

# THE BIBLE AND THE HERMENEUTICAL HORIZON: THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THEOLOGY

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SOME YEARS ago I began work on a theological treatment of divine providence. I first published an article, "The Eternal Plan of Divine Providence."<sup>1</sup> This was programmatic for fully rethinking the Christian faith concerning God's action in the world. Such a rethinking required, first of all, a study of all that Scripture has to say about God as Lord of nature and of history. Previous studies, in so far as they dealt with biblical material, considered only a very limited selection of texts designed to support a particular thesis that really originated elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> They did not present a view that resonated to the faith of the believing community; for while they asserted firmly the power of God to achieve His purposes, they did not satisfactorily deal either with human freedom or with the presence of evil, especially moral evil or sin, in the world. Further, considerations of God's power finally overshadowed the reality of His universal love.

In working on this study of what Scripture has to say about the divine action, it has become clear to me that a somewhat different way of dealing with the biblical data is called for than those commonly employed. This way does not reject or discount in principle other theological uses of Scripture; in fact, it gives them a new ground and support through a fresh look at the meaning of faith and revelation. In the present article I wish first to sketch briefly some of the other ways of using Scripture,<sup>3</sup> then to describe the method I have come to employ, and finally to illustrate this by a summary presentation of the teaching of the Psalms on the divine action in the world.

## SOME COMMON WAYS OF USING SCRIPTURE IN THEOLOGY

Biblical writings are the faith expression of a believing community. These writings in all their variety (narrative, poetry, prayer, gospel, letter,

<sup>1</sup> See *TS* 27 (1966) 27-57.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Providence* (St. Louis: Herder, 1937). The book begins by devoting more than 150 pages to a philosophical presentation of providence. From this it deduces three characteristics of providence, which are then proved from the OT in 12 pages, followed by chapters on the hidden ways of providence from Job (15 pages) and providence in the Gospel (13 pages). The following 175 pages spell out the implication of all this for living the Christian life. In *Predestination* by the same author (St. Louis: Herder, 1939), 21 pages are given to the biblical data; the remaining 350 pages are occupied with historical sketches and speculative elaborations in support of the "Thomist" position.

<sup>3</sup> In developing this section I am much indebted to David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

apocalypse, etc.) express the faith of the writer and the faith of the community within which and for which he was writing. For this reason these writings became the authoritative scripture of this community, for the members found there an expression of the faith which unites them in their dedication to God and to one another. Faith is both God's gift to them and their obedience to Him in His self-communication. The Scriptures guide them in receiving this gift and in obeying the intentionality it contains.

These writings are also held to be divinely inspired, for the faith they express is the gift of the Holy Spirit. This divine Spirit, who was leading and forming the developing Church, led and guided the biblical writers in the expression of their faith and in the words they addressed to the Church. As Karl Rahner has observed, the very process which was the formation of the Church involved writing as a constitutive element of it; and the entire process is the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Theology, since it is "faith seeking understanding," endeavors to discover and understand the faith expressed and embodied in the biblical writings. However, the very meaning of "faith" has been undergoing changes and developments in recent years and this has affected both the task of theology and the way it makes use of Scripture.

When faith is thought of primarily as a free assent to truths revealed by God, an assent that relies on the authority of God as supremely knowing and truthful, and when the Scriptures are regarded primarily as the divinely inspired written source of revelation, it is not unreasonable to use Scripture in theology primarily as a source of proof texts. This view prevailed for many centuries and theologians brought to Scripture their own questions and problems, their own positions and theses, and endeavored to find there a word of God that would answer their questions and confirm their theses. The generally polemical atmosphere that pervaded theology in the post-Tridentine period strengthened the proof-text approach. Engaged in debate with another who also recognized the authority of Scripture, the theologian would search for texts that supported his own position and demolished his opponent's.

Two factors, at least, operated to change the proof-text approach in theology. One was the realization that the writers of Scripture were directly concerned with issues and questions that either were not the

<sup>4</sup> "If God wills the original church as an indefectible sign of salvation for all ages, and wills it with an absolute, formally pre-defining and eschatological will within salvation history, and hence if he wills with this quite definite will everything which is constitutive for this church, and this includes in certain circumstances scripture in a preeminent way, then he is the inspirer and the author of scripture, although the inspiration of scripture is 'only' a moment within God's primordial authorship of the church" (*Foundations of Christian Faith* [New York: Seabury, 1978] 375).

same as ours at all, or else were set in a historical and cultural situation so different from ours that our questions and positions could frequently not be brought directly to the biblical text for answers or confirmation. Another was the recognition that biblical inspiration, however understood, did not remove from the text of Scripture the effects of historical conditioning, the particular perspective of a given stage of human intellectual development, and the personal limitations of a given writer.<sup>5</sup>

These realizations had come about largely from the work of historical criticism and led naturally to a greater reliance on the historical-critical method. Textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, and redactional criticism became the foundation for various kinds of exegetical and theological works that did not regard Scripture primarily as a source of proof texts. Theologians and biblical scholars turned their attention to the questions, concerns, preoccupations, and historical settings of the biblical writers themselves. Only after these were discovered in some satisfactory degree was an attempt made to bridge the differences between situations expressed in the Bible and our own.

As this changed approach to Scripture was going on, and fostered by it, changes in the understanding of faith and revelation also promoted different uses of Scripture in theology. If the Bible is regarded as the faith expression of a community, it is not enough to use the tools of historical-critical research in order to use the Bible in theology; for the most basic view of theology is that it is "faith seeking understanding." Hence new scientific methods for researching the text of Scripture will not by themselves determine how Scripture is to function in a discipline whose primary concern is to seek an understanding of faith. It is clear that the historical-critical method is indispensably necessary, but it is not sufficient. As a matter of fact, it has not been the only factor at work in developing different uses of Scripture in theology.

Since faith as a human activity does have a noetic dimension, the view that faith involves accepting truths communicated by God in revelation continues to operate in the use of Scripture in theology. The Second Vatican Council, for example, taught: "Since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation."<sup>6</sup> From this point of view the work of theology involves mainly a work of

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Brown has indicated some of the implications of this conditioning in "And the Lord Said? Biblical Reflections on Scripture as the Word of God," *TS* 42 (1981) 3-19.

<sup>6</sup> *Dei verbum* 11 (Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* [New York: America, 1966] 119).

translation: expressing in a modern idiom the truths contained in Scripture.

If, however, the truth communicated by God is thought of not so much in terms of particular truths or mysteries but as *meaning*, then faith can be expressed in a different way. It is not so much accepting statements of fact, assenting to propositions that express divine mysteries, as it is interpreting the world of human experience and history through concepts and ideas formed under the influence of God's self-revelation. Thus, to understand human life and destiny, we draw from Scripture the concepts, themes, and ideas which make this clear. We speak of covenant, justice, sin, freedom, grace, eternal life, redemption, Christ, Spirit, Father, church, faith, and so forth, first understanding them in their biblical usage and then using them to illumine our own human predicament today. Biblical dictionaries and the study of biblical themes may be considered as instances of doing theology in this mode. Vatican II pointed to this use when it encouraged the study of the "pre-eminent themes of divine revelation": "In the study of Sacred Scripture, which ought to be the soul of all theology, students should be trained with special diligence. After a suitable introduction to it, they should be accurately initiated into exegetical method, grasp the pre-eminent themes of divine revelation, and take inspiration and nourishment from reading and meditating on the sacred books day by day."<sup>7</sup>

Another way of speaking about revelation and the faith which accepts and interiorizes it sees revelation as embodied in a history of salvation. Faith, then, means not so much assenting to truths or employing special interpretative concepts as perceiving and acknowledging the activity of God in the history of salvation. As we read Scripture with the same kind of faith that the biblical writers had, we learn how to discover God's saving action at work in the events of human history. Theology then tries to understand this history of salvation both as recorded in the Bible and as continuing in the lives of men and women today, in the life of the Church, and in human society generally. Vatican II also provides a basis for doing theology in this way: "The plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them."<sup>8</sup>

A fourth way of regarding revelation entails a corresponding difference in the meaning of faith and in the task of theology as faith seeks understanding. Revelation can be considered the personal presence of

<sup>7</sup> *Optatam totius* 16 (*Documents* 451).

<sup>8</sup> *Dei verbum* 2 (*Documents* 112).

God manifested to us and confronting us with the need to surrender to Him unconditionally. It is not so much a matter of communicating truths or ideas, or even of guiding history, as of summoning each person. Faith, then, recognizes the divine presence as the Scriptures here and now manifest God to us, make Him present, and call for a response of trust, love, and obedience. Much of the theology of Karl Barth takes this view of Scripture and revelation.<sup>9</sup> Theology then becomes faith's endeavor to understand the God who is present, the mode of His presence, the grace He offers, the call He addresses, and the kind of response we should make to Him, both as He encounters us in the reading of Scripture and as He continues to meet us, individually and collectively, in the world today. Once again Vatican II offers a basis for dealing with Scripture this way. In recalling the different ways in which Christ is present to the Church, the Council declared: "He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the church."<sup>10</sup>

Still another way to approach faith and revelation is to focus on the symbolic expression of both. Religious symbols may be described as ways in which the divine power is mediated to us, released into our lives and consciousness. Words, events, things, and persons may become symbols of the redeeming power of God. The Scriptures radically and primarily present us with symbolic expressions of this power. Paul Tillich in particular used symbol to illumine this meaning of revelation.<sup>11</sup> To read Scripture in faith is to appropriate the power of these symbols, to receive the liberation and redemption mediated by them. The task of theology is especially to explore the power and meaning of these symbols and their relevance for our lives. Without using the word "symbol," Vatican II offers a basis for this approach to Scripture and for the kind of theology that derives from it: "For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her children, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life."<sup>12</sup>

Symbols, however, may be thought of not so much as loci of divine

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Church Dogmatics* 3/3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961) 200, and the remarks of Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture* 39.

<sup>10</sup> *Sacrosanctum concilium* 7 (*Documents* 141).

<sup>11</sup> "The religious symbol, the symbol which points to the divine, can be a true symbol only if it participates in the power of the divine to which it points" (*Systematic Theology* I [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1951] 239). He further asserts in connection with revelation: "This double meaning of the truth of a symbol must be kept in mind. A symbol *has* truth: it is adequate to the revelation it expresses. A symbol *is* true: it is the expression of a true revelation" (240).

<sup>12</sup> *Dei verbum* 21 (*Documents* 125).

power as ways to challenge our superficial and self-centered attitudes toward life and reality as a whole. Faith is accepting this challenge and moving toward a decision of authentic existence. This is the view that prevails in the existentialist approach of Rudolf Bultmann. The Bible is considered a collection of extended religious symbols of this sort, that is, of myths which represent to us the transcendent power of God as working in our world. The work of theology is to get behind the myth, to "demythologize," so as to perceive the challenge to decision, which is a call to faith. This precise view of "myth" and "faith" seems to find no support in Vatican II, though its positive content as challenge and decision does not seem inconsistent with the message of the Council.

#### ANOTHER APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE

I wish, however, to attend to still another way of viewing faith and revelation, which combines many of these approaches and will affect our understanding of Scripture and our way of doing theology. This grows out of the recognition that revelation itself takes place within the event of faith, not prior to it, and that the expression of this event in words and symbols is the word of God, carrying within itself the power to generate faith/revelation in one who hears or reads with openness. Theology will be the endeavor to understand this event in itself and in its expression as the word of God, and to make this understanding relevant to today's world.

Frequently enough when faith is described as the human response to God's self-communication, the supposition seems to be that revelation is somehow first presented to a human and as yet unbelieving subject. Thereupon the human being makes up his mind and either accepts in faith and obedience or rejects in unbelief and sin. It is as if the divine activity of revelation has taken place in the world and is whole and complete in itself before any human person actually accepts it. One may be able to speak this way when there is question of someone communicating to another a revelation he or she has already received (as will be clear, this is not entirely true even here). But if we are considering revelation as it first comes to a person who may thereafter be commissioned to spread it abroad, it is not possible to imagine that the inbreaking of the divine mystery which God in His freedom and mercy is giving to a human being is actually achieved except when the human acceptance is also present. No doubt the divine activity of self-communication has absolute priority, but this is like the priority of a ring which leaves its impression on wax. If the wax is thought of as voluntarily receiving the impression of the ring, then the wax in faith is accepting the revealing activity of the ring. If the wax refuses to be impressed, no revelation is actually given, even if it is offered.

The language and symbols in which this faith/revelation event is expressed are not entirely distinct from the event, merely following upon it, giving it outward form. Our inner life of thought and reflection is shaped by language as well as by many other cultural influences. This means that a person reflecting upon and appropriating the event of faith in response to the divine communication being given necessarily “languages” the event. The words so framed, by the very nature of the situation, express not merely the faith dimension of the experience but its revelation dimension as well. These words are not only human words but divine words also. They express not only the human intentionality and meaning in receiving God’s self-communication but also the divine intentionality and meaning in giving this self-communication.

Thus these words do indeed become the locus of divine power. Because they embody a divine intentionality and meaning, they have the ability to mediate the divine self-communication to another who hears the words in faith, that is, with openness and acceptance. St. Paul’s description of the effect of his preaching illustrates this. He wrote to the Thessalonians: “We thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13). Here, too, it is not the case that the divine self-communication which is revelation is simply contained in the objective meaning of the words that anyone knowing a language can grasp; rather, the revelation is made directly to the human spirit as believing, while the power of this self-communication is borne by the words as instruments of God. The words themselves as bearers of the power of divine self-communication elicit in one who is open and receptive the response of faith, within which, therefore, the event of revelation also takes place. Vatican II also expressed this vital relationship between the word of God and faith: “For through the saving word the spark of faith is struck in the hearts of unbelievers and fed in the hearts of the faithful. By this faith the community of the faithful begins and grows. As the Apostle says: ‘Faith depends on hearing, and hearing on the word of Christ’ (Rom 10:17).”<sup>13</sup>

The faith/revelation event with language expression occurs in somewhat different way in the case of prophets and that of inspired writers. A prophet is one who speaks for God; the word he speaks is the word of God. Old Testament accounts of prophetic utterances make clear that not only do prophets speak the word of God; they are also as a rule manifestly and deeply aware of this. Jeremiah, for example, exclaimed: “If I say, ‘I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name,’ there

<sup>13</sup> *Presbyterorum ordinis* 4 (Documents 539).

is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer 20:9).<sup>14</sup> An inspired writer is not usually as manifestly in the grip of the divine spirit. The writer may simply be trying to transmit faithfully the words of another who has spoken as a prophet, or to recount history in which God's activity is discernible, or to share the fruit of meditation, or to reply helpfully to the questions and problems others have addressed to him. Nevertheless, in so far as he writes out of his faith, the faith shared by the community under the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit, the word he writes is the word of God. The Church in a subsequent moment, in recognizing the writing as canonical and normative for her life, acknowledges in these writings the intention and direction of the same Spirit that animates and guides herself.

This insight into the event of faith and revelation with its constitutive linguistic expression seems to validate the various uses of Scripture in theology that we noted earlier: divine assertions of truth; ideas or concepts for understanding in a divine way; a history of salvation in which God manifests Himself; words which render God present and active; symbols of power; symbols which challenge to authentic decision. In all of this the historical-critical method of inquiry will be very necessary for determining the meaning of the text, hence the meaning of the faith/revelation event which the text embodies. But it seems clear that the historical-critical method will not be sufficient; for the meaning of words is not determined merely by other words but by distinctive experiences, and the distinctive experiences underlying the words of the faith/revelation event are precisely experiences of faith in response to divine self-communication. Theologians using the Scriptures in theology must, then, not only use all the necessary aids of historical-critical research; they must also allow the words of Scripture to bring about in their own interior the event of faith/revelation that the words express and embody, endeavor to understand this, and to express it in a way relevant to their own cultural and life situations.

This indicates that there is another and more radical approach to the use of Scripture in theology than any of those previously described. It involves seeking out the way in which the revelation event has shaped the faith response of the writer as expressed in what he has written, then allowing the same faith response to take shape within oneself, and

<sup>14</sup> John's Gospel, however, indicates that a person may prophesy at times without realizing it. When Caiphas gave his counsel, "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish," the Evangelist observed: "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:50-51).



expressing this as clearly and coherently as possible, both in itself and in relation to the many questions that arise from the human situation.

Let me be more precise. Whatever may be said about Rahner's contention that in every affirmation there is an implicit, nonthematic affirmation of the reality of God as the absolute horizon of the affirming subject's knowing and being,<sup>15</sup> the affirmation and acceptance of faith is an affirmation of God as the ultimately real and as somehow here communicating Himself in power and goodness. As the ultimately real, God is indeed the horizon of being and knowing; for if there were anything real beyond God, then God would be within the horizon of that further reality. He would be perceived against the background, within the context, of the being and truth of what is beyond Him. Thus, in describing the faith response and its correlative revelation, it is necessary to speak first about how this ultimate horizon is perceived. What are the most comprehensive and general affirmations that are made about God? How does the reality and activity of God actually and explicitly contextualize the situation about which the person is speaking or writing? From this perspective the first requirement of any biblical theology or of any use of Scripture in doing theology is to discover and express the biblical writer's faith in God, that is, his way of viewing the ultimate attitudes and activities of God. It is against this background that other topics may be treated theologically, e.g., Christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, and so forth.

In developing this faith stance of the writer toward God communicating Himself, it can be helpful first, to the extent that the text exhibits it, to describe the experiences in which this faith/revelation is embodied, e.g., a sense of "the fear of the Lord," "joy in the Lord," "outpouring of the Spirit" in tongues and other signs, "being known and loved by God." Next, as a more objective enunciation of the divine reality being communicated and affirmed in grateful acceptance, it is necessary to discover what God is said to do, how He is said to be present and active, and under what conditions. At the same time, it is necessary to see how God is said to be transcendent to this situation, to be other, to be beyond, without thereby necessarily being distant or remote. In other words, after exploring the subjective dimension of "religious experience," one looks at the objective affirmations of divine immanence and transcendence. Finally, one considers the particular persons, things, events, etc. within this contextualizing divine horizon and milieu, to see how they are the bearers of the divine purpose and presence, how they are related to God and to one another within this sphere of divine influence.

Furthermore, besides the immediate experience of God's revelatory

<sup>15</sup> Cf., e.g., "Man as Spirit," in *Hearers of the Word* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 53-68.

activity that forms the faith stance of the believer, there is the continuing capacity to judge and reflect upon other events precisely in the light of that experience. The immediate experience becomes paradigmatic of what God is doing elsewhere as well. This enables the light of revelation and the affirmation of faith to expand through a grace-filled consideration of other happenings. Remembering becomes the human activity through which God's self-communication continues to exercise and extend its influence.

#### THEOLOGY OF THE PSALMS

The Psalter provides a particularly apt way of illustrating this approach to the use of Scripture in theology, for it has long been recognized that the Psalms contain the whole of the Old Testament teaching in the form of poetry and prayer.<sup>16</sup> Because all that the Old Testament has to say about God is reflected here, a study of the Psalms can yield a comprehensive insight into the faith/revelation encounter of God with the Hebrew people. And since the style of the Psalms is affective and reflective, they offer material which can more easily be analyzed and understood in the way we have indicated. Finally, since the individual Psalms were composed by many different individuals over a period of several centuries, the Psalter in a special way is an expression of the faith of a community living in history and responding as a people to changing circumstances.

#### *Religious Experience in the Psalms*

Two basic religious experiences pervade the Psalms: fear of the Lord and joy in the Lord. These are the forms in which faith appears most fundamentally as the human spirit opens to receive God's self-communication. They correspond to what are the fundamental characteristics of divinity: power which is utterly beyond the human capacity to understand or control, and an all-encompassing goodness. Psalmists stand in awe of the one and find a firm ground of happiness and security in the other.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas introduced his commentary on the Psalms by observing: "The individual books of the Bible have each their own special material, but the book of the Psalms has the general matter of all theology, because it treats of every work of God. . . These books have different forms or modes, e.g., narrative or hortatory, etc. There is also a prayerful or praising mode, and this is found in the Psalter, because whatever is found in other books in their own mode is placed here in the mode of praise and prayer" (*In psalmos Davidis expositio, Prooemium s. Thomae*). John L. McKenzie made a similar observation seven hundred years later: "It is difficult to speak of the 'teaching' of the Psalms. The book is a collection of the spontaneous popular piety and beliefs of Israel from the monarchy to the postexilic period. It is not prophetic or wisdom in conception and style, but lyrical; in one sense the Psalms are a summary of all the beliefs of the Old Testament, but in another sense only the entire Old Testament is a sufficient commentary on the Psalms" (*Dictionary of the Bible* [Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965] 705b).

Fear of the Lord is not terror before something that threatens harm, but a sense of awe before the divine transcendence. In particular, it is aroused by a recognition of the creative power of God: "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all who dwell in the world revere Him. For He spoke and it was made; He commanded and it stood forth" (Ps 33:8-9). Joy in the Lord is evoked especially by an awareness of God's saving action in the world and in history; it is a response to the divine immanence. When the Psalms recall the Exodus, the central saving deed of God in the Old Testament, we read: "And He led forth His people with joy; with shouts of joy, His chosen ones" (105:43). The great gift of the law brings joy: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (19:9). In a more personal way, God brings joy to one who has experienced sadness: "He establishes in her home the barren wife as the joyful mother of children" (113:9).

Other forms of religious experience, often explicitly linked to fear and joy, are gratitude and sorrow for sin (looking to the past) and a sense of the need of God joined to trust and confidence (looking to the future). All of these affective states both are aroused by particular happenings and serve to interpret those happenings at the same time. Gratitude and joy are expressed together: "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will declare your wondrous deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, Most High" (9:2-3). Gratitude for an abundant harvest is linked to fear of the Lord: "May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you! The earth has yielded its fruits; God, our God, has blessed us. May God bless us and may all the ends of the earth fear Him" (67:5-7).

Sorrow for sin is most often expressed in the acknowledgment of failure and the confident plea for mercy and forgiveness. In a Psalm mostly concerned with the grateful remembrance of God's blessings, forgiveness is joined with fear of the Lord: "Not according to our sins does He deal with us, nor does He requite us according to our crimes. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so surpassing is His kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the East is from the West, so far has He put our transgressions from us" (103:10-12). But the following expresses sorrow explicitly: "For I am very near to falling, and my grief is with me always. Indeed, I acknowledge my guilt; I grieve over my sin" (38:18-19).

A sense of the need of God reflects the Psalmist's awareness that God alone can supply what he wants: "To you, O Lord, I call; O my Rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you heed me not, I become one of those going down into the pit" (28:1). Generally speaking, these Psalms of petition contain also an expression of confidence that God will hear and respond: "I lift up my eyes to the mountain; whence shall help come to me? My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (121:1-2).

These religious experiences of fear and joy, gratitude and sorrow, dependence and trust (and others also) provide the interpretative stance for speaking about God. They refer to the faith/revelation event which finds expression in words which are both human and divine, that is, they manifest both the faith of the Psalmist and the revealing activity of God which evokes this faith.

*The Actions of God as Lord of Nature and History*

In describing these religious experiences, we have already begun to say something of the understanding of God they called forth. A complete theology of the Psalms would require further attention to all that they say about God and His presence and activity. We may indicate here the main lines of this theology. There can be no doubt that God as Creator and Lord of nature provides the fundamental horizon against which all else that He does is understood. Creation is not considered for its own sake or as a solitary event of power; it is the beginning of God's saving deeds. God's creative action and His activity in the world of nature provided the basis for His saving action in history. Thus, Psalm 136 begins with the invitation to thank God (1-3), proceeds to describe His action in creating heaven and earth (4-9), and then moves directly into an account of the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan (10-22).

The most fundamental aspect of God's creative activity is its universality: He has made everything, "... heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them" (146:6). He has not only brought these things into being, but makes them endure by His power: "He has made the world firm, not to be moved" (93:1b). God does this by His word and His will: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made; by the breath of His mouth all their hosts" (33:6). "All that the Lord wills He does in heaven and on earth, in the sea and in all the deeps" (135:6). The basic consequence flowing from God's creative act is His dominion over all things: they are His. "For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. In His hands are the depths of the earth, and the tops of the mountains are His. His is the sea, for He has made it, and dry land, which His hands have formed" (95:3-5).

Faith in God the Creator of heaven and earth makes clear the distinction between God and the world. This is the essential meaning of the divine transcendence. This is sometimes represented in the Psalms in a spatial metaphor of height, which is designed to express not distance but supreme excellence: "High above all nations is the Lord, above the heavens is His glory. Who is like the Lord, our God, who is enthroned on high and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?" (113:4-6). One aspect of the divine transcendence that receives special attention is God's

eternity: "Your throne stands firm from of old; from everlasting you are, O Lord" (93:2). It is not just that God outlasts all things; His very being and perception of duration are different: "Before the mountains were begotten and the earth and the world were brought forth, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. . . . For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night" (90:2,4).

This transcendent Creator God manifests Himself in creation: "O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth! You have exalted your majesty above the heavens" (8:2). He shows Himself in storms: "The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over vast waters" (29:3). "Fire goes before Him and consumes His foes round about. His lightnings illumine the world; the earth sees and trembles" (97:4). But it is especially in blessing people and providing for their needs that God is at work in nature: "The eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season; you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (145:15-16).

The Psalms, however, as all of the Old Testament, are more concerned about God's action in history than in nature. But because God is the Creator of the whole world, He is also the Lord of all history. He is the Lord of all nations: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations shall bow down before Him. For dominion is the Lord's, and He rules the nations" (22:28-29). God's plan is eternal and overcomes human resistance: "The Lord brings to nought the plans of nations; He foils the designs of peoples. But the plan of the Lord stands forever, the design of His heart through all generations" (33:10-11). This universal and eternal plan brings justice: "But the Lord sits enthroned forever; He has set up His throne for judgment. He judges the world with justice; He governs the peoples with equity" (9:8-9).

But Israel's awareness of God's action in history centered mostly on her own history. The Hebrew people saw themselves as God's inheritance, His special possession: "For the Lord will not cast off His people nor abandon His inheritance" (94:14). They were His because God had chosen them: "Happy the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen for His own inheritance" (33:12). This special relationship to God was summed up in terms of covenant: "He has sent deliverance to His people; He has ratified His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name" (111:9). Observing the covenant brings blessings; failure to observe it is the source of all misfortune: "All the paths of the Lord are kindness and constancy toward those who keep His covenant and His decrees" (25:10). "They kept not the covenant with God; according to His law they would not walk. . . . And He rejected the tent of Joseph, the tribe of Ephraim He chose not" (78:10, 67).

This covenantal history begins with Abraham and the first patriarchs: "He remembers forever His covenant which He made binding for a thousand generations, which He entered into with Abraham and by His oath to Isaac" (105:8). All the great events of Israel's subsequent history are recalled in the Psalms. Psalm 105, after speaking of the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, tells of the first wanderings in Canaan, of Joseph and the descent into Egypt, of the plagues and the Exodus, the wandering in the desert, and finally the conquest of the Promised Land. Several other Psalms recall the Exodus and the gift of Canaan as well (e.g., 78, 135, 136). The giving of the law is associated with Moses and Aaron: "they heard His decrees and the law He gave them" (99:6-7). The law is the source of countless blessings and a mark of God's singular love for Israel: "He has proclaimed His word to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not done this for any other nation; His ordinance He has not made known to them. Alleluia" (147:19-20). There is also some allusion to God's protection of the people in the time of the Judges (83:10-13).

But the history associated with David evokes a particularly rich expression of praise, thanksgiving, and trust. The Psalms present this from three points of view: the promise to David and his descendants, the city of Jerusalem and Mt. Zion, and the institution of monarchy. God's choice of David and His promise are recalled, for example, in Ps 89:4-5, 20-38 in appealing to God for assistance in the calamitous events of the exile or the period immediately following. Jerusalem, the city chosen by David as the capital of his kingdom, is celebrated both as a place of divine presence and as a pledge of victory: "Zion is my resting place forever: in her will I dwell, for I prefer her. . . . In her will I make a horn to sprout forth for David; I will place a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon him my crown shall shine" (132:14, 17-18). The temple, planned by David and built by his son Solomon, was a special place of the divine presence: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (84:2-3). In the years following David and Solomon, the king became the concrete center of hope, the manifest embodiment of God's care for His people. The Psalms celebrating the royal enthronement and asking divine blessing on the king are among the most splendid compositions in the Old Testament. The fact that they continued to be used even after the collapse of the monarchy and were probably embellished with even more glorious details indicates how they came to express the confident hope of salvation through God's anointed one, the Messiah. His rule is universal and comes from God: "Ask of me and I will give you the nations for an inheritance and the ends of the earth for your possession" (2:8). It is also everlasting:

“He asked life of you: you gave him length of days forever and ever” (21:5). His birth as God’s son is before the creation of the sun: “Yours is princely power in the day of your birth; in holy splendor before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you” (110:3).

The Psalms recall the bitterness of the Babylonian exile: “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (137:1); the joy of the return: “When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing” (126:1-2); and the power of God at work to restore the ruined city: “The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; the dispersed of Israel He gathers” (147:2).

### *Understanding the Divine Action*

Besides recalling and celebrating the great deeds of God in nature and history, the Psalms show evidence of seeking somehow to understand these deeds, so as to rejoice in the way God works and to marvel at the way in which His wisdom and power achieve results. This is not, of course, a sustained speculative effort but an extension of the spirit of adoration and praise. This seems to go forward in two ways: first, by a series of descriptive verbs that identify what God is doing; second, by detailing the way divine action penetrates created action, especially that of human beings, for this is ultimately how God is at work in the world and history.

The descriptive verbs say of God that He leads and guides (e.g., 25:9; 31:4), protects from danger (e.g., 121:5-8), rescues from evil (e.g., 107), blesses His people, giving them peace and prosperity, e.g., 36:8-10: “How precious is your kindness, O God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They have their fill of the prime gifts of your house; from your delightful stream you have given them to drink. For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light.”

When the Psalms further detail the way divine activity penetrates the unfolding of human life, it is first noteworthy that they employ the constellation of ideas that etymologically and traditionally belong to the concept of providence: presence and knowledge, watching over and caring. Ps 139 illustrates this in the most remarkable way; it begins: “O Lord, you have probed me and you know me; you know when I sit and when I stand; you understand my thoughts from afar” (vv. 1-2). It speaks of divine omniscience (1-6), the divine omnipresence (7-12), the mysterious creative and governing power of God (13-18), and concludes with a prayer that God will punish the wicked and continue to lead the Psalmist. Other Psalms also speak of the great and searching knowledge of God (e.g., 11:4-5; 33:13-15; 37:12-13). This knowledge and watchfulness provide guidance and protection: “The Lord has eyes for the just and hears their

cry. . . . He watches over all his bones; not one of them shall be broken" (34:16, 21; see also 32:8; 40:18; 66:7).

A second way the Psalms describe how God's action penetrates history may be described as charismatic, the way of interior illumination and inspiration. Thus, in the great Psalm of repentance: "Behold, you are pleased with sincerity of heart, and in my inmost being you teach me wisdom" (51:8). Inner strength is God's gift: "When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me" (138:3). God grants interior docility: "I will run in the way of your commands when you give me a docile heart" (119:32). Gladness and love are also God's gifts (e.g., 4:8; 16:3). God not only touches the hearts of the Israelites; He is also at work in the hearts of their enemies. He caused them to fawn and cringe (18:44b-46); He moved Israel's captors to compassion (106:45-46).

Von Rad has made the following observation on the importance of the charismatic in Hebrew religion:

It is therefore evident that the charismatic was an absolutely constitutive factor in Jahwism. It appeared in many forms, in the guise of an inspiration for war and in the word of the prophets, in the praises of the Levitical singers, and in the counsel and teaching of the wise men. When it was absent, crisis supervened, and when it finally disappeared, the end of ancient Jahwism had been sealed, and the day of scribal religion had dawned.<sup>17</sup>

Besides dealing with the watchful care of God and with the charismatic divine influence, the Psalms treat a third aspect of the way God's action influences human history: the way in which God *responds* to human attitudes, choices, and dispositions. It is here that the basic pattern of God's action as dialogic is made clear: divine initiative, human response to this initiative, and divine response to this human response.<sup>18</sup> Most of what we have considered so far in the Psalms belongs to the divine initiative: creation, election, illumination, inspiration, etc. These proceed from the simple graciousness of God, who brings things into being and draws them to Himself and to a share in His life without any presupposition of worthiness on their part. But what God actually achieves in history is mediated by human willingness. God's ultimately effective action is basically one of judgment. This judgment, in so far as it is ongoing in history, is never merely response to human response; it is also joined to further divine initiatives of gracious love calling the human partners in the dialogue to further conversion and growth.

In the Psalms this theme of divine responsiveness, the way that the human conditions the divine action, appears in four fundamental ways:

<sup>17</sup> *Old Testament Theology* 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 102.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. my treatment of this pattern in "Judgment, Divine (in Theology)," *NCE* 8 (1967)



(1) the general theme of divine retribution; (2) divine frustration, where the human refusal blocks the divine purpose to some degree; (3) God's special care of those disposed to receive it; (4) God's answering of prayers.

Divine retribution, in the broad sense of giving both the just and the unjust their due, is a basic theme of wisdom Psalms (e.g., 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 112, 128). All these are concerned with the way of life that leads to happiness and prosperity; these are God's gifts, given to the wise and just. The wicked, on the contrary, are finally overcome by misery and misfortune: "For the power of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord supports the just" (37:17). Other kinds of Psalms also advert to such divine responsiveness; one Psalm of thanksgiving has the following lines: "Toward the faithful you are faithful, toward the wholehearted you are wholehearted, toward the sincere you are sincere, but toward the crooked you are astute. For lowly people you save, but haughty eyes you bring low" (18:26-28). And a Psalm of trust generalizes: "you render to everyone according to his deeds" (62:12).

Divine frustration is reflected in every expression of divine anger or displeasure with sinners: "You despise all who stray from your statutes, for their deceitfulness is in vain" (119:118). But the divine disappointment comes through poignantly: "But my people heard not my voice, and Israel obeyed me not. So I gave them up to the hardness of their hearts; they walked according to their own counsels. If only my people would hear me and Israel walk in my ways, quickly would I humble their enemies; against their foes would I turn my hand" (81:12-15).

God's special care for some people seems to be more than divine judgment responding to human goodness. It is also a further graciousness freely bestowed on those willing to receive it: "For a sun and shield is the Lord God; grace and glory He bestows; the Lord withholds no good thing from those who walk in sincerity" (84:12). Psalm 103 expresses this in a particularly attractive way; it begins: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all my being, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; He pardons all your iniquities, He heals all your ills" (vv. 1-3). What follows shortly shows that this is outside a simple arrangement of rewards and punishments: "Not according to our sins does He deal with us, nor does He requite us according to our crimes. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so surpassing is His kindness toward those who fear Him. . . . As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him" (vv. 10-11, 13). Elsewhere God is said to be concerned in a special way with the poor, the lowly, the oppressed (see 113:7-8; 146:7-8).

Answering prayers is one of the most significant ways in which God acts in response to human choice and activity. Psalms of petition or laments are the most numerous kind in the whole collection. Each

manifests the conviction that it is worthwhile to address God in this way. The objects of these prayers constitute the whole range of human needs: protection, justice, long life, deliverance, forgiveness, victory, prosperity, vindication, blessings, joy, etc. But these Psalms of petition not only manifest the needs for which people pray, they also show a constant awareness of being heard; God has indeed answered the prayer with effective action: "But I will call upon God, and the Lord will save me" (55:17). "In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me" (120:1). Dozens of such texts could be adduced from the Psalms of petition. Psalms of thanksgiving, besides thanking God for gifts and benefits that come without asking, are also full of gratitude for answers to prayers: "In my straits I called upon the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free" (118:5). Other kinds of Psalms likewise offer many examples to confirm the fact that the Israelites believed strongly in the value and importance of the prayer of petition.

### *Evil and Eschatology*

Two problems in different ways continually challenge faith in a powerful, good, and wise God. To interpret the experience of the transcendent through this kind of faith requires somehow meeting these challenges. One is the problem of evil, which puts in question the power and goodness of God. The other is the mystery of the ultimate future, which raises the issue of His wisdom as well. The Psalms give some insight into the Old Testament response to these challenges.

The Hebrew Scriptures are devoid of dualism. Everything in some way falls under the divine control, including suffering and sin. No rival evil principle is invoked to account for these things in the world. The Psalms often enough attribute suffering to God: "You have plunged me into the bottom of the pit, into the dark abyss. Upon me your wrath lies heavy, and with all your billows you overwhelm me" (88:7). Most frequently suffering is regarded as punishment for sin: "There is no health in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no wholeness in my bones because of my sin; for my iniquities have overwhelmed me; they are like a heavy burden, beyond my strength" (38:4-5; see also 1:4, 6; 79:5, 8; 90:7-11; 112:10).

But God's punishment is not mere vindictiveness. The suffering God sends as punishment is aimed also at the sinner's benefit: his conversion, his purification, and his instruction. Under suffering the sinner acknowledges his fault and returns to God: "As long as I would not speak, my bones wasted away with my groaning all the day. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not. I

said, 'I confess my faults to the Lord,' and you took away the guilt of my sin" (32:3-5). As the testing of metals by fire purifies them, so sinners are tried by suffering and eventually brought to happiness again: "For you have tested us, O God! You have tried us as silver is tried by fire; you have brought us into a snare; you laid a heavy burden on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you have led us out to refreshment" (66:10-12). Finally, suffering as punishment also teaches and disciplines: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes" (119:71).

But not all suffering comes from sin: "All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, nor have we been disloyal to your covenant" (44:18). This is the protest of innocence that Job also made. There is no easy solution for this. Psalm 71 tells of the sufferings of an old man who has trusted and praised God; he exclaims: "Though you have made me feel many bitter afflictions, you will again revive me; from the depths of the earth you will once more raise me" (71:20). It seems that for him, as for Job, suffering becomes a mystery of trust and divine union. Two verses in Psalm 119 also suggest this attitude toward suffering: "My comfort in my affliction is that your promise gives me life" (v. 50). "I know, O Lord, that your ordinances are just, and in your faithfulness you have afflicted me" (v. 75). "Faithfulness" here translates the Hebrew *emunah*, meaning basically stability and truth. Through affliction the Psalmist learns to trust in God beyond every other support.

God also acts to relieve suffering: "The desire of the afflicted you hear, O Lord; strengthening their hearts, you pay heed to the defense of the fatherless and the oppressed, that man, who is of earth, may terrify no more" (10:17-18).

It is nowhere suggested that sin comes from God. Human wickedness is the creature's work. God deals with sin, not simply by punishing it but especially by forgiving it and by using it for His own purposes. Forgiveness is a particularly divine act: "Yet He, being merciful, forgave their sin and destroyed them not. Often He turned back His anger and let none of His wrath be roused. He remembered that they were flesh, a passing breath that returns not" (78:38-39). God's willingness to forgive inspires reverence and trust: "But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered. . . . More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the Lord; for with the Lord is kindness and with Him is plenteous redemption; and He will redeem Israel from all their iniquities" (130:4, 6b-8). God's use of human sinfulness to achieve a purpose not intended by the sinner is a favorite theme in the Old Testament; the wickedness of Joseph's brothers and the hardness of Pharaoh's heart both glorified God and in the end manifested His power and goodness. The Psalms sometimes refer to this:

"For the wrath of Edom [or human wrath] shall glorify you. . ." (76:11).

Finally, as the human heart looks to the ultimate future with hope and trust in God, what do the Psalms tell us of the meaning and object of that hope? There is the general conviction that God's purpose will prevail in the establishment of His kingdom throughout the world and in the hearts of all peoples: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before Him. For dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations" (22:28-29). But what can this mean for individual persons? How do they share in the realization of the divine purpose? The earliest Hebrew view of survival after death projected only a shadowy existence in Sheol, the nether world. Whether this actually meant the end of all personal existence or not, it is clear that survival in Sheol had no real meaning; all significant relationship with God was ended: "For among the dead no one remembers you; in the nether world who gives you thanks?" (6:6).

But gradually, it seems, a conviction developed concerning the endurance of their relationship with God, even beyond death: "Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body too abides in confidence, because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption. You will show me the path to life, fulness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever" (16:9-11). Another Psalm draws a contrast between the Psalmist and his persecutors. Of them it says: ". . . Their portion in life is in this world, where with your treasures you fill their bellies" (17:14). But of himself he says: "But I in justice shall behold your face; on waking, I shall be content in your presence" (v. 15). Context requires us to understand this "waking" as beyond the sleep of death. It is perhaps noteworthy that the Hebrew word here translated as "presence" is *temunah*, meaning literally "likeness, image, or similitude." The Septuagint translates "in the vision of your glory."

Three wisdom Psalms cast further light on the final destiny of the individual who trusts in God. One of these describes Sheol as a place of punishment for the wicked, while the Psalmist escapes from it: "Like sheep they [the foolish] are herded into the nether world; death is their shepherd, and the upright rule over them. Quickly their form is consumed; the nether world is their place. But God will redeem me from the power of the nether world by receiving me" (49:15-16). "Receiving" here translates the common Hebrew verb for "take," *laqach*. It was used to describe God's action in taking Enoch at the end of his life: "Enoch walked with God, and he was no longer here, for God took him" (Gen 5:24). It was also used of Elijah, whom God took into heaven (2 Kgs 2:3).

The second of these Psalms shows the Psalmist troubled by the problem of the prosperity of the wicked: "Though I tried to understand

this, it seemed to me too difficult, till I entered the sanctuary of God and considered their final destiny" (73:16-17). In the contrast between their ultimate fate and his own he finds the answer to his problem: "You set them, indeed, on a slippery road; you hurl them down to ruin" (v. 18). Of himself he declares: "Yet with you I shall always be; you have hold of my right hand; with your counsel you guide me and in the end you will receive [*laqach*] me in glory. What else have I in heaven? And when I am with you, the earth delights me not. Though my flesh and my heart waste away, God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever" (vv. 25-26).

The third Psalm seems to point to the communal dimension of eternal life: "Behold, how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell as one! . . . For there the Lord has pronounced His blessing, life forever" (133:1, 3). The harmonious community is a symbol of those dwelling together forever.

#### CONCLUSION

We began by describing some common ways of using Scripture in theology and then outlined a somewhat different way of doing this. This means approaching Scripture as the expression of faith/revelation events, and searching in Scripture first for the ultimate contextualizing horizon of divine presence and activity and thereafter locating within that horizon the divine activities by which God achieves His purpose. When this method of using Scripture is applied to the Psalms, we get the following theological understanding of God and His activity.

In the Psalms the presence and action of God are sensed radically in religious fear and joy. He is known also in responses of gratitude, sorrow, trust, and confidence. This God is acknowledged as Creator, Lord of heaven and earth. As Creator, He transcends all things; He is superior to them, greater than they, beyond time, not limited by place. But as all things come from Him, they reflect His glory. They manifest His coming and His presence; they work in response to His will.

God is also the Lord of history. Indeed, nature and its phenomena primarily provide the background for history. God is universal King, ruling the world, governing peoples, disposing of nations, taking care of the whole human race. He has a special care for Israel, His people; these He has chosen for His own. With them He has concluded a covenant. To them He has given laws, promises, and institutions of kingship and priesthood. In every decisive event of their history, from the calling of Abraham to the rebuilding of the city and temple after the exile, God was at work to care for them.

God's action leads into the future. It supports and upholds, protects and rescues, defeats enemies and confers blessings. He does this by His

all-powerful and omnipresent knowledge, by His influence over the interior of the heart through light and inspiration and strength. God's action is conditioned by human attitudes, choices, and dispositions. Thus He renders to each one according to his works; He is frustrated in His immediate objectives by human sinfulness. He cares in a special way for the lowly and the upright. He hears and answers prayers.

Suffering and sin are also in God's hands. Suffering most often is seen as punishment for sin; but it is inflicted with a view to benefiting the sinner through conversion, purification, and discipline. At other times it is a mysterious way of drawing one into union with God. God deals with sin especially by forgiving it. Even through sinful human intentions God works His own good purposes.

God's ultimate purpose is finally realized in His kingdom. Individuals are called to share in this as God establishes with them a personal relationship that is stronger than death.

When this teaching of the Psalms is compared with what is found in other books of the Bible, an astonishing harmony is disclosed. Despite innumerable differences in emphasis, cultural expression, concrete embodiments, circumstances, and concerns, the ways in which the biblical writers express "the ultimate hermeneutical horizon" finally coincide. God, who is ultimately and radically gracious, summons human creatures to responsible free acceptance and commitment; and He responds to their responses with effective judgment and continuing graciousness. Human beings thus lead their lives under both grace and judgment. Grace points ultimately to the absolute initiative of creation; judgment points finally to the definitive achievement of the divine gracious purpose in and through human freedom.

The exploration of biblical teaching is, of course, foundational for a further work of theology, the movement from the biblical situation to our own. It is necessary to see how the scriptural understanding became modified and developed, even distorted at times, when subsequent thinkers attempted to express this matter for their own times in different philosophical and cultural patterns. It is also necessary to express this understanding for ourselves, in the concepts and symbols we can and do use to frame our own basic view of the world and ourselves and the problems we encounter today.<sup>19</sup> It is my plan to treat these historical and speculative theological issues in two other sections of my projected study of God's action in the world.

<sup>19</sup> I have treated some of these speculative questions in "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom: The God Who Dialogues," *TS* 38 (1977) 450-77, and "Problem of Evil, Mystery of Sin and Suffering," *Communio* 6 (1979) 140-56.