

A misty forest scene with a path leading to a bright light, surrounded by trees and fallen leaves. The path is covered in red and orange autumn leaves. Several large, dark rocks are scattered along the path. The trees are tall and thin, with green and yellow foliage. A bright, golden light emanates from the end of the path, creating a strong contrast with the misty atmosphere. The overall mood is serene and spiritual.

What it means to Know God



Introduction

For the past five weeks, we have continued in our quest to consider the ways of knowing (epistemology) and to understand what it truly means to know God (not just *about* God). Princeton theologian Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) came to understand that “all spiritual life is by its very nature a hidden life, a life shut up in itself.” “Such a life,” he claimed, “we can know only through revelation. If this be true as between man and man, how much more must it be so as between God and man....The inward hidden content of God’s mind can become the possession of man only through a voluntary disclosure on God’s part. God must come to us before we can go to Him.” This same idea was also expressed by the great French religious philosopher, Simone Weil:



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“The infinity of space and time separates us from God. How are we to seek for him? How are we to go toward him? Even if we were to walk for hundreds of years, we should do no more than go round and round the world. Even in an airplane we could not do anything else. We are incapable of progressing vertically. We cannot take a step toward the heavens. God crosses the universe and comes to us. Over the infinity of space and time, the infinitely more infinite love of God comes to possess us. He comes at his own time.”

God came, first, through his creative activity. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). His creation was so

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astounding, glorious, majestic, beautiful, and good, that the Psalmist exclaimed: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). The very idea that creation has a voice, that God has revealed His eternal power and divine nature through what He has made, is so evident to all, that those who choose to turn away from His general revelation and kindness and betray their own consciences are left in the unenviable position of being without excuse. And in this situation, it is not true that a bad excuse is better than none at all.

General revelation, then, is plain enough for every person to see clearly, but not sufficient to lead one into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The Law of Gravity



Simone Weil

1909-1943

“When a man turns away from God, he simply gives himself up to the law of gravity. Then he thinks that he can decide and choose, but he is only a thing, a stone that falls.”



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God also speaks. He creates *and* He speaks and is the sole Interpreter of all that He has made. All truth is God's truth. Theologian John Frame states the case simply and concisely: "His Word comes from His lips to our ears, minds, and hearts."

As we have noted, the three categories of revelation media God uses are events, words, and persons. "Through all of the media of revelation," Frame says, "God expresses all the aspects of his lordship...Scripture treats all of God's revelation as supremely powerful, authoritative, and personal." Therefore, "if we are to accept God's revelation, we must accept what we hear and see through his media."

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The next part of our journey in knowing God brings us to a field of study that, *perhaps*, you have never encountered before. For me, personally, I was not introduced to it until I was in my second year of seminary. At the time, the concept was foreign to my thinking but, ultimately, after considering this branch of theology for two semesters under the able and gifted teaching of Dr. Gerhard Van Groningen, it changed my thinking about God, about His self-disclosure, about how I read Scripture, about how I see the world (worldview), and about how I can communicate with Him and He with me. Our subject, *What It Means to Know God*, is the most fitting place I know to introduce you to what is known as *Biblical Theology*. And it can change your life.

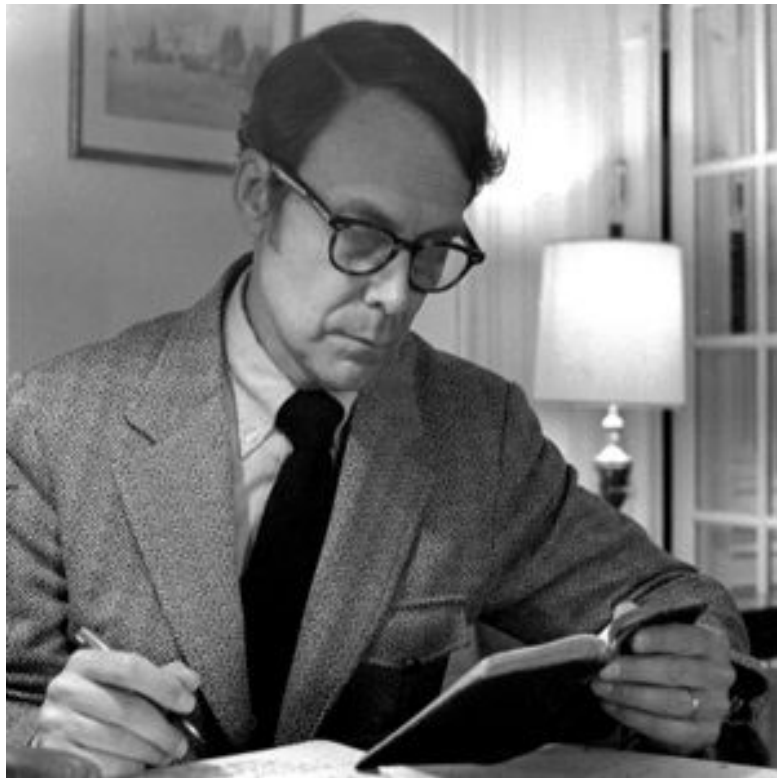


What Is Biblical Theology?

“Biblical Theology occupies a position between Exegesis and Systematic Theology in the encyclopedia of theological disciplines. It differs from Systematic Theology not in being more biblical, or adhering more closely to the truths of the Scriptures, but in that its principle of organizing the biblical material is historical rather than logical. Whereas Systematic Theology takes the Bible as a completed whole and endeavors to exhibit its total teaching in an orderly, systematic form, Biblical Theology deals with the material from the historical standpoint, seeking to exhibit the organic growth or development of the truths of Special Revelation from the primitive pre-redemptive Special Revelation given in Eden to the close of the New Testament canon.”

- Geerhardus Vos

Edmund Clowney on Biblical Theology



Edmund P. Clowney
1917-2005

“The Bible records revelation given in the course of history. This revelation was not given at one time, nor in the form of a theological dictionary. It was given progressively, for the process of revelation accompanies the process of redemption. Since redemption does not proceed uniformly but in epochs determined by God’s acts, so revelation has an epochal structure, manifested and marked in the canonical Scriptures.”

Understanding Exegetical Theology

- It is a process in which God speaks and man listens.
- It involves the study of the actual content of the Scriptures.
- It inquires into the original origin of the biblical writings (writers, time, occasion, dependence on sources, etc.).
- It addresses the question of how these writings were collected into a unity (the canon of Scripture: 39 OT books; 27 NT books).
- It studies the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space which lie behind the writings of the biblical documents (biblical theology).

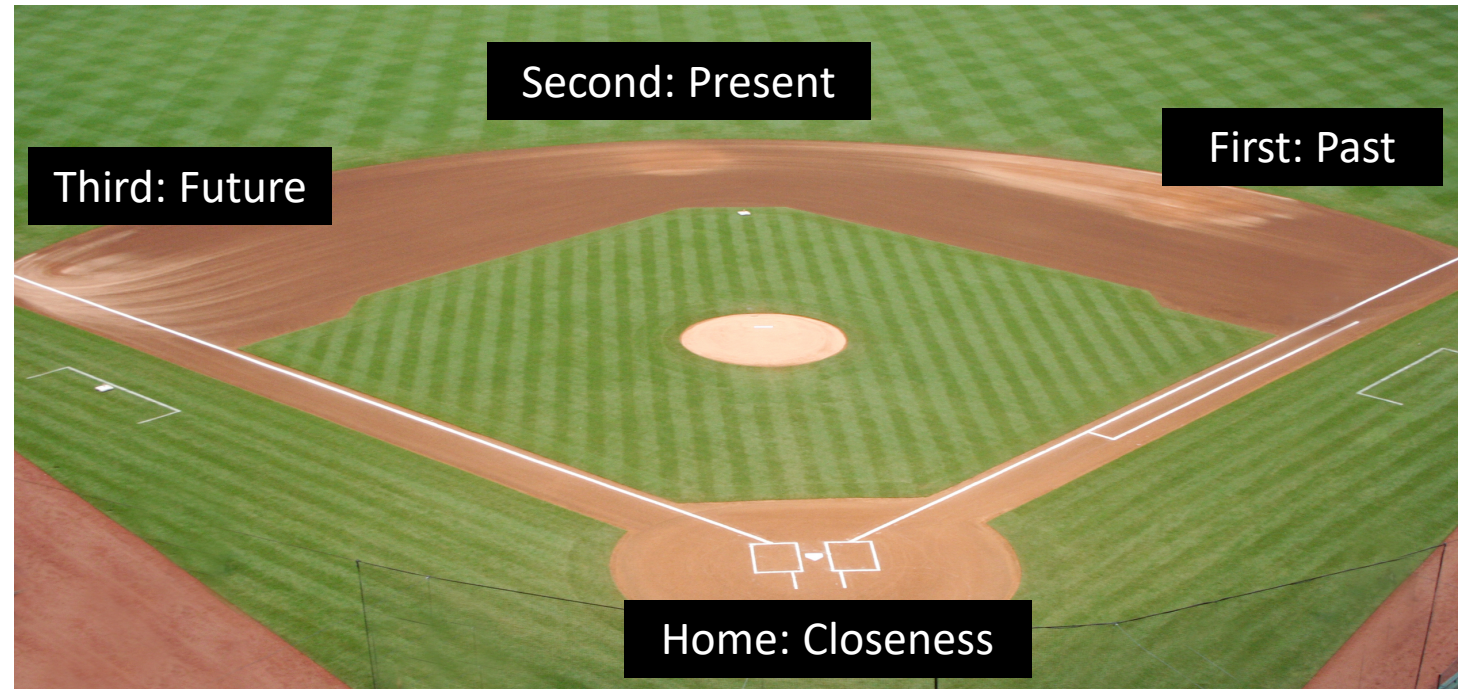


Division of Theology: Four Departments

- **Historical Theology:** Biblical (Old & New Testament history) and post-biblical history (Ancient, Medieval, and Modern).
- **Systematic Theology:** Christianity is dealt with as a scientific system. The material is organized as an organic whole.
- **Practical Theology:** “The science and art of the various functions of the Christian ministry for the preservation and propagation of the Christian religion at home and abroad” (Philip Schaff).
- **Exegetical Theology:** The branch of theology devoted to the interpretation of the Bible itself. **Biblical Theology** is a branch of Exegetical Theology and is the study of the gradual development of the revelation of God through the Bible.

How Do You Come To Know Another Person?

- Gradually
- Observation
- Listening
- Asking
- Sharing life together
- Quality time
- Vulnerability
- Within historical context



The Requirement of Self-Disclosure

“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”

- I Cor. 2:11





The Term *Progress*

“When one is in a fruit market and purchases fruit, e.g., a tomato or an apple, one acquires the end result of a process. The initial factor in the process was the seed. Without seed no plants appear. Rather, the seed planted in receptive soil, mulched, moist, and warm, sprouts and sends forth its plant. The seed produces a plant that in turn produces fruit, the actual tomato and apple, and in the fruit is seed for subsequent planting. It produces results that, in turn, produces the very same essential types of seed that were originally sown. There is no real progress; there is repetition. That is not the situation with the spoken word. The word produces growth and fruit which, in turn, provides the setting for new words, different words, that result in new activity and developed or new fruit.”



The Term *Progress*

“When progress in revelation is observed, then one sees and considers expanded or further revelation. One is not to think of the expanded and/or advanced revelation to be entirely new. In a sense nothing pertaining to the original was present....There is advancement; there is development; there is growth; there is increasing richness as revelation continues from one stage to another or from one scene to another, or from one active situation to another.”

- Dr. Gerhard Van Groningen

From the Oxford English Dictionary

Progressive, *adj.*, “Of circumstances, attributes, ideas, conditions, etc.: characterized by, relating to, or involving gradual change or advancement, esp. for the better; growing, increasing, developing; marked by continuous improvement” (OED).





“The organic progress is from seed-form to the attainment of full growth; yet we do not say that in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree.”

- Geerhardus Vos

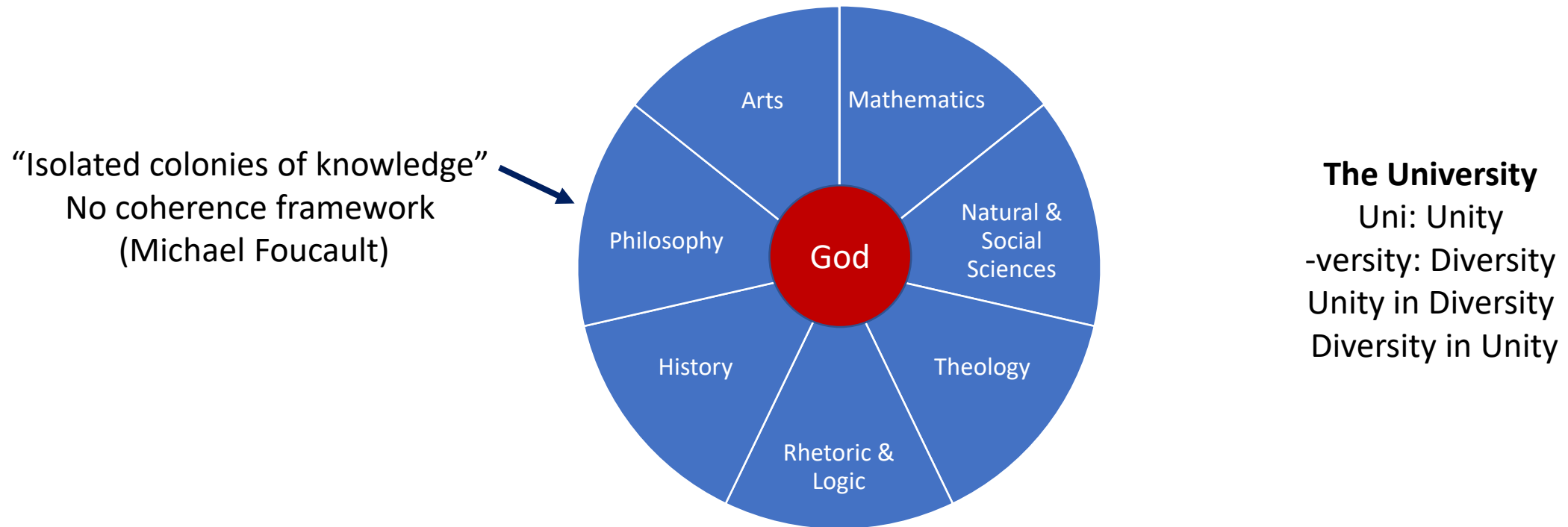


Understanding *Encyclopedia*

- **Encyclopedia**, *n.*, from the Greek, *encyclical* (circular, rounded, round) + *education* (training and teaching, education), the circle of arts and sciences considered by the Greeks as essential to a liberal education (OED). “It denotes the whole circle of general education” (Dr. Morton Smith).
- “Since all truth comes from God, and since every fact is, therefore, revelational, it necessarily follows that the whole circle of human learning is theological. It all comes from God and as man learns the truth in each particular field, he is learning something about God” (Smith).

Theological Encyclopedia

Theological Encyclopedia is that area of thought which is designed to orient people to the entire circle of theological study.



Description of the Christian Mind

“That perfection of the intellect which is the result of education, and its beau [beautiful] ideal, to be imparted to individuals in their respective measures, is the clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things, as far as the finite mind can embrace them, each in its place, and with its own characteristics upon it. It is almost prophetic from its knowledge of history; it is almost heart-searching from its knowledge of human nature; it has almost supernatural charity from its freedom from



Cardinal John Henry Newman
1801-1890



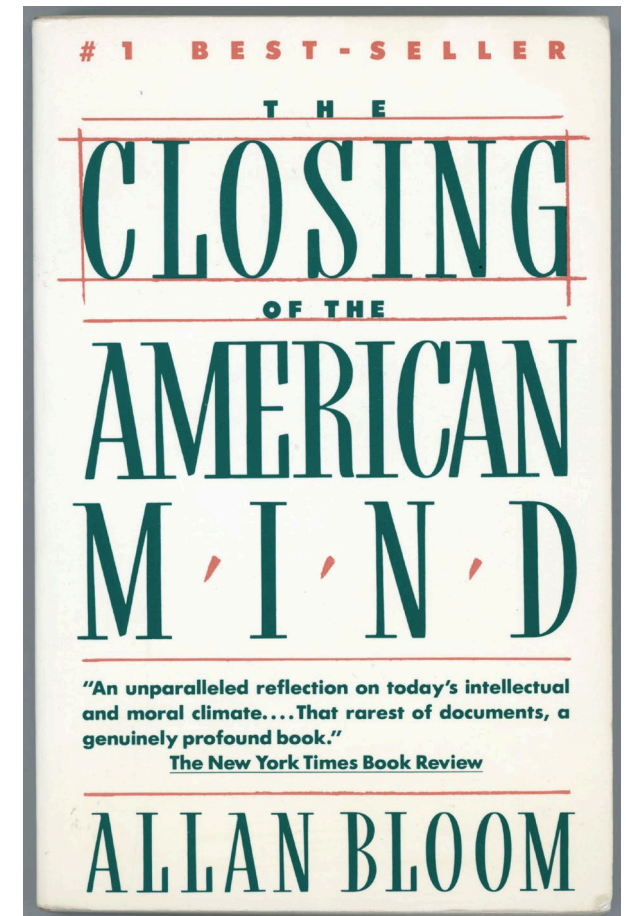
Description of the Christian Mind

littleness and prejudice; it has almost the repose of faith, because nothing can startle it; it has almost the beauty and harmony of heavenly contemplation, so intimate is it with the eternal order of things and the music of the spheres.”

The Music of the Spheres: Pythagoras considered that the harmonious sounds that men make, either with their instruments or in their singing, were an approximation of a larger harmony that existed in the universe, also expressed by numbers, which was *the music of the spheres*. Plato taught that “rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful” (Robert R. Reilly).

Diversity Without Unity in Universities

“The real problem is those students who come [to the university] hoping to find out what career they want to have, or are simply looking for an adventure with themselves. There are plenty of things for them to do – courses and disciplines enough to spend many a lifetime on. Each department or great division of the university makes a pitch for itself, and each offers a course of study that will make the student an initiate. But how to choose among them? How do they relate to one another? The fact is they do not address one another.





Diversity Without Unity in Universities

“They are competing and contradictory, without being aware of it. The **problem of the whole** is urgently indicated by the very existence of the specialties, but it is never systematically posed. The net effect of the student’s encounter with the college catalogue is bewilderment and very often demoralization. It is just a matter of chance whether he finds one or two professors who can give him an insight into one of the great visions of education that have been the distinguishing part of every civilized nation. **Most professors are specialists**, concerned only with their own fields, interested in the advancement of those fields in their own terms, or in their own personal advancement in a world where all the rewards are on the side of professional distinction.



Diversity Without Unity in Universities

“They have been entirely emancipated from the **old structure of the university**, which at least helped to indicate that **they are incomplete, only parts of an unexamined and undiscovered whole** (emphasis added). So the student must navigate among a collection of carnival barkers, each trying to lure him into a particular sideshow. This undecided student is an embarrassment to most universities, because he seems to be saying, ‘I am a **whole human being**. Help me to form myself in my wholeness and let me develop my real potential,’ and he is the one to whom they have nothing to say.”