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"A Critical Evaluation of Western Theology toward a Reappraisal of the Biblical Faith" **by Dr. Han, Chul-Ha**

Evangelicals' concern is to hold fast to the biblical faith which has been distorted by and large by various forms of western theology. Until the modern period, when natural science made a rationalistic impact upon the mind of mankind and technological culture transforming the actual lifestyle of modern man, the truth of biblical revelation has maintained its integrity.

Modern western theology made an attempt to escape from the fundamental conflict with the biblical beliefs through its typical methodology. This attempt to escape has been made by abstracting out a certain meaning from the integral faith of the Bible.

The Methodology of the Modern Western Theology

In spite of the extreme variety of western theology, there are several common characteristics in all of those systems. **First**, they are logically consistent systems which are established upon certain fundamental concepts, such as, the idea of moral conscience" in the system of Immanuel Kant, Schleiermacher's "the immediate consciousness of absolute dependence," Ritschl's "the moral kingdom of God," Hegel's "the Weltgeist," Berdjaev's "the freedom," Teilhard de Chardin's "the evolutionary cosmogenesis," Tillich's "the being," Bultmann's "the existential self understanding," Pannenberg's "revelation in the mirror of history," Moltmann's "hope," etc.

Second, since all these Cartesian theologians appropriate biblical revelation to various forms of human understanding, the reality and power are stripped from God and His revelation. The spiritual reality of God and the manifestation of His power in redemptive history is indeed the fundamental characteristic of God, the Lord of Israel, the Christ Jesus, the Lord of the Church.

Now the modern Western theology is doing exactly opposite of what Paul did (Acts 19:11, 12; Rom. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:5; 1 Cor. 2:4, 5), that is, it presents the gospel in terms of "enticing words of man's wisdom" rather than in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Thus, the faith of modern western theologians stands mainly on the wisdom of men rather than the power of God.

Even though these expressions in human words are not adequate to guide us to the very divine Source Himself, yet they try to assess the biblical faith of God, distorting less than those modern western theological formulations which take its wrong methodology from the very inception by not taking seriously the biblical literal teaching. Consequently, those formulations are doomed to depart from the biblical faith from the very beginning.

The Invisible Dimension Was Lost

Because of the secularistic spirit of modern western theology, it has completely lost the spiritual dimension of the biblical faith, that is, the major portion of the reality in the divine economy of creation and redemption. Since their view is confined to the space, time, and lifespan of human individuals, biblical faith of the larger and wider economy of God, which goes far beyond the scope of the visible world, had been lost. Scripture starts with the

account of the creation of the heaven and the earth.

The Bible reaches that the glory of God is far beyond the heavens. The Bible is the book which tells what has happened on the earth from the beginning to the last day. The visible world is a smaller portion of the entire created world so that the grandeur and glory of the invisible things may manifest the greatness and glory of God. God, who is a Spirit, is invisible. Because of the invisible spiritual nature of God, the spiritual invisible realm which is directly related to Him is considered to be more primal than His visible creatures.

The contemporary western theology cannot attribute to God the expression "existence." By doing so, God is placed side by side with other existing things. Therefore, Tillich declares: "God does not exist. He is being itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exist is to deny him"(Systematics I, p. 205). The problem arises when the modern mind ascribes the final and ultimate reality to the existence of the visible world. Biblical faith, on the contrary, views the primary and absolute reality only in God and conceives His existence only from God. The modern western theologians lost a very important dimension of man, that is, the invisible. This has been an important heritage of mankind because human beings are spiritual beings, a distinction from the beasts. The modern scientific worldview created a secularistic spirit, and so modern man has lost scope of the larger world beyond the visible world. If we recover biblical faith, we may cure the eyes of the modern man and restore his sight, "If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"(Matt. 6:23).

The Word of Barthian Theology and the Biblical Worldview

Neo-orthodox theology tries to distinguish itself sharply from modern theology. Helmut Thielicke sharply distinguishes between Cartesian theology(Theology A) and non-Cartesian Theology(Theology B). In Cartesian theology, a thinking subject takes a primary role as the very starting point of theologizing by appropriating the revelation to the measure of thinking subject while in non-Cartesian theology, the word of God takes a primary role in any theological activity. Cartesian theology takes as its starting point the Cartesian ego while non-Cartesian theology the revelation as the Word. In contrast to this theological method of Cartesian theology, the theology of the Word tries to uphold to the essential point of Christian religion, that is, the Word. Here in this theology, the fundamental concept of the Word actually stands as the center and pivot around which everything turns. This fundamental concept of the Word or the Spirit seems to be sharply distinguished from the literal truth of the Bible which contains things which are unintelligible to the modern rationalistic mind.

The Abstract Character of the Modern Scientific Worldview

The modern physical scientific worldview is nothing but an abstract world seen through the eye-glasses of mathematics and physical hypotheses. These are very useful because they are actually the normative laws by which this physical world actually operates. But when we come to the actuality of this world, even the physical objects themselves are something more than physical science can ever exhaust. Physics itself always operates on certain presuppositions. Modern physics shows that all things are alike. In actuality there is nothing alike in the concrete world. Rationalism insists that the biblical message must be

demythologized even though our lives are full of wonders and mysteries. Science declares that life is mechanically bound by the causal nexus of this universe. Man, as a morally responsible person, makes a solemn decision to take his course of life even in opposition to the various natural propensities of his inner urge.

The Disasters of a Theology Which Uncritically Presupposes This Outlook

The modern mind confuses itself to become of age, forgetting about its dependence upon its Maker and Sustainer. The fundamental issue arises from the basic differences between the two worldviews: one, the atheistic, and the other, theistic. One presupposes that this world is not created but exists of itself; the other that this world is the handiwork of the Creator who is to be glorified alone and forever. In other words, the Bible teaches that the whole world and the entire creation is to honor God who alone is to be praised forever. The modern worldview, however, deprives God of His power and His existence.

If neo-orthodoxy, or the theology of the Word takes revelation seriously as it professes to do, why does it not go one step further to accept the full authority of God in respect to His creatures, so that we can truly fear Him, worship Him, and enjoy His blessings with gratitude?

The Evangelical Theological Concern Reconfirmed

We can discover that all modern western theologies both Cartesian and "non-Cartesian" assumed the contemporary scientific worldview as the basic premise of their cosmology, rejecting the biblical worldview as "outdated." Particularly the Barthian as well as the Bultmannian insist that it is not the intention of the Bible to enforce the biblical outdated worldview upon the modern mind. Both try to divorce the kerygma and the myth in Scripture, even though Helmut Thielicke makes a certain proposal "re-mythologizing" as a kind of compromise. But they reject the conservative position which tries to uphold to the traditional Christian faith without compromise.

The Barthian may reject this conclusion in trying to uphold to the very essence of Scriptural revelation, that is, the creative Word. It may be so. But when it comes to the question of this world in which we live, their conclusion can be no different from the presupposed assumption. Since they presuppose the contemporary atheistic or agnostic worldview where God is either dead or silent, they come to this conclusion. Among numerous defects involved in this kind of theology, only two have been indicated: the question of the reality of God and the loss of the invisible dimension of the biblical worldview.

The contemporary scientific worldview represents only a certain abstract aspect of reality. In that world we do not have any individuality, humanity, or historical direction. On the other hand, the biblical perspective provides the modern worldview with its metaphysical basis and future in terms of God's creation, judgment, and redemption in Jesus Christ.