Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 86.

truth, sometimes in personal acts (e.g., Isa 6:1-8)—but always for the purpose of our trusting the person of God.

> The disjunction between faith in a person and belief in a creed is a delusion. . . . Trust in a person is a knowledge of a person; it is a matter of assenting to certain propositions.[39]

As long as propositions take us beyond dry creedal conformity into a relationship with a living person, there is no real person/proposition disunity.

One may well conclude, then, that the attempt to explain theological language in terms of empirical knowledge theory is an utter failure. Without reference to the biblical concept of divine revelation, theological language will either crash on the rocks of rationalism or evaporate in the mysteries of irrationalism.

TOWARD A BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: PRESUPPOSITIONAL APPROACH

The failure of modern philosophy to defend even the possibility of theological language reinforces an important principle: that "Christianity is based on revelation, not experience."[40] Therefore, instead of refuting sceptics on their own grounds or building a philosophy of language on their philosophical premises (as theologians have tried and failed), biblical data will be used to paint a biblical picture of religious language.

It may be objected that such a presuppositional approach involves circular reasoning.[41] But the choice is not between one approach that is circular in its reasoning and another that is not. It should be evident from this review of modern philosophy that once one assumes knowledge to be exclusively experiential, he will not be able to defend propositional revelation. This in turn implies that knowledge is only experiential—which is circular reasoning. The choice is, rather, between sets of presuppositions.

EXPLORING BIBLICAL DATA

The Bible never directly addresses the question of whether God can meaningfully speak to man. It is assumed as self-evident that God

[39]Ibid., 102. Notice also that the Bible rules out the concept of existential or subjective truth, because it frequently refers to "hearing" or "understanding," terms which would be irrelevant on the modern view, according to W. J. Martin, "Special Revelation as Objective," in C. F. H. Henry, *Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958) 66.

[40]Clark, *Language and Theology*, 141.

[41]M. E. Taber, "Fundamentalist Logic," *The Christian Century*, July 3, 1957; 817.

can intelligibly communicate with the human beings he created. Likewise it is assumed that man can understand and interact with the God who made him.[42] As these assumptions are uncovered exegetically, we will address the issues often discussed under the heading of "philosophy of language."

The Starting Point of a Biblical Philosophy of Language

As has been suggested, one of the Bible's assumptions is that God can speak to man because he created him. In other words, God must have endowed man with adequate faculties to respond to and interact with his Creator. One of the most prominent features of the creation of mankind is that God created them "in his own image" (Gen 1:27). This text (and related ones) brings out some important guidelines for a doctrine of the image of God in man without directly defining it.

Gen 1:26, "Let us make man in our *image*, according to our *likeness*," uses the two terms צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת. It appears that both refer to a visible image or at least something that can be visualized, while דמות is the more abstract of the two.[43] The Hebrew construction is most likely a hendiadys and would therefore function as a form of parallelism,[44] so it is best to take the latter term as intensifying the former. Thus, we should not distinguish rigidly between the two terms.[45] The resultant meaning is that "man, the end point, can be recognized as being an adequate copy of the God who made him, the starting point."[46]

It would be hard to make much of the different prepositions used, - ב and - כ. While the clause in Gen 1:26 reads בצלמנו כדמותנו, it reads בדמותו כצלמו in Gen 5:3; the prepositions remain in place, but the nouns have changed positions. The difference in the use of these

[42]See J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 208–11 for a brief analysis of the kind of language the Bible uses. He shows that biblical language is a normal language, no different from daily speech except in the topics it deals with.

[43]T. Craigen, "Selem and D^{e}mut: An Exegetical Interaction" (unpublished term paper, Grace Theological Seminary, 1980) 5, 11.

[44]P. F. Taylor, "Man: His Image and Dominion" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1974) 62–63.

[45]L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (8 vols.; Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 2:161; C. L. Feinberg, "The Image of God," *BSac* 129 (June–August 1972) 237; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (trans. J. Martin, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942); and Taylor, "Man: His Image and Dominion," 71.

[46]Craigen, "Selem and D^{e}mut: An Exegetical Interaction," 24.

prepositions is negligible.[47] Both of these prepositions can mean "after," but it would be clumsy to interpret this as if man is the copy of an image of God, "after our image and likeness." Rather we should take this to mean that man himself constitutes the image of God.[48]

Furthermore, Gen 1:26 mentions the image of God in man and man's dominion in one single breath. This should not, however, lead us to conclude that dominion is part of this image:

> Man must exist before dominion can be invested in him and . . . man has authority because of the truth that he is made in the image or likeness of God. The authority is not the cause of the image or likeness, but the image or likeness is the ground of authority.[49]

The next two verses (vv 27–28) identify the image as part of man's essential makeup, whereas dominion is an office conferred upon him; the image is created, the dominion is commanded. The image is the foundation of man's dominion.[50]

Thus, according to Gen 1:26–28, man himself is the image of God in the sense that God is the pattern after which man was made; God is the archetype and man the ectype. As a result man has been granted dominion over the earth.

In light of this, it would be erroneous to follow the common procedure of determining the content of the image of God by discerning what characteristics differentiate man from animals. If God is the archetype, then a more biblical approach is to examine the divine image in relation to God, not in relation to the rest of creation.[51]

Accordingly, a biblical philosophy of language (as well as a biblical epistemology) should begin by analyzing the Creator–creature relationship and only secondarily the relationships between creatures and with the rest of creation.[52] This is strikingly different from the philosophies of Hume and Kant which began by analyzing man's relationship with created things and sought to explain any relationship with the supernatural in terms of the observable relationships between man and things.

[47]Ibid., 19. Cf. also L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941) 204; J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (trans. and ed. J. King, reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979); Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*; and Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*.

[48]Taylor, "Man: His Image and Dominion," 71–72.

[49]Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:162.

[50]Feinberg, "The Image of God," 239; Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*; J. Piper, "The Image of God," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 1 (March 1971) 20.

[51]Cf. D. Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: Collins, 1973) 118.

[52]Even then man's relationship with his fellows is more important than his relationship with the rest of creation (cf. Gen 2:18).

It may be objected that, in a fallen world, God no longer serves as an archetype to whom man is reliably comparable. The human capacity for a relationship with God has been crippled by the effects of the fall. Sin obviously hinders our relationship with God. So how could we base a philosophy of language on this doctrine of the image of God and analyze a Creator–creature relationship marred by sin?

This admittedly is a difficult task. But the continuing importance of the doctrine in several areas of human conduct must not be overlooked.

The first human birth in history is recorded with the words, "Adam . . . had a son in his own likeness, in his own image" (Gen 5:3). The terminology used in this verse is almost equivalent to Gen 1:26 (which may have been what Luke had in mind when he wrote, "Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God," Luke 3:38). This passage establishes the fact that the pattern for the creation of man is perpetuated in human procreation.[53] Many expositors hold that this passage teaches that fallen human nature is transmitted from one generation to the next.[54] Although one may agree with this statement in the light of further revelation (e.g., Romans 5), the passage itself does not address this issue. The repetition of the terminology of Gen 1:26 in 5:3 refers the first human birth back to the creation process and shows that the image of God in Adam is recreated in Seth through human procreation.

A second passage in Genesis is more problematic:

(1) Whoever sheds the blood of man,
(2) by man shall his blood be shed;
(3) for in the image of God has God made man (Gen 9:6).

The first and most debated question is whether phrase (2) refers to the institution of human government or to a designated avenger of blood. The context, however, does not decide this issue, so "the argument . . . is based on silence."[55]

A second question, often overlooked, is whether phrase (3) refers to phrase (1) or (2) or both. If it is taken as referring to the second phrase, then the conclusion would be that man has the right to punish murder, because man as the one who punishes is made in God's image and is therefore clothed "with the judicial function appertaining to kingly office."[56] It is unlikely, however, that the image of God

[53]Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:167.

[54]Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*; Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*; Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

[55]J. J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975).

[56]M. G. Kline, "Creation in the Image of the Glory-Spirit," *WTJ* 39 (Spring 1977) 265.

is the foundation of man as judge. The *imago dei* is usually mentioned in contexts that are concerned with personal ethics and not with judgment *per se*.

In verse 5*b* God demands an accounting from each man "for the life of his fellow man." The manner of this accounting is indicated in verse 6, phrases (1) and (2), while the reason for God's demand is given in verse 6, phrase (3). Thus, God's demand for an account of human life is based on the divine image in man: murder destroys this image.[57]

Capital punishment is not, in essence, retaliation for life destroyed or harm done; it is the punishment for one who blasphemes God by destroying what God expressly made in his image. Man's possession of the image of God continues to have profound moral implications even in a fallen world.

Similar moral implications are evident in Jas 3:9. Hiebert points out that the perfect tense used in "men, who have been made in God's likeness" indicates a present result of a past event.[58] "The connection is simply that one cannot pretend to bless the person (God) and logically curse the representation of that person (a human)."[59]

I Cor 11:7 is somewhat more difficult. Paul identifies the man as "the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man." It is not immediately clear why only the man is identified as the image of God. Paul has been explaining that Christ is the head of every man who, in turn, is the head of the woman (v 3). In vv 8–9 he refers back to Gen 2:21–24 and "uses the mode of Creation to prove simply that God intended men and women to be different."[60] The difference is not whether both men and women are created in God's image (the text is silent about women in this respect), but rather whose glory men and women are.

In our context, it is best to take δόξα in the objective sense of that which "honors and magnifies" God.[61] Thus, the passage teaches that "a man, who is the image of God, reveals how beautiful a being

[57]Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*; Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*; Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*.

[58]D. E. Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith* (Chicago: Moody, 1979).

[59]P. H. Davids, *The Epistle of James, A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Text Commentary* (ed. I. H. Marshall and W. W. Gasque; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Hiebert, *The Epistle of James*.

[60]J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2–16," *CBQ* 42 (1980) 496.

[61]F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (ed. F. F. Bruce; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953). See also A. Feuillet, "L'Homme 'Gloire de Dieu' et la Femme 'Gloire de l'Homme,'" *RevBib* 81 (1974) 172, and F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, vol. 2 (trans. A. Cusin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

God could create, which makes him the crown of creation, the glory of God. A woman, on the other hand, reveals how beautiful a being God could create from a man."[62]

Paul highlights a man's relationship to God by mentioning not only glory but also the image. But when he discusses a woman's relationship to a man, he cannot simply repeat that "she is the image and glory of man" because a woman is not made in the image of man. Yet he does not want to say that "a woman is the image of God and the glory of man," because he is singling out a woman's relationship to a man. Thus Paul drops the concept of image and only states that "the woman is the glory of man." He leaves understood that a woman is in the image of God, while he points out man's close relationship to God by expressly referring to the image.

Clearly, the doctrine of the image of God is far from irrelevant in a fallen world. It adds significantly to our understanding of human procreation (Gen 5:3), capital punishment (Gen 9:6), human relationships (Jas 3:9) and orderly conduct in the church (1 Cor 11:7). These observations certainly allow the doctrine to play a significant role in a biblical philosophy of language.

Human Language Legitimately Refers to the Supernatural

Inquiring into the doctrine of the image of God points to the primacy of the Creator–creature relationship. Therefore, man's existence in the image of God is first of all to be seen in light of God's presence. Man's existence takes on a moral dimension and is first of all a theological fact, only secondarily an existential reality. The fact that man *exists* is secondary to the fact that God has *created* him.

The Genesis account itself supports this concept. God on several occasions pronounced his creation good. On the sixth day, after creating man in the image of himself, he pronounced it "very good" (Gen 1:31). This establishes a "profound moral significance to man's

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1957). R. C. H. Lenski (*The Interpretation of Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937]) interprets δόξα as "reflection" but this has little support from other sources (see Feuillet, 163). Others have taken the term as indicating "supremacy" (J. Moffat, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, in *The Moffat New Testament Commentary* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938]), but this is also unlikely, since the term either carries a subjective meaning, such as "opinion, belief, conjecture," or refers to the objective reality of "reputation, glory, honor" (Feuillet, 163). In addition, the Hebrew word כבוד corresponds to the Greek δόξα, which also indicates a meaning other than reflection or supremacy (Ibid., 164).

[62]Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Cf. D. R. DeLacey, "Image and Incarnation in Pauline Christology—A Search for Origins," *TynBul* 30 (1979) 18–19, and Feuillet, "L'Homme 'Gloire de Dieu' et la Femme 'Gloire de l'Homme,'" 178.

appearance as the divine *imago*-bearer."[63] Before the creation of the world the persons of the Trinity "communicated with each other, and loved each other (John 17:5–8, 21–24)."[64] With creation, God broadened the circle of communication to include mankind. This communication implies "a human capacity to grasp and respond to His [God's] verbal address."[65] If man utilizes his capacity for communication in "articulately and intelligently responding" to God's call, he brings glory to God in his own unique way.[66]

Any attempt to define the content of the divine image must take account of these facts. "The ability to know and love God must stand forth prominently in any attempt to ascertain precisely what the image of God is."[67] The role of reason in this matter is hotly debated. Clark argues that reason *is* the image of God, because morality and fellowship both require the use of reason.[68] This, however, would only necessitate that reason is part, or at least a precondition, of the image.

Whatever else may be said about the exact content of the image, it certainly implies a capacity for fellowship and communication with God. As such it underlies all of revelation.[69] The image implies that "the communication system of God and that of man are not disjoint."[70] This assures us of the intelligibility of God's revelation:

> By dependence upon and fidelity to divine revelation, the surviving *imago* assures the human intelligibility of divine disclosure. . . . It qualifies man not only as a carrier of objective metaphysical truth about God's nature and ways, but more particularly as a receiver of the special revelational truth of redemption.[71]

We must add that this is valid only if reason submits to and fellowships with God, which presupposes a regenerate state (1 Cor

[63]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:126. See also Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 2:162, and Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 204.

[64]Schaeffer, *He Is There And He Is Not Silent*, 16, 65.

[65]Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," 214.

[66]T. A. Hoble, "Our Knowledge of God According to John Calvin," *EvQuar* 54 (January–March 1982) 8. Perhaps the fact that "God created man in His own image . . . ; male and female He created them" (Gen 1:27) indicates that communication between a man and his wife is to be a reflection of the fellowship and communication in the Trinity, especially since marriage joins a man and a woman, two individuals, into one whole.

[67]Feinberg, "The Image of God," 246.

[68]Clark, "The Image of God in Man," 218

[69]*ISBE*, s.v. "God, the Image of," J. Orr, 2:1264.

[70]K. L. Pike, "The Linguist and Axioms Concerning the Language of Scripture," *JASA* 26 (1974) 48.

[71]Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:130. See also Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," 215–16.

2:11–12). Does this mean we understand God's language, the vehicle of his revelation to us? Although God can certainly communicate without language (e.g., through natural revelation, dreams, visions, etc.), his saving communication to the non-apostolic, non-prophetic believer takes the form of written revelation and thus involves God's use of language. Although man is certainly different from God (he is a sinner, he is finite, he is time-and-space-bound), his possession of the image of God seems to ensure that God and man share enough crucial attributes (the ability to reason, the capacity for relationship, etc.) to make a shared language possible. Thus, not only is general revelation possible, but also a special revelation involving language that is intelligible to man. The basic likeness of intellect between the divine and the human seems to provide for divine-to-human intelligibility through language as well as other vehicles of revelation.

Empirical knowledge theory held that human language does not naturally speak of God; that it cannot speak legitimately of the supernatural. The Bible, on the other hand, paints a different picture. Man is truly man as he responds to and fellowships with God. The doctrine of the divine image in man implies that creature and Creator can relate together and possess an adequate shared communication system for that purpose. There can be little doubt, then, contrary to much contemporary thinking, that human language legitimately communicates about the supernatural.[72] Consequently, to speak about God is not to "stretch" ordinary language as many linguists today would aver. "What is unnatural is the 'shrinking' of language reflected in the supposition that it can talk easily and naturally only of physical objects."[73]

Human Language Originated with God

One of the problems for modern philosophy and evolutionary thinking is the origin of language. If words originated as conventional signs for ideas or impressions that arose from human experience, then it remains incomprehensible how the first of these conventional signs could be understood.

> The Biblical Adam and Eve, or the first two evolutionary savages, would not have talked to one another. Adam would have selected a

[72]This does not, of course, imply that man can exhaustively understand any supernatural concept. All that is claimed is that God can use human language as an adequate vehicle of divine truth; and man, in the image of God, has been created as a moral agent, accountable to act on this truth which he is capable of understanding. See also R. Nicole, "A Reply to 'Language and Theology,'" *GordRev* 1:4 (December 1955) 144.

[73]Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," 214.

> sound for tree, sun, or air, and Eve would have had no idea what it referred to.[74]

If evolutionary theory were true, then, it is likely that Eve had no idea what Adam was trying to communicate.

The problem is only further complicated when the biblical account is fully considered. Some of the words in the Genesis account may have been derived by abstraction from experience (though that is hard to imagine), but to expect Adam to accomplish all this in one day would be too taxing even for his superior capacities.[75]

Further analysis of the Genesis record yields important data about the origin of human language. Genesis describes God as the first language user, and "shows us that human thought and speech have their counterparts and archetypes in Him."[76] God instituted language as the vehicle of communication between man and himself. Appropriately, the first experience of man described in Genesis is the hearing of God's blessing and his command to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28). Human language, then, originated not with man's observation of creation but with man hearing God's voice.

Eternal Truth in Changing Human Language

The basis for today's linguistic and cultural diversity resides in God's judgment at the tower of Babel. God purposefully diversified man's language and as a result the people scattered over the whole earth (Gen 11:7–9; cf. also 10:31). Since then, of course, languages have continued to diversify and develop, according to the degree of isolation of people groups.

Observing the relationship between language and culture, some have advanced the idea that language, as it changes and develops within any given culture, cannot be the vehicle of eternal, unchanging truth. Propositional revelation is not seen as absolute, universal truth, but as relative to culture. Curtis supports this position by the observations that every language offers its "speakers and interpreters a ready-made interpretation of the world" and that every language changes over time.[77] But Curtis supposes that once universal and unchanging truth has become embedded in human language, this truth must change along with the language.

[74]Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, 131.

[75]It is true that one can distinguish a great variety in the levels of communication of different species, from chemical to instinctive to cognitive. These levels, though, do not necessarily imply evolutionary progress. They merely show that the various species have an adequate communication system that enables its members to interact with one another.

[76]Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," 214.

[77]Curtis, "Language and Theology," 104.

But it is wrong to assume that a vehicle must alter its contents. Our language is quite different from that spoken in biblical times, and this certainly implies the need for sound exegesis to uncover the truth couched in ancient language. But the biblical writers seem not to consider this an insurmountable problem. Paul states in Rom 15:4 that the whole OT is relevant for our instruction. Even in Paul's day that document was centuries old. Yet he did not see the slightest need to adjust his claim about the usefulness of the OT.[78]

God's judgment at Babel directly addresses this situation:

> It is *God* who is responsible for the linguistic diversity springing from Babel, and it was obviously not his purpose to frustrate his own "stream of true prophetic interpretation" which he introduced into the world. (emphasis original)[79]

God evidently expects us to grasp and act on his word. Therefore, from the divine perspective, there is no great trouble in communicating divine eternal truth in changing human language.

God's Perfect Accommodation to Human Language

Some theologians suggest that, in order to communicate with man, God had to accommodate himself to man to such an extent that his communication manifests the inevitable error and mutability of human language. After all, we may argue that God originated language, but he also allowed sinful man to be (sinfully) creative in language.[80] So is it not necessary for God to indulge this corruption?

Obviously not! When Moses asked to see God's glory (Exod 33:18ff.), he only saw God's back (v 23). The problem was not *God's ability* to show his glory to sinful man, but *man's capacity* to behold God's glory in full. God could not communicate his full glory to frail creatures like man, because it would mean instant death. Similarly, God condescends in his verbal communication with man by accommodating to man's finite capacity for understanding. The problem lies not only with the limits of language, but also with the limits of the human mind.

Later in history God showed his glory to mankind through Christ in the incarnation (John 1:14). This involved some measure of accommodation without setting aside his divinity (Phil 2:6–8). But if

[78]See J. M. Frame, "Scripture Speaks For Itself," in *God's Inerrant Word* (ed. J. W. Montgomery; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974) 190.

[79]D. B. Farrow, "The Inerrancy Issue in Methodological and Linguistic Perspective" (unpublished M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1980), 130. See also V. S. Poythress, "Adequacy of Language and Accommodation" (paper delivered at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy Summit II, November 1982).

[80]See Martin, "Special Revelation as Objective," 70.

Christ is truly the Word of God become flesh, then he did not accommodate himself to human form in any of its sinfulness.[81] Christ did not sin (1 Pet 2:22) and therefore his accommodation to man in the incarnation is perfect, without sin, yet realistic since he was truly a man.[82] Similarly, God can accommodate to human language and communicate eternal truth without admixture of error or corruption as commonly happens when man uses the same language.

The Validity of Revealed Propositional Truth

Christ's incarnation has further relevance to a biblical philosophy of language. Christ wholly accepted the truth of the OT. He frequently referred to it with the phrase "It is written," indicating its authority. "He relied on propositional statements to convey truth in and of themselves and to convey it accurately."[83] Christ submitted to the authority of the Scripture, interpreting it in terms of propositional truth: "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:26). Thus, Scripture imposed a *necessity* upon Christ.[84]

Christ also demonstrated his stronger view of Scripture when he rebuked the Pharisees for their unbelief, since they did not believe the things Moses had written about him (John 5:45–47). Christ's attitude toward the OT was one of complete trust. He did not doubt that God had spoken, and that he had spoken intelligibly. He believed that the OT itself was God's word. His insistence upon the authority of even a form of a word (Matt 5:18; 22:32) showed that he believed it to be true down to the very words it employed.

In spite of this evidence, some believe that God could not address us in terms of propositions that are true. But note further that Jesus *did* speak in intelligible language:[85] "the common people heard Him gladly" (Mark 12:37). Clearly, several contemporary views of religious language become problematic on the basis of the incarnation alone.

Still others argue[86] that to concentrate on Jesus' teaching is to miss the point, because we are to be concerned with Jesus as a person. Yet, our Lord himself emphasized repeatedly the necessity of

[81]See Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 120.

[82]"Any linguistic theory that impoverishes language so as to separate man from divine discourse must attack the authenticity of the person and work of Christ himself" (Farrow, "The Inerrancy Issue in Methodological and Linguistic Perspective," 126).

[83]C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Inerrancy* (Chicago: Moody, 1981) 77.

[84]Frame, "Scripture Speaks For Itself," 188.

[85]Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 132.

[86]See our earlier analysis of philosophical trends involved in this issue.

accepting his words if we love him.[87] The criterion by which one knows whether the person of Christ is accepted is to see whether his words are accepted and obeyed. There is an intimate relationship between propositions and the person of Christ: both are necessary for true discipleship. Propositions are the impetus for discipleship. A relationship with the person of Christ is the essence of discipleship.

Christ evidently never doubted that supernatural truth could be conveyed by means of propositions. He believed that God uses language to convey information, even about the supernatural world.

The Authority of Revealed Propositional Truth

Many have tried to divorce the authority of God's word from its truthfulness. Barth, for instance, maintained that Scripture still had authority over the Christian's life, even though its propositions were not regarded as inerrant. However, "Biblical authority is an empty notion unless we know how to determine what the Bible means."[88] God cannot impose absolute demands on us without clearly stating these demands. Therefore, the marriage of absolute authority with propositional truth is unavoidable if one is to maintain a clear perception of the nature of Christianity.[89]

Historically, Christianity has well understood these things. It has always pointed to its written revelation as the authoritative source for faith and practice. Paul (2 Tim 3:16) and Peter (2 Pet 1:20–21) proclaimed the divine origin of these writings.[90] If this record is indeed God's record, then it carries his truth, his authority, and his power.[91]

But more than that, when one considers the biblical data it becomes plain that the Bible itself never makes a distinction between truthfulness and authority. Whenever God's authority is expressed, it is connected with his word, whether spoken or written. A sampling of some biblical statements will suffice to demonstrate the point.

Gen 26:5 says that God blessed Abraham "'because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.'" What are these requirements, commands, decrees and

[87]Matt 7:24–29; Luke 8:21; 9:26; John 5:21, 38; 8:31, 37, 47, 51, 55; 10:27; 12:47–50; 14:15, 21, 23–24; 15:7, 10, 14; 17:6, 8, 17; 18:37. Cf. also 1 John 2:3–5; 3:22; 5:2–3; 2 John 6; 2 Tim 6:3; Rev 12:17; 14:12. See Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:484, and Frame, "Scripture Speaks For Itself," 184.

[88]Farrow, "The Inerrancy Issue in Methodological and Linguistic Perspective," 132.

[89]P. D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 285.

[90]N. B. Stonehouse, "The Authority of the New Testament," in *The Infallible Word* (ed. N. B. Stonehouse and P. Woolley; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978) 107.

[91]Frame, "Scripture Speaks For Itself," 195.

laws? It would seem that they refer to God's promises as in Genesis 12, 15, 17 and other places. Abraham, therefore, accepted God's words and obeyed him.

Exod 24:7, "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.'" But notice that they had not heard the Lord speak; they had only heard Moses read from a book. Yet the people obeyed, because they knew that these *written* words carried no less authority than if the Lord himself had spoken to them.[92]

Exod 24:12, "'. . . the law and commands I have written for their instruction.'" The instruction again is concerned with *written* words. In this case, the Lord himself did the writing![93]

Exod 31:11, "'They are to make them just as I commanded you.'" Bezalel and Oholiab were to manufacture the appliances that were to be placed in the Tent of Meeting. The plan according to which they were to be made was given by God. If this plan was not in plain, ordinary language, how could the workers have known what to make? This kind of plan had to be fairly precise; otherwise there would have been no plan at all.

Another important concept is the covenant. This was a written document setting forth the terms of a treaty between a suzerain and his vassal. In Israel the written document was to serve as a witness against the Israelites (Deut 31:26). Other passages warn against subtracting from this covenant.[94] The emphasis is again on the *written* word and its authority.

Deut 6:17 admonishes, "Be sure to keep the commands of the Lord your God and the stipulations and decrees He has given you." Here we see that God's people are called back to his written word.[95]

In Matt 5:18 our Lord said, "'I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.'" "The indissolubility of the law extends to its every jot and tittle,"[96] and is clearly interwoven with a written document.

Matt 22:32, ". . . 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead but of the living." The argument here depends on the very form of the verb "to be." So God's word is clearly identified with the written record.

[92]Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself," 186.

[93]Ibid. See Exod 31:18; 32:10; 34:1; Deut 4:1; 9:10f.; 10:2-4.

[94]Deut 4:2; 12:32. Cf. Prov 30:6; Rev 22:18. See Frame, "Scripture Speaks For Itself," 187 and E. J. Young, "The Authority of the Old Testament," in *The Infallible Word*, 67.

[95]Frame, "Scripture Speaks For Itself," 188. See Deut 4:1-8; 5:27-33; 6:24f.; 7:9-11; 8:11; etc.

[96]J. Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Infallible Word*, 22.

References can of course be multiplied, but the point is clear. God's word is identified with the written record, and this written record carries God's authority. To obey the record is to obey God; to disobey the record is to disobey God.[97] God's authority cannot be divorced from his written revelation. This written revelation must be clear to be authoritative. Hence, revealed propositions carry the same authority as if God had spoken directly in an audible voice.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

At the outset it was observed that the debate concerning the adequacy of human language arose in the context of contemporary philosophical analysis. The problem of religious language was intimately bound up with a sceptical view of religious knowledge. Our discussion of Hume, Kant, Barth and others yielded the insight that doubts about the adequacy of religious language were rooted in an empirical theory of knowledge. This empirical basis of epistemology did not leave room for meaningful religious language. Even Kant's and Barth's attempts to restore some validity to religious language essentially failed. Therefore, most philosophers and even many theologians rejected religious language as an adequate vehicle of divine, inerrant truth; they rejected the biblical view of revelation. However, they were operating in the arena of philosophical analysis, not in the arena of biblical reflection.

Operating within the biblical arena we uncovered no objection to religious language. Instead, we found that without a doubt biblical data supported inerrant, divine communication to man by way of human language. God created man in his own image, so man has the necessary faculties to communicate intelligibly with his Creator. Language, therefore, can legitimately speak about the supernatural. Moreover, God originated human language, even in all its diversity, and uses those languages to communicate unchanging eternal truth. God's accommodation to human language does not involve error and so the truth and authority of propositional revelation are upheld, whether the communication is verbal or written.

The Bible, therefore, teaches that human language is an adequate vehicle to communicate divine truth. As long as one submits to the framework of biblical revelation, there is an adequate foundation for biblical thinking about the role of language in communication between God and man. In the face of the evidence discussed above, only unbelief would turn from propositional revelation to some other view of language, perhaps as dictated by currents in contemporary philosophy.

[97]Young, "The Authority of the Old Testament," 67.